

# TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

The tension between religious and secular in Israel is always felt, erupting at different times over different issues. This time it is transportation, specifically whether or not the government can do repair work on Shabbat, even if not doing that work will inconvenience thousands of commuters. There is a 'status quo' agreement that has been in place for 70 years, but it's complicated, and many realities have changed in that time. What is a reasonable solution to the tension between the religious nature of a large part of the population, and the needs of a modern state in which large parts of the population are not religious?

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/hundreds-protest-netanyahu-decision-to-halt-shabbat-train-work/>

## Hundreds protest Netanyahu decision to halt Shabbat train work

Opposition MKs join angry Tel Aviv and Haifa residents demonstrating against PM for capitulating to ultra-Orthodox pressure

BY [TIMES OF ISRAEL STAFF](#) September 4, 2016, 9:31 am 6

Hundreds of people in Tel Aviv and Haifa on Saturday night demonstrated against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to halt infrastructure work on several of Israel's railway stations on Shabbat following pressure from ultra-Orthodox parties.

The protests, which drew Knesset opposition figures, came hours before the halting of trains between Tel Aviv and Haifa amid a bitter intra-Likud row snarled Sunday morning traffic for over 100,000 travelers and commuters, including thousands of soldiers trying to return to base.

Protesters gathered outside various train stations in both cities waving Israeli flags, carrying signs that read "Bibi, this is our train too," and "Let's get the country back on track." The rallies were organized by an organization called Free Israel, a non-profit group fighting against ultra-Orthodox hegemony in Israel.

**Chairwoman of the left-wing Meretz party Zehava Galon and colleague Tamar Zandberg** joined protesters at the Savidor train station on Tel Aviv's Arlozorov Street.

Galon, who earlier in the day petitioned the High Court of Justice over Netanyahu's decision, slammed the prime minister for capitulating to the ultra-Orthodox members of his coalition. "The people are demanding more than public transportation, the people are demanding leadership that care about them, and who makes decisions that prioritize you, the public, as the priority," she said.

The demonstrations were organized after Netanyahu on Friday instructed Israel Railways to halt 17 out of 20 projects that had been scheduled to take place over the weekend, after ultra-Orthodox parties threatened to topple his coalition if work continued on Shabbat. Work on the 17 projects instead began on Saturday night — after Shabbat ended — and into Sunday, leading to the cancellation of at least 150 train departures on the Haifa-Tel Aviv route Sunday morning, affecting an estimated 150,000 travelers and commuters. The headache was

particularly acute as Sunday is the day most soldiers are expected to return to base after weekend leave.

The Tel Aviv-Binyamina line was canceled throughout Sunday, while southbound trains entering Tel Aviv from the north at the city's Mercas Savidor station without reaching the southern half of the city.

Israel Radio on Sunday morning reported heavier than usual traffic on highways between Tel Aviv and Haifa, with the gridlock rippling out to other parts of the country.

Members of the opposition also said Saturday that they have collected the 25 MKs' signatures needed to force a special Knesset committee session to discuss the decision to terminate services at several railway stations after Shabbat, in order to allow for construction work that should have taken place on Friday and Saturday, when trains do not run.

The three projects that were allowed to continue despite ultra-Orthodox objections were those whose delay would, according to the police, constitute a genuine risk to human life due to traffic complications. But, the Ynet news website said the ultra-Orthodox parties rejected the police argument, and claimed that alternative solutions should be found.

According to Jewish law, the religious rules of conduct for Shabbat, such as the prohibition to work or to operate electrical machinery and engines, can be violated when a human life is at risk. Moshe Dagan, secretary-general of the Chief Rabbinate, however, said the weekend work is not something that would save human lives and as such would not be allowed.

**Netanyahu on Saturday accused Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz** of intentionally sparking a coalition crisis with the ultra-Orthodox parties over Sabbath work on the railways, just weeks after the two fought over control of a key Likud party institution.

Netanyahu claimed Katz created the crisis by ordering construction work on the rail network over the weekend when it wasn't necessary to do so, ostensibly in order to avoid train delays.

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/train-crisis-goes-to-heart-of-religion-state-debate-but-wont-derail-government/>

## **Train crisis goes to heart of religion-state debate, but won't derail government**

Dispute over what public work gets done on Shabbat has brought chaos on the streets and within Likud, but the Haredim ultimately got what they wanted — and so the coalition will live another day

BY [RAPHAEL AHREN](#) September 4, 2016, 4:53 pm

More than the Jews have preserved the Sabbath, the Sabbath has preserved the Jews, **Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel** told reporters Sunday morning as he headed into the weekly cabinet meeting.

