

Policy Stance

**DIGITAL
SECURITY ACT**

**FOREIGN WORKERS IN
BANGLADESH**

**ELECTION
COMMISSION**

TIB urges the govt. to include media and civil society representatives in the DSA amendment process



Dhaka, 31 December 2021: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has cautiously praised the announcement made by Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Anisul Haque, where he said the suppressive clauses of the Digital Security Act would be amended. At a press statement issued on 31 December 2021, TIB said that the government is late to work on it but it is a step in the right direction and called for the inclusion of media and civil society representatives in the committee formed to review and amend the law. In addition, the anti-corruption organisation has said that a special decree announced to stop immediate arrests of journalists in cases filed under the Act has to be applied equally for ordinary citizens as well.

Recently, the Law Minister mentioned that the government admits the Digital Security Act has been abused in many cases and the state is working to follow global best practices to ensure the best use of the law. Saying that the government has regained its senses by admitting the mistakes, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Since the enactment of the Digital Security Act, media and civil societies have been against many sections of the law, especially 25 and 31. It was feared that these sections would be detrimental to freedom of thought and expression, but the government did not listen. The promises made by the Law Minister to avoid such misuse of the law were never realised. On the contrary, influential quarters and the government administration weaponised the law to suppress dissent and create an atmosphere of fear. Amid such

realities, the steps taken by the government to amend the law would fail again if all stakeholders including media and civil society representatives are not included in the amendment process."

Dr. Zaman cited Article 19 figures indicating that 225 cases were filed under the Digital Security Act in 2021 alone, which led to 166 arrests from more than four hundred accused. Most of the cases were filed by influential persons against critiques on social media. "There is clear evidence that the law is not only being weaponised to silence the free press but also to suppress any dissent and repress criticism of the government. A prime example of human rights abuse is the death of incarcerated writer Mustaque Ahmed. The government decree to stop immediate arrests of journalists in cases filed under the Digital Security step is a positive step, but it is not inclusive. Ordinary citizens must also be protected from arbitrary arrests under the law."

TIB also called upon the government to take steps so that the verbal announcement made by the Law Minister to stop arbitrary arrests under the law can be formalised through official announcements in police stations across the country.

A strategic policy formulation for regulating foreign workers in Bangladesh will increase tax revenue and legal remittance:TIB



Dhaka, 29 December 2021: TIB has said that the provision initiated by the central bank to allow foreign workers in Bangladesh to send their full earnings back to their home countries as remittance is a positive approach. However, the anti-corruption think-tank has said that

the formulation of a combined strategic policy and its implementation is a precondition to ensure good governance and block money laundering. If the policy is integrated properly, the state can stop illegal remittance transfers and avoid revenue losses.

At a press release issued on 29 December 2021, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman cited TIB's research '**Employment of Expatriates in Bangladesh: Governance Challenges and Way-out**', and said, "A large percentage of foreign workers in Bangladesh work here illegally and send their earnings back home through hundis. Foreign workers in Bangladesh earn at least BDT 260 billion annually. As illegal transfers slide through tax nets, the government loses almost BDT 120 billion in revenues. The Bangladesh Bank's decision to ease remittance transfers will only bring positive results if all authorities concerned can work together to ensure foreign workers' willingness to send money home legally. Without united effort, this decision will only be good on paper like many other such cases."

Dr. Zaman also mentioned that there is a sort of anarchy in employing foreign workers in Bangladesh due to the lack of oversight and collusion of a faction of dishonest and corrupt officials from the Home Ministry, employing organisations, and other benefactors. "Most foreign workers in Bangladesh do not follow legal procedures to arrive, stay, and work. Even if they come to Bangladesh for work, they come in Bangladesh by getting tourist visas, on-arrival visas, or business visas. Upon arrival, they make deals with employers to join offices without work permits and avoid state regulations. On the other hand, employers enlist lower salaries for foreign workers to sidestep tax brackets. As a result, the state is losing revenues, and a dishonest quarter is taking the opportunity to launder money."

For proper regulation, TIB has called upon the government to enlist foreign workers through conducting searches by a combined taskforce involving the National Board of Revenue (NBR), Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), NGO Affairs Bureau, and Special Branch of Police. It has also called for establishing a combined information system for foreign workers and updating the monthly salary limit for the workers.

