

HYDERABAD

THE HINDU • SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2009

Now, a forensic lab for common citizens

Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI: Truth Labs, an independent forensic service facility established in collaboration with the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), has set up shop here, breaking government monopoly in the highly specialised area and offering its services to the common man.

It is the country's first private lab which provides DNA profiling, polygraph or lie detector tests and computer analysis. It can also be used to establish the authenticity of documents and disputed fingerprints, for DNA profiling and cyber forensics and in medico-legal cases.

With just 30 government forensic labs across the country catering for the requirement of scientific evidence in nearly six lakh cases every year, and a dismal conviction rate of 1.4 per cent of those arrested, the need for more such facilities has been felt for long.

With a pendency of about two crore cases in courts and a large number being registered by the police every year, scientific evidence will help the police in quickly nailing the accused.

While inaugurating Truth Labs earlier this week, Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram described it as a "milestone" for the forensic science community. He, however, sounded a note of caution saying, the lab must aim to establish the truth and truth alone, however bitter. "And it must defend it come what may. Any deviation will compromise the integrity of private sector services. It must set a high benchmark and adhere to it. It must also win the confidence of the people." Mr. Chidambaram said

the new facility was like any other pathological laboratory. "The Shopian case in the Kashmir Valley illustrates what a laboratory can purportedly do, but ultimately it is a gross miscarriage of justice." This non-profit, non-government, public-private partnership project, billed as a private forensic lab, is the brainchild of Dr. Gandhi P. C. Kaza, the former Andhra Pradesh inspector-general of police, who used his personal and family savings to set up the facility. He also happens to be a former director of the Andhra Pradesh Forensic Sciences Laboratory. "A common man is either hesitant or afraid to go to the police or the judiciary," he said. Individuals and institutions that prefer to resolve familial disputes or those of a personal nature, will have access to forensic science facilities, he said.

Mr. Chidambaram also stressed the need for better coordination between the Centre and the States to improve the functioning of the police administration. "It is my endeavour to improve police infrastructure in the country. We [the States and the Centre] must work together for the better policing," he said.

Senior Advocate K. T. S. Tulsi, the former Director of the Tamil Nadu Forensic Science Department Dr P. Chandrashekharan, Central Information Commissioner M. L. Sharma, and Delhi High Court Chief Justice A. P. Shah also lauded the initiative. They pointed out that the services of a forensic lab were being utilised by the police, the courts, detective agencies, law firms, banks and financial institutions, corporates, vigilance departments, and individuals.