

South Asian TI Chapters express concern over shrinking civil society space: Call for space and transparency in climate finance

Transparency International (TI) Chapters of South Asia- Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka expressed deep concern over the shrinking space for civil society and climate activists in the South Asia region. The TI Chapters also called for a space and transparency in climate financing in a joint declaration wrapping up an integrity talk on climate finance governance jointly organized by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and Transparency Maldives (TM) on April 25-27, 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand.

In the declaration, the TI Chapters observed with disappointment, civil society actors throughout the South Asian region are increasingly restricted in their work, often on unjust and politically



motivated grounds. They noted with further concern that rights-based civil society organizations in particular are being subjected to further restrictions by the imposition of new legal and policy provisions often in the name of national security that are also curtailing fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of opinion and freedom of association. They also observed, relevant authorities do not seem to

realize that such restrictions are fully contradictory to not only their constitutional and legal commitments, but also the series of international pledges that they have made by being state parties to international conventions and covenants.

The TI Chapters demanded that national government institutions ensure the existence of a constructive and safe operational space for the functioning of NGOs and climate activists since a safe space for these groups is an essential element to ensure accountability and transparency in the use of public money, including climate funds, they observed. They called on the governments of the South Asia region to refrain from any actions or initiatives



that may threaten civil society space, including reform of laws and policies to restrict the fundamental freedoms and rights of the public to voice their opinions and demands.

The participating TI Chapter asked the developed country governments and multilateral funding institutions for extending support to their push for civil society space to ensure that funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation is delivered as committed and used transparently and accountably. They observed that the use of climate funds in a way that effectively benefits the most climate vulnerable communities can only be ensured in a context where civil society organizations have the necessary space to operate, and rights of activists and whistle blowers are fully protected. Restricting civil society space is the most convenient means of promoting and condoning various forms of corruption and impunity by undermining transparency and accountability.

The TI Chapters called upon all stakeholders, including governments, multilateral institutions, civil society and the private sector to actively build partnerships to ensure that climate finance and action initiatives are undertaken with the overarching goal of reaching the most vulnerable people and contribute towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

TIB urges for effective measures to stop questions leakage for a merit based Bangladesh

TIB called on the government to take effective steps to stop the incidents of questions leakage to rebuild a merit based country through ensuring good governance in the education sector. Through holding nationwide anti-questions leakage human chains on April 1, 2018 TIB demanded exemplary punishment to the culprits involved in question paper leakages. TIB also demanded reducing the number of steps between preparing question papers and distribution, and increasing punishment for the leak-sters up to 10 years of imprisonment by reforming the section 4 of the Public Examinations (Offences) (Amendment) Act, 1992.



Besides the centrally organized demonstration at the Student-Teacher

Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University in the morning TIB's Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) separately organized human chains at the country's 45 locations in which TIB members, officials, YES and YES Friends members, CCC and Shojon members and students, teachers and social activists participated.

During the human chain at the TSC of Dhaka University, Mohammad Rafiqul Hassan, director of research and policy of TIB said, the impact of question leak is very lengthy and dangerous, although it seems that it is a small corruption. Such impact exists till the professional life. There is a few example of punishing the leak-sters comparing to the number of question leak incidents. He said, some people, who are involved in coaching business, play a significant role in question leak. The government should increase supervision in this area, also in the social media where the questions spread. He said if the menace is not stopped, the country will not be built based on good-governance and merit, he added.

TIB announced a nine-point demand which includes providing incentive to teachers to stop coaching business and increasing supervision to stop misuse of information and communication technology, publishing the investigation report on the recent question paper leaks and taking necessary measures, and ensuring the application of laws to ban supplementary books, which are almost identical to guidebooks.

TIB backs single authority for centralized role at RMG



Concerted efforts by relevant stakeholders followed by tragic Rana Plaza collapse have gained considerable amount of progress in establishing good governance at the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. However, significant shortcomings still prevail in the major foreign currency earning sector and a lot of reform initiatives taken since the deadliest incident are yet to be implemented, a fact-finding research study by TIB observed. The study, citing lengthy judicial process associated with the Rana Plaza collapse and other industrial cases an unfortunate impediment to trying the people responsible for the deadliest garment incidents recommended formation of a speedy tribunal for quick disposal of the cases, and establishment of single authority in the long run for centralized supervision and coordination in regulating issues to speed up the implementation of the reform initiatives.

