

Baitul Mukarram Mosque, situated at Purana Paltan, east of the Secretariat and north of the Stadium is the largest in the city. Three storied and designed like the Kaba Sharif, it has been built on a high platform. Beautiful costly decorations adorn the interior and the flight of stairs with a long lawn, garden and rows of fountains to the south and east.

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## Hospitals continue to dispose of hazardous waste in public bins

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Medical waste continues to endanger public health in the city as most hospital authorities care little about public safety and dispose them in the roadside public bins.

Medical waste is considered as the worst form of hazardous waste, which requires specialised treatment and proper management for safe disposal.

Though infectious waste of hospitals constitutes a small amount of the total medical waste, it can be highly hazardous to human health if not properly disposed of, experts said.

According to Dhaka City Corporation's (DCC) Solid Waste Management Division, the volume of total solid waste generated in the city is around 3,500 metric tons a day of which around 50 metric tons are from healthcare facilities.

There are various types of medical waste. Among them the biological categories such as human tissues, blood, body fluids, organs, body parts, human foetuses, and other similar waste from surgeries, biopsies and autopsies pose severe threat.

Clinical waste includes dressing materials of infected or surgical wounds, disposable towels, gloves, broken hospital equipment, needles, syringes, scalpel blades, razors, infusion sets, broken glass and blood tubes.

Medical waste, especially biological substances, could carry bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungus. Improper handling of these can expose people to various diseases including hepatitis, HIV, tuberculosis, gangrene, tetanus and many others," said Professor Mahmudur Rahman, director, Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).

"In Bangladesh, the street children and waste pickers who sift through the pile of garbage with bare hands are in most danger," he added.

"Any type of waste poses threat to humans and medical waste are the worst of them. It requires specialised treatment and management before final disposal. Medical waste needs to be classified and quarantined properly," Rahman said.

Decomposed medical waste can also contaminate underground water and soil.

During the last couple of years the city saw a mushrooming growth of private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres running without government monitoring. This has led to a considerable increase in generation of medical wastes.

There is no updated information about the existing healthcare facilities. According to the health ministry, there are only 368 registered clinics in the capital and 845 outside Dhaka.

The number of diagnostic centres is 1,541 of which 580 are in Dhaka city.

However, the number is far more than that as many hospitals continue to run without registration, sources at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said.

Also, there are around 200 blood banks operating in the capital city without any registration, the sources said. Total number of blood banks in the country is around 500.

These blood banks are also responsible for openly disposing of waste, endangering the public health as there is no monitoring of their waste disposal. In

absence of any government regulations and monitoring they have been disposing of infectious medical waste in public places for long.

"The generation rate of medical waste has increased rapidly over the past few years with an ever-increasing number of hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres in the city," said Tarit Kanti Biswas, programme coordinator, Medical Waste Management Programme, Prism Bangladesh, an organisation working with medical waste.

He pointed out dearth of information about the city's healthcare facilities. "Since we

do not have accurate data about the existing facilities, it is hard to find out how much wastes actually city hospitals generate. A proper survey is essential for planning," he said.

Prism initiated the Hospital Waste Management Project in February 2004, financed by the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP) and supervised by the DCC.

So far, Prism is the lone organisation working on clinical wastes. According to officials of Prism, after collection and transfer to the disposal site at Matuail, the waste materials are divided into several categories. Infectious wastes go through

incineration and autoclaving, non-infectious materials including plastic and glasses undergo chemical disinfections, while sharp objects, needles, amputated body parts and fetuses taken for deep burial.

With three covered vans for transporting waste, one incinerator and autoclaving machine at Matuail, Prism currently provides services to 246 private healthcare establishments in the city.

Experts said, none of the 15 government hospitals in the city generating the highest amount of hospital waste, is equipped with any type of safe waste disposal system.

The 1,700-bed Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) is the largest producer of medical waste in the country. Besides daily outdoor patients and resident patients, around 2,500 individuals are treated in the hospital every day.

All the highly dangerous medical waste produced by the hospital are usually dumped in public bins of the Dhaka City Corporation near the hospital.

Most of the large hospitals in Dhaka, including Infectious Diseases Hospital, Orthopaedic Hospital (Pangu Hospital), Shishu Hospital, Suhrawardy Hospital and Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital dispose of waste in the same manner.

There are no in-house waste disposal facilities in these hospitals. Hospital sweepers are not properly trained to handle them.

