

Tanzania national undergoes knee replacement surgery: Dazzled by modern machines

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CLEMENTINE MOLLEL (58) has been an active politician since 1992 at Dar-es-Salaam, the largest city and former capital of Tanzania. Excruciating pain in her knees since October last year, however, kept her bedridden and away from campaigning even ahead of a crucial election held in the country this year.

With the raging coronavirus pandemic, it was only in November that Mollel finally managed to obtain due permission from the Indian High Commission in Tanzania and came to Ahmedabad to get both her knees surgically replaced.

On Saturday, speaking over a video call, a delighted Mollel said, "I'm moving all around in my house, see!"

In November first week, Mollel accompanied by her 25-year-old daughter, took an Air Tanzania flight to Mumbai. They took a second flight to



Clementine Mollel after her surgery at a private hospital in Ahmedabad. *Express*

Ahmedabad, she said. "My first visa was for March when I was supposed to fly down to Ahmedabad to get knee replacement surgery done at Zydus Hospital. Due to Covid-19, the visa was cancelled. I went to the Indian High Commission,

begged them, 'please, you can see my condition', but they said no. (They) told me that only Indian-origin people are being taken on special flights. My Air Emirates ticket, too, was cancelled and they refused to give me a refund so I had to engage a

lawyer. I went to the Indian High Commission a second time. I told them I will not move and finally, I was then given a visa in November. My daughter and I took an Air Tanzania flight and went straight from Ahmedabad airport to the hospital," Mollel

said.

Her daughter, Queen said, "When we thought about the healing (relief) that we will get with the surgery, we forgot about the coronavirus. We only wanted her to get better, so we took the risk."

The duo left for Dar-es-Salaam on November 21 after 11-day hospitalisation and another 10 days stay at a hotel in Ahmedabad, and "dazzled by the modern machines, customer care and post-operation follow-ups" and biryani here.

"Customer care is excellent. They still call me to follow-up. Last year, my aunt underwent the same operation at Zydus Hospital in Ahmedabad and she had given us glowing feedback. We see a lot about Indian hospitals in magazines here. Some popular hospitals have become saturated with post-procedure care not being as good," Mollel said.

For Mollel, who weighed 125 kgs at the time of the surgery, what stands out in the health-care system in Ahmedabad from

Tanzania is the advanced machines. "We have never seen the variety of machines (and diagnostic tools) as we did here. Our doctors, too, are not familiar with the advanced procedures. My doctor in Tanzania could not believe that both my knees were operated on in a single go and I could walk on the second day after surgery."

Dr Daria Singh, senior joint replacement and orthopaedic surgeon at Zydus Hospital who conducted the three-hour surgery on Mollel on November 5, said the 58-year-old had been suffering from osteoarthritis since the past decade and her weight was key in the progression of the disorder. Doctors also found that her knee alignment was not normal, which is dependent on genetic predisposition.

It "was thus decided to conduct a bilateral knee replacement surgery, which was challenging given her body-mass index," said Dr Singh. World over about six to seven per cent knee replacement procedure is

bilateral. Among the pros of the procedure is lesser recovery time. "There are some debatable issues where some available literature suggests that overall neurological and cardiac complications may develop, and in some, it says the opposite. Our experience has shown benefits," Dr Singh added.

With flights resuming tepid operations, medical tourism is regaining traction from its complete halt during the lockdown, although it is far from the normal statistics. "Say, prior to lockdown, our hospital would conduct approximately 50 OPD procedures a month (on foreign patients) which now stands at 10-15 patients a month," Himanshu Sharma, head of international relations at Zydus Hospital, said. While Zydus Hospital representatives would have planned trips to other countries, holding health camps, nearly every other month, the system is yet to resume.

Mollel, who says that she was a member of parliament from the ruling party in

Tanzania in 2015 Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCP), had hoped to contest from the reserved seat for women in Dar-es-Salaam this year, but severe knee pain rendered her immobile and unable to campaign, although this has now only encouraged her to work harder for 2025 elections.

Sharma says that a large proportion of Gujarat's foreign patients are from east and central Africa, more specifically from countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, partly because of several generations of Gujarati diaspora in these countries and also owing to periodic health camps held by private hospitals of Gujarat in these countries and years of liaisoning. While there is no central database for an exact number of medical tourism patients, Sharma estimates that at least 600-650 such patients would visit per month on an average in Gujarat. This has, however, now seen a decline by 85-90 per cent owing to restrictions in air connectivity since Covid-19 outbreak.