

Singapore hospital invests more in tech upgrade

Chief executive of Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital says they want to expand operations in the region



Stephens Lo, left, chief executive officer of Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital in Singapore, is seen with Zahid Khan, head of the Bangladesh country office of Parkway Hospitals Singapore Pte Ltd.

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

MOUNT Elizabeth Novena Hospital in Singapore is investing heavily in technology, skilled professionals and services as the state-of-the-art healthcare provider aims to maximise patient satisfaction and widen reach in the region, said its top executive.

"We even serve patients who have already exhausted all options and possibilities," said Stephens Lo, chief executive officer of the hospital.

In South Asia, India and Bangladesh know Mount Elizabeth as a centre for superlative medical care. The hospital has been serving the Asia Pacific for more than 30 years as a leading medical hub. It earned the trust of patients from all over the region by blending exceptional medical talents with advanced technologies.

Established in 2012, the hospital is part of Parkway Pantai Group, which is the largest private healthcare provider in Singapore and operates Mount Elizabeth Hospital, Gleneagles Hospital and Parkway East Hospital -- all accredited by the Joint Commission International.

Lo said the owners have taken the opportunity of latest tools of hospital design and have invested in cutting-edge technology. "The focus is maximum patient satisfaction and medical outcome."

Each room at the hospital comes with standard hotel-styled features such as floor-to-ceiling windows, marble-tiled bathrooms, mini

bar, coffee machines and luxury linen. Also available upon request -- at no additional charges -- are limousine transfer services and complimentary massages for maternity patients.

Single rooms significantly reduce the risk of hospital-acquired infections while the added privacy allows patients to recover in a peaceful environment, according to the hospital. Lo said the hospital is no more expensive than any other premier hospitals in Singapore or other developed countries.

The \$2-billion hospital also receives a number of patients from Bangladesh. Although Mount Elizabeth Novena is new compared to Mount Elizabeth Orchard, the two complement each other. "Experienced doctors of Orchard do practice at Novena. Younger talents also join us. We are growing together and complement each other," said Lo.

During his stay in Dhaka last month, Lo visited a hospital in Dhaka and was impressed by the facilities available there.

Talking about the standards of healthcare in Bangladesh, he said healthcare is different in every country: the standards of healthcare in a country are actually what the people expect and can afford as well.

Bangladesh's healthcare services are as good as they can be at this point of time. "But there is always room for improvement, even in countries such as Singapore."

The 333-bed hospital serves both local citizens and medical tourists. International patients account for about 20 percent of total

patients seen at Mount Elizabeth Novena. The occupancy rate is about 80 percent.

Parkway Pantai Group is the market leader in Singapore and Malaysia. "We are expanding operations in markets and countries where we have suitable opportunities," he said, adding that the group would open hospitals in Bangladesh if it finds suitable opportunities and partners.

Mount Elizabeth Novena has grown tremendously over the years and the 42-year-old official has put the annual revenue growth at 20-25 percent. "We are introducing more beds and more doctors and specialists to improve our capacity."

The hospital has 13 operating theatres, including a hybrid operating room, and specialises in minimally-invasive and robotic surgery. It has 1,500 specialists and 500 nurses.

Lo, who graduated in economics and accounting from the London School of Economics, once visited Mount Elizabeth Orchard with a relative. During the visit his idea about hospitals changed, and prompted him to join the healthcare sector.

"During the visit, I came to realise that not only the doctors make the difference at hospitals -- there are other people, and everybody work together to make sure that the patients have good recovery. I told myself that despite not being a doctor, I can make a difference."

About the changing scenario in healthcare in Singapore and in the region, Lo said everybody is working to raise the standards and making investment in technology and services to provide the best medical services.

"I think competition is good. It helps us improve and do better."

The group has patient assistance centres in Dhaka and Chittagong, and plans to open a centre in Sylhet, said Zahid Khan, head of the Bangladesh country office of Parkway Hospitals Singapore Pte Ltd.

The patient assistance centres provide one-stop service to local and international patients looking for specialist expertise, personalised patient care and cutting-edge technology at Parkway Hospitals Singapore. It also organises events to raise awareness about different diseases, brings nutritionists and holds motivational programmes for cancer survivors.

Khan said the staffers of the patient assistance centres are professionally trained to provide genuine care and comfort, and to attend to the special needs of patients before, during, and, if necessary, after their visit. They are also able to provide advice on the estimated cost of treatments and procedures at the hospitals, Khan said.

fazlur.rahman@thedailystar.net

Umbrella heist dampens Japanese city's spirits



Visitors and locals alike in Japan could pick up one of about 1,000 transparent umbrellas -- embossed with a multilingual city logo.

AFP, Tokyo

FREE umbrellas for tourists -- what could go wrong? Pretty much everything, as it turns out.

Officials at the local chamber of commerce in a northern Japanese city have been left red faced after hundreds of umbrellas left for visitors to use while they were in town vanished.

