

Israelis rally again to protest government's judicial overhaul

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Israelis protest against plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new government to overhaul the judicial system, in Tel Aviv, Israel, Saturday, March 4, 2023. (AP Photo/Ohad Zwigenberg)?

Tel Aviv, March 5 (RHC)-- Protesters have taken to the streets of Israeli cities for the ninth straight week to reject a government plan to overhaul the country's court system. Tens of thousands took part in Saturday night's demonstrations in Tel Aviv and other locations which continued peacefully, unlike

protests earlier this week that descended into violent clashes with police.

“I came to demonstrate against the regime revolution, which the Israeli government forced upon us,” 53-year-old history teacher Ronen Cohen told the Reuters news agency. “I hope that this huge demonstration will affect and prove that we are not going to give up.”

The marches have attracted huge crowds on a weekly basis since early January, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government took aim at the Supreme Court. The protesters oppose legislation that Netanyahu and his right-wing and religious allies hope to pass that would limit the Supreme Court’s powers to rule against the legislature and the executive, while giving legislators decisive powers in appointing judges.

Judicial reform is a cornerstone of Netanyahu’s latest administration, an alliance with ultra-Orthodox and far-right parties which took office in late December.

Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, presented the overhaul as key to restoring the balance between the branches of government in a system he has argued gave judges too much power over elected officials.

The legislation would give more weight to the government in the committee that selects judges, and would deny the Supreme Court the right to strike down any amendments to so-called “Basic Laws” -- Israel’s quasi-constitution. These provisions have already received first-reading endorsements from legislators.

Another element of the reforms would give the 120-member parliament power to overrule Supreme Court decisions with a simple majority of 61 votes. Analysts have said such a derogation clause could allow lawmakers to uphold any annulment of the corruption charges Netanyahu is being tried on, should parliament vote to absolve him and the Supreme Court then ruled against it.

Netanyahu has denied the charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust, and rejected any link between the reforms and his own court case.

The intensity of the protests increased this week when Israeli police fired stun grenades and scuffles broke out in Tel Aviv on Wednesday during a nationwide “day of disruption.” “There’s a great danger that Israel will turn into a dictatorship,” 68-year-old high school teacher Ophir Kubitsky said on Saturday. “We came here to demonstrate over and over again until we win.”

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