There are allegations of dumping human limbs and body parts in bins near the Orthopaedic Hospital at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar where as many as five major government hospitals are situated.

"Pilot projects regarding proper management of hospital waste will soon start in three medical college hospitals in Rajshahi, Faridpur and Khulna and in 17 district hospitals," said one of the officials concerned at the DGHS.

Training process of the manpower in these hospitals is currently going on. Logistics will be supplied after that, the official said. Any such project however is yet to start in Dhaka city.

"In Dhaka, in-house management will be carried out by the hospitals and the rest of the disposal process starting from collecting, transporting and final disposal will be carried out by the city corporation with the help of non-government organisations," the official added.

Meanwhile, MR Chowdhury, chief conservancy officer of DCC, said: "When Prism will expand its work and provide services to government hospitals DCC will provide necessary logistics for that. They are now talking with the authorities of some hospitals in the city."



A waste picker sorts out plastic elements from syringe, saline bags and other used clinical materials from a bin near the Pongu Hospital.

## Stringent law soon for proper hospital waste management

The government is going to impose strict regulations on the healthcare facilities for safe disposal and proper management of medical waste.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is formulating the Medical Waste Management Regulations, which is now in the final stage, under The Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995.

Sources at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said the draft of the regulations has been prepared and it is currently with the Ministry of Environment and Forest for suggestions. Finally it will be sent to the law ministry for vetting.

The new regulations will have provisions to punish the people responsible for environment pollution and public health hazards due to medical waste. The punishment will include jail sentence, fine or even shutdown of

hospitals, clinics and diagnostic labs. Special court will be set up with magistrates to deal with the matter.

Without proper waste management facilities no new healthcare facilities will be given operating licence in future, said an official concerned of the DGHS.

Almost all the hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres, dispensaries, nursing homes and blood banks across the country are at present running without proper waste management system and government monitoring.

Healthcare facilities generally produce six types of wastes including infectious and non-infectious. These clinical wastes seriously endanger public health.

According to the new regulations, separation of different types of waste and keeping them in labelled contain-

ers in the hospital will be made mandatory. Hospitals will not be allowed to store the waste for more than 45 hours.

Dumping of waste has to be done in a segregated area so that it does not mix with household waste and comes in contact with people. Only experts will be allowed to manage the waste.

However, private operators will be encouraged to be involved in such waste management. The ministry will issue licence to specialised organisations for the job who will provide the service for a charge fixed by the government.

There will be three types of licence -- for management, transfer to the disposal site and final disposal of the waste. One organisation can apply for all the jobs. The licence will be issued for three years but initially it will be valid for only one year.



## KALABAGAN CHILDREN'S PARK

# Occupied for decades in name of maintenance

TAWFIQUE ALI

Kalabagan children's park has been illegally occupied by Kalabagan Krira Chakra, a local sports club, for nearly three decades in the name of maintenance.

The club does not have any permission from the authorities but it is using this public space in an exclusive manner denying free public access to the ground.

Although the club is making money out of the ground in various ways, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has ever been playing a murky role.

"This is a blatant denial of city's dwellers' right to enjoy open space, with the DCC allowing such illegal practice," said a resident of Kalabagan.

The club has occupied the entire park, known as Kalabagan Math, uses its southern part as an exclusive playground and runs a big commercial nursery on the northern part.

Any sporting team or clubs have to pay Kalabagan Krira Chakra a certain amount of money to use the ground for any match, tournament or practice session.

Mubasshar Hussain, a resident of Dhanmondi and president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), said, "The club has forcibly been occupying the playground. Neither DCC nor Public Works Department (PWD) has authorised the club to take it over."

The club first built a shed, then a one-storey structure and finally a two-storey building on the ground without obtaining approval from Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk).

SM Shahjahan, a former adviser to caretaker government and vice-president of environmentalist group Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), said that public spaces must be used properly in public interest.

"Public parks and playgrounds are not meant to satisfy the greed

of any coterie," said SM Shahjahan, who is a former secretary and adviser to the Youth and Sports Ministry. "Public properties must not be abused to cater to the interest of a privileged group."

General Secretary of Kalabagan Krira Chakra Saleh Ahmed Tipu admitted that they have no formal authorisation from the authorities to take control of the playground.

"I could not find any documents of permission to use the ground in this manner. We don't have permission from Rajuk to build the club office at the playground," he said.

