

INTERNATIONAL RIGHT-TO-KNOW NEWS STORIES

“Health Risk Kept From Residents for 2 Years” By Ann Rees, *The Toronto Star*, 20 September 2003

The findings of a year-long investigation conducted by the Atkinson Fellow in Public Policy revealed how the Canadian government tries to obstruct access requests. Specific records exposed by the study showed how in one instance the government had euthanized 7,209 raccoons from 1999-2002 for rabies, but that only 16 raccoons had tested positive for the disease. The document noted how release of this document may be detrimental for public relations as the cost of the program was \$2 million. In another case, documents showed how Ontario’s environment ministry waited two years to inform local health authorities that carcinogenic chemicals had contaminated the groundwater in one neighborhood. When a local resident filed a FOI request that would have covered documents on the two-year wait, he was instructed to limit the dates of his search, which in effect excluded the damaging information from the request. Former workers in a nearby factory claim that at least 19 of their co-workers have already died of cancer.

“Transparency for Land Deal” *Shanghai Daily News*, 20 September 2003

The Shanghai Housing and Land Administrative Bureau will release information on land plots available for open bidding every month in order to improve transparency in land leasing transactions and to curb corruption in the bidding process. The new transparency process will allow interested developers equal access to information on land and will go so far as to report any manipulation or abuse of the bidding system. If any transaction is accomplished through backchannel negotiations or favoritism, the bid will be reviewed and annulled. To support urban renewal projects in Shanghai the bureau has indicated that low-income residential housing projects will receive preferential treatment.

“Kohl Files Could Be Opened” *International Herald Tribune*, 18 September 2003

An administrative court ruled the East German Stasi secret police files on former Chancellor Helmut Kohl could be released, in effect overturning a March 2002 federal ruling. Researchers, journalists and historians have asked to see Kohl’s 2,500-page file, which Kohl himself has viewed and has appealed the decision of the court’s to disclose. There continues to be speculation that the file may shed light on a party financing scandal that discredited Kohl and damaged his conservative party. The head of the agency overseeing the archives stated that she believed Kohl should be allowed to defend himself against the file, but that his file should be released as the former leader should not be exempt from laws applying to others.

‘Right to Information’ Comes in Handy for Get[ting] Municipal Work Done”
Press Trust for India, New Delhi, 11 September 2003

Residents of New Delhi have begun to use the Right to Information Act to compel authorities to finish long-pending civic projects. In the low-income sections of city the change is apparent as development projects that have been pending for over 20 years are finally being completed. One resident of Sunder Nagari who was tired of waiting for the authorities to finish installing a sewer that had been under construction since 1983, applied for documents recording the progress on the project. The sewer was

quickly completed. The Right to Information Act, enacted in Delhi in 2001 is empowering the community as it affords them the right to hold their officials accountable.

“Presidency Dissociates Itself From ‘Controversial’ Nigerian Oil Deal”
BBC Monitoring Africa, 24 July 2003

Documents requested by the Democratic Alliance revealed a controversial outcome of an oil deal between South Africa and Nigeria. A lucrative oil contract meant for South Africa and secured with South African President Thabo Mbeki’s help was reportedly diverted to an offshore company with no benefit for South Africa. The controversy partially stems from a misunderstanding about Mbeki’s insistence to Nigerian government officials that the deal was between governments. The Democratic Alliance requested documents from Mbeki’s office under the Promotion of Access to Information Act.

“Hospitals Oppose Plan to ‘Cohort’ Patients” By Eithne Donnellan, *Irish Times*, 22 July 2003

Opposition to a cost-cutting proposition in Dublin’s hospitals was uncovered by the release of documents under Ireland’s Freedom of Information Act. The Eastern Regional Health Authority proposed to a number of hospitals that they group together, or cohort, so-called bed-blocking patients into defined areas to save on costs. A document prepared by a director of nursing, however, vociferously rejected such an idea, citing inadequate facilities, services, and levels of nursing care if the changes were adopted.

