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## Events

### Anti-Corruption Debate Competition: Jagannath University Debating Society Clinches Title, Dhaka University Debating Society Runner-up



Everything was set, adjudicators were ready, and there was pin-drop silence among the audience; everyone was eager to hear the final fiery debate of the Inter-University Anti-Corruption Debate Competition 2024. The two final teams were from the country's most reputed public universities—The University of Dhaka and Jagannath University. As soon as the clock struck, the debate began on the motion: “In the backdrop of the recent uprising, this House supports the reformation of the Constitution, not its amendment.”



After one hour of witty exchanges and sharp logical arguments between the two teams, the final round concluded with Jagannath University emerging as the champion, and the University of Dhaka finishing as the runner-up. The fellow teams and audience cheered them on for the breathtaking Parliamentary-style debate they had just witnessed. The best debater of the tournament was Maien Al Mubassir from Jagannath University, while Ragib Anjum from the University of Dhaka was named the best debater of the final.

## Public and Private University Participation

The three-day national-level debate was organized by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) at the CCDB Hope Center in Savar from 12 to 14 September 2024. The aim was to encourage young minds to address issues of irregularities, anomalies, and corruption, fostering transparency, accountability, and good governance in rebuilding a New Bangladesh. The event saw the participation of 32 public and private universities, selected through a rigorous selection process for the anti-corruption debate. A total of 87 debates took place during the event.

## A Platform for Free Expression and Networking

The event provided a space for young debaters to speak freely and share their views on issues related to the economic crisis, contemporary political situations, reformation policies for a New Bangladesh, and more. On the first day, an anti-corruption oath ceremony was held for the debaters to instill the spirit of fighting corruption. The session was conducted by TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman.





## International Democracy Day: Youths Delineate Strategic Framework for a ‘New Bangladesh’



What direction will the youth of ‘New Bangladesh’ take? In order to guarantee democracy and effective governance, what should be the subsequent course of action following the "second wave of independence"? The questions and their thought-provoking responses were inextricably linked on the occasion of International Democracy Day 2024.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) organized a lively discussion on 15 September 2024 and convened an engaging discussion to learn what the youth of Bangladesh think about the post-autocracy country. There is limitless promise for this country's future, according to youths and youth leaders. The distinguished guests, who ranged from anti-discrimination movement organizers to famous writers and journalists, were all in agreement that future government must be held accountable and transparent by calling into question current practices in governance and corruption.

Additionally, they voiced for large-scale reformation of administrative, judicial and educational structures so that the public remains as the true power holder. All things considered, those who were present at the event reached a consensus on the idea of changing the ‘New Bangladesh’ into a secure environment in which the fundamental rights of all individuals will be safeguarded.

Hasnat Abdullah, coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, highlighted the culture of distrust between the government and the public that existed in the past. He said, ‘Question us because through this reformation will be accelerated. It is twice as important to ensure the safety of those who disagree with us than those who express their views on our side.’

Arif Sohel, another coordinator stated that, ‘We were able to remove tyranny because we were able to speak the language of the people, and the movement took place to ensure equality, dignity and social justice for all’.

Samanta Sharmin, spokesperson for the National Citizens' Committee, commented that the New Bangladesh has birthed new hopes and aspirations among the youth of the country. Furthermore, she emphasized the need of organizing public conversations at the grassroots level in order to mobilize the masses and restructure the state system.



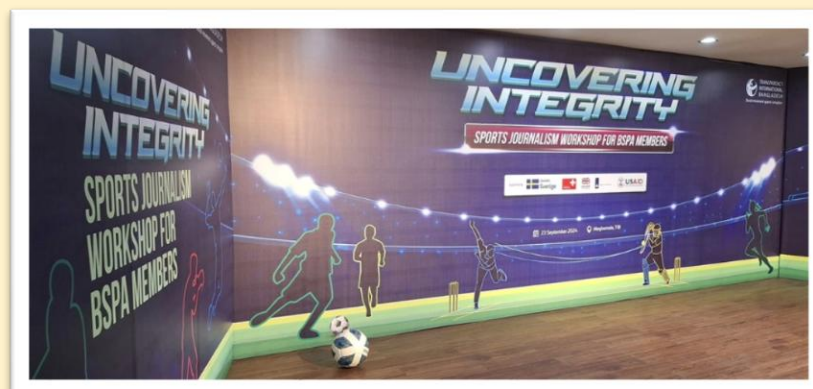
Resonating her words, Ariful Islam Adeeb, member of the National Citizens' Committee, added that one of the key responsibilities of the stakeholders of New Bangladesh is to uphold the social dignity of every citizen.

Known author Sadat Hossain emphasized that merely organizing timely elections does not guarantee the existence of democracy. “The effective incorporation of democracy within our state framework cannot be achieved without the engagement of intellectual discourse among the populace,” he stated. Simu Naser, a journalist and satirist, expressed a desire for a future in which individuals can voice their criticisms of authority without the apprehension of persecution by government forces in what he envisions as ‘New Bangladesh’. He also acknowledged the valuable input of individuals from diverse backgrounds in the struggle against autocracy. In a thoughtful critique of isolated instances of mob justice, media professional Farabi Hafiz articulated that the 'New Bangladesh' must not entertain revenge and violence.

Journalists, young professionals, and members of the Youth Engagement and Support (YES) group from several Dhaka-based educational institutions took part in the open discussion with great enthusiasm.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of TIB, commended the youth for their courageous win over oppression while conducting the event. He emphasized that establishing a new political force embodying the ethos of the anti-discrimination movement is crucial for constructing the 'New Bangladesh' in accordance with public aspirations.

## Igniting the Spark of Integrity in Sports Journalism



A diverse group of sports journalists gathered for the first national sports journalism ethics workshop, aptly titled “Uncovering Integrity: Sports Journalism Workshop for BSPA Members.” This morning, the conference room of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) buzzed with anticipation as Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, TIB's Executive Director, welcomed attendees with a playful twist. While inaugurating the workshop Dr. Zaman addressed the importance of stopping corruption. He highlighted the lack of in-depth studies on corruption within sports in Bangladesh, urging journalists to contribute their unique insights and stories. “Your voices matter,” he asserted, igniting a spark of inspiration among the audience.

