

Sunday Health Care

Conjoined twins land Sion hospital doctors in ethical dilemma

Days after a set of conjoined twins was born at the Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Sion Hospital, doctors are now facing the ethical dilemma of saving only one of them. The rare twins have two heads but share a heart.

While the mother – 26-year-old Mumtaz Bano (name changed) – recuperates in the hospital's gynaecology ward, paediatric surgeons at the hospital are busy assessing the twins' diagnostic reports to come to a decision. "2D echo, MRI and CT scan of the heart have been done. We also did MRI fibre tractography, which will give a clear picture of the spinal tracts arising from the brain," said Dr Paras Kothari, head of the paediatric surgery department.

Dr Kothari and his team are currently scanning medical literature and calling experts to draw opinions while waiting for all the diagnostic test reports.

"Medical literature shows that only two such conjoined twins with single heart have survived across the world. But only one of the babies can be saved. It will be a surgical challenge and an ethical dilemma," said Paras. The babies are in a stable condition in the neonatal intensive care unit. Their father, a cobbler by profession, is yet to be briefed about their medical condition. "We first want to be sure with all the diagnostic tests before briefing them," said Paras.

A doctor from the paediatric surgery department, who didn't wish to be named, said the hospital's ethics committee has refused to give its opinion in the matter, stating that it didn't come under their jurisdiction. "We will have to take a legal opinion in this case. Both babies are stable and have survived for four days. Letting them grow without a surgery will lead to social stigma for both the twins and their parents. Since both are stable, we can't take the decision of saving only one of them. A legal opinion is a must," said the doctor.

Another doctor from the department where the 2D echo test was done said the twins have one-and-a-half hearts. "One heart is normal. The other is not developed and has two chambers instead of four," said the doctor.

The babies were born by caesarean section at the hospital at 9.25am on Wednesday with the birth weight of 3.6kg. They share a heart but have two stomachs, two spinal cords, and a spinal column till the sacrum. The sacrum is not well developed. They have two lungs, two kidneys, three hands, two legs and a single pelvis between them. The condition is known as single-hearted thoraco parapagus.

"We have started feeding the babies via tubes. They are passing stool and urine normally but we cannot say who is passing the stool and urine, as they have common genitalia," said Dr Kothari.

Dean Dr Suleman Merchant said the hospital will provide all facilities to the twins free of cost.

"These conjoined twins have a very complex internal architecture. Externally, they have two separate heads and necks, but a partially common thorax; and are completely fused below the umbilicus level. 3D rotational CT angiography, multiplanar re- constructions and other complex CT techniques have been utilised to diagnose the complex internal architecture of the babies. MRI fibre tracto-graphy will be utilised to establish the communication between the brains and other parts of the nervous system, including nerve supply to limbs. The twins will require many more investigations. After all investigations are complete, the next course of action will be decided upon," said Dr Merchant.

Amit Kharkanis, a lawyer who handles medico-legal cases, said, "First of all, there is no ethical dilemma in such cases as doctors have to decide which baby has a higher survival rate. After the medical investigations, they have to take the parents' consent."

Twin tale
Conjoined twins is a rare sporadic event, with a prevalence of 1 in 200,000-5,000,000 births. The mortality rate remains quite high. There are nearly a dozen different types of conjoined twins. The twins born at the Sion hospital are called cervico parapagus.

Female conjoined twins are three times more likely to be born alive than male conjoined twins.

Most conjoined twins are separated weeks or months after they are born, to give them a chance to grow and become strong enough to survive surgery and to let doctors study their anatomy.

Conjoined twins are genetically identical and are therefore always the same sex. They share the same amniotic cavity and placenta and develop from the same fertilised egg.

BJ Wadia hospital currently houses a pair of former conjoined twins, born to a couple from Panvel on May 6, 2013. The girls were attached by their hip at a 90 degree angle, because of which it was impossible for them to walk. They were separated on January 17, 2014, and have since been recuperating in a special room at the hospital's paediatric ward.