Ariel, a senior member of the Orthodox-nationalist **Jewish Home party**, recycled the much-cited bon mot from early Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am in order to justify his position in the current traffic-crippling controversy over the state conducting maintenance work on the national railways during the Jewish people's day of rest. The holiness of the day, Ariel argued, trumps (nearly) all other considerations.

In response, political analyst Amit Segal — himself an Orthodox Jew — [quipped on Twitter](#) than more than Israel has safeguarded the Sabbath, trains running on the Sabbath have safeguarded Israel. Segal was presumably implying that in order to survive in today's world, the Jewish state had (and still has) to make certain compromises.

The always-contentious conflict between religion and state in Israel reared its head again loudly this weekend, resulting in nasty political mud wrestling within Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling Likud party and bona fide chaos on Israel's streets. Here's a look at what caused the crisis, how idling trains and angry commuters could have shaken up the government, but why the dispute won't topple the coalition.

**The so-called status quo regulating the state's approach to religious issues mandates that the government not publicly violate the Sabbath, save in cases of life and death.**

That's why, for instance, when the prime minister wants to issue statements on Shabbat he never does so in a formal manner but via "briefings" from his aides.

On paper, official bodies do not operate on Shabbat unless lives are at stake, in which case the seventh day's sanctity is suspended and any usually prohibited act is permitted, even encouraged by Jewish law.

In practice, however, major public works, including even standard maintenance work on Israel's railroad system, has taken place on the Sabbath for decades, even when ultra-Orthodox parties were essential parts of the governing coalition.

Crises have arisen occasionally, especially when news of government-sanctioned work on the day of rest that was not a matter of life and death somehow found its way onto the front pages of Haredi newspapers. It's the Haredi media coverage that has sometimes turned otherwise standard procedures into political dynamite.

That is what happened with [the current spat](#). Israel Railways had scheduled standard maintenance work to be carried out on a series of late summer Saturdays, when no trains are running. This was fully backed by Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz, who also just so happens to (reportedly) be eyeing the leadership of the Likud party in the post-Netanyahu era.

When the issue hit the headlines late last month, the Haredi parties felt the need to put their foot down and threatened to leave the coalition — and thus bring down the government — if the repair work was not canceled. A week ago, a partial compromise came into play, with much of the work going ahead.

Netanyahu proposed a compromise for this past Saturday's work, too, in which repairs would not go ahead at 17 out of 20 originally scheduled sites. He argued that work on the three remaining could proceed because the repairs were necessary for passengers' safety — a matter of life and death.

At first, the Haredi factions — **United Torah Judaism, led by Health Minister Yaakov Litzman, and Shas, headed by Interior Minister Aryeh Deri** — agreed to the deal.

Subsequently, though, they pushed Netanyahu to cancel the planned work at all 20 locations.

The last-minute changes of plan caused chaos: Complex preparations for the work had begun on Friday, but because it was not carried out on Shabbat, the train service was not usable in many locations. As the work belatedly got under way, some 150 train

departures on the Haifa-Tel Aviv route, the country's busiest, were canceled on Sunday morning, affecting an estimated 150,000 travelers and commuters. Since soldiers returning to their bases after a weekend at home were particularly affected, the Defense Ministry organized a fleet of buses to help alleviate the chaos, but [anger was still widespread](#) among troops and the general public alike. Some felt that Netanyahu had folded to Haredi pressure, others that he had sacrificed their well-being in order to show his ostensibly rebellious transportation minister who's boss. Netanyahu, for his part, rejected any blame. "This crisis is completely unnecessary. There was no need to reach this situation," he said at the beginning of Sunday's weekly cabinet meeting. He was sitting right next to Katz, though avoiding any eye contact with him.

"There has been a status quo in the State of Israel for many years; we honor it. When work needs to be done on Shabbat — it is done, as it was last Shabbat on the Ayalon highway," Netanyahu went on. "When it does not need to be done on Shabbat — it is not done. This has been our guiding principle; this is the principle that will continue to guide us."

### ***The political ramifications, or lack thereof***

Katz, who heads the Likud secretariat, and Netanyahu have been at odds over control of some key party institutions for years. But the crisis over the train works has provoked an unprecedentedly harsh slugfest.

