

## OVERVIEW



### Research Release:

- 12th National Parliament Election: Process Tracking
- The 6th Upazila Election (3rd Phase): Affidavit Analysis and Recommendations
- The 6th Upazila Election (2nd Phase): Affidavit Analysis and Recommendations
- The 6th Upazila Election (1st Phase): Affidavit Analysis and Recommendations
- Green Climate Fund: TIB says GCF Lacks Good Governance Standards



### Policy Stance:

- Ensure Accountability of High-Level Power Abuse and Release Corruption Whitepaper: TIB
- Personal Data Theft of Citizens: Leakage of Personal Data Alarming; Govt. Initiatives to Safeguard Data Superficial: TIB
- TIB Concerned Over Expansion of Online Gambling and Money Laundering Spree; Demands Ban on Advertisements and Prompt Enactment of Law



### Day Celebration:

- World Press Freedom Day: No Alternative to Press Freedom to Tackle Climate Crisis

## CCC NEWS

- Empowering Youth with the Right to Information: A Transformative Campaign at Kushtia Government Central College
- Orientation on National Integrity Strategy (NIS) and SDGs Held in Chattogram
- Consultation Meeting with Sreemangal Upazila Health Authority Held
- Citizens' Gathering in Gaibandha Promotes: Transparency and Accountability to Improve Service Quality
- Dhaka University and Stamford University YES Groups Celebrate World Environment Day

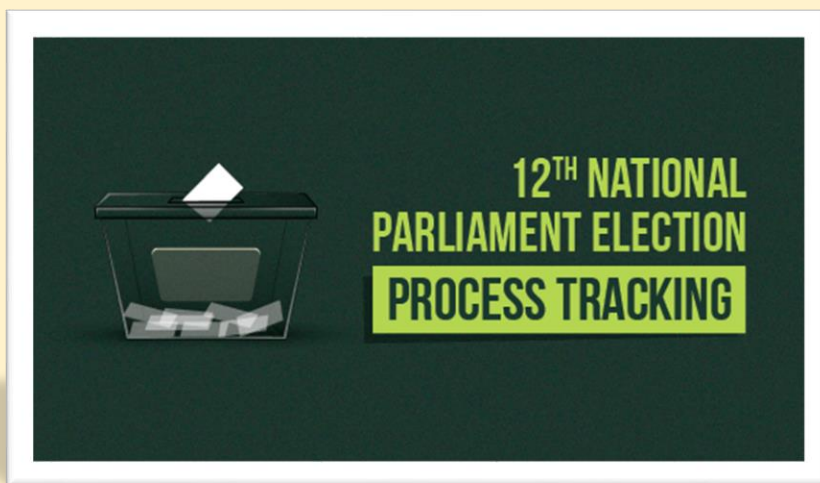


### Research Release

(Research Release)

**12th National Parliament Election**

**Election Commission's Failure to Release Report on Expenditure of Candidates and Parties Disappointing; TIB Urges Immediate and Unrestricted Information Flow**



**Dhaka, 29 May 2024:** The Election Commission (EC) has failed to fulfill its legal obligations to provide reports of the expenditures of candidates and political parties involved in the 12th National Parliament Election, even though it has been five months after the election ended. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has voiced its disappointment at the EC's failure to release the expenditure report within the designated timeframe. TIB claims that the EC is violating the country's electoral laws by maintaining secrecy regarding the matter. Moreover, there are no instances of the commission taking any punitive measures against the candidates and political parties who have failed to submit their expenditure reports on time, which is not expected from a constitutional body. After publishing the final Election Process Tracking report on the TIB website (<https://ti-bangladesh.org/articles/research/6895>), the organization has called for urgently disclosing the expenditures related to candidates and parties.

As per Section 44-Ga of the Public Representation Order, 1972, candidates are required to submit a verified report of their election-related expenses to the Election Commission within 30 days of publishing the election results in a gazette. Non-compliance carries penalties such as fines and imprisonment. Additionally, Section 44 Ga-Ga of the order mandates that political parties submit their expenditure reports within 90 days of the results being gazetted, with provisions for penalties and potential registration revocation for non-submission. Moreover, Section 44Gha assigns returning officers and the commission the responsibility of making expenditure reports public.

The 12th National Election took place on January 7, 2024, setting February 7, 2024, as the deadline for candidates to submit their reports and April 7, 2024, as the deadline for political parties. However, the Election Commission did not impose any penalties on the preponderance of

candidates and parties who failed to meet these deadlines. Raising concerns about the motives behind the inactiveness of the EC in collecting and disseminating information on election-related expenditures, TIB Executive Director (ED) Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "The candidates, parties, and even the Election Commission itself are disregarding the legal obligations related to election expenditures. Candidates and parties have shown disinterest to submit expenditure reports within the stipulated time, and on the other hand, the EC has not taken any punitive measures despite the crossing of the deadline. The EC is responsible for ensuring accountability of candidates and political parties that fail to adhere to electoral laws. On one hand, the EC ignoring electoral laws is disappointing, and on the other, the inactiveness of the commission is further encouraging candidates and parties to break the laws. This is embarrassing for a constitutional body like the Election Commission."

In accordance with the Public Representation Order, it is mandatory for returning officers to securely store the verified expenditure reports of candidates either in their office or at an alternate location. Furthermore, the order mandates the disclosure of these reports to the public upon the payment of a BDT 100 fee. Any individual who submits a formal request and pays the specified fee is entitled to access this information. However, according to TIB's research, returning officers at the local level have failed to comply with this directive. Citing the absence of appointed personnel to manage the fee collection and a lack of explicit instructions regarding the payment process, the concerned returning officers have refrained from releasing the election-related expenditure report. Additionally, TIB's request for this information was denied by the Election Commission (EC). Notably, the expenditure report has not been made available on the EC website.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman stated, "This is such a blatant disregard for the legal obligations of the Public Representation Order that it denies individuals access to essential information and blocks the path to ensuring accountability of public representatives, which is further undermining democracy and good governance. The commission's decision to maintain secrecy on election related expenditure is deviating from the best practices. We request the Election Commission to release the report of the candidates and political parties' expenditure on the commission's website in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Public Representation Order. We urge the Election Commission to set a precedent by pursuing legal action against candidates and political parties who fail to submit their expenditure reports on time."

