



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ **President Clinton defended his decision not to meet with the Israeli prime minister last month.** The remarks came as the Netanyahu government sought to develop broad guidelines for a further withdrawal from the West Bank. [Page 3]

■ **Israel's communications minister called on the United States to free Jonathan Pollard.** Limor Livnat told the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations: "After 12 years in jail, enough is enough." She is scheduled to meet with Pollard on Wednesday in the U.S. prison where he is serving a life sentence for spying for Israel.

■ **The head of an international panel probing World War II-era dormant Swiss bank accounts said that 4,500 of the 6,600 claims filed by heirs were valid.** Paul Volcker said the panel did not know how many of the accounts had belonged to victims of the Nazis, but he said many of the names appeared to be Jewish.

■ **A Philadelphia man who served as a guard in two Nazi concentration camps was ordered deported from the United States to his home country of Slovakia.** Johann Breyer, 72, was a guard at Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

■ **An Israeli court sentenced one of the founders of the Hebron settlers movement to six months in jail.** Rabbi Moshe Levinger also received a suspended sentence and a fine for disturbing Muslim prayers at Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs and for blocking an army commander from entering a settlement near Hebron.

■ **Israeli's Chief Sephardi Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron sent a letter to spiritual leaders in Iran urging a meeting with rabbis.** Meanwhile, Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Yisrael Meir Lau, met with Egyptian religious leaders and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo.

■ **Police in Philadelphia arrested a man suspected of committing several recent hate crimes, including against Jewish individuals and institutions.** Police made the arrest after identifying the man through caller ID.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

From intermarriage to divorce: Kids often get caught in cross fire

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jeffrey Kendall wanted his children to believe their mother was destined to burn in hell.

The children, attending their father's fundamentalist Christian church, were told that their mother's observance of Judaism had sealed her fate and that they, too, would be doomed if they did not accept Jesus as their lord and savior.

It was not always this way for the Kendall family.

Kendall and Barbara Zeitler were married in a Jewish ceremony in 1988. Kendall was nominally a Catholic and Zeitler was a mildly observant Reform Jew. They agreed to raise their children, now ages 9, 6 and 4, as Jews.

But Kendall's decision to join a fundamentalist Christian sect in 1991 and Zeitler's adoption of Orthodox Judaism in 1994 eventually led them to divorce, and their children became caught in the cross fire of their wildly divergent religious practices.

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court put a stop to that last week.

In a unanimous decision, the court ruled that divorced parents of different faiths can be prohibited from teaching their religious beliefs to their children if it creates substantial harm.

The court barred Kendall from bringing his children to his church because it said doing so would stir emotional conflict within the children and wrongly force them to choose between their parents.

While it may not have been a precedent-setting decision — several courts throughout the country have issued similar rulings — it nonetheless has focused new attention on one of the more problematic consequences of intermarriage.

The issue also provides a different twist to the holiday season, when intermarried couples often struggle with how to celebrate Chanukah or Christmas.

How to approach the December quandary when the couple is divorced is that much more difficult.

The question of how divorce affects the religious identification of children of intermarriage has become an increasingly vexing dilemma. By some estimates, one out of three American Jews now lives in an interfaith household. About a third of interfaith marriages result in divorce, compared with about 20 percent of Jewish marriages, according to experts in the field.

Leaving 'lasting psychological scars'

During the past two decades, a growing number of children have been placed in situations in which one of the parents has sought to change the religious identification of the child over the objections of the other.

"In too many of these cases, this has caused significant harm to the child," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center in Washington.

There have been cases "in which a child, a year before Bar Mitzvah, was told by the custodial parent that they would no longer be Jewish and henceforth would be a member of another religion," said Saperstein, who teaches Jewish law and church-state law at Georgetown University.

In other instances, parents like Jeffrey Kendall have actively sought to discredit their children's religious upbringing and convert them to another religion.

"All the variants of these situations place the children in untenable situations in relation to their parents, arguably violate the religious rights of the child, and too often leave lasting psychological scars," Saperstein said.

Egon Mayer, a professor of sociology at Brooklyn College, said the cases are characterized by a complicated clash of rights — "namely, the right of any parent to enjoy their religious freedom and the right of the other parent to raise their children in a way that respects their custodial rights.

"When you have a clash of rights, you have the makings of real tragedy," said Mayer, an expert on Jewish intermarriage. "It's one thing

when you have a clash of right and wrong. It's another thing when you have a clash of right and right."

Despite the ambiguities, the legal answer has been, for the most part, straightforward.

The custodial parent is almost always allowed to determine a child's religious upbringing. When there is joint custody, a child's prior religious upbringing or identification is generally the determining factor.

In settling disputes, the courts have followed the judicial equivalent of the physician's Hippocratic oath: "First, do no harm." Even constitutional concerns are secondary, according to legal experts.

