Policy Stance

Control corruption, not information: TIB demands withdrawal of the circular restricting govt. hospitals' info

Dhaka, July 10, 2021: Expressing grave concern over the ban on disclosing information of patients and health services at the govt. hospitals to the media during COVID 19, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) demanded immediate cancellation of the order signed by the Dhaka District Civil Surgeon.

The anti-graft watchdog also called for strict action against those who are benefited illegally from the restrictions.

In a statement, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "The COVID 19 pandemic has taken a terrible turn in the country and the number of infections and deaths is on the rise almost daily. At such a time, imposing restrictions on disclosing information to the media regarding health and patient care at government hospitals in Dhaka is a complete violation of the constitutional right of free media and free flow of information and the Right to Information Act. At the same time, it conflicts with the promise of independent and objective journalism. It intentionally obstructs the free collection and dissemination of information in the media."

"In a highly controlled lockdown, access to information for the public is limited already, therefore the direction of not providing information to the media will deprive people of up-to-date information on healthcare, and it will be difficult to get a true picture of the capacity and limitations of the hospitals at the field level, which is not expected at all," he added.

"The question here is, who are the higher authorities of the instruction that the Civil Surgeon referred to as the source of the order? Why is there an urgency to control information? How will it contribute to controlling the pandemic? Initiatives must be taken now to stop the repeated attempts to impose such restrictions," he demanded.

Expressing doubt that the order might be an attempt to conceal the current corruption in the health sector, Dr. Zaman said, "The day after the directive was issued, the health department published an advertisement in more than ten national dailies at the expense of the state and the people while trying to say that no corruption took place in the health sector. But, innumerable irregularities, corruption and mismanagement in various fields including recruitment, procurement, construction of infrastructure and services in the health sector in the last one year can be found in newspapers."
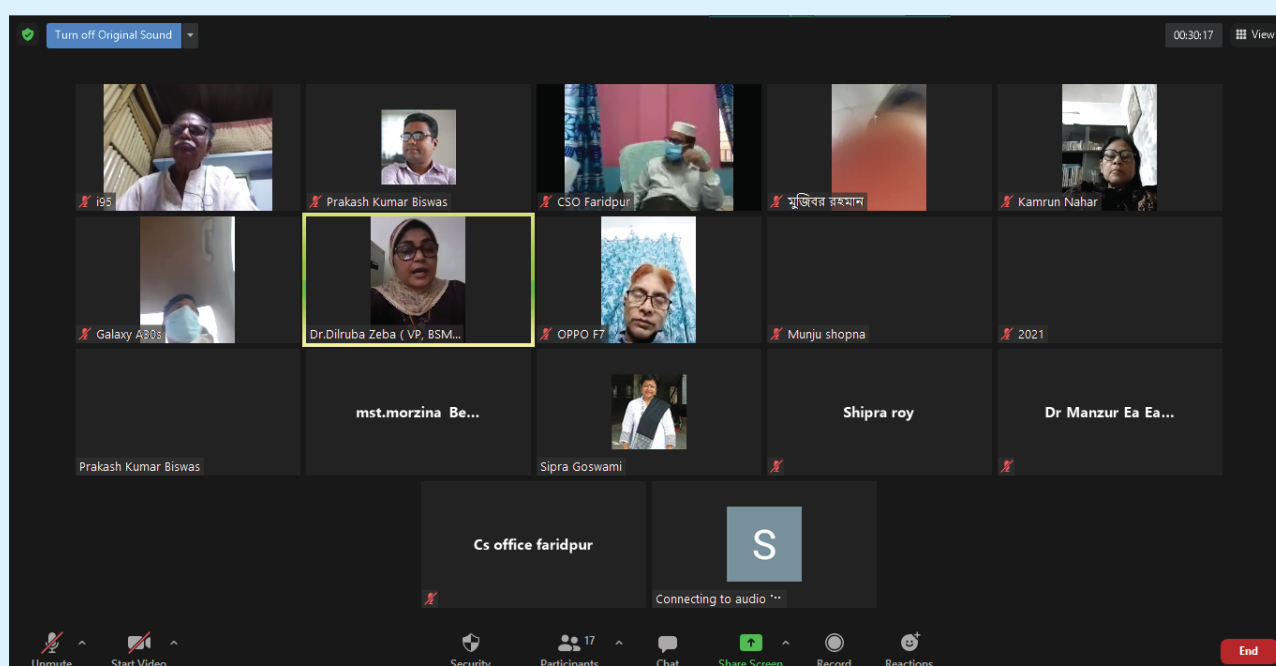
"This is also reflected in the report raised in the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Health. Recent research by TIB has also highlighted the lack of good governance in the sector, which has been widely discussed in various quarters. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the efforts to cover up corruption, irregularities and mismanagement in the health sector by advertising and banning on information disclosure are tied in the same thread," he opined.