**(Research Release)**

**The 6th Upazila Election (3rd Phase)**

**One-party dominance, power for profit take front seat; Authorities need to be proactive, says TIB**



**Dhaka, 27 May 2024:** Similar to national elections, local government elections are increasingly characterized by one-party dominance and the growing influence of business interests, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) observed. These observations were made during a press conference held to present the data analysis and review of affidavits of candidates for the Third Phase of the Sixth Upazila Parishad Election-2024. Besides, TIB called on the Election Commission (EC), National Board of Revenue (NBR), and Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to investigate the candidates' declared income and assets to ensure they are consistent with legitimate income and to check for potential tax evasion.

TIB has continued its analysis of candidate affidavits for the third phase of the Upazila Parishad election. TIB's findings highlight a significant disparity in income and wealth growth between previously elected officials and non-elected candidates. Over the past decade, the income of previously elected local representatives had increased by 681.37%, and their movable assets by 1010.12%. In contrast, non-elected candidates have seen income grow by 71.71% and assets by 31.35%. This indicates a rapid accumulation of wealth and income associated with holding power.

Analyzing the affidavits, TIB found that business candidates continue to dominate the third phase of the Upazila Parishad election, similar to the national election and the first two phases of the upazila election. Businessmen candidates make up 58.14% of the total, a 7% increase from the 4th upazila election. Specifically, 66.53% of chairman candidates, 68.99% of vice-chairman candidates, and 31.56% of female vice-chairman candidates list business as their profession. Additionally, 48.54% of female vice-chairman candidates identify as housewives, with 14.5% of these candidates having income from business. Overall, 15.14% of all candidates are associated with some business organization.

Referring to the arbitrary influence of businessmen at the upazila elections, TIB Executive Director Dr. Ifekharuzzaman said, "In public representation, the presence of public interest has become rare, allowing personal interests to flourish through the abuse of power. It is natural for business people, like any other professionals, to enter politics. However, the concern is whether their aggressive participation aligns with the right political process and serves public welfare. The current situation suggests that the profit oriented goal is driving businessmen's interest in politics, leading to family oriented power-grab at the local level."

Dr. Ifekharuzzaman also highlighted how holding public office is viewed as a "license to abuse power," allowing individuals to exert influence from market regulation to safeguarding business interests in policy decisions. Moreover, he lamented the lack of accountability for those involved in irregularities, corruption, or controlling market syndicates. Often, the very entities responsible for enforcing accountability are intertwined with these groups, serving as their beneficiaries, partners, and protectors. This profit-centric approach in politics is gaining momentum, underscoring the urgent need for the government to demonstrate goodwill and honor its election manifesto pledge to establish transparent, responsible governance and combat corruption.

The analysis reveals that approximately 37% of the candidates have an income below 3.5 lakh taka, indicating they have no taxable income. In contrast, 10.5% of candidates report an income exceeding 16 lakh taka. For chairman candidates, 24.21% have an income above 16.5 lakh taka,



while only 3.45% of other candidates have this amount. Conversely, 19.5% of chairman candidates have an income below 3.5 lakh taka, compared to 45.74% of other candidates. This suggests that wealthier individuals are more likely to run for chairman positions. Additionally, 106 candidates in the third phase have assets exceeding 1 crore taka, with the number of multimillionaires nearly quadrupling compared to the previous election.

According to the affidavit analysis of the third phase candidates, 16% are currently accused in various cases, while 21.63% had past accusations. Currently, 7 candidates face over 10 cases, with the highest being 27 cases against a chairman candidate. In the past, 37 candidates had over 10 cases, with a vice chairman candidate also facing 27 cases. The charges include assault, breach of public peace, intimidation, harassment, abuse of women and children, and fraud.

The analysis reveals that the income of a chairman increased by 2889.68% over 10 years, and by an astounding 10422.04% in just 5 years. In the same 10-year period, movable assets grew by up to 18793%, while in 5 years, the assets of spouses and dependents increased by up to 5400%. Upazila Parishad representatives have surpassed parliamentarians in the growth of movable assets, with a chairman's assets increasing by over 9850%, compared to the highest increase of 3065% for a Member of Parliament.

Regarding the unusual rise in earnings and assets, the TIB Executive Director remarked, “The increase of income and assets is usually expected, however if these are increased unnaturally then it may raise questions. It's also alarming that 37 percent of candidates claim they have no taxable income in their affidavits, which is unbelievable. Additionally, many disclosed their income but obscured its sources, implying that their earnings may not be legitimate. The Know Your Candidate (KYC) dashboard developed by TIB serves as a vital data repository for relevant regulatory bodies. For instance, a thorough investigation by the National Board of Revenue (NBR) could reveal extensive tax evasion. Moreover, it is imperative for the NBR, Election Commission, and Anti-Corruption Commission to proactively verify the legitimacy of the information provided in candidates' affidavits and ensure that their reported incomes and assets are consistent with legal sources. However, these regulatory bodies seem indifferent to these duties. We urge the concerned authorities to rigorously investigate the findings of our analysis.”

TIB Assistant Coordinator Rifat Rahman presented the organization's analysis and observations at the press conference. TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman and TIB Adviser-Executive Management Sumaiya Khair were also present along with the research team members, including Outreach and Communication Division's Director and head of the research team Mohammad Tauhidul Islam, Assistant Coordinator Ikramul Haque Evan, and K. M. Rafiqul Alam. TIB conducted a multi-dimensional and comparative analysis of eight data points from approximately 4000 affidavits across 111 upazilas for the fourth, fifth, and sixth upazila council elections. The overall findings and upazila-wise comparisons are available to the public on TIB's website under the “Know Your Candidates” dashboard.

(Research Release)  
**Upazila Parishad Election – 2024 (2nd Phase)**  
**Wealth Accumulation Steals Spotlight from Public Interest; Incumbent Candidates**  
**Increased their Income by Around 550% in 10 Years**



**Dhaka, 19 May 2024:** Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), during a press conference on the release of the analysis and observations of the affidavits of candidates in the 6th Upazila Parishad Election-2024 Second Phase, criticized the local government system for neglecting public interest. TIB highlighted that candidates often prioritize personal wealth accumulation over serving the public within the realm of politics. According to TIB, there exists an unhealthy competition among candidates aspiring for public office, viewing it as an opportunity to amass income and assets.