Dialogues not enough, need legislation for an impartial, neutral, and acceptable EC:TIB

Dhaka, 20 December 2021: The dialogues with registered political parties initiated by His Excellency President Md. Abdul Hamid for forming the Election Commission as the current commission's tenure ends is important, but not enough. Previously, the ECs formed by dialogues and search committees could not serve their purpose. In retrospect, TIB has demanded the formulation of the Election Commission Act in order to enable an impartial, neutral, and acceptable commission.

In a press statement issued on 20 December 2021, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "The President has started the dialogues for forming the new EC

from today, but most political parties are not interested or excited about it. The parties do not think that this dialogue will address any positive discussions on the Election Commission Act, or outline any specific roadmaps. In the past, commissions formed after such dialogues have entirely failed to meet the expectations of the people. We expect that the honourable President will meet the expectations of the people by taking immediate steps to form an independent, neutral, and acceptable Election Commission."

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman also called for the formulation of the Election Commission Act as prior methods of forming the EC were controversial back in 2012 and 2017. "Civil society organisations have long been demanding an EC law so that people can entrust the commission that is able to carry out free and fair elections that can ensure people's right to elect their representatives."

TIB expects that the Honourable President would play a significant role in formulating the Election Commission Act before the next election which will ensure fair, impartial, and non-partisan involvement of the election commission, law enforcement agencies, and the administration in all election related activities. The anti-corruption watchdog has also demanded that non-partisan and independent observers from national and international organisations are allowed to observe election procedures from nomination submission period rather than just the election day.



Observance

Int'l Anti – Corruption Day: Winners of Investigative Journalism Awards and Anti – Corruption Cartoon Competitions declared

December 9, 2021: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has commemorated the International Anti-Corruption Day 2021 with various events at national and local levels on 9 December 2021. The theme of this year's celebration was 'Your Right, Your Role – Say No to Corruption'. TIB celebrated the day by declaring the winners of two of its flagship programmes, i.e., the Investigative Journalism Awards and Anti-Corruption Cartoon Competitions, and inauguration of the week-long exhibition of curated cartoons at national level.

As part of national-level initiatives, TIB announced the Investigative Journalism Awards



2021 following a discussion on how institutional challenges adversely affect investigative journalism in Bangladesh. Zafar Sadiq Akhond, in his keynote paper, stated that there was no doubt that the restrictive legal regime posed as a serious impediment to investigative journalism. Nevertheless, the media industry in Bangladesh cannot ignore its responsibility when it comes to the institutionalisation of professionalism, good governance, proper human resource policy, transparent management, and investment in capacity building initiatives for the journalists.

During the open discussion on the keynote paper, the speakers said that the high number of media outlets does not necessarily guarantee an environment of media vibrancy; instead, free press requires better governance in who gets media licenses and how those are run. It is remarkable that the countrymen believe in social media but not mainstream media because of trust issues. And, an honest journalist has at disposal the best weapon, the truth, to fight legal harassment.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman reaffirmed the speakers' concerns and



commented, “The state, and the government must ensure the environment that is needed for investigative journalism. However, a culture of repression is seen nowadays regarding freedom of speech and other fundamental rights. We want to remind the government that our constitution does not support this.”

Following the discussion, TIB announced the Anti-Corruption Investigative Journalism Awards 2021. This year, ten journalists, including two camerapersons, were awarded in 7 categories.

Later in the day the results of TIB’s flagship Anti-Corruption Cartoon Competition were announced alongside the inauguration of the exhibition of curated cartoons at TIB’s Meghomala Conference Hall. Suzanne Mueller, Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of



Switzerland, Tom Burge, Counsellor and Head of Governance and Political Team of the British High Commission, and Paola Castro Neiderstam, Second Secretary of the Embassy of Sweden, were present as guests of honour. The guests spoke at the awards giving ceremony. They said that corruption is a global problem that erodes the glue that binds together democracy, good governance, and human rights. It impacts the poor and the vulnerable the most. They urged everyone to fight corruption on all fronts and said that anti-corruption initiatives should be prioritised by society and the individual. The guests also applauded TIB for engaging youth in the fight against corruption through multifaceted approaches, including the nationwide anti-corruption cartoon competitions. While speaking at the anti-corruption cartoon awards event, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “Corruption is such a disease that everyone must fight it unitedly. The whole society has to take part, especially the young people. The government must create a suitable environment for that to materialise.” Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of TIB, Dr. Perween Hasan, said, “Cartoons are a great medium in the fight against corruption. This



competition has enabled the young people to participate in the social movement against corruption.”

