
Netanyahu in hot water amid claims he canceled Russia visit to pull 'racists' into his coalition

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Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid slammed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for postponing a visit to Russia, saying that he is “working tirelessly” to incorporate far-right groups into his coalition instead.

Scheduled for Thursday, Netanyahu’s visit to Moscow was meant to focus on Syria and bilateral security issues, but the Kremlin had to postpone the meeting due to the Israeli PM’s “domestic political affairs,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Yair Lapid, the leader of the centrist Yesh Atid party, [said](#) Netanyahu put off the Russia negotiations to hold talks with far-right groups to strengthen his coalition ahead of the April 9 Knesset election.

“The prime minister is tirelessly working to ensure the participation of a group of racists in his coalition.”

The harsh accusations target Netanyahu’s Wednesday agreement with two fringe religious-nationalist parties, one of which, the Otzma Yehudit movement, is led by former disciples of the infamous ultra-nationalist Rabbi Meir Kahane, who was banned from taking part in the 1988 Knesset election over racist comments.

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Thursday is the deadline for the submission of party slates ahead of the parliamentary election. With less than two months before the election, Netanyahu faces increasing pressure from his opponents. In early February, he had to step down as foreign minister after a petition questioning his ability to hold multiple ministerial posts was filed to the High Court. Netanyahu, however, retained his posts of defense minister and healthcare head.
