

CSR

Giving new life to the sightless

StanChart looks to deepen ties with Bangladesh by helping tackle avoidable blindness

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

SEEING is Believing (SiB), an initiative of Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) and the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness to tackle avoidable blindness in developing countries, has gone on to turn around the lives of many a visually-challenged people, its ambassadors said.

"It is a completely brilliant initiative, and has become an economic success. People who would have been a drain on the community are now contributing. It is a complete turnaround," Joanna Lumley, an ambassador of SiB, told The Daily Star in an interview.

An actress and author by profession, she is also a trustee of The Coldest Journey, the current expedition to Antarctica, organised by Sir Ranulph Fiennes to raise more than \$10 million for the initiative.

Lumley was in Dhaka last month with Sir Ranulph, another ambassador of SiB, to see for themselves the impact the global charitable initiative is having on the lives of the people in Bangladesh.

They visited the Ispahani Islamia Eye Institute and Hospital in the capital, where the initiative was born 10 years ago. They met many patients, including young children, who were recovering after cataract operations that cost as little as £20.

There was an emotional scene when Lumley was reunited with 13-year old Arif, who she had met on a previous trip to Bangladesh in 2005.

"Returning to Bangladesh after eight years and to go back to the hospital I visited the last time and meet the same child whose operation I watched when he was a four-year old was very thrilling."

"The little boy has now grown into a tall 13-year old and is doing so well at school. You can see the difference the small operation that took only 15 minutes to perform and cost £27 has made," added the British actress.

The duo also met with Shefali, a beneficiary of SiB in 2010. At that time, she was losing her sight and therefore was forced to give up her vegetable stand, with which she supported her four children.

"Shefali has got her wonderful vegetable store back and is having a wonderful life with her children. It is the best possible way to spend money," said Sir Ranulph, adding that she is now a strong advocate of SiB and its local NGO partner, Sightsavers.

Described by Guinness World Records in 1984 as 'the world's greatest living explorer', Sir Ranulph has already raised £6.3 million through two expeditions for the initiative.



SK ENAMUL HAK

From right, Joanna Lumley, British actress; Sir Ranulph Fiennes, British explorer; and Jeanette McKenna, global head for a project, Seeing is Believing, were in Bangladesh last month to see for themselves the impact the initiative is having on the lives of people in the country.

He almost blinded himself during one of his expeditions in 2002, and since then has been working to tackle avoidable blindness globally. "To be blind is just horrible. Then I started to think about blind people, maybe for the first time."

The 69-year old explorer said SiB is very important for the whole world as blindness is expected to be an epidemic worldwide due to diabetes, malnutrition and pollution.

The initiative, which has reached over 41 million since its inception in 2003, is now aiming to raise \$100 million by 2020. To date, it has raised over \$60 million, with SCB matching all donations.

"The 2020 is a nice goal but a lot of things have to be done before and after that," Jeanette McKenna, global head of SiB, said, adding that sustainable steps and long-term funding would be needed.

She said SCB is very passionate about the cause as 90

percent of avoidable blindness occurs in the developing world, where much of the bank's business is rooted.

"It is not just about the funding that we put in, we also dedicate a lot of volunteering time to it. Changing people's lives is the most important part -- there is no measure you can put on that."

In Dhaka, the bank has committed \$1 million to Dhaka Urban Comprehensive Eye Care project that will serve over 270,000 visually impaired people.

"Blindness is not just a health issue, it is also an economic one. It affects employment and education opportunities of both blind individuals and carers. By helping tackle avoidable blindness we are opening up new possibilities and strengthening the social and economic fabric of our communities," SCB CEO in Bangladesh Jim McCabe said.

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Pakistan to privatise national carrier

AFP, Karachi

PAKISTAN'S new prime minister plans to sell off a 26 percent stake in ailing national carrier PIA and hand over management control in a bid to stem haemorrhaging losses.

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is one of the poorest performing state-run companies in the country and businessmen were quick to welcome the decision, announced late Thursday.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who has made repairing the weak economy his top priority, ordered PIA management to slash losses to make the company viable for sale.

The company has incurred heavy losses because of poor management, corruption and inefficiencies.

PIA officially lost \$320 million last year but the deficit would have been much larger if the state had not been pouring money into its coffers in a bid to keep it afloat.

The company has a staggering 18,000 employees for 42 planes, a ratio of more than 400 staff per aircraft, a PIA spokesman said.

