

National News

Political will, effective law enforcement and transnational collaboration imperative to combat human trafficking and money laundering

Transnational sharing of best practices and information together with effective enforcement of laws contribute significantly in addressing organized crimes like human trafficking, money laundering and corruption. In these areas, civil society organization can play critical role through ensuring necessary legal reforms and increased public awareness and knowledge. Besides, civil society organizations can also contribute in promoting more active government engagement in these areas as well as informing citizens and vulnerable groups through intensive oversight and engagement.

The observations were made by the speakers in a virtual seminar through webinar on 'the role of civil society organization in combating transnational organized crime' jointly organized by Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS) and Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) on 12 July 2020.

Conducted through a webinar, the seminar focused on three specific transnational crimes i.e. human trafficking, money laundering and corruption under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, realities and expectations. Speakers also discussed on recent allegation against a Bangladeshi MP and the involvement of leading figures in the public sector as well as Kuwaiti parliament members in corruption, money laundering and human trafficking.

The speakers of the seminar emphasized that transnational challenges need to be resolved through transnational responses. In this regard, all countries involved in such process have to work collaboratively and collectively. In combating the organized crimes, strict enforcement of laws are essential as per traditional laws, however, strong collaboration between involved countries may contribute significantly. The allegations against public representatives involved in such organized crimes have risked the society, polity and public representation in both the countries. The speakers also feared that failure to ensure accountability without fear or favour in these cases will further institutionalize corruption and criminality in all aspect of life, especially in the political space of the countries.

In the seminar, the distinguished participants included: Ms. Delia Ferreira Rubio, Chairwoman, Transparency International (TI); Mr. Majid Al- Mutairi, Chairman, Kuwait Transparency Society; Dr. Iftekhar Zaman, Executive Director, Transparency International Bangladesh; Dr. Hassan Johar, Ex- Kuwait Parliament member; Mr. Saber Hussain Chowdhury, Member of Parliament of Bangladesh, and Honorary President, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU); Dr. Dalal Al Saif, Kuwait University-Law School. Ms. Asrar Hayat, Member, Board, KTS moderated the seminar.

In her introductory speech, Ms. Delia Ferreira Rubio highlighted on link between corruption and money laundering crimes, and the initiatives taken by Transparency International in combating those. "Laws, policies and enforcement are important to combat corruption. Transnational crime could be curbed through collective and transnational efforts," Ms. Delia further stressed on appropriate and independent legal structure, necessary resources i.e. financial allocation and technological capacity and extensive oversight of relevant authorities to address these crimes.

Mr. Majid Al- Mutairi shed light on the most controversial issues that have recently appeared and circulated in the media and social networks related to money laundering, human trafficking, illicit gain and embezzlement, and KTS's role in combating them. Recognising prevalence of corruption and money laundering cases in Kuwait, Mr. Majid emphasized that the corrupt must be punished to prevent pervasiveness of corruption. He also hinted that the law enforcing agency couldn't make some arrests due to diplomatic immunity.

In his presentation on 'Alleged involvement of a Bangladeshi public representative in human trafficking and money laundering: Implications and opportunities', Dr. Iftekharuzzaman pointed towards increased

participation (62%) of business-people in the parliament of Bangladesh. Dr. Zaman said, “Apart from the allegation against arrested Bangladeshi MP in Kuwait, there have been many allegations of corruption cases including money laundering, human trafficking, drug, abuse of power, illicit gain of public money against number of MPs. Arrest of a Bangladeshi MP in Kuwait for such organized crime is embarrassing for Bangladesh. Such allegation has caused potential damage in international relations of Bangladesh, especially with destination countries for Bangladeshi expatriate workers including the risk of losing the job market for them, loss of their income and damage to dignity in the host country.”

Asserting available national and international laws and provisions to bring those involved in organized crimes like human trafficking and money laundering under accountability, Dr. Zaman said, “the key issue in such cases is enforcement of the national legal provisions and international commitment for accountability and repatriation of illicit transfers in the due process.”

