



Public Opinion Survey on the proposed amendments to the Anti-corruption Act 2004

Background & Introduction

In the election manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League, the largest party in the ruling Grand Alliance, the second highest priority was to make the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) independent and strengthened. Even after the 9th National Election this commitment was reinstated many times by the top leaders including the Prime Minister. Expectations grew out of her strong public stance in favor of institutionalizing democracy, establishing rule of law and fighting corruption.

However, since the formation of the present government, questions have been raised on the seriousness of the government in fulfilling its commitment as a result of a number of policy and administrative initiatives. On 26 April 2010 the Cabinet approved a set of proposed amendments to the Anti-corruption Act 2004, which are likely to be presented in the Parliament for enactment.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has undertaken a series of activities to intensify the support for its demand for reconsideration of such proposed amendments, which will significantly weaken the Commission and make it ineffective. TIB submitted a policy brief on the subject to the Prime Minister, her Cabinet Colleagues and all members of the Parliament; it undertook other demand creation activities such as a series of human chains in Dhaka and various parts of the country where TIB operates; it conducted a signature campaign, on-line petition, press statements and press conferences. About 170,500 signatures were collected under the signature campaign.

The survey

In continuation of the above, a public opinion survey was conducted among 3,998 respondents throughout the country in 29 districts and 7 Upazilas covering all the 6 divisions. In the survey 100 respondents were interviewed from each selected area. Considering population density, from Dhaka city 400 and from Chittagong city 200 respondents were interviewed. A structured questionnaire was used as the survey tool. The survey was conducted from 1 to 5 July 2010.

Among the respondents 87.2% were males. Most of them (76.7%) had educational background of tertiary level and above. Among the respondents there were public officials (15.8%); professionals (20.3%) including teachers, physicians, engineers, lawyers and journalists; political activists (14.7%); officials from private and non-government organizations (20.2%); and other common people (29%) including students, business people, traders, home-makers and others.

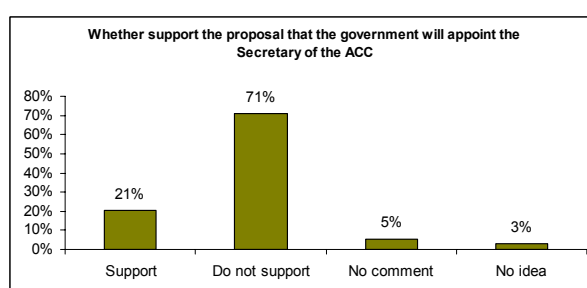
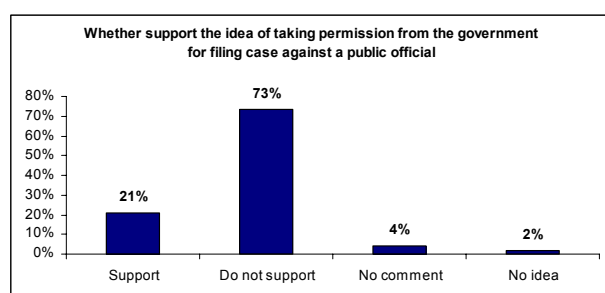
Survey Findings

Almost all (99.7%) the respondents are aware of the existence of the ACC. They are also well-informed about its functions. Some informed that the main task of ACC is to prevent corruption (56%), while others indicated taking legal actions against the corrupt persons was its main function (21%). 11 percent of the surveyed people viewed ACC as the institution that conducts investigations against corruption.

Almost 97% respondents emphasized the need for an independent and effective ACC in combating corruption. Almost 92% informed that they know that most of the political parties in their electoral pledges made commitment to ensure the independence of the ACC and to strengthen it.

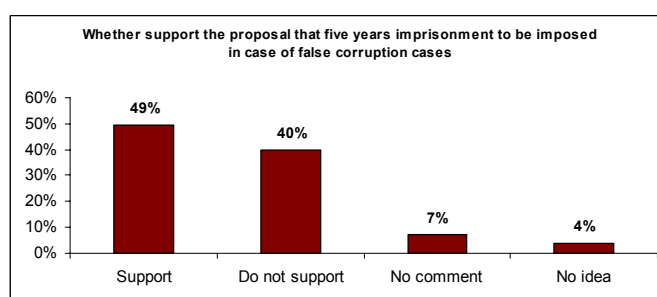
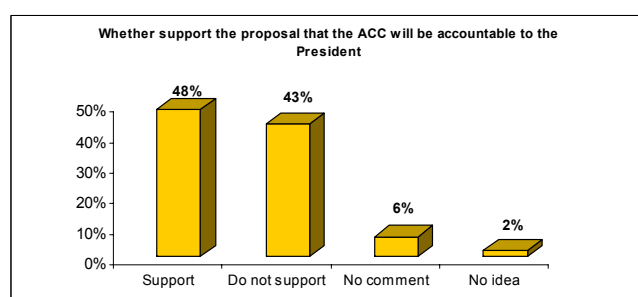
Opinions were sought from the respondents on four key amendments to the ACC Act 2004 that have been proposed by the government.

1. Only 21% was in favor of the proposal that the ACC should take prior permission from the government in case of taking action against corruption by public officials, while 73% was against this proposition.



2. The proposal that the government should appoint the Secretary of the ACC was supported by only 21%, while as high as 71% opposed it.

