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## Israel protests flare over Netanyahu's new Supreme Court bill

By Rami Amichay

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< **Summary** >

Thousands join protests as justice bill moves forward  
Tens of thousands rally at Israel's main airport  
Police deploy water cannon, U.S. backs right to protest

TEL AVIV, July 11 (Reuters) - Thousands of protesters blockaded Israel's main airport and highways on Tuesday as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-right coalition pressed ahead with a justice bill that has opened the deepest splits seen in the country in decades.

A day after parliament passed a key element in the bill, which aims to curb the power of the Supreme Court, crowds of flag-waving protesters stopped morning traffic in major intersections and on highways nationwide. Some lay down on roads, while others threw flares.

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Police on horseback deployed among hundreds of demonstrators in Israel's business hub, Tel Aviv. At the entrance to Jerusalem, officers used a water cannon to disperse some protesters and dragged others away by force. At least 66 people were arrested, police said.

Around 1,000 police were deployed at Ben Gurion airport, outside Tel Aviv, where thousands of protesters turned the area in front of the main entrance into a sea of blue and white Israeli flags. A spokesman for the airport said flights were not affected, despite the large crowds.

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The United States, which has called for the independence of the judiciary to be protected and urged Netanyahu to try to build consensus for the proposals, said Israel should respect the right of peaceful protest.

The drive by Netanyahu's nationalist-religious coalition to change the justice system has led to unprecedented protests, stirred concern for Israel's democratic health among Western allies, and bruised the economy.

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"They are trying to ruin our judicial system, by putting and enforcing laws that will demolish democracy," said Ariel Dubinsky, who joined one of the protests in Tel Aviv.

The proposals have also alarmed investors and helped push the shekel down almost 8% since January.



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[1/9] People confront with an Israeli police officer as they demonstrate on 'Day of Disruption' in protest against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his nationalist coalition government's [Acquire Lice...](#) [Read more](#)



The new bill won a first of three required votes to be written into law late on Monday to the cries of "for shame" by opposition lawmakers.

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If passed as is, it would curb the Supreme Court's power to quash decisions made by the government, ministers and elected officials by ruling them unreasonable.

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The government and its supporters say the overhaul is needed to rein in interventionist judges, many from the left, who they say have encroached on the political sphere. They say the change will help effective governance by curbing court intervention, arguing judges have other legal means to exercise oversight.

For critics, who include most of the country's tech and business establishment, Supreme Court oversight helps prevent corruption and abuses of power and weakening it will remove a vital part of Israel's democratic checks and balances. Groups of military reservists, including combat pilots and members of elite special forces units, have also joined the protests.

Some members of Netanyahu's Likud party have said the bill will be watered down before it is brought to a final vote which they hope to wrap up before the Knesset breaks for the summer on July 30.

But Simcha Rothman, the head of the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee which is drafting the bill, told Army Radio: "I'm saying this explicitly: I am not convinced that any significant changes are to be expected."

Netanyahu - who is on trial on graft charges he denies - had paused the judicial campaign for compromise talks with the opposition but the negotiations collapsed in June.

Additional reporting by Maayan Lubell, Dan Williams and Steven Scheer and Matt Spetalnick in Washington; Writing by Maayan Lubell and James Mackenzie; Editing by Louise Heavens, William Maclean and Angus MacSwan

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