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## NATIONAL

### Opposition sets new boycott record, TIB for law banning boycott

The Ninth Parliament (January 2009 - November 2013) witnessed record high boycott of parliamentary sessions (342 out of 418 working days, almost 82%) by the main opposition. Besides, rampant quorum crisis wasted more than 222 hours; the estimated cost of which is more than Tk 104 crore. These were revealed at the release of "Parliament Watch on Ninth Parliament" – a regular study conducted by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) over the years to assess the governance situation of the National Parliament. To overcome this noxious practice, TIB recommended for enacting law on banning Parliament boycott. Ms Juliet Rosettee, Programme Manager and Ms Morsheda Akter, Deputy Programme Manager of Research and Policy, TIB jointly presented the findings of the study at the press conference to release the report on 18 March at capital's CIRDAP auditorium. M Hafizuddin Khan, Member, Board of Trustees; Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director and Dr Sumaiya Khair, Deputy Executive Director, TIB were also present. TIB initiated its "Parliament Watch" study back in 2001 and till 2014 a total of 10 reports have been released.

According to the study, MPs of the Ninth Parliament spent very poor time (8.2 percent) of the total 1331 hours in 19 sessions for law-making purpose and only 57 of the 350 lawmakers took part in this. They took only 12 minutes on an average to pass a bill compared to 20 minutes in the Eighth Parliament. The Ninth Parliament witnessed alarming increase of businessmen-turned-MPs (57 percent) compared to the First Parliament (17.5 percent). On the other hand, the number of lawyers-turned-MPs was very low (14 percent). The study revealed an increase in attendance of lawmakers in parliamentary sessions from 55 percent in eighth parliament to 63 percent in ninth parliament. The formation of all parliamentary committees in the first session was another positive feature of the Ninth Parliament.

Strategising on making the parliament more effective Hafizuddin Khan said, "lack of strong political will is making the Parliament weak and less effective." "There is no alternative but a strong opposition to make the Parliament effective" he added.

Iftekharuzzaman said, "The boycott culture is one of a kind in the world, completely embarrassing and akin to disrespecting people's mandate."

TIB tabled 21 points recommendations for a strong parliamentary democracy, making the parliament effective and above all turn it into the hub of accountability. Key recommendations include passing a law banning parliament boycott, making rules against absence of sessions for more than 30 consecutive sittings and annulment of membership in applicable cases, convening sessions at least for 130 days a year and continue every session for at least six hours, enactment of MPs Code of Conduct Act etc.



## **TIB urges effective implementation of laws for ensuring food safety**

Immediate gazette notification of Safe Food Act 2013 was stressed for its effective implementation at the press launch of the study titled “Safe food governance: challenges and the way forward”. The study was conducted by TIB and was released on 20th March at the Hotel Abakash in Dhaka. The report also said that the absence of exemplary punishment for adulterators, legal bindings, and coordination gap among authorities, city centered monitoring system and inadequate manpower are the hindrances of governance in food sector of Bangladesh. Mr Md Shahnur Rahman, Programme Manager of Research and Policy, TIB presented the findings of the study. Advocate Sultana Kamal, Chairperson, Board of Trustees; Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director; Dr Sumaiya Khair, Deputy Executive Director and Mohammad Rafiqul Hassan, Director, Research and Policy were also present during the release.

Citing data of World Health Organization (WHO), the report said around 45 lakh people are being affected every year in Bangladesh by consuming adulterated food. The report identified limitations of existing act and laws, lack of their implementation, absence of proper monitoring and accountability system behind this malpractice of food adulteration. According to the study the newly passed Safe Food Act 2013 was yet to be published through a gazette notification and hence not being implemented. The study said, although the government has taken many positive steps to fight food adulteration, absence of an integrated food safety system is limiting the expected goal.

TIB report also identified lack of coordination among ten food adulteration prohibition related agencies and that move against food adulteration was mainly capital centric. Besides, food adulterators manage food inspectors, field officers and custom officials with unethical transactions which range from 500-10000 Tk.

Executive Director of the TIB said: “We demand to form a safe food authority to reduce food adulteration”. “The culprits must be brought to book” he added.

The report also revealed that there is shortage of manpower in the departments responsible for ensuring food safety-only 78 sanitary inspectors against the approved organogram of 370 are working in 319 municipalities and 11 city corporations. Also, 30 posts of the BSTI field officers under districts and divisional levels have remained vacant for a long time. In addition, the infrastructures are not strong enough to tackle the grave situation of food adulteration. For example there is only one food court under Dhaka North City Corporation.

