Thousands protest against Mexican judicial reform

AFP – Thousands of Mexicans, mainly court employees and law students, protested in the capital on Sunday against a controversial judicial reform proposal that would see judges elected by popular vote.
They gathered in Mexico City as the Senate began to debate the initiative pushed by outgoing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and approved by the lower house, called the Chamber of Deputies, in which the ruling party holds sway.

The proposed reform, which would see the election of judges of the Supreme Court and other tribunals as well as magistrates, has sparked diplomatic tensions with the United States, prompted protests by opponents, and upset financial markets.

“The judiciary will not fall,” chanted protesters who marched on the Senate, expected to vote on the proposal Wednesday.

The bill was approved by Senate committees on Sunday night and is expected to be presented to the plenary on Tuesday ahead of the vote a day later.

Striking judicial workers have asked the Supreme Court to intervene in the matter, a request that Lopez Obrador has said has no legal basis.

In rare public remarks the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Norma Pina, appeared to lash out Sunday at the reform proposal, although she did not name it specifically, saying Mexico risked “the demolition of the judicial branch.”

Pina said last week the court would discuss whether it has jurisdiction to halt the reform.

In her remarks Sunday, carried on social media, Pina presented two alternative reform proposals and called on Lopez Obrador

and congress to listen to Mexicans’ comments about the reform package.

“Today it is still possible,” Pina said. “We can change things.”

Currently, judges and some other court positions qualify for promotion based on their record and years of service.

The United States, Mexico’s main trading partner, has warned that the reforms would threaten a relationship that relies on investor confidence in the Mexican legal framework.

Lopez Obrador, who will be replaced by his ally Claudia Sheinbaum on October 1, argues that the change was warranted because courts currently serve the interests of the political and economic elite.

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