

Lone forensic lab limps for acute manpower crisis

Delay in preparing viscera reports seriously delays trial of sensational cases

DURDANA GHAS

Country's lone forensic laboratory, already burdened with huge workload, is facing severe manpower shortage as two of its three chemical examiners are going to retire within the next few months.

Sources at the forensic lab at Mohakhali, officially known as Chief Chemical Examiner's Office, CID, said the lab will face a big void if the two examiners go into retirement and the posts are not filled up soon.

The police depend solely on this heavily understaffed laboratory especially for investigation of murder, unnatural death and rape cases as there is no other such forensic test facilities in the country.

Chemical examiners prepare the viscera reports usually after testing portions of stomach of the dead and its contents; portions of liver, kidney and other body parts taken as samples for investigation.

According to sources in the police department and the laboratory this is the lone laboratory in the country that has the facilities of testing poisonous substances in the internal organs and the presence of blood and sperm.

Toxaemia test is done to know the presence of poison in human organs and serum test is done to know about the condition and presence of blood and sperm, which is a vital tool in finding out the criminal in a rape case.

At present three chemical examiners are working at this lab against four sanctioned posts while there are three reporting officers against 10 posts. All the staff working here are the civil staff of CID.

The process of recruiting assistant chemical examiners is done by Public Service Commission through written test and viva voce.

Officials working at the laboratory said generally it takes three to four months to get the samples and then three to four months more to prepare the viscera report. In the end it takes almost six months to get the report.

"In a normal murder or similar cases it takes five to six months to deliver viscera report and the delay is now silently accepted by the police, the victims' families and the press," said senior crime reporter of a national daily.

"The delay amounts to denying timely justice to the victim's family," he remarked.

However, lab officials said sometimes they get the samples late, which delays the entire process of preparing viscera report.

Sometimes it takes years to get the samples from the hospitals. "Last month I received a sample from Chittagong Medical College Hospital which I was supposed to get in 1987," said an official, seeking anonymity.

However, after a monitoring a cell was formed over two years ago, truckloads of viscera samples from different hospitals came to the lab, he said.

"When there is pressure from the higher authorities or in case of a sensational murder or death then we have to prepare the report in the shortest possible time," said the official.

While the victims complain that trial of cases are delayed due to late in preparing viscera reports, police officers claim that the situation is now much better than in the past.

Syed Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge, Uttara Police Station, said that previously they had to wait from one to two years to get a viscera report but now due to the monitoring cell they are getting the report quickly.

"A one-year delay was very natural and a six-month delay

was minimum," said Nazrul. "Now we even get report within one month of giving samples."

"Previously there were over 100 UD [unnatural death] cases pending on an average with each police station. But my station has only four UD cases pending now," he said. "UD cases are fully dependent on the viscera reports. In the Evidence Act viscera report has been given vital importance as evidence," he added.

However, families of the victims still complain that they are not getting the report in time. Often they have to wait for indefinite time to get the reports.

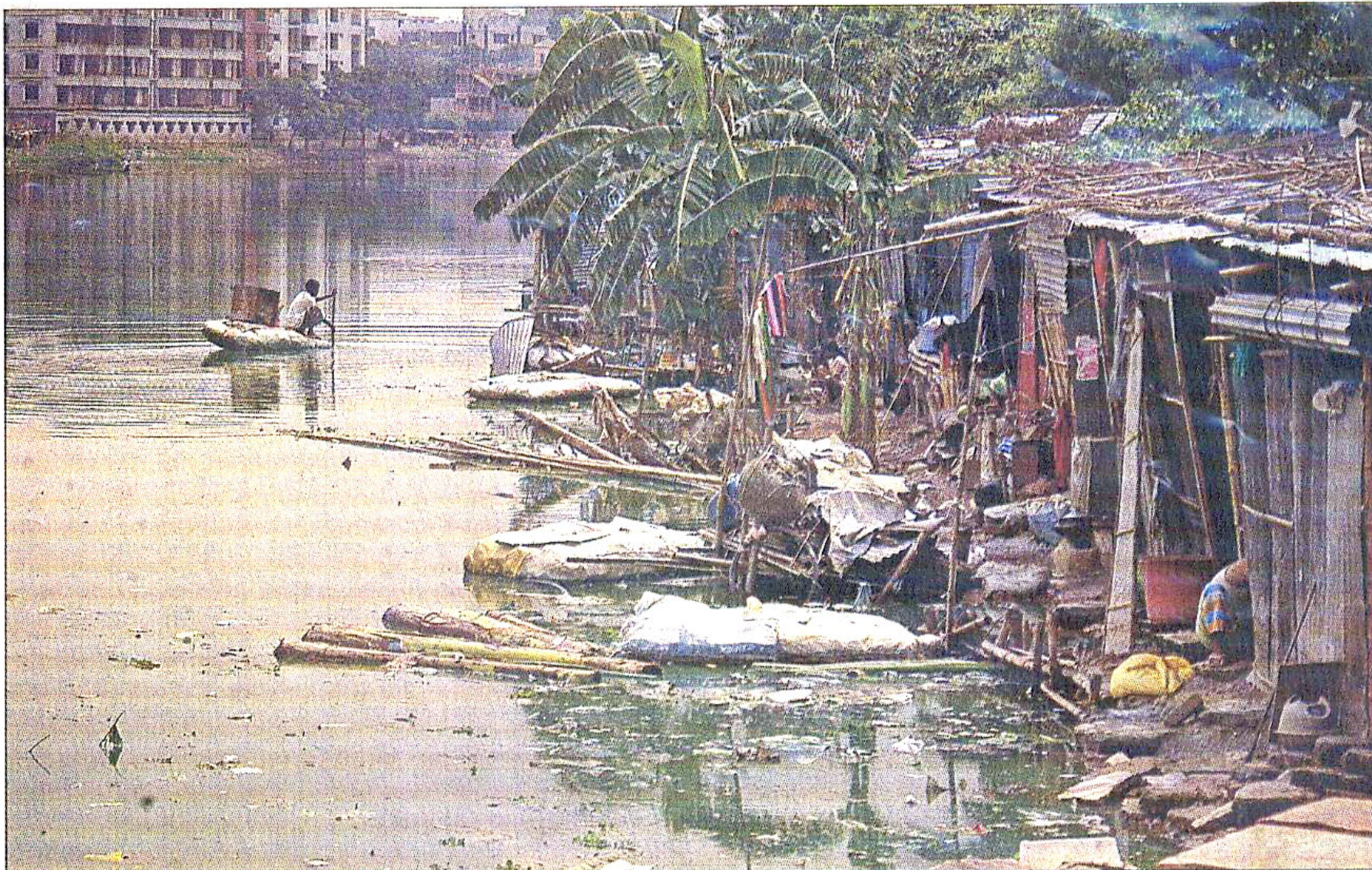
Sultan Faruque, father of Sadia Nowshin Priyanka, a 17-year old girl who was found dead at her house on July 18, said it is a very unbearable situation to wait for the second post-mortem report for his daughter for more than 7 weeks.

