

TIB meets the Election Commission, suggests amending laws to ensure government's neutral and conflict of interest free role during elections



Dhaka, 13 June 2022: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has urged the Election Commission to make necessary legal reformations for ensuring the government's neutral and conflict of interest free role during elections. TIB presented a number of recommendations to Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal and the commissioners during the meeting on 13 June 2022.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Adviser Executive Management at TIB Professor Dr. Sumaiya Khair, and four other representatives took part in the meeting. TIB presented research findings and analysis reports on challenges of the Election Commission. Issues such as inclusive election, level playing field, transparency and accountability in the election process, and legal limitations were discussed.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, while speaking at the meeting, urged the election commission to ensure a level playing field during elections and said, "The people of the country have both expectations and concerns over the government's attitude, behaviour, form, and structure during the election. To remove the concerns, the Election Commission can give its well thought-out advice to government, or other relevant stakeholders on how the government's attitude should be during the election. Similarly, the commission can

propose for amending laws to that end. If incumbent ministers and members of parliament want to participate in the polls without resigning from their posts, the commission can propose for amending laws to ensure a level playing field for all candidates participating in the election. Moreover, our recommendation is to ensure unrestricted flow of information during the election. The media alongside local and international election observers must be able to work without restrictions. Uninterrupted internet and mobile networks should be ensured. We also urge the Election Commission to ensure that EVMs are technically flawless and all stakeholders accept it before it is integrated in the election process.”

To ensure a free, fair, and inclusive election, TIB has given the following recommendations to the Election Commission -

1. Legal Amendments: Legal amendments can be made to ensure a neutral and conflict of interest free role of the government during the elections. If incumbent ministers and members of parliament want to participate in the polls without resigning from their posts, the commission can propose for amending laws by consulting with relevant stakeholders to ensure a level playing field for others competing in the election.

2. Gaining trust of all stakeholders: Steps should be taken to gain the trust of all stakeholders, particularly of political parties and voters. The commission should conduct dialogues with specific agendas on the neutrality of the government in order to gain trust.

3. Ensuring a level playing field for everyone: To ensure a level playing field for everyone, the electoral code of conduct should be amended so that law & order, and administrative atmosphere in polling areas can be monitored with the help of relevant agencies at least six months before, and after three months of the election. At the same time, the right to campaign and arrange public meeting must be ensured for all political parties, and the authorities must play a neutral role strictly curbing any form of suppression of opposition leaders and activists.

4. Steps against the breach of code of conduct: If multilateral accusations arise regarding violence and unlawful application of force during the national election, they have to be investigated properly and neutrally with effective punitive steps from the authorities. If the commission fails to prevent breach of code of conduct, it must provide explanatory notes publicly. Apart from the steps taken by the commission, the government has to take such accusations into consideration and initiate judicial investigation into them.

5. Disclosure of information: In order to make the election process more transparent, alongside existing information, the Election Commission has to disclose information on annual financial reports of political parties, overall information of the election (voter list of predetermined constituencies, voter related information on specific centres, cases filed over election etc.), results or reports on meetings with relevant stakeholders conducted by the commission, monitoring and evaluation report of projects implemented by the commission, and detailed budget of the Election Commission, audited financial reports and other relevant documents.

6. Disclosure of financial information of the parliament members: The Election Commission must provide the financial information of the parliament members annually to the public.

7. Disclosure of financial information of political parties: The annual financial report of income and expenditure of political parties, and the updated report on assets must be published.

8. Digitalisation: Different steps of the election process (updating voter list, collecting and submitting application for candidacy, financial statement verification of candidates, return submission etc.) have to be digitalised. The political parties must be encouraged to digitalise their candidate selection process.

9. Local and international election observers: For the sake of a healthy, safe, acceptable, and inclusive election, all interested local and international election observers must have unrestricted and pressure-free access to election centres. To this end, the accreditation process must be adequately reformed.

10. Creating an atmosphere of free access to information: Any sort of restriction or control cannot be imposed on election observers and media personnel to ensure free-atmosphere of access to information for relevant stakeholders. The common restrictions that cannot be applied are – reducing the speed of internet services, shutting down 4G and 3G mobile networks, restricting the use of motor vehicles without emergencies etc.

Birangonas wait years to get govt. benefits; victim of bribery and complicated process, finds TIB study



Dhaka, 16 June 2022: It takes more than three years for the Birangonas, the war heroines of 1971, to be included as freedom fighters in the government gazette due to its complicated process and the absence of a definite timeline for their inclusion, found a TIB

study.

