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“ The FA is no longer interested in policing, just politicking ” Martin Samuel

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From The Sunday Times

May 25, 2008

Iraqi mothers deny their sick children Israeli heart operations



Aria, an Iraqi toddler, had successful heart surgery in Tel Aviv

Ali Rifat in Amman and Uzi Mahnaimi in Tel Aviv

The parents of Iraqi babies with congenital heart problems are facing a dilemma: should they allow their children to be treated in Israeli hospitals when they have been brought up to believe that Israel is their mortal enemy?

Hostility towards the Jewish state in Iraq is so strong that many parents refuse to travel to Tel Aviv for free life-saving hole-in-the-heart surgery.

Some accept the offer but never reveal where their children were treated, even though the operation has not been available in Iraq since its leading cardiac clinic burnt down after the American-led invasion in 2003.

Other parents are seeking treatment elsewhere in the Arab world, despite prices of up to £15,000 for heart surgery in private clinics. They fear the stigma of being treated in Israel.

Aria, an 18-month-old baby from Kirkuk in northern Iraq, was waiting to return home last week after a successful operation at the Edith Wolfson medical centre in Tel Aviv, where 11 Iraqi children are being treated. The surgery is sponsored by Save a Child's Heart (SACH), a humanitarian organisation founded in Israel in 1996 and supported by private sources, including Christian charity groups.

Aria's young mother, Paiman, paid tribute to the clinic and the surgeon, Dr Lior Sasson, saying: "He saved little Aria's life."

However, the parents of other Iraqi children in urgent need of surgery said they had rejected free treatment when they heard it would be performed in Israel.

Sara, 2, needs surgery for a defective heart valve. After taking her from Iraq to neighbouring Jordan for preliminary tests, her mother, Shatha, 37, turned down treatment at the Wolfson centre. She said she had had no idea before she left for Amman, the Jordanian capital, that the operation would be in Israel.

"We've been foes of Israel since before we were born. We firmly believe that they are our enemies. You can't change this overnight," she said.

She is now planning to have the operation performed in Algeria instead: its government agreed to pay for 14 Iraqi children to be treated there rather than be sent to Israel.

Shatha's friend, an Iraqi Kurd from Kirkuk who was too afraid to give her first name, also travelled to Jordan so that her son, Ahmed, could be assessed for a heart operation. She too turned down the free treatment offered by SACH.

"Now I can sleep with a clear conscience. I'm able to hold my head up high and not be ashamed by having my son treated in

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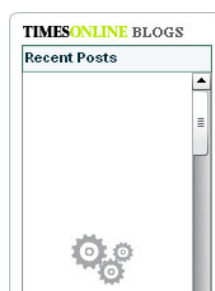




there was nothing they could do for her. When he heard she could be treated in Israel, he did not hesitate. She has now had surgery and is making a good recovery.

"I can honestly tell you that I didn't worry for a moment about where or who will operate on my daughter," he said. "Nor did I worry about the reaction of my family and relatives. Anyone who blames me should put themselves in my place and live for nearly two years watching his daughter die in front of his eyes, and then tell me what he'd have done."

His wife, who accompanied Souz to Israel for the operation, added: "The doctors were helpful and understanding, and were sympathetic to our suffering." She had not been charged anything and would be able to return home with the \$1,000



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