Dr. Zaman also emphasized that civil society and media have to play significant role in preventing such crimes. It is essential to take immediate and effective investigation and legal action against the arrested Bangladeshi MP in Kuwait in the interest of the dignity of the country and the parliament. Both the governments of Kuwait and Bangladesh have to take necessary steps regardless of identity, political affiliations, fear and favor in addressing the crimes, and also, it should be ensured that no negative implications of such incident affect the long-standing and durable relationship between the two countries and its citizens, concluded Dr. Zaman.

Dr. Hassan Johar emphasized on the role of member of the legislating authorities in combating organized crime. He also elaborated the inability of the supervisory agencies to play their preventive role, especially after the recent transformation of the State of Kuwait into a front for money laundering and human trafficking. He stressed on restructuring of the legal system and the whole management of the sector to ensure corruption prevention and fair employment system. Terming corruption a virus like COVID-19, Mr. Saber Hussain Chowdhury said, “Such virus needs a broader and holistic approach to uproot. No one can be exempted for this. Many of Bangladesh's MPs have maintained their strong stance against corruption. Therefore, it is important to exchange experiences and strengthen collaboration between countries in prevention of corruption. In particular, it can be very effective in suppressing transnational organized crime.”

Dr. Dalal Al Saif discussed on legislative deficiency in the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime agreement in accordance with the Kuwaiti criminal law. Citing recent instances of increasing human trafficking and money laundering cases in Kuwait, she stressed on necessary legislative reforms in Kuwait.

TIB Advocacy through Policy stances

TIB shared policy stances to the policy stakeholders on three (3) major contemporary issues in an effort to generate public opinion through media, which pushed the authority to initiate necessary measure:

- **Imposing Discriminatory test fees of COVID- 19;**
- **Scandal regarding the Regent and JKG conspiracy for COVID tests;**
- **Unethical re-appointment of controversial WASA MD;**
- **WASA and Dhaka City Corporations coordination gap for city's water-logging;**

Discriminatory imposition of COVID- 19 test fees: TIB demands to increase free tests

TIB has expressed deep concern on the imposition of fees for Covid-19 detection tests while the infection is showing a growing trend. Terming it discriminatory, inhumane, mischievous and suicidal, TIB in a statement released on 8 July 2020, has demanded an immediate removal of the decision.

In addition, TIB called upon the government to increase the sample testing number and capacity as measures to fight the virus in the country. There is a sharp fall in the sample testing and down trend in the number of virus detection after the enactment of the government decision of imposing charge on it which ultimately exposed more vulnerability towards infection, the statement added.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekhruzzaman said, "Amid growing cases of Covid-19 in the country, the health ministry decided to charge for sample testing on June 30. Because of the reckless decision, it is not abnormal to raise the question against the intention whether the government is discouraging the people from examining sample during such a crisis."

Dr Zaman also said, "For those who have made this decision, the fees may seem small; But for those who can't afford regular meals, this two hundred BDT is a huge burden. It needs to be scrutinised whether this decision is to discourage poor and low-income people from taking the test. Such discriminatory and inhumane decisions are unacceptable."

"According to the available data, it is not possible to know the real status of corona virus infection in the country. And the steps that the government will take to deal with the epidemic on the basis of this information will certainly be inconsistent with reality. At the moment, to ensure the accuracy and normal flow of information, there is no alternative to increasing the number, scope and scope of testing," concluded Dr. Zaman.

The Regent and JKG scandal regarding the COVID tests: TIB demands for arrest and exemplary punishment of covert influential conspirators

TIB considers the unearthed disgusting fraud in COVID 19 detection test and treatment by the Regent and JKG as a mere example of corruption in the health sector. Those powerful and influential culprits behind the scene who played in collusion with human life and death in such circumstances, need to be identified and brought under exemplary accountability to prevent the corruption, said TIB.

In a press statement issued on 15 July 2020, TIB said the unbelievable forgery by Regent and JKG Health Care on Covid-19 testing, which has surfaced lately, was just the tip of the iceberg of unabated corruption in the country's health sector and warned that feeling complacent about the arrest or legal action against the visible culprits would not result in any long-term solution to the actual problem.