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The Kashmir the media does not report

Run Sumegha, run!" These are the only three words that still ring in my ears, though I can recall the whole incident as it happened before my eyes.

As an irony to mark the end of my peaceful first week in Kashmir, the protests at Lasjan presented a facet of Kashmir to me, which I had only heard of. A CRPF vehicle had crushed a 10-year-old girl, and the driver had run away after the accident. As my colleague led me through the mob to the dead body, things seemed under control. Yes, the anger and frustration was pretty evident. True, the young men of the area hurled abuses at the Indian Government and the military forces. But still, things seemed manageable.

It was only after the mob tried to burn the vehicle that the forces swung into action. And before I could comprehend what was happening, I saw people running, everywhere. My colleague told me to run, too. But I could not. I was blank and pale. I looked around and saw the men in the uniform throwing tear-gas shells at the young and old alike. It was at that moment that I realized for the first time, the difference between reading about 'Conflict Reporting' and reporting from a conflict zone in real life. I looked at my colleague, who was still urging me to run. And then, I ran. Not because I wanted to shirk off my journalistic duties but because no story is worth a life. And nineteen is too young an age to die. So, I ran for my life.

On my way back to office, while overcoming the initial shock that often grips naïve reporters, I wondered how far from reality was the image that the world has of

Kashmir today. Barely a week here in Srinagar, and I already feel as if I am living in constant "captivity". At every next crossing, a bunker awaits you. In the midst of the lush green lawns at the Kashmir University, the CRPF personnel seem completely out of place. They can stop you, beat you, rape you, pass lewd comments, run their vehicles over the kids, and guess what, nobody can stop them; courtesy, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Which democracy in the world throws tear-gas shell at its unarmed, protesting civilians? Which republic imposes a curfew on the day of the Parliamentary elections in the whole state? Which "efficient governance" justifies patrolling of heavy army vehicles, even though the city roads are not meant for such load?

Before coming here, Kashmir was an image, a mirage that had men with long beards, women wearing hijab, a restricted and closed society. That reflection was the result of "facts" that I was "made aware of" by the Indian media for the past 19 years of my life. That image today stands broken, shattered. There are no men with long beards and Kalashnikovs roaming on the streets.

A lot of women wear hijab, some wear burqa, and almost all cover their heads; yet it is perfectly fine if one doesn't wish to adhere to any of the above. One finds ATMs at every corner. Brands of every essential commodity are available. Big hotels and small dhabas coexist to give the true flavour of Kashmir. Lal Chowk is as lively—during days, not nights—as Connaught place of Delhi in the evenings. Wherever one goes, people are good in the true sense of the word. They are good-natured and they don't fake for personal

interests, the way people in Delhi and Mumbai do. Kashmiri hospitality is famous round the globe, and now I know why. Even if arriving uninformed, the Kashmiris are ready to serve their guests. Be it the traditional samovar for the qahwa or the tashnari to wash one's hands; be it the rista or the keema – they know how to take care of their guests.

I remember walking down the street once, in the evening, when I asked a middle-aged woman for directions to the local market. She told me to go back home since it might be unsafe with the military being around. Sensing the urgency, she accompanied me to the market and back home. I thanked her, remarking how good Kashmiris are. She kissed my forehead and blessed me. We never met again. But God alone knows, I will never be able to forget her affectionate eyes.

Is this the Kashmir that India has, for so long, tried to term as the "breeding ground of terrorists"? Are these the people we refuse houses and rooms-on-rent in Delhi and Mumbai, fearing they might have links with the Hizbul or the Lashkar? After seeing all this, I am at a loss for words. I am dumbfounded. A sense of betrayal has crept in. I trusted my government for so long when it equated Kashmiris to whom they call 'terrorists'. Today, I know it was all a big lie that was fabricated beautifully by the Indian Government. Worse, the mainstream media, a profession I had felt proud I would soon be a part of, lied, too. Sometimes outright, sometimes by hiding the facts – but nevertheless being a permanent party to all that the Indian state did, and is doing, in

Kashmir.

