



INTERNATIONAL RIGHT TO INFORMATION DAY

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Special Supplement

Art & Design : Department of Films & Publications



Message

**PRESIDENT
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF
BANGLADESH**

It is my immense pleasure to know that, like many other countries around the world, Bangladesh is going to observe the 'International Right to Information Day' on the 28th September, 2016 to create public awareness on Right to Information as well as to inspire people for establishing their right of access to information. I welcome this effort of the Information Commission.

Information is power and correct information is invaluable resource. Receiving correct information easily and affordably is a civil and democratic right of every citizen. Information always makes people aware and helps take appropriate decision. Access to information is an inalienable part of the fundamental and constitutional right of freedom of thought, conscience and of speech. Government is committed to ensure the right of access to information of the people. Free flow of information assists to establish citizens' rights equally. It empowers the people in the society and over the state authorities. Giving priority to people's access to information Government enacted the Right to Information Act, 2009 and constituted Information Commission within the stipulated time. As a result, people get almost all information sought for and eventually their right of access to public information is being established.

Government has taken many commendable initiatives to ensure people's right of access to information and also for delivery of better services through best practices of modern technology. I am happy to learn that public interest information is now reaching the door step of the people through newly installed private television channels, radio, community radio and union digital centres.

I think people are getting pellucid idea about state activities by effective use of the Right to Information Act and becoming able to play positive role for the development of the country. I hope that it would contribute to increase people's participation in the development programmes and development process would be more transparent and dynamic.

I do believe that by observing the 'International Right to Information Day 2016', people's awareness about receiving and using information will be increased further, free flow of information will be ensured and finally, people's empowerment will be reinforced.

I wish every success of the programmes to be held during the International Right to Information Day.

Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh live forever.

Md. Abdul Hamid
Md. Abdul Hamid

International Right to Information Day, 2016 Progress of the Activities of Information Commission And Challenges Faced

Nepal Chandra Sarker, Information Commissioner

The Freedom of Press Act was passed as a right of access to information legislation in Sweden about 250 years back in the second half of the 18th century, in the year 1766 and it was also recognized in France as one of the human rights in 1789. United Nations General Assembly in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in Resolution 2200A of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) accepted the right of access to information by everyone. United States of America introduced the Freedom of Information Act in 1966 and it was made effective on the 5th of July, 1967. After the promulgation of the FOIA in USA, it gets momentum in introducing the RTI law in various countries of the world. Up to the year 2000, 36 countries framed national RTI legislations in those countries and up to 2016, 113 countries have passed the law. Latest country introducing the RTI law is the Philippines.

Freedom of thought, conscious and of speech is guaranteed subject to certain restrictions as stated in the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh under Article 39 as one of the fundamental rights and Right to Information is an inalienable part of this fundamental right. Like other countries of the world and in consistency with the international instruments and our constitution, the Right to Information Act, 2009 was passed in the 1st session of the 9th parliament to ensure people's access to information and it was made fully effective since the 1st of July, 2009. For implementation of the Act Information Commission was constituted with three members including one lady under the command of the Chief Information Commissioner within the specified period of 90 days. In the world rating of the Access to Information laws of 113 countries, the rank of the Right to Information Act, 2009 of Bangladesh is 20th considering certain indicators like right of access to information, scope, requesting procedure, exceptions and refusals, appeals, sanctions and protections, penalty provisions, promotional measures, etc. and placed 82nd by the date of introducing the Act (Source: <http://www.rti-rating.org/>).

The objectives of promulgating the Right to Information Act, 2009 include ensuring right of access to information by the people, increasing transparency and accountability in the use of national resources by the government and non-government organizations and thus establishing good governance by reducing corruption in the society for attaining the ultimate goal of empowering the people. There exists the scope for discussion and criticism regarding the activities of the Commission on implementation of the RTI process, its effectiveness in attaining the cherished goals and challenges faced. By overcoming all the challenges faced at the initial stage it managed to get its official accommodation to make a good start, required budgetary provisions, recruitment of office staff within a short period of time. Alongside, organizational programmes and future plans were undertaken and required rules and regulations to conduct its business were framed. By this time Commission organized sensitization meetings in all the districts and in 90 upazilas of 12 districts to popularize the law among the common citizens. On the other hand, training of the appointed Designated Officers was conducted by the Information Commission and by some other authorities. Information Commission also started receiving complaints against non-disclosure and disposing such cases from the year 2010 as per powers vested to it under the Civil Procedure Code, 1908.

