

Work to brighten the country’s image further

PM tells Bangladesh embassy officials in Washington DC

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has asked officials of the Bangladesh embassy in Washington DC to work with sincerity and professionalism to brighten the country’s image further.

“Discharge duties with utmost sincerity, professionalism, honesty, and patriotism to enhance the country’s image further,” she said.

The prime minister made the remarks during an exchange of views with the officials while visiting the embassy on Wednesday.

She also went around different sections of the embassy, including the Shaheed Minar and Bangabandhu

“Discharge duties with utmost sincerity, professionalism, honesty, and patriotism to enhance the country’s image further.”

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Bangladesh embassy officials in Washington DC

Corner.

On her arrival, Ambassador Muhammad Imran welcomed Hasina with a bouquet.

The prime minister paid homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by placing a wreath at the base of his sculpture and standing in solemn silence at the Bangabandhu Corner.

In 1997, the prime minister laid the foundation stone for the Chancery Building, and later in 2000, she inaugurated the newly constructed building.

During the visit, the PM was accompanied by Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, Ambassador-at-Large Mohammad Ziauddin, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, and PMO Secretary Mohammad Salahuddin, among others.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is received by Muhammad Imran, Bangladesh ambassador to the US, upon her arrival at the Bangladesh embassy in Washington DC on Wednesday.

PHOTO: PID

Canada committed to ‘closer ties’ with India

Says Trudeau amid row over Sikh leader’s murder

AGENCIES

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that Canada is still committed to building closer ties with India, despite “credible allegations” of the Indian government’s involvement in the killing of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, Canada-based National Post reported.

Pointing to the increasing influence of India worldwide, Trudeau said that it is “extremely important” that Canada and its allies continue to engage with India.

Speaking at a press conference in Montreal on Thursday, Trudeau said that he thinks it is “extremely important” that Canada and its allies continue to engage “constructively and seriously” with India

given its growing importance on the world stage, reports NDTV online.

“India is a growing economic power and important geopolitical player. And as we presented with our Indo-Pacific strategy, just last year, we’re very serious about building closer ties with India,” he told reporters.

“At the same time, obviously, as a rule of law country, we need to emphasize that India needs to work with Canada to ensure that we get the full facts of this matter,” National Post quoted Trudeau as saying.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged India to cooperate with the Canadian investigation into the murder during a meeting with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on Thursday, a US official said.

India has dismissed Canada’s allegations as absurd, and ties have become strained with both governments expelling a diplomat in a tit-for-tat move, reports Reuters.

“Blinken raised the Canadian matter in his meeting, (and) urged the Indian government to cooperate with Canada’s investigation,” the US official said.

Jaishankar yesterday confirmed that he spoke to Blinken and the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan about Canadian allegations on the killing of the Sikh leader in Canada.

“They shared US views and assessments on this whole situation and I explained to them at some length ... a summary of the concerns which I had,” Jaishankar said at a Hudson Institute event in Washington DC.

Top hospitals using unauthorised devices

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The company claimed the products they were selling were produced by Lifetech Scientific, a China-based company, and imported by another local company.

That local company, Rahman Medical Services, has no authorisation for distribution of Lifetech products since 2020, multiple sources have confirmed.

Following the DGDA raid, The Daily Star has learnt that a number of local companies, marketing professionals and doctors are involved in selling these devices to several city hospitals.

Usri Ghosh, an Indian national, brought these devices into the country and marketed them through Hearton Bangladesh, said sources at the NICVD and Heart Foundation.

Usri did not return our requests for comments.

The Daily Star has documents showing both the NICVD and the Heart Foundation purchased devices without necessary authorisation on a number of occasions.

Every year, an estimated 1,200 children require cardiac implants in Bangladesh. This year alone, around 30 percent of the devices worth around Tk 3 crore have been supplied by Hearton, sources with direct knowledge of the market said.

From January to September this year, 127 Lifetech devices illegally imported by Hearton were implanted at three top hospitals – 102 at NICVD, 12 at Heart Foundation and 13 at Labaid, the sources have confirmed.

Between September 23 and 27 alone, NICVD used 50 Lifetech cardiac devices to treat as many children.

Earlier on July 7, Lifetech products were used to treat heart defects of 13 children at the Cath Lab of the Labaid Hospital in the capital, documents show.

Brig Gen (retired) Prof Nurun Nahar Fatema, who performed the procedures, shared details about the products on her LinkedIn profile recently.

Contacted, she said she got the devices from her previous supplier, Rahman Medical Services.

“They provide me implants when I need them. But I do not have any idea about the legal issues,” said Prof Nurun Nahar.

Mizanur Rahman, owner of Rahman Medical Services, said his company no longer supplies Lifetech products.