The workshop aimed to equip journalists with the tools needed to confront the integrity crisis affecting Bangladesh's sports culture—one that unites people but has been tarnished by unethical behavior. As discussions unfolded, a palpable sense of responsibility and urgency filled the room, pushing each attendee to consider their role as keepers of transparency.



Among the participants was Khandaker Tarek, a passionate photojournalist and freedom fighter, who viewed his role in sports journalism as an extension of his commitment to transparency and justice. As he sat immersed in the workshop, his pen moved swiftly across the pages of his notebook, capturing insights on adapting his expertise to address emerging challenges in sports journalism. “What changes can we enact?” he wondered about. “How can we uphold integrity in our reporting?”



The President of the BSPA, Rezwan-uz-zaman, advocates for more of a such workshop to empower journalists with the knowledge needed to challenge corrupt practices. “Together, we must formulate a strategy to cleanse our sports of corruption,” he stated.



As the day progressed, sessions on investigative journalism and multimedia reporting unfolded, drawing journalists deeper into discussions about the complexities of ethical sports reporting. Notable speakers, like Dr. Saiful Alam Chowdhury from the University of Dhaka, advocated for neutrality and responsible storytelling, urging participants to remain dedicated to factual reporting in an era widespread with misinformation. Sonat Babla, veteran journalist and sports editor of Shokal Shondha, aptly summarized the purpose of the workshop- “This is the beginning of a crucial discussion on ethical journalism in sports,” he also said, we must continue this ongoing conversations to uncover the integrity challenges they all faced”.



With each shared experience, the journalists began to form a spirited community—committed to elevating the standards of sports journalism in Bangladesh. By day’s end, the workshop fostered not just learning but a profound sense of shared responsibility. As Dr. Iftekharuzzaman concluded the workshop, he incited the significance of their mission. “Together, we forge a new narrative—one that champions integrity and ethical standards in sports journalism.”

With robustness, Khandaker Tarek and his fellow journalists left the workshop not only as reporters, but as dedicated architects of accountability and integrity within their field. They embraced the call to not only celebrate victories but to pursue the truth, committed to enhance transparency in sports journalism for the betterment of Bangladesh and its passionate sports community.

## TIB Hosts a Comprehensive Three-Day Workshop on Renewable Energy Investigations for Media Professionals



Recently, a dynamic three-day training session took place at the Dhanmondi office of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). The main goal of the event was to enhance the investigative reporting skills of journalists working in the renewable energy field. To promote effective reporting techniques and tackle the complex issues of governance in Bangladesh's energy sector, the training, titled "Challenges of Good Governance in Renewable Energy Generation in Bangladesh: Enhancing Journalists' Capacity for Investigative Reporting".

The event begun with an address from Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, the Executive Director of TIB. He acknowledged the attendees for their dedication to enhancing governance across media. He highlighted TIB's commitment to uplifting mass media, particularly in rural and regional areas, to tackle the challenges faced by the sector. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman also stated the various internal and external challenges that journalists encounter in their profession. Staying connected with each other will ensure ongoing professional support, and he encouraged the participants to apply their newfound knowledge in real-world scenarios.





At the beginning of the session on September 21, 2024, Mohammad Tauhidul Islam, Director of Outreach and Communication, presented the workshop principles and objectives. The vibe of sharing ideas filled the room as participants, primarily journalists from diverse backgrounds, shared what they wanted to achieve from the workshop.

Newazul Moula, the coordinator of the Energy Governance Project, emphasized the crucial role journalists play in addressing issues related to governance in the energy sector. The ongoing fluctuations in legal compliance pose significant challenges to effective energy management in Bangladesh, a topic he elaborated on.

Hasan Mehedi, the Chief Executive of the Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network (CLEAN), led a session focused on the global context and the significance of renewable energy within Bangladesh's electricity sector. Trainees explored the intricacies of the nation's energy scene by engaging in the calculation of power generation and consumption. To conclude the program, participants collaborated in small groups to present their discoveries and motivate each other to express their ideas.



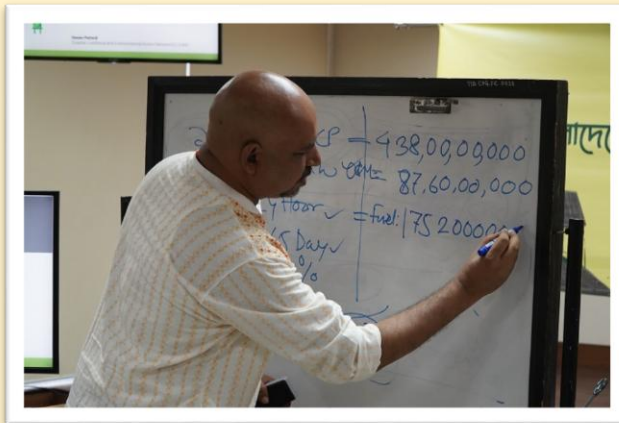
On the second day, Prothom Alo's Special Correspondent Golam Iftekhar Mahmud set off by discussing the dynamics of the power and energy sector, highlighting both the opportunities and obstacles faced in reporting on this vital area. He emphasized the importance of having accessible and reliable information sources for precise reporting on sustainable and renewable energy.

Following Newazul Moula's recap of the discussions from the day before on September 22, Mohammad Tauhidul Islam took charge of the next session. In this segment, they explored the importance of prioritizing the collection and reporting of renewable energy data. They assigned journalists to various online platforms that could assist in collecting essential data for their inquiries.

Rafiqul Islam Montu, the Coastal Regional Correspondent, wrapped up the program with an engaging session focused on tackling challenges in local report preparation. He emphasized the pressing climate and environmental issues tied to Bangladesh's power plants and provided actionable solutions for journalists to navigate these obstacles.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Iftakharuzzaman emphasized how the training significantly enhanced the effectiveness of journalists. He assured everyone that TIB will remain a steadfast support for journalists, especially those outside Dhaka, as they navigate the challenges of their profession. Moreover, he emphasized TIB's dedication to fostering top-notch investigative journalism in Bangladesh by unveiling a special recognition award for three outstanding trainee narratives.

