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Social movement against corruption

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In the Name of Protecting Cyber Space, Fundamental Rights being Criminalised



Dhaka, 30 August 2023: The digital landscape of Bangladesh is undergoing a much-needed transformation, as the nation grapples with the delicate interplay between cyber security and individual rights. After widespread discontent and international criticism, the Government of Bangladesh is rewriting its approach to digital legislation, replacing the controversial Digital Security Act (DSA) with the Cyber Security Act (CSA) of 2023. However, beneath the facade of changes lies a more concerning reality, raising questions about the future of digital freedom.

A recent comparative analysis by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has shown similarities between the DSA and the draft CSA. It highlights that while the new law may carry a different name, key concerns regarding freedom of speech, dissent, and press freedom persist.

At the heart of the issue lies lack of differentiation between cyber security and cybercrimes. The renaming to “Cyber Security Act” suggests a focus on safeguarding the digital landscape from threats, but the inclusion of provisions relating to cybercrimes derails the purpose. This combination of limiting civil liberties and protecting cyber spaces could create confusion and impede genuine efforts to safeguard digital infrastructure.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, TIB's Executive Director, deems the draft CSA a potential continuation of draconian measures, despite a softer exterior. His concern is shared by many, who fear that without substantial changes, the legislation may inadvertently become a new tool for curtailing basic rights.

“The fundamental rights to opinion, freedom of speech, free thought, and freedom of press are still in danger. Moreover, the idea that a person will be persecuted for expressing

something online has been re-established in the new law. The steps taken by the government are now in the process of criminalising the very basic fundamental rights of citizens,” adds Dr. Iftekharuzzaman.

Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, TIB’s Director of Outreach and Communication, aptly points out that the new law, like the previously enacted DSA, blurs the lines between protecting cyberspace and stifling freedom of expression. The government’s intention to secure digital frontiers might inadvertently infringe upon fundamental rights, as the government is deliberately or unintentionally failing to balance the two.

Additionally, TIB’s analysis says the law-enforcers have been given broad arbitrary power under the draft CSA without judicial supervision. While the sentences may have been reduced compared to the DSA, arbitrary power of the law-enforcement agencies still pave the path for harassment, state repression, and overreaching surveillance.

TIB has also raised concerns over the capacity of police forces and judicial bodies in investigating and adjudicating delicate matters like cyber security, which requires technical expertise and collaboration in any given setting.

As the CSA is in the process of being passed in the parliament, TIB recommends that the new law should be thoroughly overhauled to prepare a genuine Cyber Security Act that would truly serve the purpose of ensuring the security of cyber infrastructure, computer and internet systems, digital platforms, and other components of the cyber system.

The draft CSA should refrain from retaining any provision from the DSA that would compromise freedom of speech, dissent, thought and conscience, freedom of press, and independent journalism. All stakeholders, including independent legal and technical experts, sector specialists with knowledge and expertise on international best practices, human rights organisations, journalists, and other relevant professionals, should be closely involved in the overhauling process of the draft.

TIB Empowers Reporters against Corruption

Dhaka, 26 August 2023: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has taken a significant step towards bolstering investigative journalistic prowess by hosting a workshop aimed at combating corruption. The event, held on 26 August 2023 at TIB's Dhaka office, brought together members of Reporters Against Corruption (RAC), a collective of Bangladeshi journalists committed to uncovering and addressing corruption.

Some 37 journalists from print and electronic media took part in the immersive full-day workshop, titled 'Investigative Journalism Workshop for RAC'. The event comprised four distinct sessions that delved into the intricacies of investigative, cross-border, and data journalism, along with an exploration of the ACC law and money laundering.

Distinguished experts from prestigious international media outlets, including The New York Times and the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), took on the role of mentors. Their hands-on guidance provided participants with invaluable insights and practical skills, equipping them to undertake comprehensive investigations with confidence.

Highlighting the pivotal role of data journalism, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman says, "Data journalism has transformed global reporting over the past decade, resulting in impactful stories based on meticulous data analysis. While we are relatively new to this facet, we must seize the opportunity to embrace data journalism and foster continuous learning. As the world advances, journalists must evolve alongside it."

Recognising journalists as vital stakeholders in the fight against corruption, TIB reaffirmed its commitment to offering unwavering support to them. The organisation also unveiled plans to intensify initiatives in the realm of data journalism, acknowledging its potential to drive impactful narratives.



