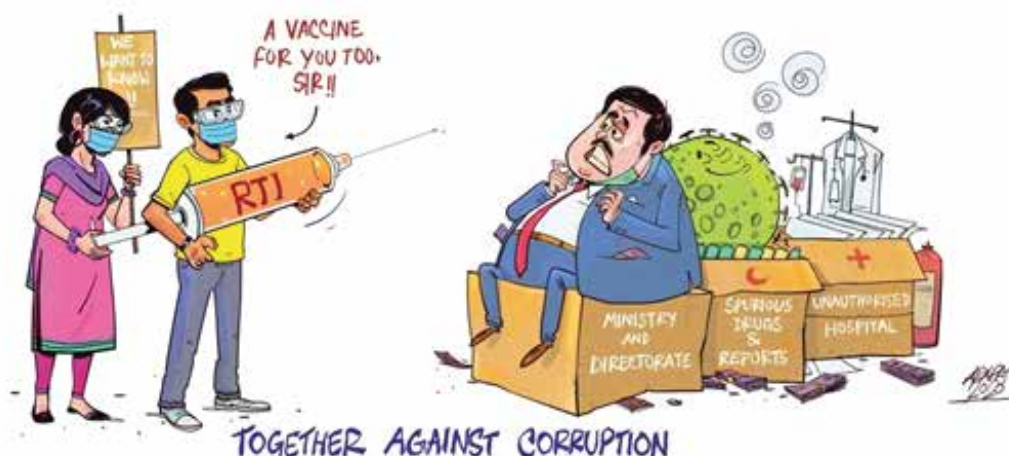


National News

TI Bangladesh Observes 2020 Int'l Right to Know Day: Investigative Journalism Awards 2020 announced



TI Bangladesh celebrated the international Right to Know Day with great enthusiasm. As the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the significance of access to information more than ever, this year, TI Bangladesh's observance specially focused on to the right to information in times of crisis. Marking the Right to Know Day on 28 September, which has also been observed globally as International Day for Universal Access to Information, TI Bangladesh called upon the government to formulate and implement effective policy strategies to ensure effective and reliable flow of information in times of crisis; thus allowing greater access to government-held information.

With the theme তথ্যের অধিকার, সুশাসনের হাতিয়ার; তথ্যই শক্তি, দুর্নীতি থেকে মুক্তি (Right to information is a tool of good governance; Information is power to get rid of corruption), TI Bangladesh chalked out week-long events to observe the day both at national and local level. Besides holding online-based youth-led campaigns and discussion meetings to encourage citizens about applying their rights to get information, TI Bangladesh organised a high-level virtual open discussion on "Right to Information, Freedom of Expression and Investigative Journalism: Bangladesh Perspective" on 28 September.

Md. Masum Billah, Deputy Programme Manager- Outreach & Communication, TIB presented the keynote paper which analyzed the current situation of right to information, freedom of expression and investigative journalism in Bangladesh. The panel discussants highlighted that most of the media nowadays are producing similar news with slight changes in headlines. Some media consider themselves as allies of the ruling party. Furthermore, political influence and pressure in different forms including indiscriminate misuse of the highly disputed Digital Security Act, widespread media capture and the lack of courage to some extent, have affected journalists negatively. Instead of being investigative, these adverse trends have been turning journalists away from actual journalism. They are not adequately prepared, and the media owners are not interested to arrange necessary trainings for the journalists. The overall situation resulted into people losing trust and confidence on media. To regain public confidence and trust, the journalists need to challenge the traditional structure through professional integrity and courage. To mitigate the division and gap created among the government, media owners and journalists, the experts stressed on strategic investigative journalism through ensuring professional safety and collective efforts against all types of evil forces.

While the government is to be applauded for enacting the Right to Information Act, the mentality of a section of the government in implementing this law is - 'Information is government property'; and the government will publish as much information as it wants. At the same time, in many cases, the disclosure of information has become a risky issue as some sections of the political and administrative powers lack courage to face criticism,” said Dr. Iftekharuzzaman in the meeting.



Criticizing arbitrary use of digital security act, Dr. Zaman termed such practice as a matter of great national and international concern. “This pressure on the media is alarming and in effect it has been creating irresistible obstacles to democratic accountability, the establishment of integrity and the prevention of corruption.” Emphasizing the significance of skills, honesty, trust and confidence of the journalists against all odds, the media also needs to be vocal together with the civil society in demanding freedom of expression, speech and opinion as recognized by the Constitution, and put pressure on the government and other stakeholders to ensure a conducive environment for journalism, concluded Dr. Zaman.