Appointment of Designated Officers
According to the provision made under section 10 of the Right to Information Act, 2009 Information Commission requested the concerned authorities through the Secretaries of the ministries and the Deputy Commissioners of the districts to appoint one Designated Officer for each information providing unit and as such 23625 Designated Officers out of who 16767 from the government and 6858 from the non-government organizations were appointed up to 15.09.2016. As a result of the initiative undertaken by the Information Commission, this year most of the courts of the country have appointed their Designated Officers all over the country. Attempt has also been taken to appoint Designated Officers in all the educational institutions those receive financial assistance from the government. On completion of appointment of the Designated Officers in all such educational institutions the number of Designated Officers will substantially increase. Name, designation and other particulars of the appointed Designated Officers along with location of the office and the particulars of the Appellate Authorities have been uploaded in the website of the Information Commission. More-over, their particulars are also available in the respective websites.

Arrangement of RTI Training for the Designated Officers and RTI Trainers
A total of 18814 persons including the Designated Officers, journalists and sub-editors of different media, NGO employees and some selected teachers from different educational institutions have been imparted training on Right to Information Act. In addition, BPATC, RPATC, BCS (Admin) Academy, NILG and some other training institutes both in the public and NGO sector have been imparting training on RTI. More-over, with a view to building up a core group of trainers on RTI, 6 officers/persons from each district and 2 officers from each ministry were given detailed training on RTI for 3 days and 250 officials including 32 from the ministries and 232 from different upazilas were selected as Resource Persons on RTI. By this time Information Commission imparted RTI training to 60 officials each of all the upazilas of 12 districts and training programme is being continued in other upazilas. All the upazilas of the country will be covered under the plan within 3 years.

Publicity on Right to Information
Information Commission organized sensitization meetings with the participation of the local elites, district level officers, heads of educational institutions, local public representatives, journalists and others in all the 64 districts and 90 upazilas of the country. Meetings/workshops were held with the govt. and non-govt. officials, different classes of professionals, representatives from print and electronic media etc. One web portal has been developed by the Information Commission for online communication with the people. Hon'ble Prime Minister formally launched the web portal on the 19th of October, 2010. The address of the web portal is www.infocom.gov.bd and the e-mail address is cic@infocom.gov.bd.

At present promotional activities for digitalization of the RTI process and its monitoring are under way with the technical support of the A2i Programme, World Bank and one NGO namely D-Net for easy implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2009. By this time two documentaries and some jingles with one potsong have been developed and broadcast and telecast through radio and television channels. They are also being exhibited at growth centres in the rural areas through district information office. During the present financial year Information Commission chalked out a plan to hold sensitization meetings in all the upazilas of selected 24 districts. With a view to familiarizing the law with future generation of the country important part of the law has been incorporated within the syllabus of the secondary and higher secondary level. Since 2012 we have been observing 'International Right to Information Day' all over the country on the 28th September each year. This year we are going to observe the day on the 28th September in a befitting manner with the theme 'Information ensures freedom and helps create a golden Bangladesh' (তথ্য গেলে মুক্তি মেলে-সোনার বাংলার স্বপ্ন ফলে).

Publications of the Information Commission
Information Commission has framed required rules and regulations to conduct its business and made 19 publications including annual reports, manuals, decisions of the Commission, guidelines for the Designated Officers, guidelines for the authorities, guidelines for the RTI applicants, leaflets, one booklet and one research study, and sent those to different authorities all over the country. Information Commission has been distributing booklets, leaflets and different forms among the people. It also published the Right to Information Act, 2009 in Braille for the visually impaired. Most of all such publications are available on the web portal of the Information Commission.

