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Ailing toddler's parents get deportation reprieve As girl undergoes surgery, couple told they can stay a year

Amr Emam, Chronicle Staff Writer
Friday, July 13, 2007

A 17-month-old girl underwent surgery for a rare heart defect at UCSF on Thursday as her parents received good news: Their scheduled deportation to their native Mexico has been postponed for a year.

The decision by immigration officials means Hazelle Roa's parents, Victor and Maria Roa, will be able to care for her in the coming months.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials, who had ordered the parents deported by July 26, said the one-year stay was based on what the agency believed was in the best interest of this family, given their circumstances.

"Hazelle needs to be in close relation with UCSF to get the required care," said Dr. Stephen Wilson, medical director of inpatient pediatrics at the hospital.

In a two-hour procedure Thursday, hospital surgeons inserted a catheter into Hazelle Roa's body, carrying a tiny balloon that opened her artery for a diminutive camera to explore whether she will need heart surgeries in the future.

Hazelle's little-known genetic abnormality left her with a thyroid deficiency and a narrow artery into her heart, which has kept her in the hospital most of her life.

The U.S.-born girl's parents crossed the border illegally 17 years ago, and they had been ordered to surrender for deportation to Mexico in two weeks.

Before the decision to allow the parents to remain, their attorney, David Lunas, criticized the agency for moving to separate the family at a difficult time.

"Hazelle would require lifelong medical care, and if her parents are deported this will cause extreme hardship to her," he said.

Hazelle's parents crossed the border in 1990 and lost their plea for asylum. In November 2004, the Board of Immigration Appeals ruled they were in the United States illegally and gave them the option of leaving on their own, Haley said.

When they failed to depart by the deadline, the request became a deportation order. In May, they received a letter telling them to surrender to immigration authorities.

"If the case is reopened, it is great," Lunas said. "I don't think the case is closed yet."

He added that the couple were not given proper notice before they were asked two months ago to leave the United States.

On Thursday, the Roas sat inside UCSF's Children's Hospital having nothing but tears to express the intricacy of their situation.

"We're quite depressed," said Victor Roas, a 41-year-old truck driver. "It's horrible for the whole family."

What makes it even more difficult for the Roas is that if they are forced to leave the United States in two weeks, Hazelle will have no relatives to tend to her as the family has no kin in this country.

If they were to bring the girl with them to Mexico, they probably could not find the care Hazelle has been receiving from the physicians at UCSF, who have followed her case from the beginning.

"Hazelle actually needs a team of doctors, as her condition affects everything in her life: the way she eats, drinks and sleeps," Wilson said.

Victor Roas said he "can't imagine being deported and leaving my daughter behind."

"The question is: If they take the girl with them to Mexico, would she still receive the same care she is receiving here?" Lunas asked.

Wilson said Hazelle's heart defect is as rare in Mexico as it is in the United States.

"We'd be sending a U.S. citizen to another country, and who knows whether the quality of care would be equal," Lunas said.

"It's hard for me to manage ... and this is out of my reach," said Maria Roa, 37. "My daughter needs to stay to undergo the surgeries she needs."

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/07/13/BAGTDQVMMG1.DTL>

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**12 housing protesters arrested in Mission
Coalition members hit with trespassing while erecting tents**

Amr Emam, Chronicle Staff Writer
Thursday, July 12, 2007

A dozen people were arrested for trespassing Wednesday after they entered a building in San Francisco's Mission District to protest plans to turn the site into condominiums the demonstrators say would be too expensive for some residents in the neighborhood.

Members of the Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition, which advocates for below-market-rate housing in the city, climbed a fence surrounding 3400 Cesar Chavez St. Wednesday morning and erected tents to oppose a development they said "does nothing to meet the neighborhood's affordable housing needs."

Police made arrests at about 11:30 a.m.

"These people cut the gate open and went inside private property," said Officer Mario Machi. "They knew that was a wrong thing to do, but there are some instigators here."

On a sidewalk nearby, about 80 people chanted slogans against expensive housing and held placards that read, "We need family-affordable housing."