"In cases where you can actually make a show of harm to children, the courts will stop the other parent from actively tearing the children religiously," said Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department.

The other parent may be permitted to discuss religious matters with the children or expose them to his or her religion by taking them to church or synagogue, but only if these actions do not cause substantial harm.

Regardless of the marital status of interfaith parents, organized American Jewry generally views consistency and stability in a child's religious upbringing as paramount. Raising children in two faiths is "utterly confusing, not to mention potentially destructive," said Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee.

In instances of divorce, mixed religious messages can become particularly damaging when parents "use the children and religion as pawns in the battle," Rudin said.

The effect, ironically, is often complete alienation from religion.

"The more vociferous parents make religion an issue in the battle, the more children will want to have nothing to do with any religion," Mayer said.

"Unfortunately, parents make a great mistake," he added, "when they think they're going to win the hearts and minds of their children by bludgeoning the other parent with their religious convictions." □

Almost a rabbi: Woman's hire charts untested Orthodox turf

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — An Orthodox synagogue, for the first time, has hired a woman to work as a rabbi — almost.

Manhattan's Lincoln Square Synagogue has hired Julie Stern Joseph to teach adult education classes, provide pastoral counseling and visit women in the hospital — roles often performed by a rabbi.

Both Stern Joseph and Lincoln Square's rabbi, Adam Mintz, in separate interviews, took pains to make clear that hers is not a clerical position.

But this is the first time that an Orthodox synagogue has been known to create a staff position for a woman in which she takes on these tasks, which are permitted to women according to an Orthodox interpretation of Jewish law.

The congregation is carefully calling her post that of a "congregational intern," and not using the term "para-rabbi," which is employed in some non-Orthodox synagogues to describe people who fill much the same role.

In the Orthodox view of Jewish law, women may not be ordained.

The topic has been highly sensitive within centrist Orthodoxy recently, as women with a sophisticated secular education have been recognized to have the capacity — and desire — for opportunities to study Judaism's primary texts.

In the Orthodox world, the full-time adult study of Torah and Talmud has traditionally been available only to men.

Drisha, the institute for women's advanced Torah study, opened its doors more than 15 years ago in New York City, becoming one of the first to offer the same opportunity to women.

The slow proliferation of programs offering such study to women has created a tension between traditional Orthodox religious roles that focus on women as mothers and wives and the possibility of talented woman working as religious leaders.

An independent program started this year by two rabbis who teach at the Yeshiva University-affiliated Stern College for Women has come under fire in the centrist Orthodox community.

The Riverdale, N.Y.-based Torat Miriam educates women on a part-time basis to prepare them for non-rabbinic leadership roles within Orthodox institutions. But it has been rejected by some rabbis as beyond the bounds of what is permitted for women.

Such a climate has Stern Joseph very concerned about the way her part-time job at Lincoln Square will be perceived.

"There's no thought that this role will evolve into a rabbinic position for women, because if there was, then I wouldn't be involved with it," she said in an interview between classes at Drisha.

She is in her first year of full-time study in the institute's Scholar's Circle, which permits gifted women to study Talmud in the morning and halachah, or Jewish law, in the afternoon.

The 24-year-old also studied for more than two years at Midreshet Lindenbaum, a Jerusalem yeshiva for women.

"I want to provide a role for women in the community," she said. "If these roles are halachically permissible, and I can maximize that, then great.

"Women often feel disenfranchised in a synagogue, and if I can bridge a gap between women and the rabbi, and at the same time help the rabbi, then that's very helpful."

Her new boss, Rabbi Mintz, said that despite worries that the new position would be controversial even at the flagship congregation of modern Orthodoxy, "the reaction from the community so far has been only positive."

"There's always going to be opposition," he said, just as there was a century ago when Sarah Schneier started the first schools for fervently Orthodox girls, which has grown into a whole network of schools known as the Bais Ya'acov movement.

"Like her, we are doing something within tradition rather than opposed to it," Mintz said.

"I hope this will become a model for other synagogues." □

Israeli officials issue rabies alert

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's Health Ministry is warning about a possible breakout of rabies.

The warning comes after an Israeli man died of rabies Tuesday — the third fatality in Israel from the disease in the past year.

The latest incident also prompted calls from the Nature Reserve Authority for a campaign to immunize wild animals.

The reports of rabies were the first in humans in Israel in some 40 years, health officials said.

They urged the public to immunize pets and to stay away from all stray and wild animals. □

Clinton defends action on Israel as Cabinet debates future maps

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President Clinton shot back at Israel's prime minister this week for his accusation that the president "humiliated" the entire State of Israel by not meeting with him during a visit last month.