In their scrutiny of the candidates' affidavits for the second phase of the Upazila Parishad polls, TIB underscored a significant trend: incumbent public representatives experienced a marked increase in income and assets over the past five years compared to new candidates. This pattern suggests a direct correlation between holding political power and wealth accumulation. An analysis of the last decade elections showed that incumbent candidates exhibited substantial growth in both income (540.68% on average) and movable assets (211.98%). Conversely, first-time candidates experienced a 56.47% uptick in income while observing a decrease of 45.44% in movable assets over the same period. On average, incumbent candidates saw their income rise by 140.61% over the last five years, whereas new candidates witnessed a 77.44% increase. The analysis revealed a similar trend in movable assets, with incumbent candidates averaging a 231.62% increase, while new candidates showed a 100.33% rise. Notably, not only did the candidates enhance their own financial standings, but their spouses and dependents also showcased similar upward trajectories in income and assets.

The TIB Executive Director (ED) Dr. Iftekhharuzzaman said women's election participation is under 2%, while businesspersons participate unilaterally. He added that one-party dominance and family-oriented power grabs are prevalent in local elections now. Mentioning that the link between

power and wealth gain is clear for public representatives who have been in power for a long time, the TIB ED mentioned, “Long-serving public representatives clearly link power and wealth. Incumbents significantly increase their wealth, leading to unhealthy competition for public representation. Often, the focus shifts from public welfare to wealth accumulation. Authorities show little interest in verifying or investigating the unusual wealth increases declared in affidavits.”

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman pointed out that both public interest and party discipline are often sidelined in elections. He observed, “In both phases, we noticed that party directives are disregarded by both major political parties. These parties struggle to maintain discipline as the primary objective of local representatives is to secure the license to amass wealth. Consequently, the election competition becomes unhealthy, undemocratic, and self-centered, and it is progressively distancing itself from the public and their welfare.”

The TIB analysis revealed a significant presence of businesspersons in local government elections. Compared to the 4th election, the 6th election saw an 8% increase in businessperson candidates, bringing the total to 57%. The breakdown is as follows: 70.51% of chairman candidates, 68.73% of vice chairman candidates, and 29.26% of female vice chairman candidates are businesspersons. Interestingly, 51.63% of female vice chairman candidates identified as homemakers, and among these homemakers, 14.55% earn a living from businesses.

The analysis also revealed that 42% of all candidates reported an income less than BDT 3.5 lakh, indicating they do not have taxable incomes. In contrast, only 10% of candidates reported an income exceeding BDT 16.5 lakh. This data points to a significant income disparity between chairman candidates and other candidates. Specifically, about 21% of chairman candidates reported an income less than BDT 3.5 lakh, compared to 53% of other candidates. Furthermore, approximately 23.62% of chairman candidates reported an income over BDT 16.5 lakh, a figure that drops to just 3.25% for other candidates. This suggests that wealthier candidates are more likely to run for the chairman position. Additionally, 116 candidates in the second phase of the election reported wealth exceeding BDT one crore. Notably, the number of multimillionaire chairman candidates has tripled since the previous election.

According to the second phase analysis, the income of one chairman candidate skyrocketed by 10,900% in the past five years, and the highest increase over the last decade was 5,336%. Movable assets saw an even greater increase, with the highest being 11,666% in the last five years. When it comes to the growth of movable assets over the past five years, local government representatives have outpaced national election candidates. In the national election, the highest wealth increase for a candidate was 3,065%, whereas a chairman candidate in the same period increased their wealth by more than 11,000%. Furthermore, four candidates in the Upazila Election own more land than the legal limit of 100 bigha or 33 acres, indicating a violation of property ownership laws.

The findings and observations from the TIB analysis were unveiled at a press conference by Ikramul Haque Evan, TIB’s Assistant Coordinator of Outreach and Communication. The conference was presided over by Mohammad Tauhidul Islam, TIB’s Director of Outreach and Communication and the lead of the research team. Other attendees included Dr. Iftekharuzzaman,

# Newsletter-2024

## May Edition

TIB's Executive Director; Professor Dr. Sumaiya Khair, Adviser Executive Management, TIB; and Assistant Coordinators of the research team, Rifat Rahman and K.M. Rafiqul Alam.

The 'Know Your Candidate (KYC)' dashboard, which offers a multi-dimensional and comparative analysis, an overall picture, and Upazila-based comparisons based on eight types of information provided in nearly 4,800 affidavits from the 4th, 5th, and 6th Upazila elections, has been published on the TIB website.

**(Research Release)**  
**Upazila Parishad Election-2024 (1st Phase)**  
**Astounding Growth of Income and Assets of Candidates in Local Govt. Elections;**  
**56% of Them Businessmen: TIB**



**Dhaka, 06 May 2024:** The influence of businessmen is increasingly evident in local government elections, leading to a dominance of personal interest or profit-centered politics over public welfare. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) made this observation during a press conference held to analyze the affidavits of candidates for the Sixth Upazila Parishad Election-2024 (1st Phase). The anti-corruption organization also noted a growing tendency to view elections as an investment opportunity ignoring public interest, even at the grassroots level.

According to TIB's analysis of candidate affidavits, the growing influence of businessmen in local government elections is similar to the national election. The proportion of candidates with business backgrounds has risen by 8 percentage points compared to the fourth election, reaching 56 percent. Among these candidates, approximately 69.86 per cent of chairman candidates, 66.59 per cent of vice chairman candidates, and 24.37 per cent of female vice chairman candidates are involved in businesses. Additionally, 19.5 per cent of candidates listing housewife/housekeeper as their profession derive income from business ventures.

Speaking at the press conference, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "In our country, politics and public representation are power-oriented. Personal gain often takes priority over public welfare. Additionally, principles such as respect for the law, party discipline, and adherence to party decisions, which are expected from democratic institutions like political parties,



are now held hostage to power politics. The pursuit of political power is seen as a pathway to unlimited wealth expansion, resulting in unhealthy competition. Of concern is whether businessmen entering politics are following proper procedures and engaging in fair competition. Those who still aspire to promote a healthy, people-oriented political culture are now nearly extinct or marginalized in the face of power politics.”