Members of Canada’s Armed Forces Stealing and Reselling Ammunition: CBC”
The Canadian Press, 21 July 2003

According to documents obtained under Canada’s Access to Information Act, there were 10 incidents of theft from Canadian military bases since 1997. Items missing included mine detectors, smoke grenades, handguns, and explosives. In 1997, three kilograms of C4 plastic explosives -- enough to level a building -- were stolen from a training exercise in British Columbia. According to CBC News world, the weapons are either sold by soldiers or kept as souvenirs

“13 Claims of Corporal Punishment Investigated in Schools”
By Kathryn Holmquist, *Irish Times*, 26 June 2003,

According to documents obtained by The Irish Times under the Freedom of Information Act, thirteen cases of alleged corporal punishment in primary schools have been investigated by the Department of Education in the last school year, 21 years after Ireland banned corporal punishment in schools and 16 years after it was made a criminal offense. Of the 13 cases, one remains unresolved and continues to be under investigation by the Department.

“Price-Fixing Row Over BP’s Russian Oil Deal – British Firm Risks Becoming Embroiled in Litigation With New Partner”
By Terry Macalister and Mark Hollingsworth, *The Guardian*, 26 June 2003

Documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act threatened to sink a £4.2bn merger between Russian and Britain oil giants BP and TNK. BP was planning to merge with TNK before revelations surfaced that could land Britain's largest company in court. The documents obtained by The Guardian were from a separate case brought against TNK by Canadian-based oil group NoreX Petroleum, in which BP attempted to prevent TNK from obtaining American loans. The information "threatens to embarrass BP" and could have an effect on the signing of the agreement.

"Gun Registry Boss Spent \$205,000 Traveling to Work in Ottawa From Edmonton"
By Alexander Panetta, *The Canadian Press*, 25 June 2003

"Editorial"
Red Deer Advocate, 21 July 2003

Documents obtained under Canada's Access to Information Act showed some very questionable spending habits by legislators who were involved in creating Canada's gun registry. Reports showed that the Canadian Firearms Center spent \$13 million on travel expenses, including \$493,000 on "hospitality" over a 5-year period. Documents also revealed that a former chief executive officer for the Center spent \$205,000 over two years commuting to his office in Ottawa from Edmonton. Taxpayers funded 56 flights, according to documents obtained by the Canadian Alliance. This revelation eventually forced a ranking government official to resign in the midst of public outcry and accusations of government corruption.

"Report: Mexican military breaks long silence on justice proceedings"
AP Newswire, 24 June 2003.

The notoriously secretive Mexican military, in an attempt to comply with the country's new freedom of information law, has released detailed statistics on court-martials. The Mexican Defense Department reported that since President Vicente Fox took office in 2000, there have been 299 courts-martial, including 210 convictions. Mexico's Federal Transparency Law went into effect June 12, requiring all branches of government to provide copies of public documents -- from government employees' salaries to details about public programs and government contracts -- within 20 days of any citizen's request. Military officials have already begun giving the media access to selected judicial proceedings, such as when Fox ordered the release of former Brig. Gen. Jose Francisco Gallardo in 2002. A military court had sentenced the general to 28 years on charges of corruption and insubordination following his advocacy of a military human rights ombudsman.

"Landmark Ruling May Open Doors for Investors." *Cape Times* (South Africa), 23 June 2003.

In a first for South Africa, a private company has been ordered to open its financial records to a shareholder. The Cape Times (South Africa) reports that a small businessman in a small Western Cape town has won a big victory for investors in private companies - but may also have created logistical nightmares for them. Last week a private company was ordered in terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act to give a shareholder access to its financial records, a privilege that neither the Companies Act nor common law gives shareholders. Public companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange are obliged to do so, however.

“JH Spends 1.47 Mil. Yen to Treat Politicians.” *Daily Yomiuri* (Japan) 9 May 2003.

Documents obtained under the Japanese Information Disclosure law, show that the Japanese Public Highway Corporation spent about 77 million yen on entertainment, between fiscal years 2001 and 2002. The report indicates that a total of 1.47 million yen was spent to wine and dine 11 lawmakers on 17 different occasions between fiscal 2001 and 2002. The Political Funds Control Law prohibits the public corporation and other government-related organizations to donate money for political activities. The lavish meetings, held at expensive Japanese-style restaurants and hotels, might be in violation of this law. In 11 of the 17 meetings, the public corporation spent more than 10,000 yen for each participant. Alcoholic beverages were reportedly often served during the meetings.

“Korea to Release Portions of Cabinet Meetings.” *The Seoul Yonha*, 3 April 2003

The Seoul Yonha, a semi-official news agency in the Republic of Korea, reports that the Government Administration and Home Affairs Ministry will begin to make sections of the minutes of Cabinet meetings available to the public. According to Kim Doo-kwan, the Home Affairs Minister, "We will open the minutes of Cabinet meetings to the public that do not require special security clearance by consulting with Cheong Wa Dae and taking into account the opinions of other ministers." He added that while the ministry will maintain a degree of secrecy concerning minutes related to national security and diplomatic issues, the general trend will be to move toward giving the public more access to information on the details of Cabinet meetings.