The fact-finding study, fourth of its kind, since Rana Plaza collapse aimed to review the progress and current state of the notable reform initiatives taken after Rana Plaza incident to establish good governance in the sector. To unveil the study findings of the report titled “Good Governance in the RMG Sector: Progress and Challenges”, TIB organized a Press Conference at its Dhaka office

on 26 April 2018 where Chairperson, Board of Trustees of TIB Advocate Sultana Kamal and Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman were present. Mohammad Rafiqul Hasan, Director, and Md. Waheed Alam, Senior Programme Manager, of Research and Policy division of TIB also attended the event. Nazmul Huda Mina, Assistant Programme Manager, Research and Policy division presented the research findings at the event.

The study observed that factory owners have been continuing disproportionate attention to the growth of RMG export and sustaining their businesses; however, rights of workers and their social protection have not received due attention. Legal limitations prevail for ensuring rights of workers. avoiding tendency of both the relevant government entities and buyer parties in reforming factories. According to the study, 39% of 102 different initiatives, taken by stakeholders since the 2013 industrial disaster, had been implemented, but a whopping 41% of targeted activities had not yet been implemented while the remaining 20% of tasks were making slow progress. The study recommended to set up a single authority in the long run for centralized supervision and coordination in regulating issues to ensure transparency in the apparel sector as factory owners needed to obtain licenses and clearances from 17 departments in absence of coordination among the regulatory bodies.

Conducted in between May 2017 and March 2018, the study identified significant progress in the areas of safety and security in factories, supervision, labor wages, efficiency of government organizations. However, challenges have been identified in setting up fire stations, appointment of required inspectors, making the online services user-friendly.

Some 400,000 workers lost their jobs as around 1,200 factories were shut down for different reasons following the Rana Plaza disaster that left 1,134 workers dead and countless more maimed, the study revealed. According to the report, lack of political will and influence of factory owners persist which influence the formation of a conducive environment for ensuring workers' collective bargain. According to the study, 40 out of 102 major initiatives in the last five years by factory owners, the government, buyers, and retailers to strengthen the workplace safety and improve workers' rights were fully implemented, 42 are still under process and 20 have been closed down.

Citing the findings, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said “Though the sector achieved notable progress in the past five years, a majority of the initiatives which have been implemented mainly focused on expanding the business of factory owners, generating profits and increasing productivity. Unfortunately, the workers were not getting the benefits of the progress and the initiatives that could have improved labor rights have not been fully implemented to date. Exporters, importers and producers did not properly bear the responsibility of strengthening working place safety.” The existing trade unions are still being controlled by a section of influential leaders deployed by factory owners. As a result, workers can't enjoy the benefits of the labour law reforms, he added.

Advocate Sultana Kamal said, “The reform measures taken by factory owners are meant to maximize their benefits and safeguard their businesses, not to protect workers’ rights. Apart from

owners, workers are a big stakeholder of a factory. Therefore, it's imperative that both parties work for the betterment of the industry."

On the other hand, there have not been notable progress regarding compensation for the loss of job, commensurate compensation for accident, maternity benefits, freedom of association, social



safety for severe injuries etc. Risks prevail for durable improvement of the sector due to financial and technical inability of RCC. Further, due to inordinate delay in legal process, punishment cannot be dispensed to the offenders of accidents and worker rights and accountability of relevant stakeholders cannot be ensured. There is no safety inspector in 147 RMG factories, and the absence of necessary fire-extinguishing equipment in many high-rise factories also poses significant fire and explosion risks. The study in its recommendation part, stressed to stop such unethical practices including closing factories, not compensating workers in case of termination and not offering fair prices of apparel items, withdrawal of the provision of giving group insurance premium from the Central Fund.

On slow progress of Rana Plaza trial, Advocate Sultana Kamal blamed the prevailing trend of impeding quick disposal of cases at the judicial system through unfair influences and legal loopholes by the influential class. "Though the incident took place in broad daylight, there is still no penalty on the main charges. This is very unfortunate and such efforts of influencing the system bring negative impacts on reform initiatives and overall governance" she added. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Those responsible for the industrial accidents are yet to be brought under the jurisdiction because of a lengthy process and others. In some cases, we believe, there are lack of political willingness," He recommended formation of a speedy tribunal to quickly dispose of the cases filed against industrial accidents including Rana Plaza building collapse.

