Wanted strong local government

The need for effective local governments for alleviating poverty and ensuring the country’s development and good governance is recognised universally. An accountable administration at the local level is the grooming ground for service-oriented mentality of a welfare state. It is not possible to eradicate poverty and establish good governance by keeping the local government system weak. Although the government has adopted various programs to strengthen the local government structure at different times, it has not been possible to install a powerful local government system during the past three decades.

The precondition for democratic decentralisation is a strong local government. The local governments in many developing countries including those of China, Latin America and even West Bengal and Kerala of India have contributed a lot to the lives of the people. Articles 9, 11, 59 and 60 of our Constitution have clearly articulated the pledge for building a strong local government system. But despite Constitutional compulsions, a strong local government and the participation of the people in local level governance could not yet be ensured.

The villages of this land were self-sufficient in ancient times. Sir Charles Metcalfe dubbed that as the ‘village republic’. Since the ancient era, the ‘village panchayets’ formed by the people were fully autonomous. But discarding that indigenous concept, the Bengal Local Government Act was passed during the British era in 1885 to constitute local government bodies. Through this, district, sub-divisional and union boards were formed at districts, sub-divisions and unions. But these were implanted from above, were dependent on the centre and remained tied to bureaucracy. The basic democracy, which was introduced during the Pakistani era, was also nothing different.

What remains of the three-tier local governments of the British era is the single-tier union councils. But these are excessively dependent on the centre in financial matters. They lack the opportunity for self-financing. Neither is there any clear jurisdiction regarding planning and policy formulation. The district councils are also devoid of public representatives. No effective initiative has been observed during the past twelve years for installation of elected upazila councils. A law has been passed recently for establishing the Gram Sarkar (village governments). But there is no scope here to elect members through direct elections. Above all, the excessive meddling of Parliament members at the local level has created unfettered opportunities for politicization.

The countrywide Union Council elections are now coming to an end. A precondition for strengthening the local governments is...
It is also essential to make them accountable to the people rather than called wheat-based development programmes of the local governments. Human and social development goals by coming out of the sphere of so-through parliament members and others. It is now necessary to focus on TR etc., inter-cadre rivalry at the Upazilla level, political influences in government offices, absence of accountability and supervision, Revenue and development funds worth crores of taka are wasted, corruption database research report published by TIB last year. Quantitative terms after law enforcement and education sectors in the This sector has been identified as the third most corrupt sector in corruption has increased in the local government sector during the past. The influence of terrorism and black money is now urgent. Would become easier. For this, the need for freeing the election from the influence of terrorism and black money is now urgent. Corruption has increased in the local government sector during the past. This sector has been identified as the third most corrupt sector in quantitative terms after law enforcement and education sectors in the corruption database research report published by TIB last year. Revenue and development funds worth crores of taka are wasted, misused and embezzled, due to a lack of coordination among various government offices, absence of accountability and supervision, misappropriation of allocations in rural programmes like VGD, VGE, TR etc., inter-cadre rivalry at the Upazilla level, political influences through parliament members and others. It is now necessary to focus on human and social development goals by coming out of the sphere of so-called wheat-based development programmes of the local governments. It is also essential to make them accountable to the people rather than to the government officials. Realistic measures on the basis of national consensus have to be taken if the local governments of Bangladesh are to be groomed as powerful institutions. Measures need to be taken to strengthen their financial base. It is not possible to accelerate the pace of politico-economic and social development of the country unless sufficient powers are delegated for policy formulation and implementation. The necessary laws, rules and regulations also need to be framed or amended, proper elections arranged, election to local government of people who are honest, competent and dedicated to people’s welfare and arrangements made for their training. It is also essential to clearly delineate the roles of the central and local governments. Representation of females needs to be raised for establishing their fundamental rights and leadership roles. Corruption would also diminish if genuinely representative and powerful local government bodies are set up at various tiers. It is necessary to forge a responsible consensus for the common good of all by overcoming the divisions at local levels resulting from the scourge of politicisation. We seek strong and effective local governments for ensuring development and good governance.

Nanni Union of Nalitabari
All Chairman candidates at Nanni union of Nalitabari upazila under Sherpur district made pledges from the same podium to undertake development works with transparency and accountability. The candidates also gave assurance that they would work in concert with each other instead of maintaining hostile attitudes even after the election was over. This exceptional projection meeting was arranged for the chairman candidates on 20 February at the initiative of TIB and Nalitabari CCC for facilitating the election of qualified candidates. Before starting the meeting, report cards prepared by TIB and CCC were released. Presentations were made on the objectives and budget of their election campaign and the role to be played by the candidates if they suffered defeat. Presided over by CCC member Mahfuzur Rahman, the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Sherpur M. Mohibul Hossain was present as chief guest and the UNO of Nalitabari as special guest at the projection meeting. CCC members Kiron Dutta, Nurul Amin, Golam Faruque and Helena Akhter Shimu welcomed the guests with floral wreaths. A festive atmosphere prevailed on the occasion. Thousands of supporters of the chairman candidates enjoyed the proceedings by remaining present in front of the podium. Amid thunderous clapping, chairman candidates Alhaj Mohammad Abdul Motaleb, AKM Mokhlesur Rahman Ripon, Mohammad Abdul Aziz and Mohammad Tayabul Haque delivered their speeches. At one stage, when the candidates joined their hands and pledged to work together for the development of the locality even after election, the audience expressed their approval through clapping. Programme Specialist of TIB Abu Zayed Mohammad also spoke on the occasion.

