

Israeli government votes to dismiss attorney general, escalating standoff with judiciary



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks at a conference in Jerusalem last month.
(Ohad Zwigenberg / Associated Press)

JERUSALEM — The Israeli Cabinet on Monday voted unanimously to fire the attorney general, escalating a long-running standoff between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the judiciary that critics see as a threat to the country's democratic institutions.

The Supreme Court froze the move while it considers the legality of it.

Netanyahu and his supporters accuse Atty. Gen. Gali Baharav-Miara of exceeding her powers by blocking decisions by the elected government, including a move to fire the head of Israel's domestic security agency, another ostensibly apolitical office. She has said there is a conflict of interest because Netanyahu and several former aides face a series of criminal investigations.

Critics accuse Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, of undermining judicial independence and seeking to concentrate power in the hands of his coalition government, the most nationalist and religious in Israel's history. Netanyahu denies the allegations and says he is the victim of a witch hunt by hostile judicial officials egged on by the media.

An attempt by Netanyahu's government to overhaul the judiciary in 2023 sparked months of mass protests, and many believe it weakened the country ahead of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack later that year that triggered the war in the Gaza Strip.

The Movement for Quality Government in Israel, a prominent watchdog group, said it filed an emergency petition with the Supreme Court following Monday's vote. It said more than 15,000 citizens have joined the petition, calling the dismissal "illegal" and "unprecedented."

In a statement, the group accused the government of changing dismissal procedures only after failing to legally remove Baharav-Miara under the existing rules. It also cited a conflict of interest related to Netanyahu's ongoing trial.

"This decision turns the role of the attorney general into a political appointment," the group said. "The legal battle will continue until this flawed decision is overturned."