

To Ensure Public Access to Information

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The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh recognizes freedom of thought conscience and speech as one of the fundamental rights of citizens and the right to information is an integral part of it. All power of the Republic belong to the people, and it is necessary to ensure right to information for the empowerment of the people. If the right to information of the people is ensured, the transparency and accountability of all public, autonomous and statutory organisations and of other private institutions constituted or run by government or foreign financing shall increase, corruption the same shall decrease and good governance of the same shall be established. There is a saying 'information is an integral driving force of our daily life'. There is no area left where there is an option to deny importance of this information.

Now we will try to find out what is information. The Right to Information Act 2009 says about information, "information includes any memo, book, design, map, contract, data, log book, order, notification, document, sample, letter, report, accounts, project proposal, photograph, audio, video, drawing, painting, film, any instrument done through electronic process, machine readable record, and any other documentary material regardless of its physical form or characteristics, and any copy thereof in relation to the constitution, structure and official activities of any authority.

What is Right to Information and why it is needed? The right to information is generally known as the right to information which is helpful in attaining the political, economic and social rights of common people, the lack of which creates obstacles in attaining these rights, hinders of the citizen's participation in the national decision - making process. The field of rights to information is created primarily due to various legal and illegal measures to withhold information. The Right to Information Act is people- friendly law. This law ensures that the government is accountable to the people. Information shall not be withheld under any pretext or the provision of all information except the information mentioned in section 7 of the Act shall be mandatory.

Under the Act, the Government officers can give information freely, as the Act has given them courage to provide information. Every authority has appointed designated officers at most levels of government structures. Authorities are now proactive to set up information desks, displaying citizens' charter, duty rosters, informing about allocation. Simultaneously, demand side community people can now have the courage to ask for information and make the authority accountable if they are not happy with their performances and can challenge authority if they are deprived from basic services. This is such an Act that has created a platform through which people from all walks of life and communities can now access their desired and necessary information, which are favorable for them. However it is important to note that the key factor of the Right to Information Act is to promote and lead to the good governance of the country. There is a close link between Right to Information and Good governance. Good governance is the vehicle for sustainable development. Right to information is related to indicators of good governance. Ensuring people's security, citizen's participation in national decision- making, best use of people's property for the development of the country. Ensuring the basic rights of citizens, transparency and accountability in governance. Ensuring right to information has a positive impact on good governance.

Some NGOs are adding their utmost efforts for individual incentive of accessing information by using Right to Information Act. Section 6 of the RTI Act ensures that every authority should publish and publicize all information related to any executed or proposed activities and decisions in such a manner which can easily be accessible to the citizens. In 2017 the Information Commission introduced Online RTI Application and Tracking System which received much appreciation from different stakeholders.

The Information Commission has been playing an important role in ensuring the people's right to information. Even at the beginning of the Corona crisis the Commission adopted virtual hearing process. At that time, no party had to appear before the Commission in person.

The countries of the world known by people as corruption free countries are oriented towards human welfare. RTI Act can play an important role to ensuring the rights of the most backward and deprived people in the society. Through the implementation of the RTI Act, it will be possible to make Bangladesh a welfare state by making people aware.

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