In the meeting, eminent Media Researcher and Social Activist Professor Afsan Chowdhury, Professor of Department of Mass Communication & Journalism, Dhaka University Dr. Gitiara Nasreen, Planning Consultant of Boishakhi Television Julfikar Ali Manik were present as the panelists. Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, Director-Outreach & Communication, TIB conducted the meeting while Professor Dr. Sumaiya Khair was also present at the meeting. Among others, representatives of different media, development organizations, and aspiring journalists attended the event.

Following the discussion meet, TI-Bangladesh announced Investigative Journalism Awards 2020 to 4 journalists and a team of journalists for video documentary. Details of the winners and the winning news items and documentary can be found here. Winning Journalists of each category will receive a cheque worth of BDT 1 lac twenty-five thousand, a crest and a certificate of honor; while the winning documentary will receive cheque worth of BDT 1 lac and fifty thousand, a crest and a certificate of honor.



At local level, in 45 locations of the country, members of the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs), YES, YES Friends and SWAJAN members observed the Right to Know day with variety of engagement programmes i.e. discussion meetings with public offices, online seminars, campaigns, video-drama presentations etc.

In the discussion meetings with the public offices, CCCs shared survey findings with the local offices with support of CCCs across the country along with YES, YES Friends and SWAJAN members that focused on the information disclosure scenario at the web portals of public offices at both Zila (District) and Upazila (Sub-district) levels. The survey covered availability of published information under seven indicators i.e. notice Board, news, information on public services, office chiefs, designated officers, officials and how to contact the authority in need. 1954 offices at Zila level and 188 at Upazila level under the survey were mainly the public-service delivery offices i.e. Offices of the Deputy Commissioners, Superintended of Police, Fire Service, Anti-Corruption commission, Social services, Primary education, Civil surgeon, Information, Hospitals, Local police etc. CCCs also placed 7-points recommendations at each of their areas to make the web portals more effective and citizen-friendly, including official steps to ensure publishing updates, awareness raising campaigns to encourage citizens to access information through web portals etc.

Throughout the series of programmes during the celebration, TI Bangladesh placed 13 points recommendations including formulation and implementation of effective policy strategies to ensure effective and reliable flow of information in times of crisis; vigilant focus towards increasing usage of digital tools to facilitate information disclosure and access to information; bring political parties, media and business entities under RTI Act; amendment of certain provisions of contradictory laws with RTI act and laws ensuring people's right to information, speech and expression such as Digital Security Act; ensure necessary legal protection of information seekers in the act etc.

TI Bangladesh played an instrumental role in the enactment of the Right to Information Act 2009 adopted in the Parliament on 29 March 2009, which became operational in July 2009. TIB has been observing the RTK Day since 2006, as the first organization to do so in Bangladesh.

Virtual Discussion on RTK: Investigative Journalism Award 2020

Journalists can overcome any obstacle and shift the wave with their honesty and courage, said speakers at a virtual open discussion on the anti-corruption investigative journalism award ceremony titled 'Right to Information, Freedom of Expression and Investigative Journalism: Perspective Bangladesh', organized by TIB to mark the International Right to Information Day on September 28, 2020.

Speakers also emphasized on genuine investigative journalism to gain the trust of the people. In the discussion session, the keynote paper was presented by Md. Masum Billah, Deputy Programme Manager of the Outreach & Communication division. Masum analyzed the current situation of right to information, freedom of expression and investigative journalism in Bangladesh.

Eminent Media Researcher and Social Activist Professor Afsan Chowdhury, Dhaka University Professor of Mass Communication & Journalism Dr. Gitiara Nasreen, Planning Consultant of Boishakhi Television Julfikar Ali Manik were the panelists for this year's Investigative Journalism Award. TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman presided over the Award Ceremony. Director of Outreach and Communication Division, Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam moderated the meeting while Adviser to Executive Management of TIB Professor Dr. Sumaiya Khair was also present in the

meeting. Among others, representatives of different media, development organizations, and aspiring journalists attended the event.

Professor Afsan Chowdhury said, “The media now considers itself as a sub-political force instead of media. They rely on vague and flashy headlines without participating in investigative journalism.”

Dr. Prof. Gitiara Nasreen said, “It is questionable how much the media can play the role of the watchdog. All forms of media are providing the same kind of information.”