In continuation of the analysis of the national parliamentary election, TIB conducted dashboard analysis and reviewed affidavits of candidates participating in Upazila Parishad elections. Analysis of affidavits from the first phase of Upazila elections revealed a significant increase in movable assets among elected Upazila Parishad representatives compared to parliamentarians. Over a 5-year period, the growth rate of movable assets among parliamentarians reached a staggering 3,065 per cent, while Upazila Parishad chairmen witnessed an increase of over 4,200 per cent. Furthermore, the income of a chairman saw a maximum growth of 3,319 per cent over 5 years and an astounding 18,233 per cent over 10 years. Movable assets experienced a growth of 4,251 per cent, with the highest increase in assets belonging to wives and dependents recorded at 12,400 per cent.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman termed the results of the analysis as shocking, and said, “From the analysis, we see that the earnings of many candidates have increased astonishingly, and in some cases, the rate of increase of income and wealth is even higher than that of national election candidates. There are also doubts whether the information provided in the affidavits are legit or correct. Some candidates have presented very low income, which is unbelievable.”

He continued, “The reality is that we are only getting information by analyzing the affidavits of the candidates. However, we are not getting any reliability, verification, implementation of laws, or any positive results. It is disappointing that the ones designated to verify the information on the affidavits, the Election Commission (EC), the National Board of Revenue (NBR), or the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) are not carrying out their duties proactively, which is disappointing.”

The analysis of affidavits also portrayed how at least 09 candidates own more land than the legal limit of 100 bigha or 33 acres. Moreover, 23.41 per cent candidates have loans or liabilities. Among them, the highest amount of loan is BDT 1,528 crore. The analysis further shows that 16.64 per cent candidates in the first phase of the Upazila elections have been accused in legal cases. On the other hand, only 7 per cent of candidates of the first phase of Upazila Elections are multi-millionaires based on movable assets. Apart from them, around 9 per cent candidates have movable assets less than a crore BDT. Among chairman position aspirants, 94 candidates are multi-millionaires. Compared to the previous election, that number has increased almost three folds (37 multi-millionaires in the 5th election). Among the vice-chairman candidates 17 are multi-millionaires, while 6 candidates are multi-millionaires among women vice-chairman aspirants. In both cases, the numbers have increased by almost three folds. Other than that, 198 chairman candidates earn a minimum of a million BDT annually, which is 35.23 per cent of the total candidates. This is almost 2.5 times that of the election held 5 years ago. Likewise, the number of vice-chairman and women vice-chairman with similar incomes have increased by almost three times.

# Newsletter-2024

## May Edition

The analysis of Upazila Election affidavits showed that the participation of women is less compared to the national election. There are only 25 women candidates for the chairman post in the Upazila Elections. Overall, analysis shows that 40 per cent of the candidates do not have taxable incomes as they stated their incomes less than BDT 3.5 lakhs annually. Only 10 per cent of the candidates have presented their incomes to be more than BDT 16 lakhs. Almost 93 per cent of candidates have assets valued less than a crore BDT, while the rest of the 7 per cent have assets valued more than a crore BDT.

The analysis and its results were presented in the press conference by TIB's Director of Outreach and Communication, Mohammad Tauhidul Islam. TIB Executive Director (ED) Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, and assistant coordinators Rifat Rahman, K.M. Rafiqul Alam and Ikramul Haque Evan were also present. The 'Know Your Candidate (KYC)' dashboard containing the multi-dimensional and comparative analysis, overall picture, and Upazila-based comparisons based on 8 types of information provided in almost 4,800 affidavits of the 4th, 5th, and 6th upazila elections have been published on TIB website.

### **(Research Release)**

### **Green Climate Fund**

**Tib Says GCF Lacks Good Governance Standards; Bureaucratic and Systematic Complexities, Discriminatory Practices and Arbitrary Domination of Influential International Org. Deprive Developing Countries Like Bangladesh**



**Dhaka, 14 May 2024:** Green Climate Fund (GCF) prioritizes international organizations over the climate vulnerable countries in granting funds, which is in contradiction to GCF's own core principles. It has also failed to collect funds from the developed countries and burdened the climate vulnerable countries with loans instead of giving grants. This shows its failure in the last 12 years in fulfilling its core mandate.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has made the remarks at a press conference at its Dhaka office today marking the release of the research -“Accessing Green Climate Fund (GCF) for Vulnerable Countries like Bangladesh: Governance Challenges and Way Forward”. The research is both qualitative and quantitative, and its timeline is January 2023 to May 2024.

Speaking at the press conference, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “From the beginning, GCF has imposed such conditions that it nearly banned the developing countries from accessing funds. As a result, the countries who were supposed to receive grants, didn’t receive adequate amount as expected. Besides, GCF is not abiding by the principles to release funds and does not transfer them in due time.”

He has further said that the country ownership policies are being ignored. Besides, the policies are vague. Also, GCF provides more funds to international organizations like UNDP, IDB, ADB and EBRD, which is unacceptable and in contradiction to its core mandate.

Dr. Zaman also criticized GCF for burdening countries like Bangladesh with loans and termed this activity as discriminatory, disappointing and conducive to corruption. He added that UNDP’s accreditation was renewed despite corruption allegations, which means the mandate for zero-tolerance against corruption has been flouted to support corruption by the GCF.

TIB research has found that GCF’s recognition process is complex and time-consuming, which is making difficult for vulnerable countries like Bangladesh to receive funds directly from GCF. The GCF is also inclined toward mitigation rather than adaptation, resulting in the less prioritization of climate change related activities in the climate vulnerable countries. In the last eight years, GCF could not achieve 50:50 proportion for adaptation and mitigation or declare any timeline to achieve it. Research found that despite the demand for USD 215 to 387 billion, GCF provided only USD 5.9 billion for adaption to the developing countries.

In addition, the research observed fund crisis for the climate vulnerable countries and a gradual increase of loans in comparison to grants. According to the Polluters-pay-Principle, developed countries are supposed to provide grant-based climate finance to developing countries. However, GCF prioritized providing loans to these climate vulnerable countries. Notably, 40.6 per cent of GCF’s finance is provided as loans, followed by 41.6 per cent as grants. The loan recipient countries, who are already financially burdened due to climate change, have been under additional pressure to repay the GCF loans.

In Bangladesh, the government's selection of the National Designated Authority (NDA) for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) appears arbitrary due to the absence of clear policies governing NDA appointments. Transparency issues surround the rationale behind the NDA selection process. Furthermore, significant time is expended aligning the government body's capabilities and economic metrics with GCF standards. Despite efforts to accredit four government entities with the GCF since 2018 under the 'country programme', accreditation has not been granted in five years. Conversely, an organization in Bangladesh waited two years for accreditation due to insufficient support from the GCF Secretariat.