The training program focused on empowering journalists and enhancing governance in the renewable energy sector that wrapped up with receiving certificates from the Executive Director, marking the successful conclusion of the initiative.



## Ensuring Access to Information: TIB Empowers Indigenous Young Women



Indigenous peoples of Bangladesh have long faced discrimination and are considered marginalized, with indigenous women being among the most marginalized within their communities. To empower these groups, particularly young indigenous women, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), in collaboration with the indigenous rights-based organization Kapaeeng Foundation, organized a workshop on September 26, 2024, focusing on the right to information. In observance of the International Day for Universal Access to Information 2024, this unique, day-long event brought together participants from 11 diverse communities, including

Chakma, Marma, Garo, Tripura, Tanchangya, Khayang, Khumi, Sing, Mahato, Hajong, and Mro, from various regions of Bangladesh.

### **Indomitable Spirits of the Young Participants**

As the program commenced, Run Ley Mro eagerly began asking questions about the various aspects of the Right to Information (RTI) and how to utilize it effectively. From the very start, her enthusiasm was palpable as she actively engaged in every session. Her motivation was clear: she wanted to empower her community in Bandarban with the knowledge of RTI.

Living in a region that lacks basic amenities like tap water, medical services, internet access, and banking facilities, Run Ley faced significant challenges. Yet, her determination remained unshakeable, fueling her desire to make a difference. After enduring a long and hectic journey from her remote village, she arrived in the bustling capital, which was a new experience for her.

“The youth in my community are not aware of this Act, and I wasn’t either. But now that I’ve learned about it, I am confident it will help me protect my rights and those of my community back home,” she said, her face lighting up with a smile as she expressed her gratitude after the event.

Run Ley’s story embodies the spirit of all the participants, each facing their own barriers yet united in their commitment to learning about RTI and effecting positive change in their communities.

### **Empowerment Through RTI Knowledge**

One of the most engaging aspects of the workshop was the group learning session, where participants were divided into four groups. Each group gave a presentation on how to apply for information under the RTI Act. The participants discussed real-life challenges they face when trying to access information and sought clarification on different aspects and benefits of the Act. They also received insights into various sections of the Act and the role of the Information Commission, which is responsible for implementing the Act.

### **RTI a Tool to Ensure Transparency and Accountability in New Bangladesh**

At the inaugural session, Pallab Chakma, Executive Director of Kapaeeng Foundation, emphasized the workshop's goal of not only ensuring the right to information but also empowering people to





exercise that right. He called for unity between indigenous communities and citizens, saying, “If the plains and hills unite, new horizons of friendship will emerge.”

Dr. Sumaiya Khair, Adviser at TIB, paid tribute to the anti-discrimination movement, urging participants to both understand and apply the RTI Act in their daily lives, as a tool for recognizing injustice. TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman highlighted the youth-led overthrow of the authoritarian government, describing the RTI Act as a vital tool for ensuring transparency, accountability, and good governance in building a New Bangladesh—one where these principles are essential to achieving a nation free from discrimination.



## Policy Stances

### **Freeze Bangladeshi Laundered Assets Immediately: TIB and Four Anti-Corruption Organisations Appeal to Governments, Including the UK, the USA, and the EU**



**Dhaka, 03 September 2024:** To initiate the process of recovering money smuggled from Bangladesh to various countries, including the United Kingdom, United States, Switzerland, EU nations, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the United Arab Emirates, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and four UK-based anti-corruption agencies have jointly called for the immediate freezing of illegal assets held by Bangladeshis in these countries. In a joint letter addressed to the UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, TI-UK, the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition, the International Lawyers Project, Spotlight on Corruption, and TIB highlighted the importance of fostering active collaboration with the Bangladeshi government. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of working together to ensure that those who possess illegal assets are held accountable and to facilitate the return of these assets. This initiative is viewed as a crucial step towards creating a future for the envisioned "New Bangladesh" that is transparent, accountable, democratic and free from corruption.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said: “Most of the countries where corrupt money and assets from Bangladesh have been laundered to are among our development, trade and investment partners who are committed to fighting corruption nationally and internationally. Now is the time for them to take such commitments to a new level of effectiveness by immediate necessary actions to freeze illegal assets owned by all Bangladeshi individuals and entities in their respective jurisdictions. We particularly call upon governments of UK, USA, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, EU countries as well as Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and UAE to freeze such assets as the step to repatriate the same to Bangladesh and hold the perpetrators to account.”

Susan Hawley, Executive Director of Spotlight on Corruption, said, “The UK really needs to put its money where its mouth is when it comes to helping developing countries like Bangladesh track down stolen assets that the UK is harbouring, and to ensuring accountability of corrupt actors. By bolstering anti-corruption efforts at this crucial moment for Bangladesh, the UK could play a decisive role in ensuring the country achieve the secure democratic and inclusive future that the UK has promised to help it achieve.”

Duncan Hames, Director of Policy at Transparency International UK, said, “We know that Bangladeshi politicians with unexplained wealth and members of the business elite accused of wrongdoing have significant asset portfolios here in the UK and abroad. The British government should now work closely with allies around the world and civil society within Bangladesh to introduce a sanctions regime which freezes the assets of these corrupt figures and their enablers, ensuring they do not enjoy their ill-gotten gains.”

In the letter to the UK Secretary of State on August 30, it was highlighted that the extensive corruption by beneficiaries of the ousted authoritarian government is being uncovered in Bangladesh, which is currently in transition. The assets smuggled by these beneficiaries rightfully belong to the citizens of Bangladesh. In order to contribute to the reforming of a “New Bangladesh”, it is essential to promptly locate and retrieve these concealed assets from different countries across the globe. This will help improve transparency, accountability, democracy, and inclusivity in the country. The letter seeks cooperation from the the UK Secretary of State to support this effort.

