

Media's access to information to be ensured under RTI Act: Arafat

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Online Desk: State Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat today said his ministry will work proactively to ensure mass media's access to all types of information the people deserve to know under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

"We say that any government body is bound to provide all information that the people have right to know. If needed, on behalf of the mass media, I will negotiate with the government institutions in this regard," he said.

The state minister said this while addressing the inaugural function of a workshop titled 'RTI Act and Role of Media' at the National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC) in the city.

The NIMC in association with Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) organised the workshop for journalists while Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) Dr Abdul Malek and Bangladesh Bank Deputy Governor Md Khurshid Alam spoke as special guests with NIMC Additional Director General Sufi Zakir Hossain in the chair.

Arafat said the RTI Act was passed in parliament in 2009 during the Awami League government with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as the leader of the House, which actually made the government stand itself in the custody to ensure accountability and transparency in its activities.

Pointing out that the government's target is to ensure the transparency and accountability in the administration at the maximum level, he said it would be the foundation for building the Sonar Bangladesh as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"So, it is a common sense that which government can enact such law, it has no inertia to be accountable. And we also want to ensure effective implementation of the law," he added.

The state minister, however, said the journalists' approach should be professional while seeking information so that no misunderstanding is created between the information seekers and providers.

"From the both sides – journalists and government employees – we want to take a step to manifest the effective role of the law in society," he said, adding that making accurate information available within the quickest possible time would be a great strategy to combat rumor or misinformation.

Urging the journalists to remain cautious about the secret information in the national interest, the state minister said it is very important to have the ability to distinguish between public and secret information.

"Let's say about earth stations of Bangabandhu Satellite. The passwords for their operation are also information. But can you publish it through investigative journalism? Will any country allow it?" he said.

Noting some information is sensitive, which is protected under the secrecy act, Arafat said, "If you analyze the laws of European Union (EU) and its member states, and even the countries which often talk about media freedom in Bangladesh, you will find similar things in their laws."

Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) or such other bodies are actually sensitive institutions as they have to take some strategies as regulators, he added.

“For example, as a regulatory body, you are taking some strategies to take actions against indiscipline in any area under your jurisdiction. You should be kept these strategies secret in some cases until the implementation, Arafat said.

“If you leak out the strategies, then those against whom you are going to impose these will be alert, which will hamper the greater interest,” he added.

Speaking about the recent restriction on journalists’ entry to Bangladesh Bank, he said, “I talked to the Bangladesh Bank governor over the issue. The central bank authority has assured me that they will ensure free flow of all types of information in a systemic way”.

Speaking about the Cyber Security Act (CSA), Arafat said, there is a big difference between the Digital Security Act and the CSA.

There is no scope of jailing journalists for defamation under the act, he said, adding, “If you conduct a comparative study between CSA and EU laws, you will not find much difference.”

“I think the existing CSA will give protection to the professional journalism,” he said.

Principal Information Officer Md Shahinoor Miah and NIMC Director (training engineering) Md. Nazrul Islam were present at the function, among others.