Terming the arrests of the main culprits of the Regent and JKG as the first step in the investigation of these corruptions, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Since the outbreak of Covid-19 in the country, one after another allegations of corruption, fraud, deception and plundering have surfaced in the health sector."

Dr. Zaman said in the process in which the two institutions (Ministry of Health and Directorate General of Health) in question have had the opportunity to commit this fraud, the collusion of political and administrative powers can be said with almost certainty. "In only two of these cases, the direct kingpins have been arrested and that is being touted as a great achievement against corruption. We certainly welcome the ongoing legal proceedings against these defendants. But right now, I cannot accept it as a huge success. The question of whether the influential people behind the accused, who have given them this opportunity, are just trying to hide them by promoting them as 'fraudsters' is not absurd," Dr. Zaman added.

Stating that these fears are intensified by the reciprocal blaming of the Ministry of Health and Directorate General of Health over the two incidents and the attempts to put the blame on each other, Dr. Zaman said, “Some days have already passed since the allegations surfaced. So far, there should have been a clear explanation of the process, how, on the basis of what qualifications these institutions were selected, and by identifying the extent of negligence on the part of any authority. But instead of doing so, both the institutions have been trying to avoid responsibility by blaming each other. The government must take the responsibility for this arbitrary corruption in the health sector,” added Dr. Zaman.

“Therefore, the citizens expect that the arrest of two or three accused should not be accounted as an end to this incident but the influential cadres, protectors, supporters and beneficiaries behind their rise to power should be immediately brought under the law and ensure exemplary trial irrespective of their position and identity. Without it, eradication of corruption will never be possible,” concluded the statement

Unethical re-appointment of the WASA Managing Director: TIB urges for a complete neutral review

TIB has demanded a proper adherence to the law in contractual appointment of all the top positions in Dhaka WASA including the current Managing director to ensure good governance. In addition, the anti-graft watchdog urged for a complete assessment of appointment and continued re-appointment of the current Managing director, stating previous allegation of corruption and non-adherence of procedures in such appointments.

In a press statement issued on 20 July 2020, TIB termed the appointment and reappointment of the present managing director (MD) of Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority “questionable”, citing media reports that rules and regulations have been violated on each occasion of renewing his appointment.

After a controversial appointment in 2009, the present Wasa managing director has been serving the post in questionable way for five consecutive terms for the last 11 years, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said in a media statement.

The TIB executive director said allegation against the WASA managing director's reappointment also came to light in TIB's study “Dhaka WASA: Challenges of Good Governance and Way Forward.” He urged to follow due procedure and transparency to appoint someone qualified and experienced in the relevant field as the next WASA Managing Director, before the present MD's extended term ends on October 14 this year.

“At the same time, a complete impartial audit of the current managing director's questionable appointment and continued re-appointment is required for the welfare of the organization and its beneficiaries. In addition, WASA officials at all levels need to be brought under accountability by properly investigating assets that are inconsistent with their legitimate income for irregularities and corruption,” concluded Dr. Zaman.

Especially, good governance has to be established after wiping out a long-standing malpractice of “one-person centric dominance” in the Wasa management, quoted the statement.

TIB expressed its hope that the Local Government Department, Dhaka WASA and all the concerned authorities will take appropriate steps to make Dhaka WASA a more service-oriented, customer-friendly and effective organization by taking appropriate steps.

Both Dhaka WASA and City Corporations responsible for Failure to resolve the water-logging in Dhaka metropolis: TIB demands for resolving the problem instead of blame shifting

Dhaka WASA, the two city corporations, and all other concerned institutions, have failed to address water-logging caused by a lack of coordination in drainage management, rainwater drainage, and waste management in Dhaka city, observed TIB in a statement released on 26 July 2020 .

The Dhaka City Corporation and WASA authority roles are important to manage the crisis without shifting blame to each other, reads the press release, while the Water Development Board also are tasked with managing drainage in the city. But the existing culture of coordination gap, and shifting blame, actually contribute towards the water-logging problem.