According to the study, the surviving Rana Plaza victims and relatives of the deceased have not received compensation yet, as the money that has so far been provided to them was financial assistance. Dr. Zaman said, "Compensation and financial assistance is not the same thing. It is a matter of concern that the Rana Plaza victims are yet to get compensation which is a collative failure of the government, factory owners and buyers. Concerned authorities should take immediate steps to settle the issue with high importance as it is related to overall governance."

To ensure good governance in the RMG sector, the study recommended, among others, to ensure legal rights of workers specially in setting wage, overtime, leave through a coordinated effort of all stakeholders and government oversight with enhancement; ensure creation of a fund with the participation of relevant stakeholders for ensuring compliance of sub-contract and small factories and easy access to the fund of those factories; enhance financial and technical capacity of the RCC have through collective efforts of the government, buyers and ILO; and appoint neutral observers to oversee the operations of RCC and bring the buyers under legal obligation for making the operation of RCC sustainable.

TIB airs concern on BAB's proposal regarding Bank Reporting Act

TIB aired deep concern over the Bangladesh Association of Banks' proposal of formulating the Bank Reporting Act apparently to stop the publication of the reports on corruption and irregularities occurred in the bank and financial sector. Denouncing the proposal of the country's privately owned banks' association TIB termed the proposal illegal, unacceptable, corruption-friendly and opposite to public interest. Opining that the act will promote corruption in this sector by saving the persons involved in corruption and irregularities TIB urged the government and Bangladesh Bank to refuse the illogical proposal.

In a press statement on April 2, 2018 Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, the anti-public proposal will encourage irregularities and corruption in the banking sector. A Bank Reporting Act is needed, but not to create obstacles on the way to disclosing information on corruption, irregularities and frauds, rather to create an environment so that such information can be *disclosed* freely.

Dr. Zaman also said, the banking sector has no right to confuse people and spread corruption by creating obstacles to disclosing information. The people have the right to get all sorts of information of corruption as well as positive ones about private banks. He stressed the need for forming an unbiased advisory committee to take effective measures and to identify short term, mid-term and long term strategy ensuring participation of all stakeholders to solve the ongoing crisis in the private banking sector.

Though these banks are run privately, the sector is truly dependent on public money. People have a right to know about negative information like corruption and irregularities alongside reporting on positive issues. The country's banking sector is passing through a setback due to some hasty decisions made by a vested quarter, added Dr. Zaman.

TIB expresses concern over some controversial sections of the draft civil service act 2017

TIB expressed worry over some controversial sections included in the report of the sub-committee formed by the Cabinet Division to analyze the draft Bangladesh Civil Service Act 2017. In a press statement released on April 27, 2018 TIB also urged the authorities to review the draft towards building an accountable, transparent, efficient and people-friendly public administration with skilled manpower.

In the statement, Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, said some debatable conditions, including the provisions of seeking permission from authority before arresting an accused government employee on criminal offences, provision of not suspending instantly a government employee awarded with more than one-year sentence to jail have been kept in the draft act. There is also a provision in the draft act to reinstate any government employee to his/her position after being sacked by the authority or punished by the court. The provisions hinder the efforts to ensure a neutral public administration with government employees with higher professionalism, he added.

Dr. Zaman also said, the provision which requires prior government approval to arrest a government employee accused in a case involving professional responsibilities before the submission of charge sheet is discriminatory and it goes against the spirit of the country's constitution. The provision is also contradictory to the government's pledge in curbing corruption in the government sector. Authority of the Anti-Corruption Commission will be reduced if the draft act is incorporated, he said, demanding removal of the provision from the draft act. Some other provisions of the act should be revoked so that the public administration can work ignoring the political influence and pressure, he added.

TIB also called upon the government to make public the draft act through website and keep the window open for inclusion of new proposals so that the stakeholders can put forward their opinions for greater public interest.

CCC News

Head Teachers and SMC Presidents Join Together to Improve the Quality of Primary Education

Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Kushtia with cordial support from District Primary Education Office organized a Coordination Meeting with SMC Presidents and Head Teachers at Disha Hall room in Kushtia on 23 April 2018. Head Teachers and School Management Committee (SMC) Presidents of 25 Government Primary Schools under Kushtia Sadar Upazila put forward a number of recommendations in the meeting in order to improve transparency, accountability and quality of education. They also made action plans to improve the quality of education. The meeting was presided over by CCC President Md. Rafiqul Alam Tuku while Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Kushtia Md. Jahir Raihan was present as chief guest and Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Md. Hasan Habib, Sadar Upazial Nirbahi Officer Julia Sukaina, Assistant



District Primary Education Officer (ADPEO) Md. Sanaul Habib and Upazila Primary Education Officer (UPEO) Saida Siddiqua were present as special guests.

