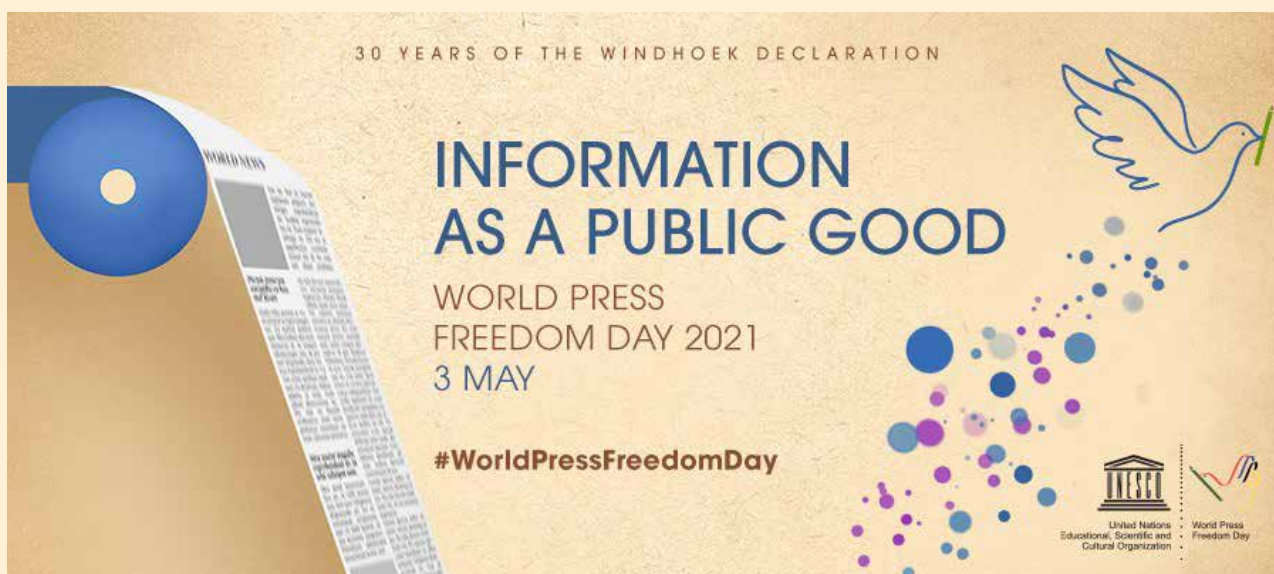


National News

DSA, collusion with politics and business obstacles for independent journalism: TIB on World Press Freedom Day



Dhaka, 2 May 2021: Despite the rise of media outlets over the last decade, independent journalism, professionalism of the media, and free flow of information are facing obstacles due to the misuse of the Digital Security Act and collusion between politics and business, said Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

Issuing a statement to mark the World Press Freedom Day, TIB also said that due to lack of strong financial and institutional structure the media houses are held hostage by corporate capital and sometimes the media houses require political favour to receive a license which put the profession and livelihood of the journalists at risk.

Also, mentioning the helpless condition of the journalists amid the pandemic, TIB called for implementing constitutional obligations and international commitments to ensure a conducive environment for independent and professional media.

TIB Executive Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “Article 39 of the constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression to every citizen as well as the freedom of the press. But in the face of various pressures the constitutional rights have been turned merely into a paper document resulting in the failure of ensuring the professional protection of journalists and free media, and subsequently weakening the democratic foundations of the state as well as undermining the people’s right to free and impartial information.”

He said that most of the media is owned by businessmen and due to the direct and indirect political involvement of this business community, ‘media capture’ has now gained an institutional basis.

He further points out that Bangladesh’s ranking 152nd out of 180 countries in the latest World Free Media Index shows the fragile state of the country’s media.

Dr. Zaman also said that the theme of this year's World Free Media Day is 'Information as a Public Good', but a section of the government thinks information is government's property and only the government has the right to publish as much information as it wants, which undermines the right of the people to know.

In conclusion, he stressed on meeting the target-10 of the SDG-16 by forming proper policy for the media houses and creating a conducive environment for journalism.

Whitening black money provision will discourage honest taxpayers, TIB says

Dhaka, 22 May 2021: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) expressed surprise and outrage at the Finance Minister's statement on the opportunity to whiten black money in the current financial year for an indefinite period.

In the long run, the benefits of whitening black money will discourage honest taxpayers and encourage the institutionalisation of the culture of default in the tax system, the anti-graft body said by issuing a statement.

TIB also demanded the government not to provide any scope to legalise black money in the next budget, terming the facility discriminatory, unconstitutional, and conducive to corruption.

The finance minister said that as long as there is undisclosed money in the economy, there would be an opportunity to whiten it. In such a reality, the plan to keep the black money whitening opportunities indefinitely will highlight the question of fairness and equity in the tax system, said TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman in the statement.

"And it will be considered as a new incentive for the corrupt at the time of COVID 19. So, it is expected that the government will move away from such reckless and suicidal plans," he adds.

If there was an opportunity to legalise black money with only 10 percent tax, why should honest taxpayers pay 25 to 30 percent income tax, he questioned.

"Even if the government gets some revenue from such an opportunity temporarily, it will gradually encourage a large number of taxpayers to default, which will increase the level of revenue loss in the long run and institutionalise a new culture of tax evasion," said Dr. Zaman.

Now is the right time to stop the long-standing unconstitutional practice of providing opportunities for whitening black money, said the TIB executive director.

Arrest of Rozina Islam: An attempt to gag independent journalism

Dhaka, 18 May 2021: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) expressed grave concern over the detainment and harassment of Rozina Islam at the health ministry and over filing a case under a draconian law—Official Secrets Act.

Strongly condemning the incident, TIB compared the incident to muzzling independent journalism. The incident is an act of revenge on her for doing a series of corruption reports on the health sector, said TIB.

In a statement, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “It is a repercussion (Harassing Rozina) of Rozina Islam’s report that portrayed the picture of irregularities and corruption of the health ministry at different times and showed the lack of coordination and professionalism of the ministry while dealing with the Coronavirus crisis. It is warning from the corrupt to the journalists who are working with principle and honesty amid hundreds of adversaries in the interest of the people.”

Expressing shock over her arrest under the colonial period act, he said, “Rozina’s identity as a journalist was not taken into consideration while filing the case. Detaining Rozina was an attempt to teach a lesson to the media by a group of vested quarters.”

Dr. Zaman further said the Right to Information Act was a light of hope for freedom of expression but the Digital Security Act and the addition of the Official Secrets Act mired everything and the incident of Rozina Islam is the consequence of that.

He also expressed outrage over the failure of proper probe and fair trial for the journalists oppressed in the past and strongly demanded unconditional release of Rozina Islam and exemplary punishment for those who were involved in harassing her.

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