TIB Executive Director, Dr Iftekharuzzaman said, “According to the law, WASA is responsible for the construction and maintenance of the main drain lines in Dhaka city, while the city corporations are responsible for the branch lines. Of the total drainage lines in Dhaka city, 385 kms are under Dhaka WASA, and some 2,500 kms under jurisdiction of the city corporations. Apart from this, WASA is also responsible for the maintenance of 26 canals with a length of 74 kms and 10 kms of box culverts.”

Dr. Iftekhar says, “due to the overlapping legal jurisdictions, the authority tackle their responsibility and liability to resolve water-logging, and the people suffer year after year during the rainy season. “It requires an immediate amendment of the law, and a single responsible authority for drainage management and the maintenance of sewerage, canal, and culvert. So, as a citizen’s service provider, the two City Corporations might get the sole responsibility including the monitoring of the works under the jurisdiction of WASA,” he added.

Pointing out the WASA’s failure during the earlier years, Dr Zaman added “While Dhaka WASA claimed in a report that 20 out of 26 canals under their control are fully flowing including the Katasur canal, TIB’s research revealed that the canal’s flow were not actually active and heavy wastes found on the surface of drains and vessel of the canal. Dr Zaman said further, “The lack of regular supervision in the development and maintenance of canals and drainage systems under WASA is also noticeable, which was supposed to be inspected twice a month is not following, so the canals are being occupied with illegal construction.

According to the report findings, neither the City Corporations nor the WASA can avoid their responsibility for the drainage management failure and waste disposal with blame shifting. It is also questionable whether the 2,500 kms of drains under the jurisdiction of the city corporations are waste-free or operational, he added. Though the law, the City Corporation never informs the WASA authority if any of damages created during the development work and finally people cannot avail benefits of the development work.

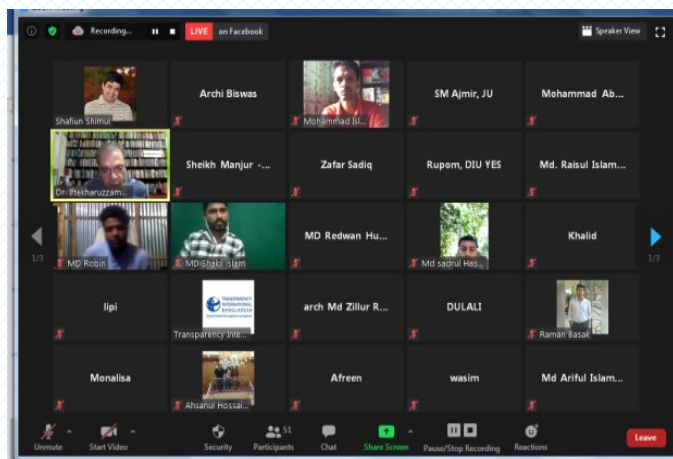
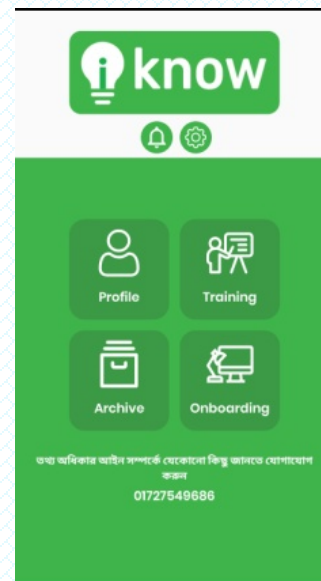
The statement refers an 'Operational/Action Committee to Reduce Water-logging in Dhaka Metropolis' was formed by the Local Government Division earlier in May 2018 to resolve the water-logging and necessary measure to take but there is also coordination gap occurs. To break this cycle of coordination, TIB feels the overall responsibility for elimination of water-logging in Dhaka metro should be entrusted to a single organization, following a specific strategy formulated by experts in the field.