Poragoon Union of Nalitabari
The three chairman candidates in the union council elections at the Poragaon union of Nalitabari upazila under Sherpur district, situated in the border region, have all pledged to work together to curb terrorism and corruption. They made this pledge at the projection meeting of the chairman candidates organised by TIB and the Nalitabari CCC in order to facilitate election of competent candidates. This meeting was arranged at the local Bathkuchi Missionary Primary School ground on 22 February. Appearing on the same stage, the chairman candidates Abu Bakar Siddique, Tota Mia and Shahajuddin expressed their firm resolve to work together for development of the election of people who are honest, competent and dedicated to people’s welfare. That is essential for creating a developed and prosperous future for the people of the country. If the union councils can be made effective by electing representatives through a proper election, concerted decision making and their implementation would become easier. For this, the need for freeing the election from the influence of terrorism and black money is now urgent. Election of people who are honest, competent and dedicated to people’s welfare. That is essential for creating a developed and prosperous future for the people of the country. If the union councils can be made effective by electing representatives through a proper election, concerted decision making and their implementation would become easier. For this, the need for freeing the election from the influence of terrorism and black money is now urgent. Election of people who are honest, competent and dedicated to people’s welfare. That is essential for creating a developed and prosperous future for the people of the country. 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the locality even after the election. Report cards were released by TIB and the CCC containing the candidates’ personal profiles and future pledges, their objectives for participating in the election, budget, role to be played if beaten in the election, etc. These were distributed among the voters.

Presided over by CCC member Mahfuzur Rahman, members of the citizens’ committee Samedul Islam Talukdar, Kohinoor Ruma, Helena Akhter Shimu, Programme Officer of TIB Ekram Hossain and CCC Secretary Mohammad Mohsin spoke at the projection meeting.

Rashidpur Union, Jamalpur
A projection meeting for the candidates of Rashidpur Union Council election under Jamalpur Sadar upazila was held on 26 February. Chaired by the CCC convenor Advocate Md. Nazrul Islam (Dulu), the Additional Commissioner (Revenue) M. Shamsul Alam Chowdhury was present as chief guest at the meeting. During the meeting, all chairman candidates made their election pledges before an audience numbering a few thousand. The candidates were M. Amjad Hossain (Chan Molla), M. Obaidullah (Bhola), M. Tofazzal Hossain (Dudu) and M. Nasiruddin Pakhi. Report cards prepared on the candidates were circulated released during the meeting.

Sharifpur Union, Jamalpur
The chairman candidates of Sharifpur union council under Jamalpur Sadar upazila made their electoral pledges in front of thousands of spectators present before the podium at Srirampur High School ground on 25 February. All the chairman candidates made commitments to work together in development activities with transparency and accountability. The chairman candidates of this union were AFM Shamsuddin, M. Zahirul Haque Akand, M. Mizanur Rahman, M. Saiful Islam, M. Enamul Haque and Mostafa Kamal Litton Fakir. Held under the aegis of TIB and Jamalpur CCC, CCC convenor Advocate Md. Nazrul Islam (Dulu) presided over this projection meeting. Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) M. Zahid Hossain was present as chief guest. In his address, the chief guest said that democracy would move one step ahead by making the people conscious locally, helping them in choosing the right candidate and by ensuring an accountable system. Programme Officer of TIB Ekram Hossain urged everybody to vote for honest, corruption-free and patriotic candidates. During the presidential address, Advocate Md. Nazrul Islam (Dulu) called upon all to make this movement successful. Report cards on the candidates were disseminated during the programme.

The picture of corruption in South Asia is similar everywhere

Mandatory payment of bribe has become a huge burden for the citizens of South Asia. In Bangladesh, corrupt officials in 7 sectors elicit bribes amounting to Taka 7080 crore per year through direct or indirect means. The citizens have to pay Taka 2066 crore above as bribes to evade police harassment. These facts were revealed in a research conducted by Transparency International-Bangladesh recently where in it sought the opinions of households regarding the nature, extent, means, location and causes of corruption. This household survey research on 7 important service sectors of the government was conducted on the basis of an identical questionnaire by the five chapters of Transparency International in South Asia, namely Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Titled ‘Corruption in South Asia’, this research has found the police and the lower judiciary to be the most corrupt in Bangladesh and 3 other countries of South Asia, with Pakistan being the lone exception. The other sectors surveyed in the research were land administration, health, education, electricity and taxation. TIB acted as the coordinator in this research exercise, which was carried out in five countries. The police department and the lower judiciary are the most corrupt sectors in Bangladesh. It is indeed sad that the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the country repose on these two departments. Among those who receive services from the government, the highest proportion (83.61 percent) falls prey to corruption in the police department. The
The lower judiciary comes next, with 75.32 percent falling prey to its corrupt practices. Land administration is the third most corrupt sector with 72.78 percent becoming victims of corruption. In case of services received from health, education, power and tax departments, the proportions of people falling victims of corruption are 55.53 percent, 39.73 percent, 32 percent and 19.25 percent respectively.

