

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 e-mails, 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 Waliur 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.

Krishanu 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, Krishanu 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 relics are a precious thing having great historic significance and so we think it should be preserved through maintaining its dignity and security," he said.

Over one hundred Sri Lankan nationals living in Chittagong and Dhaka joined yesterday's ceremony.

"We are really grateful to the Bangladesh government and people as well as local devotees for giving us the relics as gifts," said Rohita De Silva and Ruwan Kumara, who came from Dhaka.

"It's a great pride for us to be a owning country of the sacred relics of Lord Buddha, a great human being of the history, who has been respected for last 2550 years by millions of devotees around the world," said Devika Jayasekera, a fourth year MBBS student of University of Science and Technology, Chittagong.



PHOTO: STAR

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.

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 Bangladeshis 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 a workshop.

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 term 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.

Termining human trafficking one of

the cruellest forms of irregular migration that affect people and country immensely, he said, "As traffickers look to new ways and sophisticated means of profiting, we will need coordination from all parties."

Chairing the session, secretary to home ministry Abdul Karim said it is obvious that people will migrate from the developing to the developed countries, but that does not mean that they will migrate irregularly.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad, Special Superintendent (Immigration) Shah Alam, IOM Regional Representative for South Asia Shahidul Haque, Additional IGP of SB Baharul Alam and acting Australian High Commissioner Richard Rodgers also spoke.

12 wagons of goods train derail in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Twelve wagons of a Jamalpur-bound goods train from Akhaura derailed near Shambhuganj Biska Railway Station in the district early hours of yesterday.

Railway sources said the train service resumed at 1:00pm today after the relief train had salvaged the wagons from the track at 12:55pm.

The train communications were disrupted for nine hours on Mymensingh-Mohanganj-Bairab route due to derailment.

ADV SAYMA MURDER

Rab claims close to detect killer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), investigating the killing of Supreme Court lawyer Advocate Sayma Khanum, yesterday said they are close to detect the killer.

"We are about to detect the killer after we examined the call list of a mobile phone that we recovered from the spot," a top official of Rab-2 told The Daily Star wishing anonymity.

He however refused to divulge any more information for the sake of investigation.

Meanwhile, two domestic helps of the house Mina and Aleya, who were in the house when Sayma was slaughtered, were placed on seven-day remand yesterday.

Investigation Officer (IO) Shahjahan Ali of Newmarket Police Station made them accused in the case and produced them before the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate with a prayer for seven-day remand for each of them.

"We do not think that the domestic helps have any link to the killing, but it seems Aleya knows the killer," ABM Golam Kibria, officer-in-charge of Newmarket Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Police examined the entry registrar kept at the gate of Prince Tower that housed Sayma's apartment, and found that three people visited the 18-storey tower on Tuesday, the day Sayma was killed.

They said they picked up two of the three visitors yesterday and released them after questioning, as their involvement was not found in the killing.

Police suspected that the killer entered and left the tower through a narrow passage at the rare side of the high-rise tower.

A youth believed to have acquaintance with Sayma slit her throat inside her drawing room and then left the apartment.

Victim's husband Zahurul Islam, a retired engineer of PWD, filed a case without accusing anyone on the same day.

Meanwhile, all proceedings in lower courts in Dhaka yesterday remained halted till 12.00 noon in memory of the slain advocate.

A namaz-e-janaza was held on the premises of the district court.

Judges, magistrates, lawyers and general people attended the janaza.

Earlier a pale of gloom descended on the court premises when her body was taken there.

President visits ailing Sabina in Singapore

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed, now in Singapore for medical check-up, on Tuesday visited ailing singer Sabina Yasmin at National Cancer Centre of General Hospital in Singapore.

The president spent sometime beside the singer and enquired about her treatment. The on-duty specialist physician informed the president that the condition of Sabina is gradually improving.

The president wished early recovery of Sabina.

Military Secretary to President Major General Mohammad Aminul Karim, Secretary to President's Office Mohammad Sirajul Islam and Bangladesh High Commissioner to Singapore Munshi Fayez Ahmed were present, according to a message received here yesterday.

Barisal mayor sued for extortion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A construction contractor yesterday filed an extortion case against detained Barisal city Mayor Mojibor Rahman Sarwar and local BNP leader Azizul Haque Akkas.

Zakir Hossain Nannu, owner of Bisharad Trade International, filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station in Dhaka, accusing the two of extorting Tk 15 lakh from him.

The complainant said he had got a Tk 6.10 crore work order from Bangladesh Kirra Parishad for construction of Barisal divisional physical training college on October 10, 2004.

Five days later, the complainant said in the case statement, Akkas called him over phone and asked him not to start the work before meeting Sarwar at his Dhakaresidence.

Akkas also asked the contractor to give Sarwar five percent of the project expenditure. The complainant alleged that Azizul threatened to kill him if he started work.

Nannu said he later met Sarwar at his Sangsad Bhavan residence where the mayor threatened to kill him if he started work without paying him the toll.

Besides, he was forced to sign on a blank stamp.

The complainant also mentioned that he provided Tk 4 lakh through a cheque (No CD-7564255) of Shantinagar Branch of Uttara Bank, which Sarwar cashed on January 24, 2006.

