



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel votes to relax sanctions

Israel's Security Cabinet agreed Wednesday to ease restrictions on Palestinians.

The measures include enforcing curfews only at night and permitting 5,000 Palestinians to work in Israel. The easing of restrictions will be implemented at the discretion of security officials, Israel Radio reported. Other steps will include granting members of international organizations and Palestinian civilian institutions freedom of movement.

During the Cabinet discussion, a security official expressed concern that easing the restrictions would lead to a resumption of terrorist attacks inside Israel.

Palestinians, Gaza police clash

At least 21 people were reportedly wounded Wednesday during clashes between Palestinian police and a crowd of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Seven of the wounded were police, who were injured when an angry crowd attacked the police station at the Rafah refugee camp, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. The crowd threw rocks and pipe bombs, demanding the execution of a Palestinian suspected of helping Israel. A Palestinian security official accused local Hamas activists of inciting the crowd.

Earlier Wednesday, thousands of Palestinians took to the streets of Gaza in a show of support for Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

At the rally, organized by Arafat's Fatah movement, marchers chanted, "more attacks and explosives belts."

UJC mission to visit Israel

More than 100 representatives from some 40 Jewish communities across North America are planning to participate in an Israel solidarity mission. The delegation will visit Israel on July 7-12 for the United Jewish Communities' annual Campaign Chairmen & Directors Mission.

The mission will give participants the opportunity to express their unity with Israelis and see firsthand their needs and daily challenges, UJC officials said.

REMINDER: The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Friday, July 5.

Israeli procedure helps make two Arab 'bubble babies' healthy

By Jessica Steinberg

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Dr. Shimon Slavin, a slim man with stick-straight white hair, holds two of his patients in his arms.

Tassnem Abu Said, 6, daintily kisses his left cheek, while her sister, Salsabil, 22 months, offers a slightly moister version on his right side.

"Shukran," Slavin says in Arabic, thanking the two curly, dark-haired Israeli Arab sisters who scamper back to their father, Tahir, and mother, Hayam, sitting nearby.

As Salsabil toddles out of sight, her small red shoes take her over to the shiny metal elevator doors.

Tahir Abu Said quickly darts over to scoop her up before her chubby fingers get caught in the elevator doors.

It isn't unusual for toddlers to embark on search-and-explore missions. But a year and a half ago, Salsabil was living in a Hadassah hospital isolation unit, under the care of Slavin, who heads the bone marrow transplantation department at the Hadassah — Hebrew University Medical Center.

She and Tassnem were both "bubble babies," born without immune systems, a genetic disease known as severe combined immunodeficiency. SCID is caused by the lack of an essential enzyme, adenosine deaminase, or ADA, that creates a functioning immune system. Bubble babies are so named because the first patients diagnosed with SCID were isolated for prolonged periods in germ-free plastic tents.

Now both sisters have been cured of their disease — Tassnem with a bone marrow stem cell transplant and Salsabil by gene therapy, the "first in the world," says her doctor, who worked with a team of Israeli and Italian researchers from the San Raffaele Institute in Milan, Italy, to develop a gene therapy procedure that can be used for every genetic disease caused by defective stem cells.

Stem cells are "blank cells" that can develop into virtually any kind of cell in the human body.

The "elegance" of this particular scientific advancement is how it unfolded within one family, Slavin says. It is also a story of Jews and Muslims, Israelis and Arabs, looking beyond the immediate conflict and trusting one another.

The Abu Said family were childless for 10 years, and desperately wanted children. When they finally conceived Ahmed, their first-born, he died within weeks because he had SCID-ADA and lacked a functioning immune system.

When Hayam Abu Said became pregnant again, the Abu Said family knew the disease was prevalent. As first cousins — Hayam and Tahir's fathers are brothers — they had a "double dose" of this genetic disease, Slavin says. But as devout Muslims, they wouldn't undergo prenatal diagnosis to detect whether the baby in utero carried the disease.

When Tassnem was born with the disease, the current treatment was ADA replacement therapy, an extremely expensive treatment that attempts to rescue the immune system and is only effective for one or two days at a time.

A bone marrow transplant from a matching donor is the preferred option, replacing the abnormal stem cells — the building blocks for all human tissue — with normal stem cells to produce the missing enzyme.

Slavin used gene therapy to try and cure Tassnem of the condition.

He took her own stem cells, and introduced the adenosine deaminase replacement gene into her stem cells.

The experiment was successful, allowing the gene to persist in her body for more

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arafat fires security officials

Yasser Arafat dismissed two senior Palestinian security officials.

Palestinian officials said Arafat on Tuesday fired Jibril Rajoub, the head of the security service in the West Bank, and Ghazi Jabali, the Palestinian police chief in the Gaza Strip.

The dismissals were seen as part of efforts to implement security reforms in the Palestinian Authority, reports said.

