

Former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is negotiating a plea bargain to end his corruption trial, a source briefed on the matter said on Sunday, but talks have snagged over a condition that would remove him from politics.

Netanyahu, who lost power in June after 12 consecutive years as premier and is now opposition leader, has pleaded not guilty to charges of bribery, breach of trust and fraud in three cases for which he was indicted in 2019. All are being tried together.

The source said Netanyahu, 72, was discussing a deal with Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit under which he would plead guilty to reduced charges and have any resulting jail term commuted to community service.

But the talks have hit a bump over Netanyahu's demand to be spared a conviction carrying a "moral turpitude" clause, which under Israeli law would force him to quit politics for years, said the source, speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The State Attorney's Office declined to comment. A lawyer for Netanyahu, who has denied all wrongdoing and accused prosecutors of a politically motivated witch-hunt, did not immediately reply to a request for a comment.

Netanyahu has vowed to unseat his successor, Naftali Bennett, a nationalist straddling a coalition of highly diverse parties.

Likud failed to form a new government last year in part because kindred parties refused to join Netanyahu, citing the ongoing trial.

With his legal troubles behind him, Netanyahu might in theory be able to muster a broad new rightist coalition. If he were barred from politics, right-wing members of Bennett's coalition could opt to form a new government with a Likud party under new leadership.

The idea of a plea bargain was promoted by a former Supreme Court president, Aharon Barak.

He told Kan radio it would ease the pressure on the justice system, which has spent years defending itself against allegations from Netanyahu loyalists that he was being denied due process.

A spokesperson for Netanyahu's conservative Likud party said he did not know about any such negotiations.

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Israel's Netanyahu discusses plea bargain in graft trial, source says

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