

National News

Ensure free and safe media environment for effective crisis management: Don't control media, control corruption, says TIB



Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has called upon the Government to ensure conducive environment for free and unrestricted discharge of professional functions of media as indispensable precondition for constitutional rights of citizens and democratic accountability of the Government. . A statement issued to the media on 2nd May, 2020, says that in the context of Covid-19 crisis, TIB has demanded that in the interest of people's access to information and public awareness, the Government and other stakeholders must protect professional freedom and health safety of media workers parallel with ensuring that media institutions remain functional.

In a statement issued today to mark the World Press Freedom Day 2020 observed on May 3, TIB has condemned and expressed deep disappointment that media workers reporting on corruption, theft, extortion and swindling of relief goods by a section of public representatives and other politically linked influentials, often in collusion or protection of public officials, are being subjected to self-censorship by various predicaments, harassment, intimidation, physical abuse, torture, disappearance and arbitrary arrests under motivated use of the Digital Security Act (DSA). Such self-defeating acts must be stopped for effective management of the crisis, TIB says.

Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB says, "the World Press Freedom Day this year is of much greater importance than ever. Free media is the most important catalyst to control illicit designs of those who are out to convert the Covid-19 pandemic into a festival of corruption. Media must be free to report not only on corruption and irregularities in relief operation on the ground, but also on different types of abuse of power and collusive corruption at higher levels where the need to fast-track procurement and distribution decisions in the crisis and recovery period may be treated as a license for self-enrichment by a section of the politically and otherwise powerful. In this context it will be self-defeating to create any predicament against media from discharging their professional role of information disclosure freely and safely". "Don't control or harass media, control corruption", he said.

Inspite of various challenges, our media has always made important contributions to free flow of information. No exception now in Covid-19 crisis when frontline media workers have been discharging their professional duties with courage and even taking health risk to bring news and information to public focus. In fact, many are setting commendable examples of "journalism without fear or favour" commensurate with this year's World Press Freedom Day motto. We call upon the Government and other stakeholders to ensure conducive environment so that the media can carry on discharging their professional duties freely without health risk and with assurances of regular salaries and benefits including risk allowances, the statement said.

TIB called upon the government to bring to justice those responsible for harassment of journalists in various ways like intimidation, physical abuse, torture, disappearance as well as arrests under motivated use of the

DSA. The Government must remember that in the absence of free flow of information not only will the people be confused and panicked, but also the Government plan for management and recovery from the fallout of the crisis and its implementation will be self-defeatingly misinformed, inappropriate and distorted.

The statement also called upon the media organizations and professionals to uphold the highest standards of ethical, objective and professional practices in discharge of their role.

Irregularities in Government's Cash Assistance Delivery Programme and N 95 Mask Scandal: TIB Demands Deterrent Punishment to those involved

TIB has demanded deterrent punishment to those involved in irregularities in preparation of the list for delivery of the Government's cash support programme for 5 million (50 lakh) ultra-poor in the context of the Coronavirus led national crisis. At the same time TIB has expressed deep disappointment that the investigation report on the N-95 Mask scandal has not yet been disclosed, nor any action taken. Expressing deep concern that a section of the wealthy people and public representatives and their well-off relatives have been included in the list of beneficiaries of the Government's cash support programme for the ultra-poor, TIB has called for uploading the full list on the website as a means of ensuring transparency and proper delivery to the genuine target beneficiaries of the initiative.

Credible media reports show examples of irregularities like names of 200 people against one number for mobile financial service for cash transfer. Such irregularities cannot be wished away as an unintended mistake, said Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB. He reiterated deep disappointment and concern over such corrupt designs and practices.

The worst affected are the ultra-poor, joined by a large number of low income people rendered jobless who are outside the usual safety net of the government. "it is absolutely unacceptable that the lofty purpose of the Prime Minister's initiative to support the worst affected and needy is being undermined by inefficiency, irregularity and lack of coordination of those involved in delivery of the programme. The Government must ensure that the initiative benefits only those who it is intended to. To facilitate transparency and accountability through public scrutiny the list of beneficiaries must be disclosed through website and other accessible means", Iftekharuzzaman said.

Reiterating TIB's concern over unabated corruption and irregularities in relief operation including theft and misappropriation of relief materials, the Executive Director said that the widespread allegations of involvement of a section of the well-off people and public representatives demonstrates their inhuman and savagely corrupt practices. "The explanation that the need to fast-track the process has caused mistakes is also unacceptable. We are disturbed that the Prime Minister's repeated pledge of zero tolerance against corruption appears to make no difference. The latest announcement that the delivery will now be made ensuring consistency of the phone number with the national identity card raises some hope, but not enough. We call for exemplary punishment of those who are responsible for the irregularities", he said.

