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NATIONAL

Turn BTCL into a complete public limited company within 6 months

Even after 6 years of transformation from the Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTTB) to Bangladesh Telecommunication Company Limited (BTCL), the company never became a profitable and service oriented organisation. This was revealed at the release of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) conducted study titled 'Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited: Governance Challenges and Way Forward' on 30 April. In order to save BTCL and turn into a profitable company, the study recommended to turn BTCL into a complete public limited company within next 6 months. Dipu Roy, Programme Manager, Research and Policy presented the findings of the study. M Hafizuddin Khan, Member, Board of Trustees; Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director; Dr Sumaiya Khair, Deputy Executive Director and Mohammad Rafiqul Hassan, Director, Research and Policy, TIB were also present during the release.

The study identified some major achievements of BTCL including installation of 72 optical networks, optical fibers in 108 unions, 17 exchanges in 3 districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts and internet protocol based interconnection exchange; capacity to connect 47000 Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) broadband internet connection; introduction of e-system in different government and district administration offices; reduction of internet, phone connection and call charges etc.

Despite these achievements; various management limitations accompanied by corruption and mal-governance

BTCL is fighting for existence. Major challenges towards governance of BTCL are running the BTCL board mainly by non-technical government officials, complexities in appointing managing director, absence of procurement policy of its own, shortage of skilled human resources according to the new organogram, political influence and adoption of policies in favour of private telephone companies etc. The report revealed that without doing any market survey, the government issued International Gate Way (IGW) license to 25 companies and as a result international incoming calls came down to 209 crore minutes in 2013 from 357 crore minutes in 2010. Apart from these, absence of state of the art call record system caused BTCL revenue lost worth BDT 1500 crore. Among other irregularities, BTCL experienced political appointment, lack of accountability in promotion and transfer, illegal Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) by using BTCL gateway and bribery in delivering services to customers.

Commenting on its performance Hafizuddin Khan said "It is quite disappointing that quality of BTCL services have gone down since its transformation. The company should not focus only on earning profit rather focus on earning customers satisfaction".

Iftekharuzzaman said, “Although government’s logic behind making BTTB into BTCL was to make it a profitable concern but absence of an effective and conducive development plan made BTCL a losing concern. Government should come up with an implementable development plan and turn BTCL into a complete public limited company without delay.”

The study proposed 15 recommendations of which reduction of ministry’s interference over BTCL; transformation of BTCL, Tele Talk and Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Limited (BSCCL) into a single company, floating of shares within the quickest possible time, formulation of rules for appointment of managing director as well as other officials, annual wealth disclosure of all officials are major.

Updated rules for Management of Cooperatives stressed

A TIB conducted study titled ‘Management of Cooperatives: Governance Challenges and Way Forward’ stressed for updated rules for effective functioning of cooperatives and bring accountability in operations. Mohammad Hossain and Nihar Ranjan Roy, Deputy Programme Managers, TIB presented the findings of the study at the press launched held on 15 April 2014 at the Hotel Abakash in Dhaka. Advocate Sultana Kamal, Chairperson of 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.

The study analysed data collected from 37 cooperatives operating in 6 divisions, 8 districts and 11 upazillas using four indicators – types of cooperative, level, monitoring institutions and geographical location. It identified a number of positive steps taken by the government including enactment of Cooperative Societies (amendment) Act 2013, mandatory monthly inspection, increased allowance for trainees, field investigation in case of registration, departmental actions against corrupted officials, formation of ad-hoc committees to protect interests of members of cooperative indicted for corruption.

Despite these positives steps, ineffective implementation of these steps resulted in lower performance of cooperatives. According to the report, various limitations in registration, monitoring and evaluation, audit, structural weakness of monitoring institutions, internal management limitations and corruptions hindered the cooperatives from achieving the desired results. Quoting a Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) study, the report said that 47% of the cooperatives are ineffective. On the other hand media reported misappropriation of BDT 9700 crore by 21 different multipurpose, lending and savings cooperatives affecting 900000 members. The report revealed that unethical transactions ranging from BDT 8000-10000 take place during registration process. This goes higher depending on geographical coverage and ranges from BDT 35000-80000.