"There can be no serious suggestion that the United States is not interested in the peace process or respectful of the people and government of Israel," Clinton said Tuesday at his end-of-the-year news conference when asked to respond to Premier Benjamin Netanyahu's comments.

After visiting the United States and failing to receive an audience with the president, Netanyahu had publicly accused Clinton of engaging in "unbecoming" conduct.

"The entire Jewish state feels humiliated if such action is directed against us," Netanyahu said on CNN.

Clinton vigorously defended his decision not to meet with Netanyahu, citing a series of previous meetings with the premier.

"I don't believe I have ever met with any other world leader five times within an 18-month period," Clinton said this week.

Clinton said he plans to invite Netanyahu to Washington next month for a substantive meeting on the peace process.

"I think it is important when the president meets on the peace process that it be a real meeting and that there be some understanding of where we are and where we're going and what we're doing together," Clinton said.

He said he was "not suggesting that there is some standard that the government or the prime minister has to meet in order to have a meeting."

The latest public exchange between the two heads of state comes as the United States is stepping up pressure on Israel to move forward with a "credible" proposal for a further withdrawal from the West Bank. Netanyahu was expected to present U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright with broad guidelines for an Israeli redeployment during a meeting in Paris on Thursday.

Netanyahu targets mid-January as deadline

In advance of the meeting, the Israeli Cabinet was holding marathon discussions in an effort to define the principles of the further pullback within a permanent-status framework. However, no decision was expected to be made until next week. After her talks with Netanyahu in Paris, Albright was slated to travel to London to meet with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

The Americans have also pressed the Palestinian Authority to tighten security cooperation with Israel and exert a 100 percent effort to fight terrorism.

A senior Israeli official said this week that Netanyahu had targeted mid-January to finalize plans for a permanent-status arrangement with the Palestinians as well as a further redeployment.

The official said that following a Cabinet endorsement of such a plan, implementation could take up to five months, contingent upon a Palestinian fulfillment of peace commitments, including a crackdown on Islamic militants and a cancellation of the anti-Israeli provisions of the Palestine National Covenant.

As the Cabinet debated various proposals, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported this week that the prime minister was leaning toward a "security interest" map drawn up by the defense establishment over a more hawkish one submitted by National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon.

The paper said that under the proposal by Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, up to one-third of the 144 Jewish settlements in the West Bank would fall outside full Israeli sovereignty.

The Prime Minister's Office has denied that any decision on the scope of the withdrawal or the future of the Jewish settlements has been made.

Clinton's comments, meanwhile, came in the same week that he promised American Jewish leaders to continue to facilitate Israeli-Arab peace talks that enhance Israeli security.

Clinton, in a return letter to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, agreed that the United States and Israel should try to resolve their differences privately.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, sought to downplay his differences with Clinton.

In a conference call with the Conference of Presidents on Monday, the prime minister said that Israel and the United States had corrected the "difficulties we were having" and were working together to close any policy gaps.

He emphasized, however, that Israel is dealing with "existential issues that will determine whether Israel can live, survive and thrive in a climate of security and peace."

The next day, however, an Israeli Cabinet minister lashed out at the Clinton administration during a speech to the Conference of Presidents.

Limor Livnat, minister of communications, criticized the administration for failing to demand Palestinian compliance with the terms of the Oslo accords, as Clinton officials had promised in assurances to the Israelis as part of January's Hebron agreement.

"I find it appalling that at a watershed period of history, when so many countries have moved toward democracy, the United States should be supporting the evolution of an authoritarian, dictatorial regime," Livnat said. □

Israeli chief rabbi visits Egypt

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's chief rabbis are conducting a foreign policy of their own.

Sephardi Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron sent a letter to spiritual leaders in Iran, asking them to meet with rabbis and create a dialogue between religious leaders throughout the Middle East. In his letter, he called for an end to all hostile activity between Jews and Muslims, the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot reported.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat brought the letter to Tehran when he attended an Islamic summit there last week, Yediot reported.

According to other reports, the Iranian clerics responded positively to the letter, and an interfaith meeting involving rabbis and Iranian clerics may be held in a North African country in a matter of weeks.

Meanwhile, Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi has gone on a peace mission to Egypt. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau held talks this week with Egyptian religious leaders during which they condemned terrorism and pledged to use their spiritual authority to promote moderation.

The Grand Sheik of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayyed Tantawi, also said in published remarks that he asked Lau to advise Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to change what Tantawi called his anti-peace stands in order "to fulfil international and bilateral agreements" so that "the whole region does not face a catastrophe."

Lau, who also met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, was the first Israeli chief rabbi to visit Cairo while still in office. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Netanyahu's wife hot topic for uninhibited Israeli media

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel's first lady has once again become the subject of unsavory news reports — and the coverage says as much about the Israeli media as it does about the prime minister's family.

