- Anti-Corruption Commission: A Missed Opportunity
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WE WILL NEVER GIVE UP
WE ARE DETERMINED TO OVERCOME
Kathamala

‘Violations of human rights are increasing throughout the world due to the crises in good governance and morality’.
Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, during an interview with Prothom Alo on 13 January.
Source: Daily Prothom Alo, 14 January 2005

‘If corruption inhabits the mind, then no law, no commission, no administration can remove it’.
Justice ATM Azal, while speaking on the subject of keeping a distance from corruption at the convocation ceremony of BUET.
Source: Daily Prothom Alo, 31 January 2005

‘There has been no progress in work in even three months. Please don’t pull it down further by wrenching in the media’.
Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission Justice Sultan Hussain Khan, while speaking to journalists.
Source: Daily Janakantha, 14 February 2005

The more you write about corruption, the more it would grow’.
Shipping Minister Lt. Colonel (retd.) Akbar Hossain, while speaking to journalists at a press conference arranged in his ministry.
Source: Daily Manabzamin, 2 March 2005

‘Most of the private universities today have become shops for selling certificates’.
Chairman of the University Grants Commission Dr. M. Asaduzzaman, while speaking at a seminar in Dhaka on 21 March.
Source: Daily Inquilab, 22 March 2005

The ministry must remain accountable to the standing committee. But in reality it is observed that the committees are like juggernauts to the ministries’.
Chairman of the standing committee on the Ministry of Defence, Lt. General (retd.) Mahbubur Rahman, expressing his deep anguish while speaking at a discussion meeting.
Source: Daily Jugantar, 2 March 2005

Dawn to dusk hunger strike
The former Deputy Chief Accounts Officer of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation Anisur Rahman attracted the attention of all by staging a hunger strike in the court area of Dhaka on 16 February demanding stoppage of bribery and corruption. He observed the hunger strike under a banyan tree on the court compound from dawn to dusk by exhibiting a fastoon of red cloth calling for elimination of all irregularities including bribery and corruption in government and private offices and courts.
Source: Daily Prothom Alo, 17 February 2005

Radhacharan went to the police station for freeing her husband, SI Rezaul Karim demanded Taka 60 thousand from him. Threats were issued that her husband would be implicated in various cases if she failed to pay.
Source: Daily Bhoror Kagoj, 9 February 2005

Eighty-four thousand Estonians gave bribes in 2004
Some six percent of Estonian residents or approximately 84,000 people gave a bribe and 10 percent were asked a bribe last year, it appears from a corruption study by the Institute of Economic Research.

The 2004 corruption perception index of Transparency International ranked Estonia 31st among 145 countries, ahead of Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Italy, among others.
Source: Baltic News Service, 02 February 2005
When the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was set up in November 2004, notwithstanding the reported controversies about the credibility of the Commissioners and their selection process, TIB wanted to see it as an opportunity. We thought that it had marked an opening to meet public demand and expectation for a truly independent and effective institution to address the challenges of corruption.

It could also be viewed as a positive signal of a political will and commitment of the Government against the menace of corruption, implications of which are already as disgraceful as unbearable. As a co-stakeholder TIB also offered to extend all possible support and cooperation within its capacity, to which we were awaiting specific response from the Commission, which we were promised.

We further expected that even within the limitations and predicaments with which it came into being, the Commission could possibly make best efforts to indicate at least a vision and a sense of direction.

However, if the past several months are any indicator for the future, the ACC has not only led to doubts about the seriousness of purpose on the part of the Government, the Commission has also created a credibility crisis of its own. Disappointing as it is for the citizens of this country, it could soon turn out to be a missed opportunity.

There are hardly any evidences yet of a truly independent status of the Commission nor are there any reasons to believe that it can function effectively given that for all practical purposes it remains under the Government's financial and administrative control.

The Commission has not delivered on any of its key strategic tasks, not to speak of articulation of a vision for itself and a policy to implement the same. Instead, it has created quite an image crisis thanks to controversial decisions such as absorbing all the staff of the erstwhile Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC). The defunct BAC was neither active nor effective. It did not enjoy people's trust and credibility. Most of the staff lacked honesty, neutrality and efficiency. Rather than fighting corruption the Bureau became a convenient politically motivated tool in the hands of the government. Hence demands were raised for its abolition. The fundamental objective of the Anti-Corruption Commission would be lost if that same manpower is absorbed wholesale. The law on the Commission is also against this.