The group said it will continue a vigil outside the site until its appeal of the project is heard by the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday as part of the city's review of plans to build condominiums in its eastern neighborhoods.

"Although people at the planning level acknowledge that we need affordable housing, the way the Planning Department approves projects is out of sync with that," said Nickolas Pagoulatos, a coordinator for the coalition. "Some pressure is brought to bear by interest groups. It's the influence of money over politics at its best."

The project, on the site that formerly housed a Kelly-Moore paint store, includes 60 dwellings, nine "affordable" apartments, a 24-hour Walgreens and two other retail spaces, according to Seven Hills Properties, the developer.

The City Planning Commission approved the project last year.

"These people want to build housing for rich people, but there are no rich people here," said Jazzie Collins, a community organizer who joined the protest. "Will they import residents? They want to create rich neighborhoods and banish the poor. This is racist."

Pagoulatos and other affordable-housing advocates hope to persuade the supervisors to reassess the project's environmental impact.

They said they worked with Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center and created "a viable alternative project" that would provide 70 dwellings for low-income people.

Representatives of the developer were not available for comment.

"Most of the people who live here are poor," said Pagoulatos. "So instead of providing affordable housing for the poor, these developers will increase problems by creating these up-market units."

Protester Mercedes Weatherford, a 60-year-old secretary, held a sign that read, "We're here to fight condominiums."

She said she came to San Francisco from Denver in 1981, when she and her boyfriend searched without success for an apartment they could afford.

"We failed to find one, so I went back to Denver and my boyfriend went to live on the street," she said.

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/07/12/BAG61QV3GM1.DTL>

This article appeared on page **B - 3** of the San Francisco Chronicle

**Mideast surprise: changes are astir
Observers report democracy coming—dictators going**

By Amr Emam
San Francisco Chronicle
Posted on Monday June 18, 2007

Last March, an elderly woman walking down a Cairo street was taken aback by the hundreds of protesters shouting anti-government slogans and demanding the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak, who has ruled Egypt for the past 26 years.

“Quit, quit, Hosni Mubarak,” they chanted in a protest against a package of constitutional amendments Mubarak’s ruling National Democratic Party says will revitalize Egypt’s political life but the opposition counters will curtail political freedoms.

“They are insulting the president!” said the woman, who was clad in a traditional black galabia and held a plastic bag filled with vegetables. “This has never happened in my time.”

Her disbelief is a major reason why some political observers believe democratic change, despite recent setbacks, is under way in the Middle East and dictatorship is on its way out.

“Each time I visit the region, there has been something new,” said James Zogby of the Arab American Institute in Washington, D.C., who has been traveling to the region for some 30 years.

Among the changes he has personally witnessed over the past decade: the creation of Al-Jazeera, the freewheeling satellite news channel with more than 40 million subscribers and an English-language network; protesters demanding—and getting—reform in Bahrain; the first municipal elections in the history of Saudi Arabia—albeit with the little real power given to the councils; moves to establish a national council in the United Arab Emirates that includes women by next year; and Egypt’s first contested presidential election.

Encouraging Middle East democracy has been a policy priority of both Republican and Democratic administrations for the past two decades. But when 19 Arab hijackers—15 Saudis, two from United Arab Emirates and one each from Egypt and Lebanon—crashed four U.S. civilian airliners into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field on Sept. 11, President Bush made it a top priority. Some say it was one of the underlying reasons behind the invasion of Iraq.

Bush has also said the Sept. 11 terrorist acts were due in part to the absence of democracy in the hijackers’ countries.

But the efforts have been halting. Egypt's presidential election, for example, saw Mubarak winning with 88 percent of the vote, in a contest in which the electorate knew nearly nothing about the other nine candidates, who were given only a few weeks to campaign. In recent weeks, hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the banned religious group that won 88 seats as independents in Egypt's 454-seat legislature, have been arrested in a new crackdown on political dissent. The group's popularity raised fears in pro-government quarters that Islamists would take over the country in truly democratic elections.