Hezbollah scheme denied

Hezbollah denied that it has been trying to kidnap Israelis to use as bargaining chips.

Israel Radio quoted a Hezbollah official as claiming Israeli and American intelligence were circulating such stories in an attempt to shape public opinion prior to an Israeli attack on Lebanon and Hezbollah.

The denial followed reports in Israel on Tuesday that Hezbollah recruited an Israeli Arab residing in Lebanon to try to lure Israelis abroad or to the Israel-Lebanon border, so the group could kidnap them.

In another development, Army Radio quoted Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah as denying reports that the group had intended to kidnap a former Israeli energy minister, Gonen Segev.

Flak jackets worry reservists

The Israeli army admitted that ceramic bullet-proof vests used by troops could wear down over time. Israeli army reservists who conducted an improvised test on such a vest in the Gaza Strip found that it was easily penetrated, Israel Radio reported.

One of the reservists said a vest was placed on a target and fired at — and bullets pierced through both the front and back.

Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said he would order a probe into the vests.



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than a year. But Tassnem remained immune deficient because the number of cells treated were few and ineffective compared with the overwhelming number of unhealthy cells still in her body.

At that point, Slavin could not follow up with enzyme replacement therapy, an enzyme booster shot that causes slow relief to the condition and is prohibitively expensive. Tassnem remained sick, but was kept alive.

Hayam Abu Said became pregnant again, refusing prenatal treatment, but gave birth to a healthy boy, Abdul Rahman, now 5, who was a successful stem cell match for his sister.

Slavin took his bone marrow, isolated the stem cells, and transplanted them in Tassnem, successfully treating and curing her of the condition.

Another daughter, Yousra, was born without the condition. But a month and a half after Salsabil was born, Hayam Abu Said developed a sore throat and cough, and Salsabil immediately began coughing.

Since she wasn't nursing the baby, Hayam Abu Said knew that Salsabil was showing signs of the autoimmune deficiency.

Unlike Tassnem, Salsabil had no bone marrow match among her siblings' blood cells.

By the time Salsabil was seven months old, Slavin and his team of researchers had figured out how to give the genetically treated cells an advantage.

The Abu Saids were willing to give the treatment a shot, particularly given Slavin's straightforward, honest appraisal of the experimental procedure.

"Dr. Slavin said he would do the same procedure if it was his daughter," says Tahir Abu Said, 38, balancing Salsabil on his knee while cautioning Yousra, 4, not to open up the slim laptop computer sitting on the table. "So I told him to make sure he did it like he would do for his own child."

Slavin not only followed through, but found funding to pay for the procedure. Tahir Abu Said is a pastry chef by training, who worked at Jerusalem's King David Hotel before being laid off several months ago.

But even with an regular salary, the Abu Saids, who live in a two-bedroom apartment in Ras Al-Arnud, an Arab neighborhood in eastern Jerusalem, couldn't afford the cost of the gene replacement therapy on their basic health insurance plan.

As an experimental treatment, the family didn't have to pay for the procedure, which was covered by Slavin's research grant.

Slavin's team had developed a protocol that would give the genetically coerced cells a biological advantage that would allow them to prevail in the patient's field of stem cells.

He purified the stem cells and mixed them with a defective virus that wasn't infectious but had the power to penetrate and infect the stem cells, introducing the adenosine deaminase gene — the missing enzyme — into the nucleus and DNA of Salsabil's stem cells.

"It's like putting a computer chip into the body," Slavin says.

After a few days of sitting in a culture, the virus-enriched, genetically altered stem cells were put into Salsabil's body. Slavin also gave her a drug to suppress her sick cells and allow the new, healthy cells to develop and multiply for several days before encountering competition from the sick cells.

The healthy stem cells began developing rapidly and within weeks, Salsabil went home, without any fever or antibiotics.

The proof that her immune system was working came when all the other children came down with chicken pox and Salsabil stayed healthy because her body developed antibodies to the illness.

Nearly a year and a half later, Salsabil is an active, healthy toddler who runs to keep up with her three older siblings. She also has a younger brother, Ahmed, a healthy, eight-month-old baby named for his older brother who died of the disease.

"They're all fine now," Hayam Abu Said says.

As for Slavin and his team, they waited to announce the success of their treatment, making sure that the procedure was "solid and durable," not "beginner's luck," he says. They now have another patient undergoing the treatment, and are hoping the concept can be applied to all genetic diseases that require healthy stem cells. Salsabil, Slavin says, looking fondly at the active toddler, is "a model of gene therapy." □

JEWISH WORLD

Crown Heights case not dead

The Anti-Defamation League praised the Department of Justice on Tuesday for deciding to pursue the Crown Heights murder case.

After an appeals court, citing technicalities, overturned in January the conviction of Lemrick Nelson and Charles Price for civil rights violations in the 1991 murder of Yankel Rosenbaum, the ADL lobbied the Justice Department to continue the case.