Differences of opinion among the Commissioners on key issues such as division of powers and responsibilities to the extent of a confrontational interpersonal relationship haven't also served the Commission's cause. To make matters worse the Chairman faces the challenge of convincing the court that his appointment was not unconstitutional.

Inspite of all these, not everything may have been lost yet. What is urgently needed is a set of convincing evidences of commitment and capability of the Commissioners to rise up to the task they have accepted. Put properly running the affairs of the Commission, it should without any further delay articulate its strategy and set of practical policies for curbing corruption. No less pressing is the need to adopt its organisational structure, and clarify decision making process and management policy.

The Commission should open itself up to drawing from the expertise and experiences available within the country that are not difficult to find. It should also learn from some of the international best practices and tools in situations where such institutions have been successful.

An independent, committed and dynamic Anti-corruption Commission that could work without fear or favour has been a longstanding dream and demand of the people of this country. Setting up of the Commission is not an end in itself – it is only an important step on a long and arduous road. True to the letter and spirit of its political commitment, the Government must ensure the Commission's full independence inclusive of financial powers, so that it can function effectively. Otherwise, the Anti-Corruption Commission could turn out to be another unnecessary, intolerable and unacceptable burden for the nation.

Wanted a column captioned ‘Chairman’s View’

I came to know about the Chittagong Port and land administration after reading the September-2004 issue of TIB-Newsletter. Besides, I very much liked the statement of the Chairman at the inaugural function of Rangpur citizens' committee. He had said, "we can be courageous only when we are together." It would be good if a regular column is published captioned ‘Chairman’s View’.

Shelley Ahmed, Dr. Anuuddin Ahmed Sarak, Kushitia-7000

Corruption-free Bangladesh of our dreams

Bangladesh has not reached such a stage in the domain of corruption that it cannot be rescued. We all have to continue our fight against corruption. Building a corruption-free Bangladesh of our dreams is not the sole responsibility of any specific government agency or TIB. As good citizens, it is the responsibility all of us. Come, let us all fight corruption jointly.

Tanvir Aziz Peyaratala, Jail Road, Kushitia.
The present Parliament is not playing its assigned role for various reasons; these include holding of standing committee meetings without conforming to the Rules of Procedure and inability to play its due role in inquiring and investigating the incidents of corruption. An effective Parliament is needed for ensuring accountability of the government. These topics have been mainly covered in the ‘ParliamentWatch!’ research of TIB.

The fourth report of this serial research was released on 1 March through a press conference at the VIP lounge of National Press Club, in presence of a large number of journalists from various mass media. TIB Trustees Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, M Hafizuddin Khan, Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman, Research Officer Md. Abdul Ali and other officials were present on the occasion. TIB has been conducting this research titled ‘ParliamentWatch!’ from the first session of the current Parliament with the goal of establishing an accountable government and ensuring good governance in the country.

Although the standing committees are supposed to meet at least once a month according to the Rules of Procedure, it is not being complied with. Only the standing committee for the Law Ministry has fulfilled this requirement by calling more than 10 meetings in 8 months up to August 2004. No meetings had taken place of standing committees of 8 ministries during the said period. Six committees sat for only once. Research shows that Taka 5 crores 1 lakh 15 thousand had been wasted at the rate of Taka 15 thousand per minute during the 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th sessions of Parliament due to loss of over 55 hours on account of lack of quorum. During the period, an additional expenditure of Taka 74 lakh 29 thousand was incurred due to adjournments of Parliament sessions. The MPs had eulogised the members or leaders of their respective parties, criticised the leaders of rival parties and dwelt on irrelevant subjects in 1,565 instances. According to an estimate, the cost incurred for each spoken word in Parliament was at least Taka 100. Of the total time, 8.5 percent was spent on points of order and unscheduled discussions. Of this, political situation consumed 76.3 percent time.

