EDITORIAL

Right to Information Law - Vote-seeking Parties Must Pledge to Enact & Enforce

Easy and unhindered access to information is among the key prerequisites for transparent and accountable governance and democratic institutionalization. The right to information (RTI) law can be one of the most effective tools of preventing exercise of monopoly power - the main reason for corruption. Right to information is also a precondition for ensuring other basic rights of the people. Free flow of information is equally indispensable for transparency and accountability in transactions affecting lives of citizens in all sectors - public, private as well as non-profit.

Inspite of growing need and demand for framing and adopting the RTI law to guarantee citizens' right to information, no such law exists in Bangladesh, whereas many developed and developing countries of the world have moved ahead by enacting and enforcing the RTI law and creating the supporting institutional arrangements. Benefits of RTI are enormous and multifarious, not least because of its impact in terms of creating a sustainable deterrence against corruption and other forms abuse of power. Among Bangladesh's South Asian neighbours, India has passed the RTI law, with unprecedented results, in terms of facilitating people's access to information; as a precondition for ensuring other basic rights of the people. Free flow of information is equally indispensable for transparency and accountability in transactions affecting lives of citizens in all sectors - public, private as well as non-profit.

In the absence of the RTI law in Bangladesh, denial of information is pervasive, which cannot be challenged. Not only that the RTI does not exit to facilitate people's access to information; as a matter of fact, a number of archaic and regressive legal and administrative provisions exist such as the Official Secrets Act of 1923 and Government Service Rules of 1979, which can be very conveniently and purposefully used to hide and distort vital information and documents that are necessary to ensure public knowledge of matters that are in the realm of their rights as citizens of a democratic country.

The problem is not only limited to macro issues of national interest such as public procurement and policy decisions and processes, but even at the micro levels of basic service deliveries, transactions and entitlements. People face harassments, deceptions and deprivations routinely because of lack of access to information.

Research and experience have convincingly established that the propensity to corruption is much less in countries where the RTI law has been enacted and enforced, and conversely, the more are restrictions on flow of information, the more are the scope of governance failure and undermining of transparency and accountability.

The Law Commission had produced a RTI draft in 2002, which did not receive due attention of the political leadership across the spectrum. The draft contains many limitations such as too long an exclusion list which could render the proposed law nearly ineffective. Nevertheless, it gave a useful basis to work on, and many non-governmental organizations - including Manusher Jonno Foundation and TIB have taken initiatives to intensify public demand at national and local levels for a sound and comprehensive RTI.

We urge upon the political parties and leaders, who are going to seek people's votes to go to power, to acknowledge the appropriateness of this demand, include the enactment and enforcement of the RTI law as one of the top electoral commitments.

Let it also be stressed that enacting of the RTI law cannot be viewed as an end itself. When in place, it must be rigorously enforced without favour or fear to anyone. The fate of the High Court Division's directive of 24 May 2005 is a case in point. Applicable to all electoral candidates, the directive required submission to the Election Commission eight categories of information relevant to determination of their credibility such as educational qualification, profession, sources of income, criminal record, if any, assets and liabilities, previous record as public representative against pledges made, etc. It also provided for the dissemination of the information among the public through the mass media. We have disappointingly observed how the Election Commission has failed to act according to this directive in subsequent by-elections. Moreover, politically motivated efforts from powerful quarters left no stone unturned to nullify the directive. We don't want a repeat of the same in case of the proposed RTI law.

We demand that sufficient measures and arrangements must constitute part of the legal framework for the RTI law to enforce it strictly and truthfully, without which people's right to information will never be realized, nor will the dream of corruption-free, transparent and accountable governance be ever fulfilled.
Access to Information is a fundamental rights:
Speakers at Round-table organised by TIB and MJF

Free flow of information is essential for ensuring good governance and an accountable state. The speakers said this at a discussion titled ‘Good governance in Bangladesh: Needed right to information’, organised on the occasion of International Right to Information Day. Held at the BRAC Centre Inn on 28 September, the round-table was jointly organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) and TIB. A draft law on ‘Right to Information’ was presented at the programme by Barrister Tanjib-ul-Alam.

The event was moderated by the Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman. Participating in the discussion, the speakers demanded the implementation of right to information law for establishing good governance in the country, checking corruption and deterring monopoly power. The MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam delivered the address of welcome. Those who spoke included Suranjit Sen Gupta MP, former Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru, Colonel (retd.) Faruq Khan MP, Ferdous Akhtar Wahida MP, Dr. Atiur Rahman, TIB Trustee Advocate Sultana Kamal, journalist Showkat Mahmud, women leader Maleka Begum, FBCCI Vice-President Dewan Sultan Ahmed, Dr. Asif Nazrul, media personality Muhammad Jahangir et al.