Joint initiative with MRDI, an app developed for TIB youth

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the authority of the Management and Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) and TIB on 15 July 2020, under which, a capacity building training programme and a competition was organized for the youth of TIB. To increase the RTI related knowledge among the YES and YES Friends members of the 61 YES groups and 47 YES Friends groups of TIB countrywide. Under this MoU, The MRDI, developed an “iknow” mobile app which containing the access to information and freedom of speech-related acts and information for the user.

Dhaka YES organized an webinar on the reliability and access to COVID projection data

A webinar organized by all Dhaka YES groups on the Challenges of Reliability and Access to Data for the Projection of Corona virus in Bangladesh on 5 July 2020.

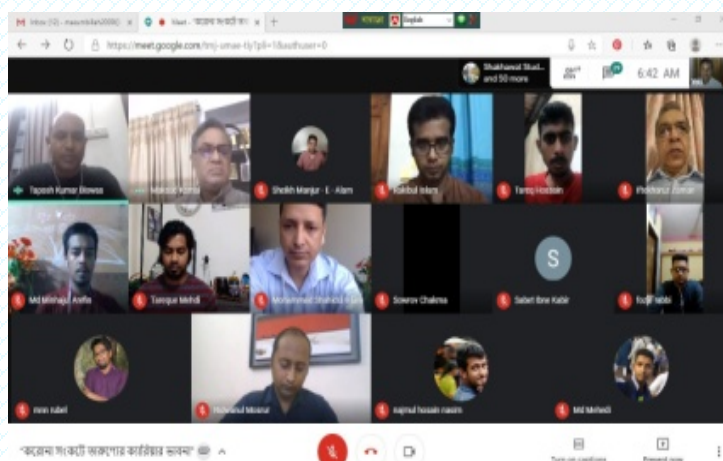


Dr. Shafiun Nahin Shimul, Associate Professor of Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka was the key speaker of the webinar. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB graced the event as a guest and welcomed the resource persons and participants. Dr. Shimul is one of the pioneer experts who forecasted the coronavirus outbreak situation in Bangladesh. He shared the models used for the projection and the kind of challenges that exist regarding the availability, reliability, and access to data and information. More than sixty (60) YES members from CCC and Dhaka based YES groups joined the webinar. After the discussion, YES members

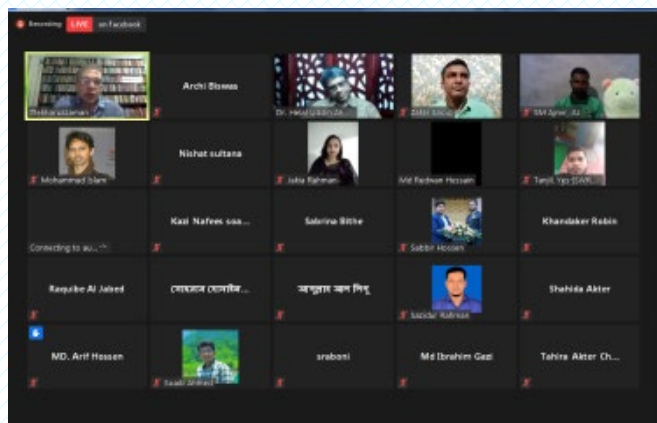
joined an interactive session with the expert. Director and SPM of O&C, TIB also attended the event.

Webinar titled Youths Carrier Aspirations during Covid-19 Pandemic

Dhaka YES was organized a series of webinars on the contemporary issues and also built their knowledge during this lock down. YES Group-Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka organized a Webinar titled Youths Carrier Aspirations during Covid-19 Pandemic on 10 July 2020. Professor Dr. A S M Maksud Kamal, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), University of Dhaka and Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB graced the event as guests. Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, Director, Outreach and Communication, TIB also attended the event. Three hundred and twenty (320) participants from CCCs, Dhaka YES and general students of Dhaka University registered their interest to the event.