The civil rights division of the Department of Justice subsequently affirmed the office's commitment to "continue to pursue meaningful and serious punishment" against Nelson.

While Price struck a plea bargain in April for 11 years and eight months in prison, Nelson's case was still pending.

Israel's president gets diaries

The chairman of the World Zionist Organization presented Israeli President Moshe Katsav with a new edition of Theodor Herzl's diaries.

The ceremony involving Sallai Meridor and other high-ranking members of the WZO took place Wednesday as part of ceremonies marking the anniversary of Herzl's death.

The edition presented to Katsav is a translation of Herzl's complete original manuscripts. The diaries were first printed in Berlin in 1922 and 1923.

Water coming from Western Wall

Water has begun dripping from a rock in the middle of the Western Wall. Palestinian officials have been alerted to the drip, which may be coming from a hose or pipe they have installed, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Because of fears of Palestinian violence, Israel has barred non-Muslims, including archaeologists, from entering the Temple Mount since then-opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the site in late September 2000.

Shmuel Rabinovitch, the rabbi of the Western Wall, told the newspaper that there might be some mystical significance to the development.

Referring to the fact that the wall has also been known as the Wailing Wall, he said, "Maybe the wall is indeed crying because of the current situation in the country."

Anti-apartheid figure dies at 82

Lionel "Rusty" Bernstein, a leader of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, died in Oxford, England, on June 23 at 82.

A leading member of South Africa's Communist Party, Bernstein also helped draft the 1955 Freedom Charter, which served for many years as the manifesto of the African National Congress.

Charitable choice advocates see promise in wake of voucher decision

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The proponents of school choice are not the only ones pleased with last week's U.S. Supreme Court decision that school vouchers are constitutional.

Advocates of faith-based initiatives are now hoping for the "voucherizing" of charitable choice.

Supporters of direct funding of religious organizations that provide social services might be looking to capitalize on the high court's decision.

The justices determined that government-funded vouchers to students to attend parochial or private schools do not violate the constitutional separation of church and state. The justices' majority opinion made a clear distinction between vouchers and direct government funding of religious institutions.

And while the issues are not the same, charitable choice supporters could opt to pursue a voucher system for their cause, giving individuals vouchers to receive social benefits where they choose, including at religious institutions.

The Supreme Court case was "a big plus" and it legitimized vouchers, according to Marshall Breger, a law professor at Catholic University.

"When there's true individual choice, then vouchers are acceptable," he said.

But even if an individual is able to choose where to obtain services such as drug counseling, child care or soup kitchens, many Jewish groups worry about an expanded partnership between the government and faith-based institutions.

Most Jewish groups believe such a partnership would break down the constitutional wall separating church and state, infringe on religious liberties and imply toleration of employment discrimination.

In contrast, Orthodox groups want religious groups to play a greater role in providing social services and want to lower the wall that separates church and state, as long as minority religions are protected.

That fear of eroding church-state separation is a psychological block that leaves Jews concerned about the urban crisis but not offering any new ideas, according to Murray Friedman, director of the Feinstein Center of American Jewish History at Temple University.

"The Jewish community needs to be more open-minded," he said.

For Jewish social service agencies, which already receive government funding, the greater fear is what a voucher system would mean for the entire system.

"The effect on the Jewish federation system could be profound," said Diana Aviv, vice president of public policy for the United Jewish Communities, the Jewish community's central fund-raising and social services agency.

Under a voucher system, agencies would no longer be able to depend on a fixed, predetermined level of funding.

They would have to depend instead on the uncertainty of individuals choosing their programs.

They also worry that agencies would not be reimbursed at the level of what it costs to provide the services, Aviv said.

While large agencies might be able to withstand the change, it would be almost impossible for new programs to start up, she said.

Opponents claim vouchers lack civil rights protections required under federal grants and direct funding, and would allow organizations not only to discriminate by employing only those of a certain faith, but also to proselytize those individuals receiving government-funded services.

Organizations that receive vouchers or certificates could include religious activities in their service provision and require religious activities for the individuals receiving services, opponents say.

While the Bush administration's faith-based initiative has focused on direct funding for social service programs, a change in the direction toward vouchers could help boost the issue.

But the administration is keeping mum on its future plans. □

Alabama vote loser blames Jews, says black-Jewish ties may suffer

By Larry Brook

Deep South Jewish Voice

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (JTA) — In a race that could have repercussions for strained black-Jewish relations, U.S. Rep. Earl Hilliard is claiming that out-of-state Jewish money bought his defeat in Alabama's Seventh District primary.

Political observers however, say Hilliard, a five-term congressman, was voted out because he was ineffective.

Attorney Artur Davis defeated Hilliard, 56 percent to 44 percent, in the Democratic primary runoff June 25. There is only token Libertarian opposition in the predominantly black district, so winning the primary virtually assures Davis, 34, of the seat.

