

Establish right to information for accountable govt

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Establishing the right to information can ensure an accountable, transparent and pro-people government, speakers at a roundtable yesterday said.

The roundtable titled 'Right to information legislation in India: How Bangladesh can benefit' was held at the Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs (Bilia) auditorium in the city.

Presenting a keynote paper, Vinod Sahgal, regional public financial accountability specialist, World Bank, discussed the Right to Information Act 2005 of India and the ways how it can be translated into Bangladesh perspective.

The Right to Information Act came into force in India on October 13, 2005 with a view to ensuring universal access to information.

Here, information means any material in any form, including emails, opinions, advices, contracts and samples, and the 'right to' means inspection of works, documents, records, taking notes, extracts, or certified copies of documents or records. It has exempted any information that may affect the sovereignty and integrity of India or may be contempt of court.

With this right to information, individuals are tackling personal or societal issues, groups of individuals or NGOs are resolving a set of individual or societal problems, communities are demanding institutional and governmental accountability through social auditing, said Vinod Sahgal.

"There are instances of social auditing... civil work in resettlement colonies has improved, leaking

pipeline has been repaired, incomplete civil work completed, wrong electricity bills corrected, incomplete road repaired, public distribution system has improved and a national campaign against bribes has been initiated," he said.

However, bureaucratic hurdles are still there, he observed, stressing the need to bring changes to the mindset of the bureaucrats. "Very often they are driven by a sense of self-righteousness."

He also laid emphasis on building partnership with the government for institutionalising transparency.

Sahgal underscored the need to enact the Right to Information Act in Bangladesh in order to involve the marginalised segment of the people in decision making.

Former ambassador Walur Rahman, director and CEO of Bilia, said that though the Bangladesh

Law Commission drafted a working paper on the Right to Information Act in 2002, little is known about its current status.

He added that efforts are underway to draft a law based on the existing paper through participation of a wide range of people, including lawyers, academics and journalists, who are trying to raise mass awareness about the right to information.

"In India, the demand for such law came from common people instead of an idea from some urban elites. It is, therefore, important that we should continue to raise awareness about the issue, especially its impact on the common people," he said.

Saiful Bari, adviser to the ATN Bangla, urged the caretaker government to seriously consider the Right to Information Act.

HAIR RELICS OF BUDDHA Handover Ceremony wears festive look

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

The handing over ceremony of Gautam Buddha's hair relics yesterday afternoon assumed a festive look as a large number of devotees from different places of the port city and outside gathered at Chittagong Buddhist Monastery.

When the relics were handed over to the representatives of Sri Lankan government, the nationals of the country residing in the port city seemed to be in an ecstatic mood as they became thankful to their Bangladeshi counterparts, who donated the relics as a gesture of fraternity.

Meanwhile, the Buddhist devotees in Chittagong, most of whom were unaware of Buddha's sacred hair relics that have been preserved in the monastery for 77 years until newspapers published the matter recently, have urged the authorities to arrange regular display of the relics.

Swapna Barua, a service holder living in the port city for 30 years, did not even hear the existence of the relics in her hometown.

"Reading the news published in different newspapers during the last few days, I came to know about the hair of Lord Gautam Buddha. This is an amazing experience for me," said Swapna who often comes to the monastery to offer her prayer.

Krishnan Barua, working in a private organisation, echoed the similar views and said that none of his family members had any idea of the relics although they frequent the monastery for prayer.

He criticised the monastery authorities for failure to make devotees aware of the presence of such sacred historic object.

It should be opened for display to enable the Buddhist devotees as well as people from other communities to see and pay tribute, Krishnan said.

President of Bangladesh Buddhist Association Ajit Ranjan Barua, however, said they arrange display of the relics on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, albeit once in a year.

The daylong workshop titled 'Emerging needs assessment of immigration process: Bangladesh' was organised by Special Branch (SB) of Police in association with International Organisation for Migration (IOM) at a city hotel.

The workshop was part of a project titled 'Enhancing capacity of the immigration officials to combat irregular migration in Bangladesh'.

A draft form of reference for the proposed Border Management Committee has already been developed to establish greater coordination among different border management agencies in the country, said the adviser, adding that the government will also formulate a comprehensive immigration law in this regard.