Elections last week for Egypt's upper house of Parliament were described by independent organizations as manipulated to ensure that the ruling party won a majority.

"Egypt has made some strides, but change doesn't happen in the blink of an eye," said Gehad Auda, a professor of political science at Helwan University, in Cairo. "The question is how to manage this foreign pressure and the domestic need for change without destabilizing the country."

That conflict has been repeated throughout the Arab Middle East.

On Thursday, Hamas gunmen seized military control of the Gaza Strip, which could doom the prospects of Gaza and the West Bank becoming a united, democratic Palestinian state.

Some Middle East observers say Bush administration policies have, paradoxically, increased the hold of authoritarian regimes.

"The very American policy that was said to be aimed at spreading democracy increased the conditions that terrify the public and reduced the attraction of democracy itself," Shibley Telhami, the Anwar Sadat professor for peace and development at the University of Maryland, wrote recently in an article on the University of Maryland's Web site. "If Iraq is an example of the democratic change they can expect, who, anywhere, would want it?"

In Cairo, Abdel Wahab al-Missiri, the new chairman of Kefaya, a protest movement that emerged two years ago, was roughed up in March by plainclothes police while leading a demonstration against the ruling party's constitutional amendments.

"The message was: 'We will not tolerate these protests anymore,' " said al-Missiri. "Things are taking a turn for the worse."

At the same time, the Egyptian government challenged a Cairo high court that rejected a Mubarak fiat to refer 34 businessmen with links to the Muslim Brotherhood to a military tribunal on charges of being members of the banned Muslim group, money laundering and supporting terrorism.

“Countries like Egypt took steps forward,” said Joshua Landis, an assistant professor of history at the University of Oklahoma. “But soon these countries took steps backward.”

Oakland students embrace cultural backgrounds in totem exhibit

by Amr Emam

Posted in the San Francisco Chronicle

Monday, May 7, 2007

Oakland teenagers who were asked to create totems showing their personalities and culture using recycled materials delved deep to tell their life stories.

The 30 small carved and painted representations, on exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California through January, show a wistful affiliation with the teenagers' cultural heritage.

"Most people forget their roots when they come here," said Daisy Velasco, one of the teenage artists. "But I'm proud of the Mexican part in me."

The 11th-grader's totem is a Mexican woman whose body reflects the green, white and red of the Mexican flag. She has eagle's legs and is perched on a cactus. In the bottom of the totem are people working on farmland.

"Interestingly enough, even young people, when they come to think of their culture they think of the culture of their families," says Lori Fogarty, executive director of the museum.

"Some people are sixth-generation Californians, and they still identify with where their families came from," Fogarty says. "I think it is interesting to see how people identify with their cultural identity."

The exhibit, "Told From a Totem," is part of a partnership between Oakland High School and the museum that started in 2000. This year, around 60 students, some of whom attend the school's Visual Art Academy, made totems and a jury from the museum chose 30 to exhibit.

"We chose 30 totems only because of the presence of limited exhibiting space in the museum," said Christine Lashaw, an artist and preparer at the museum.

Lashaw said the program gives students a chance to be heard.

"We wanted to showcase these students to give them a voice," she said.

Funding for it comes mainly from the museum, she said.

One student, Lisa Voong, created a totem with three parts, one symbolizing her family, another her culture and the third her personality. In the portion focused on her, she carved six books with titles like leadership, music, fashion and sport.

"The books refer to the different facets of my personality," the 17-year-old said.

Above them, a golden vase of flowers represents her family members, she said. And at top, her last name is written in Chinese characters.

"It represents my heritage because I am Chinese," she said. "In a place like California where all people have arrived from other places, you can find people identifying themselves with two or three cultures," said Fogarty. "This can only be found in California."

Jackie Begrin, an art teacher at the high school, said she was inspired by her students' work.

"My job is to make these students proud of their American culture and also proud of their ancestors' culture," she said.

She said developing respect for their past would help the students develop respect for themselves and the future.

"I make this to honor my mother," one student wrote under his totem.

Karen Tsujimoto, a curator, was moved by the totems.