Notably, the theme of the 16th iteration of the annual anti-corruption cartoon competition was the impact of Coronavirus on the health and education sectors. In total, 118 cartoonists submitted 168 cartoons in two age categories. Six cartoonists were awarded for their cartoons, while 33 cartoonists received special mentions. The exhibition of the

curated cartoons was open until 23 December 2021 at TIB's Meghomala Conference Hall at Dhanmondi from 3 pm to 7 pm.

Besides the national events, members of TIB inspired Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Citizens for Transparency (Shojon), Youth Engagement and Support (YES) groups, and YES Friends groups participated in human chain programmes organised in association



with the Anti-Corruption Commission in 45 areas including Dhaka.

A series of virtual and offline programmes including discussion meeting, rally, seminars, human chain, orientation, anti-corruption petition campaign, anti-corruption debate competition, quiz competition, anti-corruption oath taking, cartoon exhibition, cycle rally, cultural programmes, and awareness raising campaign were carried out countrywide. The Day was observed jointly with District/ Upazila Administration, Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and other like-minded organisations throughout the country.

CCC News

Knowledge sharing meeting with Bagerhat land authority

Bagerhat-CCC organised an online sharing meeting with Bagerhat Sadar Upazila Land Authority on 14 December 2021 aiming to improve the quality of services in the land sector. The meeting was presided over by the President of CCC, Bagerhat Professor Chowdhury Abdur Rab while Assistant Commissioner (Land) of Bagerhat Sadar Md. Rasheduzzaman was present as chief guest.



CCC Member Babul Sardar, Principal Saif Uddin Ahmed, YES leader Sheikh Saikat Ali and others spoke at the meeting. TIB's Area Coordinator Sheikh Bashir Ahmed moderated the meeting. In the meeting, the discussants emphasised on the importance of pro-active disclosure of information of land services. They also focused on setting up of help desk at land office, digitalization of land services, and taking various fees through online. The participants urged to organise public hearings for improving the quality of services in the land sector.

Chief Guest Assistant Commissioner (Land), Md. Rasheduzzaman stated that this year more mutations have been done than last years in a transparent manner. Proper arrangements have been undertaken to maintain the serial so that the people can get the service easily. AC Land urged all to inform him if anyone demands extra money for getting land services so that he can take action immediately. He promised to take immediate action to set up a help desk. He made aware of not taking assistances from brokers while seeking for land related services.

Munshiganj health authority directs doctors and health workers to be sincere in providing services

A meeting of Health Authority with the service recipients and concerned stakeholders was held on 04 December 2021 with a view to improving the quality of health services. The meeting was organised by CCC, Munshiganj at the conference room of Sadar Hospital in Munshiganj in collaboration with Munshiganj Health Authority. Speaking as the chief guest at the meeting, Civil Surgeon Dr. Md. Manjurul Alam called upon all the doctors and health workers of the district to be sincere in providing services to citizens.

The meeting was presided over by the President of CCC, Munshiganj, Muhammad Tanvir Hasan, where the Civil Surgeon, doctors and other stakeholders of Munshiganj called upon the people to be more aware in improving the quality of healthcare. The hospital authority informed the meeting that there are adequate stocks of equipment and vaccines in the corona related services.



The Civil Surgeon, Residential Medical Officer of Sadar Hospital Dr. S. M. Sakhawat Hossain and Consultant (Anesthesia) Dr. Jubayer Islam answered the questions of the service recipients in the meeting. In a welcome speech, CCC member Mahfuza Begum shared the progress of the decisions of the previous meeting. The meeting was conducted by Md. Mahbub Hossain, Area Coordinator of CCC, Munshiganj.

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