Commenting on the report findings, Sultana Kamal emphasised on promoting governance and establish effective monitoring of cooperatives. She said “Cooperative Societies must be brought under effective monitoring so that these reflect people’s aspirations”.

The report revealed other irregularities including registration of cooperatives without proper field investigation, absence of joint audit, preparation of financial statement in exchange of money, lending at a very high interest rate ranging from 30-45%, concealing actual profit during audit, formation of cooperatives for political purpose and whitening of black money through cooperatives.

To overcome these challenges and reduce incidences of corruption, the study recommended 22 measures of which updated rules for implementation of the amended act, developing a cooperative policy, proper allocation of resources, rescheduling of cooperative banks, proper inspection prior to registration and effective coordination among Department of Cooperatives and Bangladesh Rural Development Board are major.

Elected representatives for Zila Parishads recommended

TIB recommended reforming Zila Parishads by holding elections and handover the administrative responsibility to the elected representatives; reduce influence of Member of the Parliament (MP) and fitting distribution of responsibilities between Deputy Commissioners and Zila Parishad Chairmen. These recommendations were tabled at the press launch of a TIB conducted study titled 'Zila Parishad in the Local Government System: Challenges of Governance and Things Need to be Done' on 9 April at the Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management (BIAM) Foundation Auditorium. Nahid Sharmin, Deputy Programme Manager, Research and Policy, TIB presented the findings of the study. M Hafizuddin Khan, Member, Board of Trustees; Dr Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director; Dr Sumaiya Khair, Deputy Executive Director; Mohammad Rafiqul Hasan, Director, Research and Policy, TIB were also present during the launch.

Zila Parishads though being considered as an important local government institution (LGI) in country's local government system, it could not be effective as expected. Political parties for years pledged to reform Zila Parishads through holding elections but made a U turn and appointed party men as Administrator to run this LGI. Zila Parishad Act was enacted in 2000 but election never took place during last 14 years. Plus limitations of this act have been exploited to politically control Zila parishads. In addition, influences of the MPs and bureaucrat's reluctance toward people's engagement in the district level administration have resulted in weakening Zilla Parishads. There are evidences that local influential quarters and politicians are in possession of Zila Parishad's property and in many cases they have used their influences to limit its income for their personal interest.

Responding to the journalists Hafizuddin Khan Said "Local government system was more powerful and effective during the British rule. Because of present central control over the system, it has now become significantly weaker. We want an effective system free from central influence".

Dr Iftekharuzzaman said, "Empowerment of Zila Parishad has been brought to pause by not holding elections and as a result, we have witnessed lack of coordination and irregularities and non-existence of accountability mechanism in running this institution." "We want elected public representatives to run Zila Parishads" he added.

The study identified a number of other challenges in making Zila Parishads effective. These include; lack of capacity, dependency on government grant, corruption in recruitment of officials, use of Zila Parishad as party office, non-existence of both short and long term development plans etc.

To overcome these challenges, the study placed nine recommendations including clear determination of government's authority over Zila Parishad through amendment of Zila Parishad Act 2000, appointment against vacant posts, coordination with other LGIs through monthly meeting, coordination between the administrator and the chief executive officer etc.

Workshop on Land Governance and Monitoring

On 27 April a workshop was organised jointly by Association of Land Reform and Development (ALRD) & TIB on Land Governance and Monitoring issue. Representatives from the association and CCC members of TIB participated in the workshop. The participants were divided into 3 groups. They identified some governance challenges in land management in group works. The workshop stressed on developing a joint monitoring mechanism comprising of like minded organisations to identify governance challenges in this sector and also run advocacy programmes with the government and concerned authority to address these challenges.