"We did not make any attempt to obtain permission," he admitted, saying that Kalabagan Krira Chakra has been operating at the field since its inception in 1978.

About exacting money from the users, Tipu said, "We don't always demand money for using the playground except for practice net or sports equipment."

Replying to a question about running a commercial nursery at the ground, he said that the aim of setting up the nursery is to protect the space from any "illegal occupancy".

Architect Iqbal Habib of Viti Associates, which worked as consultant of the Dhamondi Lake Development Project during 1998-99, said Kalabagan playground was an integral component of the comprehensive plan of the lake development project.

"We recommended a lakeside walkway on the western fringe of the children's park, developing the northern part of ground as a children-friendly area and a connecting bridge between the ground and an island in the lake," said Habib.

One significant recommendation in the layout plan was that residents of Kalabagan area would have free access to the lake area through the walkway around playground, he said.

Construction of benches along the walkway was also recommended.

But some influential patrons of the club forced the consultant to exclude the playground from development layout approved by Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives (LGRD) ministry, said Habib.

None of the recommendations, except for the walkway, could come true. The damaged boundary wall on the western fringe was restored to ensure an independent entity of the playground and establish club's possession over it.

The lake development project had no provision for boundary wall at all, said Habib, who is also a member of the lake management committee.

The consultant recommended that the northern portion of the playground be developed as a children-friendly area, which has ever since been used as a nursery.

Regarding the high boundary wall on the ground's western side, Tipu said the DCC itself built that wall in 2006 at a cost of Tk 55 lakh.

Chief Estate Officer of DCC Abu Mohammad Yusuf said that DCC has not authorised any clubs or organisations to use any public playgrounds exclusively and make money out of them in the name of maintenance.

"Eviction drives against illegal occupancy of public properties have been stalled for want of executive magistrates at DCC," he said.

"Once we get executive magistrates, we will go for eviction of any unauthorised clubs or organisations occupying public playgrounds," he added.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said though unauthorised, some of the clubs have long been in occupancy of playgrounds. "We consider them leniently in view of their activities in the sports arena," he said.

## FOLLOW-UP

# Priyanka's killer suspect arrested but parents still get death threats

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Although the prime suspect in Sadia Nowshin Priyanka murder has been arrested, the parents of the victim are still getting death threats from unknown people.

Zahidul Haque Rintu, the prime killer suspect, was arrested at Baliyadanga village of Fakirhat upazila in Bagerhat on Saturday.

Police raided a house in the morning and rounded him up. Later they handed him over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) police in Dhaka.

ACID official in Dhaka said that they arrested Rintu after a thorough investigation into the case. "Rintu is now in Bagerhat jail. Investigation is going on. However, we are yet to get any confessional statement from him," he said.

CID started investigation after taking over the case on January 16. It will produce Rintu at the CMM court in Dhaka and seek a 10-day remand for him.

The 17-year-old girl was found dead at her house in Dhaka on July 18, 2007. Priyanka's father Sultan Faruque filed a case with Ramna Police Station on July 20 showing Rintu, her maternal uncle, as the main accused.



Sadia Nowshin Priyanka

Faruque said, "Now I want justice and an exemplary punishment to the culprit." "Still I am feeling apprehensive about the case because I am getting death threat from different quarters who have sympathy for Rintu," he said.

After the second autopsy report did not find anything significant Faruque applied to the inspector general (IG) of police to transfer the case. His application was accepted by the IG and the case was transferred to CID.

During the second autopsy done at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College, Barisal doctors found no injury as the body was decomposed.

"It was very disheartening to know that nothing was found because the body was decomposed. If nothing can be found from a decomposed body then why bodies are exhumed for post mortem?" said Faruque.

Priyanka, who passed SSC last year from Viqarunnissa Noon School obtaining GPA-5, was found dead at her house at Moghbazar. According to the first post mortem report, Priyanka committed suicide.

Rejecting the first post mortem report, done at the forensic department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, her parents said there was no obvious reason that could drive their daughter to suicide.

Priyanka's mother, Shamsunnahar, who first saw her dead, said she found her daughter lying on the floor with several knots of a georgette scarf around her neck while the door closed from outside.



Run-down taxicabs banished from the capital are dumped and left under the sun beside Notun Sharak in Fatullah thana under Narayanganj district. Some businessmen of the area buy these shabby cars and sell their reusable parts to shops at the city's biggest old spare parts market at Dholaihal. The steel bodies are also sold at wholesale recycle markets.