In nearly all cases, the service providers seek bribes either directly or through a third party. A negligible number of service-takers offer bribes directly. In all cases, the people hold ‘lack of accountability’ as mainly responsible for corruption. 95.65 percent people fall prey to police corruption when they seek the help of police administration for evading arrest on false grounds. 90.91 percent fall prey to police corruption when they seek police clearance certificates, 87.62 percent when they submit complaints and 75 percent in other police-related services. 24 percent become victims of on-duty police officers, 19 percent at the hands of investigating officers, 13 percent at the hands of officers-in-charge and 4 percent at the hands of clerks. It is seen from the survey that the households which become victims of corruption while seeking assistance from the police administration have to pay on average an additional amount of Taka 9,675. Taking this amount as the base, the concerned officers and employees of the police administration collect Taka 2,066 crore per year as bribes from the people who approach them for assistance.

After the police department, the lower judiciary has been identified as the most corrupt sector with 75.32 percent of the service recipients reporting corruption. The service recipients have spoken of falling prey to corruption at the hands of 66 percent employees of the lower judiciary, 13 percent of public prosecutors, 10 percent of lawyers representing the opposite side and 8.62 percent of the magistrates. Those households which became victims of corruption while seeking assistance of the lower judiciary had to part with an additional sum of Taka 7,800 on an average. On the basis of this estimate, the people belonging to the lower judiciary extract Taka 1,135 crore as bribes as an annual average.

The land administration is the third most corrupt sector. After approaching the land administration, the concerned households had to incur an additional expenditure of Taka 3,509 on an average. Based on this estimate, the employees working in this sector extract Taka 1,515 crore as bribes as an annual average. The average amounts paid as bribes for mutation, receipt of khas lands, land survey and purchase of stamps are respectively Taka 2,283, Taka 2,129, Taka 1,896, and Taka 1,824. Around 43 percent of the households who approach the land administration fall prey to corruption at the hands of surveyors, 27 percent at the hands of tehsildars, 13.6 percent at the hands of revenue officials, 12 percent at the hands of deed writers and 6 percent at the hands of stamp vendors.

In the health sector, 47.56 percent of the household members admitted to hospitals are done so through alternative means. 30 percent have spoken of paying additional sums for getting a bed, 19 percent for medicines, 16.49 percent for doing X-ray, 13.62 percent for pathological tests and 3 percent for getting blood. The average additional amount paid by each household for getting treatment in government hospitals was Taka 1,847. On the basis of this estimate, people have to incur an additional expenditure of Taka 1250 crore annually for getting treatment in government hospitals. 56 percent of these people have spoken of falling prey to corruption at the hands of doctors, 36 percent by hospital staff and 5 percent by nurses.

In the education sector, 87 percent of the household members have spoken of falling prey to corruption at the hands of teachers. Students who fell prey to corruption while seeking admission had to incur an additional expenditure of Taka 742 per head on an average annually. According to the figures provided by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, there are currently 3 crore 10 lakh students in Bangladesh. On the basis of this estimate, 40 percent students of the country who fall prey to corruption due to various malpractice of the education department have to pay an additional amount of Taka 920 crore annually. The households which fall prey to corruption for receiving services from the power department have to incur an additional expenditure of Taka 950 annually on an average. Based on this
estimate, the officials and employees of the power department elicit Taka 182 crores as bribe each year. Corruption is committed by the power department in areas such as providing legal and illegal connections, getting proper supply of electricity, payment of bills, over-billing and non-snapping of connections due to non-payment of bills. 98 percent of the households which recourse to alternative means for getting power connection reported that they had bribed the office staff. 32 percent of those who had gone to the power authority in connection with electricity-related work during the previous one year reported that they had been victims of corruption. Those households which became victims of corruption while interacting with the tax department had to pay an additional sum of Taka 318 on an average annually. Based on this estimate, it is seen that the officials and employees of the tax department collect Taka 12 crore as bribes annually. The members of the households fall prey to corruption at the hands of officers and employees of tax department in the course of paying their taxes. On the other hand, 67.4 percent of those who approach the agricultural bank for getting loans have to pay bribes to the bank officials.

This report presents a very dismal picture about the current state of affairs among the service providers engaged in serving the country’s citizens. The subjects covered in the report are well-known to our citizens from their day to day experience. This report has only presented an overall picture by compiling the experiences of many in order to comprehend the situation prevailing throughout the country. It cannot be said that corruption has risen suddenly or in a single day. It has come to this level after increasing for years after years, decades after decades.