CCC NEWS

Service provider-recipient dialogue: An accountability tool for improved services

Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) of Nalitabari arranged an opinion sharing meeting with the health service providing authority and service recipients on April 16 at the Auditorium of Nalitabari Upazila Health Complex. The meeting was presided over by CCC President Sarker Golam Faruq. Upazila Chairman Md. Abdus Sabur attended the meeting as the Chief Guest. Project Driving Change (PDC) project assessment team members Colin Knox and Fahmeeda Wahab also attended as guest observers. Patients participated in the meeting pointed out some problems regarding health service from the hospital such as irregular attendance of doctors, absence of doctors in the emergency department, lack of infrastructure, irregularities at outdoor department, lack of discipline, scarcity of patient's beds etc. The Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer (UHFPO) Dr. Md. Harun or Rashid committed to take appropriate initiatives to solve these problems.

Quality of education improved in Primary School

CCC Jhalakathi organised a Mothers Gathering program on 17 April, at Gabkhan Govt. Primary School, Jhalokathi. The program was organised with the objective to empower mothers of the students of the school so that they can ask for accountability from the school authority and also contribute in enhancing the quality of education of the school. The program was presided over by SMC President Md. Enamul Haque. Chairman of Gabkhan Dhanshiri Union Parishad Mr. A. K. M. Jakir Hossain attended the program as the Chief Guest. CCC President Prof. Gulnagar Begum and Headmaster of the school Mia Asaduzzaman also attended the program.



Bengali New year observance and Anti-corruption campaign of YES

On 14 April CCC and YES of Jhenidah observed the Bengali New year and organised an anti-corruption campaign at the Wazed Ali Government Primary School premises. Deputy



Commissioner of Jhenidah Md. Shafiqul Islam inaugurated the campaign. Administrator of Zila Parishad Adv. Abdul Wahed Joardder and Superintendent of Police Md. Altaf Hossain, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Sheikh Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md. Julker Nayan were present as Special Guests. CCC President Ms. Sharifatunnesa, Vice-President Md. Abu Taher participated the program. More than five hundred people from different walks of the society took part in the campaign and vowed to be engaged in the anti-corruption social movement.

On behalf of mothers Mst. Asma Begum and Tania Akter took part in the open discussion. The Chief Guest paid his sincere attention to the discussion aiming to solve different degrees of existing problems and assured his all out support to solve these problems. The gathering concluded through awarding 18 meritorious students for their brilliant academic results.

Accountability Practice at Chapainababganj Municipality

CCC Chapainababganj organised a Face the Public (FTP) program at the Ward no. 5 of the Chapainababganj Municipality on 24 April. Mayor of the Municipality of Chapainababganj Al-Hajj Mawlana Abdul Matin was present as the Chief Guest and CCC President of Chapainababganj Advocate Md Shaiful Islam Reza presided over the FTP. The Mayor answered questions raised by FTP participants and promised to solve these step by step. He urged for peoples participation to promote governance in Chapainababganj Municipality.

World Health Day observance

“Vector-borne diseases: Protect yourselves” with the slogan CCCs observed World Health day on 7 April. Different awareness raising activities like rally, discussion meeting, and satellite AI-desk were held to mark the day. All these activities focused on strategising ways to live hygienic life and to avoid infection. Cross section of people from different profession took part in the program arranged in different CCCs across the county.



YES NEWS

Drama Jabanbandi Calls for governance in garment sector

On the eve of the first anniversary of Rana Plaza tragedy on 24 April, the deadliest garment-factory accident in the history of modern civilization, the Dhaka YES Theater team observed the day by staging the drama Jabanbandi on 23rd April at TSC, Sarak Dweep. The tragedy cost 1,135 lives mostly of ready-made garment (RMG) factories that housed Rana Plaza.

‘Jabanbandi’ is a production of Dhaka YES theatre that pictured various anomalies like violation of labor rights and building code particularly in the RMG sector. The drama also threw light on working environment, ensure labor rights, and address gender issue. Finally it appeals to the concern authority and the government to adopt necessary measures to bring an end to all anomalies.



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