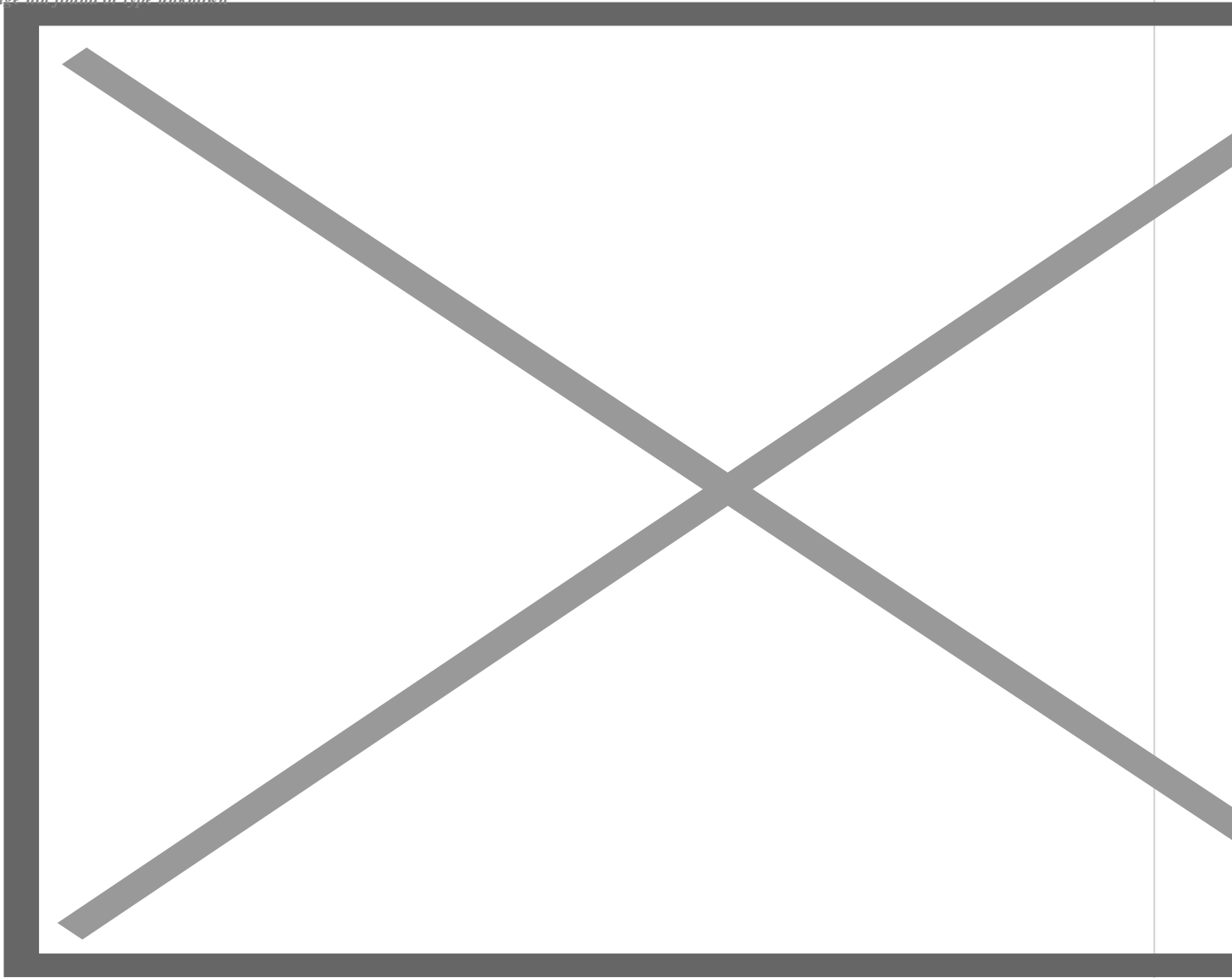


Netanyahu finally leaves prime minister's residence in Jerusalem

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The residence was the scene of weekly protests against Netanyahu's alleged corruption and mismanagement for much of the past year [File: Sebastian Scheiner/AP Photo]

Jerusalem, July 11 (RHC)-- Israel's former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has formally departed his official Jerusalem residence nearly a month after he was unseated by his successor Naftali Bennett.

"A little after midnight the Netanyahu family left the residence on Balfour [Street]," a spokesman for the family told journalists in a statement on Sunday. Moving trucks were spotted outside the residence and black Audi cars were filmed being towed from the property over the weekend.

The hawkish Netanyahu served as Israel's premier for 12 straight years following an earlier three-year term. He remained in office even as he went to trial on charges of fraud, bribery and breach of trust. He denies the charges and says they are a left-wing plot against him.

He led Israel through four deeply divisive elections in less than two years before right-wing nationalist Bennett was sworn in on June 13 to head an ideologically disparate coalition, unseating him. However, Netanyahu did not vacate the prime ministerial residence. Instead, he continued to host dignitaries including Nikki Haley, who served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations under President Donald Trump.

In late June, Netanyahu and Bennett's offices announced July 10 as the final date for the former premier to move out. Netanyahu left after midnight on Sunday, slightly after the deadline he agreed to.

"Crime Minister" an organisation that has mounted weekly protests against Netanyahu outside the residence for more than a year, mocked him on Sunday. "The defendant and his family fled as the last of the thieves in the night," the group wrote on Facebook.

The residence had become a symbol of the Netanyahus' scandals, and was the scene of weekly protests against Netanyahu for much of the past year. Demonstrators called on the then-prime minister to resign while on trial for corruption.

Bennett is to take over the prime minister's residence on Sunday.

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