THE WORKSHOP THAT NEVER HAPPENED

Hospital sources say after Usri Ghosh had flown in with unauthorised Lifetech Scientific devices on January 16, customs officials at Hazrat

Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) held those for not having the required paperwork and asked her to pay duties to collect those.

The same day, NICVD’s Head of Paediatric Cardiology Department Prof Abdullah Shahriar wrote to the HSIA customs commissioner, requesting duty-free release of the products, “meant for a technology transfer workshop” to be held the next day.

Subsequently, the items were released and used to carry out minimally invasive cardiac intervention procedures on 10 children on January 17.

Sources said no international workshop was held that day, but Usri Ghosh was present when cardiac intervention procedures were carried out on the children using those devices.

Prof Shahriar wrote the letter on the letterhead of Labaid Diagnostics, a private hospital where he is a consultant. The Daily Star has a copy of the letter.

The letter also mentioned that an Indian paediatric cardiologist named Dr Neeraj Awasthy would conduct the workshop.

Dr Awasthy declined to comment and asked this correspondent to speak to the authorities.

Prof Shahriar said he had no idea that Hearton had no authorisation from the DGDA.

“We had been using Lifetech products for the past one and a half years. We stopped using their products as soon as we learnt about this,” he told The Daily Star.

Asked why he wrote the letter, he said, “Horton officials approached me, saying the NICVD director referred them to me as he [NICVD director] was unavailable at the time.”

NICVD Director Prof Mir Jamal Uddin denied having any knowledge about the letter.

He also said he was not aware of any “international workshop” taking place on January 17.

As for scrutinising suppliers’ documents, he said the director’s office does not have any role in purchasing devices that are used commercially on patients.

“We just procure devices for the hospital stock, which is supplied free of cost for poor patients, and the funds for those come from the government or donors. The unit chiefs are responsible for allowing any company to sell their products to the patients inside the hospitals.”

A MERRY-GO-ROUND

In early March, Lifetech products supplied by Hearton were used at the NICVD to treat at least 47 children

with heart conditions during a weeklong charity campaign funded by Qatar Red Crescent Society.

The Daily Star has copies of all the invoices approved by the NICVD for the campaign.

In May, Hearton Bangladesh received around Tk 50 lakh against 47 invoices signed by Prof Abdullah Shahriar.

This newspaper has also obtained a screenshot of a WhatsApp group conversation among prominent cardiac surgeons where Lifetech products were discussed. Dr Muhammad Ataul Haqq, associate professor at NICVD’s paediatric cardiology department, favoured these products in the conversation.

“In Bangladesh, we comfortably use Amplatzer devices and Lifetech devices as per the registration with the drug administration. Lifetech products are a little bit cheaper ... We can’t judge the quality as we don’t have any testing facility. But we are comfortable with both the brands,” he told the group.

Contacted, Dr Ataul Haqq, who leads the paediatric cardiology department’s “green unit,” said there was another Dr Ataul Hoque who had taken part in the WhatsApp conversation.

His namesake, who has the same position at the same department, said he was not a member of the Qatar Red Crescent campaign committee, and so there was no question of his involvement in this.

He also said he leads the department’s “blue unit,” not the “green unit.”

These units – green and blue – are two groups created by the hospital authorities to facilitate job distribution among physicians and other medical staff.

NICVD sources said the Ataul who leads the “green unit” was the one in the WhatsApp conversation.

Asked about the use of unauthorised Lifetech devices on multiple occasions at the NICVD, Prof Mir Jamal Uddin said, “The issue has been brought to our notice. I have already issued directives to the doctors concerned not to allow the products that lack proper authorisation from the drug administration.”

CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH

The National Heart Foundation Hospital received devices from Hearton for the whole of 2022.

“Horton submitted relevant documents including the product registration certificate, but they could not provide the MRP certificate from the DGDA. So, we stopped using their products from January this year,” said Shahajadee Sultana Doly, additional

director of public relations at the Heart Foundation.

Asked why they permitted Hearton for a year, she said Usri Ghosh, manager of Lifetech Scientific in India, introduced Hearton Bangladesh to them.

“Usri Ghosh has been representing different foreign cardiac device makers at Heart Foundation for the last 15 years. In recent years, she started campaigning for Lifetech products. She also sponsored several scientific seminars and supplied many devices for free here,” Doly said.

But Heart Foundation Director Brigadier General (retired) Younusur Rahman denied using unauthorised products at the hospital.

ANOTHER COG IN THE WHEEL

Anamul Haque Prince, owner of Hearton Bangladesh, said all of the products they supplied were legally imported by Rahman Medical Services Ltd, former distributor of Lifetech Scientific in Bangladesh.