Referring to the scandal involving procurement and distribution of poor quality masks in the name of N-95 which exposed the frontline health professionals including doctors to greater risk of life at this critical situation Iftekharuzzaman expressed further disappointment that the investigation report on this much-debated scandal has not been disclosed for public information, nor any action taken yet. Even the relevant Minister reportedly didn't yet have the chance to see the report, which is deeply regrettable. Question may be raised if colluders or protectors of perpetrators are there among the powerful, or perhaps they are more powerful than the Prime Minister". TIB reiterates that if perpetrators of such cases of corruption were properly held to account, the Government could have prevented such embarrassments.

TIB demands scrapping rental power system and review of Power System Master Plan 2016

A remarkable chunk of power production capacity has been inactive in the country. And Power Division sought loan worth TK 15,000 crore from the government to pay the rent and subsidy for the power plants. Even the Power Cell of the government had recommended paying the fuel subsidy instead of paying it to the ministry of agriculture regarding subsidy to the farmers for irrigation.

To keep this view in consideration, TIB called upon the government for terminating the rental power system and revising the Power System Master Plan 2016. In a statement issued on 20 May 2020, terming the matter illogical, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “prioritizing subsidies to unnecessary power plants is irrational in comparison to providing to the farmers. It will deprive the farmers, and the burden of the subsidy for the wealthy power plant businesspersons would fall upon the farmers along with general citizens. So, the government must step back from such anti-people initiative, stop providing subsidy to private power houses, scrap Power generation and Distribution Law 2010, and the Power System Master Plan-2016 needs to be revised.”

Expressing concern over coal plants, Dr. Zaman also recommended revising the Power System Master Plan-2016. He said, “The country has the capacity of producing 21,000MW of renewable energy. In addition, the government pledged to produce 10 percent power from this sector to meet the country’s demand. However, the measures to implement the target are unnoticeable.”

Development afterwards: Upon TIB’s repeated call, government initiated some steps that included, scrap quick rental power plant; discourage costly oil based plants; halt developing all Coal power plants except big three; revise Power Sector Master Plan.

TIB demands Justice for GCC Engineer Delowar’s murder

TIB urged the government to ensure justice for Delwar Hossain, an executive engineer of Gazipur City Corporation (GCC), who was murdered for standing against corruption. In a statement issued on 26 May 2020, the anti-graft watchdog called upon the authorities concerned to bring those responsible for this murder to justice through a proper investigation and compensate Delowar’s family in a fair way.

Citing media reports those indicate towards Delwar’s killing a premeditated one by corrupt coworkers and the contractors working at the GCC, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “The government has to ensure exemplary punishment for the culprits who took advantage of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic to brutally murder Delowar.

TIB said “If the government fails to ensure justice for the victim here, then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s zero-tolerance policy against corruption will come under question. Despite the efforts of the law enforcement agencies to quickly identify and arrest those directly involved in the killing, none has yet been brought under the law.”

“We think that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), without showing any fear, should immediately identify those who are corrupt, regardless of how powerful they are or what influential quarter they belong to,” concluded Dr Zaman.

TIB worried over growing examples of unaccountable arbitrariness; Calls to curb the trend

In the wake of repeated incidents of unaccountable arbitrariness in the critical period amid Coronavirus-led crisis, TIB has strongly demanded that such trend be stopped immediately in the interest of establishing rule of law and preventing corruption.

Referring to the unconcerned irresponsibility of hospital authority over a fire in a hospital recently which caused tragic loss of life, the anti-graft watchdog has termed the case as 'negligence'. And commenting on the fleeing of suspects accused on serious charge like allegedly shooting of a top official of a private bank to avail loan facility and leave the country in an air-ambulance, TIB remarked the incident as 'commercial criminalization in collusion with concerned authorities'.

In a [press release](#) issued on May 30, 2020, TIB also expressed its fear that unethical business practices are being patronized by the government as according to news reports, it plans towards expansion of provisions in legalizing black money in the upcoming national budget. For the greater national interest, TIB demanded to ensure accountability in business sector in addition with strict implementation of Prime Minister's "zero-tolerance against corruption" policy.

Referring to the incident of tragic death of five patients in the fire at the United Hospital, TIB said in the statement that several serious allegations have come out against the hospital authorities in this tragic incident. According to media reports, the fire broke out in the isolation unit where the combustible material was used as construction material, and the fire extinguishers were out of date. Besides, all the deceased were on life support, a claim by the hospital authorities was denied by the family of the deceased and experts. "Such 'misleading behavior' on the part of the owner and failure to accept any kind of liability is absolutely unacceptable. In this case, the committee set up to investigate the incident must report objectively, without being affected by any influence, and if it finds evidence of "criminal negligence", it must ensure the strictest application of the law, including maximum compensation to the families of those who lost their lives," said TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "We want to believe that these types of private hospitals are operating from a humanitarian perspective besides making profits. However, the issue of 'service' will only be limited in signboard, and the medical service candidates will lose to the scale of business profit, their lives will be lost due to negligence - this is not acceptable under any circumstances. "

Remarking that 'the visible application of law is one of the key foundations of establishing the rule of law', the executive director of TIB said, "there has been an uproar over the cases on alleged recent shooting of a top official of a private bank for obtaining illegal loans and torture of several officials in detention. There is no chance of avoiding liability here on the shuffling pretext that 'travel ban has not been imposed against them'. Despite the practical shutdown of air travel around the globe due to the Covid-19 crisis, they have been allowed to leave the country at unusual pace of the entire legal process, and now the way through which one department of the government is trying to avoid its responsibility by imposing liability to another, has further strengthened the fear of illegal collusion."