Demanding immediate withdrawal of the order, Dr. Zaman said, "In particular, when most of the corruption in the health sector in recent years has been uncovered by the media, restrictions on journalists in collecting information will create a wide range of opportunities to hide information on irregularities, corruption and mismanagement. It will also destroy all the positive initiatives taken to deal with the epidemic. Therefore, such arbitrary orders should be withdrawn immediately, and free flow of information should be allowed."

CCC News

CCC continues support to increase transparency and accountability in health services

Faridpur General Hospital is delivering health services to the citizens successfully with insufficient manpower. The hospital authority sought support to increase the number of doctors and staff members from higher authority through an online meeting organised by the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) on 07 July 2021.

Aiming to improve health services, the CCC organised an opinion sharing meeting with the Superintendent of the hospital and Civil Surgeon of Faridpur district Dr. Md. Siddiqur Rahman as chief guest while CCC President Advocate Sipra Goswami presided over the meeting. The meeting discussed various issues including health services during COVID 19 pandemic, the effectiveness of Breast Feeding Corner, availability of medicine, display of medicine list, prohibition of brokers and preparation for vaccination programme of Coronavirus to improve health services at the locality.

The Superintendent of the hospital Dr. Md. Siddiqur Rahman said that the hospital has been serving citizens for 104 years. "We have only 12 doctors against 37 sanctioned positions and there is no doctor in cardiology, orthopedics and eye unit. The number of general patients has been significantly increased even though the hospital is already declared for COVID 19 dedicated services. The hospital authority is struggling and trying its best to meet the expectations of its service recipients." He requested the higher authority to deploy more doctors and other staff members to this hospital.

The Superintendent informed that several initiatives have been taken to prohibit brokers in the hospital premises, and the authority sought support from the Superintendent of local police to conduct drive against brokers. Now the situation is improved. Dr. Rahman
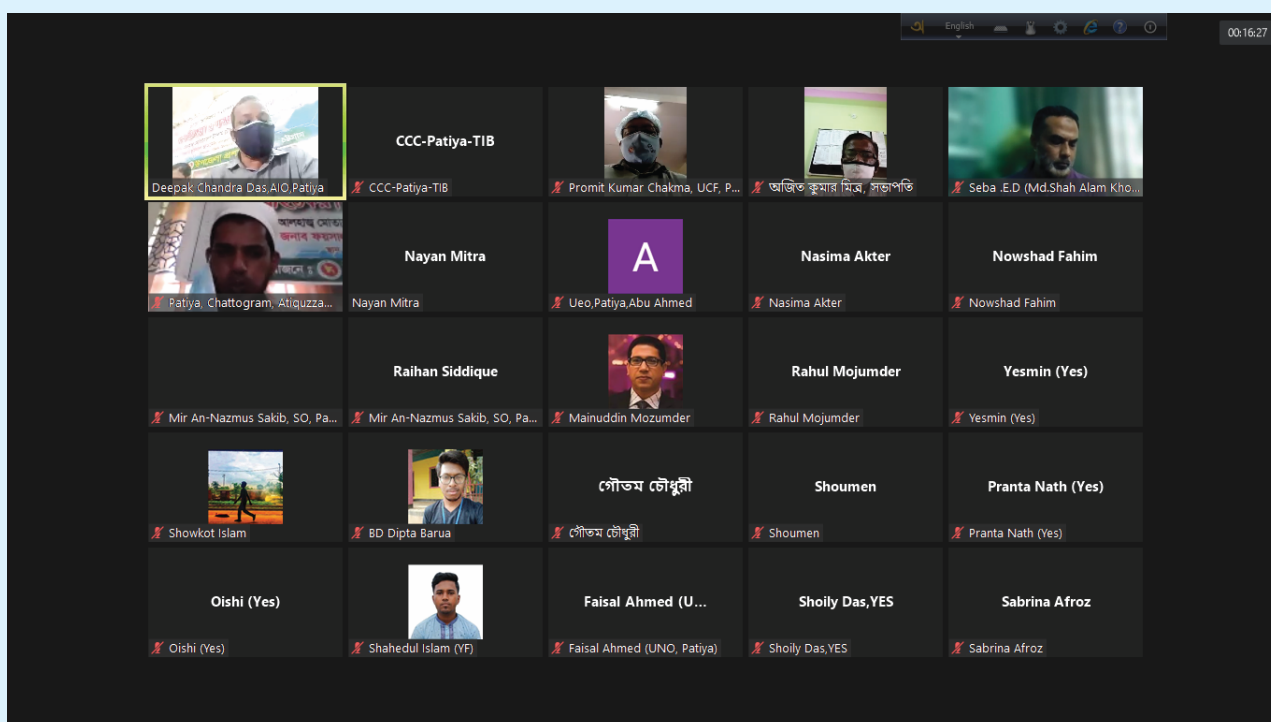
said, the local health authority is fully prepared to implement the COVID 19 vaccination programme of the government.