“Ecaar Wins Arms Skirmish.” *The Cape Argus* (South Africa), 27 March 2003

The Cape High Court has ordered the government to hand over the full affordability study done before South Africa entered into a controversial arms deal. The Economists Allied for Arms Reduction (ECAAR) who brought forward the suit, claimed in court papers that the government's financial commitment to the arms deal infringes the socio-economic rights of poor people to improved housing, health care, food, water, social security and education. ECAAR wants the court to declare the loan agreements unconstitutional and nullify the arms deal.

“Public Access to Information Legislation in Bulgaria Still Inefficient, Experts Say”
Bulgarian News Digest, 18 March 2003

Although legislation was passed giving Bulgaria a Freedom of Information Act in 2002, access to information was routinely classified because of a faulty classification scheme. According to a study by the Bulgarian Programme for Access to Information Foundation, almost 4 out of 5 individuals seeking the Foundation's assistance were facing problems with the application of Bulgaria's FOIA. The number of lawsuits against state officials who have denied access continues to grow because of what

observers feel is a misapplication of the recent law. But in one lawsuit, the Access to Information Programme won documents showing that the Minister of Science and Education had illegally rented out part of the Ministry's lobby to a private company, and then claimed he had no documents because they had been retired to the national archives.

“Russian PM Signs Decree Increasing Publication of Official Information.” *WMRC Daily Analysis*, 17 February 2003

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov on signed a decree requiring the government and federal executive bodies to post information about their activities on their official websites. Among the types of information that will be disclosed to the public are pieces of legislation and their amendments, courts' decisions regarding the abolition of certain pieces of legislation and their amendments, personal information about government members, and texts of international agreements.

“Freedom of Information is the Last Thing These Manipulators Want.” By Ryle Dwyer, *The Irish Examiner*, 15 February 2003

Using the Freedom of Information Act, Irish Examiner Reporter Carl O'Brien was able to procure copies of letters that contradicted the Finance Minister's claim during the last general election campaign on May 13, 2002 that “no significant overruns are projected and no cutbacks whatsoever are being planned secretly or otherwise.” The documents show that on February 26, 2002, the Department of Finance instructed other department to cut 13 million from their budgets so that money could be diverted into initiatives of the Departments of Health and Justice for announcements to be made during the general election campaign. Then on April 17, the Department sent out a further letter ordering that an extra 19 million should be pared from the budgets of various departments to fund the expansion of the primary school building program announced during the election campaign. Thus the electorate was deceived about the expenditure of 32 million of their own money, to facilitate a series of election announcements.

“DEP Knew of Leaking Toxic Waste for Decade”
By Michael Southwell, *The West Australian*, 8 February 2003

“Sawmill Clean-Up Cost Secret”
By Michael Southwell, *The West Australian*, 15 March 2003

FOIA documents from the State Government revealed the presence of cancer-causing arsenic at the Pemberton sawmill site, showing that the Department of Environmental Protection was alerted about the pesticide waste dump in 1989, but did little to stop the pollution or warn the public until late 2002. Documents obtained by *The West Australian* using FOIA reveal that arsenic contamination had been detected in brook sediments and soil on the river flats near the toxic sludge pits by early 1990. Government officials agreed to share the cost of cleaning the 56,000 total cubic meters of contaminated material with the landowners.

“Bahrain Marks a First in Open Government; Transparent Bidding.” *Gulf Daily News*, 6 February 2003.

For the first time ever, bids for four government projects in Bahrain were opened in public. Contractors and suppliers who bid for the jobs, as well as the press, watched as sealed boxes were opened at the Bahrain International Exhibition Centre. "The tendering process is so transparent that no contractor can later claim that there was a fabrication or that he gave a lower price than the one who was awarded the contract, said Finance and National Economy Ministry Under-Secretary and Tender Council member Shaikh Ibrahim bin Khalifa Al Khalifa."

“Bush Complies With Court Order to Release US-Chile Free Trade Pact Documents; FTAA Negotiations Next Target for Public Access.” *U.S. Newswire*, 3 February 2003.

