

Research Study

Website info of 54 per cent govt. offices 'inadequate' and 95 per cent NGOs 'alarming': TIB study



The practice of proactive information disclosure on the websites of the country's 54 per cent government institutions is 'inadequate', and 94.9 per cent of the NGO's is 'alarming' Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) study revealed.

The study found that the progress regarding proactive information disclosure on websites is not satisfactory enough. Govt. agencies' websites have plenty of information as per the information disclosure and dissemination rules. However, there's still a shortage of updating info, and a lack of formatting, expanding and accessing information according to its types.

Besides, the websites are not disabled-friendly as they are not equipped with a voice activation system. On the other hand, the websites of NGOs lack the necessary information as per the rules. In addition, the private sectors lack proper awareness regarding the information disclosure on websites, the study said.

Organising a virtual press conference on August 5, 2021, TIB published the study report titled "Pro-active Disclosure of Information by Government Institutions and NGOs on the Basis of Right to Information Act: An Assessment" aiming to find out the current scenario of the practice of proactive information disclosure in the country under the Right to Information Act.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Adviser-Executive Management Professor Dr. Sumaiya Khair, and Director - Research and Policy Mohammad Rafiqul Hassan were present. TIB Coordinator Mohammad Tauhidul Islam conducted the virtual event while TIB Senior Fellow Shahzada M Akram presented the study. TIB former researchers Juliet Rosette, Fatema Afroz and Kumar Bishwajit Das prepared the research.

Using qualitative and quantitative methodology, the study was conducted between the period of August 2020 and January 2021. Direct data were collected by monitoring the websites of the organisations and interviewing main informants. Relevant documents, laws, rules, reports published on different websites and news were reviewed as indirect information.

A total of 207 govt. organisations and NGOs were chosen as samples following proper research methodology. However, the websites of 192 organisations (153 govt. and 39 NGOs)

were monitored as 15 (7.2 per cent) other organisations didn't have any websites. The websites were given scores and evaluated based on the information disclosed under a total of 25 indicators in three determined areas of information (19- on the extent of information, 4- on accessibility, and 2- on compatibility).

Turning the final score of every organisation into percentage, a three-type grading system was introduced – "Satisfactory" (67-100 per cent), "Inadequate" (34-66 per cent), and "Alarming" (0-33 per cent), to evaluate the organisations. The average score for "Alarming" grade/stage is 8 (15 per cent), 27 (54 per cent) for "inadequate" grade, and 37 (75 per cent) for "satisfactory" grade.



The study shows that 37 per cent (57 institutions) govt. institutions have a "Satisfactory" (67 per cent) score, 8.5 per cent (14 institutions) have an "Alarming" score, and 54 per cent (82 institutions) have an "Inadequate" score. Besides, no NGOs got a "Satisfactory" score/grade; the score of 94.9 per cent (36 organisations) NGOs is "Alarming".

As per the observations of the organisations' ranking list in the study, the first top ten positions are secured by 69 govt. organisations, with scores ranging from 33 to 42 out of 50. The Ministry of Food, the Ministry of Jute and Textiles and the Ministry of Water Resources jointly secure first place with an overall score of 42 (74 per cent) while the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs wins second place and the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce, Bangladesh Bridge Division, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Education - Madrasa Board, Ministry of Industries and Ministry of Social Welfare jointly hold third place. Among the govt. institutions, Inter-Services Selection Board, secures the lowest rank 38th with the lowest score of 4 (8 per cent).

No NGO came in the top ten rankings of the list. Among the NGOs, 19 organisations that are comparatively on the first ten positions than others have scores ranging from 7-22 out of 50.

A national-level NGO, Coastal Association for Social Transformation, is in the first place among NGOs with the highest score of 22 (44 per cent), Ahsania Mission is in second, and Gana Unnayan Kendra is in third. Six of the top 10 INGOs are in the ranking list, and the rest of them are national-level NGOs, the study shows.


Speaking at the press conference, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "The government and the private sector played a role in materialising the RTI Act. Similarly, they too now have the responsibility in ensuring its proper practice. Eleven years after enacting the law, the chances of getting information have increased, but overall, it is not satisfactory. Although proactive disclosure and dissemination of information got legal importance, there are shortcomings in its practice and application. Although government organisations were ahead of NGOs in every indicator of this study, they had the opportunity to improve further."

"The proactive publication and dissemination of information haven't been prioritised at

institutional level in both public and private sectors. Many organisations do not have a website yet. As a result, the people are being deprived of the benefits they deserve. Although the benefits of the 'Right to Information Act' are supposed to ensure transparency and accountability, this isn't happening", he added.