A writer recently wrote, "When you are in Jammu, you are in India. When you are in Srinagar, you are in Kashmir". Perhaps the statement was made in an entirely different context but it holds true for me too. It's true that Kashmir and its people are different from the rest of the countrymen. Which other state would try to lead normal lives despite being under a military control?

Having been brought up in a totally different environment, in the liberal environs of the capital, I often used to wonder why so many youth in Kashmir demand Azadi. Now I know why? When you are asked for identity cards each day as you step out of the house; and that too by forces who are themselves foreigners to your land, what would one think of such a state? When the CRPF has the right to enter a home, kill, rape, murder and torture people, what are these youngsters supposed to do? My family and friends in Delhi feel India will never "give away" Kashmir. The truth is that one can only "give" which belongs to one. And Kashmir has never belonged to India. These enthusiastic youngsters will be demanding a Kashmir that is rightfully theirs.

So much blood can not go waste; and sacrificing one lakh Kashmiri youth is not a joke. The Kashmir struggle, so far, has been written by the martyr's blood. A bullet that I picked up from the protest site in Lasjan would keep the memories of the day etched in my memory forever. And I sincerely hope I live to see a free Kashmir.

(Sumegha Gulati worked on The Hoot's Kashmir related research projects in 2009).
Courtesy The Hoot

National & International News

Mixed World Heritage site Khangchendzonga National Park to give boost to Sikkim eco-tourism

ANI Gangtok, July 31: Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP), which Unesco has declared as India's first "Mixed World Heritage Site, is set to give a major boost to Sikkim's eco-tourism sector.

The state government has set for itself a target of attracting at least 12 lakh tourists by 2025 to see the breath-taking view from India's highest mountain peak Kanchenjunga (28,169 feet or 8,586 metres). Kanchenjunga is also the world's third highest mountain peak. The KNP is popular for both its beauty and majesty and has been on the tentative list of World Heritage Sites since 2006. It represents India's unique traditional links between nature and culture, fulfilling the nomination criteria under both natural and cultural heritage.

As India's least populated state, Sikkim is a Himalayan wonderland, rich in mountain peaks, lush picturesque valleys, hills, pine forests and fast flowing rivers that offer opportunities for rafting, forest-trail trekking, monasteries and incredible flora, all required ingredients to declare it a tourist haven.

"Sikkim, with a highest forest cover of 47 per cent in the country, is a favoured northeastern tourist destination. In the last decade alone, tourist arrivals have doubled," said Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling.

He added, "Sikkim registered 347650 domestic tourist arrivals in the year 2005, which increased to 705023 in the year 2015. There were 16518 foreign tourist arrivals registered in the year 2005, which increased to 38479 in the year 2015. The number of domestic and foreign tourist arrivals have more than doubled in the last ten years. The state has set a target of around 12 lakh tourist arrivals in the state by the year 2025." Sikkim is a wholly mountainous

state, with one third of its area lying above 3,000 meters to the highest point of India, Mount Khangchendzonga.

The Khangchendzonga National Park, which is located in the eastern Himalaya was set up in a 850 square-kilometer area in August 1977 and was subsequently enlarged to 1784 square-kilometres in May 1997 by including surrounding areas for the purpose of protecting and developing wildlife or its habitat.

The KNP has the widest altitudinal range of all the protected areas of the world. This park has an enviable altitudinal variation varying from 1,220m to 8,586 metres within an aerial distance of just 42 kilometres with permanently snowcapped mountains, glaciers, high altitude lakes, grasslands, cold deserts and varied forest types and consequent floral and faunal diversity to delight the visitor.

With an altitudinal range of 7,366m (1,220 m to 8,586 m) within an area of only 1,784km², KNP is endowed with one of the highest ecosystems in the world.

There are 20 peaks, which are above 6,000 metres within the KNP. Of these peaks, 11 are between 6,000 to 7,000 metres, eight between 7,000 to 8,000 metres and one above 8,000 metres. The KNP along with the adjacent reserve forests is home to some 22 endemic and 22 rare and threatened plants.