"The government is fully committed to reforming and restructuring all ailing state enterprises, including PIA," Sharif said on Thursday.

Under the plan, 26 percent of PIA's shares will be offered to potential buyers along with the transfer of management control.

The auction is expected to attract international players and could be a milestone for the country's privatisation plan, analysts and businessmen believe.

Pakistan sold its state-run telecom company in mid-2000 by transferring 26 percent of its shares and management control. The government offloaded another 10 percent of PTC shares later on.

Arif Habib, chairman of Arif Habib Group of Companies and on PIA's board of directors until last month, said that the airline could attract an international buyer.

"If an investor injects some capital it could be turned around in a short span of time," said Habib, who is a former president of the Karachi Stock Exchange and a business tycoon.

"It would be a good public-private partnership model," he said.

Nevertheless the final sale is likely to face strong opposition from rival political parties and from employees.

Farrah Marwat, head of research at JS Capital Markets, said good financial packages and retirement benefits could help to defuse the complaints.

"We have a big market of 180 million people and no other sizable company to cater them so it would be a good attraction for the buyers," Marwat said.

Twitter announces IPO plans

AFP, San Francisco

TWITTER announced Thursday, in a tweet, that it has submitted papers for the most hotly anticipated stock offering in the tech sector since Facebook's last year.

"We've confidentially submitted an S-1 to the SEC for a planned IPO. This Tweet does not constitute an offer of any securities for sale," the company tweeted.

Moments later, in typically breezy style, the company tweeted a picture of its staffers, and said: "Now, back to work."

Twitter's market value has been estimated around \$10 billion based on early venture capital investments, but the initial public offering (IPO) is likely to bring a higher amount.

"We expect @Twitter to price #IPO conservatively at 20-30x revenue, or \$15 billion, with about \$500 million in revenue," said a tweet from the private company research firm PrivCo.

The firm added in another tweet: "Unlike \$FB (Facebook) which waited too long to IPO (growth rate decelerated) Twitter will IPO at just the right inflection point."

Lou Kerner at the Social Internet Fund, said he expects a big reaction from investors.

"Given Twitter's significant growth, and the market's love affair with social media, the Twitter IPO is posed to be a home run," he said in an email.

Twitter has become one of the fastest-growing and most influential social media services, used widely by celebrities, journalists, politicians and others.

The company said earlier this year it had "well over 200 million" active users, although some analysts place figure much higher.

Twitter said this week it was moving deeper into mobile advertising with the purchase of MoPub, a startup focusing on mobile ad exchanges.

The acquisition was announced late Monday. It was estimated to be worth some \$350 million, according to the technology news site TechCrunch.

The fast-growing social network is expected to earn \$582.8 million globally in ad revenue this year and nearly \$1 billion next year, according to industry tracker eMarketer.

The San Francisco company provided no details on the IPO dates or pricing.

It is taking advantage of a rule adopted last year by the Securities and Exchange Commission, which allows "emerging growth" companies with revenues of less than a billion to keep financial details confidential until they get closer to the IPO.

Under those rules, Twitter can keep its financials private until 21 days prior to its presentation to investors, known as a "road show."

But Trip Chowdhry, analyst at Global Equities Research, said Twitter is undermining confidence by keeping its finances private.

"The idea of doing a confidential IPO undermines the credibility of the Twitter IPO," he told AFP.

"If they are not transparent, it is that they have something to hide; we know nothing of how their company has been going for the last two years."

An analysis by the website Statistic Brain says Twitter has some 554 million active, registered users and is adding 135,000 on a daily basis.

Indian pharma draws more FDA scrutiny as US imports rise

REUTERS, Mumbai

US inspectors visiting a factory in India owned by drugmaker Wockhardt Ltd in March found torn data records in a waste heap and urinals that emptied into an open drain in a bathroom six meters from the entrance to a sterile manufacturing area.

And when an inspector asked about the contents of unlabelled vials in the laboratory glassware washing area, a plant worker dumped them down a sink and said the contents could not be determined, according to a July 18 letter from the US Food and Drug Administration to Wockhardt, which makes sterile injectable drugs and various forms of insulin.

Habil Khorakwala, chairman of Wockhardt, last week told shareholders that the problem at its Waluj plant "is an inexcusable lapse, but we have taken swift and definitive action, both corrective and pre-emptive," including appointment of a new quality chief and hiring of outside consultants.