Last year, Sara Netanyahu was lambasted in the press for firing a nanny who allegedly burned a pot of soup.

Ever since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was elected in 1996, his wife has been a favorite media target.

But the bad coverage turned even worse this week, after the Israel's largest-circulation newspaper, Yediot Achronot, published a six-page investigative piece in its weekend magazine.

The article depicted Sara Netanyahu as an embarrassment to her husband, cruel and domineering toward her staff.

It also depicted her as availing herself of state resources that she had no right to.

The story in Yediot — which quickly spilled over to other Israeli media as well as the international media — prompted calls for the role of the prime minister's spouse to be defined by law.

The coverage also prompted questions of whether the first lady was hampering her husband's ability to govern.

Among the worst excesses reported in graphic detail by the newspaper was an outburst in which she hurled shoes at a veteran domestic staffer at the prime minister's residence.

On another occasion, according to Yediot, she hurled abuse at the family that had purchased her childhood home near Haifa when she and her husband visited it unannounced during a vacation this summer.

The paper also reported that once, in the middle of a jealous rage, she threatened to call the police on her husband.

Other media confirmed the general impression of a flighty and high-handed woman who maintains a facade of charitable involvement, but who insists on keeping up a sizable staff of state-paid employees to which she is not legally entitled.

Israeli media shifts away from constraints

In part, the directness — some would say crudeness — of the reports reflects a marked shift away from the self-imposed constraints that Israeli media had long maintained.

This change is widely attributed to the intensity of the competition and the huge financial stakes involved as newspapers and television channels vie for readership and ratings.

In part, too, the Yediot report signifies that covering a politician's private life, including domestic strife, is now considered fair game.

Some observers say that the media shed its inhibitions after Netanyahu became the first Israeli premier to actively thrust his family before the public eye.

But beyond these sociological shifts, there is a genuine sense of concern about the revelations in the Netanyahu household.

Many Israelis, regardless of their political sympathies, say they are sincerely concerned that the premier cannot devote all the energies he needs for his job because of problems at home.

In the words of one American Jewish leader: "The

guy has no menuchah (rest). Not in the office, nor at home. Everyone needs some menuchah in order to function."

In the wake of the Yediot article, the Netanyahus have pointed to a slew of letters of support that have been deluging the prime minister's office and residence.

Some of this support may have been initiated or encouraged by circles around the prime minister's family.

But it would be wrong to dismiss this support as staged and to contend that the Yediot report only damaged the prime minister.

Political pundits believe that diehard Netanyahu supporters will probably have had their sympathy — and their loathing of what they view as the left-liberal media — intensified by the latest coverage of the first lady.

Sara Netanyahu has attributed her bad coverage to a media bias in favor of the opposition.

The prime minister has long felt that winning over the media has been a lost cause; his concern is to get maximal, not favorable, coverage.

Indeed, he rarely loses an occasion at party meetings and public rallies to score popular rhetorical points by singling out the media for his invective.

After failing to react for several days — advance word about the Yediot report began making headlines last week — Benjamin Netanyahu issued an aggrieved statement Saturday decrying the depths of unethical journalism.

He also informed Yediot's publisher that he and Sara were canceling their subscription.

This move was calculated to appeal to the constituency that regards the media as irredeemably leftist.

That constituency recognizes the prime minister's personal flaws but nevertheless continues to support him politically.

A full-page advertisement in Israeli newspapers Monday proclaimed that "a whole nation" stands behind the Netanyahus "against base and evil media."

While the staunch spirit of this constituency can be demonstrated by the piles of letters, faxes and telegrams of support reaching the prime minister, some seasoned observers insist that the Netanyahu camp's "no damage" assessment is glib.

The influential Yediot, after all, decided to go ahead with the expose, knowing that it would be seen as an open declaration of war against the premier.

In response to Netanyahu's statement Saturday night, the newspaper reasserted that its story was well founded.

The fact that other media had done extensive follow-up stories proved conclusively that the Yediot report was journalistically valid, the newspaper added.

Perhaps even more significant, Yediot chose to follow the Sara Netanyahu story with another lengthy expose focusing on the wholesale disorganization, mismanagement and internecine struggles that are bedeviling the government's efforts to arrange a series of celebrations to mark Israel's 50th anniversary.

Government emerges as bunch of incompetents

The government — especially the prime minister and his office — emerges from the report as a bunch of incompetents.

Taken together, the two reports represent a devastating saga of prime ministerial woes that are being discussed in virtually every Israeli home.

Yediot sells some 650,000 copies on a regular Friday; the pre-publication hype probably pushed last weekend's sales even higher.

Whatever the loyalty of the premier's diehard support — and whatever its professed contempt for media — this kind of publicity cannot but have a deleterious effect on Netanyahu's standing in the long term. □