The letter urges the UK Government to promptly address three crucial matters, in line with their commitment to support the Interim Government of Bangladesh. First, the five anti-corruption organizations (TI-UK, the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition, the International Lawyers Project, Spotlight on Corruption, and TIB) request that the UK’s National Crime Agency proactively investigate whether money laundered by Bangladeshi individuals or companies is present in the UK. They urge the agency to take all necessary measures, including freezing these assets, as an initial step toward repatriating the funds to Bangladesh. Second, they seek UK government assistance in reforming key Bangladeshi institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, Financial Intelligence Unit, Criminal Investigation Department, National Board of Revenue, Office of the Attorney General, and law enforcement agencies.

Additionally, they request support in building the capacity of forensic accountants and lawyers to enable these agencies to promptly identify and recover laundered money. Third, the letter calls for cooperation and coordination with countries where Bangladeshi funds have been smuggled—namely the United States, Canada, Australia, the European Union, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the United Arab Emirates (particularly Dubai). It underscores the necessity of accelerating the process of repatriating these assets and guaranteeing accountability for all parties involved with the laundered money.

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As a follow up to their call, TIB and TI-US called on the United States government to freeze and send back illegal assets laundered from Bangladesh on an urgent basis. In a letter sent to the US Minister of State Anthony Blinken and Finance Minister Janet Yellen on 10 September 2024, the



heads of the two organizations urgently called on the government of Bangladesh to actively cooperate with the United States and the governments of other countries to ensure the accountability of the owners of illegal wealth and to bring back the laundered money to the country.

**Widespread extortion and partisan capture of political and governance space contradictory to the vision of 'New Bangladesh'; Political parties urged to take lessons of anti-discrimination movement: TIB**



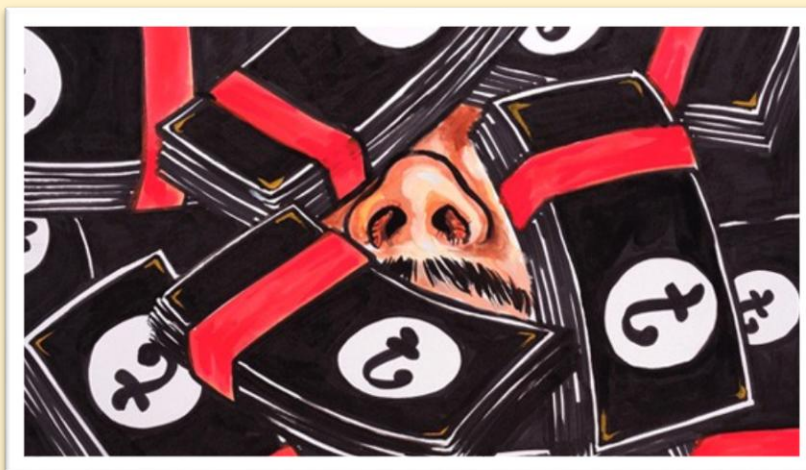
**Dhaka, 11 September 2024:** Following the end of the authoritarian Awami League government, the rise in illegal occupation, partisanship, and extortion in the sectors previously controlled by the fallen government and its leaders is completely contrary to the vision of a "New Bangladesh," commented Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). The organization has also called upon all stakeholders, including political parties, to understand and practice the underlying values of the anti-discrimination movement at both party and institutional levels.

TIB's Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman stated that current culture of partisanship, illegal occupation and extortion spreading across the country represents a betrayal of the dream of a 'New Bangladesh'. He remarked, "The anti-discrimination movement, which championed equality and justice, led to the collapse of authoritarianism and opened up unprecedented opportunities for state reform and the establishment of a new political culture in the 'New Bangladesh'. However, those who view the gains achieved through the unprecedented bloodshed and sacrifice of students and the people as merely their own political victory, while engaging in partisanship, illegal occupation, and extortion, pose a grave threat to the movement's core spirit. The students envisioned a 'New Bangladesh'—a well-governed, democratic nation free from coercion and all forms of abuse of power. Yet, since the fall of authoritarianism, we have seen a troubling rise in partisanship, extortion, illegal occupation, and efforts to dominate the political landscape nationwide. Those seizing this moment to 'fill the void' left by the Awami League leaders and their affiliates, who held power for fifteen years, with a mindset of 'It's our time now,' are following a self-destructive path. Different groups appear to be undermining the dream of a 'New Bangladesh', born from the bloody student uprising and promising a non-oppressive, illegal occupation-free nation. Rampant partisanship, illegal occupation, and extortion have emerged across various sectors—land, businesses, leases, public transport—along with unhealthy competition for positions within

government institutions. The dreams of a ‘New Bangladesh’, which sprang from the spontaneous movement of the people and transcended caste, religion, gender, class, and occupation, are contradicted by this. It also threatens to nullify the sacrifices made during the movement. We are concerned about the tendency of some people to impose a new form of discriminatory social system from the wreckage of fallen authoritarianism, which is in direct contradiction to the core values of the anti-discrimination movement.

Dr. Zaman further said, “All parties, including political organizations, should learn from this movement. The fall of an authoritarian government should not be seen as an opportunity for personal, party, organizational, or collective self-interest. No one has the right to undermine the new era that promises to build a state system ensuring equal rights for all citizens. This is the time to transition from an emphasis on state authority to an emphasis on duty towards the state. Failure to move beyond the old practices of "Now is our time for partisanship, illegal occupation, and extortion" and to set an example of people-centered politics implies no significant ideological difference from the former ruling party. We urge political parties to take steps toward creating a non-discriminatory, non-sectarian, transparent, accountable, and well-governed state that guarantees voting rights, justice, human rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of the media for all citizens. TIB believes organizations and individuals opposing authoritarianism need to truly comprehend and apply the lessons learned from the anti-discrimination struggle.”

