

TIB's response to reactions in the wake of the release of the Parliament Watch report

Dhaka, November 1, 2015

The following are the responses of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) to reactions to the report on "Parliament Watch: 10th National Parliament 2nd – 6th Session (June 2014- July 2015)", released on October 25, 2015 through a media conference and to a couple of comments made by TIB's Executive Director (ED) made during question-answer session.

1. TIB is grateful to all those in the government and political space, especially the huge number of people at large who recognized the importance of the study and communicated their support in many different ways. TIB is indeed inspired;
2. A section of political leaders seems to have, however, welcomed the report from a partisan political perspective apparently for political mileage. In this connection TIB would like to recall a recent quote from a veteran political leader who said in a public meeting, "TIB always releases various reports. When we are in power, we say *Nauzubillah*; when in opposition we say *Alhamdulillah*". This statement is as much a testimony of objectivity of TIB's stance as it is also a call to refrain from the tendency to politicize fact and knowledge-based dispassionate criticism;
3. Several honourable Ministers, distinguished Members of the Parliament and respectable individuals aligned with the ruling coalition have reacted negatively on mainly three counts: a) comment by ED during the Q&A part of the press conference based on facts and analysis revealed by the study that the ambiguous role taken by the "main opposition party" in the Parliament can be viewed to be akin to that of a "stage for puppet show"; b) his comment in response to a question that a credible election would help address challenges faced by the 10th Parliament that was formed in the wake of a debatable election; and c) in reacting to (a) and (b) some highly placed respected individuals have raised questions about the source of funding of TIB, have alluded to links of TIB with militant organizations including IS, accused TIB of showing disrespect to the Parliament, and working against national interest with political motivation. We believe the following will dispel all confusion surrounding these three concerns:
 - a. Comment of "Stage for Puppet Show": This comment was made by ED of TIB based on the data and analyses revealed in the report. The substance of the information and analyses based on which the comment was made is that the party that claims to be the "main opposition party" has not taken any specific steps to overcome crisis of identity that it has created for itself by being at the same time in the opposition bench of the House and a part of the Government sharing Cabinet positions including its leader being a Special Adviser to the Prime Minister. Their role in the study period reflected this mutually opposing identity and at the same time found them wanting in independent and assertive stance befitting a genuine opposition party. Specific detailed information are available in the report published on TIB's

website. That “there is no genuine opposition party in the 10th Parliament” is not only a comment, but well-known factual information as stated even during proceedings in the House itself by a Member of the Parliament. The self-contradictory position and crisis of identity of the “main opposition party” led to a lack of clarity in the articulation and discharge of their role. Such deficits in the highest institution of public representation also resulted in a kind of lack of confidence, hesitation and double-mindedness that has been viewed by TIB’s ED as one akin to that of a puppet that has no control in the role it plays. His purpose was not to hurt anyone’s sentiment but to draw the attention of stakeholders to take measures that could do away with the duality of the role of the “main opposition party” so as to enhance the prospect of a more effective parliament. It may be added that this comment was made by TIB’s ED as a personal observation in the capacity of a citizen exercising his constitutional right. It does not necessarily reflect the official position of TIB.

- b. “Debatable Election”: That the election of 5 January 2014 in the wake of which the 10th Parliament was formed was debatable is well-known and beyond any dispute. This was manifested quite clearly by statements made by highly placed leaders in the ruling party itself. In this context in response to a question on whether a new election was necessary to address challenges faced by the 10th Parliament, TIB’s ED replied that “an election that would be free from controversies of the type that marred the 5 January elections can indeed open the scope of addressing the challenges. However when and in what process such an election will take place have to be determined by our political leaders.” It is unfortunate that this statement has been interpreted by some distinguished individuals in high positions of power as politically motivated and that TIB was apparently calling for new elections now, which is without any basis.
- c. TIB’s funding source, etc: It has become customary for a section of our honourable political leaders to raise questions about the funding source of TIB, to bring allegations of links with political opposition and accusing TIB of defaming the relevant institutions or sectors on which TIB releases its research report. It is nothing new nor does it have any logical basis. We said this before, and we are saying it again, that TIB cannot and does not raise or spend a single penny without the due approval of the relevant government authority. We also repeat that TIB is fully compliant with relevant rules and accordingly regularly submits its financial reports to the government and publishes the same through its website. That the allegations of TIB’s partisan political linkage and/or with any militant organization are baseless need no mention. Nevertheless, TIB will leave no stone unturned to cooperate with any initiative by the Government or any other legitimate authority to investigate any such allegation. Like any other research, campaign, civic engagement and advocacy work conducted by TIB, the purpose of Parliament Watch that has been going on from the first day of the 8th Parliament (2001-5) is to facilitate improved level of performance of the Parliament in terms of parliamentary democratic practice, particularly in discharging it’s role of effective public representation in the House, in law making and law reforms,

and in ensuring accountability of the Government to the people. By widening and deepening public awareness on related matters and for that matter by catalyzing higher effectiveness of the parliament, the purpose of TIB is to enhance the Parliament's credibility and trust in the eyes of the people. Not to speak of undermining the dignity of the Parliament or its contempt, TIB has no objective other than uplifting the dignity and credibility of the Parliament and to prevent anything that may undermine the image of our Parliament. TIB does so in full compliance with the relevant Constitutional and legal provisions and consistent with the international practice of public monitoring of the work of the Parliament by civil society and non-governmental organizations all over the world.