Analysis of GCF project financing themes reveals USD 141.8 million (32%) allocated to adaptation projects and USD 256.5 million (58%) to mitigation projects. Bangladesh requires USD 12 billion to address climate change by mid-2025, yet only USD 1.18 billion has been approved from national and international sources, representing 9.9% of the required amount. Additionally, USD 448.8 million has been allocated from readiness and GCF funds, constituting 3.7% of the total required funds. Notably, Bangladesh received USD 256.4 million (76.9%) for mitigation projects and USD 76.8 million (23.1%) for adaptation projects, with 75% of GCF funds for

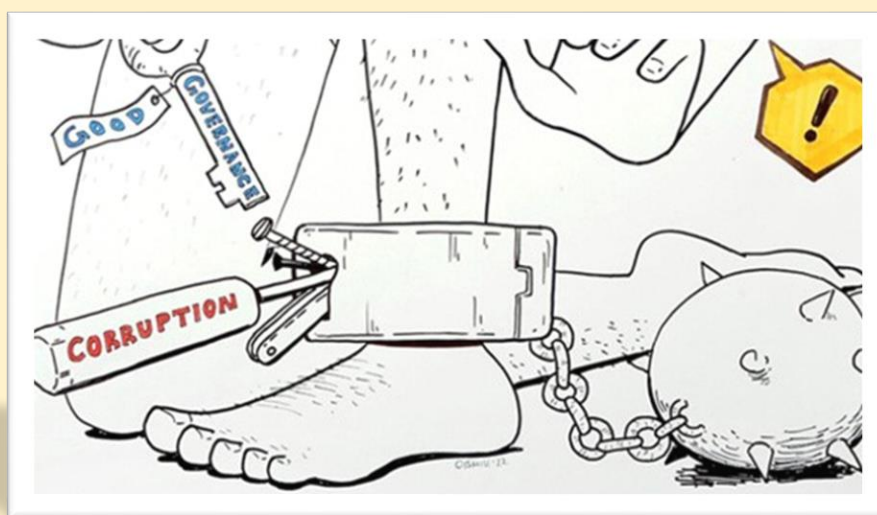
government organizations in loans and 25% in grants. However, fund disbursement from the GCF to Bangladesh is sluggish, with the first instalment of one project released three years after approval. Only 13.3% of funds for Bangladesh's nine GCF projects have been disbursed.

The research findings were presented at a press conference attended by TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Adviser-Executive Management Professor Dr. Sumaiya Khair, Director of Research and Policy Muhammad Badiuzzaman, and Senior Research Fellow Md. Mahfuzul Haque. The conference was conducted by TIB Director of Outreach and Communication Mohammad Tauhidul Islam and the research was presented by Research Fellow Newazul Moula and Research Associate Md. Shahidul Islam.

### Policy Stance

(Policy Stance)

**Ensure Accountability of High-Level Power Abuse  
and Release Corruption Whitepaper: TIB**



**Dhaka, 26 May 2024:** In light of recent exposure of high-level abuses of power, corruption, and political criminalization—including the killing of a ruling party MP, punitive visa sanction of US against a former army chief, and the court order to seize bank accounts and assets of a retired RAB and police chief—the need to demonstrate the credibility of government's zero-tolerance stance against corruption has become unprecedentedly important, stated Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

In a statement referring to the corruption allegations against the former army chief, the police and RAB chief, and the killing of the MP, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “If the government and the ruling party only offer evasive explanations out of embarrassment, it will not only be unacceptable to the people but also be suicidal for the government. The citizens of this country are already valid realizing that the three highly publicized incidents are not isolated; they



# Newsletter-2024

## May Edition

are symptomatic of deep-seated institutionalized corruption and represent just a tip of the iceberg. It is also clear that the responsibility for these crimes extend beyond those directly involved. Therefore, unless together with the direct perpetrators, those who aid, abet, benefit from, and protect them are held accountable, the government's election promises will be deemed as empty rhetoric, and corruption and wrongdoing will continue to proliferate further. Therefore, we urge to hold the high-level power abuse accountable by following due process and to release a whitepaper on corruption”

He further said, “The unaccountable actions of former heads of significant state forces such as the Army, RAB, and the Police, along with a lawmaker, have instilled doubts and concerns about the government, the state system, and the governance structure in the public's mind. These concerns need to be credibly addressed through exemplary accountability. Furthermore, the promptness exhibited by relevant institutions, including the ACC, should not be eventually diminished to mere formalities and eyewash.”

A detailed reflection of the ruling party's successive political declarations and pledges against corruption is evident in their election manifesto for the 12th National Parliamentary Election. This year's manifesto includes a chapter-long commitment with six sections dedicated to ensuring accountable governance and more than a dozen specific commitments aimed at preventing and controlling corruption. However, there is no strategy or roadmap for implementing these grand promises. Given this reality and the emerging situation, if the government and the ruling party want to demonstrate the minimum credibility of their promises, they must disclose the existing nature of high level power abuse, which is fundamental element to all three cases, and publish a whitepaper on corruption across institutions and sectors. Additionally, consistent with the ruling party's election manifesto, TIB calls for the establishment of short, medium, and long-term strategies and road-map to ensure good governance and prevent corruption.

### **(Policy Stance)**

#### **Personal Data Theft of Citizens**

**Leakage of Personal Data Alarming; Govt. Initiatives to Safeguard Data Superficial: TIB**



**Dhaka, 21 May 2024:** Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has expressed deep concern over the theft and online sale of citizens' confidential and sensitive information, including call data records (CDRs), national identity card details, and mobile numbers from the National Telecommunication Monitoring Center (NTMC). Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) highlights the alarming nature of this data theft, involving the misuse of IDs of law enforcement officials responsible for protecting sensitive citizen information. This breach violates constitutional commitments to safeguard personal data. TIB urges swift enactment of the Personal Data Protection Act, 2024, and demands severe penalties for those responsible.

According to media sources, the NTMC system was exploited using the IDs of two law enforcement officers to collect and sell confidential information, including National Identity Card (NID) details and mobile call data records (CDR), for financial gain.

