



Religious-secular clashes halted, street closed for worship hours

by NAOMI SEGAL, Jewish Telegraphic Agency

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JERUSALEM -- Quiet prevailed on Jerusalem's Bar-Ilan Street this week, after the decision to close the thoroughfare went into effect.

Israel's High Court of Justice ruled last week that the street would be closed to traffic during Sabbath prayer times.

In doing so, the court upheld a decision of the transportation minister announced earlier in the week.

Citing technical reasons, the judges convinced the secular activists who challenged the decision to withdraw their petition.

The court also suggested that the petitioners, Meretz leader Yossi Sarid and Ornan Yekutieli, a member of the Meretz faction on the Jerusalem City Council, wait four weeks before deciding whether to file a petition again.

By then they will be able to determine whether violence has resumed on the thoroughfare after being reopened to traffic during non-worship hours, the court said.

The street, which runs through ultra-religious, or haredi, neighborhoods, has been at the center of a bitter and sometimes violent dispute between secular and religious Jews.

Earlier this year, the High Court ruled that if Bar-Ilan Street is closed to traffic during prayer times for the religious residents, alternative routes would have to be provided for secular residents.

Transportation Minister Yitzhak Levy, of the National Religious Party, announced last week that a 600-meter-long section of Bar-Ilan street would be closed during prayer hours.

He said that secular residents would be given special tags for their cars, enabling them to park "within reasonable walking distance" to their homes.

Rather than closing off the street with police barricades during the times of prayer, electronic signals would be posted at either end of the street alerting drivers. Emergency and police vehicles would be allowed to pass through the street at all times.

Petitioner Yekutieli said that while the petition was being withdrawn for now, he would resubmit it if there were any incidents of violence or attempts to close off the road outside of the prescribed hours of worship.