The Bush administration today, in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit filed in November 2001 by Earthjustice on behalf of the Center for International Environmental Law, Friends of the Earth, and Public Citizen, has made public documents revealing U.S. and foreign government positions in trade negotiations concerning the recently completed U.S.-Chile Free Trade Agreement. The documents offer the public its first view of a trade negotiating process conducted behind closed doors that will have dramatic impacts on domestic public health, labor, and environmental laws.

“The Philippines: A Liberal Information Regime even without an Information Law.” *Freedominfo.org* web posting, 17 January 2003.

A study conducted from April to May of 2002 by the Philippines Center for Investigative Journalism reveals how accessing public records despite not having any formal access to information laws is hit or miss. It took student interns only a letter of request and a week to get from the House of Representatives the asset statements of all congressmen from the Central Luzon region from 1998 to 2001. At the Senate, a letter and a day-long wait yielded the statements of all 24 senators for 2000 and 2001. But statements from 1998 to 1999 could not be immediately located and were released only after 28 days from the time the students put in their request. The two offices proved to be the exception rather than the rule when it comes to releasing statements of assets and liabilities of public officials. The Presidential palace however refused to release the statements of all members of former President Estrada's Cabinet, saying these were "confidential" documents that could be released only to the government officials themselves or to law enforcement agencies for use in court cases

“Blair Sent Swedish PM Thanks for Sven” *M2 Presswire*, 23 December 2002

Documents obtained by BBC journalists under the Swedish freedom of information laws revealed several thank-you and congratulatory notes from Tony Blair to the Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson. The BBC sought the documents from Sweden after the British government initially rejected the request for possible “damages to foreign relations.” In all, about 20 letters were released, on topics from the World Cup to Mr. Persson’s BBC radio interview.

“Japanese Government to Disclose List of South Korean Forced Laborers”
BBC Monitoring, 20 December 2002

The Japanese government delivered a list of almost 110,000 names of Koreans who were forced to come to Japan and work during World War II as part of a court settlement. The government was reluctant, however, to disclose the list to the public, saying that the Japanese freedom of information laws do not require such information to be available for public disclosure. The court required the Japanese government to disclose the names to the families of the laborers.

“Politicians Bill Taxpayers For Novel, Passport: Ontario Tories’ Expenses.”
By Robert Benzie and April Griffin, *National Post*, 7 December 2002

According to documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, Ontario taxpayers were billed by Conservative politicians for a copy of Bridget Jones’ Diary, a visit to Winston Churchill’s wartime bunker in London and a Cabinet minister’s passport so he could jet to Italy. In releasing 12,000 pages of documents, Conservatives were apparently hoping to bury some of the more tawdry details of government waste. Instead, books such as “Podium Humor” (\$19.95), “Keys To Great Writing” (\$29.99) and “A World of Ideas: A Dictionary of Important Theories, Concepts, Beliefs and Thinkers” (\$24) were all uncovered.

“Czech Cabinet Ministers Submit Property Statements”
BBC Monitoring, 3 December 2002

In accordance with the Czech laws on free access to information, Czech government ministers submitted property statements detailing income and assets to government officials. Anyone seeking to obtain this information can now request it in writing

“Who Chooses the Righteous Gentiles?”
By Chris McGreal, *The Guardian*, 14 November 2002

A judge ruled that a memorial council must release its files under Israel’s freedom of information law, bringing a degree of openness to a process that had sparked much controversy among Israeli citizens. Israeli courts entered the conflict between a body of reform Jews and the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial over the selection of names for the “Avenue of the Righteous,” a memorial to non-Jews who helped Jews during the Holocaust.

“Green Watch Wins Bujagali Ppa Case.” *All Africa News*, 13 November 2002.

Relying on the open government clause of the Ugandan constitution a top Ugandan judge, Justice Egonda-Ntende, on Nov. 12 ordered the release of a key document about a controversial dam project

that the Ugandan government and the World Bank declined to disclose. The Power Purchase Agreement, whose very existence the Ugandan government denied during the court proceedings, defines the business arrangements relating to a controversial River Nile dam project. Critics of the so-called Bujagali Dam, which is funded by the World Bank, argue that the commercial terms misstated the benefits of the electric-generating dam.

