

OTs unlock, Afghan kids go home hale and hearty

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Kolkata: Resumption of international flights, in a staggered manner, has come to the rescue to three Afghan infants with congenital heart ailments. All three underwent treatment at a hospital in Howrah and were discharged on Tuesday. They will now be flying home on December 7, after post-operation check-ups.

Seven-month-old Ursa Arkhel was born with a hole in the heart. Suffering from ventricular septal defect (VSD), the baby had been struggling to breathe and was not gaining weight. The infant from Takhar province had a successful open-heart surgery at Narayana Super-specialty Hospital (NSH) Howrah.

The flight that brought Ursa to Kolkata on November 19 also had eight-month-old Mohammad Amir Zahid Jabarkhel from Kabul and Nehan Atmar Balach from Daikondi province. While the three-year-old Nehan was also born with a hole in his heart (atrial septal defect) and underwent interventional device closure, Zahid was diagnosed with tetralogy of fallot (blue baby) and underwent an open-heart surgery. The patients underwent the procedures on November 24 and 25.

The hospital had set up a clinical team consisting cardiac surgeons Debasis Das and Nilanjan Dutta, paediatric cardiologists Amitabha Chattopadhyay, Sanjeeban Ghosh and Jayita Nandy, cardiac anaesthetists Manish Sharma and Rangan Koley and paediatric cardiac intensivist Shubhadeep Das for the kids' treatments.

"They were waiting for

MED CONDITIONS & TREATMENT

Patient | Ursa Arkhel →

- Age | Seven months
- Ailment | Ventricular septal defect (VSD)
- Procedure | Open-heart surgery



← Patient | Zahid

- Age | Eight months
- Ailment | Tetralogy of the fallot, in which the child turns blue
- Procedure | Open-heart surgery

Patient Nehan →

- Age | Three years
- Ailment | Atrial septal defect
- Procedure | Interventional device closure



some form of the unlock process to come here for treatment. Waiting longer could have led to their conditions becoming inoperable or developing complications," said cardiac surgeon Debasis Das.

Since all the children were from poor families, their treatments were sponsored by NGOs, including Rotary Club of Mahanagar and Cultural and Empowerment Organization for Afghans led by Fatima Nargis.

"The resumption of inter-

national flights came as a relief for the parents of these children. We, however, have to struggle a lot for the visas. Doctors at NHS have always had a special bond with patients from my country. Thanks to the team, these children will now fly home with a new lease of life," Nargis told TOI.

The team at the hospital has already treated 22 Afghan patients with different heart conditions in the past few years. But the pandemic had paused this.