Journalist Zulfiqar Manik said, “There is, was and will be pressure on journalism, especially investigative journalism. Through this we have to work with honesty and courage.”

Participating in the open discussion, MRDI Executive Director Hasibur Rahman said, “Journalists have to decide whether they will cultivate news or hunt them!”

Seasoned investigative journalist Badruddoza Babu said, “The media owners have sided with the influential people. So, objectivity of journalism is being compromised.”

Journalist Sharifuzzaman Pintu emphasized the importance of investigative journalism in resolving it and ensuring the professional protection of journalists.

In the closing remarks of the discussion session Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “While the government is to be applauded for enacting the Right to Information Act 2009, the mentality of a section of the government in implementing this law is - 'Information is government's property'; and the government will publish as much information as it wants.” He further added, “This pressure on the media is alarming, as a consequence it has been creating irresistible obstacles to democratic accountability, the establishment of integrity and the prevention of corruption.”

The discussion meeting was followed by the Investigative Journalism Award 2020. TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, announced the names of the award winners. A total of 49 reports were submitted to have considered for this year's Investigative Journalism Award. A total of four journalists and one documentary programme were awarded.

In the print media regional category, two journalists were jointly awarded. Faisal Islam was awarded for a series of three episodes titled “Corruption in Family Planning Activities in Jessore” published in 'Dainik Gramer Kagaz' and Mohammad Selim was awarded for the report “Bashundhara Group is 'consuming' paddy land, homesteads and forests indiscriminately in Satkhira” published in Chatgar Bani.

Arifur Rahman, a senior reporter of Dainik Kaler Kantho, has won the National Newspaper category for his four-episode series 'ADP: Virus in the Antidote'. NTV senior reporter Safiq Shahin has won the Television (Reporting) category this year for his six-episode series of reports aired on NTV on October 6-13, 2019 under the title 'A litigious syndicate: From the plain to the hills'.

In the Television (Documentary) category, Channel Twenty-Four's crime show ‘Searchlight’ won the award this year for its investigative episode titled ‘Blanket!’

Each of the winning journalists received a certificate, a crest and a cheque worth of 125,000 BDT. For the past 22 years, TIB has been hosting the ‘Investigative Journalism Award’ to journalists and reporters who work to uncover corruption and crime.

Political patronage and bribery aid chemical businesses run in Old Dhaka: Bribery ranges from TK 1,500 to 2,50,000 for issuing chemical trade license, finds TIB study



With the backing of a section of political leaders and corrupt officials from different law enforcement agencies, old Dhaka's chemical business is still running, exposing its dwellers to deadly fire incidents like the last year's Churihatta blaze in Chawkbazar, finds TIB study.

The study identifies that after the Churihatta fire incident in 2019, renewing licenses of chemical business continues in old Dhaka by unfair means under political influence.

The report says some political leaders obtain licenses under their names without even owning the business they have permits for. Later, in exchange of money, they let business persons use the licenses.

The study also shows that the risky chemical warehouses in old Dhaka couldn't be relocated due to corruption and lack of coordination among concerned government offices and political clout.

TIB unveiled the research study titled "Nimtoli, Churihatta and Afterwards: Governance Challenges in Ensuring Fire Safety in old Dhaka and Way-out" on 3 September 2020 at a virtual press conference.

Aimed at looking into the performance of relevant ministries and departments, progress of implementation of recommendations followed by fire incidents and reviewing fire safety initiatives in old Dhaka, the study finds significant deficiencies in all six governance indicators of the study i.e. capacity, coordination, transparency, participation, accountability, irregularities, and corruption.

Speaking at the conference, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekhazzaman said, "Lack of good governance is acute among the relevant institutions which are responsible for the recurrence of fire tragedies like Nimtoli and Churihatta. Similarly, lack of political will is also evident when it comes to removing the chemical warehouse from old Dhaka."

The study found that the bribe for issuing licenses ranges from BDT 20,000-30,000 in Department of Environment, BDT 1,50,000-2,50,000 in Department of Explosives, BDT 3,000-12,000 in Fire Service and BDT 1,500-18,000 in city corporation.

Besides, flammable matters are imported and carried to the warehouses openly, and the law enforcement agencies take BDT 300 to release each vehicle.

The study further revealed that no legal action had been taken so far against the illegal chemical warehouses and the culprits of the Nimtoli and Churihatta tragedies, although they were identified.



