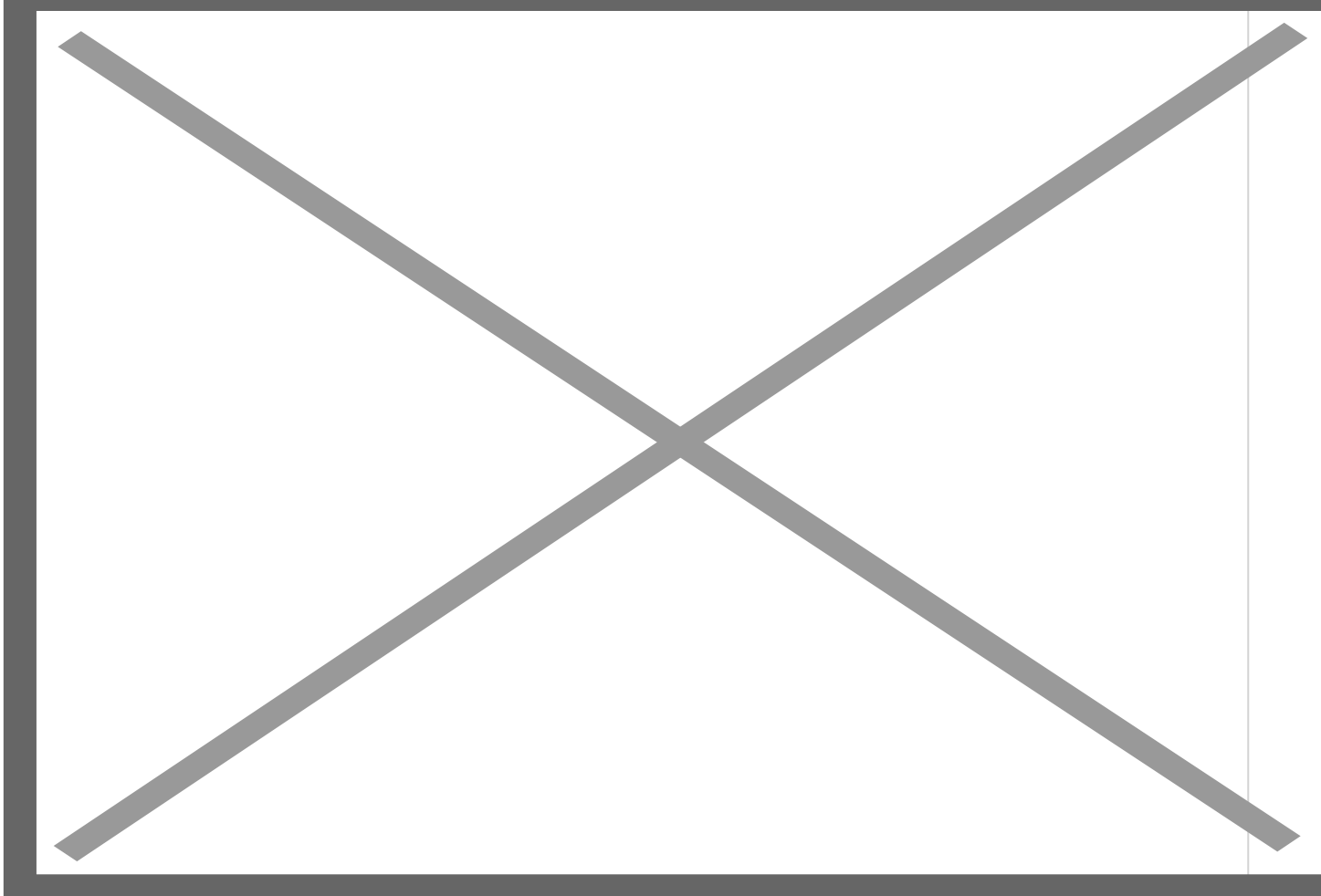


Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators protest Netanyahu's judicial reforms for 16th consecutive week

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Thousands of demonstrators lift flags and placards during a rally to protest the Israeli extremist

Tel Aviv, April 30 (RHC)-- Hundreds of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets across the occupied territories for the 16th consecutive week against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 'judicial reforms'.

One of the biggest rallies on Saturday was held in central Tel Aviv, where crowds gathered in a show of opposition to the unpopular prime minister's plan. The Tel Aviv demonstration came ahead of another mass protest planned for the coastal city on Sunday to coincide with Netanyahu's speech to the general assembly of the Jewish Federations of North America.

The weekly protests have continued even after Netanyahu announced a "pause" on March 27 to allow for talks on the so-called reforms, which were moving through the regime's parliament. Demonstrators held banners with the words "Crime Minister" overlaid on Netanyahu's face.

The protests have already spread to all social strata across the occupied territories. Thousands of officers in reserve units of the regime's military have said they will refuse to report for duty. High-tech business leaders and the security establishment have also come out against the proposal while trade unions have called for a general strike.

According to Israeli media, around 380,000 gathered for the protests, with 165,000 demonstrators in Tel Aviv alone. Other mass rallies were held in Herzliya, Rehovot, Holon, Kiryat Ono, Netanya, Rishon Lezion, Eilat, and elsewhere across the occupied territories. "The public understands that the sword of the dictatorship is still on its neck...", protest organizers stated.

Opposition politician, Yair Lapid, addressed a protest rally, saying, "If you hadn't taken to the streets, the disaster would have already happened..." The reforms seek to render the regime's Supreme Court powerless in the face of decisions made by the politicians.

Netanyahu's coalition, a combination struck between his Likud party and extreme-right and ultra-Orthodox political allies, argues the changes are needed to rebalance the power between lawmakers and the judiciary.

Last week, Moody's credit rating agency announced it had downgraded the regime's outlook to "stable" from "positive."

Summing up the months of turmoil since Netanyahu returned to power late last year at the head of the religious-nationalist coalition, Moody's said the regime's institutions were less predictable given the cabinet's handling of events. It added that the change in the Israeli regime's outlook "reflects a deterioration of Israel's governance, as illustrated by the recent events" around the Israeli cabinet's "proposal for overhauling the country's judiciary."

A poll released on Friday showed the reforms are deeply unpopular, with 53 percent saying they believe the plan will be harmful. Additionally, 48 percent of respondents believed the situation across the occupied territories will continue to get worse.



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