The politicians go to power by making pledges to weed out corruption. But many of them themselves get involved in corruption after coming to power. Quite often, they object to this type of report. People try to put the blame on each other. TIB has recommended the report that corruption can be checked through the constitution of an independent anti-corruption commission, appointment of an ombudsman, administrative reforms, political goodwill of the policy framers, and above all by building up a social movement against corruption. Needless to say, if the politicians and policy formulators do not come forward to curb corruption with political goodwill, then the general people would have no alternative but to groan due to the crushing weight of corruption. The sooner the policy framers, politicians and members of the civil society come forward to build a corruption-free society, the better it is for the masses.

‘Terrorism and corruption are two sides of the same coin’

- Dr. Kamal Hossain, at a meeting on Good Governance, Corruption and Human Rights

Renowned lawyer and Chairman of the Advisory Council of Transparency International Dr. Kamal Hossain has said that terrorism and corruption are two sides of the same coin. The Constitution is directly hit whenever a terrorist, arms-holder or extortionist is kept above law, he added. He was speaking as chief guest at a meeting on ‘Good Governance, Corruption and Human Rights’ organised by the Jamalpur CCC on 18 December 2002.

Chaired by the Convenor of the CCC Advocate Md. Nazrul Islam (Dulu) and held at the Jamalpur Public Library building, the Chairman of the TIB Board of Trustees Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid was present at the meeting as special guest. The keynote paper was presented by Advocate Sorwar Zahan.

Dr. Kamal Hossain opined that the ruling and opposition parties should reach a consensus on how the lives and properties of the people can be protected. There should be a consensus that the people are the real owners of the country and all should work together to uphold democracy, Constitution and rule of law.

Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid said that the growth of GDP would have doubled annually if the wastage due to corruption could be checked. He called upon the countrymen to get united for establishing good governance, justice and a corruption-free state.
Terming corruption as a monster with a hundred hands in the context of Bangladesh’s socio-economic and political setting, former Chief Adviser of the caretaker government Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman has said that the Constitutional mechanism to fight corruption has become totally ineffective. Even the electoral process, which has been to ensure the participation of the people in order to ensure their rights, has

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‘Corruption is a monster with a hundred hands’
- Justice Habibur Rahman, at a citizens’ meeting organised by CCC

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**FROM NEWSPAPERS PAGES**

**Monthly power theft of Taka 20 crore**
There are complaints of monthly power theft worth Taka 20 crore in the south zone of DESA through collusion among some officers and employees of the power department. The authorities claim that the amount of system loss or power theft is lesser. Lakhs of taka are collected each month by a section of officers and employees of DESA through theft of electricity by encouraging the owners of factories and industries.

*Source: The Daily Ittefaq, 6 January 2003*

**Taka 9 crore as bribes**
The officers and employees of the forest department working in Chittagong’s south and north jones received bribes worth Taka 9 crore 72 lakh during the past one year. 20 lakh cubic feet of wood worth Taka 200 crore had been illegally smuggled to various places of the country including Dhaka from Janali Hat and Battoli railway stations of the city by preparing fake legal papers. The bribe money were obtained in this way. Although carrying of wood by the railway was once stopped due to the existence of this practice, it was again resumed for unknown reasons.

*Source: The Daily Inqilab, 18 January 2003*

**Theft of wheat worth Taka 37 crore**
Incidents of wheat-theft worth Taka 37 crore from foreign ships that came to Mongla port for downloading goods have been unearthed. During the past four years, 37,750 metric tons have been siphoned off from ships that came to the port carrying assistance for the country from foreign donor organisations. The price of this pilfered wheat is around 37 crore 44 lakh taka.

*Source: The Daily Manabjabin, 4 February 2003*

**Allegations of corruption against railway ministry**

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**Stipend money embezzled**
Headmasters of many schools of Paikgachha upazila under Khulna have embezzled stipend money which was collected through corruption and irregularities in collusion with concerned
now become corrupt in different ways. He was speaking as chief guest at a citizens' meeting organised by Nalitabari CCC of Sherpur district on 25 December. Presided over by the CCC Convener M A Hakam Hira and held at the Taraganj Pilot High School, the theme of the meeting was 'human rights and corruption'. Chairman of the TIB Board of Trustees Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid and educationist Nurjahan Murshid were present as special guests at the meeting. In his speech, the TIB Chairman said that the structure of our state would be destroyed if the people lose faith in the courts.

Nurjahan Murshid said that it would be possible to achieve success if the movement for rule of law and human rights could be taken to the grassroots. Others who spoke on the occasion included Professor Problat Chandra Paul, Enayet Hossain, Maolana Abul Mobarak, Moshtak Habib and Zakir Hossain. The programme was conducted by Samedul Islam Talukdar and Kohinoor Ruma.

