

RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Involve marginal people in formulating law

Academics tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Academics and civil society members at a discussion yesterday called for creating mass awareness and involving marginal people in formulating the right to information act.

They also stressed the need for setting up government information offices at the grassroots levels to change the 'culture of secrecy' and bridge the gaps between the government and people, and between the private sectors and people.

The discussion titled 'People's ownership on public information: Bridging strategy' was held on the last day of the three-day programme organised by Massline Media Centre at LGED auditorium in the city in association with Manusher Jonno, Article 19 and World Bank marking the Right to Information Day of September 28.

"The draft of right to information act should be widely circulated seeking public opinion and be enacted as soon as possible to strengthen democracy, good gov-

ernance and accountability at every sphere of life," said Mahbubul Alam, former adviser to the caretaker government.

Speaking as chief guest, he said ownership of information lies with the people, but it is preserved by the government.

So the government must provide people with information on demand, he added.

Mahbubul Alam, also editor of The Independent, said the information offices at district and divisional headquarters could be rearranged, so that people as well as the journalists have better access to information.

Due to government service rules, the public servants usually do not want to share information, which slowly led to a culture of secrecy that must be changed for transparency of the government as well as of the private and NGO sectors, he observed.

Speaking as guest of honour, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Iftekharuzzaman said establishing public ownership on the right to information act (draft) is very

important, and as an opportunity has been created now, the act could be promulgated immediately and then may be amended if necessary.

"We should not delay in promulgating the act, because we saw how it was ignored for years," he said, adding that available information is also not properly used by people for their ignorance about their rights.

The issue of right to information is not only a government issue, Iftekharuzzaman said, adding, "If private sectors like corporate bodies and NGOs are not transparent, then they do not have the right to ask the government to give information."

Presenting the keynote paper, Associate Professor Shameem Reza of Dhaka University said only some civil society members and NGOs were involved in the movement for right to information, but participation of marginal people was not ensured.

The common people are little aware of the right to information, he said, adding that involving people in the movement is important for effective enforcement of

the act.

To bridge the gap between the government and people, Shameem suggested utilising information officer at the district level and using their mobile film units in creating awareness about the right to information and its impact on people.

"Our authoritarian mentality will have to be changed for bringing a change in information regime," said Executive Chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, who presided over the session.

World Bank Senior Public Sector Specialist Saku Akmeemana said people at the top like bureaucrats and politicians should also be involved in the movement of right to information, besides involving marginal people.

Former chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Marghub Murshed also spoke at the discussion participated by journalists from across the country, rights activists and civil society members.

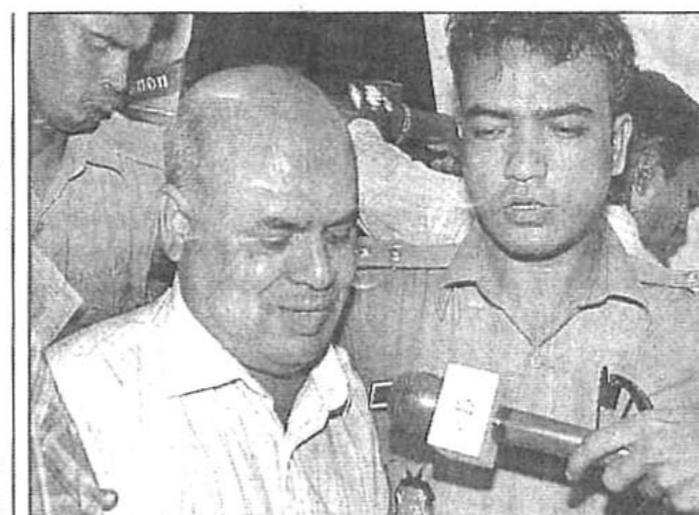


PHOTO: STAR
Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) President Sadru Amin, left, and General Secretary Anwar Hossain, right, were produced before the judicial probe commission of Justice Habibur Rahman Khan at the Circuit House at Bailey Road in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 1)



PHOTO: STAR
Former adviser to the caretaker government Sultana Kamal speaks at a discussion on the occasion of National Girl Child Day at the Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On her right are Ranjan Karmaker, Mahbuba Nasrin and Rekha Sultana. Steps Towards Development organised the meeting.

Discrimination against girl child an impediment to dev

Speakers say at discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 8th National Girl Child Day was observed with due festivity across the country to promote the rights and opportunities of girl child.

To mark the occasion, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in association with the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum organised a colourful rally and a discussion meeting in the city.

Adviser to the ministry Geeti Ara Safiya inaugurated the rally which was participated by the representatives of around 30 organisations.

Starting from the Public Library at Shahbagh the rally ended at the Shishu Academy.

Speaking as chief guest at the discussion at the Shishu Academy, Geeti Ara said half of the country's population are women, and as such

it is not possible to move forward by keeping them behind.

Considering this the government has taken various steps for the development of women in the country, she added.

The adviser said discrimination against girl child is an impediment to national advancement.

Highlighting the significance of the day, Chairman of Shishu Academy Mushfequl Ahsan said the girl children should be provided with equal rights so that they can overcome various obstacles that they face from their childhood.

Around 500 children took part in these programmes.

While inaugurating a programme, BNWLA Executive Director Salma Ali highlighted the present situation of girl children and the story of their deprivation.

She also pledged to work for upholding the dignity of the children.

Secretary to women and children affairs ministry Rokeya Sultana, President of National Girl Child Advocacy Forum Dr Badruddin Majumder, Dr Halima Khatun and Latifa Akand of Dhaka University, litterateurs Imdadul Haque Milon

and Anisul Haque also spoke with a call for eliminating existing discriminations against girl child as these are hampering national progress.

The discussion was followed by a cultural function and prize distribution among the winners of an art competition.

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) also organised art competition, discussion and cultural function at four different places on this occasion.

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