#### **Preventing Money Laundering and Return of Stolen Assets No less a Responsibility of Destination Countries: TIB**



**Dhaka, 19 September 2024:** The richer and so-called developed countries are the main destinations and beneficiaries of the lion's share of Bangladesh’s laundered money. In view of the continued national and international media disclosures of accumulation of wealth in such countries by high profile publicly exposed Bangladeshis of the fallen regime, TIB has reiterated its call upon governments of the destination countries to take concrete actions to help Bangladesh expedite the return of stolen assets as part of their international commitments and responsibility.

In a statement Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh said, “Conventional hosts of money laundering like UK, USA and proverbial Switzerland have been joined in recent couple of decades by Canada, Australia, Singapore, Hong Hong, Malaysia, Middle East countries like UAE, especially Dubai and even many offshore island territories as attractive hosts of Bangladeshi laundered money. In each destination of illicit transfers, there are powerful syndicates of highly skilled law firms, trust companies, offshore specialists, real estate agents, accountants, regulatory experts, and banking and financial services companies that facilitate the secret deals. These syndicates have systematically strengthened the demand side over the years, and by providing safe and lucrative incentives to our money launderers contributed to flows of investments in host economies in multiple sectors, especially real estate, banking and luxury consumption.”

In some cases, these are outcomes of relevant government policies or policy loopholes, whether deliberate or not. Many such countries have been persistently keeping provisions to invest laundered money by various means like trusts, real estate, investment passports, etc. If not by policy provisions or loopholes in policies, enforcement deficiencies have helped creation of heavens for the money laundering facilitators who have been systematically incentivizing money launderers of Bangladesh, he also stated.

We call upon governments of the host countries of Bangladesh’s laundered money like UK, USA, Canada, Dubai and Singapore to:

- Proactively identify and freeze any illegal assets owned by Bangladeshi nationals or entities in their respective jurisdictions;
- Take immediate actions to dismantle and hold to account syndicates facilitators of accumulation of money and wealth through illicit transfers;
- Cooperate with the government of Bangladesh to start and expedite the process of repatriation of the stolen assets and hold the money launderers to account through the available international processes including mutual legal assistance and technical support;
- Contribute to building the necessary professional and international capacity of relevant Bangladeshi state agencies, especially ACC, BFIU, CID, NBR and Attorney General’s Office; and
- Collaborate and coordinate with other above-mentioned host countries of Bangladesh’s laundered money to take similar actions.

The burden of responsibility to prevent, control and bring back laundered money lies mainly on Bangladesh’s shoulders, but it is also no less a responsibility of countries or territories where the laundered money from Bangladesh have been invested and thereby helped the host economies.



## International Day for Universal Access to Information 2024: TIB Calls for Overhauling of Information Commission and Amendments to Right to Information Act



**Dhaka, 27 September 2024:** On the occasion of the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) 2024, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has urged a comprehensive overhaul of the Information Commission to protect it from partisan influence. TIB views this reform as critical to building a 'New Bangladesh' that guarantees freedom of speech and unhindered access to information. In a press statement, TIB emphasized the importance of avoiding past practices of withholding information, advocating instead for the right to information as a tool to serve the public. TIB outlined a 13-point set of recommendations, including the timely amendment of the Right to Information Act, 2009, to ensure universal access to information, greater public participation, and improved transparency.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman stated, 'The extraordinary optimism created by the youth of our nation, following their unprecedented sacrifices and the fall of the authoritarian regime, has sparked an exceptional optimism to rebuild a 'New Bangladesh.' Freedom of speech, the right to dissent, and the unrestricted flow of information are integral aspirations of this vision. Ensuring the free flow of information is fundamental to our belief in creating a transparent, accountable and corruption-free Bangladesh. The past authoritarian regime's downfall was driven by the systematic manipulation of information, creation of false narratives, and the suppression of free expression and dissent opinion. TIB urges the interim government to prioritize free speech and the right to information as essential to this new era.'

The TIB Executive Director further stated, 'Attacks, incidents, various forms of harassment, and even death threats have become normalised in seeking information following legal proceedings. We must promptly initiate the necessary amendments of the Right to Information Act and establish a non-partisan Information Commission to break the culture of secrecy and foster greater transparency.'

TIB has presented 13-point recommendations to ensure universal right to information, information accessibility and public participation. The recommendations include effectively implementing the

Right to Information Act as one of the key instruments for ensuring freedom of speech and the right to dissent; abolishing all legal and institutional obstacles, especially discarding digital structures for public surveillance created under some draconian laws; comprehensive reform of the Information Commission, focusing on transparent appointments of qualified personnel as commissioners free from partisan influence, to enhance its effectiveness; simplifying digital tools and infrastructure to improve access to and disclosure of information; amending and repealing laws that conflict with the Right to Information Act, 2009; ensuring no future legislation conflicts with the spirit or implementation of the Right to Information Act; adding provisions in the Right to Information Act to ensure the necessary legal protection for access to information etc.

### **Cancellation of Textbook Review Committee: TIB Calls It a Worrisome Precedent of Compromise by Interim Govt with Radicals**



**Dhaka, 13 August 2024:** Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has commented that the interim government has set a worrisome and risky precedent by compromising policy decisions in response to self-interested radical threats. The organization expressed deep concern that the decision to cancel the coordination committee to amend and revise all textbooks, prepared and printed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), contradicts the vision of a non-discriminatory ‘New Bangladesh’ and its non-communal spirit. This, TIB asserts, is indicative of the interim government’s compromising stance.

Issuing a press statement today, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “In response to the multi-dimensional and unprecedented human rights violations by the authoritarian government, and the sacrifice of thousands of martyrs, the students have paved the way for the creation of a ‘New Bangladesh’—a nation committed to the peaceful coexistence and equal rights of all, regardless of religious, social, or cultural diversity. This ‘New Bangladesh’ will be non-discriminatory, non-sectarian, transparent, accountable, and well-governed, where no religious or ideological doctrine will be imposed on anyone. However, we are alarmed by efforts to spread malice, hatred, and hostility against non-communal spirit and pluralism, which are gaining momentum. The interim government is compromising by succumbing to the propaganda and threats posed by self-interested factions. A troubling example of this is the cancellation of the coordination committee to amend and revise textbooks, which not only represents a concession to

fundamentalism and communalism but also betrays the very aspirations of ‘New Bangladesh’ for a non-discriminatory, non-communal, and democratic future.”