Before the citizens' meeting, the guests visited the ancient Saint Leo’s Church at the tribal village of Baromari, 15 kilometres from Nalitabari. There, the Garo tribal community, who are also Christians, warmly welcomed them on the occasion of Christmas. The tribal boys and girls received the guests with traditional songs and dances.

Entries invited from journalists for Investigative Journalism Award 2003

Transparency International Bangladesh has invited entries from journalists for participating in its Investigative Journalism Award-2003. The reports have to be published in any Bengali and English daily during the period 1 January to 31 December 2002. The submitted contribution will be judged on the basis of its revelation of either systematic corrupt practices or mal-administration. Each prize carries a cash award of Taka 50,000 (fifty thousand). The entries have to be sent to the TIB office (Transparency International Bangladesh, Progress Tower, House-1 (5th & 6th floor), Road-23, Gulshan-1, Dhaka-1212) by 31 May 2003.

Medicine Company accused of bribery

A dismal situation is prevailing in the Sylhet passport office due to rampant corruption, scourgé of brokers, lack of adequate space and manpower. The people who come for obtaining passports face harassment in different ways due to a powerful nexus between the officers-employees of the office and the travel agents and brokers.

Source: The Daily Bhorer Kagoj, 18 February 2003
A workshop on ‘Corruption and Transparency’ was held on 12 January under the auspices of a news agency called News Network. The speakers at the workshop opined that an independent anti-corruption commission must be constituted for curbing and containing corruption. Held at the capital’s CIRDAP Auditorium, the keynote paper at the workshop was presented by TIB Executive Director Manzoor Hasan.

In the paper titled ‘A Clear Choice for Bangladesh: Transparency or Corruption’, Manzoor Hasan said that although much progress has been achieved in some areas during the past few years, Bangladesh is still one of the poorest countries in the world. We cannot change our lot for various reasons including confrontational politics, deterioration of law and order and widespread corruption. Quoting from various national and international research surveys, he said that good governance has to be ensured if we are to develop the country by keeping pace with the global scenario. Political will is essential to achieve this. He said that Bangladesh was once rich in resources, for which it could attract foreigners. There were many opportunities in the past for making progress, but nothing came out of that because of the failure of our political leadership. Eradication of poverty and sustainable economic development is not possible if we fail to remove the hindrances that stand in the way of good governance, he concluded.

Praising the keynote paper, the Country Director of the World Bank in Bangladesh Frederick T. Temple said that various reform measures would have to be undertaken to rid Bangladesh of corruption, including transferring the service organisations to the private sector, formation of an independent anti-corruption commission and separation of the executive from the judiciary. Chaired by Shahiduzzaman, Editor of News Network, the workshop was divided into two sessions. Communication Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda was present as chief guest during the morning session while it was the turn of former Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria in the afternoon session. Those who took part in the discussion included the Chairman of TIB Trustee Board Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid, Member Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, President of Bangladesh Economic Association Dr. Quazi Khaliquzzaman, General Secretary Abul Barkat, journalists Enayetullah Khan, Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury, etc. The Bureau Chief of Associated Press Farid Hossain acted as the moderator.

A group discussion was held on 9 February 2003 at the TIB office in Gulshan on the Global Forum Country Study Report. Presided over by the Chairman of the TIB Board of Trustees Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid, former Advisors to the Caretaker Government M. Hafizuddin Khan and ASM Shahjahan, TIB Trustee Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, former Member of Parliament Tasmina Hossain, member of the Public Service Commission Professor Mohabbat Khan, former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr. S A Samad, former Secretary Ahmed Farid and TIB Executive Director Manzoor Hasan were present during the discussion.

Workshop: National Integrity Programme

A workshop on the National Integrity Programme was held at the hilly resort of Rangamati on 30-31 December 2002. All officials of TIB including the Executive Director Manzoor Hasan were present at the workshop. The Executive Director of NRT Dr. Sanaul Mostafa was present as the resource person. The main objective of the workshop was to review the successes and limitations of various TIB activities during the past three years and to determine the future direction of programmes in the light of those.

Discussion at Kathmandu

A discussion was held on the Civil Society of South Asia at the Nepalese capital Kathmandu under the auspices of UNHCR. Representatives from various human rights organisations of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and hosts Nepal took part in the 3-day deliberations between 16 and 18 January. Subjects such as ‘democracy and good governance’, ‘conflict and human rights’, ‘war against terrorism’, ‘globalisation’, etc. received priority during the discussions. The Executive Director of TIB Manzoor Hasan presented a paper on ‘Governance, Democratisation and Human Rights’.

