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Al Jazeera

Israel readies as protests set to spread

Demonstrators urged to "get out of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem" to strengthen economy protests across the country.

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Israel is preparing for another weekend of social protests with marches, demonstrations and sit-ins now expected to spill from Tel Aviv to cities and towns across the country.

Protest leaders have called on participants to "get out of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem" on Saturday to bolster demonstrations in other locations.

"We want to strengthen the movement in the periphery, where those who have pitched tents in protest are still few, so we have made a call to leave Tel Aviv and Jerusalem to take part in rallies in twelve cities," Stav Shafir, a protest leader, told the AFP news agency.

"In these periphery cities people's lives are even more difficult than in the centre, near Tel Aviv. It is essential to express the solidarity of the whole movement with the populations of these communities," Shafir added.

Israel has been gripped since mid-July by a rapidly growing protest movement born out of outrage over Israel's property prices. It has transformed into a nationwide phenomenon to also demand cheaper education and health care.

The campaign now represents many strands of Israeli society and an ever-expanding list of grievances. The protests show no signs of deflating, and the government is clearly anxious.

'Up to the government'

Under pressure, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said he was willing to alter his approach to the free-market economy and meet the demands of the demonstrators. He created a commission to propose reforms and present recommendations to the government within a month.

Not all Israelis are convinced the government is doing enough.

An opinion poll released by Channel 10 television on Tuesday showed that 88 per cent of respondents said they supported the movement, with 53 per cent saying they are willing take part in protests.

Last weekend more than 250,000 people marched in Israel's commercial capital to demand reform. This weekend's protests are expected to be even larger, activists said.

"For years our leaders ignored the country's social problems and the plight of the people. This should be a wake-up call and they can't brush it aside," Irit Gabay, 58, a social worker, told the Reuters news agency.

Like other protest leaders, Shafir has rejected any immediate negotiations with the government.

"For a month Netanyahu has been trying to humiliate us, divide us, buy time - and he has done absolutely nothing," she said.

"It is up to the government to take concrete steps to demonstrate its goodwill, only then can a dialogue begin."