Dr. Zaman further said, “No matter how overpowered the oppressive and communal forces that have emerged from the ruins of authoritarianism are, and no matter how hard they try to impose their discriminatory ideology on society, we firmly believe that the mainstream of the anti-discrimination movement will not allow such forces to thrive. The strength of the interim government lies in the core values of the anti-discrimination movement—pluralism, inclusiveness, equality, and non-communalism. TIB expresses hope that the government will continue to uphold its responsibility to reform the state and steadfastly avoid compromising with all forms of malign forces, especially communal and fundamentalist factions.”

## CCC News Highlights

### **CCCs celebrate the Right to Know Day Speakers Advocate for Safeguarding Freedom of Speech and Unrestricted Access to Information**



On September 28, 2024, Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) across Bangladesh observed International Right to Know Day with enthusiasm, under the theme "New Bangladesh: Freedom of Speech, Free Access to Information." Rallies, human chains, discussion sessions, anti-corruption cultural programs, and various campaigns were organized locally to raise public awareness about the implementation of the Right to Information Act of 2009 and to educate citizens about their rights to accessible information.

Forty-five CCCs, together with their Youth Engagement and Support (YES) groups, collaborated with local administrations to commemorate the day. Deputy Commissioners (DCs),



Superintendents of Police, Additional Deputy Commissioners, Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs), and other government officials attended the events, joined by representatives from civil society organizations, educators, students, journalists, CCC members, YES groups, and Active Citizens groups. The YES groups led satellite campaigns on citizens' rights, provided guidance on preparing and submitting information requests under the Right to Information Act of 2009, and organized various competitions for the occasion.

Speakers at the events emphasized that the Right to Information Act of 2009 is a critical piece of legislation for public welfare in Bangladesh. They noted that corruption remains a significant barrier to national development, and this Act serves as a vital tool for combating corruption and ensuring organizational transparency and accountability. However, awareness of this law is still limited, particularly in marginalized and remote areas. Thus, a comprehensive publicity campaign is needed to increase public awareness. Speakers proposed educating students on the Right to Information Act from the school level and suggested that government information be readily available on official websites.



Furthermore, speakers advocated for the effective implementation of the Right to Information Act as a means to protect freedom of speech and dissent. They urged for the removal of legal and institutional obstacles, specifically calling for the repeal of restrictive laws such as the Information and Communication Technology Act, Digital Security Act, and Cyber Security Act. Additionally, speakers recommended restructuring the Information Commission to enhance its effectiveness, including appointing qualified, non-partisan commissioners through a transparent selection process. Awareness-raising materials, such as leaflets and flyers, were distributed to participants at the events.



## Health Authorities Commit to Addressing Concerns Raised at Public Hearing to Ensure Quality Services



On September 26, 2024, a public hearing was held at the Kalirbazar Health and Family Planning Center to enhance the quality of health services. The event was jointly organized by the Adarsha Sadar Upazila Family Planning Office and the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Cumilla, and included the participation of service recipients. Authorities addressed the issues and concerns raised by attendees, committing to take necessary actions to improve service standards.

The hearing opened with a welcome speech from Upazila Family Planning Officer Md. Abu Kawser and was moderated by Prabir Kumar Dutta, Area Coordinator of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). CCC member Professor Bijoy Krishna Roy outlined the goals and objectives of the hearing. In the discussion led by Badrul Huda Jenu, convener of the CCC's health affairs sub-committee, service recipient Morsheda Akhter highlighted that patients are charged fees for normal deliveries. Social worker Sakhawat pointed out that long-standing staff members,



often influenced by local leaders, make it challenging for patients to receive adequate services.

Md. Rafiqul Islam, representing service recipients, mentioned the prolonged absence of doctors and the unsuitable condition of the labor room. Teacher representative Abdul Barek called for an increase in medicine allocations and better oversight of staff.

Deputy Director of the District Family Planning Office, Mehbub Morshed, emphasized that serving the public is their primary responsibility and reassured attendees that corrective actions would be taken against those neglecting their duties. He instructed that the hotline remain operational at all times and that the list of available medicines be prominently displayed. He further promised to consider increasing the number of OT rooms and medicine allocations. The District Family Planning Office expressed gratitude to the CCC for organizing the event aimed at improving health service quality.

CCC President Professor Nikhil Chandra Roy thanked all participants, stating that the purpose of the program was to foster transparency and accountability in health services and to explore ways to improve service quality at the Kalirbazar Health and Family Planning Center. He affirmed the CCC's ongoing support for initiatives that contribute positively to the community. Present at the hearing were CCC member Mohammad Anisur Rahman Akhand, Family Welfare Visitors (FWV), Family Planning Inspectors (FPI), Family Welfare Assistants (FWA), representatives of service providers and recipients, print and electronic media members, and YES representatives.

Information Fair held in Sunamganj and Jamalpur  
**Right to Information Act, 2009: Empowering Citizens with Authority to  
 Access Information and Promote Transparency**



To increase public awareness and promote practical use of the Right to Information Act (RTI) of 2009, information fairs were recently held in Sunamganj and Jamalpur. These events were organized through collaborative efforts between local Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) and district administrations. Both fairs brought together government and non-government institutions from various sectors to share service-related information with the public. The events not only offered citizens an introduction to the RTI Act but also provided hands-on guidance on how to request information from relevant institutions.



### **Sunamganj Information Fair**

The two-day information fair in Sunamganj, held on September 28-29, 2024, took place at the Shahid Abul Hossain Auditorium and was organized by the Sunamganj District Administration in partnership with CCC Sunamganj. Eighteen government and non-government organizations set up booths to distribute information, answer questions, and guide attendees on how to submit requests under the RTI Act. The fair drew hundreds of citizens, over 400 of whom applied for information from government offices directly at the event, successfully accessing information as guaranteed by the Act.