Earlier, the High Court issued a show-cause notice to relevant authorities asking why the chemical warehouses would not be removed from old Dhaka. But no government agencies have replied to the notice even after ten years of the order. Similarly, when the Department of Environment files cases, they do not get due support from the local police station to investigate the offenders.

Moreover, the study finds that compensating the accident victims has not been addressed with importance. There is still no guideline for compensation, and the victim families of Nimtoli and Churihatta tragedies have not yet been properly compensated.

Referring to the study, Dr. Zaman said, “None of the accidents at Nimtoli and Churihatta was isolated. Almost all the institutions responsible for preventing these accidents have failed in their duties. The lion's share of instructions by the task force remain unimplemented, so there will be nothing to be surprised if such a fire incident is repeated. Concerned institutions continue to disobey government directives. Such incidents are a clear example of lack of good governance and immorality.”

He concluded by saying that those responsible for implementing the directives of the task force should be held accountable; otherwise, it won't be possible to prevent the recurrence of such accidents.

Recommendations

The study recommended necessary steps to ensure adequate compensation to the victim families of the previous incidents with rehabilitation.

Other recommendations included --- formation of a national chemical safety committee with members from concerned institutions and experts and formulation of a guideline and policy on chemical safety; awareness-raising programmes for the citizens, ensuring participation of locals in relocating chemical warehouses; and ensuring proper legal actions against those liable for delaying the implementation of recommendations made by the inquiry committee and the task force.

Conducted by TIB Outreach and Communication Director Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, Research & Policy (R&P) Deputy Programme Manager Mostafa Kamal presented the research findings at the conference.

E-GP process shrouded in political influence, collusion, and syndication; TIB calls for more accountability



Political influence, collusion between influential people, and syndication still play a crucial role in getting public procurement contracts from four government institutions despite introducing a simplified procurement process named e-Government Procurement (e-GP), reveals a report of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

The four institutions are the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Roads and Highways Division (RHD), Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), and Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (BREB).

The TIB report has unearthed that the introduction of electronic government procurement (e-GP) system since 2011 helped shift the public procurement system from manual to digital, and incidents like tender box snatching, preventing tender submission, and blocking office premises also stopped, but corruption organisations persist in other ways.

The observations came up in a TIB study titled ‘Good Governance in Government Procurement: Monitoring the Effectiveness of e-GP in Bangladesh’, launched through a virtual press conference on September 16, 2020. TIB has also made 13 recommendations to overcome the existing limitations and get the benefits of e-GP.

TIB analysed and reviewed the application and effectiveness of e-GP in the form of good governance in the public procurement sector in Bangladesh based on data collected from July 2019 to February 2020. The data was collected from 52 offices of the four administrative sectors using the internationally recognised ‘Traffic signal method’.

The data was then analysed under 20 different indicators of significant five areas, including Institutional Capacity, e-GP Process, e-GP Management, Transparency and Accountability, and Effectiveness. Each indicator had a scoring system as high, medium and low which refers to the scores as ‘good’ (81% or more); ‘satisfactory’ (61% to 81%); ‘not good’ (41% -60%); ‘worrying’ (40% or less).

According to the report, the RHD (75%) obtained the highest score under the institutional capacity, and BREB (63%) came second. All institutions have the financial capacity to operate e-GP, and no need to allocate separate funds for e-GP management. Most institutions have the required staffing, but there is a lack of necessary skills and training for the concerned officials.

The government guideline to initiate e-GP in at least 20% to 75% of the purchases and procurement is not adequately followed at the local offices. E-GP has not been fully introduced to purchase in many places, including Upazila Parishad offices. The annual purchase plan is not given on the website of any institution. In addition, e-GP has never been followed in military-led construction works.

According to the report, the introduction of e-GP has resulted in some positive changes in the overall government procurement. The work of purchasing, submitting and verifying the schedule has been expedited as there is no need to print the schedule and collect the documents.

Despite the easy processes, officials of almost all organisations have expressed that e-GP has nothing to do with reducing corruption. Despite the introduction of e-GP, various types of irregularities and corruption exist. There are allegations of politically controlling the work and dividing it among contractors. In some areas, political leaders, especially local MPs, decide who will submit tenders for a particular job. In many cases, the local political leader distributes work among his workers under a large license.