“Revealed: How Howard Brushed Aside the Tampa’s Medical Alert”

By Marian Wilkinson, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 October 2002

Previously classified documents released under FOIA revealed Australian Prime Minister Howard’s misrepresentation of several key facts surrounding the “Tampa Incident,” a controversy over a sinking boat of asylum-seekers that sparked a change in governmental policies towards border protection. The incident involved a military operation to turn away asylum seekers off the coast of Christmas Island. Although the Prime Minister told the Australian Parliament shortly after the incident that “nobody was in need of urgent medical assistance” on board the asylum-seeking ship, documents reveal a military doctor’s assessment stating that two individuals on the ship were actually in “urgent” need of medical attention. Hundreds of released documents were released to the *Sydney Morning Herald* after a drawn-out Freedom of Information battle.

“Ministries Give Farewell Gifts to Bureaucrats, Amakudari Jobs.” *Asahi News Service*, 22 October 2002

Efforts to curb bureaucrats “descent from heaven” have been less than divine. The practice of Amakudari, the descent of retired government bureaucrats into cushy jobs in the private sector, remains rampant not only among career-track officials but also among lower-ranking officials. It, in fact, is even customary for ministries to help the officials land their post-retirement jobs. Using the information disclosure law, the *Asahi Shimbun* obtained government documents covering the paths of 2,418 central government workers in non-career track positions who retired during the last three years. About 36 percent, or 866 of the former government officials, landed jobs at companies that had won contracts with the bureaucrats’ former offices.

“29 Immigration Officers Disciplined Without Publicity.” *Japan Policy and Politics*, 30 September 2002

The Japanese Justice Ministry has disciplined 29 immigration officers over a series of mostly unpublicized offenses ranging from forgery of official documents to hit-and-run traffic accidents and street fighting. A *Kyodo News* survey discovered that disciplinary measures had been taken through information obtained under the freedom of information law. According to the documents obtained under the FOI law, an Osaka immigration officer forged an investigation paper in 1998 in order to make a personal contact with a foreign national. The officer duly obtained the address of the foreigner and visited the person. The officer’s supervisor saw the forged paper, but the incident did not surface until the victim filed a complaint with the immigration Bureau. Officials said the disciplinary measures were not made public out of concern for staff privacy and the nature of some of the incidents.

“Old Agreement Leaves Wireless Internet Market Hamstrung”

By Karlin Lillington, *Irish Times*, 6 September 2002, p. 55

According to documents obtained in Ireland under the Freedom of Information Act, a deal arranged between four companies in 1999 is severely hampering attempts to bring wireless internet service to the country. Documents show that the deal brokered with the help of the Office of the Department of Telecommunications Regulation is now “in grave danger of backfiring.” The agreement makes it difficult for regulators to reallocate or change the terms of licenses even though one of the license-holders has folded and the other three claim they are struggling to meet the terms of their commitments. At the time the agreement was signed it was intended to cement positions for the four companies to bring service to Ireland. Government officials, however, were largely unaware that such an agreement existed, and the delay in broadband Internet access within the country has become a political and economic sore subject.

“Supreme Court: Public Body Must Reveal Details of Contracts”

By Dan Izenberg, *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 August 2002

Contracts between government entities and private companies in Israel are now open to the public, thanks to a court ruling that publicizes contracts unless there are special circumstances that override the Freedom of Information Law. The ruling came on an appeal by a private planning and building company against a lower court ruling in favor of Amir Liran, who asked to see the contract signed by the Israel Lands Administration (ILA) and the private company and the terms of payment to the authority from the company. The ILA asked the company whether or not it agreed to hand over the information and it refused. Liran petitioned Tel Aviv District Court against the ILA decision and won.

From *Asahi Shinbun*, July 19, 2002

According to minutes of a panel of experts charged with setting compensation standards for victims of “Minamata disease,” Japan’s national government sought to minimize areas designated as affected by the disease in order to limit compensation payments. Minamata disease is a condition caused by mercury poisoning that leads to debilitating health problems, especially sensory disorders. Beginning in the 1960s, thousands of residents of the southern island of Kyushu acquired the disease by consuming seafood contaminated with mercury. Disclosure of the minutes under Japan’s national freedom of information law provides a public record of comments by individuals appointed to oversee the payment of compensation to victims.

“Tax Controversy: OIC Orders Release of Details.” *The Nation (Thailand)* 6 July 2002

Thailand’s Official Information Commission (OIC) ordered the Revenue Department to release the details of three tax decisions that are believed to favor stock transactions conducted by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his wife Pojamarn. The Revenue Department had refused to divulge the information citing a provision about the confidentiality of taxpayer information. The OIC however, ruled that the tax rulings were public information and that the relevant authorities must ensure access to such information. The commission reminded the Revenue Department that it could, under the Official Information Act, delete parts of the material deemed to violate the right to privacy.

