

Bangladesh treats first case of 'tree girl' syndrome

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A young Bangladeshi girl with bark-like warts growing on her face could be the first female ever afflicted by so-called "tree man syndrome", doctors studying the rare condition said Tuesday.

Ten-year-old Sahana Khatun has the tell-tale gnarled growths sprouting from her chin, ear and nose, but doctors at Dhaka's Medical College Hospital are still conducting tests to establish if she has the unusual skin disorder.

Less than half a dozen people worldwide have epidermodysplasia verruciformis but none so far have been women, said Samanta Lal Sen, the head of the hospital's burn and plastic surgery unit.

"We believe she is the first woman," Sen told AFP.

Her father, a poor labourer from Bangladesh's rural north, said he didn't worry too much when the first warts appeared on his daughter's face about four months ago.

But as the growths spread rapidly he grew concerned and brought Khatun from their village to the capital Dhaka for treatment.

"We are very poor. My daughter lost her mother when she was only six. I really hope that the doctors will remove the barks from my beautiful daughter's face," her father Mohammad Shahjahan told AFP.

Another of Khatun's doctors said the young patient was displaying a milder form of the disease, and it was hoped she would make a quicker recovery than those in the more advanced stages.

The hospital has been treating one man with a serious case of the disease for the better part of a year, conducting 16 surgical procedures to remove giant warts from his hands and legs.

Huge growths weighing five kilogrammes (11 pounds) each had consumed the hands of 27-year-old Abul Bajandar, the first recorded Bangladeshi to be suffering from the disease.

His plight has captured national attention and the interest of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who promised the patient would receive treatment free of charge.

Doctors told AFP last month that for the first time in a decade, Bajandar had been able to touch his wife and daughter, and was almost ready to leave the ward.

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