It has been found from this research that although the opposition had submitted 491 adjournment motions during the last four sessions, no discussions were held on any of them. The main opposition party had remained absent for 48 days out of total 83 working days in 2004. Of these 83 working days, the sessions could start on time only thrice. It has also been observed that on an average, 5 percent members of Parliament belonging to different parties did not come to Parliament at all. Due to quorum crisis, the sessions had to be adjourned 4 times.

It is seen from the ‘ParliamentWatch!’ research that 30 bills were passed in the 4 sessions of 2004. No private member’s bill was passed during the period. The objections on amendments raised by the opposition parties to the adopted bills were rejected through voice vote. Of the 30 bills passed, the number of bills on decentralisation of local government, justice and court reforms were comparatively higher. It is seen from available statistics that the Prime Minister’s question-answer sessions were either not held or the answers were merely placed on table in 32 percent of the scheduled dates. Despite acceptance of the questions for consideration, 57 percent of the questions and answers were merely put on the table. It has been noted that 90 percent of these questions were submitted by the members of the ruling party. The main opposition party had always boycotted the Prime Minister’s question-answer session. In the British Parliament, it is the opposition that throws most of the questions to the Prime Minister.
Over one-fifth of the questions and issues of national importance raised in Parliament for the Prime Minister and the ministers related to construction of infrastructure and repair of roads etc. Although subjects like poverty alleviation, commerce and economics, education and health got prominence, issues like terrorism and eradication of corruption were not given due importance. Only 76 percent of the notices were accepted for discussion under rule 71. The participation of women members was minimal. Although 1 female member had participated in the question-answer sessions against 76 male members, none of them had participated in the legislative business.

TIB holds the view that goodwill of the ruling party and active participation of the opposition is required for making the Parliament strong and effective. Provisions should be incorporated for acceptance of certain percentage of the notices and resolutions placed by the opposition for discussion. Law can be framed for observing opposition’s day at least once every fortnight of working days. Law can be enacted for solving the quorum crisis. The committees related to ministries should be constituted in the first session, regular meetings, decision-making and follow-ups should be ensured for strengthening the parliamentary system. The roles of the parliamentary committees would be more forceful if 50 percent of the posts of chairmen are filled from the opposition. Efficient manpower and infrastructure facilities should be enhanced for facilitating proper functioning of the committees. The Parliament would be able to play a more effective role if the participation of the backbenchers, working days and working time could be increased and wastages could be averted.

Research shows that Taka 5 crore 1 lakh 15 thousand had been wasted at the rate of Taka 15 thousand per minute during the 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th sessions of Parliament due to loss of over 55 hours on account of lack of quorum.

‘ParliamentWatch’ in Editorials

A number of editorials and post-editorials were published in various dailies after the release of ‘ParliamentWatch’ research report. These editorials basically highlighted the information gathered from the research and the recommendations put forward.

The title of the editorial published by the daily Prothom Alo on 6 March was ‘the parliamentary standing committees can enhance the transparency and accountability of the government’. It said, the government must be accountable if it is to be made democratic. For this, initiatives should especially be taken for strengthening the standing committees. The daily Janakantha published an editorial titled ‘ineffective parliament’ on 4 March. The main theme of this editorial was that the Parliament was now ineffective and it cannot be made effective in the existing circumstances. A sea-change in politics is needed for this to happen. The title of the editorial published on the same day in the daily Amar Desh was, ‘where is the accountability of parliament members’? The newspaper wrote, would this TIB report catch the attention of our parliament members? The title of the editorial published by the Bhoron Kagoj on 3 March was ‘the Parliament in the research report of TIB’. It commented, ‘it is not understandable to us from which perspective, from which outlook the Speaker has rejected this TIB report’.

The Daily Star published the editorial titled ‘parliamentary standing committees: ministerial non-cooperation is the problem’ on 3 March. The Bangladesh Observer and The News Today published two separate editorials with different titles on the same day on the basis of ‘ParliamentWatch’ research report of TIB. The daily’s Sangbad and Aijker Kagoj published editorials on the subject on 4 and 5 March respectively.