To overcome the governance challenges to ensure food safety, TIB placed sixteen point recommendations including amendment of Safe Food Act 2013 and its quick implementation, introduction of provision of taking legal actions by consumers, amendment of the Consumer Rights Protection Act 2009, and establishment of food courts at all districts and metropolitan cities.

## **TIB condemns Shipping Minister’s remark on crossfire and demands immediate withdrawal**

TIB condemned Shipping Minister’s remark supporting extrajudicial killings through crossfire terming it “necessary” and “countrymen have accepted crossfire” to root out terrorism from the country. The minister made the statement during BBC Sanglap programme.

The organisation also demanded immediate withdrawal of this remark. “No citizens are above the law but the statement of the Minister to eliminate terrorism through crossfire is unconstitutional, undemocratic and against the rule of law,” said TIB ED Dr Iftekharuzzaman in a statement on 9 March.

“We hope it is not the stance of the government and hope the Prime Minister and the parliament will soon clarify this”. “The minister should immediately withdraw his remark dishonouring democratic value” he added.



## **TIB condemns toll collection by Finance Minister, demands disclosure of info**

In a press statement issued on 10 March, TIB condemned Finance Minister's move to collect toll from the non government organisations to finance world record attempt of singing national anthem by record number of people on the eve of upcoming T20 World Cup. The organisation also urged him to stop such toll collection as it is contradictory to article 20(2) of the constitution. "The government should disclose the collected amount, its source and detail expenditure info" said Dr Iftekharuzzaman. "This kind of toll collection from local and foreign firms is a severe example of deterioration of the country's politics and governance scenario," he added.

TIB feared that the businessmen who will pay such tolls will tend to be corrupt by taking favour from state power. "This move is corruption friendly, unconstitutional and contradictory to governments to curb corruption" the statement said.

## **CCC NEWS**

### **Mothers are playing important role in enhancing quality education**

Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) of Brahmanbaria organised a Mothers' Gathering followed by a prize giving ceremony at Mirhat



Government Primary School aiming to motivate the students and guardians of the school to enhance

quality education. The programme held on March 18 was chaired by Tapas Kumar Adhikary, District Primary Education Officer and moderated by Mohammad Arzu, Convener of the Education Sub-committee of CCC. Guests and participants shared their opinion and made some recommendations on improving the quality of education and over development of the school.

### **Khagrachari: Peoples engagement in improving health services**

On March 16, CCC Khagrachari arranged an opinion sharing meeting with district health authority to exchange views and recommend improvement strategies for services from the hospital. Dr Narayan Chandra Das, Civil Surgeon of Khagrachari Hill Tracts District presided over the meeting. CCC members including Dr Ananta Bihari Khisa, CCC President were also present. CCC acknowledged the improvement of service delivery during last few months in the hospital. CCC made some recommendations including regular meetings with the Hospital authority, uninterrupted power supply, posting of eye specialist; appointment of specialist doctors, separate toilet facilities for male and female etc. to improve the service delivery situation further.

### **Kalakhali Union Parishad an 'Island of Integrity'**

Kalakhali Union Parishad (UP) under Sadar Upazila of Pirojpur District has signed an 'Integrity Pledge (IP)' to promote transparency, accountability and people's participation in their activities. CCC Pirojpur organised a 'Face the Public' programme at Pukharia Girls High School premises where this tripartite pledge was signed. This tripartite agreement include Kolakhali Union Parishad, Union Citizen's Committee and Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Pirojpur. The IP was signed by Advocate Nasir Uddin Ahmed, Chairman of Union Parishad, on behalf of Union Parishad Mr Enayet Kabir Khan, on behalf of Union Citizen's Committee the Convener of the Committee, and Advocate Md. Sahidullah Khan, Vice-President of CCC. Chaired by the Convener to the Local Government Sub-Committee of CCC Advocate M. A. Mannan, the programme was moderated by CCC member Ataye Rabbani Firoj. Chairman and member of the Union Parishad replied various questions relating to development activities of UP, future plan, existing problemmes etc.



## All 45 CCCs observed 'International Women's Day'

All 45 CCCs observed 'International Women's day' with the theme of 'Good Governance and Effective Control of Corruption for Equality of Women'. Programmes included rally, discussion meeting, gatherings, cultural events, theater show, debate competition, campaign, distributing leaflet and facilitating Satellite Advice and Information Desk. A position paper on International Women's day was presented in the discussion meetings. Speakers in these meetings stressed for changing the existing patriarchal attitude. They also stressed for combating corruption to ensure equality for women. Representative of government and non-government institutions, civil society activists, cultural and social activists, journalists, students, local people attended those programmes along with CCC, Shojon, YES members and YES Friends attended these observations.



