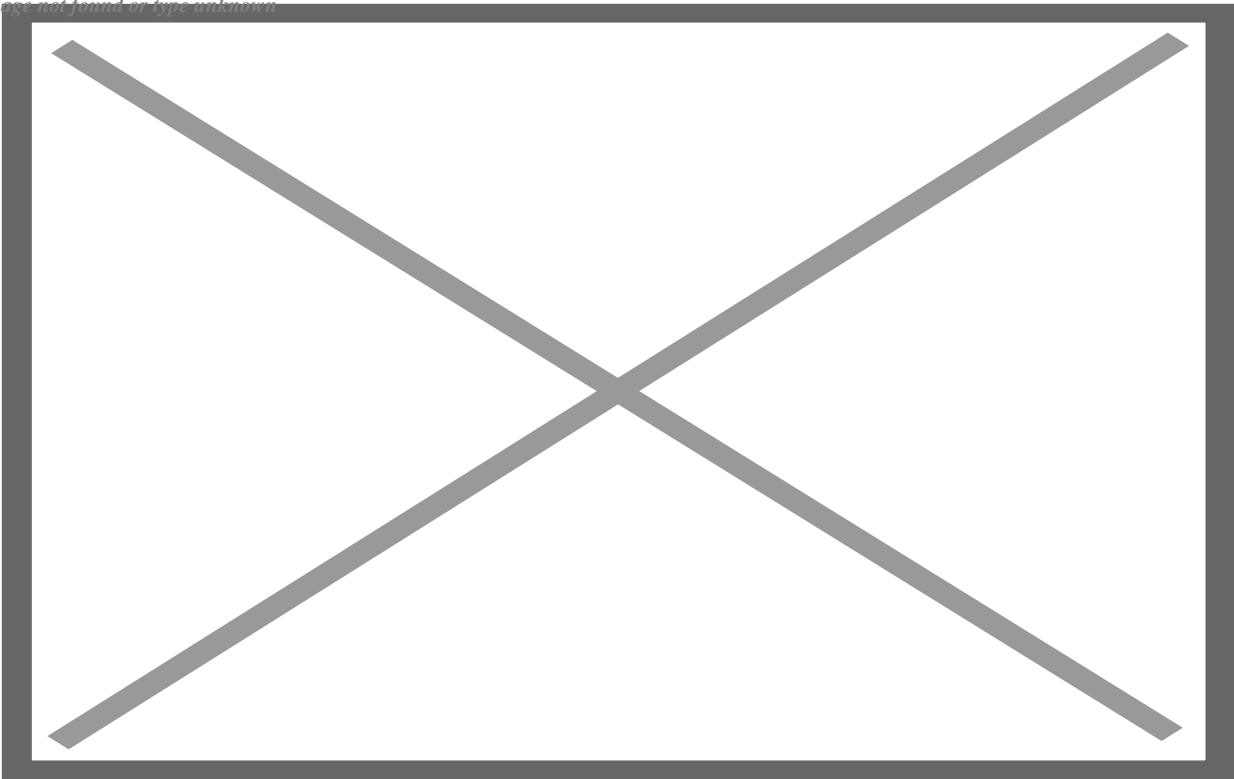


Tens of thousands of Israelis protest against judicial reform plan

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Tel Aviv, April 22 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of protesters have flocked to Tel Aviv and cities across Israel to express their opposition to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government and its divisive plan to overhaul the country's judicial system.

Crowds of Israelis held banners with the words "Crime Minister" overlaid on Netanyahu's face in Tel Aviv at Saturday's protest, the latest in a series of weekly actions since the start of the year.

Plans by Netanyahu's government to weaken the Supreme Court have outraged Israelis who see it as an assault on their country's system of checks and balances and a threat to its very democracy. "This is not about so-called judicial reform, it's about democracy," said Sheila Katz, head of the National Council of

Jewish Women, from the rally in central Tel Aviv. “In order for your sacred courts to protect the rights of all people, they must remain independent from politics.”

Protests last month brought Israeli cities to a standstill and threatened to shut down the economy, compelling Netanyahu to delay the judicial reform plan in hopes of finding a compromise.

However, protesters have been undeterred. Crowds of Israelis chanting “Shame!” have flooded the streets in the weeks after Netanyahu backed down, demanding that the overhaul be scrapped altogether. The plan would give Netanyahu, who is on trial on corruption charges, and his partners in Israel’s most hardline coalition in its history the final say in appointing the nation’s judges. It would also give parliament, which is controlled by his allies, authority to overturn Supreme Court decisions and limit the court’s ability to review laws.

The protests have galvanized people across Israeli society. Thousands of officers in elite reserve units of the military have said they will refuse to report for duty. High-tech business leaders and the security establishment have come out against the proposal. Trade unions have called for a general strike.

The United States, Israel’s most crucial ally, has even publicly rebuffed Netanyahu, with President Joe Biden telling him that he “cannot continue down this road.”

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