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) urged the Head Teachers and SMC's Presidents to build a merit based Bangladesh through creating free flow of information, ensuring people's participation and uninterrupted teaching. He said that free flow of information, people's participation and awareness of parents are required to achieve targets declared by the government as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). GO-NGO combined efforts are needed to increase the quality of primary education. DC advised the Head Teachers and SMC Presidents to replicate the model followed by 60 No. Karimpur Govt. Primary School in order to improve the quality of education in their respective schools. DC assured to provide necessary support from District Administration to implement the action plan made by the participants in this meeting. ADC (General) also emphasized on the joint efforts of teachers, SMC and local citizens in order to increase the quality of education. He showed interest to get involved in the monitoring process of the action plan. UPEO assured to provide all sorts of cooperation for the improvement of schools that are lagging behind.

In the open discussion session, the participants stressed on the ethics and moral education, regular and timely presence of teachers in school, ensuring joyful learning in the classrooms, proper utilization of educational materials, raising awareness of parents, reducing drop-out rate of students, facilities of pure drinking water and toilets, increasing free flow of information, and ensuring transparency and accountability in all activities etc.

A power point presentation on the activities taken by CCC, Kushtia in increasing quality of primary education was presented by Area Manager of TIB Md. Areful Islam. Among others CCC Vice-President Dr. Sarwar Murshed, CCC Member Dr. Md. Abu Daud, Shahjahan Ali, Head Teachers, SMC Presidents and Upazila Education Officers spoke in the meeting.

Meeting with Madhupur Upazila Land Authority: Initiative to increase the quality of services

CCC, Madhupur organized a meeting with Madhupur Upazila Land Authority on 25 April 2018 with an aim to increase transparency, accountability and citizen's services in land sector. Assistant Commissioner (Land) Md. Mahbubul Haque presided over the meeting where CCC, President Dr. Mir Forhadul Alam Moni explained the objective of the meeting. In the meeting AC (Land) Md. Mahbubul Haque shared different initiatives and plans of Madhupur Land Office to increase the quality of services. He stated that the authority is committed to take measures required for delivering better services to the people. All the gaps



have already been identified and effective measures will be taken accordingly, AC (Land) added. He sought cooperation from CCC in this regard.

Summary of baseline reports on Madhupur Land Office and Sharankhola Union Land Office were shared in the meeting. The reports showed that there is no Designated Officer in the Sharankhola Union Land Office. On the other hand, despite the display of Citizen Charter at Mahdupur Land Office, the information is not updated. The initiatives by Madhupur Land Office for proactive disclosure are visible, but still there are scopes for improvement. As most of the land owners are not aware about land development tax, they are not informed properly on whether the actual land tax according to the quality of land is fixed up or not by Union Land Office. In most of the cases people communicate with Union Land Office instead of AC (Land) Office for mutation process and they face problems. Due to lack of campaign on khash land, people's awareness is below expected level. It is also reported that there is acute shortage of man power in these offices.

CCC also put forward a number of recommendations in the meeting for the sake of improvement of services which included increasing mass campaign to ensure transparency and accountability in land services, organize sharing meeting, ensure free flow of information, assignment of Designated Officer and set up of Complain Boxes in these offices. AC (Land) pointed out that the CCC's recommendations have been taken into account. He assured to undertake joint initiatives with CCC, Madhupur to increase the services.

Alhajj Abdus Samad Talukdar, Convener of CCC's land Sub-committee shared CCC's activities and plan aiming to increase the quality of services of Madhupur Land Office. Area Manager of TIB Md. Habibur Rahman Chowdhury was the moderator.

Public Hearing with Water Development Board on Climate Finance Issue

CCC, Dinajpur organized a public hearing program with Dinajpur Water Development Board (WDB) on 5 April 2018 at 9 No Viyal Union Parishad premises of Chirir Bandar Upazila with an aim to ensure transparency, accountability, integrity, participation and opinion from areas affected by climate change where government's Climate Change Trust Fund's projects are being implemented. CCC's Climate Finance Sub-Committee Convener Md. Mozaffar Ali Milon presided over the meeting while CCC member Principal Hazera Hasan delivered welcome speech.