A post-editorial headlined ‘enhancing powers of parliamentary standing committees’ was published in The Daily Star on 8 March. This article, written by former secretary Abdul Latif Mandal, was very informative as it presented information and recommendations from the ‘ParliamentWatch’ report and cited examples from the parliamentary committees of various countries. Another article was published in the daily Aker Kacoil titled ‘how is the Jatiya Sangsad running’? Quoting from the TIB report, the writer, former secretary Manzur-e-Mowlia, said that the quorum crises arose despite two-thirds majority in parliament. This sort of situation could arise as they did not take the Parliament seriously.
M. Hafizuddin Khan and Sultana Kamal become TIB Trustees

Former adviser to the caretaker government and retired Comptroller and Auditor General M. Hafizuddin Khan and the Executive Director of Ain-O-Shalish Kendra and distinguished human rights activist Advocate Sultana Kamal have been elected members of the TIB Trustee Board.

M. Hafizuddin Khan had discharged important responsibilities including chairman of the Expenditure Review Commission of the government and as former secretary to the government. He had also served as consultants of various international organisations including the World Bank and the UNDP. He is presently working as the Managing Director of Social Development Foundation Bangladesh.

Eminent women's leader Sultana Kamal had actively participated in the glorious war of liberation of the Bengalees. She is also involved with various social, cultural and development organizations. Sultana Kamal received the Ananya Award in 1995 and the John Humphrey Freedom Award the next year for her roles in women's development and human rights.

Training on report card survey

TIB has taken up a program for carrying out report card surveys in some northern districts of the country with the objective of verifying the quality of services in some sectors at the grassroots level. With this goal, 30 staffs were recruited and imparted training. This training was held at BHAC-TEHC in Bogra between 20 and 23 March. The training program was inaugurated by the Executive Director of TIB Iftekharuzzaman.

Senior Program Officers of TIB Saidur Rahman Molla and Ekram Hossain served as chief instructors. Some officials from various echelons of TIB dwelt on the aims, objectives and programs of TIB. Six members of Rajshahi divisional CCC participated as resource persons. They were, Samiul Haque, Md. Kuddus Ali, Advocate Moizul Islam, Saiful Islam Reza, Dr. Zakir Talukdar and Professor Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan.

It may be mentioned that the report card surveys would be conducted for verifying the quality of services in primary, secondary and madrasa education, local government and primary health care at the district headquarters of Rajshahi, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Natore, Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi town.

"The youth should be invigorated"

Eminent educationist, organiser, writer Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed has said, it is not sufficient to become good humans; we have to forge ahead and stage protests. Vigour has to be generated among the youth. He said this while speaking as chief guest at the CCC Volunteers' Convention held at Gazni in the border-district of Sherpur on 12 February.

Presided over by the Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, around 200 young volunteers from 6 thana CCC-areas of greater Mymensingh participated in this convention. There were arrangements for discussion meetings, preparation of action plans, cultural programme and theatre during this day-long convention. The volunteers from the six CCC-areas of Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Kishoreganj, Muktagachha, Modhupur and Naitabari presented paper on 'expectations and preparations of future citizens'. Those who participated in the discussion included Ekram Hossain, MA Hakam Hira, Professor Golam Samdani, Meera Al-Hadi Muzahiduzzaman, Samiul Aowal, Golam Rabbani Khan, Nazmun Nahar, Abbas Ali and Ankhi.

Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed said that Bangladesh was divided today. On the one hand, there is a multitude of pauperised and poor people and on the other hand there is handful of powerful persons. But there is no reason why we should become pessimistic. This situation would not last for long if the good people of society become united.
Much importance has been attached to tackling corruption in the construction sector and establishing transparency in government purchases and procurement in the Global Corruption Report of Transparency International (TI) this year. The report said, the magnitude of corruption at all levels of construction projects was much higher compared to any other sector, which directly affected the day to day living of the people. TI called upon all countries to follow minimum standards for checking corruption in the construction sector.

**TI’s Global Corruption Report: Transparency in construction sector and government purchases emphasised**

The 316 pages Global Construction Report has highlighted corruption in the construction sector in a number of countries of the world. Apprehension has also been expressed about massive corruption in the spending of huge amount of money received as loans and aids for reconstruction in post-war Iraq, in the absence of any specific strategy for transparency and accountability. Expressing his apprehension, the TI Chairman Dr. Peter Eigen said, ‘Iraq is at risk of becoming the biggest corruption scandal in history’. It may be mentioned that various donors including the IMF have already made pledges of 120 billion US dollars as credit assistance for reconstruction of Iraq. The report has also put special emphasis on the need for transparency in using resources for relief and rehabilitation in countries affected by the recent tsunami.