"The government will consider providing necessary support to form a central functional Border Management Committee, which we believe, will facilitate various border-related authorities to work in a coordinated manner," he said.

Termin human trafficking one of



Former adviser to the caretaker government Sultana Kamal speaks at a press conference on 'Strong Local Government National Convention' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. On her left are Mohsin Ali, Taleya Rahman and Masuda Khatun. The convention will be held at Biam auditorium in the city on July 22.

PHOTO: STAR

Govt mulls law to check irregular migration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has undertaken a number of initiatives, including modernising the passport issuing process and strengthening Bangladesh missions abroad, to check irregular migration and prevent the sufferings of thousands of Bangladeshi living abroad, said Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) Adviser Mohammad Anwarul Iqbal yesterday.

"We took various initiatives to put in place an effective border control to ensure that those leaving for a better life abroad do not find themselves in situations of deprivation and exploitation," he said as chief guest at the closing ceremony of a workshop.

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Hasina could have been held in other ways
Says Sultana Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former adviser to a caretaker government Sultana Kamal yesterday said a summon could have been issued before arresting Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina.

"Such racket was unnecessary in arresting her [Hasina], she could have been arrested in other ways," Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra, a legal aid organisation, said replying to a question.

She was speaking to reporters at a press conference in Jatiya Press Club yesterday which was organised by the Strong Local Government National Convention Organising Committee, comprising 27 organisations that work with local governments for better governance.

When asked about the role of the army in strengthening the local government system, she said, "In democracy, the army cannot play any direct role in governance. Their [the army's] main task is to deal with defence."

"The army could play a role at the time of national disasters," she added.

"We are in a critical situation at present," the former adviser said, adding, "We all hope to return to a democratic system."

In demand for building stronger local governments, Strong Local Government National Convention Organising Committee is organising a daylong convention on July 22 at the Biam auditorium in the capital.

Adviser to the Local Government and Rural Development Ministry Anwarul Iqbal is expected to be present as the chief guest of the convention.

Five taskforces have been formed to make recommendations on different aspects of local government at the convention. About 700 representatives from different local government bodies including chairmen and members are expected to be present at the convention.

All recommendations made at the convention would be placed before a committee, which the government formed to find out ways to strengthen the local government.

Dr AMM Shakhat Ali, a former secretary, heads the seven-member committee.

Obituary

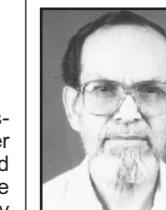
BSS, Dhaka

Mehedi Monnu, writer and journalist, passed away due to a massive cardiac arrest at United Hospital at Gulshan in the city yesterday at the age of 56.

He left behind his wife, two sons and one daughter.

He was buried at Uttara Graveyard in the city after namaz-e-janaza at Al-Baitul Jame Mosque at Sector No-4 at Uttara after Zohr prayers yesterday.

Death anniversary



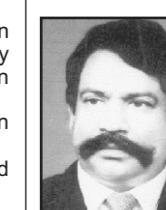
Today is the 4th death anniversary of Mizanur Rahman, a language movement veteran and journalist, says a press release.

On the occasion, Qurankhwan, milad and doa mahfil will be held at his residence at 28 Bangram in the city and at Bhawal Ideal Academy in Gazipur today.

Mizanur Rahman Smriti Sangsads will hold a discussion, milad and doa mahfil at Jatiya Press Club in the city after Asr prayers today.

Mizan was the chief reporter of the daily Dainik Ittefaq and business editor of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

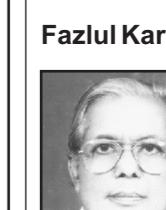
Dr Md Zahir Khan



Today is the 8th death anniversary of Dr Md Zahir Khan, a renowned social activist and ex-chairman of Bangladeshi Krishi Bank and senator of International Parliament for Safety and Peace, says a press release.

On the occasion, Qurankhwan and doa-mahfil will be held at his Gulshan residence in the city after Asr prayers tomorrow.

Fazlul Karim



Today is the 13th death anniversary of Fazlul Karim, former chief arboriculturist of Roads and Highways Department, says a press release.

Relatives, friends and admirers have been requested to pray for salvation of his departed soul.