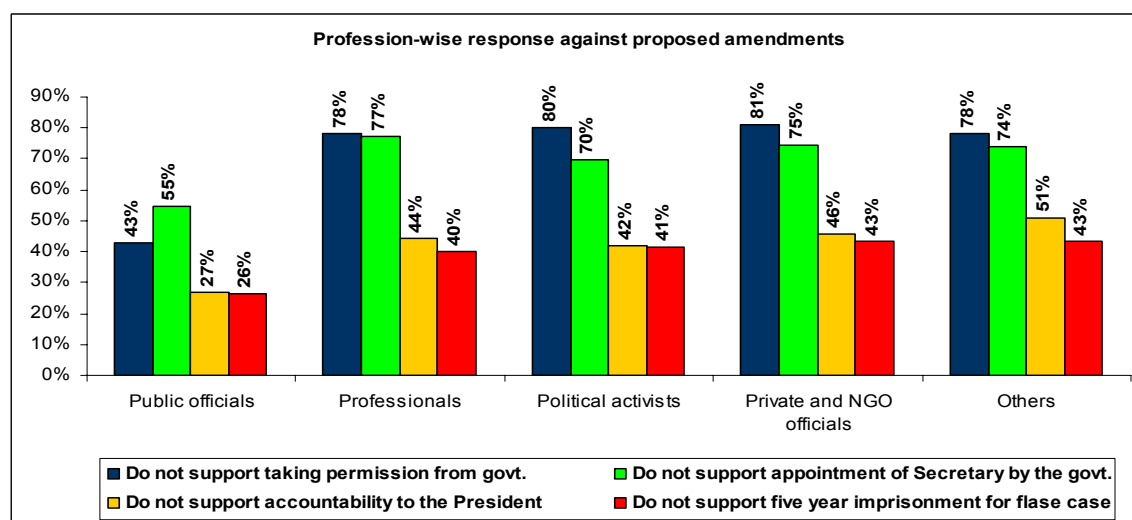
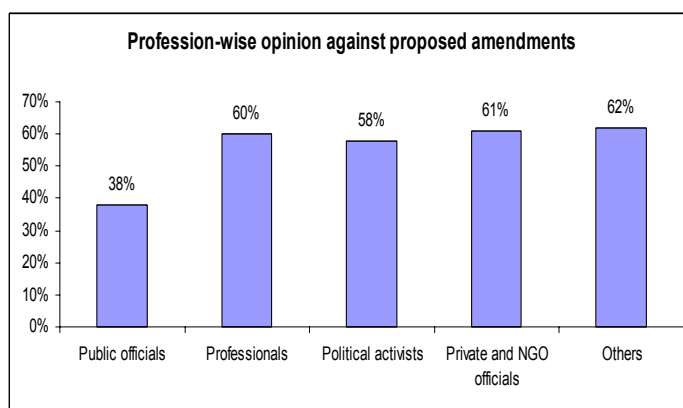
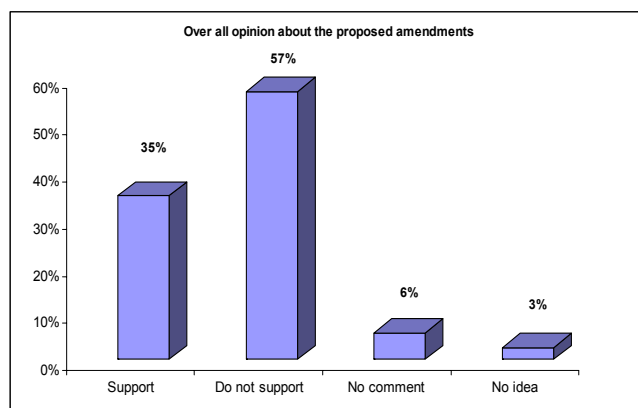
3. That the ACC should be accountable to the President was supported by 48% whereas 43% of the surveyed people opposed it.



4. The proposal to introduce special provision of five years imprisonment to be imposed in case of false corruption cases was supported by 49%, while 40% was against it.

The survey revealed that that overall 57% of the respondents did not support the proposed package of amendments, while only 35% was in favor.

Variations have been observed in response of the surveyed people to the amendments depending on the profession. 38% of the public officials, 60% of the professionals, 58% of political



activists, 61% of private and NGO officials and 62% of the common people do not support the proposed amendments.

About three-fourths of the respondents opined that the government has not taken adequate measures to empower the ACC in accord with its electoral commitment. 55% of the surveyed public officials held this view, whereas 80% of the professionals, 71% of the political activists, 82% of the private and NGO officials and 79% of the common people held the same opinion.

48% of the respondents considered the government unsuccessful in curbing corruption while another 38% opined that the government was not at all successful in this regard.

Conclusion

In view of the above findings it is clear that the people do not support the proposed amendments to the ACC Act. Therefore, TIB reiterates its demand that the government and the Parliament reconsider the proposed amendments and proceed in a manner that is consistent with its electoral commitment as well as with the expectation of the people who gave them the mandate to power.

TIB also urges upon the Government to hold a series of public consultations in and outside the capital engaging the key stakeholders, particularly citizens at large, before enacting amendments of such high importance for the institutional capacity to control corruption which was at the core of the Government's electoral pledge.