## YES initiatives to stand against corruption

YES group of CCC Jessore organised a number of events including cycle rally, theatre show, discussion meeting and cultural programme as a part of their campaign against corruption with the slogan 'Invincible Youth Shall Surely Resist Corruption'. Deputy Commissioner of Jessore Md. Mostafizur Rahman and General Secretary of Jessore Institution Sheikh Rabiul Alam inaugurated the cycle rally at the Town Hall premises. CCC President Abu Saleh Tota and other members were also present in the event. A number of 300 young people encircled the main roads of Jessore town in a bid to raise awareness against corruption.

Immediate after the rally a drama titled 'Rukhe Darao Bangladesh' was staged by the theatre group of YES. A discussion meeting on 'The role of youth to curb corruption' was also held on the same day. The discussion was focused on the spearheading the role of youth in every sphere of society. After the meeting, 17 cultural organisations performed in the anti-corruption cultural programme. Approximately 800 people were reached through this campaign.

## TIB NEWS

### Young debaters debate on equality, respect and honour for women



Jannatul Rafea, Mehedi Hasan of Dhaka University and Shakil Ahmed of Jagannath University were adjudged as the best debater, first runner up and second runner respectively among 150 young debaters from 17 institutions. They participated in the TIB organised debate competition focusing on anti-corruption and equality for women from

15-16 March. Education Minister Mr Nurul Islam Nahid, MP gave away the prizes and certificates on 16 March - the closing day of the competition. Secretary General of TIB's Board of Trustees and noted writer Selina Hossain attended the event as the Special Guest. Earlier the event was inaugurated by the State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Ms Meher Afroz Chumki, MP. Member of TIB board of trustees Rokia Afzal Rahman was present as the Special Guest. Executive Director of TIB Dr Iftekharuzzaman presided over both the ceremonies.



The competition was organised by TIB with this theme “Good governance and effective control of corruption for equality of women” to celebrate the International Women’s Day 2014. The objective of the competition was to sensitise college and university students on women rights and gender equality, raise awareness on repression against women as well as affect of corruption on them and above all encourage them stand against corruption through social movement.

In the opening session, participants questioned the minister on various women development issues. Basana Chakma – a young volunteer from CCC, Rangamati said, “The condition of women in my area knows no bounds and Government needs to act to ensure education and safety for Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) women.” She then questioned, “What will your government do to bring an end to repression against CHT women?” Yeasmin Khatun, another volunteer from CCC, Rajshahi asked, “Some of our friends have suggested counseling for harassed women as a preventive measure to tackle untoward situation. But I do believe counseling is very much needed for teasers as well.”

Education Minister stressed on the need for the world class education to ensure equal rights and respect for male and female. He sought cooperation from all students to resist women harassment through social movement.

Citing from a survey, Dr Zaman said, “Women are more emotional, honest, less likely to give and accept bribe than men and greater good of the society is always a priority to them”. “Countries where women have been politically empowered at national and local level, performed better in Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)” he added.

The young debaters also raised questions about women’s security and education in Chittagong Hill Tracts, cyber crimes, reserved seats in Parliament, stalking, sexual harassment, counseling in educational institutions and workplace, and gender issues in madrasa education.

TIB’s Programme Manager (Gender) Kazi Shafiqur Rahman presented a position paper highlighting the current status of women in Bangladesh and placed 11 point demand for realisation of women’s rights in the country.

educated at a Sirajganj village said “I will share this recognition with girls of the school I studied and encourage them to win challenges ahead”

## Members Day Held



Chaired by Member Dr Md. Nuruddin, the quarterly meeting of TIB Members titled ‘Members Day’ was held on 20 March. At the beginning, members observed one-minute silence in memory of TIB’s life member late Syed Fyyaz Husyn. This meeting was more like an ‘Open House’ event where Members discussed on contemporary issues and shared their opinion on strengthening anti-corruption social movement.

**Editor:** S. M. Rezwan-ul-Alam    **Sub-Editor:** Meer Ahsan Habib    **Design:** Barkat Ullah Babu

**Write us :** Transparency International Bangladesh, e-mail: [advocacy@ti-bangladesh.org](mailto:advocacy@ti-bangladesh.org)

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