He also alleged that Akkas has been issuing threat on him for rest of the money.

Our Barisal correspondent adds: Akkas told The Daily Star that he was a working partner of the project and Nannu implicated him in the case as he had filed a case against Nannu earlier following a dispute over profit sharing of the same construction project.

Prof Muinuddin new VC of ASAUB



Prof. M. Muinuddin Khan has been appointed vice-chancellor of ASA University Bangladesh (ASAUB), says a press release.

He has been appointed for four years with effect from April 1, 2007.

Prof. Khan, a former adviser to a caretaker government, was the Dean of the Faculty of Business Studies from 1995 to 1997 and chairman of the Department of Accounting and Information Systems in 1979-1982 and 1988-1992.

He was also the chairman of the Bureau of Business Research and a member of the Finance Committee of Dhaka University. He is the author of a popular text book named 'Advanced Accounting'.

Female student strangled in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A female student who passed SSC examination with GPA-5 from Viqarunnisa 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-storied building at Peyarabagh 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.

On return she found the main



door of her flat open and Nawshin dead.

The next door neighbours who rushed to the flat hearing Shamsunnahar's scream said they saw the mother untying the scarf from Nawshin's neck and crying.

Shahjahan, a guard of the house, said he did not see anybody entering or going out during the incident.

"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.

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.

‘Ensure efficient management for quality railway service’

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday underscored the need for greater investment in and efficient management of the railway in order to revive its image as the 'cheapest and quickest means of travel'.

The railway still remains in its early stage as the successive governments had always neglected this sector, they said.

Paribesh Bachao Andolon, Unmayan Dhara and WBB (Work for a Better Bangladesh) Trust jointly organised the roundtable titled 'Importance of railway sector as an environment-friendly, affordable and safe communications system' at the National Press Club in the city.

Citing a study, Convenor of Paribesh Bachao Andolon Abu Naser Khan said that 95 percent of people of low- and medium-income group travel in trains, but the quality of services provided by the railway is far less than satisfactory.

Only formulation of a comprehensive policy and its proper implementation can revive the image of railway as 'the cheapest and quickest means of travel', he added.

He also said that further investment coupled with efficient management can ensure quality service in this sector.

Speaking as the chief guest, Vice-President of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) Prof AMM Shafiullah said the government has a plan to shift Kamapur Railway Station to the outskirts of the city. But the poor people would not benefit much from such move as the relocation of the station would lead to an increase in their travel cost.

Acting Editor of Shaptahik 2000 Golam Mortuza said unwarranted interference by some trade union leaders in railway affairs also contributed to the poor performance of the railway.

Head of Urban and Regional Planning Department at Buet Prof Ruhksana Hafiz, Prof KM Maniruzzaman, Prof Jubair Bin Alam and Sheikh Muhammad Shahidullah, convener 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.

WEATHER TODAY

Rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at many places over all the six divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy to heavy rainfalls are also likely at places over the country, Met office said.

It also said that day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

Highest temperature 34.6 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Ishwardi and Jessore and lowest 25.7 degree Celsius at Chittagong.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:48pm today and rises at 5:22am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	32.3	28.0	84	89
Chittagong	29.2	25.7	90.9	3
Rajshahi	34.5	27.2	89	96
Khulna	32.2	27.5	83	77
Barisal	31.4	27.2	87	88
Sylhet	30.2	26.7	86	97
Cox's Bazar	30.5	26.2	90	88

DHAKA TODAY

Seminar

Save the Children UK organises a dissemination seminar of study on 'Justice system for children in Bangladesh'. Venue: Cirdap auditorium.

Exhibition

The inaugural ceremony of 'Colour from hills', a group exhibition of artists from Chittagong Hill Tracts led by Kanak Champa Chakma. Venue: Drik gallery. Time: 5:30pm.

AGM

The 22nd annual general meeting of Bangladesh Photographic Association will be held. Venue: Hotel Orchard Plaza. Time: 11:00am.

Discussion

Coalition for Good Governance will hold a discussion titled 'Reforms in the political parties: Current thoughts and debate'. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 10:00am.

Debate

The inaugural ceremony of 'Jukti Kathana', a national level debate contest organised by ATN Bangla, will be held. Venue: Level 8, Bashundhara City. Time: 12:00noon.

Report launch

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) will launch UNCTAD's Least Development Countries Report 2007. Venue: CPD dialogue room. Time: 11:00am.

Dialogue

National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources and Electricity-port organises a dialogue titled 'National interest and fuel policy'. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 11:00am.

Painting exhibition

The inaugural ceremony of a solo painting exhibition titled 'Story of time' by Uttam Kumar Roy will be held. Venue: Zainul Gallery-1, Institute of Fine Arts. Time: 6:00pm.

Hasina could have been held in other ways

Says Sultana Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former adviser to a caretaker government Sultana Kamal yesterday said a summons 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 Jatitya 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 Shawkat 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, Qurankhwani, 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 Sangsad will hold a discussion, milad and doa mahfil at Jatitya 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 Bangladesh Krishi Bank and senator of International Parliament for Safety and Peace, says a press release.

On the occasion, Qurankhwani 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.

Sharddha

Sharddha (post-funeral rites) of Haripada Saha will be held at his residence, Saha Kutir, at Shikaripara 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.