Speaking about the NGOs, Dr. Zaman said, "We thought the private sector or NGOs would do much better. But unfortunately, that did not happen. The scores of NGOs are not satisfactory, but about 95 per cent of NGOs are alarming instead, which is disappointing. In the case of international NGOs, they have no information (uploaded to their websites) according to the information disclosure and dissemination rules. Since non-governmental organisations are involved in the right to information movement and work with the government to implement it, the proactive practice of publishing and disseminating information needs to be exercised more."

For the Bengali press release information ([click here](#) )

For executive summary of the research work ([click here](#) )

Int'l Youth Day: TIB recommends 9 ways to recover from COVID's impact on youth's education and employment

Dhaka, 12 August 2021: The youths in Bangladesh are facing a deep mental health and socio-economic crisis as they cannot attend educational institutions in person while being in disarray about employment and the future of job sectors in the country. TIB has called on stakeholders to immediately focus on effective steps and special measures to ensure that the education of youths and future employment opportunities are protected.

In a press statement on August 12 on the occasion of the International Youth Day, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "There is no definite roadmap in place to open educational institutions in the country even though 16 months have passed since closure due to the pandemic. Despite attempts to carry out online classes, it has mostly failed as there was a lack of technical expertise alongside power and internet shortcomings. Rather, this has created a new form of disparity in the educational sector. The study report has pointed out that 63 percent of families in rural areas do not have the opportunity to access internet while 87 percent families lack the technical knowledge to do so. As a result, rural and indigenous communities have been impacted most. The disparity between the rich and the poor, and the cities and the villages have been intensified due to this, and any steps to tackle it yet to be seen. This is very disappointing."

Pointing out the increasing number of dropouts for prolonged closure of educational institutions and the decreasing income in households due to pandemic, Dr. Zaman said, "According to some recent research, 19 percent students dropped out from the primary level and 25 percent from the secondary level. Facing an uncertain future, child marriages have increased by an alarming 26 percent. How will these students be returned to their classrooms? Can they ever come back? I don't think anyone is worried about that. We have not seen the government taking any steps or allocating additional funds to face all these new challenges in the educational sector, and calling it reckless would not be an overstatement."

The Executive Director also said, “International Labour Organization’s predictions of doubling youth unemployment during the pandemic has definitely crossed that threshold now. Most youths have lost their jobs in the pandemic and most of them are from non-formal trades, for whom the government has no assistance package. Alongside decreasing number of jobs, the job sectors have also changed as there are demands for new technological and vocational skills. Without facing these realities, the positive placement of youths in the working population will also be disrupted.”

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman also mentioned that the social and political spheres for youths are shrinking due to the pandemic. “Although youths played an extremely important role as volunteers during the pandemic, their political rights have been choked. Political malpractice and abuse of the Digital Security Act has severely disrupted the constitutional right to free speech. Arrests made over social media posts have impacted the youths and they are distancing themselves from engaging in different issues, which is really alarming.”

Some notable recommendations of TIB to ensure youth’s education, employment and freedom of speech during the pandemic -

1. Students including all relevant personnel have to be vaccinated against COVID-19 on priority basis and educational institutions have to be reopened following proper health measures;
2. By implementing specific short, medium and long-term plans, all students from different levels have to be evaluated and promoted to the next class;
3. Special steps have to be taken to bring drop-outs back to school. Especially, women, persons with disabilities, financially backward pupils, indigenous communities and backward communities have to be given special incentives to ensure uninterrupted education for all;
4. Adequate job opportunities have to be created for youths through short, medium and long-term specific work-plans;
5. Alongside incentive packages for young entrepreneurs, steps have to be taken in order to re-employ youths that have lost jobs from small and medium enterprises and industries.

TIB praises NBR for identifying 80 thousand companies avoiding taxes, calls on establishing effective financial governance mechanisms

Dhaka, 2 August 2021: The National Revenue Board (NBR) Taskforce has garnered praise from Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) as it has identified 80 thousand companies outside the tax net and has initiated efforts to ensure effective taxation. TIB has called upon authorities concerned to unearth how such a huge number of companies could avoid taxes for so long and what amount of revenues were lost in the process. There has also been calls to identify systematic flaws in all tax related bodies so that such inefficiencies can be addressed and avoided in future.

In a statement today, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, the findings by the NBR Corporate Compliance Taskforce only prove how deeply the financial sector is impacted by irregularities, corruption and the lack of good governance. "A registered company has been doing business for half a century yet it has never paid taxes. In other cases, there are 1400 companies registered in two addresses and one person is the director of 46 companies but has only four TINs! Such irregularities and financial mismanagement are even beyond fairy tales," said Dr. Zaman, adding that this culture of tax avoidance in the corporate sector has not taken place overnight, rather it was a premediated effort by corrupted beneficiaries. "Alongside ensuring accountability of the perpetrators, the procedural weaknesses in the system should be identified and resolved."

