

‘We want to provide compassionate cancer care at an affordable cost’

Says Sakif Shamim, managing director of Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Center

The Daily Star (TDS): As a young entrepreneur, what motivated you to invest in a new cancer unit for Labaid?

Sakif Shamim: According to the World Health Organisation, more than 1.5 lakh new cancer patients are detected in Bangladesh every year while more than 1 lakh people die from the terminal disease. So, a large volume of these cancer patients needs comprehensive modern treatment. Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive cancer care hospital with international standard treatment facilities in our country.

As a trusted healthcare service provider, Labaid Group has to improve this scenario. That's the reason my father, Dr A M Shamim, stepped forward and took the decision to build a comprehensive cancer care hospital with international standard treatment facilities.

TDS: What challenges have you faced at the Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Center due to Covid-19, and how have you addressed the needs of your patients, especially cancer patients?

Sakif Shamim: Cancer patients are vulnerable because their treatment procedure is highly risky and may impact their immune system. That's why the coronavirus situation has been a big challenge for cancer patients as well as cancer hospitals.

If any cancer patient is infected with Covid-19, they might be at life risk and fear hospital treatment. To improve this situation, we strictly monitor international coronavirus protocols and health safety policies. We take utmost care in ensuring patients that this hospital is Covid-free.

Our doctors, nurses, frontline workers and quality management team ensure full support to the patient. Our psychological counselling team communicates with patients and attendants and gives them mental support.

TDS: Do you think that the fear of Covid-19 has delayed cancer diagnosis and treatment? How would you address the pandemic going forward?

Sakif Shamim: Cancer is a fast-growing disease and if it is not diagnosed and treated in its early stage, chances of survival become slim.

I just want to say, please don't delay your treatment. International standard treatment now can be availed in Bangladesh with proper health safety norms and Covid-19 protocols. We don't know when this pandemic will end. I request all cancer patients not to delay their treatments.

TDS: Has there been any recent upgradation of cancer care therapies at Labaid?

According to the World Health Organisation, more than 1.5 lakh new cancer patients are detected in Bangladesh every year while more than 1 lakh people die from the terminal disease

Sakif Shamim: The hospital is equipped with the most advanced equipment and technologies with the widest range of services, comprising a TrueBeam Linear Accelerator (with stereotactic radiosurgery), HDR brachytherapy, advanced chemotherapy day-care centre, immunotherapy, genome therapy and so on.

Our management, doctors, nurses and all other staff pledge full support

and contribution towards the goal of providing compassionate services at an affordable cost.

We have also started Oporajoy Abashan (like the Tata Memorial Hospital in India). This is a hospitality service for patients who come from outside Dhaka for treatment. Oporajoy Abashan is located near our hospital and is equipped with emergency medical services, good accommodation at low costs, good quality food and a secure environment for every patient.

TDS: Currently, we do not know when the Covid-19 pandemic will end. How do you plan to continue working amid the pandemic?

Sakif Shamim: Considering the current scenario, the pandemic looks like it will take more time to end. However, we have to move on with a new strategy.

This pandemic has taught us many things, bringing wide-scale reforms to the healthcare system. We are more cautious about our treatment system, patient and hospital management. We have to work on more patient-centric treatment. We have to introduce new technologies, train manpower, and emphasise technology-friendly work environments and virtual healthcare management, such as telemedicine.

TDS: Tell us about Labaid Cancer Hospital's plans and goals for the near and distant future.

Sakif Shamim: The Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Center in Dhaka is the first comprehensive cancer care facility in Bangladesh. It was established with a vision to provide affordable healthcare services with a spirit of patient-centricity and ethical

practice.

With the right combination of 30 years of trust and the legacy of Labaid and modern leadership in healthcare, this hospital aims to revolutionise the overall cancer treatment scenario in Bangladesh.

We also want to be the pioneer in changing the perception that quality care for cancer patients provided by private hospitals is beyond the reach of common people.

With the choice of cost-effective care and a wide range of services and facilities to choose from, we are contributing to the overall development of the domestic health sector.

In a continuation of this effort, the Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Center seeks to bring advanced cancer treatment to the patients that include six advanced modular operation theatres, three advanced LINAC machines, robotic surgery, a solid organ transplantation programme, BMT Unit, cyberknife technique, access to clinical research drugs. Also, we will establish 30 peripheral centres across the country for ensuring accessibility to cancer treatment and care.

TDS: Do you have any message for cancer patients and oncology professionals in the country on the occasion of World Cancer Day?

Sakif Shamim: This year, the theme of World Cancer Day is "Close The Care Gap", which means everyone deserves access to cancer care. So, we can say those who are suffering from cancer have the right to better treatment and quality of life.

Our oncology professionals have to work more closely with the patients, ensure better treatment, and earn their trust.

We, the healthcare professionals, have to take more initiatives to introduce more advanced treatment facilities and ensure modern technology and treatment facilities for every cancer patient in Bangladesh.

Implementation of BBIN deal to cut business cost Analysts say

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Implementation of the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) motor vehicle agreement will enable the adoption of a sub-regional protocol for a cost-effective, efficient and seamless multimodal transport system, according to speakers at a webinar.

This will lead to a significant decrease in the cost of doing business and eventually increase the standard of living in the sub-region, they said at the "National Advocacy Dialogue" yesterday.