Webinar on Mental Healthcare of Youth during Corona Pandemic



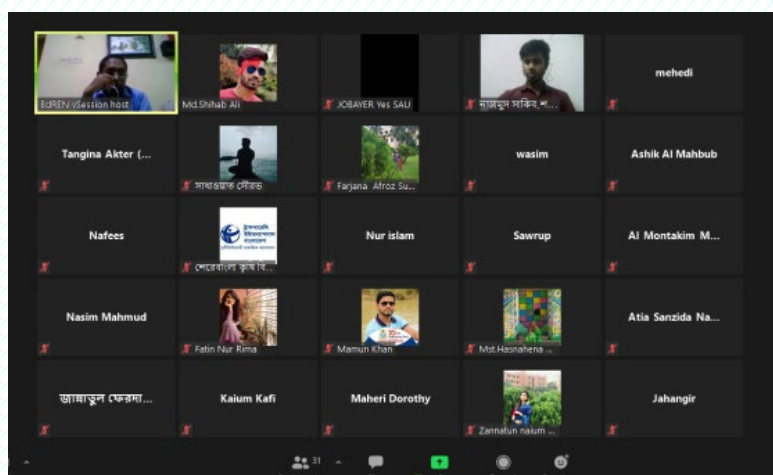
Dhaka YES jointly organized for the YES members and YES friends a webinar on Mental Healthcare of Youth during Corona Pandemic on 15 July 2020.

Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed, Associate Professor of National Institute of Mental Health and Jakia Rahman, Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Dhaka were the resource persons of the event. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB inaugurated the event. Resource persons discussed about the kind of mental healthcare problems youths are facing during this Corona pandemic and suggested the youths how to

overcome these problems. Thereafter, YES members joined an interactive Q&A session with the resource persons where they shared the kind of mental healthcare problems they are facing in this period. Experts answered their questions one-on-one. More than a hundred (100) of YES members from different CCC and Dhaka based YES groups joined the webinar.

YES Sher-e-Bangla University (SAU) organized training on Developing Communication skill:

YES Group Sher-e-Bangla A University (SAU) organized a Training on Communication skill Development on 17 July 2020 at the evening. Md. Mamun Abdul Kaioum, Assistant Professor of the Department of Mass Communication & Journalism, University of Rajshahi facilitated the training session where YES coordinator, Adviser Md. Harun-ur-Rashid the YES members and friends were attended. After the presentation on the basic understanding of the communication perspective, an open question and answer session was followed by. At the end of the session YES members and adviser give him thanks to taking the session.

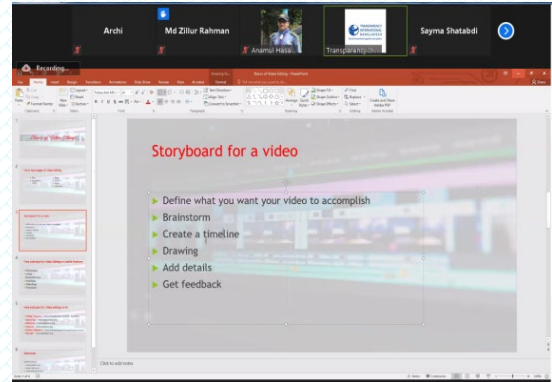


YES- Daffodil University and Jahangirnagar University organized an webinar on Digital Security Act

YES members of Daffodil International University (DIU) and Jahangirnagar University (JU) jointly organized a Webinar titled 'Digital Security Act 2018' on 21 July 2020. In the ongoing lockdown situation, while the vigilant and technology savvy youth became much dependent on the social media communication. In this circumstance, ensuring the digital security has been considering the priority issue among all the smart phone users. To make aware the youth, this session was highlighted on the loopholes and specific clauses to be more careful while using the social media. Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, Director, Outreach and Communication conducted the session among the youth in a webinar programme. A question-answer session was held followed by the presentation on the Digital Security Act 2018. Nearly sixty (60) YES members and YES friends participated in this event.

Training on Video Editing organized by YES group-2 of Dhaka:

Dhaka YES-2 group organized training on the Basics of Video Editing on 26 July 2020 via Zoom platform. Md. Barkat Ullah Babu, Programme Manager of O&C, TIB facilitated the session. He discussed about the basic rules of video editing, where to find the resources and the softwares/apps used for video editing. YES members from different Dhaka and CCC based YES groups joined the training. Participants showed their interest to have another session in the topic later on.



