

DRAFT OF RTI ORDINANCE 2008

Shorten exemption list for maximum disclosure

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday called for shortening the list of exemptions in the proposed right to information act to ensure maximum disclosure of information.

They stressed the need for passing the ordinance within the tenure of the caretaker government, saying that otherwise a new campaign would be needed to motivate the next elected governments to pass it.

The roundtable on the draft of RTI Ordinance 2008 was held at the Prothom Alo office yesterday.

The discussants urged the government to extend the deadline, now set at March 23, for incorporating people's suggestions in the draft prepared by a government-formed committee.

They also suggested incorporating a clause on the protection of the whistleblowers and the people seeking information.

The roundtable titled 'Let It Be More Open' brought together experts from different fields who said people will warmly welcome

enactment of RTI ordinance by the government no matter how critical they are of its other steps.

"We cannot oppose any good initiative," Prothom Alo Editor Matjur Rahman said, adding that the ordinance needs to be passed for people's welfare.

"The law must be enacted as early as possible. It has to be done while the caretaker government is in power," said Dr Saadat Hussain, chairman of the Public Service Commission.

Shawkat Mahmud, president of the National Press Club, urged the government to include the RTI in its talks with the political parties.

"We received commitment from the political parties earlier. Now let them make commitment during the talks that they would approve the ordinance in the next parliament," he added.

Shawkat suggested that political parties and voluntary organisations should also disclose their information to people.

Stressing the need for involving politicians in discussion on the draft, Shaheen Anam, executive

director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said, "The politicians themselves can come forward to take part in it."

The discussants suggested inclusion of senior media personalities in the search committee that will make recommendation for appointment to the Information Commission, which will deal with people's appeals regarding disclosure.

"The ordinance should also set criteria for selection," said Dr Saadat.

He called for deleting the words "dignity", "foreign policy", "secrecy of information" and "personal secrecy" from the section on exemption.

The discussants agreed that the exemption from disclosure of information for "public interest" should be deleted "since it goes against the spirit of the law".

Barrister Tanjibul Alam, who was involved in preparing the draft earlier, echoed a common demand for publishing an annual report on the activities of an office in stead of a biennial report.

Suggesting proactive disclosure of fundamental information, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said, "The information seekers should only be asked to provide contact address and nothing else."

He also suggested setting up office of information commission at divisional level so that people do not have to travel all the way to the capital to register any appeal.

Moshiul Alam, an associate editor of the Prothom Alo, called for increasing the number of members of the Information Commission from three to five or seven.

Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of Sujon, suggested that the information commissioners would have to explain to the central information commission reasons for denying any disclosure.

Kamal Uddin Ahmed, head of the RTI Ordinance 2008 drafting committee, said the recommendations would be considered for incorporating them in the draft.



The Basila Road at Mohammadpur in the city is a pain in the neck for the locals and commuters, as the road remains waterlogged all the year round because of sewerage water and downpours. The picture was taken yesterday.



Badhir Unnayan Sangha (an association of the deaf) forms a human chain on the Chittagong Press Club premises yesterday protesting occupation of its land by the criminals in the Jamal Khan area in the port city.

1000 tons Thai rice for Sidr victims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thailand has donated 1000 tons of rice in aid of Sidr-affected people of Bangladesh.

Thai Ambassador Chalermphol Thanchitt will hand over the rice to Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Hussain Jamil at the Chittagong port on March 19, said a press release of the embassy yesterday.

The rice is expected to reach the port by an ocean vessel today.

The donation is made as a gesture of goodwill to Bangladesh and Sidr victims and reflects the warm relations and close bond of friendship between the Thai and Bangladeshi peoples.

Earlier on November 27, 2007, the Thai government sent emergency aid for Sidr victims.

Platinum Jute Mill project director closed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

State-owned Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill Project Director (PD) Md Mohiuddin Ahmed was closed to BJMC Zonal Office.

Besides, project director of Star Jute Mill was transferred to Platinum Jubilee Jute Mill.

Bangladesh Jute Mill Corporation (BJMC) Zonal Coordinator Abu Taher said yesterday Mohiuddin Ahmed failed to tackle movement of workers.