At the conference, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "e-GP was launched with many expectations. We thought that this would lead to the expected positive results in good governance and control of corruption in the public procurement sector. But the frustrating thing is that e-GP has increased institutional capacity, especially in the field. Still, it has not had any effect on controlling corruption and improving the quality of work."



He expressed his deep concern about the existing practice in essential areas like e-GP management, transparency & accountability, and effectiveness. He said, "Though the institutional capacity increased among the RHD, BREB, BWDM and LGED, still an overall deficit is there in every case. Political influence plays an important role in this. In our country, tenders are often used as a tool to earn illegal wealth using political power, and the government procurement sector is not free from their influence."

TIB Executive Director urged the government to ensure good governance in the e-GP process to stop the political influence, collusion and syndicates.

Documents related to this research report can be found here.

<https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/index.php/en/research-policy/92-diagnostic-study/6137-governance-in-public-procurement-effectiveness-of-e-gp-in-bangladesh>

Central Bank non-functional: Puts banking sector on edge Default loan, political influence, and business groups intervention blight Bangladesh Bank



Bangladesh Bank (BB) failed miserably in containing defaulted loans due to the pressure from political forces, illegal interference of business syndicates and weak leadership, finds Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) study.

According to the study, the vested interest groups have influenced the recent amendment to the Banking Companies Act 1991 and other policies, including bank inspections and the appointment of deputy governors of the central bank.

Such malfunctions at the central bank that enjoys autonomy in supervision and regulation of banking activities merely on paper contributed to a 417 per cent increase of defaulted loans against a 312 per cent increase in the amount of credit between 2009 and 2019 said the study.

The entire banking sector is now at the edge of a cliff. The authorities concerned should take immediate measures to avert a probable collapse in the days ahead, it noted.

Organising a virtual press conference on 22 September 2020, TIB unveiled the research study titled 'Banking Sector Supervision and Regulating Defaulted Loan: Governance Challenges of Bangladesh Bank and Way Forward', aiming to identify the governance challenges of BB. The study considered activities of BB from January 2010 to June 2020, collecting information from January 2019 to June 2020.

TIB Research and Policy (R&P) Director Mohammad Rafiqul Hassan shared the study findings while Outreach & Communication Director Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam conducted the press conference.

Referring to the study, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Bank owners, regulators and the government – these three parties jointly create the scope for depositors' money to be looted. The government must provide security for people's money. But what is happening is quite the opposite of that. The government has been made hostage by loan defaulters."

"Bangladesh Bank, whose responsibility is to ensure the protection and security of the people's deposits has become non-functional in controlling defaulted debts by succumbing to leadership inefficiency while political influence has taken an institutional form, and businesses captured political power," said Dr. Zaman.

According to the study, the bad-loan figure would be around Tk 3 lakh crore if the written-off loans worth Tk 54,463 crore is added to the IMF-calculated Tk 2,40,167 crore in defaulted loans up to June 2019 given the volume of restructured and rescheduled loans and the amount of NPLs shown as unclassified ones because of higher court's stay orders.

The amount of defaulted loans was brought down artificially after September last year as the BB offered a relaxed rescheduling facility that allowed delinquent borrowers to regularise NPLs by making a down payment of only 2 per cent of the outstanding amount with a repayment period of 10 years, finds the study. This helped the habitual borrowers to carry on their misdeeds, leaving depositors in dire straits.

The study identified two main reasons behind the deterioration of BB's supervision and regulation over the banking sector.

One of them is “external challenges” that include limitations of law/policy and political influence by highly connected business owners. Another is Bangladesh Bank's “internal challenges” that include limitations in capacity, lack of transparency and accountability, irregularities and corruption in supervisory activities, and weak leadership.



For these reasons, BB has gradually declined from the regulatory role of the banking sector and has become subservient to the stakeholders, observed the study.

In addition, shortage of human resources in departments relevant to supervisions, inadequate time for inspection, decreasing delegation of authority to the inspection teams etc., widened the opportunity and risks.

The study found that the central bank had earlier tried to take action against the delinquent borrowers, but its efforts proved futile due to political pressure.

Dr. Zaman blamed the corrupt political culture of Bangladesh for the crisis in the sector and also opined that the businessmen have taken the country's politics hostage.

“As a result, although there is strong commitment in the government declaration on the control of defaulted loans and establishing good governance within the regulatory body, its application or effective implementation is not possible; which has brought the entire banking sector to the edge of a cliff,” he said.

Dr. Zaman warned that if the situation is not brought under control, the mass people will have to bear the brunt. So, he suggested forming an independent and neutral commission, free from the control of the government and central bank.