Regarding the Yacyreta hydropower project on the Argentine-Paraguay border funded by the World Bank, the report said that the project was causing damage through floods, it was not economically viable and the government had to pay subsidy for it. No accounts were kept on the 1.87 billion US dollars spent for the project in the General Accounting Office of Paraguay. Besides, the report presented pictures of massive corruption in various construction projects of Argentina, Paraguay, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Uganda. But there was no information on the construction sector of Bangladesh in the report.

The report mentioned about the types of steps taken last year (2004) by various countries for curbing corruption. On Bangladesh, the report dwelt on the formation of Anti-Corruption Commission and the framing of procurement regulations for the public sector. Regarding the Anti-Corruption Commission, it said that though it has been given sweeping investigative powers, it has not been endowed with full freedom. According to the law, the President would appoint the commissioners and the government would control the budget. On procurement in the public sector, it said that the new procurement regulation of the planning ministry would assist in ensuring transparency and accountability. But keeping military spending outside its purview was criticised by the report.

The Global Corruption Report is basically a collection of articles by experts on the corruption scenario in the world. Last year’s report dwelt on the regulations for funding political parties in different countries and the culture of buying votes. The subject matter of the 2003 report was ensuring access to information. It may be mentioned that this report has no linkage with the yearly rankings of various countries on the basis of Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) published by TI. For detailed information, please visit [www.globalcorruptionreport.org](http://www.globalcorruptionreport.org).

The recommendations in the report said that the respective governments would have to play the primary and principal roles in ensuring transparency and accountability of public sector purchases and procurements. Transparency International has formulated some minimum criteria for the purpose, which have been mentioned in pages 4 and 5 of the report. TI has urged various countries of the world to follow this.
Annual conference of citizens’ committees

Pledge to establish good governance at the grassroots level

The participants at the annual conference of the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) pledged to work for establishing good governance at the grassroots level. Participated by the members of 12 CCCs formed at district and upazila levels of greater Mymensingh, Rajshahi and Rangpur regions, the conference was inaugurated by the Chairman of TIB Trustee Board Samson H. Chowdhury. 120 members of the citizens’ committees participated in this 4-day conference held between 28 and 31 January at the Hotel Media International of Cox’s Bazaar.

The TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman delivered the address of welcome at the gathering. The guest speaker at the inaugural ceremony was Dr. Muinul Islam, eminent economist and dean of the faculty of social sciences in Chittagong University. Discussions were held at the conference on the ongoing programs of the citizens’ committees, programs executed during previous years and the future work-plans.

In his address as chief guest, the TIB Chairman said that between 80 and 90 percent of the corrupt people in the country were civil and military bureaucrats. By intruding into politics, they corrupt politics, which is darkening the country’s future. He called upon the conscious citizens of the country to get united against corruption.

Dr. Muinul Islam said, poverty is increasing in the country and development is being hampered due to corruption. Only a handful of people are getting benefits from economic growth. The government has no effective program for transforming the population into human resources.

Corruption has to be curtailed first for reducing terrorism in the country, not through 'cross-fires' of RAB. He called upon the conscious citizens to work together for curbing corruption in the country.

Praising the roles of CCCs in the past, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, there is no alternative to building a social movement against corruption if good governance is to be established in the country. He called upon the CCC members to work more actively for establishing good governance at the grassroots level.

CCG members including member of Mymensingh CCG and elderly educationist Mamtazuddin Ahmed, member of Natore CCC Shahana Akhtar Mohua and member of Rangpur CCC Mahamatun Nesa spoke on the role of civil society in the social movement against corruption at local levels. The conference was conducted by the officials of TIB including Senior Program Officers Ekram Hossain and Saidur Rahman Molla.

It may be mentioned that the Committees of Concerned Citizens or CCCs have been acting as watchdog forums as well as catalysts for bringing about positive changes in the lives of local people. The committees are mainly working through the participation of the consumers or silent population at the grassroots level for curbing corruption and ensuring transparency and accountability in order to establish good governance in the service sectors. Apart from its own programs at the local level, the CCCs actively participate in various surveys and research programs on good governance conducted by the TIB.