Request for and Supply of Information
After the constitution of the Information Commission a total of 76,043 requests for information were submitted to various authorities all over the country within six years up to 2015. In the year 2015, a total of 6181 requests were submitted to different offices and information was provided against 5940 requests which is about 96.10%. Out of the total requests 96.33% requests were submitted to the government offices and only 3.67% requests were submitted to the non-government offices. Number of requests for information has come down compared to the previous year which may be due to uploading huge information in the websites of the ministries, departments, districts, upazilas and even the union digital centres under the proactive disclosure guidelines. Cost of information amounting to Tk. 300772.00 has been deposited to the government treasury in 2015.

Filing and Disposal of Complaints
Information Commission has been vested with the powers under the Civil Procedure Code to receive and dispose of complaints relating to supply of information. A total of 1450 complaints were filed with the Commission up to 15th September, 2015 out of which 1393 complaints were disposed of leaving only 57 cases pending for hearing and disposal. Number of filing complaints and rate of taking cognizance of cases is on the gradual increase from 42% in 2011 to 71% in 2015. It reflects that people are gradually coming forward to use the RTI Act and there has been a positive indication of improvement in using the law. Of the disposed of cases fines were imposed on 10 Designated Officers and one Assisting Officer for not supplying requested information in time. Besides, 15 Designated Officers, 4 Appellate Officers have been strictly warned for their ignorance about the law. Also 7 Designated Officers have been directed to pay compensation to the concerned complainants.

Challenges faced by the Commission in the Implementation Process
Some challenges were also found active beside the progress of implementing the RTI process in Bangladesh. Non-appointment of Designated Officers in every Information Providing Unit, lack of manpower, lack of office space, not having any audio visual vehicle or equipment, lack of publicity, lack of training, tendency of the Designated Officers in maintaining secrecy of information, lack of awareness of the Designated Officers and the people about RTI law, some legal weaknesses of the RTI Act, etc are important bottlenecks for implementing RTI.

At the end it may be said that despite various challenges the progress of implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2009 in Bangladesh is aspiring. Beside the solution of individual problems by using the RTI process, the law has started rolling in the process of implementing national level plans and programmes and combating corruption. Since Right to Information Act started to play a key to the process of empowering the people there has been a slight shift in a positive direction in the process of delivering services and in the behavioral pattern of the officials. I do believe, with the participation of the mass people along with the public representatives in the practice of the RTI Act, the very objectives of introducing the law will be achieved and Bangladesh will be able to attain the sustainable development goals in time like achieving the millennium development goals.

[Writer is an Information Commissioner]



**PRIME MINISTER
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S
REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH**

Message



I am happy to know that 'International Right to Information Day' is going to be celebrated in Bangladesh like various other countries around the world on 28th September, 2016. The theme of the day this year is 'Information ensures freedom and helps to create a golden Bangladesh' (তথ্য গেলে মুক্তি মেলে-সোনার বাংলার স্বপ্ন ফলে).

In order to establish democratic rights, good governance and to prevent corruption, the present government has given special significance to implement right to information of the people. Information is a necessary component for empowering citizens. Showing due respect to this right of the citizens we passed the 'Right to Information Act, 2009' in the first session of the 9th Parliament. In accordance with the provisions of this 'law, Information Commission was constituted. As a result, the right of access to necessary information by the citizens and the mass-media has been established and people's empowerment has been accelerated.

The Awami League government has continuously been playing a pioneering role in empowering and advancing the country's mass-media in the development process of the country. During 1996-2001 term of our government, we were the first to approve private satellite television channels in the country. To further expand the scope for free flow of information, besides Bangladesh Television, BTV World and Sangshad Television, 41 private television channels have been permitted to broadcast. Moreover, private proprietorship has been established for 28 FM radio stations and 32 community radios. As a result, this has facilitated dissemination and disclosure of information, and created new employment opportunities. By the introduction of Sangshad Television the sessions of the National Parliament have been very easy to broadcast to the people. Now the country's media is enjoying complete freedom.

The role of digital technology is immense for the outreach of Right to Information. We have commenced the 'National Web Portal' with around 25 thousand websites including union, upazila, district, division, departments and ministries all over the country. The cost decline of internet usage has increased the number of internet, users to 65 million. As a result, the facilities 'for access to information have reached the citizens' doorsteps. Our anticipation on accomplishing 'Digital Bangladesh' has progressed significantly.

