

LearnEng with Shahan

Written English for BCS/ Bank

Lecture - 02

Reading Comprehension

Read the following passage and answer questions No. 01 - 07:

Arunendu works for the Rangamati Hill District Council in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region of Bangladesh. He is known for his dedication and commitment to public service. So his office appointed him the designated official (DO) to deal with Right to Information (RTI) queries from the public. On receiving RTI applications from journalists and the general public, Arunendu seeks the advice of his seniors in order to prepare the replies.

In his own words : "As the Hill Council has to deal with many government departments, in preparing replies to people's RTI applications we need to seek information from several offices. Officials at such offices sometimes say there are objections from the authorities on sharing information." Arunendu, however, does not take 'no' for an answer. "I caution them that if I don't get the information from them and cannot satisfy the people who have asked for them, they would be in trouble too, not only me." This level of dedication to the RTI act in a public servant is rare. And yet, in order for the RTI Act to succeed, citizens must believe that the law was enacted to promote open governance and public officials must realize that it is meant to be respected or else they may have to face its sanctions.

The two sides involved in implementing the law - citizens who seek information and public officials who provide it - both find it difficult to believe that the government is serious about opening up its vast reservoir of information to public scrutiny. Citizens, long used to secretive governance, are instinctively skeptical about the sincerity of government's intention to be transparent and accountable. Public officials are equally unconvinced that the government really wants them to disclose information to the people which was previously denied and for which public servants took the oath to secrecy when joining service. In other words, citizens must feel confident that they may ask public officials for most of the information held by the government without fear or justification.

Public officials, on the other hand, must understand that citizens are entitled to obtain such information as of their right and not as of grace. More simply put, citizens are the rights-holders and public officials the service providers. There are encouraging signs that we have made a start towards this mindset. This was confirmed at a seminar in Dhaka last month, organized to discuss the findings of a research project on the prospects and challenges of the implementation of the RTI Act in the country. What was most heart-warming about the seminar was that almost half of the large gathering was composed of

government officials. They belonged mostly to the Cabinet Division of the Government, which spearheads the implementation of Government's National Integration Strategy (NIS).

An integral part of this strategy is the promotion of people's right to information. In fact, the Cabinet Secretary to the Government, who was the chief guest at the seminar, endorsed many of the recommendations that were made. As was expected, the research findings indicated that there was still a great deal of hesitation on the part of government officials to play their role under the Act in a robust manner. Many public servants are appalled by RTI applications from people who would tremble even to speak to them in the past. Such findings were, of course, not very pleasant for many government participants at the seminar. Some claimed that the picture was perhaps not always so negative. They felt that some of their colleagues were slowly but surely opening up to their responsibilities under the law, though their numbers may still be very small. We very much hope that they are right. We thought it useful, therefore, to focus in our column this month on two positive stories from the government side. They were reported to us by MRDI, an important NGO of the country, dedicated to the promotion of the RTI Act. Both our individual examples are cited from MRDI's.

Arunendu, our public servant in the Hill Tracts, explains to reluctant officials that if they do not cooperate by providing the requested information under the RTI Act, people could exercise their right to appeal to higher officials or even complain to the Information Commission, which has quasi-judicial power even to penalize them. He thought that as a member of the public, he himself expected certain services from government offices like the one he was serving now. He said, "So I like to create an environment in the District Council so that people can get access to all the information they require."

As there was no provision for people to seek information through formal written procedure before, a culture of providing information has not developed. Now together with the filing of RTI applications, and subsequent appeals that may follow, one can seek legal redress if s/he is not furnished with the information. So for obvious reasons, officials holding the information are now bound to change their mindset and share information with the people. For example, in the past there were no conscious efforts to follow the government rules on recruitment for public jobs through a quota system. There were many instances of job quota violations. Not anymore. Now there is RTI fear. Officials in charge of recruitment can now afford to disregard undue lobbying from high-ups in favor of the candidates of their choices."

Part – A

01. Answer the questions below. Do not copy any sentence from the passage above. Write the answers in your own sentences having your own wording and phrasing. 3 × 10 = 30

- a. What is Arunendo's reply if other officers refuse to expose the desired information?
- b. What does the law about RTI say?
- c. Why do people and officials find it difficult to believe that Government is really willing to open up with all sorts of information?

- d. How can RTI accelerate the efficiency of the government?
- e. What does the recent research say about the implementation of RTI?
- f. Why in the past did people tremble to ask for necessary information from the officials?
- g. What are the mindsets of the officers in regard to providing the asked information?
- h. What can people do if they are denied the requested information?
- i. What makes the official compelled to provide the sought information?
- j. How can RTI make people aware of the transparency of the government?

02. Guess the meanings of the following words/expressions using contextual clues (the words are underlined in the passage). 5 × 1 = 5

- a) Caution; b) Sanction; c) Skeptical; d) Grace; e) Endorse

03. Fill in the table by putting words in the empty cells according to their parts of speech.

5 × 1 = 5

Noun Verb Adjective

- (a) No
- (b) Negative
- (c) Month
- (d) High
- (e) Rare