The Residential Medical Officer of the hospital Dr. Gonesh Kumar Agarwala said, ''There is no staff at the Radiology department, so X-ray and Ultra sonogram services are being hampered." CCC President Advocate Sipra Goswami asked the relevant higher authority to deploy sufficient manpower in this hospital. CCC will continue its support to increase transparency and accountability, she added.

Among others, doctors, nurses and other officials of the hospital along with the Deputy Civil Surgeon of Faridpur SM Manzul Elahi, Dr. Dilruba Zeba along with other members of the CCC and SWAJON were virtually connected in the meeting.

UP authority should take measures to curb corruption

Union Parishad should be transparent and accountable for its services towards being a corruption-free and citizens-friendly institution. Union Parishad should create more options for citizens' participation in its activities and implement a corruption-free programme. Patiya Upazila Parishad Chairman Alhaz Motahelur Islam Chowdhury expressed these in an event titled "Challenges and way forward of implementing activities of local government institutions during Coronavirus pandemic" on 05 July 2021, virtually organised by the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC). He added that Union Parishad is

the main and a big tire for implementing any government directives in this country. UPs could be involved in the activities regarding achieving Sustainable Development Goals, too.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Patiya, Chattogram Faisal Ahmed presided over the meeting while Director - Civic Engagement of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Ferhana Ferdous and Officer-in-Charge of Patiya Police Station Rejaul Karim Majumder were present in the meeting as special guests. President of the CCC Ajit Kumar Mitra delivered the welcome speech.

UNO Faisal Ahmed said government officials and locally elected representatives are now more accountable to citizens about their responsibilities and services. Citizens have the option to raise complaints against any type of irregularities in government services. People are aware of now regarding corruption-free services.

A report on monitoring activities (conducted by CCC, Patiya) on the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme of 17 Union Parishads under Patiya Upazila of Chattogram district was shared in the meeting and recommended to overcome the gaps for effective implementation of VGD programme.

Chairmen of different Union Parishads asked government to increase allocation for corona-affected people and safety equipment for locally elected representatives who are frontline fighters in this coronavirus pandemic.

CCC members asked the UP authority to ensure citizens' participation in its decision-making process through 'ward shova' and standing committee meetings. They urged to increase the budget for the welfare of women and children. Among others, members of SWAJON and Youth Engagement & Support (YES) Groups were also present in the meeting.

Orientation for young students on RTI Act, 2009 organised

To inspire youths for using the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009, Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Jamalpur organised an orientation for the young students of different educational institutions on 14 July 2021 through online google meet. Based on the theme "Right to information ensures good governance, information is the power which protects corruption", CCC trained the youths about the basics of the RTI Act. They were imparted techniques of applying the act in their personal and professional life, the procedures for submitting application forms according to the act to different authorities, etc.

Convener of the sub-committee's Advice & Information Desk of the CCC, Jamalpur Shamima Khan shared the objectives of the orientation among the participants while Ajoy Kumar Pal, President of the CCC, presided over the programme. The President shared that those who are being oriented on RTI Act should play an effective role by applying the act to curb corruption.

Respective Area Coordinator from TIB Md. Arif Hossain facilitated the session while Vice President of the CCC Prof. Kayed-Uz-Jaman, Convener of YES & YES Friends sub-committee Mehedi Mahmud Khan Shuvro and Coordinator of TIB Md. Nurul Islam among others also connected in the event. A total of 25 students participated in the orientation.