

eWaves

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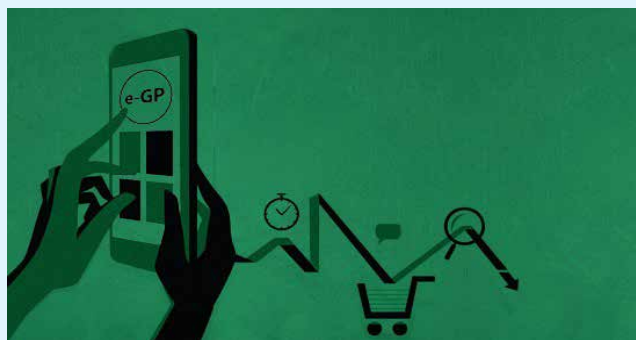


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Public Procurement Faces Challenges, as Corrupt Quarters Control Market

Dhaka, 25 September 2023: A decade after the launch of the electronic-Government Procurement (e-GP) system, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has revealed significant challenges undermining the system's core objectives of transparency and competitiveness in public procurement. TIB's latest study, titled 'e-Government Procurement in Bangladesh: A Trend Analysis of Competitiveness', has exposed alarming trends in the public procurement landscape, as corrupt entities exert control over the market.



Collusion and Decline of Competitiveness

Since 2012, over BDT 600 billion (60,000 crore) in government work orders have been awarded to contractors through single bids, raising suspicions of collusion among corrupt parties within the system. This revelation has severely constrained competitiveness in public procurement, with the e-GP system falling short of its intended goals.

Data-Driven Insights

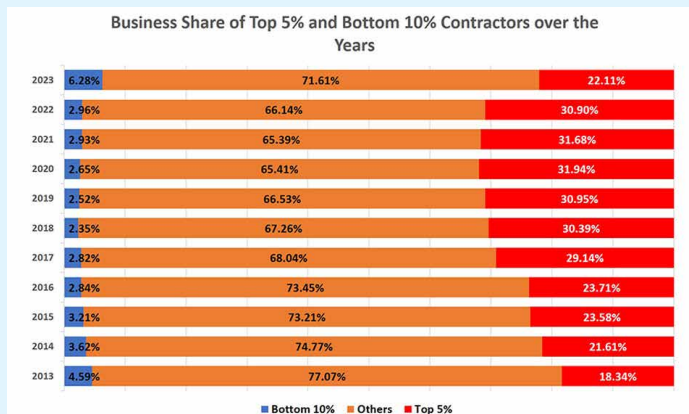
The TIB study has analysed more than 450,000 work orders from the government open data on procurements spanning from 2012 to 2023. Mohammad Tauhidul Islam, Coordinator of TIB's Outreach and Communication Division, and data visualizers K M Rafiqul Alam and Rifat Rahman presented their findings in a press conference in Dhaka, shedding light on critical issues within the e-GP system.

Market Domination by a Few

Analysis of the data indicates that more than 99 per cent of work orders in the e-GP system are valued under BDT 250 million (25 crore), revealing that large-scale government contracts still evade the centralised procurement system. Meanwhile, the top five per cent of contractors have significantly increased their market share over the years.

Market Distortions and Limited Tender Methods (LTM)

Limited Tender Methods (LTM) have become more popular than Open Tender Methods (OTM), further complicating the procurement landscape. TIB's analysis highlights that almost 65 per cent of contracts under OTM have fewer than four submissions, potentially stemming from the government rules that distort the market.



Alarming Rise in Single Bids

One out of every five contracts under the e-GP system was awarded via single bids, with one out of four contracts under OTM sharing the same fate. This worrisome trend of single-bid procurements, which has increased since 2021, exposes collusion among corrupt parties and threatens the e-GP system's integrity.

