

Health & Technology

Bangladesh 'Tree Man' returns to hospital as condition worsens

'I made a mistake by leaving the hospital'

DHAKA: A Bangladeshi father dubbed "Tree Man" for the bark-like growths on his body returned to hospital yesterday after his condition worsened, he told AFP. Abul Bajandar has had 25 surgeries since 2016 to remove the growths from his hands and feet at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Doctors were on the verge of declaring their treatment a success before a sudden relapse prompted Bajandar to flee the clinic in May without notifying staff. But yesterday he was readmitted to the hospital after his condition deteriorated, with the growths now covering almost the entirety of his hands and feet, the 28-year-old said.

"I made a mistake by leaving the hospital. I sought alternative treatment but could not find any. I now I understand I should have stayed and continued the treatment here," Bajandar said. Samanta Lal Sen, a plastic surgeon at the hospital, said doctors would resume treatment "very soon", adding the growths had spread to other parts of his body. "I requested Bajandar to return as soon as possible. Now we have to start from the very beginning. We'll have to conduct more surgeries," Sen told AFP. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had promised free treatment for Bajandar after his plight captured the sympathies of the country.

He lived in the hospital's expensive private cabin with his wife and daughter for nearly two years during his first round of treatment. The father of one suffers from epidermolytic hyperkeratosis, an extremely rare genetic condition also known as "tree-man syndrome". Sen said that fewer than half a dozen people worldwide have the disease. His hospital also treated a young Bangladeshi girl suffering from the condition in 2017. Doctors declared her surgery a success, but her father later said the growths had returned in even greater numbers, prompting the family to halt treatment and return to their village. — AFP

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'World's oldest man' dies in Japan at 113

TOKYO: "World's oldest man" Masazo Nonaka, who was born just two years after the Wright brothers launched humanity's first powered flight, died on Sunday aged 113, Japanese media said. Nonaka was born in July 1905, according to Guinness World Records—just months before Albert Einstein published his special theory of relativity.

Guinness officially recognised Nonaka as the oldest living man after the death of Spaniard Francisco Nunez Olivera last year. "We feel shocked at the loss of this big figure. He was as usual yesterday and passed away without causing our family any fuss at all," his granddaughter Yuko told Kyodo News. Nonaka had six brothers and one sister, marrying in 1931 and fathering five children.

He ran a hot spring inn in his hometown and in retirement enjoyed watching sumo wrestling on TV and eating sweets, according to local media. Japan has one of the world's highest life expectancies and was home to several people recognized as among the oldest humans to have ever lived. They include Jiroemon Kimura, the longest-living man on record, who died soon after his 116th birthday in June 2013. The oldest verified person ever—Jeanne Louise Calment of France—died in 1997 at the age of 122, according to Guinness. — AFP



ASHORO, Japan : This file photo shows Masazo Nonaka of Japan, then aged 112, smiling after being awarded the Guinness World Records' oldest male person living title in Ashoro, Hokkaido prefecture. — AFP

Insomnia treatment may help ease depression during menopause

NEW YORK: Women going through menopause may have fewer symptoms of depression when they get treatment for insomnia than when they don't, a recent experiment suggests. Researchers recruited 117 menopausal women with insomnia for the study and randomly assigned them to three groups. One group received cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). Another group received a component of CBT known as sleep restriction therapy. The third group only received education on so-called sleep hygiene, or habits that can make it easier to fall and remain asleep.

Overall, 4.3 percent of the women had moderately severe depression. Both forms of insomnia treatment helped ease depression symptoms for these women, but sleep hygiene education did not. "We can add targeted cognitive behavioral treatment of insomnia to the current arsenal of treatments available to alleviate menopausal associated insomnia and with this treatment we have the added benefit of reductions in depressive symptoms which frequently co-occur with sleep disturbance associated with menopause," said senior study author Christopher Drake of the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, Michigan.

