

Netanyahu's son blocked on Facebook for anti-Muslim posts

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JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's eldest, Yair, tweeted on Sunday that Facebook blocked his page for 24 hours over apparent anti-Muslim posts and called the leading social network a "dictatorship."

In a message posted Thursday on his Facebook page after deadly Palestinian attacks, Yair Netanyahu had called for "all Muslims (to) leave" Israel.

"Do you know where there are no attacks? In Iceland and in Japan where coincidentally there are no Muslims," the prime minister's son wrote.

In another post he wrote that there were only two possible solutions for peace, either "all Jews leave (Israel) or all Muslims leave."

"I prefer the second option," he added.

His comments came after two soldiers were shot dead on Thursday at a central West Bank bus station near a settlement.

On the same day, a baby prematurely delivered after his mother was shot and wounded in a separate attack nearby on December 9 also died.

Facebook deleted Yair Netanyahu's posts, prompting him to take to Twitter to criticize the social networking giant, calling it a "dictatorship of thought."

Critics of the prime minister have often attacked Yair as a grown man living in the premier's residence despite having no official role and benefitting from a bodyguard, a driver and other perks.

They say the parents of the 27-year-old are grooming him for future political power in an attempt to establish a ruling dynasty.



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[UN Syria envoy to host top envoys from Russia, Turkey, Iran](#)

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Mon, 2018-12-17 15:47

GENEVA: The outgoing UN envoy for Syria will meet top diplomats from Iran, Russia and Turkey this week, his office said Monday, in a final bid to make headway toward a new Syrian constitution.

The talks scheduled for Tuesday in Geneva will likely be one of Staffan de

Mistura's last meetings with major players in the Syrian conflict, as the veteran UN diplomat is due to step down in the coming days. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov will attend, a spokesperson from his office said.

A Turkish diplomatic source told AFP that Ankara's top envoy Mevlut Cavusoglu will be in Geneva along with Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. The UN did not immediately confirm the list of attendees.

The planned constitutional committee was agreed at a Russia-hosted conference in January.

The centerpiece of UN peace efforts in Syria, the committee would be tasked with negotiating a new post-war constitution that would pave the way to elections aimed at turning the page on seven years of devastating war.

But it has run into objections from the Syrian government.

The opposition has pushed for an entirely new constitution, but Damascus has said it will only discuss altering the current one.

In October, Damascus rejected a list presented by de Mistura of 50 civil society representatives and technical experts.



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Turkey may work with Syria's Assad if elected fairly

Author:

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ANKARA: In a potentially major policy shift, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Sunday said Ankara will consider working with Syrian President Bashar Assad if he wins a free and fair election.

Ankara had previously called on Assad to step down following the start of the uprising against him in 2011.

There are suggestions that the U-turn may be due to Turkey's opposition to growing Kurdish influence on both sides of the border.

"Turkey can't solve the (Kurdish) Democratic Union Party (PYD) problem with the US alone," said Timur Akhmetov, a researcher at the Russian International Affairs Council. "A start of dialogue with Assad ... seems like a logical step."

Turkey will also be driven by ambitions to install friendly political figures in the Syrian government, Akhmetov added.

"Renewed relations between Turkey and Syria will contribute to reconstruction of (Syrian) cities with Turkish companies and bilateral trade," he said.

A UN-led plan to draft reforms to Syria's constitution, laying the ground for fresh elections, is expected to be established within weeks.

Under the plan, the Syrian regime will choose 50 members of the Constitutional Committee, with Turkey proposing 50 Syrian opposition members and the UN nominating a further 50 people – comprising academics, experts and civil society members – to oversee the reforms.

Last week, Ankara said it will launch within days a military campaign east of the Euphrates River against the Syrian-Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), whose political wing is the PYD.

"Ankara may intend that Russia rhetorically supports such a campaign in exchange for a positive message about Assad's theoretical chances of staying in power," said Akhmetov.

But mistrust between Ankara and Damascus remains a significant hurdle to smoother diplomatic relations.

Last month, Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad demanded that Turkish "occupation" forces leave the country.

He said Damascus would not count on Turkish assurances because Ankara's intentions are "colonial" and "expansionist."

Aron Lund, a Syria analyst at the Century Foundation, said he does not think Turkey's expressed willingness to work with Assad constitutes a big change.

"What Cavusoglu seems to be saying is that Syria should have a democratic election, as is called for in UN Security Council resolution 2254, and that the winner – even if it's Assad – could be considered legitimate by Turkey," he told Arab News.

Cavusoglu simply responded to a hypothetical question, Lund said, adding: "For now, Turkey seems content to continue along the current course of action, working with Russia to secure its interests in Syria and relaying messages to Damascus through Moscow and Tehran."

Ankara still refuses to talk directly to Damascus to seek an end to the conflict in Syria. Sinan Hatahet of Al-Sharq Forum in Istanbul said Turkey's stance is conditional upon elections in Syria.

"Previously, Turkish officials made it clear that they don't believe that the regime would let elections happen," he told Arab News.

"It's still difficult to believe there will be any reconciliation between the parties for now."



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Three rail workers detained after Turkish rail crash

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Mon, 2018-12-17 18:36

ANKARA: A Turkish court on Monday placed three railway workers in pre-trial detention after they were accused of negligence leading to last week's fatal rail crash in Ankara.

Nine people were killed and almost 90 injured after a high-speed train crashed into a locomotive.

Those detained – a signalman, a switchman and a controller working for the state railway authority – face charges of reckless manslaughter and causing injury, the Anadolu state news agency reported.

Following the accident Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed those responsible would be held to account.

Ankara Governor Vasip Sahin said the accident happened after the early morning high-speed train with some 200 people aboard and traveling to the central province of Konya hit a locomotive checking rails on the same route. Turkey has in recent years sought to modernize its railways network following a string of fatal accidents.

July saw 24 people killed when passenger train left the track in northwestern Turkey.



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Ankara train crash leaves nine dead, 47 injured
Turkey train crash leaves 9 dead, dozens injured

[Labor again weakens border policy](#)

Labor's announcements today on its proposed actions to protect Australia's borders are nothing but subterfuge.