Terming it 'alarming' TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Repeated incidents of theft involving personal and sensitive information like national identity cards and call data records are not new. Previously, Bangladeshi citizens experienced thefts of various confidential documents such as birth certificates and national identity cards at different times. Recent events have seen a surge in such breaches, with personal data being pilfered by law enforcement organizations tasked with safeguarding it. The process and technical infrastructure used by the govt. to protect citizens' sensitive information raises questions regarding its integrity and capability."

He further said that it appears the government lacks the commitment and investment required to establish robust data protection mechanisms compared to the ill motive and activities of the groups who want to misuse them in the digital world. Consequently, its efforts in this regard seem insufficient and ineffective. Therefore, it's not an overstatement to say that the government's legal and institutional initiatives to ensure data protection are nothing but superficial and appallingly risky, he added.

Dr. Zaman highlighted the recurring incidents of theft involving personal confidential information of Bangladeshi citizens, noting the absence of preventative measures. He also emphasized the lack of efforts to enhance security measures for safeguarding sensitive data. While welcoming the decision by law enforcement agencies to suspend the user IDs of the implicated parties, he stressed the importance of identifying all individuals involved in the data trafficking and ensuring they face exemplary punishment through thorough investigation.

Mentioning not to see the incident as a separate event Dr. Zaman said that TIB's review of the draft Personal Data Protection Act, 2024, identified a concerning risk of granting government agencies unchecked authority over personal data under the guise of national security and public interest. Allowing such agencies unrestricted access to data servers without judicial oversight could lead to potential abuse of data without accountability, undermining the principles of the rule of law. The recent incident involving the trafficking of sensitive personal information by law enforcement personnel further underscores the urgency of enacting robust data protection legislation. Therefore, TIB urge prompt formulation of the Personal Data Protection Act through comprehensive consultation with relevant stakeholders to safeguard citizens' privacy.

### (Policy Stance)

#### **TIB Concerned Over Expansion of Online Gambling and Money Laundering Spree; Demands Ban on Advertisements and Prompt Enactment of Law**



**Dhaka, 09 May 2024:** Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has expressed dismay at the increased promotion of online gambling across traditional broadcast and social media platforms, as well as the associated issues of money laundering and the negative impacts of widespread gambling. Despite clear directives from the apex court, there appears to be a lack of visible measures to curb this trend. Instead, gambling is being advertised under new guises on satellite channels and social media platforms. To safeguard a significant portion of the population, particularly the youth, from falling prey to online gambling addiction, TIB has urged for the immediate restriction of gambling-related advertisements, enforcement of the Gambling Prevention Act, and proactive measures by relevant law enforcement agencies.

Despite all forms of gambling being illegal under the country's laws, it is being promoted using various strategies. Flashy advertisements for different betting sites are disguised or presented in "surrogated" formats in traditional media during broadcasts of popular sporting events like IPL, BPL, or others. This year, a surrogated advertisement for a betting site was even observed on a BPL team jersey. TIB Executive Director (ED) Dr. Iftekharuzzaman expressed grave concerns, stating, "We are witnessing a surge in online gambling in the country. Exploiting legal loopholes for profit cannot be deemed responsible broadcasting. Even city billboards are promoting online gambling. Despite last year's High Court orders to block online gambling advertisements, different social media platforms and television, particularly sports channels, continue to actively promote betting and gambling, which is wholly unacceptable."

TIB highlights the significant concern of massive money laundering facilitated through online gambling. Media reports and the Criminal Investigation Department reveal that millions, especially youth, are addicted to online gambling across the country, even in rural areas. Funds are laundered using mobile financial services (MFS), e-Banking, credit cards, and cryptocurrencies. While most online gambling sites are based in Russia, Malaysia, and Indonesia, local agents in

# Newsletter-2024

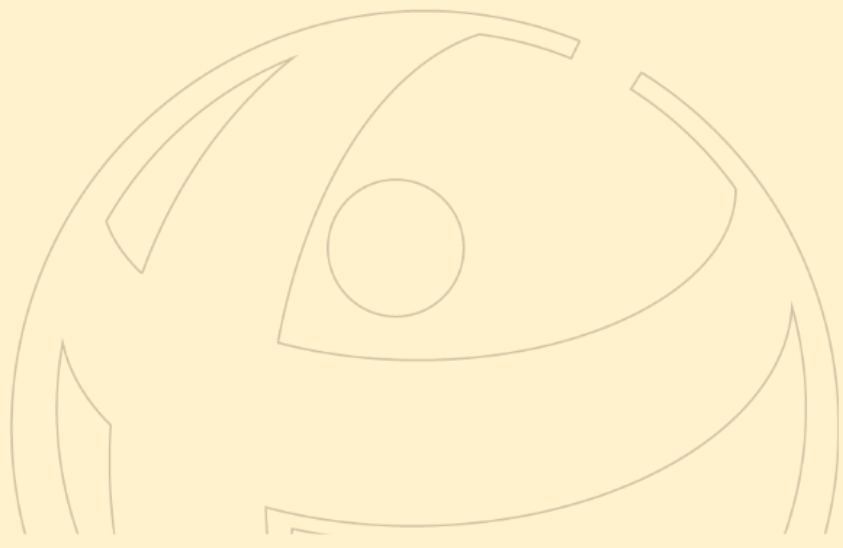
## May Edition

Bangladesh facilitate transactions through mobile banking, leading to millions laundered abroad. Despite this, there are no visible strategic plans or actions against such activities by the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) or other relevant agencies. Moreover, a substantial illegal and unethical gambling promotion business thrives under the noses of regulatory bodies.

The TIB ED emphasized that online gambling is fueling various social crises, stating, “We frequently hear reports of gambling addiction leading to suicides and domestic conflicts. Recently, a 35-year-old man from Thakurgaon committed suicide after losing approximately 15 to 20 lakhs BDT in online gambling. Beyond the personal tragedies of addiction, depression, and financial ruin, many individuals are illegally amassing substantial wealth through these activities. Gambling addiction is eroding the moral fabric of our youth, posing threats to families, society, and the state.”