"When I tried to know why the report was being delayed officials said that the tests would be done at the forensic laboratory at Mohakhali, which is the only forensic lab in the country. They said that laboratory has to deal with a heavy workload so I will have to wait till my serial comes," he said.

"The second post-mortem of my daughter was done on August 2 and now it is end of September. Still I have not received the viscera report. Can you tell me how long will I have to wait for the report?" posed a bewildered Faruque.

"I cannot tell you how it feels to wait for the report for such a long time. I feel quite helpless. There are many other people who are suffering like me and they have no other option other than waiting," he said.

"I think we need more forensic labs with required workforce where viscera tests can be done swiftly like the trials of the speedy tribunal," he added.



Makeshift houses mushrooming on the Banani Lake. Encroachers are also polluting the lake's water with household waste. But the authority seems indifferent to it.

Worn out Zia Shishu Park cries for care

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

The Shaheed Zia Shishu Park is unlikely to get the long-awaited facelift soon despite years of ambitious planning to renovate it as the project proposal has been put on ice by the authorities, said a source at engineering department of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

Continuing procrastination by the authorities over the years is making concerned citizens believe that the authorities are not in the least bothered about ensuring an affordable and safe recreational facility for children of Dhaka -- an overcrowded city that definitely needs more parks of this sort.

Several project proposals that are being tied up in bureaucratic red tape for years are comprehensive renovation work of the park, addition of new rides and features, expansion of the park, and constructing two underpasses connecting the park with National Museum and Dhaka Club, the DCC source said adding it is unlikely that any of these schemes would see the light of day anytime soon, if ever.

"Ever since the park was handed over to the DCC, there have been a number of proposals to renovate it. As most of these schemes have remained as mere proposals over the past years, it would be unwise to expect anything out of those in the coming years," said an official at DCC engineering department requesting anonymity.

"It's evident that even the children have become bored with the obsolete and dull rides that have been around for over two decades now," he added.

In a bid to give a facelift to the park as well as to increase revenue by attracting more visitors, the DCC proposed a Tk 92-crore project in 2004.

The ambitious proposal outlined a comprehensive renovation of the park that would include refurbishment of worn out rides and adding 16 new rides such as Barn Stormer, Roller Coaster, Mono Rail, Water Splash, Giant Wheel, Viking Mars, Bumper Cars, laser shows and 3-D movies.

The proposal also included a plan to expand the park up to the police control room at Shahbagh, increasing the park's land area from 15 acres to 19 acres.

This ambitious project is still awaiting the approval of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) even though the officials concerned earlier claimed that the project would be completed within the end of 2006.

The Shaheed Zia Shishu Park, first of its kind in the country, was built by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation in 1979.

DCC sources alleged that besides routine maintenance checks, no renovation work has ever been carried out during the park's 25-year existence.

Installed by Japanese technicians in 1979, rides named Merry-Go-Round, New Trabant, Wonder Wheel, Benkino Train, Roller Skating, Trampoline, Battery Car, Chair Tower and Flower Cup are still the central attractions of the park.

Only three new rides -- Jet Star, Astro Fighter and F-60 Fighter -- were installed by DCC in 1992 and 1997.

