

A seminar titled “Two Years of RTI in Bangladesh: A Review” was organized jointly by RIB, BLAST and Nijera Kori in the VIP Lounge of National Press Club, Dhaka on September 18, 2011. The seminar was moderated by Dr. Shamsul Bari, Chairperson, RIB. Mr. Muhammad Zamir, Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh was present as the chief guest. Panel discussants of the seminar include: Prof. Sadeka Halim, Information Commissioner Bangladesh, Sara Hossain Honorary Director, BLAST and Khushi Kabir, Coordinator, Nijera Kori.

At the beginning, Dr. Shamsul Bari made a brief touch of the Keynote Paper ‘Two Years of RTI in Bangladesh’ prepared by RTI Team of RIB. Dr. Bari requested the participants to concentrate their discussion on experience of implementing RTI over the last two years. He remarked that till now many officials of the republic are unaware about the importance and proper use RTI. This demand extensive publicity and dissemination of the law. Information Commission (IC) of Bangladesh have a lot to do in disseminating as well as implementing the RTI. Assessing the effectiveness of RTI required focusing light on three major areas: assessment of demand side, supply side and the activities of Information Commission. Dr. Bari requested the participants to make constructive criticisms of the Information Commission in assessing its activities for the last two years. Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, Executive Director, RIB then presented the main Keynote paper. Booklets containing both Bengali and English versions of the Keynote paper were circulated among the participants. Panel discussant Barrister Sara Hossain in her remarks mentioned that in the past for obtaining reliable information from the respective government departments we need to lodge public litigation suits. Now we can use RTI for getting information such as number of cases lodged on road-safety and other areas from the police stations. As lawyers we can also use RTI for getting relevant information from the government. Khushi Kabir, another panel discussant congratulated the organizers of the seminar. It is not that we will involve ourselves in conflicts among the players of RTI users but it is now the time for us how to make better use of the RTI Act jointly and in a coordinated manner for the benefit of the people. She mentioned about the non-cooperative attitude of the grassroots level officers at the Upazila levels in providing information sought by the people. She suggested some changes in the *modus operandi* RTI implementation so that information can be sought both by an individual or group of individuals jointly. Prof. Sadeka Halim, Information Commissioner and a panel discussant of the seminar commented that as a Commissioner she is not defensive of the criticisms made in Keynote paper. But he suggested that in such an important paper sources should be mentioned while criticizing specific activities of the Information Commission. It is true that at the Upazila/Union level there exist no information centres and some of the officials too do not want to provide information quoting different clauses of various rules. Many of the applications lodged for seeking information are not prepared correctly. Chief Information Commissioner Mr. Muhammad Zamir congratulated RIB, BLAST and Nijera Kori for organizing

this seminar. Before preparing such a report he requested the concerned organizations to contact Information Commission for citation of correct scenarios while discussing the activities of the Commission. He informed the house that training on RTI for the local level officials have already organized in 49 districts. Officials are being trained at PATC, BARD and MJF. RIB may also help the Commission in organizing such training programmes and by providing their experienced resource persons. With the help of Commission different Mobile Phone Companies have already sent around 200 millions SMSs on RTI. He made a request to the Supreme Court Bar Association for using RTI by the learned advocates as well as in the highest court of the country so that all concerned can get copies of the judgments and other information. He emphasized for more use of proactive disclosures of information. Large number of participants from different institutions/organizations such as Dhaka University, TIB as well as individual participants from different fields took part in free discussion.