"We hope to one day show that targeting insomnia symptoms early when depression is mild or yet to develop can prevent depression from ever developing in the first place," Drake said by email. Women typically go through menopause between ages 45 and 55. As the ovaries curb production of the hormones estrogen and progesterone, women can experience symptoms ranging from vaginal dryness to mood swings, joint pain and insomnia. CBT can train people to use techniques that address the mental (or cognitive) factors associated with insomnia, such as the "racing mind," and to overcome the worry and other negative emotions that often accompany inability to sleep. CBT can also help people with poor sleep establish a healthy bedtime routine and

improve sleep patterns, previous research has found.

Sleep restriction therapy can be done on its own, or as a component of CBT for insomnia. This intervention is designed to limit how many times people awaken during the night and reduce the total amount of time spent in bed; it doesn't aim to restrict the total amount of time people spend asleep. Women in the study who received CBT completed six face-to-face therapy sessions with a registered nurse specializing in behavioral sleep medicine. Sleep restriction therapy was briefer, and involved two face-to-face sessions as well as three phone sessions.

Sleep Medicine

The control group of patients assigned to sleep hygiene education, meanwhile, got six weekly emails with tips on how to create better nighttime routines and information on the connection between sleep and a variety of health problems and lifestyle habits. Right after insomnia treatment, women with depression who received CBT experienced moderate to large reductions in symptoms of the mood disorder, researchers report in Sleep Medicine.

Patients also reported moderate improvements in depression with sleep restriction therapy, but these effects didn't occur until six months after treatment ended, the study also found. One limitation of the study is that it excluded women diagnosed with major depression, so it's not clear how well these insomnia treatments would work for these women, researchers note. Differences in the duration and form of treatment between the types of insomnia therapies tested may have also impacted the results.

Researchers also didn't look at hot flashes - a common menopause symptom that can keep women from sleeping well - and it's possible addressing this aspect of menopause could impact both mood and sleep, said Dr. Mary Jane Minkin, a researcher at Yale University School of Medicine in New Haven, Connecticut, who wasn't involved in the study. The study also didn't examine the impact of hormone therapy, which doctors may prescribe to help ease a variety of menopause symptoms. Minkin said by email. "Hormone therapy usually has a significant impact on sleep," Minkin said. "It is good to know of the benefits of CBT for insomnia, which is always potentially a valuable adjunct," Minkin said. "But clinicians should never forget to think about the potential role of hormone therapy." — Reuters

NASA and China collaborate on Moon mission

WASHINGTON: The space-agencies of the United States and China are in touch and coordinating efforts on Moon exploration, NASA said yesterday as it navigates a strict legal framework aimed at preventing technology transfer to China. "With the required approval from Congress, NASA has been in discussions with China to explore the possibility of observing a signature of the landing plume of their lunar lander, Chang'e 4, using our @NASAMoon spacecraft's instrument," NASA's associate administrator for the science mission directorate, Thomas Zurbuchen, said on Twitter.

Zurbuchen's tweet confirmed a similar statement made Monday by the deputy chief commander of China Lunar Exploration Program, Wu Yanhua. NASA shared information from a US satellite while China told the Americans about the latitude, longitude and time of the landing "in a timely manner," he said. The hope was that NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) could observe the historic touchdown of the Chinese lander on January 3.

NASA provided the planned orbit path of LRO to China, but it turned out the spacecraft was not in the right place at the right time. "For a number of reasons, NASA was not able to phase LRO's orbit to be at the optimal location during the landing, however NASA was still interested in possibly detecting the plume well after the landing," the agency said in a statement. "Science gathered about how lunar dust is ejected upwards during a spacecraft's landing could inform future missions and how they arrive on the lunar surface."

Such observations could help astronauts prepare for future missions to the Moon. NASA's lunar orbiter will pass over the Chang'e 4 landing site on January 31 and will snap pictures, as it did for the Chang'e 3 in 2013. The agency said significant findings resulting from the cooperation would be shared with the global research community in February at a United Nations space gathering in Austria. — AFP

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