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman underscored the necessity of a multi-dimensional approach to combat online gambling, stating, “According to section 18(2) of the constitution and conventional laws, it is mandatory for the government to prevent all forms of gambling. However, the country still relies on a 157-year-old law to regulate gambling. Despite initial steps to enact the Gambling Prevention Act, 2023, it remains in the draft stage. The urgency for a stringent and contemporary gambling prevention law has long been apparent given the current landscape. While section 6 of the draft Act addresses overseas and online gambling, and section 7 tackles betting, it overlooks the prevalent surrogate advertising methods and the nexus between money laundering and online gambling. Additionally, although section 4.5.3 (Gha) of the National Broadcast Policy prohibits advertisements related to gambling or betting, it lacks directives on surrogated advertising. Furthermore, law enforcement agencies have not taken proactive measures against online gambling. Halting the advertising of gambling and ensuring proactive law enforcement are crucial to curbing its proliferation in online spaces.”

Under such circumstances, TIB has strongly urged for the prompt enactment and enforcement of the draft Gambling Prevention Act and advocated for thorough review of the draft in consultation with the ICT Division, BFIU, Information and Broadcast Ministry, human rights organizations, and other stakeholders. Additionally, TIB has demanded a definitive prohibition on gambling-related advertisements and urged law enforcement agencies to conduct regular monitoring and take effective measures against online gambling.





### Event/Celebration

#### World Press Freedom Day No Alternative to Press Freedom to Tackle Climate Crisis



**Dhaka, 02 May 2024:** There is no alternative to freedom of the press and freedom of expression to ensure democracy. It is also imperative that the safety and freedom of the press be prioritized to tackle the ongoing environmental crisis and natural disasters. Marking World Press Freedom Day (WPF) 2024, speakers made these remarks at panel discussions organized jointly by UNESCO (Dhaka office & regional office-New Delhi), Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), and ARTICLE 19.

The discussions centered around the WPF theme of this year – “A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the Face of the Environmental Crisis.” There were two separate panel discussions where the panelists talked about issues like the ongoing oppression against journalists and their safety concerns in the context of climate-related issues, freedom of expression and the press, tackling misinformation, and access to information.

Speaking as a panelist, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB mentioned that in the period from 2022 to 2023, there were 23 attacks on the media resulting in the torture of 43 journalists while covering environmental issues. Between 2016 to 2021 alone, 12 individuals, including environmental rights activists, were killed for protesting against coal-based projects. He further added, "Many of those who are legally responsible for protecting the environment are protecting the perpetrators in collusion with them. Therefore, it is imperative to create an environment where journalists and civil society organizations can play their active roles. But in

reality, such space is being shrunk by the use of repressive acts like the Digital Security Act. The harassment of media workers and civil society actors has been normalized through this process. To tackle such challenges, those who are responsible in the government have to respect the commitment to freedom of press and speech enshrined in the constitution, so journalists and

activists working on environmental issues do not become victims of the culture of ‘shooting the messenger’.”

Speaking at the opening session, Susan Vize, Head of Office and UNESCO Representative to Bangladesh, said, “Raising public awareness about climate change and other environmental issues in Bangladesh is critical to achieving behavioral change. The media remains the single most influential source of credible public information. WPF 2024 aims to build the capacity of Bangladesh’s media to ensure accurate and impactful coverage of the current environmental crises.”

Alexandra Berg von Linde, Ambassador to Bangladesh, Sweden Embassy, said, “Public interest is inextricably linked to climate change and environmental degradation. The negative effects of climate change are becoming more visible, affecting people's daily lives. People want to know about the results and effects of negative climate change. Freedom of the media and the ability to report independently on all such matters of public interest are important elements of democracy.”

Responding to a question about the misuse of repressive acts- ICT, DSA & CSA, and safety concerns of journalists, Mohammad Ali Arafat, State Minister, Information and Broadcasting Ministry, said, “We always talk about ensuring freedom of the press. However, in some cases, vested interests exploit this freedom to publish agenda-driven news and disseminate misinformation. Instances of such misinformation regarding Rampal or Adani power plants have been observed. Therefore, alongside ensuring media freedom, accountability must also be ensured. If media freedom is misused to spread false information or disinformation, appropriate legal action should be taken. However, I will take necessary steps to ensure the protection of journalists in the country who report on environmental crises or climate issues based on truth and scientific evidence.”

The first panel discussion titled “A Press for the Planet: Free Press and Freedom of Expression in the Context of Current Global Environmental Crisis” kicked off with the presentations of Shamsuddin Illius, Bureau Chief-Chittagong, The Business Standard, and Usraat Fahmidah, Freelance Journalist, regarding the challenges of journalism in environmental issues and training young journalists. It was moderated by Sheikh Manjur-E-Alam, Regional Director, ARTICLE 19, while Mohammad Ali Arafat, State Minister of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, was the chief guest. Alexandra Berg von Linde, Ambassador to Bangladesh, Sweden Embassy; Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director, TIB; and Rejoan Haq, Editor-in-Chief, Maasranga Television, participated as panelists. A book on the Safety of Journalists in the South Asia Region was launched during the session.

The second panel discussion focused on the safety issues of journalists under the theme of “Media Defense for Crisis Reporting,” where journalists and experts from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka participated. It was moderated by Shafiqul Alam, Bureau Chief, Dhaka, Agence France-Presse (AFP). The second session kicked off with the presentations of Ms.

# Newsletter-2024

## May Edition

Sabina Inderjit, Vice-President, International Federation of Journalists, and Ms. Princess Giri Rashir, Meghalaya State Correspondent, EastMojo. The panelists for this session were Hezekiel Dlamini, Advisor for Communication and Information for South Asia UNESCO New Delhi Regional Office; Ms. Yeshi Pelmo, Programme Officer, Journalist Association of Bhutan; Ms. Radhika Roy, Litigation Counsel, Internet Freedom Foundation; Mr. Mohamed Junayd Saleem, Senior Member, Maldives Journalist Association; Mr. Viranjana Herath, Chairperson/Founder, Media Law Forum; and Ashita Singh, Associate Project Officer, UNESCO New Delhi Regional Office.

### CCC News Highlights

#### **Empowering Youth with the Right to Information: A Transformative Campaign at Kushtia Government Central College**



**Kushtia, 16 May 2024:** On May 16, 2024, Kushtia Government Central College, in collaboration with the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) Kushtia, hosted an impactful campaign and orientation program on the Right to Information Act-2009 (RTI). The event saw the enthusiastic participation of around two hundred students, eager to learn about their rights and the power of information.