Shardha

Shardha (post-funeral rites) of Haripada Saha will be held at his residence, Saha Kutir, at Shikarpura in Nawabganj today, says a press release.

He passed away on July 4 at the age of 80.

He is survived by his wife, four sons and three daughters.

Relatives and well-wishers are requested to pray for the peace and salvation of the departed soul.

Female student strangled in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Sadia Nawshin

A female student who passed SSC examination with GPA-5 from Vigyanika Noon School and College this year was strangled inside her flat at Moghbazar in the city yesterday.

The girl, identified as Sadia Nawshin, 16, daughter of Sultan Faruk Manju and Shamsunnahar, was tied with a scarf around her neck.

Victim's mother Shamsunnahar suspected that somebody suffocated her daughter.

She found the body lying face down in a room next to a bathroom of their flat on the fourth floor of the six-storey building at Peyerabagh at 12:30pm.

With the help of the house owner, Shamsunnahar rushed Nawshin to Holy Family Hospital and later to Dhaka Medical College where the doctors declared her dead.

Shamsunnahar went to bring her son Rono home from school at Kakrail at around 11:30am keeping her daughter Nawshin alone in the residence.

"It is tough to determine whether it is a murder or incident of suicide before investigation," said A K M Daulat Akbar, officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station.

On return she found the main

34 illegal passports, Tk 4.4 lakh seized 3 manpower brokers arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested three manpower brokers with Tk 4.40 lakh and seized 34 illegal passports and fake medical certificates from their possession at Paltan in the city yesterday.

The arrestees were identified as Samsul Alam, Mohiuddin Sheikh alias Mohon and Ali Akbar.

The raid was conducted at about 12:30pm following information that some manpower brokers were staying in an office named Apex Traders on the fifth floor of a building at Paltan.

The materials seized from their possession also include 230 fake medical certificates, an ambush seal of Chittagong University and 34 international passports.

Sources said the arrestees had been sending people abroad using fake medical certificates.

Head of Urban and Regional Planning Department at Buet Prof Rukhsana Hafiz, Prof KM Maniruzzaman, Prof Jubair Bin Alam and Sheikh Muhammad Shaihidullah, convenor of the National Committee for the Protection of Oil-Gas-Mineral Resources, Power and Port, also spoke.

ENTRY TICKETS TO CULTURAL MONUMENTS

India to cut rate for Saarc, Bimstec tourists

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India has decided to cut the rate of entry tickets to cultural monuments and world heritage sites for tourists from Saarc and Bimstec countries and bring them down at par with Indian nationals.

Tourism and Culture Minister Ambika Soni said this has been done to promote regional solidarity.

Addressing a meeting of the parliamentary consultative committee attached to her ministry here on Tuesday, she said this decision should not be seen as a first step towards introducing uniform entry fee for all visitors, Indian and foreign.

Soni said entry fee is not exorbitant for most foreign visitors and reducing the fee for all foreign visitors would lead to a major loss of revenue to the government.

The fees in India are less than what is charged in many other countries, she pointed out.

Foreign visitors are now required to pay US\$ 2 for 101 'B' category monuments and US\$ 5 for 15 'A' category monuments which are world heritage sites.

The entry fees for Indians are Rs 5 for 'B' category and Rs 10 for 'A' category monuments.

Saarc brings together Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives, Bhutan, Afghanistan besides India and BIMSTEC that comprises Thailand, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India.

The tourism ministry would spend Rs 933 crore during the 11th Five Year Plan on maintenance and restoration of cultural monuments.

The entry fees for Indians are Rs 5 for 'B' category and Rs 10 for 'A' category monuments.

Women For Women, a research and study group, also condemned the killing of Sayma Khanum and called on the authorities concerned to ensure that such horrible incidents do not repeat in future.

Advocate Abed Raja, former president of Dhaka Metropolitan Bar Association, also expressed his shock at her killing and conveyed his condolence to the bereaved family.

The BSEHR leaders also demanded an immediate arrest of the criminal.

Karmojibi Nari President Shirin Akhter and General Secretary Sharmin Kabir also condemned the killing of Sayma Khanum and said her killing came as the latest example how women are persecuted in the country.

They called on the authorities concerned to hunt down the criminal and demanded an exemplary punishment to them.

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