DFID team inspection

A team from the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom visited Muktagacha to inspect the activities of the local CCC. They praised the efforts of the CCC members and the various programmes it undertakes for establishing good governance at the local level. Those present on the occasion included the TIB Executive Director Manzoor Hasan, Pogramme Officer Ekram Hossain, the Convener of Muktagacha CCC Advocate Shamsul Haque, Chairman of the Municipality, various local government officials, teachers, social workers and almost all CCC members. The DFID delegation included Chief Governance Adviser Roger Wilson, Senior Adviser Leuk Mukubvu and Sector Coordinator Bea Parkes.
Meeting with railway authorities
The members of Jamalpur CCC sat at a meeting with the concerned authorities for raising the quality of passenger services at the Jamalpur railway station. Held at the office of the Station Master on 21 December, an 18-point recommendation was made on behalf of the CCC for checking black-marketing of tickets, unhygienic environment and lack of security. The authorities gave assurance that they would sincerely try to solve these problems. Officials including the Station Master JAINAL ABEDIN were present on the occasion.

Publication of wall magazine
A wall magazine was published by the volunteers of Mymensingh CCC on the occasion of the glorious victory day. Stories, poems and articles on the liberation war and independence were included in the magazine.

Cleanliness day observed
Mymensingh: The Mymensingh CCC observed a 'cleanliness day' on 24 December with the objective of building a beautiful and clean town. Various programmes were taken up on the occasion. These included a colourful rally, clearing dirt from the drains, distribution of leaflets, and posting of posters on cleanliness. A colourful rally was brought out from the town hall at 9 a.m. in the morning which ended at the Amlapara municipal office. Convenor of the Mymensingh Sadar CCC Professor Shamsul Islam, members Advocate Anisur Rahman Khan, A.H.M. Khalequzzaman, ward commissioner Asghar Ali, volunteer group of the citizens’ committee, rover scout team of Ananda Mohan College and the voluntary organisation ‘Prerana’ participated in the rally.

Nalitabari: A cleanliness day was observed by the Committee of Concerned Citizens of Nalitabari on 20 December. An on the spot meeting was held at ward number 7 of the Pourashava on the occasion. Chaired by ward commissioner Sajal Chandra Saha, the Upazila Executive Officer of Nalitabari Najmul Hasan Khan was present as chief guest at the meeting. Around 50 representatives from various classes were present at the meeting. A colourful rally was brought out on the occasion as a part of the cleanliness campaign after the conclusion of the meeting.

Anti-corruption citizens’ meetings
The speakers at an anti-corruption citizens’ meeting organised by the Mymensingh CCC said that awareness about one’s own responsibilities is a prerequisite for curbing corruption and establishing good governance. The people of the Union Councils should have a clear idea about their own responsibilities as well as the duties and responsibilities of the Council chairmen and members, so that the people can hold them to account if they fail to provide services.

The citizens’ meeting was held at the Akua Union Council office on 17 December. Presided over by CCC member A.H.M. Khalequzzaman, Advocate Emdadul Haque Millat, Sheikh Bahar Majumdar, freedom fighter Alhaj M. A Halim Suruj, Mainul Hossain, Kamrul Islam Chanchal and TIB Field Assistant Karuna Kishore Chakraborty were present at the meeting. The local people participated during the question-answer session of the citizens’ meeting. A 12-point recommendation was placed at the meeting on behalf of the CCC and TIB to ensure transparency in the workings of the Union Council. Around 70 citizens from various classes and professions, including members of the Union Council, teachers of schools and madrasas, members of the managing committees, Imams of mosques, businessmen and students participated.

Discussion meeting on the occasion of Human Rights Day
Transparency International Bangladesh and four Committees of Concerned Citizens jointly observed the World Human Rights Day-2000 at different places in December for generating public opinion on ‘how corruption becomes the cause of human rights violations’. The day was observed through holding seminars, citizens’ meetings, processions and publication of wall magazines.

Mymensingh: A discussion meeting was held at Mymensingh on 12 December on the occasion of World Human Rights Day-2002. The meeting was jointly organised by TIB and the local CCC. Presided over by CCC convenor Professor Shamsul Islam, the keynote paper was presented by Advocate Emdadul Haque Millat, a CCC member. During discussions, the speakers said that corruption is one of the main reasons for frequent violation of human rights in our country. It is possible to curb corruption and improve the human rights situation through political goodwill. The meeting expressed deep sorrow at the loss of lives due to bomb explosions at four cinema halls of Mymensingh.

Muktigacha: The Muktigachha CCC brought out a colourful rally in the town on 10 December. Eminent citizens of the locality participated in it. The CCC also organised a discussion meeting on 11 December on the occasion. Professor Jotin Sarker presented a paper on the day’s theme. He stressed in his paper that human rights are violated due to corruption and lack of pragmatism. The speakers at the gathering called for implementation of universal declaration of human rights in all countries affiliated with the United Nations. Those who spoke on the occasion included Sasanka Mohan Dey, Advocate Sharafuddin Ahmed, A.K.M. Mahbubur Rahman (Bulbul), Khakendra Malek Shahidullah, etc.

Modhupur: The CCC of Modhupur organised a discussion meeting on 15 December on the occasion of the observance of World Human Rights Day. The meeting called upon all to ensure human rights in the country by eradicating corruption and to generate a new awakening in society against corruption. The discussants included Babul D. Nokrek, Bapi Siddiqui, Tanvir Ahmed, etc.