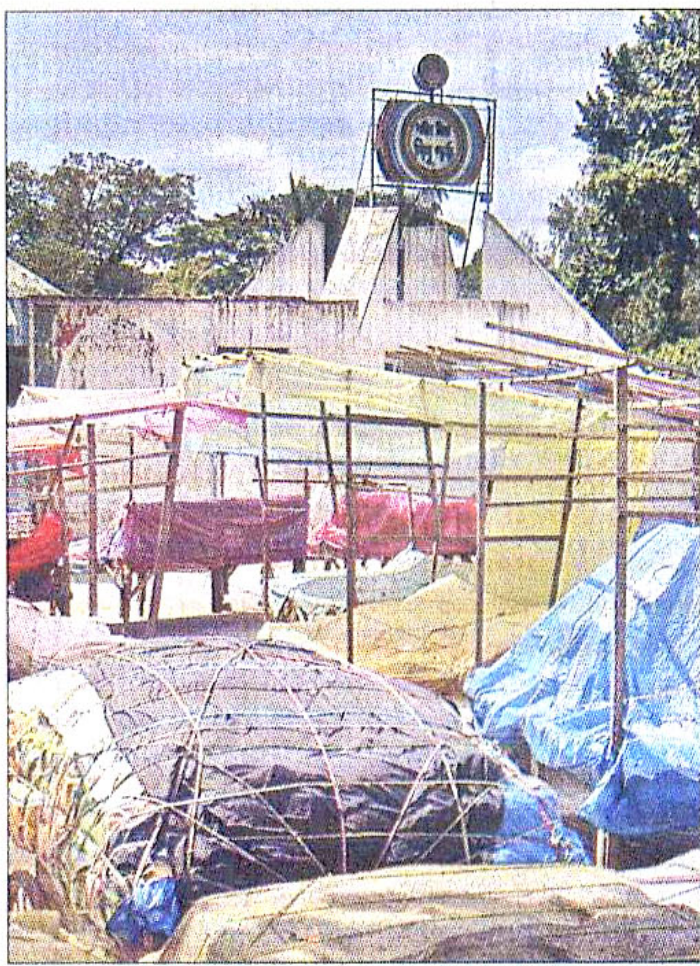
Warranty period of nine out of twelve amusement rides expired

thanks to sincere maintenance work by the DCC.

Although DCC officials claimed that the rides are kept in top-notch state, they did not rule out the possibility of unwarranted accidents as the rides have exceeded their lifespan.

"It's true that the park has never experienced any fatal accident, but we do not have the luxury to relax. We must take precautionary measures to ensure the safety of our visitors," said Nurul Haque, assistant engineer at engineering department of DCC.

The DCC authorities also considered having private organisations do the renovation and modernisation -- a concept that could not draw any due attention of the ministry either.



Entrance to the Zia Shishu Park at Shahbagh tells the tale of neglect.

almost 16 years ago and a comprehensive renovation scheme can only ensure public safety, sources said.

With the existing rides exceeding their life span of 10 years, serious accidents might occur if precautionary measures are not taken, fears DCC officials.

"It is quite impossible for any apparatus to offer optimum service over 10 years as equipment and components wear and tear over time," said a DCC official concerned adding that some rides are still functioning well --

However, the officials at DCC engineering department are still optimistic about the future of the park.

"I am confident that the future of the park will be determined soon, at any of the upcoming meeting of the government, and the decision will be beneficial for the park," said a top official at DCC engineering department.

According to sources, an average of around 5,500 visitors visit the park everyday and the DCC earns around Tk 2 crore from the park alone each year.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"We have been tasked with some specific duties... we will go back [to the barracks] the moment the government asks."

-- General Moeen U Ahmed

Army Chief

Said while inaugurating a fair of handloom products in Manikganj, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"[Instead of undertaking gradual reforms] it seems that they are undertaking 'big bang' reforms, which is likely to have adverse rather than positive effects on the country."

-- Akbar Ali Khan

Former adviser

Said while speaking at the fourth Policy Debate on Reforms organized by Centre for Governance Studies at a city hotel, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"Be it defence or LGED we want to see all the budgets."

-- Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury

Chairman, Anti Corruption Commission

Said at a roundtable on right to information organised by Transparency International Bangladesh, on Thursday. Source: Prothom Alo

"We were hoping that indoor politics would be allowed all across the country with the same conditions attached. However, the government did not do so and it might have valid reasons for it since it is an unelected government."

-- ATM Shamsul Huda

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)

Said at a view exchange meeting with representatives of different television channels and radio stations, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"We too want lifting of the emergency but it depends on the politicians' behaviour as to when it will be withdrawn."

-- Mainul Hossain

Law Adviser

Said at the Secretariat responding to reporters' query about CEC's suggestion that the emergency should be relaxed in areas where local body elections are scheduled from next January, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"The government has unveiled the list according to its promise but it should have included more names of the self-styled pro-reform leaders."

-- Brig Gen (Rtd) ASM Hannan Shah

Adviser to the detained BNP chairperson

Told reporters at his Mohakhali residence, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias



Pedestrians squeeze their way through a narrow lane littered with heaps of waste at Shankhari Bazar.