On Saturday night, the prime minister issued a statement blaming his transportation minister for having "initiated" an unnecessary crisis in order to undermine his relations with the ultra-Orthodox public or damage his image among the general public.

"The prime minister is outraged over Minister Katz's cynical attack on passengers and soldiers," the statement added.

During Sunday's cabinet meeting, Netanyahu continued his public rebuke of Katz.

"When nobody wants a crisis, it is possible to avoid it. On this matter I expect full cooperation by all ministers. Ministers are appointed in order to avoid crises and solve problems, not create them."

Rumors of Netanyahu's intention to fire Katz have been swirling since Friday, but on Sunday proved to be premature. The prime minister's chief of staff, Yoav Horowitz, met with Katz on Sunday in a bid to sort out the crisis, and the word after the meeting was that, at least for now, the transportation minister will keep his job.

There are already too many disgruntled former Likud ministers (Kulanu leader and Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon, ex-education minister Gideon Sa'ar, ex-defense minister Moshe Ya'alon) for Netanyahu's liking, and the prime minister would prefer not to push another Likud heavyweight into their arms.

Thus Netanyahu seems unlikely to spark a bigger Likud crisis over the issue, and the ultra-Orthodox parties have no need to. So the government will not fall over this episode, it appears. Besides countless missed appointments, soldiers arriving late for duty, and perhaps a growing sentiment in some parts of the electorate that the prime minister is susceptible to ultra-Orthodox pressure, this weekend's crisis will not have drastic consequences. Not yet, at least.

### ***The ultra-Orthodox parties react***

For now, though, **Shas, United Torah Judaism and even the more modern-minded Jewish Home have scored another victory** in the ongoing struggle over the state's ostensible violations of the Sabbath — and emphasized their coalition leverage.

“The entire world knows to rest on the seventh day; certainly the Jewish state needs to do so,” Minister Ariel said. Even if for decades, non life-saving maintenance work has been performed on train tracks on Shabbat, the time has come to change that, he added triumphantly. “If for 60 years they did something that wasn't right, is that a reason to continue doing it?” Ariel asked reporters.

**Litzman, of UTJ**, disputed the assertion that Israel Railways had regularly violated the Sabbath on the scale that had been intended now. “There was nothing,” he insisted. Litzman also rejected the argument that work on the three sites that both sides had initially agreed on was crucial and thus permissible on the Sabbath.

All maintenance work could be done on weekdays, for instance during the eight-day shutdown of the railroad planned to take place in the near future, Litzman argued. If the work was planned properly, he said, there were ways to avoid major traffic chaos. As he spoke these benignly reassuring words, minutes before Sunday's cabinet meeting, however, thousands of Israelis were still stuck en route to work, the army and other appointments, bitterly trying to figure out how to reach their destinations.

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.741607>

### **Israel's Shabbat Wars Are Not Just Another Political Crisis**

The furor over rail maintenance on Shabbat highlights inherent contradictions in Israel's political system and real problems with its structure.

Anshel Pfeffer Sep 12, 2016 5:19 PM

A senior Western diplomat stationed in Israel admitted last week his exasperation at the difficulty of having to explain in clear terms the latest political crisis here to his superiors back home. And with good reason. The three-way struggle between Benjamin Netanyahu, Yisrael Katz and the ultra-Orthodox parties over the knotty issue of rail maintenance work on Shabbat seems like just another one of those periodical bouts of jealousy the prime minister suffers from when one of his Likud underlings receives too much favorable attention, coupled with the eternal state-and-religion tension of the Jewish State.

And then, just like that, it all seems to have blown over. Another Shabbat rolled on, work on the rails resumed, and the ultra-Orthodox parties are turning a blind eye once again. But even if the furor seems to have died down and the warring sides are edging back from the brink, this wasn't just your standard coalition crisis. The events of the last two weeks highlighted three of the contradictions inherent in Israel's basic framework — and you can't just blame Netanyahu for them, as they go back all the way to the foundation of the state.

A prime minister who cannot tell his ministers what to do.

The principle of joint cabinet responsibility is actually written into Israeli law — it's part of a Basic Law no less, which is the closest thing we have to a constitution. It says that “a minister is responsible to the prime minister for the positions he is in charge of.” But as we saw quite clearly last week, Netanyahu can't even get his transportation minister to sort out which projects will go ahead when. A few days earlier, it also seemed like he couldn't direct Education

Minister Naftali Bennett which schools will be closed down in Tel Aviv and where the children of African migrants can be enrolled.