CCC News

Open budget discussion of Mymensingh City Corporation Emphasized on public health safety and fight against Covid-19

Speakers of an open budget discussion of the Mymensingh City Corporation emphasized on fair distribution of government schemes among the targeted poor & marginalized people and taking measures to protect irregularities and corruption during this corona virus pandemic. They asked mass people to fight against Covid-19 together with complying the health safety. The authority of Mymensingh City Corporation assured to allocate sufficient budget for supporting these activities and initiatives in the 2020-21 fiscal year.



Speakers addressing these issues in an open budget discussion held on 15 July 2020 through online webinar. Mymensingh City Corporation organized this event by the assistance of Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Mymensingh Sadar. Mayor of the City Corporation Ekramul Haque Titu was the chief guest in the event while Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Dr. Iftekharuzzaman was present as

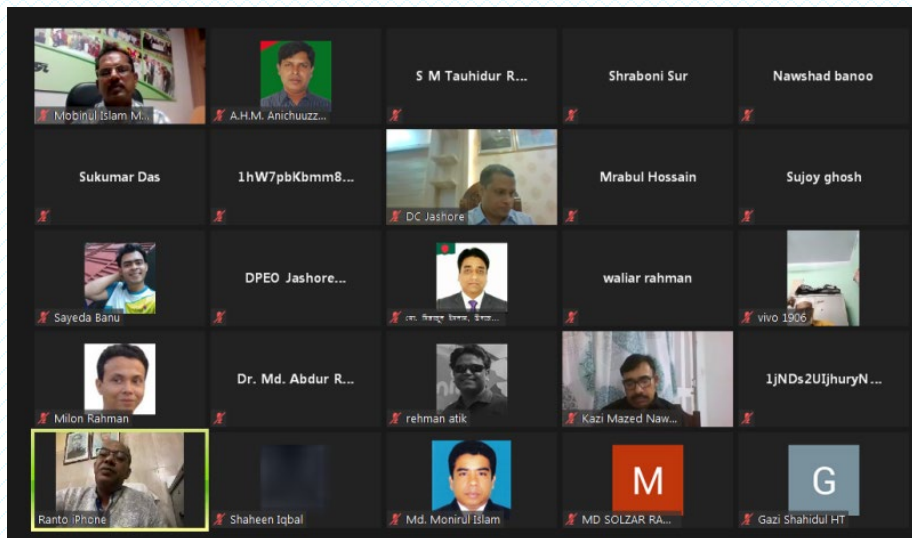
discussant. Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation Mohammad Anwar Hossian presented the draft budget for the fiscal year 2020-2021 at this event. CCC President Mr. Sharifuzzaman Porag presided over the meeting.

Mayor of the city corporation Mr. Ekramul Haque Titu said, the corporation will mainly focus on public health issues considering the Covid-19 context in this upcoming 2020-21 fiscal year budget. In addition, initiatives will be taken for upgrading life standard of the poor & marginalized people. A set of database will be introduced on low income group people for providing financial assistance during this pandemic, he added. Mayor assured to incorporate the feedback and issues received from this discussion on the drafted budget.

Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman made importance to proper delivery of government schemes to the targeted poor & marginalized people who are mostly sufferer financially for corona virus pandemic. The corporation will take necessary measures to prevent irregularities and corruption in these cases, he expects. He thanked the authority for sharing the prepared budget though online discussion meeting.

Vice President of the CCC, Mymensingh Sadar Meer Golam Mostafa moderated the discussion where other members of the CCC, Civil Society Organizations, different government institutions, SWAJON, YES and YES Friends participated.