Earlier on Saturday night, 136 laid-off workers of Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills lay down in front of Mohiuddin's moving car demanding payment of their all arrears.

Police later rescued him from angry jute workers.

REFORMS IN BCS QUOTA SYSTEM

Ultimatum to publish report by March 29

A CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka University (DU) students who have been demonstrating on the campus under the banner of Quota Reform Movement (QRM) yesterday gave an ultimatum to the government to publish the report of the two-member committee, formed to evaluate the quota system for the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations, within March 29.

The demand came from a press conference at Dhaka University Journalists' Association (Duja)

where QRM Convener KM Selim read out a written statement.

Selim, a student of political science department, said if the government dillydallies to disclose the report and distributes the forms for the 28th BCS examinations without reforming the quota system, they will take to the street again and lay siege to Public Service Commission (PSC) to press home their demand.

However, their movement will be suspended till April 10 because of the upcoming 44th convocation of DU. Earlier, the government formed a

two-member committee headed by Regulatory Reforms Commission (RRC) Chairman Dr Akbar Ali Khan to evaluate the quota system in BCS exams under the Public Service Commission (PSC).

Several left-leaning student organisations of DU earlier brought out processions and circulated leaflets on the campus in favour of the quota system.

Leaders of several left-leaning student bodies alleged that a group of students has been conducting the movement in patronisation of ICS and JCD activists to make the campus unstable.

Senate confirms Moriarty as US envoy in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US Senate has confirmed nomination of James Francis Moriarty as the new ambassador to Bangladesh.

He is expected to arrive in Dhaka soon to begin his new diplomatic assignment.

The US Senate confirmed his nomination on March 13 after a hearing, said a press release.

Moriarty, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, served as the US ambassador to Nepal before being nominated as the US ambassador to Bangladesh.

He also served as special assistant to the president and senior director for Asian Affairs on the National Security Council.

Early in his career, Moriarty, who is from Massachusetts, served as a counsellor in the Political Section of the American Embassy in Beijing.

He obtained bachelor's degree from Dartmouth College.

Free surgery for eye patients

BSS, Dhaka

Renowned eye surgeon of Pakistan Dr Syed Mohamad Asif will conduct free phaco surgery from today at Lion A Badal Eye Hospital in the city.

Dr Asif will operate 300 patients on a first come, first served basis.

Interested persons have been requested to enlist their names in the following address: E-163, South Banashree, Eastern Housing, Goran or 353, East Rampura, Dhaka or phone 7293054 or 0191-3590856 numbers to enlist names.

17 injured in stampede in Ctg RMG factory

CU CORRESPONDENT

At least 17 female garment workers were injured in a stampede fearing an outbreak of fire at Fakirhat area in Chittagong yesterday morning.

Source said the accident occurred at around 11.00am at Delta Fashion Limited under Bandar Police Station when an electric wire sparked on the ground

floor of the seven-storied factory building.

Hearing the fire alarm the panic-stricken workers rushed to come out hurriedly through the staircase of the factory resulting the stampede, sources said.

The injured were identified as Shiuli, 20, Khadiza, 25, Shefali, 25, Rasheda, 20, Moni, 25, Salma, 25, Ruby, 28, Nazma, 22, Rozina, 25, Lipi, 22, Kulsum, 22, Nishat, 20,

Parvin, 25, Shahinur, 25, Sanwara 32, Fatema, 22, and Baby, 24.

General Manager of the factory Saiful Islam said they controlled the spark after ringing the alarm for workers.

"We sent the injured workers to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) for medication and activities of the factory were resumed at around 12:00noon," he said.



A joint meeting of Awami League presidium members and organising secretaries was held at the party chief Sheikh Hasina's political office at Dhanmondi in the city with acting president Zillur Rahman in the chair.



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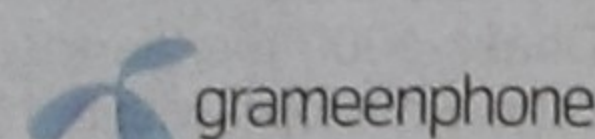
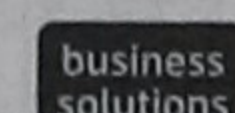
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