

India train derailment kills two. Indian officials and bystanders gather at the derailed train carriages at Rura, some 30 kms west of Kanpur on December 28, following a train crash in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. At least two people died and 28 were injured after a train derailed in north India, close to the site of a previous rail accident that killed 146. [AFP]



Israeli right wing dismisses Kerry speech, waits for Trump

Criticism. Netanyahu says Kerry's speech is biased against Israel and more focused on settlements than Palestinian violence.

BY AFP

ISRAEL. Israel's right wing dismissed US Secretary of State John Kerry's speech on the conflict with the Palestinians on Thursday as a parting shot of little consequence, especially with Donald Trump soon taking office.

One minister repeated his assertion that a Palestinian state will be "off the agenda" once expected ally Trump takes over, while others from what is seen as Israel's most right-wing government ever mocked Kerry.

"Palestine will be taken off the agenda," Education Minister Naftali Bennett of the hardline Jewish Home party told the Ynet news site.

He repeated his call for Israel to annex most of the West Bank, which would destroy any hope for a two-state solution -- long the basis of negotiations and which Kerry passionately defended Wednesday.

Kerry's speech included forceful criticism of Israeli settlement building in the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem, warning that it was helping put the two-state solution in "serious jeopardy."

Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he still supports a two-state solution, but he has also described his government as Israel's most pro-settlement, leading many analysts to question his sincerity.

Religious nationalists such as Bennett who see the West Bank as part of Israel, pointing to the Jewish connection to the land from the



Speaking. US president-elect Donald Trump, along with boxing promoter Don King, answers questions from the media after a day of meetings on Wednesday at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida. PHOTO BY AFP

biblical era, hold heavy sway in Netanyahu's government.

Netanyahu hit back immediately following Kerry's speech, calling it biased against Israel and more focused on settlements than Palestinian violence.

He has lashed out at US President Barack Obama and Kerry in particularly harsh language, blaming them for orchestrating last week's UN Security Council resolution demanding a halt to settlement building.

The United States abstained from the vote in a rare move, with the resolution passing 14-0.

"Israelis do not need to be lectured about the importance of peace by foreign leaders," Netanyahu said on Wednesday night.

After Trump tweeted ahead of

Kerry's speech "Stay strong Israel, January 20th is fast approaching!" Netanyahu responded with a tweet of his own.

"President-elect Trump, thank you for your warm friendship and your clear-cut support for Israel!" he wrote.

"Israelis do not need to be lectured about the importance of peace by foreign leaders."

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

While Kerry's speech broke little new ground, it included unusually stern criticism of Israel from an American leader.

"The Israeli prime minister publicly supports a two-state solution,

but his current coalition is the most right-wing in Israeli history, with an agenda driven by the most extreme elements," he said.

He added later that "the settler agenda is defining the future in Israel. And their stated purpose is clear: They believe in one state: greater Israel."

Israel occupied the West Bank and east Jerusalem in 1967. It later annexed east Jerusalem in a move never recognised by the international community, and Israel now describes the entire city as its "eternal capital."

Culture Minister Miri Regev, from Netanyahu's Likud party, mocked Kerry's comments on Jerusalem, suggesting he should divide Washington instead.

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