Pointing towards the wrecked banking sector, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Taking unethical commercial benefits, influential people have already brought the country's banking sector to the brink of destruction. As always, if they are acquitted with the 'direct aid' of the government this time also, it will be sheer disobedience of the Hon'ble Prime Minister's 'Zero Tolerance Policy' against corruption."

Assessing the overall activities of the government, TIB observes that there is fear about whether the Hon'ble Prime Minister's 'declared position' against corruption to ensure accountability is confined to speech only. "The government is certainly not in a position to claim that such fear is completely baseless in all the incidents we have witnessed one after another in the months during the Corona crisis. In such a reality, we call on the government to move away from this suicidal step. We want to believe that the government of the country has not yet been taken hostage by a handful of vested interests, concluded Dr. Iftekharuzzaman.

YES NEWS

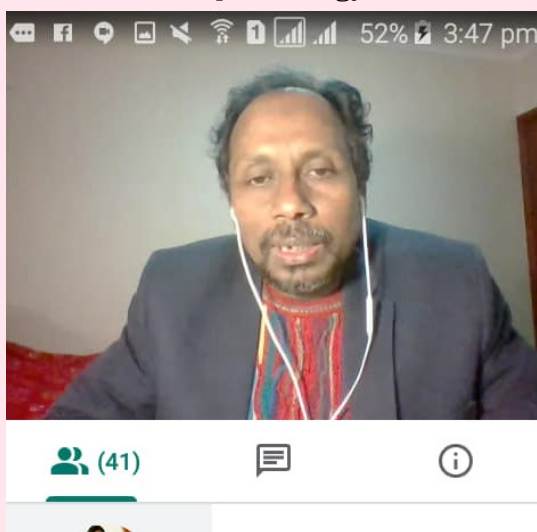
IER-YES launches an online poster campaign

To create awareness among the students on Covid-19, YES Group-Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka launched an online poster campaign on 12 May 2020. They made different types of posters aiming to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. The campaign received an overwhelming response from the students of IER as well as across the University of Dhaka.



ULAB-YES arranges a webinar 'Understanding the Covid-19 Pandemic'

YES Group-University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) organized a webinar on "Understanding the Covid-19 Pandemic" on 22 May 2020. The arrangement was first of its kind among the all YES groups of Dhaka and CCCs. Total 100 counts participants were registered their interest to that event. Professor Dr. Abul Hasnat Milton, Director, Epidemiology Resource Centre, Australia was present as the featured speaker. The session



was so insightful, informative and enthralling that the participants had thousands of questions/queries. Unfortunately, it was not possible to accommodate all of those questions in that session.

Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, Director, Mr. Mohammad Tauhidul Islam, Senior Programme Manager, Outreach and Communication of TIB and Mr. Hasibul Hasan, Adviser to the ULAB YES Group had also graced the event

CCC News

CCCs extend hands for Covid-19 affected people and make awareness

Under the umbrella of Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), SWAJON, YES and YES Friends along with the CCC members extended hands for financially affected vulnerable people in the Coronavirus pandemic. The self-motivated young volunteers, specially the YES & YES Friends members of 45 CCCs, undertook a series of voluntary activities in response to COVID-19. The activities covered raising awareness, financial & essentials support, distributing different goods etc. CCC and SWAJON members contributed financially in these activities and guided youths for raising campaign. A number of CCCs also mobilized fund for supporting Covid-19 ridden vulnerable core actors & vulnerable people of their community.

YES and YES Friends members distributed the health advisory published by TIB among the grass-root people including their own community. They made awareness to maintain social distance and stay at home during the period of contagious disease. With the support of CCC & SWAJON, YES & YES Friends members distributed masks and hand sanitizers free of cost among the vulnerable people. Mr. Sudhen Chandra, one of YES Group leaders from Nilphamari CCC, said, 'with the guidance & initiatives of CCC, YES & YES Friends members got a scope to drive humanitarian activities and efforts among the affected people in this pandemic.

In addition, the YES & YES Friends members also provided extensive voluntary support to the local administration and different organizations for reaching out vulnerable people. They helped to prepare lists of persons desperately in need of relief and submitted it to the respective authority.



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