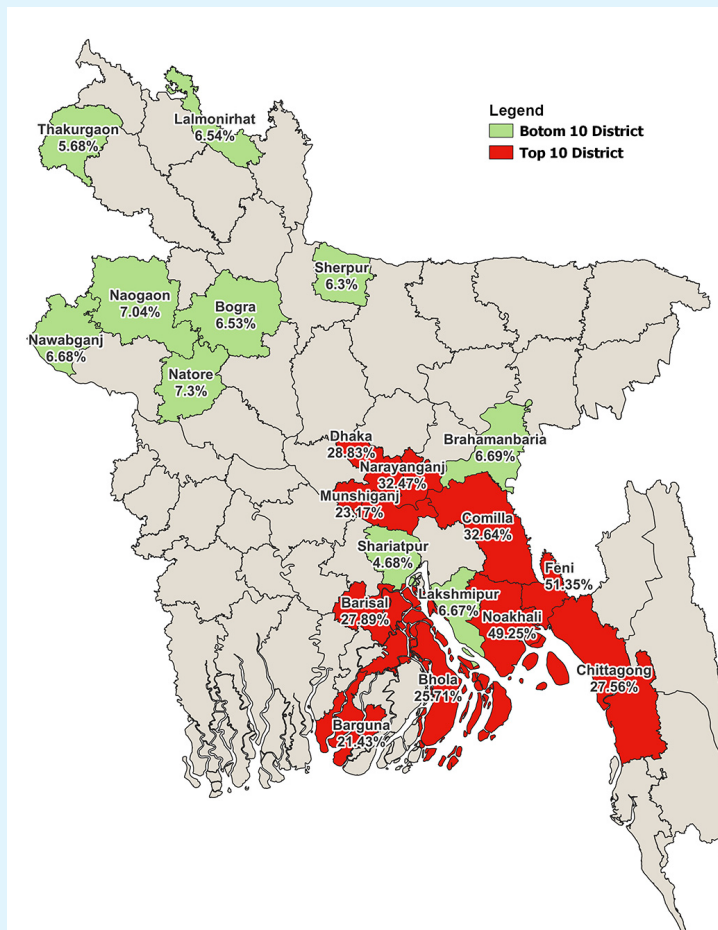
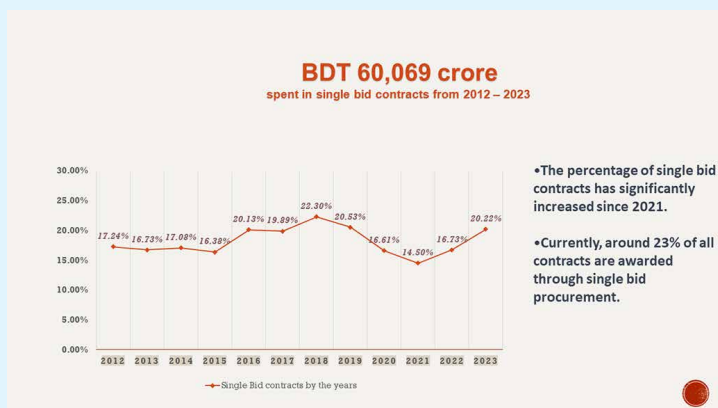
TIB's Call for Action

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB, expressed concern over the situation, emphasising that the e-GP system was designed to enhance competitiveness and improve the quality of work, but it has been hijacked by corrupt elements. He noted, "The market has been captured and monopolised. As a result, people cannot reap the benefits of low-cost, high-quality competitive procurement system."

Regional Disparities

The study has also highlighted regional disparities, with certain districts, constituencies, and city corporations being more susceptible to single-bid procurements. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman underscored the importance of data analysis in identifying weak points within the system, stating, "A three-way collusion between procurement authorities, politically backed quarters, and contractors has monopolised the public procurement system. We believe that the government can take appropriate actions by identifying weak points in the system by analysing datasets like these."

This trend analysis study, offering a comprehensive exploration of the challenges of Bangladesh's public procurement system, marks a significant milestone for TIB, utilising open data analysis tools such as Python, Power Query, DAX, and PowerBI for the first time.



Refining Data Protection for Digital Age

Dhaka, 20 September 2023: In the era dominated by data, the need for a robust legal framework to safeguard personal information is undeniable. While the Government of Bangladesh has involved stakeholders in drafting the Data Protection Act, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has voiced concerns over vague definitions, arbitrary powers, and independence of the proposed data protection authority.



During a press conference, TIB expressed apprehensions that the draft law leans more towards data regulation than protecting personal data.

Dr. Md. Toriqul Islam, TIB's Data Protection Officer, pointed out that while some recommendations of the organisation were incorporated in the draft, many others were dismissed. TIB's review highlighted a broad definition of 'personal data', raising fears of potential government surveillance and misuse. TIB urged clear definitions to prevent arbitrary law enforcement and called for ensuring independence of the data protection authority.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, TIB's Executive Director, urged careful legislation through inclusive discussions with all stakeholders to avoid pitfalls and emphasised the pivotal impact on citizens' lives.

Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, TIB's Director of Outreach and Communication, emphasised the need for clarity on whether the draft aims to protect citizens' or companies' data, and stressed that the blurred lines between legal and natural persons hindered understanding of data protection concepts.

Another concern was the draft's inadequate safeguards against the government access to personal data. Granting broad powers without requiring a warrant posed a risk of misuse against political opponents and activists.

Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam also highlighted the potential conflicts of interest and urged independence for the data protection board to ensure equal protection for all citizens.

TIB also flagged the draft's lack of transparency and accountability, focusing on the importance of disclosing how the government collects and uses personal data.

TIB called for a revision of the draft Data Protection Act to address these concerns, stressing the need for meticulous review and consideration of potential implications.

Outcry over Rapid Approval of Cyber Security Act

Dhaka, 14 September 2023: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has expressed deep concern over swift approval of the Cyber Security Act (CSA) 2023, focusing on its restrictive clauses akin to the Digital Security Act (DSA).

TIB has warned of potential infringements on constitutional rights, including freedom of thought, speech and press. The organisation has called for a comprehensive review, emphasising the risks posed by the CSA to civil liberties and vital aspects of cyber infrastructure.

TIB's Executive Director, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, regretted the hasty passage of the bill without considering assurances and sidelining stakeholders' inputs. The CSA's potential criminalisation of fundamental rights raises alarm, particularly regarding cyber insecurity.

Referring to recent cyber threats, he noted the CSA's failure to address cyber security concerns adequately, calling for ethical practices in addressing cyber threats and the need for a robust legal framework.

TIB Calls for Thorough Reform of Cyber Security Act 2023

Dhaka, 08 September 2023: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has urged parliamentarians to reform the draft Cyber Security Act 2023 in line with international best practices. TIB has emphasised avoidance of repressive provisions akin to the Digital Security Act and safeguarding freedom of thought, expression and media.

In a working paper, TIB has highlighted concern over the CSA, granting extensive powers without clear definitions. The organisation has called for inclusive discussions and involvement of stakeholders to ensure a purposeful focus on cyber infrastructure and internet security.

TIB has recommended essential elements for the revised draft, emphasising the importance of involving experts, civil society, and media in the legislative process.

TIB Suggests Exemplary Punishment for Money Laundering

Dhaka, 05 September 2023: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has cautiously welcomed the recent unearthing of money laundering involving 33 garment factories. While commending the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID), the anti-graft watchdog has emphasised the need for a comprehensive investigation into money laundering cases.

TIB Executive Director (ED) Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, in a statement, lauded capacity of the authorities concerned, but also highlighted the broader issue of combating money laundering. He called for exemplary measures against those involved in money laundering,

irrespective of identity, and criticised limitations of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

The TIB ED urged effective enforcement of laws and institutional measures to combat money laundering, emphasising the importance of proactive measures in this regard.

TIB's Anti-Graft Debate Championship: Battle of Wit and Wisdom

Dhaka, 23 September 2023: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has successfully organised the three-day National Inter-University Anti-Corruption Debate Competition 2023.

The competition was held in a residential format for the first time at the CCDB Hope Centre, Savar on 21-23 September. It drew teams from 32 universities, along with 52 judges and one tab director, engaging in a total of 87 rounds of debates. The biggest national-level anti-corruption debating competition of the year was filled with the battle of minds and the buzz of arguments in every corner.

Jahangirnagar University Debate Organisation (JUDO) claimed the championship, narrowly edging out Daffodil International University Debating Club (DIUDC) in the runner-up position. Yeasin Arafat Limon from Bangladesh University of Professionals Debate Club (BUPDC) secured the title of the best debater of the tournament, while Taposhi Dey Prapti was honoured as the best debater of the final round.

TIB views fact-based debates as an essential platform in a functional democracy, and this year's competition focused on motions related to various facets of the anti-corruption movement. Teams from debating clubs across



Bangladesh engaged in rounds covering topics like role of media in curbing corruption, public awareness on right to information, the central bank's failure in controlling loan defaults, women's empowerment in corruption mitigation, and citizens' role in ensuring effective public service delivery.