The study suggested 10 point recommendations including, the formation of a banking commission consisting of experts, empowering BB, setting specific guidelines on the appointment and termination of the BB board members, governor and deputy governors, and increasing the number of posts for the experts in the BB board by reducing representation from the government organisations, and scrapping of Articles of 46 and 47 of the Bank Companies Act.

The 11th National Assembly ‘not effective as expected’, says TIB’s Parliament Watch



The 11th Jatiyo Sangshad (National Assembly) has failed to function as expected in terms of legislation, representation of the people, and ensuring government accountability, said the flagship TIB study Parliament Watch (PW). The study was presented to the media through a virtual press conference on September 30, 2020.

The latest Parliament Watch (PW), first of its kind on the 11th national assembly and the 16th of the Parliament Watch (PW) series since 2001 by TIB, also identified some challenges, including gaps in the parliamentary openness, deficits in playing a vital role by the opposition party and the Speaker, and inadequate information disclosure.

The expected role of the 11th parliament, which formally commenced in early 2019 after a questionable national election, was extensively constrained by many shortfalls, mainly due to the increased exercise of monopoly power in parliamentary activities by the ruling party. Also, the inactive role of the opposition party due to its contradictory position, fewer legislative discussions and poor performance of the Members of the Parliament (MPs) and standing committees in holding the government accountable contributed to the poor performance of the Parliament.

PW covered the 1st to 5th sessions of the 11th Parliament, analysed the roles and proceedings of all the sessions in ensuring democracy and good governance, and offered recommendations for making the Parliament effective. The report summed up the observations examining the activities of the parliamentary standing committee including various sessions, President’s Speech, roles of MPs in ensuring people’s representation, enacting laws, making the government accountable, assessing the role of Speaker and engaging the MPs in the management of parliament, sustainable development goals, gender perspective etc.

According to the report, among the Members of Parliament (MPs), 61% of them are businessmen, 13% are lawyers, 5% of them are politicians, and other 21% of them are from different professions (teachers, doctors, farmers, retired government and military officers, homemakers, consultants, etc.). The report found that most of the time of the Assembly was spent on activities related to establishing public representativeness and accountability (31%). In comparison, only 9% of the time was spent on the legislation process (without budget). Although the main opposition party and other opposition members were found relatively active in proposing amendments and scrutiny of the bill, the treasury bench members spent only 16% (the ministers who introduced the bill) time out of the total law enacting times.

Also, people's participation in enacting laws could not be ensured adequately as all requests for seeking public opinion on proposed bills were rejected by voice vote as practised earlier. Similarly, views and proposals floated by opposition members in law-making processes were also dismissed.

The report also observed that only 51 out of 737 notices (7%) were adopted for discussions during the five sessions. Among these, the highest numbers of notices (53) were related to the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives. A significant number of members expressed their displeasure over the lack of opportunity to discuss various critical contemporary issues of the country. Furthermore, the total time lost due to the quorum crisis is estimated to be 19 hours and 26 minutes – which was 17.3% of the time spent. The monetary value for the entire time of the quorum crisis is estimated to be Tk 22 crore 8 lakh 63 thousand and 627.

The report identified a lack of skills and preparations among some of the MPs in presenting the statements and opinions, especially in enacting laws. The treasury bench has maintained monopoly control over the passage of the bill.



PW also identified several un-parliamentary manners, abusive words towards some civil society members and opposition parties, and disorders in the house violating the Rules of Procedure. However, the Speaker of the house did not take adequate measures to maintain order in the gallery and rarely issued a ruling to expunge the abusive comments.

Speaking about the opposition party, Dr. Zaman said, “The absence of an effective opposition party has been systematically confirmed in the current parliament. As a result, an effective opposition party that is crucial for effective parliament is missing. Unfortunately, a culture of questionable and controversial elections has been established. The possibility of a change of power through free and fair elections has been ruled out, the effect of which we can see in the parliament.”

“Thus, the absolute majority of one party in the Eleventh National Assembly and the exclusive opportunity of one party in the parliamentary activities have gained institutional form. As a result, we do not see the expected role of parliament in all of its fundamental responsibilities: legislation, law reform, public representation, and government accountability,” he added.

To make the Parliament more effective, PW placed 12-points recommendations stating that national parliamentary elections must be participatory, fair and neutral in the real sense to make the Parliament effective. In addition, Parliament should operate in a manner that ensures active participation of the opposition party in the parliamentary process, reads the report.