Civil society think-tank Unnayan Shamannay and CUTS International jointly organised the event under a project, styled "Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multi-modal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region".

The speakers said integrating roadways, inland waterways, the railway and coastal shipping transport systems were important in reaching their potential.

Considering the political and economic importance, it is of paramount importance that all stakeholders reach a consensus regarding the implementation of the BBIN deal and realise

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Stocks keep rising

Thanks to healthy corporate earnings

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Shares on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) rose for the second consecutive day yesterday, pushing the benchmark index above 7,000 points after three days.

The DSEX, the broader index of the premier bourse in Bangladesh, closed 19 points higher at 7,016 at the end of the trading on the day.

The index closed above the 7,000-point mark, as investors put fresh bets on large-cap stocks based on the latest quarterly earnings declarations, said International Leasing Securities Ltd in its daily market analysis.

Buying pressures of the investors lifted the DSEX at the beginning of the session. But after the mid-session, buyers' activity became slow, dragging it downwards. The DS30, which comprises blue-chip companies, and the DSES, which consists of Shariah-based firms, closed 4.20 points and 6.50 points higher, respectively.

The gainers took a strong lead over the losers, as 204 issues advanced, 126 declined and 51 remained unchanged on the DSE floor.

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Sri Lanka gets \$500m Indian loan to pay for oil

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka was handed temporary relief from energy shortages and rolling blackouts on Wednesday with a \$500 million loan from India to finance urgent oil purchases for the cash-strapped nation.

The island's economic woes have left thermal power generators unable to keep the lights on and disrupted transport networks, as traders run desperately low on foreign currency to fund imports.

Frequent breakdowns at a huge coal power plant have compounded unannounced electricity cuts and households are also struggling to source cooking gas and kerosene.

Officials said a formal agreement was being signed on Wednesday after two weeks of talks, in addition to a recent \$915 million in foreign exchange support.

An Indian diplomat said talks were underway on another \$1 billion credit line to fund urgently needed food and medicine imports from India.

"The \$500 million is for Sri Lanka to purchase petroleum products from Indian suppliers," the official said.

Sri Lanka's economy is also seeing a scarcity of rice, automotive parts and cement, with supermarkets forced to ration some staple foods.

The shortages pushed food inflation to a record 25 per cent last month.

Tourism is a key foreign exchange earner for Sri Lanka but the sector has collapsed in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.



A man waits to buy liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders in Colombo on December 31, 2021, as shortages of essentials gripped the island following a shortage of foreign exchange to finance imports.

PHOTO: AFP

Google parent Alphabet nearly doubles annual profit

AFP, San Francisco

Google's parent firm Alphabet announced quarterly profits Tuesday that beat expectations and nearly doubled in 2021 -- after a booming holiday season for the online ads giant facing anti-trust regulation scrutiny.

The tech giant had net income of \$20.6 billion on revenue that grew 32 per cent to \$75 billion in the final quarter of 2021, ending the year with a total of \$76 billion in profit.

That was nearly double the \$40 billion annual profit reported for 2020, as the pandemic had already accelerated a shift to online shopping, working and learning that also benefited fellow giants like Amazon and Facebook.

Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai cited "strong growth in our advertising business... a quarterly sales record for our Pixel phones despite supply constraints, and our cloud business continuing to grow strongly" for the success.

In all, Google earned more than \$61 billion in advertising revenue, mostly from online search and its video platform, while its cloud business grew by 45 per cent to \$5.5 billion in revenue.

Google's dominance online has powered it to new heights during the pandemic period, but has also left it in the sights of regulators around the world.

Pichai said during an earnings call that Alphabet is open to "sensible" regulation by Congress but is "genuinely concerned that they could break a wide range of popular services we offer to our users."

Some regulatory proposals could have unintended consequences such as weakening privacy and safety, or putting US companies at a disadvantage, according to Pichai.

Alphabet's strong earnings come after Apple, another pandemic-era winner, reported record revenue last week as

markets were jittery about tech's future as well as geopolitical risks like the Ukraine crisis.

However, regulators' scrutiny around the world is stacking up as one of the most significant risks for the Silicon Valley giant.

"Google has the biggest uphill battle in terms of antitrust issues among all of the Big Tech companies," Third Bridge analyst Scott Kessler wrote.

"Despite Apple's bigger size and Meta/Facebook's bad publicity, Google is seen most at risk in terms of US antitrust law," he added.

Just last week, a group of top US justice officials accused Google in lawsuits of tracking and profiting from users' location data, despite leading consumers to think they could protect their privacy on the tech giant's services.

These suits are the latest legal threats against Google and other US Big Tech giants, which have long

faced probes and court cases but a lack of new national laws that would regulate their businesses.

The courts and legislatures are not moving fast. Two weeks ago, for example, Google appealed a European court ruling that upheld a 2.4 billion-euro fine imposed by Brussels in 2017 for anti-competitive practices in the price comparison market.

Alphabet's expectations beating results offered positive signals even as diminishing growth shadowed firms like lockdown lifestyle champ Netflix.

Netflix lost tens of billions of dollars in market capitalization last month -- but has rebounded -- after projecting growth of just 2.5 million subscribers this quarter.

Fortunes were quite different for Google, with Alphabet saying its board had approved a 20-to-1 stock split that would make shares more affordable to small investors.