It is listed as one of the 14 "eight-thousanders", independent mountains on Earth that are more than 8,000 metres high above sea level. Its name, "Khangchendzonga" literally means the "abode of Gods consisting of five treasure houses." Mt. Khangchendzonga is flanked by Mt. Narsing (5,825m) Mt. Pandim (6,691m) and Mt. Kabru on the southern side, the Twins (7,350 m), Nepal peak (7,150 m) and Tent peak (7,365 m) on the northern side, and Mt. Simvo (6,811 m) and Mt. Siniolchu (6,886 m) on the eastern side. All these mountains and peaks lie wholly or partly within KNP.

Mt. Khangchendzonga is perhaps, the finest example of an independent mountain having its own glacial system radiating from its several summits. There are eighteen glaciers. Among them, the huge, fearsome and turbulent looking Zemu Glacier which is at its widest point 300m and 26 km in length and ice reserve of 22 km is one of the largest in Asia. Similarly, 73 glacial lakes occur within the KNP which are all above 4,000 metres. Together with the mountain peaks, KNP has a claim to some of the most magnificent snow and ice scenery in the world.

The white snow leopard, jet black Asian black bear, red fox, blue sheep, blood pheasant, yellow throated marten, red panda, Tibetan argali (wild sheep), leopard cat and colourful high altitude pheasants are few of hundreds of species that enrich various niches in this unique hill range. The emerald waters of eighteen high altitude lakes dot this snow clad hill range and host more than a hundred species of birds. Numerous waterfalls which cascade down the hill slopes with their sonorous music also create hundreds of rainbows as the sunrays filter through the valleys between lofty hills.

The KNP has 18 sub-forest types. It has a large diversity of species of higher plants (1,580), mammals (124) and birds (300). There is no other protected area found in the Indian Himalaya with such variety of sub-forest types and species diversity. Though KNP has less than 0.1 per cent of the total area of India, a significant number of mammals are found here. 124 species of mammals (31 per cent of the estimated 400 mammal species found in India), 300 species of birds and 400 species of butterflies have been reported in KNP. More than 100 species of medicinal plants are found in KNP and its surrounding areas. The KNP along with the adjacent reserve forests is home to some 22 endemic, rare and threatened plants.

There are a total of 313 glacial lakes throughout the Teesta basin of the Sikkim Himalaya covering an area of 21.5 square kilometers. Of these, 73 glacial lakes occur within the KNP covering an area of about 3.34 square kilometers.

All the lakes within the KNP are above 4,000 metres and are classified as glacial lakes. The Prek Chu and the Zemu Chu watersheds have the maximum number of 16 lakes each, while the Rangit Chu watershed has just two lakes. In terms of area, the Lhonak Chu watershed contains 43 per cent of the total area under lakes, primarily due to the presence of South Lhonak Tsho which has an area of 0.71 square kilometers.

For trekking, there is the popular Yuksam-Dzongri-Gochela trek or the expedition to the Green Lake. Tourism has also improved the living standards of local communities, especially at Pelling, Yuksam, Gangtok and Rabongla. Tourism-related activities such as running pack animals, portering, guiding and lodge management have become major economic activities and now determine the way of life.

There are no major developmental projects like roads, buildings or public places which can affect the integrity of KNP. The only colony that existed within KNP comprising 10 family units of Tibetan refugees at Tshoka in its south-west part was relocated outside the park.

The mean minimum and mean maximum temperatures vary inversely with altitude with January being the coldest month and August the warmest. Due to altitudinal variation, the temperature distribution shows a north-south change. Average temperature of the warmest month is indicated as 22°C in the temperate area in Aug. 15°C in the sub-alpine area in July and 12°C in the alpine area in July. Average temperature of the coldest month is indicated as 3.8°C in the temperate area in January, -3°C in the sub-alpine area in January and -17°C in the alpine in January.