Newspapers and TV channels to re-register respective online: TIB expresses grave concern over free flow of information and freedom of opinion

TIB expressed grave concern over the government directive to separately re-register all online portals of the country particularly those of the long serving national newspapers and TV channels.

In a statement issued to the media on September 1, 2020, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB said, “Although it is being explained by the Information Ministry to be part of an attempt to provide the media the advantages of being registered with the government and as an attempt to control yellow journalism, this will in reality only establish total control of the government over the media in the country.”

“Control if you can the promotion of personal interests by vested quarters, but do ensure free online media at the same time. Failure to ensure free media in Bangladesh will convert pledges like ‘free flow of information’, ‘freedom of expression’, and ‘Digital Bangladesh’ as only rhetoric.”

TIB earnestly expects that the government will abandon this new directive and ensure free media in the country.

TIB demands a judicial inquiry into the attack on the UNO of Ghoraghat: Calls for exemplary punishment for those involved

TIB has strongly protested against the propaganda being carried out by vested quarters that are calling the barbaric attack on the UNO in Ghoraghat a ‘theft motive’ or ‘isolated incident’. In a statement issued on September 6, 2020, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman called for a judicial inquiry into the real cause and the identification of the real culprits directly involved in the brutal attack and ensuring exemplary punishment.

In the statement, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “The way such a shocking and disturbing incident is being promoted as a ‘mere theft’ and an ‘isolated incident’ based on the initial ‘confession’ of a suspect is very disappointing and suspicious.” “We are demanding exemplary punishment by identifying those involved through a judicial inquiry to find out whether local vested interests have a role to play in the attack on a government official.”

Dr. Zaman also said, “The heinous attack posed a real risk of a crisis of public confidence in the political party and the administration. Besides, I think it is very important for the political leadership of the country to do a rigorous introspection on the embarrassing details of the involvement of leaders and activists of the ruling party at various levels in every unfortunate incident.”

Dhaka WASA's re-appointment of current managing director is unethical and illegal: TIB calls for avoiding corruption

TIB has strongly condemned the special meeting of the Dhaka WASA Board that was to be held on September 22 with a proposal to re-appoint the current managing director in an unethical and unconstitutional manner. In a press release issued on September 19, TIB said that in the language of the agenda of the meeting, it was clear that the top management of Dhaka WASA would continue to maintain the unethical and illegitimate position of the same person without any hesitation.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “According to media and reliable direct sources, the special meeting of the Dhaka WASA Board has only mentioned the name of the current managing director and asked him to finalize the recommendation for re-appointment for another three-year term. Dr. Zaman said, “After the controversial appointment of the current managing director of Dhaka WASA in 2009, has been serving for 11 consecutive years for five consecutive terms in a questionable process.”

According to media reports and other reliable sources, every time there has been a violation of law and order in renewing his appointment. TIB demanded that a new managing director with qualifications and experience should be appointed in a transparent manner.

Global Climate Action Day: TIB seeks implementation of promised mitigation measures and assurance of adequate adaptation funds for LDCs

The global school students' movement, Fridays for the Future, called for the first-ever "Global Climate Action Day" on 25 September 2020, calling on political leaders to take effective steps to mitigate climate change and increase the use of renewable energy instead of fossil fuels. TIB supports the moral movement of school children around the world against the polluting activities responsible for climate change.

In a statement on September 24, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "In the face of increasing global risks of climate change, the Paris Agreement does not meet the target set by global warming to reduce the temperature to at least 2 degrees Celsius and 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to the pre-industrial era."

In the statement, TIB called on school children to unite and move forward with the 'Fridays for the Future' movement, in line with the Paris pledges of the industrialized nations to reduce green-house gas emissions without delay and to ensure funding for the affected countries.

Nationwide story writing competition

To mark the International Youth Day, YES group- Department of Development Studies, DU organized a nationwide story writing competition. The story submission was carried out from July 15 to September 15. The subject of the competition was 'Story of Corruption and Resistance during COVID 19'. In the first part, 35 stories were submitted by the story writers from all over the country and ten stories were selected for final evaluation. Renowned writer and story-teller Sadat Hossain and Rahel Rajib were the judges for the final round. They have selected three winners among ten finalists.