I believe the increased use of RTI and freedom of the press shall establish the citizens' right to information. Democracy, and good governance shall be strengthened further.

I wish every success of all the events arranged on this occasion.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Sheikh Hasina
Sheikh Hasina



**Chief Information Commissioner
Information Commission.**

Message

Right to information has been ensured for the people of Bangladesh. International Right to Information Day is being observed to ensure access to information. Like many other countries in the world, the Information Commission and government and non-government organizations are observing the day today on 28 September, 2016.

Bangladesh is a developing country built on the legacy of the Great Liberation War. The people of the country are progressive, socially-conscious, pious, and peaceful. The existing traditional laws, rules and regulations are being extensively modified in the course of development, new laws are being enacted. The Right to Information Act has been enacted for accountability and good governance to ensure the empowerment of the people. Most of the laws of the country have been made to govern citizens but the Right to Information law is for the people to practice over the authorities.

The Right to Information Act is a safeguard for society, and citizens. If any citizen wants to know about the activities, planning, and services about any government and non-government organization, office, department, division, and ministry, then he/she can get his/her required information under the Right to Information Act. According to rules, a citizen can get his or her requested information within a defined time on payment of a nominal fee.

Use of the appropriate law is helping the citizens to take the country to a newer status with the goal to create a transparent administration and a transparent society. It is now necessary to increase the demand for information. If the demand for such information increases among the people of different professions and classes, then a change in their standard of living will be assured. There will be an equilibrium of pressure in society when citizens of different classes and professions start to ask for information. This unified pressure will work as a common agenda in society. As a result, the development of society, growth, transparency, reduction of corruption, accountability—all will be achieved.

I expect that the technological development in information exchange and the change in the mentality of the manpower concerned will gain momentum. Let us be information-enriched, let us add a new dimension in the culture as well as to the development of our standard of living.

Prof. Dr. Md. Golam Rahman
Prof. Dr. Md. Golam Rahman

'We, the People' -the Owner of Bangladesh

Professor Dr. Khurshida Begum Sayeed

Emancipation of the humanity from suppression and exploitation, hypnosis and hypocrisy is the core politico-intellectual quest to build or rebuild the political civilization of the humankind. Humane conscience should precede the very quest which can only take shape through unhindered massive flow of information unfolding the secrets of all the maladies. Freedom of speech can channel the conscience throughout the socio-economic political system to stand firm before the pitiless social injustice and plagu corruption and finally to fight back the evil forces. People's Right to Information is, therefore, a pivotal panacea to break up the doors of restricted areas of Secrecy which are to keep the claws and clues of vested interests hidden therein.

An "Open-door" Public Administration is an auspicious conviction of the present Age to ensure people's entry into any component of public works funded by the Tax-payer people and meant for people's welfare.

People's ownership of the state as citizens is to be realized by their freedom to access information. The Freedom or the Right resolves that the Government and related sections or bodies of any sort involved in public interests are to be exposed and all their returns should be explicit and explanatory before the Citizens, the Sole Authority of the State. Here lies the significance of the observance of the "International Right to Information Day".

The government of Bangladesh has enacted the Right to Information 29 March, 2009 in the first session of the ninth Jatyo Sangsad (Legislature) as a law xx. This has placed the country on the high echelon of the political value-implementation functional framework so far as the spirit of liberty, equality, dignity and responsibility of the citizens of a democratic political system are concerned.

The prime responsibility bestowed upon the Information Commission Bangladesh (ICB) is to generate the "Spiriti" of the Law to the huge body of the citizens formed by more than 160 million (2016) either horizontally or vertically. The ICB is not only to carry the inherent message of the law up to the grassroots but also to activate this "Demand-side" for enforcing their legal power to enquire, supervise, check and balance the regular administrative flow process. Besides, the ICB is to train thousands of public officials, particularly the Designated Officers to be responsive and responsible to people's demand for information. It is quite a critical task for the ICB to build a new psyche of the Supply Side, in other words, help the officials come out from the age-old practices of "Restrictions" for information, for "Official Use Only". Finally, the ICB is to settle the delivery of Information on public demand (if not exempted by Section 7 of the law.) through legal proceedings giving verdict in this regard.