The prime minister's critics repeat the mantra that "Bibi is weak." But this weakness is in no way unique to Netanyahu. With the exception of Ariel Sharon who swiftly fired ministers who openly defied his policies, all Israeli prime ministers have swallowed dissent. One explanation for this is the fact that no ruling party has ever held a Knesset majority and therefore all governments were coalition-based, but that is an insufficient explanation as also ministers who are members of the prime minister's own party have been openly defiant.

Go as far back as the mid-1950s and you have the poisonous relationship between David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett and Pinhas Lavon, all members of Mapai. Likud leaders were no more authoritative; both Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir stomached colleagues who openly abused them.

The weakness of prime ministers in the face of their own ministers is largely due to the tiny size of the proportionally-representative Knesset. With only 120 members, Israel has one of the smallest parliaments in the world. Even the most successful Israeli prime minister can ill afford having a fired minister on his party's back-benches stirring up trouble, when he may need that minister's vote at any moment.

Netanyahu threatened to fire Katz last week, and if half of what his aides were briefing him on the way Katz was allegedly plotting against him was true, he would have been fully justified in doing so. Ultimately, Katz continues to sit at Netanyahu's right hand in cabinet meetings because he can cause him much worse damage from outside. Every Israeli cabinet is a cabinet of rivals and they don't have to hide it. In some ways it is a useful check on a prime minister's powers, but it also leads to governmental paralysis and makes it nearly impossible to affect change.

#### *The plausible deniability of religious desecration.*

Everyone knows Israel has an inbuilt tension between the Jewish State and the Jewish religion. Ostensibly this is somehow solved by sticking to the 70-year-old "status quo" that Ben-Gurion agreed upon with the rabbis. But there's no way that the status quo can work smoothly in a 21st-century society and economy. Sticking religiously to those arrangements would in reality mean imposing unbearable restraints on Israelis.

Instead of the status quo, we have a system of plausible deniability, in which on the surface Israel officially does not work on Shabbat, the rabbinate controls all matters of family and marital status, and the health and education systems abide by the ultra-Orthodox version of Jewish law. In reality, tens of thousands work seven days a week, keeping the economy running nearly-smoothly, thousands of couples get hitched abroad without a rabbi and are registered as married upon their return, a quarter of all new immigrants in the last three decades receive citizenship under the Law of Return despite the rabbis not considering them Jews, and hospitals provide free-for-all abortions under the rubber-stamp of the "social clause." Each side can turn a blind-eye and believe that they are living in a secular, or religious society.

Except when either the "desecration" of the Torah's commandments, or their coercion, becomes too blatant to ignore and someone – usually the media, as in the latest case of rail

maintenance work on Shabbat – decides to draw unwanted publicity to the convenient arrangement.

In such cases, politicians scramble to take advantage of the crisis, as Netanyahu and Katz both seem to have done. Others try to find ways to damp down the flames as quickly as possible, as Social Affairs Minister Haim Katz has done by taking charge of the Shabbat work permits and resuming the usual quiet arrangements with the Haredi politicians. But this will become more difficult as time passes, with the inevitable transparency of government and an increasingly boisterous and independent Haredi media.

As the pressures mount on an Israeli society, which is at once becoming both more religious and more Westernized, the plausible deniability that is the foundation for the façade of the status quo will be even more difficult to maintain.

Startup Nation on crumbling infrastructure.

Beyond the political strife and serial state-and-synagogue clashes, another inherent weakness revealed by the Shabbat work crisis was the woeful state of Israel's civil infrastructure. First-time visitors taking the bus or train can barely believe this is the fabled Startup Nation, especially when stuck in a fighting mob trying to board a bus in one of the sooty central bus stations reeking of urine and falafel oil.

There is only one functioning line on the central rail link with Tel Aviv; the train ride between Tel Aviv and the capital takes, if you're lucky, 81 minutes (twice what it takes by road, and it's not as if Highway One is anything to write home about); and families moving to one of the new suburbs in places like Modi'in and Shoham have little choice but to run two cars if both parents want to continue working, as public transport plans are lagging about a decade behind the inadequate supply of housing.

So why does a technological powerhouse have such an inadequate transportation infrastructure? Why do tens of thousands of software engineers waste valuable hours daily in traffic?

Those who were around in the early 1980s can remember very similar questions being asked of the discrepancy between Israel's military prowess and its financial shambles. How come a small, resource-poor country managed to build and maintain an advanced strategic advantage over the vastly larger and wealthier Arab world, but its economic sector was capable only of growing deficits?