Implementation of climate finance project activities and proper utilization of funds, impact of climate change, quality of completed works and its maintenance etc. were discussed in the program. The beneficiaries put forward their opinions on the activities of 385 kilometer embankment protection project along the Kankra River with a projected budget of 3 crore taka.

Executive Engineer of PWD answered all the questions raised by community people in the program. The people living in the land erosion areas asked Executive Engineer of PWD about the government allocation of budget for building more embankments in their areas. He said that more cooperation from community people is required to ensure proper utilization of BCCT funds. He assured to take initiatives when problems arise after completion of the project. PWD authority mentioned that maintenance of the project activities is the responsibility of local community especially to the Union Welfare and Disaster Management Committee. In addition, a 7 member's committee has been formed by CCC. They could monitor the activities.

The community people as well as PWD authority appreciated the initiative and thanked TIB- CCC for organizing such an event where the community people got opportunity to express their concerns and opinions. Among others UP Chairman Narendra Nath Roy, UP Secretary Md. Firojul Islam, UP Members, Sub-Divisional Engineer of PWD Md. Mansur Ahmed, Deputy-Assistant Engineer Md. Siddiquir Rahman and other engineers, CCC and SWAJAN members and community people attended the program.

Faridpur Municipality meets the public

Mayor of Faridpur Municipality Sheikh Mahtab Ali Methu along with the Councilors from different wards answered various questions raised by its citizens in a 'Face the Public' program held on 23 April 2018 at Ambika Memorial Hall in Faridpur. Mayor placed City Development Plan in the program jointly organized by CCC, Faridpur and Faridpur Municipality with an aim to strengthen its services and governance through establishing transparency, accountability and people's participation. The program was presided over by CCC President Ramendra Nath Roy Karmaker while CCC Member Professor Altaf Hossain welcomed all in the meeting. TIB's Program Manager Md. Atikur Rahman delivered a speech titled 'People's Representatives Meet the Public and the Municipality Envisioned by the Citizens.'



The citizen raised questions regarding the development of Faridpur Municipality which included development of roads, drains, culvert; City Plan and its implementation, garbage management, building market, community centre, anti-mosquito drive, approval of house design, street light, VGF, Widow Allowance, Old Age Allowance, proactive disclosure of information, complain receive and re-dressal mechanism etc.

The Mayor assured to uphold peaceful environment in the municipality and to rigorously resist eve-teasing. Focusing on different services of municipality he revealed that initiatives for building roads, improvement of drainage system and supply of pure drinking water will be undertaken. With cooperation from local people the authority will build Citizen-Friendly Faridpur municipality,

the Mayor added. Among others Councilor Md. Anisur Rahman Chowdhury Sajal, Md. Adbul Jalil Sheikh, Hosen Ara Begum, Secretary Md. Tanjilur Rahman, Executive Engineer Md. Shamsul Alam attended the program.

YES News

Awareness events on Right to Information at UODA held



Dhaka YES-2 group organized an anti-corruption cartoon exhibition, a discussion and quiz competition on Right to Information (RTI) at University of Development Alternative (UODA), Dhanmondi campus on 05 April 2018. Mr. Abu Zayed Mohammad, Professor and Chairman, Dept. of Law and Human Rights, UODA inaugurated the event and discussed about the importance of RTI. Mohammad Zahidul Islam, SPM-O&C, TIB presented the background and contents of RTI Act and rules of filling up the RTI form. After the discussion session, a quiz competition on RTI issue held and three winners were awarded. 65 participants from multiple departments of UODA and nine members from Dhaka YES-2 group attended the event.

Youth take pledges against corruption through the game



It was raining since morning on Tuesday, 17 April 2018. Soon after the heavy rainfall, some youth gathered at the Dhaka University Snacks (DUS) premises and started playing an unusual game 'Game against corruption' by name which created an enthusiastic cheer among others present in the premise. People started to gather in the playfield surrounding the Youth cheering and clapping throughout the event.

This out-of-box anti-Corruption game show was organized by the YES Group- Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka. Around 100 Students from the University of Dhaka and others has participated in this event divided into 20 groups. Top scorer of each group has awarded a book as token of appreciation. The participants were very curious regarding this type of event and give very positive feedback to implement such kind of anti-corruption open-air awareness program. They have enjoyed a lot and participated proactively and spontaneously.

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