

## Call for budgetary allocation to implement RTI Act

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a workshop yesterday demanded budgetary allocation for proper implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

They also underlined the importance of special allocation in the upcoming national budget for setting up an information commission.

Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI), a non-government organisation, in assistance with USAID PROGATI organised the workshop on 'Ensuring implementation of RTI following pro-poor approach: Role and potential of media' at Brac Centre Inn in the city.

While speaking on the implementation of RTI act, the speakers said a free information commission is yet to be established, though the act would come into effect after only one month.

Information can play important role in poverty reduction, combating disaster and ensuring basic rights, and media can facilitate people's right to information, they said, adding that people should know what is RTI and how will they be benefited by using the information.

"Media can highlight success cases of

information centre as a model of development; individual and collective cases of adopting better livelihood options using information," said Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation.

"As an advocate and promoter of RTI law, media can draw attention of policymakers to the extent and type of information barriers that exist at various levels," she added.

Presenting a keynote paper, Shaheen Anam said media can play a watchdog role in tracking and monitoring the performance of information commission and other information-providing agencies. Media also has a role in protecting whistleblower from harassment and threats.

The speakers said RTI efforts should be mainstreamed into all development agenda targeting the poor and disadvantaged not only for alleviating poverty, but also for raising their dignity.

NGOs and local media can build a partnership in mobilising grassroots demand for information, they added.

"RTI is not only for the media, rather it can be used as a development tool also," said AHM Moazzem Hossain, editor of The Financial Express, adding that the social needs for RTI should be addressed through

multi-dimensional ways and political will is a must to overcome the challenges in implementing the act.

Drawing examples from different communities, Dr Ananya Raihan, executive director of D.Net, said RTI could be helpful for the people in many ways as information database would be created and maintained for its proper implementation.

Shawkat Mahmud, president of the National Press Club, said both the media representatives and government officials should be sensitised in using the RTI act.

He also stressed the need for special budgetary allocation for a strong and effective information commission.

The speakers also called for coordination among different government, non-government organisations and media, and an easy handbook of the RTI act for mass people and training of the government officials on the act.

Among others, Farid Hossain of Associated Press, Shyamol Dutta, editor of the Bhorer Kagaj, Hasan Shahriar, president of Commonwealth Journalists Association, also spoke, while Executive Editor of the Sangbad Manjural Ahsan Bulbul moderated the session.

MRDI Executive Director Hasibur Rahman delivered his welcome address.

## BNP leaders, workers pay tribute to Zia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders and workers of BNP and its associated organisations yesterday thronged the mazar of late president Ziaur Rahman in city's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and paid tribute on his 28th death anniversary.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia accompanied by a huge number of party leaders, workers and supporters placed wreath at the mazar of Zia, founder of BNP.

The party flag was hoisted at half-mast at the party headquarters at Naya Paltan.

Several incidents of attack took place in Natore, Magura and Barisal during the observance of death anniversary of Ziaur Rahman, who was assassinated by a group of disgruntled army men at Chittagong Circuit House on this day in 1981.

Miscreants fired two gunshots at former deputy minister for land advocate Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu while he was addressing a discussion meeting in Natore. Dulu, however, went unhurt.

Witnesses said two people wearing black masks sprayed bullets targeting Dulu and fled the scene quickly.

Criminals also attacked the death anniversary programme in Magura. No one, however, suffered serious injury in the attack.

In Barisal, miscreants attacked the motorcade of BNP leader Sharifuddin Santu on his way to join a milad mahfil. Local BNP leader Golam Mahbub blamed Awami League men for the attack.

In the capital, the BNP chief offered fataha at the mazar and prayed seeking divine blessings for the departed soul of Zia.

Khaleda also joined 'Khatme Quran' and 'milad mahfil' organised by Jatiyatabadi Ulema Dal on the mazar premises.

Leaders and activists of BNP, its associated organisations and different pro-BNP professional bodies also placed wreaths at Zia's mazar.

The BNP chief inaugurated a voluntary blood donation programme arranged by Zia Sanskritik Sangathan (Zia Cultural Organisation).

Later, Khaleda Zia distributed food among the destitute at several other points in the capital.

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Shamsul Islam Khan, MK Anwar, Mirza Abbas, Sadeque Hossain Khoka and Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farroque, among others, were present.

The three-day death anniversary programme announced by BNP will be ended today.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia offers munajat after placing wreath at the mazar of late president Ziaur Rahman in city's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar yesterday.

## Misuse of law leaves domestic violence unchecked

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Misuse of Women and Children Repression Prevention Act is an obstacle to preventing domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, speakers said at a roundtable yesterday.

False cases filed by exploiting the act is actually suppressing the real use of the law posing a challenge in ensuring justice for the victims of abuse and violence, they added.

They said forming community level volunteer support groups can help address domestic violence, which is prevalent in Bangladesh. The support group must include both men and women, they added.

The roundtable titled 'Addressing domestic violence in Bangladesh through community involvement' was organised by Women Entrepreneur Association of

Bangladesh (WEAB) with support of the American Bar Association (ABA) Rule of Law Initiative at the Lake Shore Hotel at Gulshan in the city.

Funded by US State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, the purpose of the roundtable was to advise the future implementation of a community-based domestic violence reduction programme.