“Mexico President Releases Once-Secret Government Files” By Amparo Trejo, *AP*, 18 June 2002

“Forgetting is Not Justice: Mexico Bares Its Secret Past.” By Kate Doyle, *World Policy Journal*, Summer 2003

Mexican President Vicente Fox released 60,000 secret intelligence files collected by the military, government departments and a variety of police agencies from 1952-1985. The move came a week after Fox signed the Transparency and Access to Information Law, which removes restrictions on public access to official documents. Human rights activists hailed the move as a positive step but have cautioned that its long-term impact will depend upon how much access the government grants. Amnesty International, for instance, condemned the “disappearances” of Mexican civilians at the hands of the country’s security forces since President Fox took office, urging the release of information and documents related to these disappearances.

“Prosecution keeps records on '87 airline bombing under wraps.” *The Korea Herald*, 28 May 2002.

The prosecution turned down a civil petition filed by 14 family members of the victims under the Freedom of Information Act, seeking the disclosure of official documents on an airplane crash perpetrated by North Korean agents in 1987, officials said yesterday. The Korean Air Flight 858 blew up over the Indian Ocean in November 1987, killing all 95 passengers and 20 crewmembers. The Seoul District Public Prosecutor's Office (SDPPO) made the decision April 13, refusing to reveal SDPPO documents related to the investigation and trial of a North Korean agent, Kim Hyun-hee, one of two North Korean agents who planted plastic explosives on the ill-fated aircraft. "The disclosure of the information would pose a clear and present danger to public security, as well as to crucial national interests in defense, reunification and diplomacy," the SDPPO said of the decision. However, the relatives did succeed in persuading the National Institute of Scientific Investigation (NISI), a National Police Agency affiliate, to publish the autopsy records of Kim's 69-year-old accomplice. Earlier, the Government Archives & Records Service publicized a partial record of Kim's trial at the request of one of the 14 relatives.

From *Asahi Shinbun*, 10 January 2002

More information on medical errors at national hospitals should be made available to the public, an appeals tribunal held in a Health Ministry case under the Japanese freedom of information law. The tribunal’s proposals include naming doctors and detailing when and how the incidents occurred – a dramatic departure from previous Japanese practice of citing personal privacy to avoid release of such information. The recommendations, all of which to date have been followed, represent the first specific standards for malpractice-related disclosure. They are expected to remove the secrecy surrounding malpractice cases. The review board panel recommended that details such as the date and time of the incident, the date of the first examination and the department in charge, be disclosed, along with the names of the doctor in charge, any doctor who performed an operation and others involved in the patient’s medical care. It also said information on medical practices related to malpractice cases and

the causes of errors should be made public, as should the minutes of malpractice reviews by in-house panels.

“Organic Activists Win Freedom of Information Case, Agency Must Disclose Location and Owners of Transgenic Crops.” *Santiago Times*, 7 January 2002.

Organic farmers and public interest attorneys won their first ever “freedom of information” case on January 4, when a Santiago court ordered Chile’s Cattle and Agricultural Service (SAG) to disclose information concerning the location and ownership of transgenic crop farmland, where bioengineered crops were growing. The lawsuit was filed on July 27, 2001 after SAG officials repeatedly denied requests, the first dating back to October of 1999, by zoologist Maria Isabel Manzur, to reveal information concerning the location and ownership of transgenic crops in Chile. In a December 13, 2000 letter, SAG explained that “unfortunately the location of these transgenic crops—which this organization must constantly review and monitor for quarantine purposes – is confidential in nature and is kept in safekeeping because of factors relating to competition.”

From *Yomiuri Shinbun*, July 11, 2001 and other sources

Immediately upon the launch of Japan’s national freedom of information law on April 2, 2001, Japan’s major newspapers filed requests for minutes of meetings held by the Financial Rehabilitation Commission (FRC). The FRC was created in 1998 and charged with overseeing the inspection of Japan’s banks and making recommendations for remedial action. FRC recommendations led to the nationalization of two major banks and the injection of more than fifteen trillion yen (more than \$ 100 billion) of public funds into fifteen others in early 1999. This action saved the nation from a possible meltdown of the banking system due to massive portfolios of non-performing loans. Although many critical details were blacked out, thousands of pages of documents were released and provided the material for lengthy front-page stories in all major newspapers and other detailed coverage in the media.