During the award-giving ceremony, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman emphasised the pivotal role of youth, especially thinkers and speakers in the debating community, as vital stakeholders in the fight against corruption. He expressed confidence that the experiences gained in the competition would enhance the participants' debating skills, empowering them to contribute to building a corruption-free society.

Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, TIB's Director of Outreach and Communication, extended gratitude to all debaters and judges, expressing hope that the participants would continue to inspire change.

TIB plans to sustain its commitment to hosting debating competitions, recognising their role in mentoring debaters with critical thinking, expanding perspectives, and fostering public participation in policy dialogues.

TIB Empowers Indigenous Youths with Information Rights

Dhaka, 26 September 2023: In an initiative aimed at empowering indigenous youths and raising their awareness about the right to information, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) organised a transformative training workshop.

The daylong event, part of the activities to celebrate the International Day for Universal Access to Information 2023, took place on 26 September 2023 in partnership with the Kapaeeng Foundation. Twenty-nine indigenous youths, representing diverse communities such as Orao, Santal, Chakma, Garo, and Tripura, participated in the workshop. It equipped them with essential tools to exercise their right to information, fostering empowerment.



Journey of Dedication

Two college students, Tusha Chakma and Sujan Chakma, showcased exceptional dedication by embarking on a gruelling 12-hour journey from remote Rangamati to Dhaka. Despite facing challenges in their home, including unreliable access to basic amenities,

they demonstrated unwavering determination to attend the event. Their maiden voyage to the capital reflected their commitment to learning and sharing knowledge with their communities. Tusha and Sujana expressed deep appreciation for the opportunity and pledged to impart insights about the Right to Information (RTI) Act to fellow youths in their villages.



Empowering through Engagement

The workshop witnessed enthusiastic participation from all attendees. Delving into various sections of the RTI Act, the participants explored practical implementation procedures, understood key institutions involved, and identified officers responsible for disseminating vital information. The engaging sessions encouraged active participation, with participants posing thoughtful questions to expert trainers. The initiative not only empowered indigenous youths with knowledge but also fostered a sense of unity and purpose, transcending geographical barriers and championing the right to information for all.

A Call to Action

During the event, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "The Right to Information Act guarantees every citizen, including indigenous people, access to information and the power to use it. You, as the young generation, have the spirit and courage to use this Act. Do not be deterred by initial resistance; follow proper legal procedures to make a difference in your community. TIB will support you every step of the way."

This pioneering initiative of TIB underscores the organisation's commitment to empowering marginalised communities and promoting transparency, accountability, and equal access to information.

Empowering Media Professionals for Election Reporting

Dhaka, 05 September 2023: With the upcoming national election in focus, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has organised a training workshop - 'Election Reporting Skills for the Reporters Forum for Election & Democracy (RFED)' - to enhance the skills of journalists.



During the programme, veteran journalists led sessions on election monitoring, information collection, challenges faced by

media houses, and investigative journalism for equipping the participants with required tools for transparent and informed election reporting.

TIB emphasises its commitment to supporting journalists in promoting freedom of expression as well as plans for collaboration on data journalism during the upcoming election.



The workshop serves as a platform for journalists to explore the potential of election reporting while upholding integrity and accuracy in news delivery.

TIB Training on Investigative Reporting

Dhaka, 09 September 2023: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has empowered aspiring journalists with a focus on investigative reporting through a workshop at Jahangirnagar University, where the students learned tools for analysing data and methods for impactful storytelling.

The workshop, conducted by a group of veteran journalists, aimed to develop the participants' investigative capacities, fostering a culture of integrity and accountability in journalism.



TIB's Executive Director, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, in his speech on the occasion, reiterated support for journalists, mentioning their crucial role in unearthing corruption.

TIB's Outreach and Communication Director, Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, highlighted the organisation's commitment to enhancing journalists' professional skills.

Int'l Right to Know Day: CCCs Focus on Online Access to Empower Citizens

On September 28, the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) celebrated the International Right to Know Day across the nation, focusing on the theme 'the importance of the online space for access to information'. Rallies, human chains, discussions, and anti-corruption cultural events were orchestrated at local level to sensitise people about the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2009, ensuring that everyone understood their right to

access information, particularly in the online sphere.