The taskforce stated "a saddening picture of a country drowning in corruption" and "lack of good governance in country's financial sector" in the initial report on companies without TINs, to which Dr. Iftekharuzzaman agreed and said, "The blame falls on every organisation and authority involved. It is clear that the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC) does not have the ability to identify irregularities even though a single location is hosting hundreds of companies and the irresponsible behaviour of a handful of

'law firms' that help registration of companies share the equal blame." The TIB Executive has also pointed out that the NBR lacked effective measures to identify why and how only a mere 26 thousand registered companies pay taxes while 78 thousand businesses have TINs. "Among the companies paying taxes, half of them submit fake audit reports and sidestep massive taxes. In order to prevent such incidents in the future, an effective work strategy has to be implemented and technological coordination and connections have to be strengthened among all organisations concerned."

The TIB Executive Director also requested all concerned bodies to be sincere about ensuring that companies and individuals can contribute to the country's economy by paying taxes in a hassle-free environment. "We also hope that business bodies would not be harassed while this ongoing taxation improvement drive takes place."

Journalists threatened over exposing plans for Safari Park in Lathitila wildlife sanctuary: TIB demands accountability and cancellation of such destructive projects

Dhaka, 6 August 2021: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has expressed stern resentments and concern over plans to erect a safari park at one of the country's most bio-diversified tropical evergreen forests in Moulvibazar's Lathitila. The anti-corruption organisation is also apprehensive over threats and fearmongering towards journalists who unveiled this unsustainable and invasive project. Alongside criticizing the necessity of such environmentally destructive projects in the name of tourism, TIB considers the threats against the investigating journalists as an attack on the freedom of press. Moreover, TIB has raised demands for exemplary punishments for the perpetrators involved in threatening journalists.

In a statement today, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said the entire motive of building a safari park in Lathitila has turned controversial as the project was based on a survey led by a former forest conservator who was arrested on charges of corruption, irregularities and graft. "How logical and important is it to construct a safari park in the tropical evergreens when there are multiple eco-parks including the Moulvibazar National Park? The concerns raised by wildlife and environmental experts over biodiversity loss, systematic extinction and deforestation in the long-term cannot be called unreasonable."

Moreover, TIB has pointed out that there are fears that 300 families from villages inside the forest and local forest-dependent communities may be uprooted if the safari park is established. Dr. Zaman called on the government to prioritise the opinions of the locals and experts rather than constructing the safari park.

Commenting that it is highly important to analyse the results and the extent of the damages in similar projects implemented before, TIB Executive Director added, "It is tantamount to threatening the freedom of press when local journalists are barricaded in their homes as intimidated for publishing reports on building safari parks in protected forests. It is also important to set an example by bringing such perpetrators under the rule of law."

Bangamata National Cellular and Molecular Research Centre Project: Non-transparent procurement in project implementation facilitates corruption, says TIB

Dhaka, 8 August 2021: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) expressed outrage and concern over the secretive procurement process of equipment in the name of setting up a temporary lab, even before the beginning of infrastructure work, at the government medical laboratory named Bangamata National Cellular and Molecular Research Centre (BNCMRC).

In a statement today, it said, the attempt to hire a particular company at exorbitant rates as well as exert influence in a manner that does not comply with the government procurement rules is a brazen expression of corruption.

The Ministry of Health has to ensure accountability for those involved in it and take effective measures in making the whole process transparent to materialize the project instead of only ceasing the tender process, the anti-corruption watch dog demanded.

Referring to the newspapers, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said that the government handed over the responsibility of a five-year project to establish an international standard medical laboratory to Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC) three years ago. But, under different pretexts, the infrastructural work didn't begin and now the sudden initiative to set up a temporary lab raises question and its future sustainability.

"It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a strategy to squander government money in the name of setting up a temporary lab without a rational explanation of all these questions when the procurement is worth more than Tk 50 crore and there's an attempt to hire a particular company in exorbitant rates. What even more frustrating is that the way the BMRC chairman has supported this illegal process of violating government procurement rules and is embroiled in a tussle with the ministry is by no means desirable," said Dr. Zaman.

Dr. Zaman also said a feasibility study report was submitted cursorily when questions were raised after the project of worth Tk 1,500 crore was approved. Furthermore, purchasing goods even before starting the physical infrastructure work is also alarming that reveals to what extent irregularities and corruption can occur in the implementation of this project.

The Ministry of Health itself has found proof of irregularities such as the inclusion of members in the technical sub-committee of the tender evaluation committee, amending the Draft Project Proposal to allow the preferred organisation to award the job, asking for permission to buy illegally in foreign currency, and not sending the updated progress of the tender to the cabinet committee on procurement, he said emphasising the need to reform the relevant committee and ensure accountability to implement corruption free project.

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