In 2000, Hilliard trounced political newcomer Davis by 24 points. This time around, Davis had the money to give Hilliard his first serious challenge since he was elected to Congress in 1992.

Political observers say the race shows the continuing "maturation" of the black electorate in Alabama, which has voted out many longtime officials backed by major organizations in the last two years.

Rather than voting based on pure sentiment — for example, supporting Hilliard because he was the state's first black congressman since Reconstruction — they look for representatives who can bring results and improvements in their lives, the observers said.

The race drew national attention because of Hilliard's outspoken views on the Middle East, exemplified by his controversial trip to Libya in 1997. Hilliard also was among a handful of House of Representatives members to vote against a May resolution supporting Israel's fight against terror.

Hilliard advocates a Palestinian state, but insists that he is not anti-Israel. He seeks a "more balanced" approach to Middle East diplomacy, he says.

Hilliard also introduced a controversial bill that would require the establishment of diplomatic relations with any regime the United States has punished unilaterally — such as Cuba — but not with regimes punished by the rest of the world.

Last year, the House of Representatives' Ethics Committee reprimanded Hilliard for irregularities in his handling of campaign funds. In previous campaigns where he had little or no opposition, Hilliard spent much of his money on "polling" and donations to political groups, and did little actual campaigning.

Hilliard had never lost a race in his 28-year political career. But the rush of support for Davis seemed to blindside Hilliard.

Local Jewish activists, impressed by the Harvard-educated Davis in 2000, felt he could win if his message could get out. They encouraged friends to support him.

In all, Davis raised about \$900,000, including almost \$800,000 in individual donations — the vast majority of which came from Jews, especially in New York.

Hilliard raised about \$600,000, with less than one-third coming from individuals. Reports to the Federal Election Commission leading up to the runoff showed that 28 of 35 individual donors to Hilliard were out-of-state Muslims.

Davis visited the April annual meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to meet several donors and thank his Alabama supporters.

Shortly thereafter, a flier surfaced in Alabama entitled "Artur

Davis and the Jews: Bad for Black Belt." Though it was signed with shortened versions of the names of two Hilliard associates, Hilliard disavowed the flier and implied that Davis wrote it himself to scare Jewish donors into giving him more money.

Davis dismissed the accusation as nonsense.

The large number of out-of-state Jewish donors to Davis also alarmed the pro-Arab community, which mobilized to support Hilliard in what it depicted as a test of strength against the "Israel lobby." A Web site, votehilliard.org, was established on May 20 by Ahmed Bouzid of Palestine Media Watch. The site said Hilliard was "under an AIPAC attack," while "his only crime is standing up for Palestinian rights."

James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute in Washington, devoted his May 27 column to the race.

Davis narrowly lost to Hilliard in the June 4 primary, but won enough votes in the three-man race to force a runoff. Hilliard launched a new series of attacks on Davis' out-of-state support, including a commercial morphing a cigar-smoking white New Yorker into Davis' face.

Hilliard also brought in Rev. Al Sharpton, Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) and Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), among others, to convince Alabama voters not to be influenced by out-of-state forces.

Hilliard supporters also tried to call into question Davis' allegiance to black voters. Many speakers as well as the anti-Davis flier noted Davis' past as a federal prosecutor.

Davis' "only work experience was putting black folks in jail and now he tells us that Jews are our best friend," the flyer said. "This man is very, very, very dangerous."

The Birmingham Times, the Southeast's largest black weekly, wrote: "The bottom line is that Mr. Davis sold out America by signing a decree of intent to support Israel, according to Congressman Hilliard. This comes very close to implying treason."

Hilliard believes Jewish groups now will set their sights on the outspokenly anti-Israel McKinney, and said his loss will increase tensions between blacks and Jews. He predicted "retribution" for Jewish involvement in campaigns in heavily black areas.

Not everyone shared the dire appraisal of the situation.

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas), chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, said in a statement that "contrary to the opinions of some, this race did not create a rift between the African-American and Jewish members of Congress."

Davis, in fact, portrayed his victory as a harbinger of better relations between blacks and Jews.

He sounded a unifying note at his victory party, saying the margin of victory shows "racial division and religious bigotry have no place in the Seventh District," and that voters rejected those tactics.

Much of the national attention in the race focused on the Middle East, but Davis said the race actually was about health care, education and economic opportunity in a region gripped by poverty.

He said Jewish donors never asked about how he would vote on specific issues, only about his philosophy and if he is willing to work for better relations between blacks and Jews.

Davis noted that the Jewish community traditionally has been very active in the Democratic party and in supporting the Civil Rights Movement. He also said he had to expand his fund-raising base outside the district because donors who supported him against Hilliard in 2000 reported suffering "repercussions." □