



Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad speaks at a seminar on "Right to Information Act: How to Move Forward" at a city hotel yesterday. Management Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) organised the seminar. On his right are Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Muhammad Zamir and Shaheen Anam and on his left, Ghulam Rahman, James F Moriarty and Iftekharuzzaman. (Related story on Page 1)

Govt reduces court fees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the face of demand of lawyers, the government has re-fixed the court fees in respect of filing some types of cases with effect from September 1.

A gazette notification on reducing the court fees was issued on September 21. Earlier on August 30, the government issued a gazette notification on the Court Fee Amendment Act, 2010 increasing the court fees 25 to 50 times higher than previous fees.

The law ministry has reduced the court fee from 15 percent to 2.5 percent for filing a money suit and from 10 percent to 2 percent in filing a land related case.

Now, the litigants have to pay Tk 50,000 as maximum fee for filing any money suit and Tk 40,000 for filing a land related case, said Law Minister Shafigue Ahmed yesterday.

Addressing a press briefing at the secretariat in the afternoon, the law minister said the ministry has re-fixed the court fees for the sake of poor litigants.

The court fees have been reduced in respect of filing those cases, which are mostly filed by the poor people, he said.

He also said a revenue stamp fee has also been reduced from Tk 200 to Tk 20.

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) on September 21 demanded of the government to cancel its decision on increased court fees.

The SCBA leaders also threatened to go for a tougher move against the government if the demand was not met.

Call to speed up implementation of RTI Act to curb corruption

Experts urge government to set up info management system in public offices

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a seminar suggested establishing modern information management systems in public offices to speed up implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act to reduce corruption in the country.

They also advocated for massive dissemination of the act so that general people can demand information about the public service and expenses.

The suggestion came at a seminar titled "Right to Information Act: How to Move Forward" organised by the Management Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) in association with Progati, a flagship anti-corruption programme of the US government, at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

The seminar was organised following a series of seminars at divisional levels on the implementation status of the RTI Act, passed by the parliament over a year ago.

"People are afraid of seeking information, thinking they will face difficulties. On the other hand, designated officers are hesitant because of mindset," said RTI Forum Convenor Shaheen Anam.

D.net Executive Director Ananya Raihan in his keynote said the RTI Act is still at a level of discussions, not in implementation stage. The common people, even many public offices, are not aware of it, he added.

Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman stressed the need for building a strong information management system in public offices to provide information.

This, however, will require adequate resources, website and capacity building of the officials concerned, he said.

Barrister Tanjib-ul Alam said the Information Commission could instruct the government on ways to preserve information in a unified

system to facilitate voluntary disclosures.

The NGOs should set an example by disclosing their information and creating awareness among people to help them make the demand of information from public offices, he noted.

RTI campaigner Lutful Haque said the government could consider having a public records law to keep information in a systematic way. Participants also suggested inclusion of the act in the textbooks at university and secondary school levels.

Chief Information Commissioner Muhammad Zamir said the commission has been working to make sure that designated officers are appointed soon and finding out ways to include the RTI Act in the textbooks of secondary schools.

However, he criticised the NGOs saying that not even one percent of the NGOs has appointed designated officers to provide information. Zamir

regretted that the public officers who are designated to provide information to the public are not awarded.

Anti-Corruption Commission Chairman Ghulam Rahman said dissemination of citizens' charters and RTI Act is very important to make people aware of the act and use it. Use of IT is also necessary for it, he noted.

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad said the government has every effort to establish a transparent and accountable society, but it would not be right to expect that the RTI Act would be implemented in a year, as the government has many other priorities.

Information Secretary Dr Kamal Naser Chowdhury, US Ambassador to Bangladesh James F Moriarty and MRDI Executive Director Hasibur Rahman also spoke at the seminar moderated by Boishakhi Television Editor-in-Chief and CEO Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul.

7 expelled from DU hall

DU CORRESPONDENT

Authority of Ziaur Rahman Hall in Dhaka University yesterday temporarily expelled seven students from the dormitory for their connection to a recent violent incident.

The action was taken as per recommendation by a fact-finding committee that was formed immediately after a clash between two groups of Bangladesh Chhatra League's activists on August 20.

The fact-finding committee submitted its report to the university administration on September 20.

The expelled students are AKM Ziaul Haque, Meer Mehedi Mahmud and Zahid Hossain Sohag of political science department, Al Mahmud of Bangla department, Ruhul Amin Rana of Persian department and Razu Ahmed and Ataus Samad of history department.

"We have expelled them from the hall for three months on charges of involvement with the clash and vandalism," Provost of the hall ABM Farook told The Daily Star.



Amnesty International Secretary General Salil Shetty calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her hotel suite in New York on September 22.

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