Jannatun Naium Shoma from the Sher-E-Bangla Agriculture University got the champion's award. Md. Fakhrul Islam from the University of Dhaka and Sabrina Mansur from Dhaka Medical College were named runner ups in this competition. The winners were awarded books and certificate while their stories were published in three national print and online media.

To announce the result, YES group organized a webinar on 'durniti birodhi golpo adda' on September 15, 2020. The judges expressed their opinion about the competition and stories. Sadat expressed his

hope about a better criminal justice system and a corruption free Bangladesh. Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman congratulated all of the participants and encouraged them to learn from the honorable judges and write regularly. He instructed everyone to continue to fight against corruption while declaring the top 3 winners.

Meeting with Sreemangal Upazila Land Office: Making it citizen-friendly

Sreemangal Upazila Land authority will enhance transparency and accountability to make the office more citizen-friendly. A complaint redress mechanism will be introduced so that citizens able to raise their issues and get fruitful remedy on regular basis. In addition, brokers will not be allowed in the office premises which will ensure citizens services without paying undue payment, stated Assistant Commissioner (Land) of Sreemangal Upazila of Moulvibazar district Md. Nesar Uddin in an online meeting with Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Sreemangal held on September 8, 2020. President of the CCC Dwipendra Chandra Bhattacharjee presided over the programme.

The Assistant Commissioner added, for introducing e-registration of land, service recipients are getting services without any undue assistance from brokers. He committed to make the office more citizen-friendly.

CCC, Sreemangal suggested the authority to set-up Designated Officers' (DO) name plates in all Union Land Offices along with the Upazila Land Office for ensuring free flow of information. They also recommended to introduce hotline number, complaint box, information desk along with updating the citizen charters at the office. CCC asked the authority to ensure delivery of gender-friendly services too.

Vice President of the CCC Md. Bodrul Alam delivered the welcome speech in the meeting. Among others, public surveyor of the Upazila Land Office Shahidul Islam, Registration Assistant Sayed Mottakin Billah, members of the CCC Jahar Tarafder and Shah Arif Ali Nasim also participated in the meeting.

Climate Finance Governance during Corona: Madaripur Municipality ensures citizens' participation implementing climate funds

A virtual discussion meeting titled 'Climate Finance Governance during Corona: The Role of Stakeholders' was held on September 9, 2020 organized by Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Madaripur. Md. Khalid Hossain Yead, mayor of Madaripur municipality was present as chief guest while Khan Mohammad Shahid, president of the CCC, presided over the meeting. The meeting discussed local and national issues on climate change and way forward to prevent its impacts. Locally elected representatives, government officials, civil society members, social activists, teachers and students participated in this meeting.

Khalid Hossain Yead said, "Citizens' participation surely increases transparency and accountability in any decision-making process as well as development works. The municipality ensures citizens and victims participation in implementing the climate funds. The mayor asked the citizens to act responsibly for securing the nature.

Numbers of recommendations to the authorities were placed included stopping the dumping of garbage in local rivers; curbing filling up ponds of municipality area and making arrangements for their conservation by digging; motivating the citizens to plant trees and maintaining the balance of the natural environment; increasing transparency and accountability of climate finance projects to implement at the local level; increasing public opinion to involve in project adoption and implementing at the local level; increasing coordination among the departments which are implementing climate finance projects; emphasizing the use of surface water instead of ground water for irrigation; and keeping in mind the adverse effects of climate change while planning any project etc.

Khan Mohammad Shahid, president of CCC, Madaripur said, transparency and accountability is the pre-condition of good governance. Each of the public service related government offices should ensure citizens' participation in their activities.

Md. Zakir Hossain Khan, Senior Programme Manager - Climate Finance Governance of TIB presented the thematic concept paper in the meeting while Md. Atikur Rahman, Senior Programme Manager-Civic Engagement of TIB shared the goal and objectives of the meeting in his welcome speech.

Among others, Executive Engineer of Water Development Board Partho Pratim Saha, Deputy Director of Department of Agricultural Extension Md. Moazzem Hossain, Executive Engineer of Public Health Department Joyonto Sarker, District Fisheries Officer Ripon Kanti Ghose, District Primary Education Officer Nasir Uddin Ahmed, Deputy Director- Horticulture Md. Saiful Islam, Principal Scientific Officer Dr. Saleh Ahmed and Inspector Md. Tuhin Alam of Department of Environment participated in the meeting as guest speakers. A total of 58 people were connected in the meeting.

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Design: Barkat Ullah Babu

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