Dr. Mohammad Elias Mia, Deputy Commissioner of Sunamganj, inaugurated the fair and highlighted the district administration's commitment to removing barriers to information. He emphasized the importance of accessible information in driving development and transparency, noting that this fair was aimed at addressing a widespread lack of public awareness about the RTI Act. According to Dr. Mia, by actively supporting citizen engagement and streamlining access to information, local administrations can empower communities and promote accountability in governance.

The opening ceremony, led by CCC President Jogeswar Das, included remarks from various district officials and CCC members who spoke about the value of transparency and the need for consistent public engagement in service processes. Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Mohammad Rejaul Karim, Superintendent of District Sadar Hospital Dr. Mahbubur Rahman, and TIB Cluster Coordinator Areful Islam were among the speakers. Each highlighted the need for collaborative efforts between citizens and service providers to create a transparent, accountable governance system.

An integral part of the fair was the campaign led by the Youth Engagement & Support (YES) Group, which focused on educating attendees about the RTI Act. YES members offered on-site assistance, helping visitors fill out RTI application forms and explaining the Act's guidelines. They also hosted anti-corruption activities, including a cartoon exhibition, a quiz competition, an art competition, and cultural performances designed to engage the community in a positive, informative way. In addition, a public hearing specifically aimed at improving Sunamganj Municipality services allowed citizens to ask questions directly to municipal officials and receive timely responses.

### **Jamalpur Information Fair**

In Jamalpur, a similar two-day information fair was held on September 29-30, 2024, organized by the Jamalpur District Administration and CCC Jamalpur. The event saw participation from 32 government institutions and non-government organizations, attracting a large crowd. Over 2,000 citizens took advantage of the fair to submit applications for information under the RTI Act, receiving assistance directly from officials present at the fairgrounds.

Deputy Commissioner Hasina Begum of Jamalpur inaugurated the fair, addressing the attendees and emphasizing the importance of RTI in bridging the information gap between government and citizens. She shared the district's commitment to ensuring information access not only in urban areas but also in remote villages, so that every citizen, regardless of location, can benefit from the RTI Act. Hasina Begum noted that the district administration has taken steps to improve digital access to information by updating local government web portals, in line with a research report

from CCC-TIB. This initiative will further streamline the process of requesting and obtaining information.



The public hearing at the Jamalpur fair focused on addressing concerns related to services provided by the Upazila Land Office and the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA). Attendees raised questions about service availability, transparency, and efficiency, and representatives from these offices responded, clarifying procedures and acknowledging areas where service improvements were needed.

### **Closing Ceremonies and Impact**

Both fairs concluded with award ceremonies recognizing competition winners and honoring institutions that actively participated in sharing information and guiding citizens. Speakers at the closing events expressed that events like these information fairs are crucial for promoting the Right to Information Act and for fostering a culture of accountability. They highlighted that while the RTI Act grants citizens the legal right to information, further efforts are needed to ensure that this right is fully understood and accessible to everyone. By bridging gaps in public knowledge, these fairs contribute significantly to the goal of building a transparent, accountable, and corruption-free society.

Many attendees expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to interact directly with service providers and to gain clarity on the information application process. Organizers noted that the strong turnout and active participation underscored a widespread desire for transparency and engagement between citizens and public service institutions. Both fairs marked an important step toward making information more accessible and empowering citizens through knowledge, helping to lay the groundwork for good governance and a more informed, engaged society.

### **Hundreds of students take oath against corruption**

With the theme "Together Against Corruption, Invincible Youth Will Resist Corruption," the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) Savar gathered at Savar Collegiate School on September 5, 2024, to inspire young minds in the fight against corruption. The campaign event brought together over three hundred students who participated in anti-corruption activities, including inspirational talks, an oath-taking ceremony, a signature drive, and a satellite advice desk, all designed to empower students and foster a culture of integrity.

The day began with an impactful discussion, where CCC President Professor Dipak Kumar Roy, in the presence of teachers and students, shared insights on the importance of ethical values. Following the talk, he led an anti-corruption oath with the students, encouraging them to pledge their commitment to honesty and transparency. Joining him were esteemed community members, including the school's head teacher, Md. Shahidul Islam, CCC adviser Engineer Kamal Reza, CCC Vice President Advocate Nazrul Islam, Freedom Fighters M. A. Khalek and AKM Sirajul Islam, as well as members of Active Citizens Group (ACG) and Youth Engagement and Support (YES).

Throughout the event, speakers reminded students that they are the future leaders of the nation and that their actions will help shape a fair and just Bangladesh. "A commitment to integrity and justice starts now," they emphasized, encouraging students to carry forward the spirit of anti-corruption.



The students who took the anti-corruption oath expressed a strong sense of duty toward their country. They vowed to speak out against any corruption or injustice they encounter and committed to creating a future where transparency and accountability are the norms. Inspired by patriotism, the students resolved to build a corruption-free Bangladesh, uniting their voices in a promise to never tolerate corruption. In a powerful show of solidarity, each student signed their names to a collective pledge, adding their voices to the mass signature collection in support of the campaign's theme, "Together Against Corruption."

For these young individuals, the event wasn't just an assembly; it was a call to action. With new knowledge, a supportive community, and a shared commitment, they walked away inspired to actively pursue the values that will one day define the nation's future. Through their participation, these students proved that, united and determined, they are indeed "invincible" in their stand against corruption.



## CCCs Monitor 60 Government Web Portals, Issuing Key Recommendations to Enhance Information Accessibility

As part of the observance of Right to Know Day 2024, the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) undertook a comprehensive study of the web portals of government institutions at the local level. The primary objective of this initiative was to compile an extensive report detailing the current status of these web portals, thereby providing critical insights to the relevant authorities for necessary action. In this endeavor, 29 CCCs conducted a thorough analysis of 60 web portals, encompassing a total of 3,113 government institutions within the districts, reflecting a concerted effort to bolster citizens' rights to access information.

Following the findings of the study, both the Additional Deputy Commissioner (Education and ICT) of Madaripur District and the Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Chakaria Upazila in Cox's Bazar District took proactive measures by issuing directives to subordinate offices, urging them to update their web portals in accordance with the study's recommendations.