"Curbing corruption is possible through mass awareness and political goodwill"

At a discussion meeting organised by TIB for forming a Committee of Concerned Citizens at Chittagong city, the speakers said that curbing corruption is possible by generating mass awareness against corruption and through political goodwill at the highest level. The meeting was held on 19 March at the Regional Public Administration Training Centre located in Kazir Deuri of the Chittagong city.

Conducted by the Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, the meeting was attended by distinguished citizens from various classes and professions. Those who participated in the discussion included eminent social scientist Dr. Anupam Sen, economist Dr. Muinul Islam, writer and widow of a martyr Begum Mushtari Shafi, poet and journalist Abul Momen, Professor Dr. Muhammad Yesha Akhter, linguist Dr. Mahbubul Haque, Dr. Mohit-ul-Alam, former chairman of Chittagong Chamber Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury, politician Ahsanullah Chowdhury, women’s leader Nurajan Khan, commissioner Rehana Kabir Ranu, etc. Ekram Hossain, a senior official of TIB, delivered the address of welcome.

Dr. Anupam Sen said that unabated corruption in the country couldn’t be curbed except through mass awakening. Dr. Muinul Islam said, corruption assumes an institutional shape when the politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen collude with each other. All the speakers welcomed the TIB initiative to set up a Committee of Concerned Citizens at Chittagong. While winding up the discussion, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said that TIB is waging a social movement against corruption for treeing the state, government, politics, trade and commerce and the day to day lives of the general masses from corruption. He said, curbing corruption is possible only through political goodwill at the highest level.
Municipal Councils
Face to face with the people

Kishoreganj: The Kishoreganj municipal has held a face-to-face meeting with the people. Held at the Swaranee Girls' High School auditorium, the local citizens asked the municipal chairman and commissioner's questions on various issues. The TIB and CCC arranged this accountability event titled 'people's representatives - face to face with the people'.

Attended by over 200 citizens, they asked the chairman and commissioners various questions on road communication in ward no. 9 of the municipality, drainage problem, water-logging, playing-field, recreation, narcotics control, etc. Municipal Chairman Abu Taher Mia, Commissioner Kamrunnahar Lipi and Emdadul Islam Babul gave replies to various questions. Senior Program Officer of TIB Ekram Hossain, CCC Convener Khursheduddin Bhuian, Members Advocate Bhupendra Bhowmik Dolan. Professor Abdul Ghani, Mrs. Khaleda fancy, Second Secretary of the Swedish embassy in Dhaka Max Allevant, Program Officer of Stockholm-based SIDA Jenny Chris, municipal commissioner Ariful Islam Arjo were present at the meeting.

Modhupur: The union council members of Alokia union has held a face to face meeting with around 300 citizens. This accountability event was organized by the TIB and CCC at the Alokia union council premises on 16 March. Presided over by the convener of citizens' committee Golam Samdani, union council chairman Fazlur Rahman replied to various queries from the people. The meeting called for transforming the union council into a pro-people model institution through establishment of transparency and accountability.

"All should resist corruption"

Eminent economist and TIB Trustee Professor Muzaffar Ahmad has said, people irrespective of gender should build up resistance against corruption. He said this while speaking as chief guest at a seminar on 'Role of the Civil Society in Establishing Good Governance' organised by the citizens' committee of Rangpur sadar at Raja Ram Mohan club auditorium, Rangpur, on 14 March.

Terming corruption as the principal impediment to good governance, he called for waging a social movement against it at the local level. Professor Ahmed said that although all the governments in Bangladesh have all along been vocal against corruption, none have taken any effective measure in this area. Although the present government has constituted an independent Anti-Corruption Commission, the Commission has failed to earn the trust of the people as the recommendations made by TIB on the formation of selection committee comprising of members from ruling and opposition parties and stoppage of wholesale absorption of Bureau of Anti-Corruption officials in the Commission were not accepted.