The mass broly theft -- about 900 disappeared -- has left historic port city Hakodate's feel-good tourism scheme in tatters, and triggered an angry response from some local taxpayers, who slammed it as a waste of money.

Launched at the end of March, the programme was designed to celebrate the extension of Japan's iconic bullet train service to its northernmost island Hokkaido, where the city is located.

Visitors and locals alike could pick up one of about 1,000 transparent umbrellas -- embossed with a multilingual city logo -- left at stands around town.

Keep them as long as you like and return them when you're done, signs advised.

But it seems many umbrella lovers helped themselves to a permanent souvenir.

Hakodate's chamber of commerce, which was behind the promotion, says it has added 500 more umbrellas to the depleted stands.

But checks with local hotels, museums and other businesses have turned up just 13 of the missing umbrellas.

"Preferably, it would be good if as many as possible are returned," a chamber of commerce spokesman said.

"But the people who borrowed them are no longer in Hakodate if they were tourists. There may be no way to get them back."

Mexico, Singapore leaders back TPP ratification

AFP, Mexico City

MEXICAN President Enrique Pena Nieto said Friday that he and Singaporean counterpart Tony Tan will promote the ratification of a trans-Pacific trade pact.

The two leaders met during Tan's state visit to Mexico, the first by a Singaporean head of state to any Latin American nation.

After talks at the capital's ornate National Palace, Pena Nieto said the two agreed to deepen bilateral relations, bolster ties between Southeast Asia and Latin America and "promote the ratification" of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

For his part, Tan praised the series of economic and energy reforms enacted by Pena Nieto since 2012.

"These reforms have created more opportunities for trade and investment, and the ratification of TPP will further increase opportunities," he said.

Once ratified by the 12 participating countries, TPP backers say the deal will slash tariffs and trade barriers for 40 percent of the global economy and establish the largest free trade area in the world.

The 12 signatories are: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam.

For India's surging economy, small is beautiful

REUTERS, New Delhi/Mumbai

FOR Rohan Sharma, business has never been better. Sales at his autoparts company in Gujarat are booming and the order book has almost doubled in the past year.

His Bhagirath Coach & Metal Fabricators has just invested nearly \$120,000 in new machinery and plans to spend up to \$1.2 million this year to expand capacity.

That's an encouraging sign for Asia's third-largest economy, where stressed balance sheets at big firms and heavy reliance on bank credit, which has dried up following a surge in troubled loans, have stymied efforts to revive private investment.

Sharma does not face such constraints. He says his firm is debt-free and relies mainly on internal resources to fund capacity expansion.

A survey from the Reserve Bank of India shows he is not alone. The annual study of nearly 240,000 unlisted small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) found they are saving their way to growth, helping transform India into the world's fastest-growing large economy in the past two years.

India has more than 45 million SMEs, accounting for nearly 40 percent of gross domestic product. Most are unlisted, and their earnings growth has outpaced listed companies for the past three years.

"We never allowed exuberance to get the better of hard business logic," Sharma said.

Sales at smaller private firms grew 12 percent in 2014/15, the central bank survey showed. Sales at listed big companies rose 1.4 percent over the same period.

Operating profit of the unlisted firms grew an annual 16.6 percent in the year, three times the pace at listed companies, and they increased their gross savings.

While higher expenses halved net profit growth at private firms, they still grew at double-digit pace. In contrast, listed companies struggled with shrinking profits.

Debt-laden big listed firms, meanwhile, are still reluctant to undertake new investments,



A worker separates casting joints of gearboxes inside a small-scale automobile manufacturing unit in Ahmedabad, India.

and foreign firms can find India's labyrinthine regulations overwhelming. Also, infrastructure and resources needed for complex manufacturing, like roads, skilled labour and consistent power supply, is often lacking.

That led to a contraction in capital spending in the January-March quarter. Despite that, strong consumer spending helped power economic growth of 7.9 percent, the fastest rate among the world's major economies. "Being a small-scale company has helped us in getting more orders," said Pramod Patel, managing partner at Reliable Paints.

Patel's company, which supplies industrial paint to the metals, chemical, auto and defence sectors, saw 25 percent growth in its order book in the fiscal year ending in March.

"We can customise different paint shades for clients, unlike big paint companies which can only provide specific paint shades," he said.

Capacity utilisation at his Gujarat-based factory shot up to 80 percent from 50 percent in 2014/15. Now, Patel is buying new machines, hiring workers and spending more on marketing.

Helping power smaller firms has been Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan to build 10,000 km of new national highways and upgrade another 50,000 km as part of \$32 billion infrastructure spending this fiscal year.

This has boosted sales of heavy commercial vehicles and, by extension, auto ancillary companies. Steel Strips Wheels, for example, reported a 55 percent jump in earnings per share in the fiscal year that ended in March.

The company, which supplies wheel rims to major automakers, has seen a big leap in capacity utilization. Its commercial vehicles wheel plant is now using 95 percent of capacity from little over 35 percent in 2013/14.

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