The investigative workshop stands as a testament to the organisation's dedication to nurturing a squad of skilled journalists equipped to unearth corruption and champion transparency. As the media landscape evolves, TIB's proactive approach ensures that journalism remains a potent weapon against corruption, safeguarding the principles of truth and accountability.



TIB Stresses for Stakeholder Involvement in Election Observation Policy Revision

Dhaka, 20 August 2023: The Election Commission (EC) has taken a significant step towards revising the policy regarding foreign election observers for the upcoming national parliamentary election. In response, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has suggested a comprehensive amendment to the policy, considering the perspectives of experts, media professionals and other stakeholders along with international best practices.



In an official statement, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman emphasises the importance of amending the existing policy to ensure free presence and unrestricted movement of both local and foreign observers. He opines that such inclusivity is essential to uphold the principles of fairness, impartiality, and participation in elections.

“A fair, impartial, and participatory election necessitates policies that allow free presence and movement of both local and foreign observers. If restrictive policies are formulated without considering a broader range of opinions, it will not only deepen the crisis of confidence in the EC, but also discourage foreign observers from fulfilling their crucial roles,” he says.

Dr. Zaman further calls for ‘modernisation’ of the policy, highlighting the importance of considering foreign observers as a vital tool for ensuring a level-playing field and equal competition.

He notes, “The EC’s responsibilities extend beyond organising elections. The entity also encompasses the obligation to conduct transparent and credible elections. It is imperative to remember the commission’s constitutional duties and obligations.”

TIB has emphasised that the policy revision should be guided by international best practices, drawing on the insights of impartial experts, media figures, and various stakeholders. It should also take into account both the positive and negative experiences of Bangladesh in the past.

In reference to a comment made by the then EC secretary in 2018, who said that observers should be like “statues” in polling stations, TIB has called upon the current EC and relevant government authorities to ensure that such a mindset does not influence the policy amendment process.

National Mourning Day Observed with Anti-Corruption Resolution

Dhaka, 15 August 2023: TIB's staff members observed the National Mourning Day by organising a commemorative meeting to honour The Father of The Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The organisation's affiliated groups - CCC, YES, and ACG - commemorated the day nationwide with different activities including rally, seminar, and essay and quiz competitions, highlighting the aspirations of Bangabandhu to fight corruption. Flags were kept half mast and attendees wore black badges to pay homage to Bangabandhu.

In Jhalakathi, CCC members observed the day by engaging the YES group and ACG in organising a seminar and a debate competition, followed by an award-giving ceremony.

In Bagerhat CCC, discussion and quiz competition were organised highlighting the anti-corruption aspirations of Bangabandhu in Bagerhat.

In Pirojpur CCC, a discussion was organised remembering the Father of the Nation and his anti-corruption commitments.

Kustia CCC also held programmes honouring Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In Jhenaidah, CCC members paid their homage by placing wreaths at a monument of Bangabandhu, marking his 48th martyrdom anniversary. A quiz competition was also organised.

Moreover, various activities were organised by CCC offices in Rajshahi, Savar, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Gaibandha Dinajpur, and Patuakhali to mark the day and engage in its observance.



‘State Mechanisms Fail to Realise Bangabandhu's Anti-Corruption Aspirations’

Dhaka, 14 August 2023:

Bangabandhu's life was a testament to how to raise one's voice against injustice, irregularities, and corruption in all sectors of existence, serving as a wellspring of inspiration for everyone, as articulated by speakers in a commemorative meeting at the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) office, marking the National Mourning Day.



Similar to TIB's emphasis on a social movement against all-encompassing corruption, particularly the youth, Bangabandhu too emphasised the significance of social movements to counteract corruption, say speakers.

To mark the occasion, TIB organised the meeting titled 'The Anti-Corruption Social Movement: In the Spirit of Bangabandhu' across all its 45 working areas. The meeting was held, online and offline, for all staff members to mourn the death and honour the legacy of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was brutally assassinated along with his family members in August 1975.

Led by TIB's Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, attendees held a moment of silence in honour of Bangabandhu. TIB Adviser Executive Management Sumaiya Khair, Research and Policy Director Muhammad Badiuzzaman, and Outreach and Communication Director Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam were present in the meeting, among others.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman in his speech says, "The tragic assassination of the Father of the Nation and his family stands as a unique instance of political murder, not solely within Bangladesh but across the globe. TIB's mission is rooted in opposing corruption. Throughout his life, Bangabandhu vehemently opposed corruption. He unequivocally condemned corruption during his student life, the era of Pakistan, and the period of independent Bangladesh. He issued directives and expressed firm convictions against corruption, although he was unable to see their proper implementation. Nevertheless, the example he left behind continues to serve as a wellspring of motivation for us."