In 2020, Hearton received 93 devices from Rahman Medical Services, according to an agreement, seen by this paper, between the two parties.

The Daily Star is also in possession of documents that show Hearton supplied many devices to its clients that were collected from sources other than Rahman Medical Services.

Mizanur Rahman, owner of Rahman Medical Services, said, “Lifetech terminated its contract with us in 2020. We have had no business with them since.”

He also denied selling or distributing any other devices to Hearton.

A certificate of registration, issued by the DGDA, also confirms termination of the contract between Rahman and Lifetech. It also shows that another company, Bangladesh Healthcare and Pharma Solution, has obtained registration for distribution of Lifetech products.

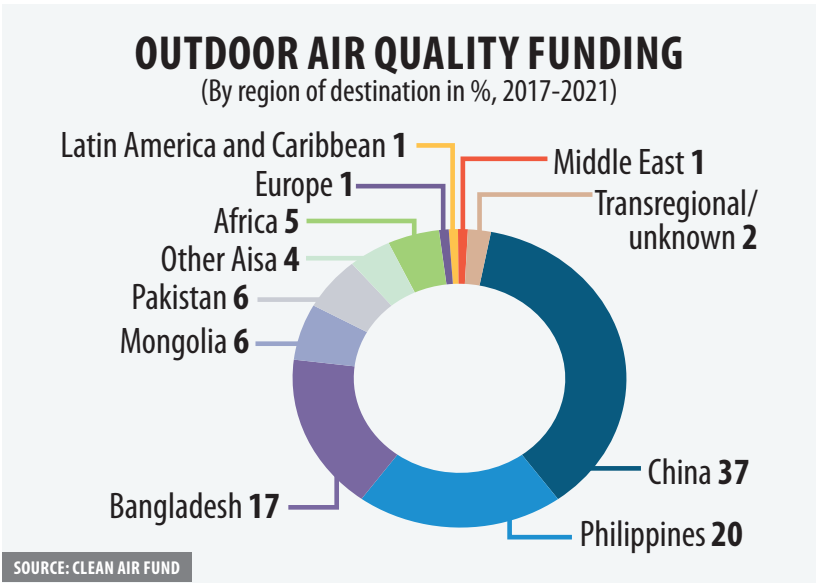
However, sources at the DGDA said Bangladesh Healthcare and Pharma has not yet started marketing any Lifetech products.

Since 2020, sales and distribution of Lifetech products through any company other than Bangladesh Healthcare and Pharma Solution are illegal.

This means, Hearton lacks not only the MRP certificates to sell medical devices but also a legal contract with a registered distributor.

“No company can supply products without getting an MRP ceiling from us. We have been investigating the issue,” said DGDA Director General Mohammad Yousuf.

\$2.3b int’l fund fails to improve situation



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to the World Health Organization (WHO).

There are many different sources of air pollution in Bangladesh, including emissions from brick kilns, vehicles, construction sites, and transboundary air.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, special envoy of the prime minister on environment and climate change, said he was not aware of the size of the fund but he was aware that Bangladesh had received some financial support.

“We have identified sources of both indoor and outdoor pollution. We now have clean air rules in place, we have a revised timeline and action plan to move away from brick kiln fires to blocks. We also recognise that air quality has transboundary aspects and we are open to working with other countries in the region. Preliminary discussions have been held in this regard,” he said.

He, however, said of course much more needs to be done to combat this silent killer, which is also severely impacting the quality of life and taking away years from the lives of Bangladeshi people.

Experts have said that as there are multiple sources of air pollution, a comprehensive, multi-sectoral air quality management plan is required to address air pollution in Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh.

Air quality remains very poor for nearly half the year and hits extremely unhealthy heights in

winter. As a result, the average life expectancy of Bangladeshis is being cut short by 6.8 years due to their continuous exposure to polluted air, according to a report from the Air Quality Life Index of the University of Chicago.

Md Ziaul Haque, director of Air Quality Management at the Department of Environment, said there is no denying that the air quality situation in Bangladesh is still not good but the government has taken up a number of initiatives whose positive impacts will be visible shortly.

The CAF study report also said for the first time in history governments, agencies, and development banks have spent more aid money on clean air than fossil fuels – an estimated \$2.3 billion was spent on tackling outdoor air pollution in low- and middle-income countries, compared to \$1.5 billion on fossil fuel projects such as oil and gas extraction and production.

Although five of the top 10 countries with the highest levels of air pollution are in Africa, the African countries received only 5 percent (\$0.76 billion) of all air quality funding in the same period (2017-2021).

The report, however, said spending targeted at clean air made up just one percent of international development funding and two percent of international public climate finance between 2015 and 2021.