Kishoreganj: A similar discussion meeting was held at Kishoreganj Press Club auditorium on 12 December under the auspices of the local CCC. The convenor of the CCC M. Khurshed Uddin Bhuian presided over this discussion meeting on the theme ‘human rights and corruption’. Discussions were held on the history of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the responsibilities and obligations of the state towards the citizens according to the Constitution and how corruption contributes to the violation of human rights in the context of Bangladesh.
The youths against corruption. A conference of CCC volunteers was held at the Headmaster of Haji Usman Ali High School M. Ziaul Haque, a total of 80 citizens from various classes and professions participated in the meeting. Discussions were held on the functions of the municipality, duties and responsibilities of the chairman and ward commissioners, mass awareness and good governance at the local level.

Mass contact
The Modhupur CCC conducted a public relations exercise to inform the ward-level people about the huge losses incurred due to corruption. Held with the participation of eminent inhabitants of ward no. 4 at Modhupur, it reminded everybody about the harms caused by corruption to the state and the society as well as highlighting the duties and responsibilities of the state and called upon all to remain united against corruption.

This meeting was held on 25 December 2002 at Charalajani government primary school, and was presided over by the ward commissioner. Local elite, teachers, politicians, public representatives, and many other people including members of the CCC and its convenor Professor Golam Samdani were present.

Conference of CCC volunteers
TIB has formed teams of volunteers in the CCC areas with the objective of motivating the youths against corruption. A conference of volunteers was organised by TIB on 13 December for introducing the teams of volunteers to each other, and for exchanging views and experiences regarding the activities they carried out in their respective areas as well as their future plans and programmes. Held at a place called ‘Jaloikot’ in ‘Dokla’ range of Modhupur, it reminded everybody about the huge losses incurred due to corruption.

Health-care services
Modhupur: The Modhupur CCC held a meeting with the authorities of Modhupur Health Complex with the objective of overcoming various irregularities including those related to services of physicians and nurses as well as the quality of tests and medical examinations. The authorities mentioned their limitations and various problems they themselves face. The citizens’ committee put forth some recommendations in this respect to improve the quality of services.

Kishoreganj: An exchange of views meeting was held on 21 December under the aegis of Kishoreganj CCC with the goal of improving the quality of health-care services. A 7-point recommendation was made at the meeting on behalf of TIB and the CCC to raise the quality of health-care services at Kishoreganj Sadar Hospital. Civil surgeon Dr. ABM Azizul Islam sought the cooperation of the citizens as well as the government for building a modern hospital. Those present at the meeting included among others Principal Jalal Ahmed, Advocate Bhupendra Bhoumik Dolan, Amirul Islam and Nasiruddin Faruq.

Citizens’ meeting at Nalitabari
A citizens’ meeting was held on 20 December at the Zainuddin Para Government Primary School of Nalitabari Sadar union. Presided over by the retired headmaster of the school Shamsul Alam, a number of citizens belonging to various professions, including the CCC convenor M A Hakam Hira, participated in the proceedings. The CCC convenor of Modhupur extended special assistance for the holding of the event.

Nalitabari People’s Theatre
Acclaimed by Chittagong Audience
Around a thousand spectators assembled at the Chittagong Shilpakala Academy auditorium to enjoy the presentation of an anti-corruption play staged by the Nalitabari People’s Theatre of TIB on 22 December. This captivating performance by the theatre group was presented on the last evening of the 2-day conference on ‘rights and development’ organised by the local NGOs of Chittagong. Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury of Chittagong was present as chief guest on this last day of the conference. The People’s Theatre received adulation of the spectators by performing both at Chittagong University and at Patenga sea-beach.

The TIB officials and the artistes of the theatre group sat at a meeting with the members of Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA) on 22 December to exchange views. Held at the BITA office at Mehdibagh of Chittagong City, discussions were held during the meeting on future cooperation in addition to sharing experiences. BITA gave assurance of all-out cooperation in this regard. Akbar Reza and Saiful Islam of BITA, Media Outreach Relations Officer of TIB Mohammad Imam Uddin, Coordinator Theatre and Publications Kamal Hossain Mintu, member Md. Hamidul Islam and Drama Director Jewel Kabir were present.

People’s play ‘Caricature of Corruption’ staged
Two performances of the people’s play ‘Caricature of Corruption’ were presented on 25 December at Dapunia Bazar and Chukatala village of Mymensingh. Staged by the Muktagacha People’s Theatre group of TIB, this play depicted the irregularities, mismanagement and corruption of the police, education, health and forest departments as well as the chairmen of union councils. Around a thousand spectators enjoyed the shows.
Global Corruption Report 2003
The corruption are running out of places to hide from courageous whistleblowers and journalists

The Global Corruption Report (GCR) 2003 of Transparency International (TI) says, “The corrupt are running out of places to hide from courageous whistleblowers and journalists”. This report was formally released on 22 January 2003. It is the second of its kind published by the TI. The first report was published in 2001. In his introduction to the GCR, TI chairman Dr. Peter Eigen writes, “Freedom of information is not enough; however professionally and accurately information is processed, corruption will continue to thrive without the vigilance of the media and civil society, and the bravery of investigative journalists and whistleblowers.”

