

DISCUSSION MEETING ON COMMUNICATION RIGHTS, JUNE 30, 2005, DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Establishing communication rights

A discussion meeting on 'Communication Rights in the Information Society: Bangladesh Perspective' was held on June 30 in Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB) Trust auditorium, Dhaka. The meeting was attended by the teachers, journalists, NGO representatives, professional groups, CSOs and the members of the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) Bangladesh chapter.

The speakers emphasised on analysing the Bangladesh situation regarding communication rights and find out strategies to uphold it. The speakers also said about the hindrances of establishing communication rights due to a number of obstacles like official secrecy Act, corporate control over information, political influence and the influences of power holders, etc.



Ahmed Swapan Mahmud, Convener of CRIS Bangladesh chapter delivered his introductory speech mentioning the necessity of widening the CRIS campaign raising a number of issues on communication rights perspective in Bangladesh. He also explained from the CRIS charter the elements of communication rights, which are based mainly on the four pillars - creating spaces for democratic environments, reclaiming the use of knowledge and the public domain, reclaiming civil and political rights in the information society and securing equitable and affordable access. He demanded resistance to information becoming a commodity under the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs-Intellectual Property Rights regime of World Trade Organisation (WTO-GATs-IPR).

Professor Lutfor Rahman, Vice-Chancellor of Pundra University of Science and Technology stressed to widen the CRIS campaign among the students so that they take necessary measures to establish rights of the people who are vulnerable.

Arshad Siddiqui, a media activist and member of 'Janaadhikar Andolon' emphasised how to make substantial contribution to the field of communication while rhetoric triumphs instead of activities. He stressed to communication rights education at the grassroots level and develop easy materials for disseminating them at all levels.

Samar Roy, Director of Media Professional Groups stressed the importance of this campaign and widening the activities.

Dr. Tapan Bagchi, a working journalist of a renowned daily 'Amader Somoy' said of formulating a communication policy in Bangladesh and urged to make pressure to the government.

AHM Bazlur Rahman, Executive Director of Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) spoke on strategies to work further over the issue. He said about different forms of communication like theological communication, political communication, population communication, etc. and stressed in all aspects Bangladesh lag behind in communication rights.

Sohel Aorangajeb, an ICT expert said that communication rights is a vast area and stressed to formulate strategies and build up people's capacity to claim their rights on communication.

The speakers gave importance of preparing position paper and country situation on communication rights. A number of activities have been planned as a draft to implement as a short term basis which are mentioned below:

- Disseminate the CRIS charter (Bangla version) countrywide;
- Organise grassroots and national level meeting/dialogue on communication rights;
- Form an online discussion group to disseminate information regularly;
- Develop a CRIS Bangladesh website and update time-to-time;
- Organise consultation meet of the staff of CRIS local network organisations on communication rights;
- Publish a report on the current status/situation analysis of Bangladesh on communication rights;
- Review different policies e.g. communication policy, ICT policy, copy rights and patent law, etc to identify the gaps and prepare a set of recommendations to further work over the issue in own perspective;
- Develop networking and coordination with WSIS process to pursue integrating CRIS mandate;
- Facilitate people's access to and control over ICTs analysing IPR regime, WTO and contextual framework;
- Publish booklet, poster etc for opinion mobilisation to build a knowledge society which will bridge the gap of digital divide. ■

For more information visit www.voicebd.org/cris.htm