The ICB has undertaken various programmes for the dissemination of knowledge about Right to Information throughout the country, particularly to the new generation who are to take care of the state in near future. These programmes include, sensitization of the people of different districts, inclusion of RTI in the syllabi of Secondary, Higher-Secondary and relevant departments of the universities, seminar, discussions in universities and colleges, documentary film making, radio-broadcasting, Telecasting, research and publications as well as training of the Designated Officers, record-keeping methods, self-initiated disclosure of information etc.

It is now time for the citizens to come forward and exercise the Right to Information and resolve finally people's ownership of Bangladesh as enshrined in the constitution; it is beyond challenge.

[Writer is an Information Commissioner]



**MINISTER
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH**

Message

Right to Information is extremely important for establishing citizens' rights in the process of development of democratic Bangladesh. I am immensely pleased to know that International Right to Information Day, 2016 is going to be observed throughout the country on the 28th September with the theme 'Information ensures freedom and helps create a golden Bangladesh' (তথ্য গেলে মুক্তি মেলে-সোনার বাংলার স্বপ্ন ফলে).

Article 39 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees the freedom of thought, conscience and speech as one of the fundamental rights of the citizens. Right to Information is considered as an effective medium for people's empowerment. To increase transparency and accountability in the functioning of government, and non government, organizations is considered to be possible through people's empowerment and active participation. If we can fruitfully ensure all these by the use of Right to Information (RTI), I think, it will reduce corruption and establish good governance in the country.

With the sincere desire and intention of establishing good governance and reducing corruption government took this courageous step to pass the Right to Information Act, 2009 which was highly praised all over the world. Though the mandate for implementation of the law has been vested with the Information Commission, it cannot be fully implemented without active participation of the Govt. and Non-govt. organizations and the people of the country. People from all walks of life of the country should know the process of the law to get its benefits and should come forward for making the way of life easier and smoother to achieve people's empowerment. A clear perception about the spirit of the law and its implementation in a correct manner will play the main role for people's empowerment. I request print and electronic media to come forward more extensively in the process to publicize and implement the law.

Information Commission Bangladesh with its limited powers and resources and wholehearted cooperation of the government has been working relentlessly to reach the doorsteps of the people and trying to remove the existing impediments in the field of getting information which is, no doubt, aspiring. Information Commission on receipt of complaints from the information deprived people is ensuring its availability through hearing of the cases which has raised a positive response in the minds of the people and in the authorities. Proactive disclosure of information is on the gradual increase by the Govt. and Non-govt. authorities. I believe successful implementation of the Right to Information Act has been taking place in the country with the efforts of the Govt. and Non-govt. authorities and active participation of the people. I also believe public awareness on right to information will increase through celebration of the International Right to Information Day, 2016.

I wish every success of all the events arranged on this occasion.

May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Hasanul Haq Inu, MP
Hasanul Haq Inu, MP



**SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH**

Message



International Right to Information Day 2016 marks people's right of access to information. And it is extremely relevant to Bangladesh, as we are bound by our constitution to implement this right for the citizens. Enactment of Right to Information Act (RTI) 2009 is a milestone achievement for the present government in this regard. The theme of the Day this year in Bangladesh 'Information ensures freedom and helps create a golden Bangladesh' is indeed time-worthy.

The Right to Information Act plays a major role in setting up a well governed society as it promotes transparency and accountability in both state and non-state affairs. Citizens' right of access to information empowers them to exercise their right both in the society and in the state level.

Remarkably, Information Commission has taken a number of measures to apprise people the very basics of right to information with the help of the Ministry of Information. The ministry has successfully encouraged all public and private media to publicize the citizens' right to information.

As result of these concerted efforts, people are becoming more and more aware of the right to information and gradually becoming well versed in using this Act. As the role of Right to information Act is very important in establishing good governance and democracy in the country, I believe, people will be more enlightened through their participation in different programs organized by the Information Commission.

I wish every success of the programs to be held on the occasion of the 'International Right to Information Day 2016'.

May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Martuza Ahmed
Martuza Ahmed