The study also revealed that they are forced to pay bribes and not provided legitimate information regarding the process. Many Birangonas also face social stigmas during the entire process. Besides, the absence of proper planning, accountability, and institutional capacity at the public offices also brings woes for the Birangonas.

Even after being recognized as freedom fighters, they have to wait at least three to six months to get allowances and more than six years to get a house allocated for insolvent freedom fighters by the government, the study said.

TIB disclosed the findings of the report titled 'State Recognition and Rights of Birangona Freedom Fighters: Governance Challenges and Way-out' during a virtual press conference on 16 June 2022. The qualitative reach was conducted between January and March this year. TIB Research Associate Rabeya Akter Konika presented the findings.

The government started to issue gazettes declaring Birangonas as freedom fighters in September 2015. Till May 24 this year, the total number of gazetted and certified Birangona freedom fighters in the country is 448, as per the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs' website. However, the ministry's Management Information System (MIS) shows a list with 403 entries.

Besides, the study said the MIS has various types of mistakes in the names of 89 Birangonas and in the case of father or husband's name of 207 Birangonas. Such misinformation leads to complications in getting further benefits.

Reportedly, Birangonas are required to present some credentials for the verification of their application to be recognised as freedom fighters. In some cases, it gets difficult to collect the accreditation from the freedom fighter's commanders, the study found.

Moreover, the study showed there are massive allegations of extortion and bribery in the certification and housing applications, which often remain unreported for fear of further complications.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Birangona freedom fighters are marginalised due to the lack of adequate government priority in ensuring their state recognition and rights, and also due to the negative socio-cultural attitudes prevailing at the local level. Also, there is a lack of good governance in the whole process from identifying the Birangona freedom fighters to providing state recognition and facilities."

He also said, "The lack of social awareness and sensitivity has been a major obstacle to the recognition as well as ensuring rights of the Biranogonas."

He further added that despite the late recognition, issuing a gazette in 2015 is a commendable initiative of the government, however, there are still challenges. He called upon the government to consider the recommendations that came up in the research.

Among the 10 recommendations, some notable ones include developing a specific framework to identify Birangonas; assigning a designated person at the local level by Liberation War Affairs Ministry to assist Birangonas regarding gazette notification and other govt. benefits; and ensuring a specific timeline for receiving allowances and other benefits from the time of application for gazette registration.

All documents related to the research study can be seen here - [বীরাঙ্গনা মুক্তিযোদ্ধাদের রাষ্ট্রীয় স্বীকৃতি ও অধিকার: সুশাসনের চ্যালেঞ্জ এবং উত্তরণের উপায়](#) - Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) (ti-bangladesh.org)

DGHS drive against unauthorised hospitals a good step, but not enough

Dhaka, June 1, 2022: The ongoing drives of the health department against unauthorised private hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres and other outfits is a step in the right direction, but not enough to ensure good governance considering the volume of irregularities in the sector, said Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

Calling for a permanent solution, TIB issued a press release demanding the formation of an independent supervisory authority to monitor, control and above all ensure good governance of private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres.

Referring to a recent [TIB study](#) on private health services, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzama said, "The submission of a large number of applications at the same day the drives took place proves that the absence of monitoring is huge. Under that reality, it is questionable how much the drive will have an impact. To get benefits in the long term, the long-awaited draft law for the regulation and supervision of private medical services should be finalized and enacted as a law quickly, and specific steps should be taken for its effective implementation. At the same time, it is necessary to form a strong impartial oversight authority to monitor the quality of the private healthcare sector and ensure good governance."

TIB also stressed on conducting such drives on a regular basis. Besides, it urged the authorities to issue and renew licenses to those organisations meeting the criteria through proper inspection.

In this case, TIB urged the health directorate officials to complete their tasks in an unbiased manner and stay free from political influences, fear and nepotism.

