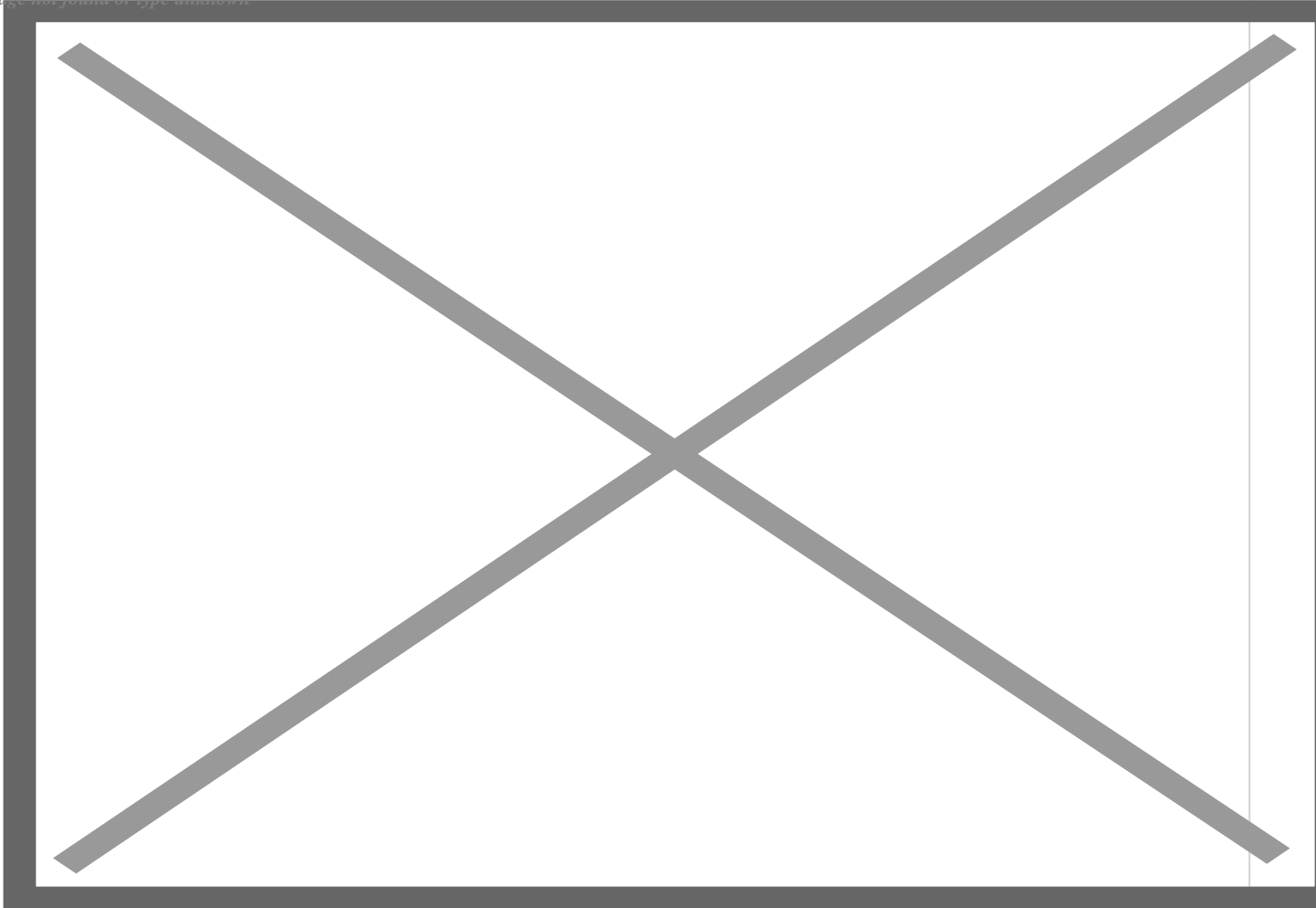


Protests swell in Israel as Netanyahu advances judicial plan

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Israeli protesters take part in a demonstration against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his nationalist coalition government's judicial overhaul, in Tel Aviv, Israel July 15, 2023 [Oren Alon/ Reuters]

Tel Aviv, July 18 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of protesters continue to rally in the streets of Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities, promising "days of disruption", as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government advanced its plan to overhaul the judiciary.

The rallies over this past weekend marked the 28th straight week of demonstrations against Netanyahu's plan and come days after his government gave initial approval to a key bill which is part of the overhaul.

The bill, which was approved in its first reading, would reduce the "reasonability" clause through which the judiciary can strike down government decisions. It would also give the government a greater say in the appointment of judges. The bill still needs to be approved in two more votes, expected by the end of the month, before it becomes law.

In Tel Aviv, protesters unrolled a large banner reading "SOS" and threw paint powder into the sky, streaking it pink and orange. "Handmaids" – women dressed in red robes as characters from the dystopian novel and TV series *The Handmaid's Tale* – once again took to the streets. Their jarring appearance is meant to drive home the notion that, if the overhaul passes, women could be stripped of their rights.

"This is a battle for the country, we want to keep Israel democratic and the dictatorship laws won't pass here," protester Nili Elezra, 54, told the AFP news agency. Passing the laws would harm Israel's financial and global standing, she said. "Things will be bad. People are already leaving, money is being lost, investors are fleeing, the world doesn't want to talk to us, nobody is happy with what's going on here," she said.

Saturday's protesters in Tel Aviv were joined by others across the country. Protesters brandished lit torches outside Netanyahu's home in Jerusalem and demonstrated in the coastal cities of Herzliya and Netanya.

Protest organisers also said they would hold a "day of disruption" on Tuesday if the Israeli leader continues to move ahead with the plan. The protests came as Netanyahu remained in hospital after getting admitted earlier on Saturday for dehydration. The 73-year-old sought treatment after suffering a dizzy spell and having spent the previous day in the sun without drinking water. He later released a video from the Tel Aviv hospital saying he felt good.

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