"This exhibition is important because it shows that creativity is universal," says Tsujimoto, whose speciality is modern and contemporary art. "Like all artists, these students are sharing a part of themselves through their art."

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Media in Middle East acting like a free press

Amr Emam, Chronicle Staff Writer

Sunday, June 17, 2007

Observers of the Middle East disagree on the extent to which democracy is making progress in the region, but they do agree that the press is getting into areas unheard of a few years ago.

Newspapers from Riyadh and Cairo to Qatar and Bahrain are abuzz with editorials, columns and articles critical of government, Islamic extremism and their own societies.

After a student gunman killed 32 people at Virginia Tech in April, Iraqi columnist Riyadh 'Abd criticized families of suicide bombers in the Middle East who feel unabashed pride in the casualties caused by their children. He noted the remorse shown by the family of Virginia Tech student Seung-Hui Cho, who said in a statement that they felt hopeless, helpless and lost and were left heartbroken by the terrible, senseless tragedy.

In an article titled "This is the Difference Between Muslims and the Civilized World" posted on the Arabic-language Web site Elaph 'Abd wrote: "Let's compare this civilized behavior that places value on human life with (that of) families of Arabs who have lost their sons in criminal suicide operations that kill the innocent and then boast of their relative's martyrdom. This strange behavior and sick pride in criminal acts can only be explained as a conclusive sign of the moral decline and deterioration of contemporary Islamic and Arab civilization."

Arab bloggers have also emerged to challenge governments and longstanding social taboos -- sometimes at great personal risk. Most recently, Egyptian blogger Kareem Amer (karam903.blogspot.com) was sentenced to four years in prison for criticizing the government of President Hosni Mubarak.

But highly critical articles appear frequently in the Egyptian press.

In the state-owned English-language daily Egyptian Gazette, columnist Tarek Heggy has written that religious extremism in Egypt stems from the government's harsh treatment of Islamists. But he has also lashed out at those who attribute the spread of Islamic fundamentalism to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the long-standing Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"Those quick to point an accusing finger at external forces should realize that if Egypt had been a haven of social tolerance, brotherhood and peace, it would not have been susceptible to" such outside factors, he wrote. "The repression of ideas and beliefs produces unexpected forms of extremism, violence, terrorism and even crime ... the

many years of repressive dictatorship has generated a climate of extremism that had not previously existed."

In Saudi Arabia, Shakir al-Nabulsi wrote in the daily Al-Watan (The Homeland) that the failure of Arab regimes to establish modern states after independence, endemic corruption and the absence of transparency has paved the way for Islamists to appear as a better choice. "Arab backwardness will continue for years" unless these problems are addressed, he wrote.

One of the most vocal critics may be Abd Al-Hamid Al-Ansari, the former dean of Islamic law at Qatar University, who declared his support for the U.S. presence in Iraq on the Al-Arabiya television network last month. "It is legitimate and legal, because of the U.N. Security Council resolution. If 10 million Iraqis elected the current government, it is a legitimate government, whether you support it or not. This legitimate government invited the Americans, and it renews this invitation every year," he said during the interview. "Iraq needs the American presence for its stability and defense more than we, in the Gulf, need the American bases to protect our interests."

Al-Ansari also blames mosques and religious schools for the rise in Islamic extremism ignoring the guiding principles of a peaceful Islam.

"The discourse (at these venues) does not address human beings as human beings," he said. "We lack what I call the culture of humanity," a reference to imams who condemn those who don't follow fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.

"A youth in the prime of life puts on an explosive belt, and blows himself up among innocent people," said Al-Ansari. "How can we call that jihad, what is happening in Algeria, Morocco, and Iraq?"

Online resources

Here are some Web sites of English-language Arab press:

Al-Ahram Weekly, Egypt: weekly.ahram.org.eg/index.htm

Daily Star, Lebanon: www.dailystar.com.lb/

Gulf Times, Qatar: www.gulftimes.com/

Bahrain Tribune, Bahrain: www.bahraintribune.com/

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/06/17/MNG56QGQEG1.DTL>

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