TIB calls for binning unethical, discriminatory, and legally contradictory provision to bring back laundered money

Dhaka, 10 June 2022: Putting logic on the COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic instability instigated by the Russian aggression in Ukraine, and to keep the economy running by reducing public spending and reinforcing the private sector, the Finance Minister has unethically and unprecedentedly proposed to add a new provision in the Income Tax Ordinance to allow money launderers to bring back laundered money with little to no penalties. Such a provision, if implemented, will be unconstitutional, contradictory to existing laws, discriminatory, and tantamount to state patronisation of heinous crimes like money laundering. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has called for binning such a disgraceful proposal that was raised in the parliament.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “No matter how the minister explains it, the provision to bring back laundered money with minimal taxes and zero interrogations clearly indicates rewards and unethical protection of money launderers. Yet, the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012 and relevant international laws state that money laundering is a major crime. According to the country’s laws, laundered money is to be confiscated, perpetrators have to pay fines double the laundered amount, and they can be jailed for up to 12 years. The provision to bring back laundered money will encourage money laundering and all forms of corruption, which is against the constitution and insulting towards the Prime Minister’s ‘zero tolerance against corruption’ mandate. On the other hand, the proposed provision is immensely discriminatory towards legal tax payers as they pay minimum three times the 7 percent proposed by the minister. This is discrimination and against the core principles of the constitution. The provision has to be cancelled immediately and the national and international legal procedures must be applied to ensure accountability of the money launderers and to bring back the laundered assets.”

Saying that the provision to legalise laundered money is just a continuation of the government’s previously mandated illegal provisions to whiten black money, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “The provision to whiten black money had no real success and we don’t have to point out that the similar provision for laundered money will be unsuccessful. There is no basis of the daydream thinking that money launderers would excitedly bring back laundered money due to some incentives. Particularly, the government cannot bring back the laundered money without establishing legal bindings with destination countries where the money has been laundered. Rather, such a provision would only relieve the corrupt and the money launderers, and even make them delightful. If money laundering is licensed in such a way, the magnitude and depth of corruption and money laundering would increase exponentially in the country. We call upon the government to step away from such an illegal, unwise and suicidal path.”

TIB also urged the government to revisit and renew the budget for FY 2022-23 by consulting with renowned economists and relevant experts so that the country can face the upcoming economic challenges.

TIB's Annual Members' Meeting demands a corruption-free, well-governed, and democratic Bangladesh

Dhaka, 30 June 2022: Members of TIB in the Annual Meeting of Members (AMM) have expressed their concerns over the government's perceived lack of steps to mitigate damages caused by the devastating floods in Sylhet and Sunamganj, the government's lack of interest to protect independent journalism and the lives of media personnel, and the government's ambitions to increase pressure on independent journalism by going forward with the draft Press Council Act 2022, and the questionable decision to allow laundered money to be brought back to the country without any precondition.

The members also strongly called upon the government to take effective steps to manage disasters and protect the environment; institutionalise democracy by enabling a free, fair, and inclusive election; and to establish a well-governed democratic Bangladesh by curbing corruption and overcoming mere formalities.

In total, 47 members, who voluntarily enroll themselves in the anti-corruption social movement with TIB by paying an annual member's fee, joined the annual meeting organised on the virtual Zoom platform. The meeting was moderated by TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, presided over by elected representative of the TIB members' panel, Mohammad Shahjahan Siddiqui. Following detailed presentation of activities of TIB at the meeting, the members positively commented and expressed satisfaction regarding TIB's research work, advocacy initiatives, financial audits, and other relevant activities.

In the declaration letter of the meeting, the TIB members expressed concerns over the government's failure to mitigate damages with lack of planning and implementation in the devastating floods of Sylhet and Sunamganj despite Bangladesh has been considered a 'role model' of disaster management in the world. The TIB members called upon the government to identify the lacks in the disaster management initiatives and to support the businesses and individuals who faced losses during the crisis. Alongside that, they called on the government to come out of the disappointing position in regards to protecting the environment, biodiversity, and to mitigate the impacts of climate change. There were also calls for focusing on renewable energy sources with a specific plan to divert from coal, and LNG-based power plants.

Concerns over the overreach of the Digital Security Act and the drafted Press Council (Amendment) Act, 2022, which has the potential to suppress independent media and individual freedom of expression and has ringed alarm bells in rights groups, were also mentioned in the declaration letter following the annual meeting. On the other hand, the unconstitutional clauses of the regulation for digital, social media, and OTT platforms were also discussed and the members raised concerns over such an Act that has the potential to be used to curb freedom of expression of Bangladeshi citizens. Saying that such draconian laws are against the spirit of an Independent Bangladesh, the TIB

members called for removing all obstacles on the path to independent journalism and freedom of expression.