The CCCs presented a comprehensive set of recommendations to the respective authorities based on their localized findings. These recommendations included the following:

1. **Effective Initiatives for Information Updates:** The authorities are encouraged to implement robust initiatives aimed at ensuring that information on web portals is consistently updated, as demonstrated by the issuance of directives to subordinate offices.
2. **Adherence to the National Information Portal Manual:** It is recommended that all government offices align their web portal updates with the National Information Portal Manual, ensuring uniformity in the format of information presented across all web portals.
3. **Regular Updates of Designated Officer Information:** Special emphasis should be placed on maintaining accurate and current information regarding the 'Designated Officer'—including their name, designation, phone number, and email—on the homepage of the web portal, as mandated by the Right to Information Act of 2009.
4. **Frequent Monitoring of Web Portals:** Designated personnel should be instructed to visit the web portal multiple times each month to ensure that dynamic information is consistently updated.
5. **Comprehensive Information Disclosure:** Organizations should ensure that all essential information is thoroughly updated, rather than providing partial data. This includes adding mobile numbers and email addresses alongside the names and designations of the officers or employees.
6. **Linkage of Independent Websites:** For organizations possessing separate websites not linked to the National Information Portal, it is imperative that links to these independent sites be prominently displayed on the homepage of the existing portal.
7. **Training and Supervision:** Providing necessary training to personnel responsible for updating web portals is essential. Additionally, higher authorities should conduct regular supervision of these updates to ensure compliance.
8. **Public Broadcasting Enhancements:** Efforts should be intensified to promote public awareness regarding the web portals, thereby increasing their accessibility and effectiveness for the citizens.

Through these initiatives, the CCCs aim not only to enhance the accessibility and transparency of information but also to empower citizens in their pursuit of knowledge and accountability from their government institutions.

### **AI Desk and RTI Campaign held at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in Dhaka 4512 patients, Relatives Receive Service Related Advices and Information**



A two-day Advice & Information (AI) Desk and Campaign focused on the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009 was conducted by the Youth Engagement and Support (YES) Group of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University on September 21 and 22, 2024. This event took place in the outdoor premises of the Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, where a total of 4,512 patients and their relatives—2,567 males and 1,945 females—received essential advice and information from the AI Desk and RTI Campaign. The initiative was officially inaugurated by Dr. Md. Arifur Rahman, a former advisor of the YES Group and an Associate Professor in the Department of Bio-Chemistry & Molecular Biology at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University.



During the course of the campaign, 368 individuals were oriented on the provisions and applications of the RTI Act, 2009. This campaign was designed to enhance public awareness

regarding the rights guaranteed under the Act and to educate citizens on how they can effectively utilize these rights to access information from government institutions.



Upon the conclusion of the events, a meeting was held on September 22, 2024, with Dr. Md. Shafiur Rahman, the Director of the hospital, along with other medical professionals. The meeting was attended by Dr. Md. Arifur Rahman, Dr. Md. Akkas Ali, a Senior Scientific Officer at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, the Coordinator of the YES Group, as well as former and current leaders, deputy leaders, and various other members of the YES Group. During this meeting, the Director invited the YES members to share their observations and feedback regarding the operations of the AI Desk throughout the two-day campaign.

The members of the YES Group provided comprehensive insights based on the complaints and recommendations received from patients and their relatives during the campaign. Dr. Md. Shafiur Rahman commended the initiatives undertaken by the YES Group and assured attendees that necessary actions would be taken to address the complaints highlighted during the discussions. He encouraged the YES members to compile a concise report summarizing the observations and complaints gathered through the AI Desk.

Furthermore, the Director expressed his agreement with the proposal to collaborate with Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) in developing an informational sheet or flyer that would detail hospital services. This resource is intended to support future AI Desk initiatives within the hospital. Dr. Rahman also encouraged the YES members to organize additional AI Desk campaigns, recognizing the importance of sustained engagement with the community to promote awareness of the RTI Act and to facilitate public access to information regarding healthcare services.

### **Over Hundred Students of UAP Receive Orientation on the Right to Information Act, 2009**

On September 29, 2024, an orientation session followed by a Quiz Competition centered on the Right to Information Act, 2009, was organized by the Dhaka YES-1 Group at the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) of Dhaka International University (DIU) to commemorate International Right to Information Day. The event was attended by a total of 65 students from the Faculty of CSE at DIU.

The inauguration of the event featured a welcome address delivered by Mr. Paritosh Chandra Roy, Lecturer and Head of the Workshop and Seminar Organizing Committee at the Faculty of CSE.



The orientation and quiz competition were formally inaugurated by Md. Zahidul Islam, Assistant Professor and Coordinator (1st Shift) of the Faculty of CSE.

During the prize-giving ceremony, Md. Tahzib-Ul-Islam, Associate Professor and Acting Chairman of the Faculty of CSE, served as the special guest, while Professor Dr. ATM Mahbubur Rahman, Dean of the Faculty of CSE, attended as the chief guest. The Dean expressed his gratitude to Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and the Dhaka YES-1 Group for their efforts in organizing the events and urged them to extend similar initiatives to students from other departments within the university. The speakers highlighted the pivotal role that youth play in the implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2009, and encouraged them to take an active stance against corruption. The winners of the quiz competition were recognized and awarded during this ceremony. Additionally, Professor Dr. ATM Mahbubur Rahman facilitated TIB's Anti-Corruption Oath-taking session.

In a parallel initiative, the YES Group of the University of Asia Pacific (UAP) conducted a day-long Anti-Corruption and Right to Information campaign during the Club Fair held on September 30, 2024. The fair was inaugurated by Architect Mahbuba Haque, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees at UAP, who toured the various stalls alongside the Vice Chancellor of the university. Members of the UAP YES Group provided orientations to visiting students regarding the applications of the Right to Information Act, 2009, in combating corruption. In total, 89 students received hands-on training on how to submit RTI applications to the appropriate authorities as per the provisions of the Act. The guests in attendance expressed their appreciation for the YES Group's initiatives aimed at enhancing the capacity of youth to combat corruption effectively.



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