All CCCs and their Youth Engagement and Support (YES) groups collaborated with the local authorities concerned. The events were graced by the government high-ups including the deputy commissioners (DCs), superintendents of police (SPs), additional deputy commissioners (ADCs), and upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) along with representatives from the civil society organisations, educationists, students, journalists, and members of CCC, YES, and Active Citizens Groups. The YES groups led



satellite campaigns, guiding citizens in preparation and submission of information requests according to the RTI Act 2009 and also organised engaging competitions. During the discussions, the speakers underscored the significance of the Act as a critical tool in combating corruption as well as promoting transparency and accountability within organisations. They also acknowledged that lack of awareness existed, especially among the marginalised and remote communities, necessitating a substantial awareness campaign. They proposed introducing the Act into school curricula and publishing information of the government schemes online. Informative materials like issue-based leaflets and flyers were distributed among the event participants, making it a day for them to remember in the quest for transparency and informed citizenship.



CCC-Backed Public Hearing Initiates Positive Changes in Schools

A public hearing at Ghaturi under Muktagachha in Mymensingh on 14 September 2023 helped express the local community's concerns over the government primary schools. The event took place, as Upazila Education Officer Mohammad Kamruzzaman took an extraordinary step of sharing his personal phone number, inviting direct responses from stakeholders for resolving issues. The public hearing was initiated by the Upazila Education Office and the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Muktagachha.



In the hearing, the participants highlighted various problems, ranging from absence of school management committee to teachers' negligence, class schedule deviations, and insufficient parent-teacher meetings. They also pressed for improvement in school facilities, sports equipment, boundary walls, teacher training, and increased monitoring.

Mr Kamruzzaman, in his speech on the occasion, promised swift action, prioritising formation of school management committee, delivering sports equipment, and addressing issues like school playground and boundary wall.

The event included local public representatives, assistant upazila education officers, civil society members, journalists, teachers, and parents. It marked a significant step towards enhancing transparency, accountability, and quality of education in Ghatari area.

Public Hearing Sparks Commitment to Improve Hospital Services in Lakshmipur

In a concerted effort to improve service quality in Lakshmipur District Sadar Hospital, a public hearing was held on 12 September 2023. The Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), in partnership with the hospital authority, organised the event, attended by medical professionals, CCC representatives, and stakeholders.



The service recipients shared their experiences, highlighting unprofessional behaviour and realisation of unauthorised charges by some staff members and nurses, and involvement of non-hospital personnel in patient care, leading to irregularities, harassment, and favouritism at ticket counters. They also focused on getting cleaner facilities and increased seating arrangements.

Dr. Ahmad Kabir, Civil Surgeon of Lakshmipur, made a commitment to resolve these issues in consultation with the authority. He acknowledged the challenges in the 100-bed hospital facility, serving 450 patients on an average. He pledged to issue identity cards for outsourced hospital staff, encouraged service recipients not to pay undue money, and urged them to report extortion attempts to the resident medical officer (RMO).

CCC President Prof. Z M Farooqui emphasised enhancing service quality in the hospital. The public hearing showcased a shared commitment of the stakeholders to improve healthcare services imbued with the spirit of transparency and accountability.

Thousands of Youth Take Oath Against Corruption

A rallying cry - 'Together Against Corruption, Invincible Youth Will Resist Corruption' - echoed through the halls of Mohammad Ali Yeakub Ali School and College in Savar, as the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) organised an event there on 20 September 2023 to raise public awareness.



More than one thousand students participated in the event - a blending of anti-corruption discussion, solemn oath taking, and signature collection, embodying the promise of a brighter tomorrow.

CCC Savar President and valiant freedom fighter Engineer M. A. Khalek led the oath-taking ceremony. A group of young, enthusiastic students along with their dedicated mentors took the pledge to stand against corruption. The institution's principal, Haji Farid Ahmed, Vice-President of CCC Savar Sirajul Islam, CCC member Adv. Nazrul Islam, and Md. Shahidul Islam Shaheed joined the programme, among others. The Active Citizens Group (ACG) and YES members added their presence to this significant occasion.

The young students, fuelled by a deep sense of patriotism, promised to raise their voices against any form of irregularities and malpractices to build a corruption-free and transparent Bangladesh. They also participated in a mass signature collection programme, a symbolic gesture underlining their dedication, solidarity and unwavering commitment.

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