India's drugmakers, battered by a rash of US regulatory rebukes including a record fine for Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd, face closer FDA scrutiny as the agency ramps up its presence in the country.

Increased on-the-ground oversight reflects India's growing importance as a supplier to the United States, and should ultimately bolster quality and confidence in Indian-made drugs.

In March, India allowed the FDA, guardian of the world's most important pharmaceuticals market, to add seven inspectors, which will bring its staff in India to 19. India produces nearly 40 percent of generic drugs and over-the-counter products and 10 percent of finished dosages in the United States.

"As more trade happens, as more drugs are approved and applications are submitted we will have to inspect more," Altaf Lal, the new FDA office director for India, told Reuters.

"Many Indian firms fairly well understand and they know good manufacturing practices. The problems we have seen with some companies are why we choose to make quality as one of our highest priorities," he said.

The FDA's stepped-up presence should also accelerate what some in the domestic industry hope is a more rigorous attitude towards compliance in a country whose cheap generics have made it the low-cost pharmacy to the world.

In the near term, it means Indian



REUTERS

A man rides a motorcycle in front of the office of Ranbaxy Laboratories at Gurgaon, on the outskirts of New Delhi. India's drugmakers, battered by a rash of US regulatory rebukes including a record fine for Ranbaxy, face closer FDA scrutiny as the agency ramps up its presence in the country.

drugmakers could be more frequently hit by enforcement measures or inquiries, unnerving investors.

Shares of Ranbaxy, controlled by Japan's Daiichi Sankyo Co, fell as much as 42 percent in the months after it pleaded guilty in May to US felony charges related to drug safety and agreed to \$500 million in fines.

Ranbaxy, India's biggest drugmaker by sales, remains barred from making US shipments from its plants at Dewas and Paonta Sahib. Ranbaxy has said the implementation of a consent decree it signed in January 2012 with the FDA to restart shipments has "progressed as per plan".

While Ranbaxy shares have recovered, the case put a cloud over the industry.

"We all know how Indian companies function and issues such as Ranbaxy and other import alerts have brought us a very bad reputation globally," said Ajay Kumar Sharma, director of research at the Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India.

The urgency to be first with a generic version of a drug coming off patent is the main reason for quality problems, Sharma said. The company that first launches such a drug enjoys a 180-day exclusivity period, which can be lucrative for the generic version of a commercial

blockbuster.

"We need to be sincere towards quality issues rather than following procedures just for the sake of it," said Sharma. "We are doing things fast but then losing out on certain aspects and facing import alerts."

Wockhardt's once-soaring shares fell as much as 79 percent in the months after the announcement of an "import alert" banning shipments from the Waluj factory in May. By the middle of this week, the stock was down nearly 59 percent.

On July 31, Strides Arcolab shares fell as much as 17 percent on worries over FDA scrutiny of its manufacturing practices, although the Indian company said on that day that it had answered the FDA's queries, made in a so-called form-483 letter, and continued to make U.S. shipments. Its stock has more than recovered.

The FDA's power cuts both ways. Last week, IPCA Laboratories shares gained 7.6 percent on the day it said the FDA had cleared its oral solid formulations plant in Indore for US shipments. In November, IPCA had voluntarily reported "non-conformances" at the plant to the FDA.

"More inspectors initially could mean some more enforcement actions, but eventually that would end up meaning even fewer enforcement actions going

forward," said Macquarie analyst Abhishek Singhal.

India is the biggest overseas source of medicines to the United States and is home to over 150 FDA-approved plants, including facilities run by global players. Pharmaceutical exports from India to the United States rose nearly 32 percent last year to \$4.23 billion.

As US demand for generics grows, especially under President Barack Obama's healthcare program, the FDA is under pressure to clear product applications while ensuring quality.

New US legislation requires the agency to inspect global plants on the same schedule as domestic facilities, and to clear its backlog of drug applications within five years. Indian firms account for more than one-third of US drug approval filings.

Lupin Ltd was the top Indian drug seller in the U.S. market last year by prescriptions, followed by Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Cadila Healthcare and Aurobindo Pharma, according to IMS Health. All have had past FDA run-ins.

In May 2009, Lupin received a warning letter from the agency over deficiencies at a plant in Bhopal, which it resolved in January 2010. Last year, the FDA lifted an import alert at a Mexican plant owned by Dr Reddy's.