Awami League lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury said one of the major drawbacks of current legislature is that it does not address the issue of prevention and protection of the victims of abuse. Provisions should be included to address these issues.

He emphasised the need for strengthening the local government to promote community level actions.

Heather Variava, deputy chief of the US Embassy, Political and Economic

Section, said lack of respect for women's rights is the main cause. However, women also need to learn that options are available for them.

Dr Shirin Sharmin, a member of parliament, said majority of women facing domestic violence cannot take any measures as they do not have economic solvency. She said security of the abused person after they have taken action is also a major concern. So they suffer silently.

Shirin Akter, founding president of Karmojibi Nari, Nasreen Awal, founding member of WEAB, Christopher Hardaway, Country Director of ABA Rule of Law Initiative, ZI Khan Panna, chairman of Human Rights Monitoring Cell, Bangladesh Bar Council, former IGP Ashraf Huda, activist Munira Khan, Barrister Cynthia Farid and Advocate Dilruba Shormin also spoke.



Save the Buriganga Movement, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon and Nirbheek jointly organise a human chain on a boat on the Buriganga river in Swarighat area demanding steps to save rivers.

## Take programmes to save rivers

Speakers urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a human chain yesterday demanded for special allocation in the upcoming budget to protect the Buriganga, Shitalaksha, Turag and Balu rivers -- the lifelines of the city.

They also demanded the government take a 100-day programme immediately to save the rivers.

Save the Buriganga Movement, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) and Nirbheek jointly organised the programme at 10:30am in Swarighat area.

The speakers said the authorities remain inactive when the rivers are being grabbed and polluted indiscriminately. The drives to recover the rivers are often halted midway of the recovery programme for unknown reasons.

They stressed the need to take sustainable development programme and its implementation by using land, water and manpower resources properly.

The government's indifferent attitude towards healthy environment, indecision, weakness, corruption and lack of coordination contribute to the destruction of rivers, con-

tinuous pollution and scarcity of pure drinking water, they said.

The rivers surrounding the capital now make the mega city most polluted, stinky, dirty and unlivable place in the world, they added.

The speakers further said that protecting the rivers from encroachment and pollution is a must to save the life and liveli-

hood of the people and biodiversity.

They also recommended that the owners of different industries be forced to use Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) to stop industrial waste emissions, while Dhaka City Corporation, Wasa and other organisations should be restricted from throwing waste to the rivers.

The Water Bodies Act 2000 should be implemented strictly and the Buriganga Taskforce be activated in this regard, the speakers added.

Former adviser to a caretaker government ASM Shahjahan, General Secretary of Bapa Dr Mohammad Abdul Matin, ATM Kamal of Nirbheek, Mihar Biswas, Taksim A Khan, Sharif Jamil and Ashraf Amir Ullah also spoke.



Green Voice forms a human chain in front of Teacher Student Centre on Dhaka University campus yesterday ahead of World No Tobacco Day today while a smoker passes by in a rickshaw.

## WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY TODAY Tobacco causes 80pc of lung cancer

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tobacco use is one of the 'most common risk factors for various diseases' in Bangladesh as well as across the globe and its economic impact is also 'devastating', anti-tobacco activists said in a roundtable yesterday.

In Bangladesh, tobacco alone is responsible for about 80 percent of lung cancer and the use of tobacco is increasing, especially among the young generation, they pointed out.

They urged the government to take effective measures for strictly implementing the Tobacco Control Law in order to restrict tobacco uses and refrain smokers from smoking in public spaces.

The roundtable was organised by Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance (BATA) at Cirdap auditorium here on the eve of the World No Tobacco Day today.

This year the theme of the day is 'Tobacco Health Warnings', underscoring the need for using picture warnings that have been proven particularly effective at making people aware of the health risks of tobacco use and convincing them to quit.

The use of picture warnings has been widely adopted in many countries and its effect is proven statistically with a 2.1 percent decrease in the number of smokers throughout the globe, said Dr Arup Ratan Chowdhury, the president of Manash, an anti-smoking organisation.

Not only on the cigarette packets, the use of picture warnings on the 'jarda', 'gul' and 'shadapata' packets should also be introduced since a large number of females tend to use these products without know-

ing their harmful effects, said Saifuddin Ahmed, executive director of WBB Trust.

In a written statement, BATA members said around 57,000 people die of diseases caused by tobacco in the country each year, quoting a report of the World Health Organisation.

They said another 3,82,000 people in the country give way to various disabilities due to smoking, quoting the same report.

Health-related or economic factors aside, smoking may also lead many, especially the young generation ashtray pushing them towards criminal and unsocial activities, said Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar, global vice president and country director, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.

The speakers at the roundtable urged the government to implement the tobacco control law to create mass awareness.

They also called on the physicians and health workers to quit smoking as common people consider them as role models.

UBINIG Executive Director Farida Akhter, International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease Technical Advisor Md Akramul Islam and Deputy Secretary to the Establishment Ministry Shahadat Hossain spoke at the roundtable.

Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance (BATA) has chalked out an elaborate programme to mark the World No Tobacco Day.

An anti-smoking procession will be brought out at 10:00am from Shahbagh in the city.

A boat rally will also be held at 4:00pm on the Dhanmondi Lake.

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