Dr. Zaman further says, "We have failed as a nation to take the opportunity to mainstream Bangabandhu's anti-corruption vision and strategic directions into statecraft and political and governance processes. As a result, corruption has flourished. Many of those responsible to implement the incumbent Prime Minister's oft-pronounced pledge of zero tolerance against corruption are ironically among the beneficiaries, promoters and protectors of corruption."

The TIB Executive Director outlines four essential components to combat corruption: political resolution, accountability, institutional capability, and societal engagement. Halting corruption necessitates active social movements, a venture dependent on public involvement. Consequently, entities like SANAK, YES, and ACG have been established to conduct on-the-ground anti-corruption endeavours, encompassing social movements.

TIB believes that the state has a role to play in encouraging the formation of social movements against corruption. The aim is to foster a conducive atmosphere for an impactful social movement, inspired by Bangabandhu's principles. However, instead of collaboration, there has been opposition. Expressing concerns over corruption and publishing reports are currently viewed as a 'source of threat', which is unfortunate.

In observance of this day, TIB Dhaka and its 45 operational zones exhibited banners on the National Mourning Day. They organised commemorative meetings, titled 'The Anti-Corruption Social Movement: In the Spirit of Bangabandhu', which included members from Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Youth Engagement and Support (YES), and Active Citizens' Group (ACG). Additionally, various activities like essay writing, quiz competition, artwork, and speech contests were held to engage young people and students. The TIB website featured the National Mourning Day banner, and the campaign 'United against Corruption on Bangabandhu's Call' was promoted across social media platforms.

TIB Calls for National Green-Skill Strategy to Empower Youth

Dhaka, 11 August 2023: On the occasion of the International Youth Day, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has called for formulation of a "National Green-Skill Strategy" to ensure youth participation in building a sustainable Bangladesh. Recognising that one-fifth of the country's population is young, TIB has emphasised the importance of equipping these youth with "green-skills" to secure employment in a competitive labour market.



Green skills encompass the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to construct, live in, and advance sustainable societies. To harness the demographic potential represented by Bangladesh's youthful population, TIB urges the government to develop a strategy that aligns with both domestic and international labour demand, in line with the Vision Plan 2041 and the Eighth Five-Year Plan of Bangladesh.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman stresses the significance of youth mastering

“green-skills” to address global and domestic sustainability challenges.

He also highlights the importance of using environment-friendly technologies and processes to protect wildlife, biodiversity, and the environment while effectively addressing the impacts of climate change.

Dr. Zaman remarks, “The formulation and effective implementation of a ‘National Green-Skill Strategy’ have become imperative to secure the participation of youth in building a sustainable Bangladesh. The strategy will play a pivotal role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reducing escalating unemployment, ultimately creating desired employment opportunities for our youth.”

Citing data from the World Energy Transition Outlook 2021, he highlights that renewable energy projects could generate 12.2 million jobs by 2050. Bangladesh can tap into this significant potential by adopting the right strategies, fostering development of environment-friendly energy and industry while simultaneously empowering young people skilled in green practices.

The Vision Plan 2041 and the Eighth Five-Year Plan have acknowledged the importance of youth skill development. Consequently, by equipping youth with green-skills, Bangladesh can strengthen its position in the competitive labour market and advance towards attainment of the SDGs.

Make CSA More than Just a DSA Successor: TIB

Dhaka, 07 August 2023: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has cautiously welcomed the Cabinet's decision to repeal the Digital Security Act (DSA) in response to persistent demands from stakeholders.

However, the organisation emphasises the importance of ensuring that the new Cyber Security Act (CSA), currently in the drafting stage to replace the DSA, does not become a tool to curb freedom of expression or stifle media voices.

TIB also urges the government to engage relevant stakeholders and experts actively throughout the law-making process.



Following recent media reports confirming the Cabinet's decision to repeal the DSA, TIB Executive Director, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, comments, “TIB has consistently maintained that even if the DSA is amended or entirely replaced, it should reflect the public interest and gain acceptance among the people. We have consistently called for repealing the DSA. We appreciate the Cabinet's decision to repeal it, which signifies a recognition that it has become repressive and is being used as a tool to suppress dissenting voices.”