The answer was, of course, within the question – ensuring its survival in a hostile neighborhood had spurred Israel to build an efficient army where an emphasis on the technology of its weapons and infrastructure made up for shortages of manpower. But prioritizing material and human resources on defense meant stagnation of the civilian economy.

On the brink of financial meltdown in 1984, Israel finally began reordering its priorities with major cutbacks in the military budget, a package deal with the manufacturers and trade unions on temporary price and wage freezes, and an emphasis on incentivizing the private sector, particularly in its areas of strength. By the late 1990s, the country was already a low-inflation, high-surplus dot.com superpower and it was easy to forget that only 15 years earlier, waiting time for the installation of a new phone line was measured in years. But with all the advance in high-tech communications and Israeli know-how being used in California to pilot driverless cars, physical infrastructure has continued to crumble.

It's not enough that the underground train in Greater Tel Aviv, first envisaged in 1935, is only now in its first stages of excavation. It takes the chaos of the rail system shutting down because of Shabbat and the tragedy of the collapse of a new multi-story car park for Israelis to begin to wake up to the absurdity of the situation.

How much worse does it have to get before another historic shift in national priorities finally drags Israel's roads and trains to the level of its military and communication networks? If past experience is anything to go by, it will have to get worse until a weak prime minister can finally overcome Israel's structural contradictions and make the necessary decisions.

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.740123>

### **Netanyahu: Train Crisis Was Avoidable, There's a Religious Status Quo in Israel**

In thinly veiled criticism of transportation minister, PM says ministers are appointed to prevent crises, not create them. Ultra-Orthodox minister says crisis was intentional and Shabbat desecration is on the rise.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that the political crisis triggered over infrastructure work on Israel's railroads during Shabbat was completely avoidable and "we should never have reached this situation."

Work conducted on Israel's railways during the Sabbath has provoked a political furor over recent days, with ultra-Orthodox parties demanding that all works be halted.

On Friday, Netanyahu ordered the cancellation of all infrastructure work planned by Israel Railways for the weekend, sparking a public outcry and a political falling out between him and Transportation and Road Safety Minister Yisrael Katz, whom the prime minister blames for the crisis.

Speaking at the weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday, alongside Katz, Netanyahu said there was a religious "status quo" in Israel which "for years we have respected.

"When we need to do work during Shabbat, it takes place — like it did last week [referring to planned work on Hashalom Station in Tel Aviv]. But when there is no reason, it won't. This is our guiding principle," Netanyahu added.

Over the weekend, Netanyahu accused Katz of deliberately causing a rift with the ultra-Orthodox coalition parties, with a source in his office claiming the work could have been done during weekdays.

In a thinly veiled attack on Katz, Netanyahu said Sunday that "ministers are supposed to resolve crises, not create them. I expect full cooperation from all ministers."

On the sidelines of the meeting, Katz met with Netanyahu's chief of staff, Yoav Horowitz, in a bid to deescalate the tensions between the two. A minister from the Likud told Haaretz that the meeting indicates that the possibility that Katz will be fired has been most likely dropped.



Regarding the work itself, Netanyahu said that "in the past seven years, we have succeeded in doing infrastructure work without redundant crises. When there is no desire to create a crisis, it is easy to avoid it."

Ahead of the cabinet meeting, Health Minister Yaakov Litzman (United Torah Judaism) blasted government work during Shabbat, saying that desecration of the Jewish day of rest was at an all-time high.

"The train [company] decided to shut down the rail for eight days [for work on the lines]. Why can't [the work slated for Saturday] take place then, together with the other work?" the UTJ chairman asked.

When quizzed about why he objected to work that was considered vital for the rail network, he responded, "That's [the information] they're peddling. All the work can be done together, and there was no reason to desecrate Shabbat. They were looking for it."

Shabbat politics

On Saturday, Netanyahu spoke with a number of Likud ministers and lawmakers, and asked them whether they would support Katz's dismissal. Netanyahu blames Katz for the rift with the Haredi lawmakers, in a bid to destabilize the coalition.

"This is an initiated and superfluous crisis on the part of Minister Yisrael Katz, which was meant to undermine the relations between the prime minister and the ultra-Orthodox public, or alternatively to harm the prime minister's image among the general public," a statement released Saturday by Netanyahu's bureau said.