In his article ‘Access to Information: Whose Right and Whose Information’, Executive Director of TI Jeremy Pope writes, “Ordinary citizens need access to government-held information in order to exercise their rights in just about every phase of their lives; without it, they are ready prey to the corrupt.”

The 48-page Global Corruption Report contains the name of Bangladesh’s Harunur Rashid amongst the list of journalists vocal against corruption. This reporter of the daily ‘Purbanchal’ was brutally killed after publishing a series of reports on corruption at different levels of the government and the nexus between the criminals and the banned Maoist guerrillas.

Divided into three parts, the report puts special emphasis on ensuring access to information. The first part contains specialist reports and articles on access to information. The second part contains 16 regional reports and evaluation of various countries of the world based on these reports. The third has analysed corruption at national level in the lights of local circumstances.

Professor Gurharpal Singh of Birmingham University has written the report on corruption in South Asia. Regarding Bangladesh, the report says that the present government published a white paper on the corruption of the previous government in 2002. The white paper has presented 40 major cases of corruption. But the present government kept the corruption and irregularities committed during its previous tenure out of the purview of the white paper. All cases pending against the politicians of the ruling party were also withdrawn. Although Bangladesh parliament had passed the Ombudsman Act in 1980, no appointment has been made to the post till now.
LETTERS

Reforming the police administration

The government had reposed the responsibility of combating terrorism on the joint forces due to the failure of the police. The police administration has much responsibility including maintenance of law and order in the country. The police force needs to be modernised in the light of existing socio-economic realities. Arrangements should be made so that people’s confidence in the police increases, and the government and the people can rely on them. For this, the police administration needs thorough reform. The editorial on this theme in the December 2002 issue was timely.

Abdul Matin
Poragao, Nalitabari, Sherpur

When would the pledges materialise

Autonomy of the courts is required for ensuring good governance in the country; but we do not know when that would be possible. But the pledge that this government has made for separation of the judiciary from the executive, why has that faded now? When would the pledge that was made to the people be implemented? Would the present government give a transparent answer to this question?

Ashraful Haque Setu
Dhap, Khalfipara, Rangpur

Implementation of pro-people education policy

The rights of all people of the world has been recognised in the universal declaration of human rights, which is a milestone in the progress of mankind and an outstanding document of civilisation; it has placed emphasis on the need to make all segments of the country’s population educated. Immediately after independence, a pledge was made in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh for free and compulsory education through establishing a pro-people and universal education system. It is a matter of great shame for us that half of the country’s population could not be educated in planned basic education even after three decades of independence. Many plans were adopted on paper, thousands of crores of taka were spent. But the darkness that pervaded the educational arena still remains. The country would be able to move on the path of progress if a pro-people education policy could be implemented after removing all aberrations.

Sumon Saha
Ukilpara, Narayanganj

Reform of the judiciary

The country’s judiciary cannot ensure the rule of law spontaneously and neutrally. The integrity of the judicial system, especially of the lower courts is now being questioned. There is almost no supervision of the lower courts. The establishment of good governance would remain a mere dream if the whole system is not overhauled including the separation of the judiciary.

Kamrunnahar
Mirpur-11, Dhaka

Investigative report

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) makes necessary recommendations after examining the reports submitted by the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, in accordance with section 233 of the Rules of Business of Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad. The activities of this committee are very important as action is taken after it reviews the irregularities and audit objections of various government offices in order to ensure accountability and curb corruption. TIB has recently released an investigative report on the Public Accounts Committee.

The investigative research conducted by the TIB on the Public Accounts Committee has analysed the functions of the committee and its role in ensuring transparency and accountability and curbing corruption. At the same time, some recommendations have been made in the report in the form of a working paper with the goal of making the body more effective in the light of information gathered from the report.

The PAC lacks research facilities and a modern approach. Even when important recommendations of past reports are accepted, no result is ultimately achieved. There is also no arrangement for handing over charge to a new committee by the old. The committee can give recommendations after reviewing the audit reports, but does not monitor the implementation of those recommendations. As a result, even when recommendations are made regarding anomalies, effective steps cannot be guaranteed due to the callousness of the concerned ministries. It is not compulsory for the government to implement the recommendations and these are also not discussed in Parliament. The TIB report says that presently collections/adjustments are made to the tune of Taka 200 core annually as per the recommendations of the government audits. 988 audit objections were resolved during 65 meetings of the PAC of the Seventh Parliament, as a result of which Taka 227 crore were deposited to the government exchequer and elaborate decisions were given regarding various audit objections.

It is expected that this report would be very helpful for the politicians, journalists, researchers, students and other interested people in knowing about the PAC. The price of the report is Taka 200.