**A Gathering of Minds:** The event was graced by the presence of notable academics and educators, including Principal Professor Md. Azmal Gani, Professor Dr. Md. Khairul Islam, Associate Professor Md. Ashraful Haque, and Md. Rowshan Ali. Their presence underscored the importance of the RTI Act and the role of educational institutions in promoting transparency and accountability.

In his opening remarks, Principal Professor Md. Azmal Gani emphasized the necessity of understanding the RTI Act. "We need to know the Right to Information Act properly. Through proper implementation of the law, it will be possible to play a role in ensuring transparency and accountability of the respective institutions," he said, setting the tone for the day's activities.

# Newsletter-2024

## May Edition

**Empowering Through Knowledge:** The orientation provided a comprehensive overview of the RTI Act, covering its global context, its implementation in SAARC countries, and the significant milestones in Bangladesh's journey towards ensuring the right to information. Students were introduced to the legal foundations of the RTI Act and were shown how to use application forms to request information.

The interactive session included a quiz competition, which not only tested the students' newly acquired knowledge but also made the learning process engaging and memorable. The lively participation of the students highlighted their keen interest and commitment to understanding their rights.

**Hands-On Guidance:** To further assist the students, a Satellite Advice and Information (AI) Desk campaign was organized. This desk provided detailed guidance on how to fill out application forms to obtain information, ensuring that students left the event equipped with practical skills in addition to theoretical knowledge.

**Moderating the Future:** TIB Area Coordinator Md. Raihanul Islam moderated the orientation, ensuring that the session was both informative and engaging. His facilitation helped bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, empowering students to utilize the RTI Act effectively.

**A Step Towards Transparency and Accountability:** The impact of this event extends beyond the confines of Kushtia Government Central College. By educating the youth about their right to information, the campaign has sown the seeds for a more transparent and accountable society. These students, now armed with the knowledge of the RTI Act, can play a crucial role in promoting good governance and holding institutions accountable.

As these young minds carry forward the lessons learned, the ripple effect of this orientation program is expected to contribute significantly to the broader goals of transparency and accountability in Bangladesh. This event stands as a testament to the power of education in fostering a culture of integrity and informed citizenship.

### Orientation on National Integrity Strategy (NIS) and SDGs Held in Chattogram

**Chattogram, 18 May 2024:** Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), highlighted the importance of political will and integrity in combating corruption during an orientation on the National Integrity Strategy (NIS) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Chattogram. He stressed that integrity must be practiced at individual, family, and institutional levels to ensure good governance and achieve SDGs. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman encouraged youth to learn from positive examples and mentioned TIB's efforts in promoting integrity and fighting corruption in both government and private sectors. The event, attended by over 100 members of the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Youth Engagement & Support (YES) Group, and Active Citizens Groups (ACGs), included presentations on the NIS, SDGs, and TIB's annual activities.



# Newsletter-2024

## May Edition

### Consultation Meeting with Sreemangal Upazila Health Authority Held

**Sreemangal, 01 May 2024:** At an Opinion Sharing Meeting on May 1, 2024, Sreemangal Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Dr. Sazzad Hossain Chowdhury highlighted significant disruptions in health and ambulance services due to severe manpower shortages and funding issues. He noted that the hospital is overwhelmed with patients, with each doctor attending to 100-120 patients daily, which hampers the delivery of quality care. Despite these challenges, efforts are being made to maintain services with the support of the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) and internal management.

The meeting, moderated by TIB Area Coordinator Md Abu Bakar, also featured discussions on various problems identified by the Active Citizens Groups (ACGs) over the past six months, including issues with duty rosters, inadequate information on services, and staff behavior. Key attendees included officials from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), CCC members, and TIB representatives.

### Citizens' Gathering in Gaibandha Promotes Transparency and Accountability to Improve Service Quality



**Gaibandha, 14 May 2024:** A significant citizens' gathering took place at the Laxmipur Union Parishad premises, titled 'Role of Citizens in Increasing Transparency and Accountability in Improving Service Quality of the Services of Laxmipur Union of Gaibandha Sadar Upazila.' This event, organized by the Active Citizens Group (ACG) and Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) of Gaibandha, aimed to foster a culture of transparency and accountability to enhance service quality in various sectors.

The gathering featured a diverse group of participants, including government and non-government officials, educators, civil society representatives, and local residents. Key speakers included Gaibandha Sadar Upazila Family Planning Officer Mahbuba Begum, Laxmipur Union Parishad Chairman Jahangir Alam, TIB's Director of Civic Engagement Ferhana Ferdous, and Professor Mazharul Mannan, an eminent educationist and CCC member. Their presence underscored the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing community issues.

During the meeting, ordinary citizens shared their insights and suggestions on improving services in education, health, agriculture, and land management. They also discussed tackling social issues such as child marriage, drug abuse, and the need for ethical upbringing of the youth. The feedback highlighted the community's demand for corruption-free government services and the activation of digital labs and libraries in educational institutions to build a better future for the next generation.

The impact of the event was multifaceted. Firstly, it created a platform for open dialogue between citizens and officials, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. Secondly, the emphasis on transparency and accountability set a precedent for future engagements, encouraging continuous improvement in service delivery. Lastly, the anti-corruption oath led by Professor Mazharul Mannan symbolized a collective commitment to ethical governance and civic responsibility.

Overall, the citizens' gathering at Laxmipur Union marked a crucial step towards enhancing service quality through active citizen participation, setting a model for other communities to follow.

### **Dhaka University and Stamford University YES Groups Celebrate World Environment Day**

The Youth Engagement & Support (YES) Group of the Institute of Social Welfare & Research (ISWR), Dhaka University, and Stamford University Bangladesh observed World Environment Day on June 5 separately with different activities on May 28 and May 30, 2024, respectively. Both groups organized quiz competitions on environmental and corruption issues, in which students from various departments participated.

Additionally, discussion meetings were held at the respective institutions, emphasizing the proper implementation of laws and policies regarding the environment. Speakers urged youth to play an effective role in raising awareness among ordinary citizens and protecting the environment. Professor Golam Azam, Director of the Institute of Social Welfare & Research (ISWR), Dhaka University, was present as the chief guest at the ISWR YES event, and Professor Kamruzzaman Majumder, Dean of the Science Faculty at Stamford University Bangladesh, was the keynote speaker at the Stamford YES event.



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