According to Netanyahu, the works could have been carried out during the week, not on Shabbat. "Yisrael Katz is holding passengers and soldiers hostage," the statement added. The decision to halt train services between Tel Aviv and Haifa on Saturday and Sunday also caused public uproar, highlighting political and societal tensions between secular and ultra-Orthodox Israelis. Hundreds attended protests across Israel on Saturday night.

"Netanyahu has had it with Katz," a Likud source told Haaretz. He said the prime minister is determining whether firing Katz for the train crisis would damage the premier politically.

<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.740118>

## **Top Transportation Official: Work During Shabbat Is Vital for Israel**

Some 150,000 Israeli train commuters set to suffer as line connecting Tel Aviv to northern Israel remains closed due to political spat over work on the Sabbath.

Jonathan Lis, Noa Shpigel, Ilan Lior and Chaim Levinson Sep 04, 2016 9:40 AM

Israel's top transportation official on Sunday rejected claims that infrastructure work on Israeli rail lines during Shabbat was the cause of a crisis that has left up to 150,000 Israeli commuters stranded.

The main line connecting Tel Aviv and the north remained closed on Sunday morning.

Work conducted on the railways during Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest, has provoked a political crisis in recent few days, with ultra-Orthodox parties demanding that all work be halted.

On Friday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the cancellation of all infrastructure work planned by Israel Railways for the weekend, sparking a political crisis between him and Transportation and Road Safety Minister Yisrael Katz.

The decision to halt the train lines on Saturday and Sunday also caused public uproar, highlighting political and societal tensions between secular and ultra-Orthodox Israelis. Hundreds attended protests across Israel on Saturday night.

Sunday morning, with heavy traffic reported across the nation and expected to continue until the evening, Transportation Ministry Director General Keren Turner defended the work and deflected criticism aimed at the ministry.

According to Turner, Israeli law has always permitted vital infrastructure work during Shabbat, and the ministry does not have the relevant authority to rescind work permits for such projects. "If we don't have to, we don't work during Shabbat. But that has nothing to do with the ministry, the minister or myself," said Turner. "We met with the ultra-Orthodox and explained when and where we were planning to work, and the minister requested then that when possible, construction work not be conducted on Saturday," she said.

However, she added that despite political claims to the contrary, work has always been undertaken during Shabbat. Moreover, she said Transportation Minister Katz does not even have the authority to authorize or cancel scheduled work: "Only the Labor Minister has that authority," she said, referring to Haim Katz.

"Should I as a director general of the Transportation Ministry have the authority to decide what harms the public or not?" she asked. "For years, we've worked with the labor minister, [who understood that] it would harm a vital service to citizens [if there was no train] and therefore we got permits to work during Shabbat.

"Israel's labor laws define what is considered a vital service to Israel's economy. Whoever doesn't want us to work during Shabbat should work to change the law that enables it. Even this Saturday, government companies that are not the Transportation Ministry worked during Shabbat. For the country to function, it is permitted, under certain conditions, to work during the Sabbath," Turner said.

"Professionally, I'm dumbstruck that an entire country is going crazy today, even though nothing has changed in the way we've been working for years. It pains me to see this insanity and the damage it causes to the public," she concluded.

Some rail lines will remain shut until Sunday evening, Israel Railways said on Sunday. The line between Tel Aviv Savidor Central Station and Haifa's Hof Hacarmel Station will only resume at 7 P.M., prompting fears of traffic chaos in Tel Aviv. Other lines will resume earlier.

Netanyahu spoke with a number of Likud ministers and lawmakers on Saturday, and asked them whether they would support Yisrael Katz's dismissal. Netanyahu blames Katz for the rift with the ultra-Orthodox parties, in bid to destabilize the coalition.

"Netanyahu has had it with Katz," a Likud source told Haaretz. He said the prime minister is attempting to determine whether firing Katz for the train crisis would damage him politically. Haim Katz, also the social affairs minister, has publically announced he stands by the transportation minister, as has Deputy Housing Minister Jackie Levy. As of Saturday evening, no Likud minister or lawmaker had publicly declared support for Netanyahu in his campaign against Katz.

**On Friday, Netanyahu spoke with leaders of the ultra-Orthodox parties. MK Moshe Gafni (UTJ) said Yisrael Katz wasn't truthful and demanded that Netanyahu fire him. Health Minister Yaakov Litzman, who heads UTJ, did not join Gafni's demand, but said that his spiritual leader, Rabbi Yaakov Aryeh Alter of Gur, instructed him to leave the government if Shabbat is desecrated.**