Webinar on “Corona virus crisis: citizen’s expectations, challenges and way forwards” District administration will take necessary measures to ensure citizen’s health safety



Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Jashore organized a webinar on “Corona virus crisis: citizen’s expectations, challenges and way forwards” on 18 July 2020 where the District Administration made commitment to take necessary measures for ensuring citizen’s health safety. The newly appointed Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Jashore district Md. Tamizul Islam Khan was the chief guest and Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman

was the key discussant in the meeting. Among others, Mayor of the Jashore Municipality Md. Zahirul Islam Chaklader Rentu delivered his speech as special guest. President of the CCC Mr. Sukumar Das presided over the meeting.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, the government declared zero tolerance to corruption in this pandemic, which is always inspiring for us. But a lot of incidents of corruption has been reported in media in government initiatives and schemes during this corona virus pandemic. This incidents are decreasing the country’s good image globally. We should prevent corruption with our all efforts together, he added.

The Deputy Commissioner Md. Tamizul Islam Khan said, the district administration and local authorities are trying their best to take all necessary measures for ensuring citizen’s health safety. But citizens have responsibilities to make the initiatives successful. He sought supports from citizens for successfully implement the initiatives taken to fight against Covid-19. Mayor of the municipality said, the locally elected representatives are working hard for making awareness regarding corona virus. He asked people to act responsibly during this pandemic.

Among others, Principal of Jashore Medical College Prof. Md. Akhteruzzaman, Associate Director of Genome Center of Jashore Science and Technology University Prof. Dr. Iqbal Kabir Zahid, Superintendent of 250 bedded Jashore General Hospital Dr. Abdur Rahim Moral and District Primary Education Officer of Jashore Sheikh Ohidul Alam delivered their speeches. Vice President of the CCC Mr. Mobinul Islam Mabin moderated the online discussion.

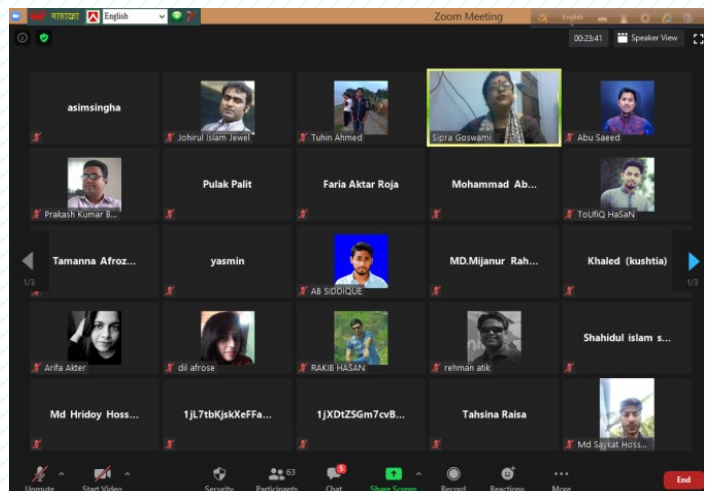
Discussions and study circles on the Digital Security Act 2018

Citizens for eliminate of the act and make awareness for responsible activities in online

Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) organized discussion meetings on the Digital Security Act, 2018 in where citizens asked the government to eliminate the act which conflicts with the rights of free speech provided by the constitution of Bangladesh. Few CCCs arranged study circles in participation with the young volunteers YES and YES friends members. Members of different CCCs, SWAJON, YES and YES Friends group participated in the cluster based discussion or study circle events. Eminent lawyers, university teachers, CCC presidents & members were the key discussants of these events.

The key discussants of these events focused on the use of digital tools to fight against corruption considering the presence of the Digital Security Act, 2018. Speakers discussed the clauses of the act thoroughly and asked people, specially the young people to act responsibly. They said, there is a long history to control the citizens protest through different rules and regulations. The Digital Security Act, 2018 is such an act which is not citizens friendly. The law enforcement agencies are harassing people through misusing this act. We should behave responsibly in our online activities so that they do not get the opportunity.

Members of the YES and YES Friends groups asked different questions on the act and procedure of activism by using digital tools in these events and experts answered the questions.



Editor: Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam

Sub-Editor: Mohammad Tauhidul Uslam, Shakil Faisal, Atia Afreen, and Hozzatul Islam

Write us: Transparency International Bangladesh | email: advocacy@ti-bangladesh.org

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