The CCC member Rezaul Karim presented the keynote paper at the seminar. Member Mushfeqa Razzak delivered the address of welcome. Among others, social worker Fazlatabonna, educationist Reza Shah Toufigur Rahman, Rizia Kuddus and the TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman spoke on the occasion. In his paper, Rezaul Karim dwelled on the magnitude and harmful effects of corruption and emphasised on updating and executing laws on curbing corruption, formation of independent anti-corruption agency or commission and generation of mass awareness.

The Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman called upon the civil society and the people at large to come forward for creating equal opportunities for all, practice democratic values at all levels and build a pro-people economy. He said, it would be easier to meet the basic needs of people if corruption could be reduced.

In his concluding speech, the chairman of the seminar and convener of the CCC-Rangpur Sadar Sadarul Alam sought the cooperation of people from all segments of society for improving the quality of services by ensuring transparency and accountability in various service provider organizations at the local level and through programs of the citizens' committee for establishing good governance.

Over 150 people from various classes and professions including the members of citizens' committee, politicians, social workers, lawyers, physicians, journalists, NGO workers, service holders and women activists participated in the seminar. Samsad Begum, a member of the citizens' committee, conducted the programme.

Report: Rafiqul Islam
Launching of the program at Rangpur:

A citizens’ meeting was held on 10 January at the Rangpur CCC office, located at DC crossing of the town, on the occasion of the launching of Rangpur Sadar citizens’ committee and Advice and Information Centre. Local elites, government officials, development workers, representatives of the mass media and civil society were present on the occasion. The convener of Rangpur CCC Sadrul Alam, social worker Fazilatun Nesa Bulu, human rights worker Syed Abu Zafar Mukul, chamber vice-president Md. Jahangir, Assistant Director of Radio Monowara Begum, etc.

The Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftikharuzzaman said at the meeting that corruption arose from disrespect for democratic values. He expressed the hope that the citizens’ committee would play an effective and courageous role in generating mass awareness against corruption. After the discussions were over, the Rangpur Sadar CCC and Advice and Information Centre were formally inaugurated by releasing balloons.

Shudhangshu Kalwar at Nalitabari and Md. Abdul Latif at Modhupur elected CCC Conveners

Advocate Shudhangshu Kalwar and Mr. Md. Abdul Latif have been elected conveners of the Committees of Concerned Citizens of Nalitabari and Modhupur respectively. They have previously discharged responsibilities as CCC members of their respective areas. Shudhangshu Kalwar replaced M A Hakam Hirat Nalitabari while Md. Abdul Latif replaced Professor Md. Golam Samdani at Modhupur.

VOLUNTEERS GROUPS

Ekushey February observed

The volunteers’ group and people’s theatre of CCC Mymensingh sadar observed the Immortal Ekushey on 21 February. Floral wreaths were placed at the martyrs’ monument in memory of the language martyrs. Later, a discussion meeting was held on the International Mother Language Day. All present expressed their firm commitment to make the social movement against corruption of TIB a success with the goal of upholding the spirit of Ekushey. The meeting was moderated by the Assistant Program Officer of TIB Karuna Kishore Chakrabarty.

On the occasion of Immortal Ekushey, floral wreaths were placed at the martyrs’ monument under the auspices of Modhupur voluntary group in memory of the language martyrs. CCC member Md. Abdul Latif and TIB Program Organizer Md. Rakibul Islam were also present.

The volunteers’ group of Jamalpur observed the International Mother Language Day through morning procession, laying of floral wreaths and discussion meeting. Besides, the volunteers’ group participated in the anti-drugs rally and the gathering organised by the district administration on 16 February.

Observance of Independence Day

The volunteers’ group of Muktagachha observed the independence day on 26 March. Floral wreaths were placed on the sculpture of independence monument on the occasion and a rally was arranged in the town.
95 percent tickets are sold in the black market

95 percent tickets of Dhaka-bound inter-city trains are sold in the black market everyday at Jamalpur railway station. As the alternative road journey takes much longer, the helpless passengers are forced to purchase tickets from the black-marketers at an additional price of Taka 20-40. It has been found from an investigation that the black-marketers, in collusion with the authorities, elicited an additional amount of Taka 13000 on 22 March by collecting a minimum additional payment of Taka 20 per ticket; and the share of the authorities was over Taka 3000, at a minimum rate of Taka 5 per ticket sold in the black market.

