

Acid attack victim's face reconstructed in 12 days

Patient from Zanzibar had suffered 25 per cent burns

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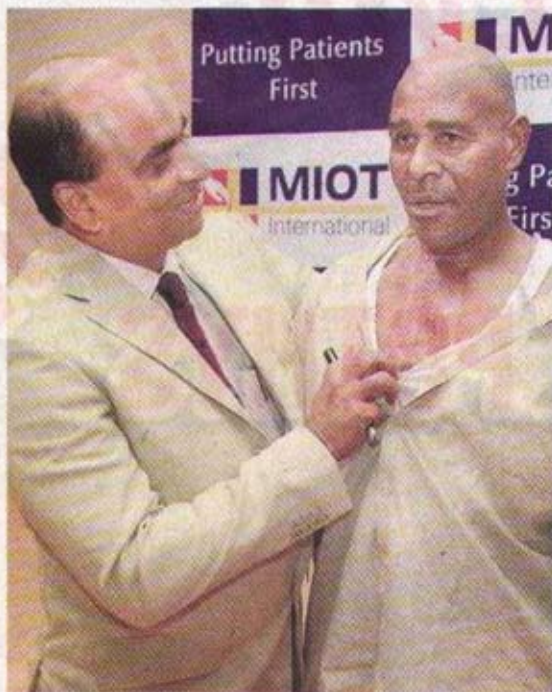
CHENNAI: The prowess of modern medicine makes grand promises we are happy to be proud of. From time to time, it wows us with what it actually achieves. In this case, in 12 days flat.

Zanzibari political representative Mohammed Omar Said, not less than 15 days ago was ravaged by an acid attack.

Photos taken 15 days ago show a red gaping wound over the right part of his face, throat, scalp and chest.

Today, at best, when he has buttoned up to the collar, you could probably say he has a mild skin condition. The cartilage, which was seared by the acid thrown on him, is not there, though he has a functional ear and can hear very well. It's the only giveaway.

"Well, we know it is possible. But it still is a fantastic outcome," says Eapen Koshy, Head of the Department of Cranio-facial and Cosmetic Surgery, MIOT Hospital.



Eapen Koshy, cosmetic surgeon, MIOT Hospital, with his Zanzibar patient Mohammed Omar Said, in Chennai on Saturday. — PHOTO: M.VEDHAN

"These are outcomes that were unimaginable years ago. Even today, without aggressive surgical management and good infection control, it would not be possible," Dr. Koshy says.

He is mobile, and without any major disability, the skin has healed well.

When Mr. Omar was

flown in by his government to MIOT, general surgeon Said Ali Said in tow, he was very sick.

On May 23, at 8-30 p.m. his time, Mr. Omar was surprised by a presumed political rival on his way back from fetching water. When the man threw some liquid on him and ran, he gave a chase, but

stopped when he was consumed by the burning sensation on his face and chest. He was taken to the police station where they poured water on him for an hour. Then he was taken to the Mnazi Mmoja Hospital where Dr. Said was in attendance.

"We have facilities for skin grafting, but not enough sophistication for facial burn. So the government sent him to India, and I came along," Dr. Said explains.

Mr. Omar had 25 per cent burns. But additionally, his wounds harboured a resistant bacteria and he had malaria too.

Dr. Koshy decided to remove the damaged tissue completely, instead of waiting and trying a combination of antibiotics.

Imported German dermadomes helped him determine the exact thickness of skin for grafting (skull, face, neck, shoulder, chest) and a mesh was used in the shoulder, neck and graft so that the skin doesn't grow and shrink, causing contractions.

"What you see in him today is what one would normally expect to see in a year. That is how good the outcome has been," Dr. Koshy says.