Dr. Zaman further stressed the need to ensure that the new cyber security law focuses on

safeguarding cyber infrastructure without impeding freedom of expression or dissenting opinions on digital platforms.

Expressing concern over reports suggesting that sections of the DSA might be incorporated into the new CSA, he further says, “Our concern lies in reports indicating that the honorable law minister has mentioned inclusion of many sections from the DSA in the CSA.”

“We are against inclusion of the provisions from the DSA, which have often been misused to suppress dissent and stifle media voices. The new cyber security law must not reappear as the digital security law under a different name. A change in the act's title should not be a mere facelift,” the TIB Executive Director adds.

Additionally, TIB has called on the government to ensure active involvement of the relevant stakeholders and experts at every stage of the cyber security law-making process to guarantee a balanced and comprehensive legal framework.

Shadow Parliamentary Debate on Int'l Youth Day

With the resolution to fight corruption, youths from different educational institutions took part in a daylong debate competition. A total of 12 Dhaka-based Youth Engagement and Support (YES) groups participated in the event to celebrate the International Youth Day.



TIB-inspired YES group from Sher-E-Bangla Agricultural University (SAU), with the cooperation of Dhaka-based YES groups, organised the parliamentary debate competition on the SAU campus on 12 August 2023. It was an Inter-YES Anti-Corruption debate competition, aimed at raising awareness and bringing the young people together to fight against corruption.

DU IER YES wins the competition

The YES Group from the Institute of Education and Research (IER) of the Dhaka University (DU) emerged as the champion in the daylong event, with the YES Group from Jahangirnagar University securing the runner-up position. Md. Rakib Mia, a member of the IER YES Group earned the title of ‘Best Speaker’.



The motion of the final round was “This parliament believes that the role of the youth in preventing corruption is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals”. A total of 13 debates were held in four rounds.

Faculty members of various departments of SAU and TIB representatives were the judges of the competition, held under the overall supervision of Prof. Dr. Md. Harun-Ur-Rashid, Moderator of SAU YES Group and Proctor of the university.

Attaining SDGs not possible without preventing corruption

During the award-giving ceremony, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman emphasised that the achievement of SDGs hinges on curbing corruption. He highlighted how corruption acts as a hindrance to sustainable development, undermining the principle of leaving no one behind.



Dr. Zaman stressed the necessity of political determination to combat corruption, noting that the call for ‘zero tolerance’ towards corruption must be translated from rhetoric into action. He further urged those engaged in anti-corruption efforts to play an active role, while also encouraging citizens to take a stand against corruption.

Speaking as the chief guest, SAU Treasurer Professor Dr. Md. Nazrul Islam hoped that these debaters would go to the national level and the initiative would continue in the future. He found TIB's initiatives commendable, believing these would contribute to the country's progress. Recognising TIB's efforts in the anti-corruption social movement in the country, he urged the youth to play a strong and active role in curbing corruption.

TIB Civic Engagement Division Director Ferhana Ferdous emphasised the importance of developing green skills by youth for sustainable development.

YES Group, Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall, DU; Department of Development Studies, DU; Institute of Social Welfare and Research, DU; Institute of Education and Research (IER), DU; Uttara University; Stamford University, University of Asia Pacific, Jahangirnagar University; Daffodil International University; ULAB; and Dhaka YES-1 and YES-2 participated in the debate competition.

Oath-taking and tree plantation

At the event, the TIB Executive Director conducted an anti-corruption oath-taking session, and some 200 participants attended it. Furthermore, both teachers and students took part in tree plantation.

UAP YES sensitises youth to fight corruption

In another event, YES Club of the University of Asia Pacific (UAP) organised a campaign in the university's Club Fair on 10 August 2023. The YES members informed their fellow students about the Right to Information Act, and motivated them to utilise it to combat corruption. The attendees came to about TIB's YES programme, aimed at fortifying the fight against corruption in Bangladesh.

Esteemed actor Fazlur Rahman Babu commended the YES members for their valuable contributions and dedication to develop a corruption-free society. He also encouraged them to lead the social movement against corruption by engaging more youth and other citizens. Among others, UAP Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Qumrul Ahsan and Pro Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Md. Sultan Mahmud visited the YES stall, inspiring youth in their anti-corruption endeavours.



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