On investigation, it is seen that 703 seats are sanctioned daily for the passengers of Jamalpur in the Dhaka-bound Teesta, Ekata, Agnibeena and Jamuna Express. But on 22 March, the total numbers of passengers including those on feet were 1394. Due to excessive demand on the day, 650 tickets out of a total 730 seats were sold in the black market. This is a longstanding picture of Jamalpur railway station. Besides, there is no service for passengers; misbehaviour of the railway staff with passengers; dirt and garbage in the railway station, inadequate sitting space in rooms, filthy toilets, insufficient arrangements for drinking water – there are irregularities, mismanagement and corruption everywhere.

TIB, CCC and the concerned volunteers’ group of Jamalpur sadar conducted a 3-hour long anti-corruption campaign at Jamalpur railway station on the afternoon of 23 March for improving the quality of passenger services by resisting black-marketing of tickets, regular cleaning of railway station and removal of anomalies and mismanagement.

Apart from the volunteers’ group members Samiul Auwal, Suman, Kamru, Luna and Russel, members of the citizens’ committee Meem Ansar Ali, Shukumar Chowdhury, journalist Mostafa Monju and TIB staff Samapika Halder and Al-Amin Mia also participated in the campaign. Leaflets were distributed and meetings were arranged at the station and in town as part of the campaign.

During the campaign, appeals were made to stop sale of tickets in the black market, maintain cleanliness of the railway station, to purchase tickets in an orderly fashion, desist from smoking, remain conscious about one’s rights and encourage others to do the same, demand services from the authorities and protect the railway as a national institution.

After the campaign, the members of the volunteers’ group and citizens’ committee sat at a meeting with the stationmaster Zainul Abedin and the OC of GRP police station Akhiur Rahman. Conceding the existence of black market, the authorities said that this problem has been in vogue for long; various limitations on their side, lack of awareness of the passengers and dearth of local initiative was also responsible for this. They called upon all to work together on the matter. The citizens’ committee and volunteers’ group pledged to work together on it. At an interview next morning with the Bengali service of BBC, communication minister Barrister Nazmul Huda conceded this problem and spoke about various constraints being faced by the Railway in rectifying them.

Report: Ekram Hossain and Al-Amin Mia

People’s Theatre

A 10-day long workshop on production-oriented theatre was organised by TIB between 11 and 20 April for production of anti-corruption people’s play. Eminent drama personality Mamunur Rashid inaugurated this workshop at the auditorium of Proshika Human Development Centre, Mymsingh. 40 drama artists belonging to people’s theatre groups of Mymsingh, Muktagachha and Nailabari CCCs as well as from TIB participated in it. Assistant Advocacy Officer of TIB Khandakar Halima Akhtarr Ribbon acted as the chief instructor.

Three plays were produced at the workshop. ‘Durniti Express’ (Corruption Express) highlighted various irregularities in the police, judiciary, health, local government and railway department, ‘Chhobal’ (Bite) was based on the spread of drugs trade with the connivance of dishonest employees of health and police departments, and ‘Srote Biparite’ (Against the tide) was based on various anomalies in the education and environment departments. Technical show of all the three plays was held on the same day. Members of the Mymsingh and Muktagachha CCCs Professor M. Ashrafuzzaman Selim and Rumi Das enriched the contents of the plays by providing valuable opinions. It may be mentioned that there are plans for staging these dramas at various places of the country with the goals of generating public opinion.
The communication and media campaigns of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) are now in progress. Recently, TIB published press advertisements on three major national occasions. A press advertisement was published on the eve of Ekushey February (21 February) to pay tribute to the martyrs of the International Mother Language Day.

TIB also distributed greeting cards on this occasion. ‘Corruption violates the spirit of Ekushey. Let us all take a stand against it’ was the message that was highlighted in the press advertisement and greeting card. TIB also launched a TV Commercial in February. The 40-second commercial was aimed at bringing back the glorious past of our country and to inspire people to take a stand against corruption.

A press advertisement was also published on 26 March (The Independence Day). It also called upon people to fight corruption together.

Another advertisement was published on Pohela Baishakh (the Bangali New Year). These advertisements were published in major dailies of the country.