The TIB members also raised concerns over increased violence against women and children during and after the pandemic. Such social issues can derail the government's efforts to ensure gender balance and women empowerment, so effective steps must be taken to protect the lives of vulnerable people, commented the TIB members.

Local Level Advocacy and CCC Initiatives

Madaripur Municipality declares fiscal budget committing highest priority on citizen services

Md. Khalid Hossain Yead, the Mayor of Madaripur Municipality, announced its budget for the fiscal year of 2022-2023, underscoring a promise of the highest citizen services with the new horizons laid by the Padma Bridge. The open budget programme was organized by Madaripur Municipality with the support of Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), on 30 June 2022, at the conference room of the municipality. The 93 crore 58 lakh 54 thousand 2 hundred 41 taka 77 paisa budget was presented in the ceremony with a pledge to ensure free flow of information, prevention of corruption, women's development and the improvement of the quality of life of the marginalized people and to ensure maximum citizen services. Local citizens, government officials, people's representatives, journalists, women leaders, businessmen, civil society, NGO representatives, CCC and YES members were present at the event. Speakers thanked the municipality authority for holding pre-budget discussion and public hearing in budget preparation and announcing the budget in an open session, in response to public expectations. Participants termed it as a people-oriented budget. They stressed on the combined role of municipal authority and citizens for the sake of a proper implementation.



Upazila and Union Land Offices committed to make transparent and accountable institutions

CCC, Sreemangal organized a sharing meeting with Sreemangal land authority on 21 June 2022 in order to increase transparency and accountability in the land sector. Mr. Sandip Talukdar, Assistant Commissioner of Srimangal Upazila Land Office presided over the meeting while the Convener of CCC's Land Sub-committee, Syed Nesar Ahmad, delivered welcome speech. CCC President Dipendra Bhattacharya spoke on anti-corruption activities of CCC. TIB's Area Coordinator Parvej Kairi moderated the meeting. The meeting discussed various issues on Sreemangal Upazila Land Office and Sub-Registrar Office. The issues were – appointment of Designated Officer (DO) in the Sub-Registrar Office, Upazila Land Office, Union Land Offices and set up name plate in visible place, launching the management of Register Book providing information by land offices, ensuring free flow of information initiatives of Upazila Land authority to pay land development tax online, remove brokers from land office and make Upazila land Sub-Registrar Office corruption-free, updating Citizen Charters and setting up information board etc.



Work together against corruption to build a prosperous Bangladesh

"In order to build a prosperous Bangladesh in line with the spirit of the liberation war, everyone must work together against corruption. Corruption is against the spirit of our liberation war," said Chairman of the Task Force on Tribal Refugee Affairs Kujendra Lal Tripura, MP. CCC-TIB is working in coordination with the ongoing agenda of the government. So everyone should cooperate in CCC's work. He said this while delivering a speech as the chief guest at the launching meeting on TIB's new project "Participatory Action Against Corruption: Towards Transparency and Accountability (PACTA)". The meeting was organized by CCC, Khagrachari, in the conference room of Parbatya Zila Parishad, Khagrachari. CCC President Prof. Bodhi Satta Dewan presided over the meeting where Chairman of Khagrachari Hill District Council Mangsuiprae Chowdhury, Civil Surgeon Dr. Mohammad Saber and Additional Superintendent of Police Jinia Chakma were present as special guests. TIB's Chittagong Cluster Coordinator Md. Jasim Uddin presented about PACTA project. CCC's Vice-President Lalsa Chakma moderated the meeting. PACTA project is aimed to reduce corruption and increase integrity in service delivery to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The World Environment Day Observed

The Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) called for the effective implementation of environmental laws and policies, and to ensure sustainable environmental development in Bangladesh. This demand was made in a human chain organized in observance of the World Environment Day on 5 June 2022. This year's theme was 'One Earth: Sustainable Life in Harmony with Nature'. Considering the importance of good governance in the environment sector as a supporting force of government, TIB observes the World Environment Day every year. Besides human chain, different CCCs organised rallies, discussion meetings etc. The speakers, in the events, said that all should take responsibility for keeping the environment healthy for their own sake. If we do not keep the environment beautiful and healthy, our life will become more miserable. They stated that Bangladesh, despite not being responsible for carbon emissions, is suffering from its harmful effects. CCC, Active Citizens Group (ACG) and YES members along with the representatives of various organizations took part in the human chain.



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