Suranjit Sen Gupta MP said, the right to information is a key element of democracy. This law should be implemented on the basis of national consensus. Abdul Matin Khasru said, information is like oxygen for a democracy. There is a need for changing our outlook with regard to access to information. Colonel (retd.) Faruq Khan said that apart from information on territorial integrity and security of the state, the citizens have the right to get all other information. Advocate Sultana Kamal said, we can realize the right to information through our concerted efforts. Shaheen Anam called upon all to come forward from their respective positions to ensure right to information. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, free flow of information is required for curbing corruption. It is possible to establish governance by ensuring free flow of information.

International Right to Information Day observed in CCC Areas

Rallies, discussion meetings, human-chains, quiz and essay competitions were organised at the grassroots level through the initiative of TIB, MJF and the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) on the occasion of International Right to Information Day. People belonging to various classes and professions including the CCC members, volunteers and theatre activists participated in these programmes spontaneously.

Dhaka Division: On the occasion of the day on 28 September, a colourful rally was brought out from the Mymensingh Press Club at 3 in the afternoon which culminated at the Muslim Institute. Other programmes included discussion meeting, poster affixing, and distribution of leaflets, stickers and T-shirts. The CCC Nalitabari took up a 2-day programme on 27 and 28 September on the occasion of the day with the slogan ‘Let our youths become illuminated with information technology’. Notable events were rally, essay, quiz contest and discussion meeting. The CCs of Muktagacha, Kishoreganj, Jamalpur and Modhupur observed the day in their respective areas through various programmes like rallies, discussion meetings and distribution of stickers.

Khulna Division: Various programmes were taken up at different CCC areas of Khulna division on the occasion of the day. A discussion meeting was organised at the office of CCC Khulna on 28 September afternoon. Presided over by the CCC convener Hafizur Rahman, the speakers at the discussion urged everybody to actively deter corruption. The CCC Kushtia organised a rally and discussion meeting on the occasion of the day. The rally started from the ‘Bijoy Ullash’ compound of the municipality and culminated at Kushtia Press Club. The day was also observed by the CCC Jessore, Bagerhat, Jhenidah and Satkhira through diverse programmes including rallies, seminars, human-chains and discussion meetings.

The speakers said, framing and enforcement of right to information law is very important for combating corruption and establishing good governance in the country. They sought the initiative and commitment of the political parties for formulation and execution of right to information law. Chaired by the Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, the discussants at the round-table said that it is necessary for all citizens to have access to information on all matters relating to the state. Free flow of information is essential for strengthening the democratic system and establishing a transparent and accountable government and state. But the people are deprived of this right to information because of various laws and administrative obstacles including the Official Secrets Act of 1923. The speakers called for instituting the right to information law as deterrence against corruption and unbridled power. The winners of the Investigative Journalism Award 2006 of TIB were given prizes in the last session of the programme.

It may be mentioned that a network styled ‘Freedom of Information Advocates’ was set up on 28 September 2002 at Sofia, the city of Bulgaria for ensuring access to and free flow of information. At the same time, it was decided that the day would be observed as the ‘Right to Information Day’. Its main objective is to create awareness on the subject and through this ensure spontaneous participation of citizens in the governance mechanism, thereby reinforcing the call for a transparent and accountable democratic government and state. TIB and MJF observed the day jointly on 28 September in order to express their solidarity with the global movement for right to information.
Abul Khair and Ahmed Sagor receive Investigative Journalism Award 2006

Senior Reporter of The Daily Ittefaq Abul Khair and Senior Correspondent of NTV Ahmed Sagor have received the TIB Investigative Journalism Award 2006 in print and electronic media category respectively. Each of the winners were awarded Taka 50 thousand, a certificate and a crest after the round-table discussion held at the BRAC Centre INN, Dhaka on the occasion of International Right to Information Day on 28 September. The TIB Trustees M. Hafizuddin Khan and Advocate Sultana Kamal handed over the prizes to the winners.

Abul Khair was awarded for his a series report captioned ‘Amra ki khachhi’ on adulterated food published in The Daily Ittefaq between 20 June and 31 July 2005. This report generated uproar throughout the country. The state of adulterated food in the country was also exposed to a great extent through this report. Ahmed Sagor was awarded for his report titled ‘Nirdosh Shasti’, which was telecast on NTV between 7 May and 5 August in the last year. This report laid bare the story of innocent Rafiqul of Aminbazar, Savar, who was sent to Savar Court by police in a false case of murder and robbery, leading to his conviction and life imprisonment totalling 31 years, as he could not pay the police bribe according to their demand.

Giving his reaction after receiving the prize, Ahmed Sagor said, “My accountability to the people and my institute has increased a lot. I understand that now I have much work to do. TIB has invigorated me with this award”. Abul Khair said, “I feel very joyous at getting this prize. But this prize has inspired me to do something more for the good of society, country and the people. It reminds me every moment to be more responsible”.

The panel of judges for the 2006 Investigative Journalism Award included editor of The Bangladesh Observer Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Professor of English Department of Dhaka University Dr. Syed Manzurul Islam, Professor of Mass Communication and Journalism Department of the same university Dr. Gitiara Nasreen and media personality Muhammad Jahangir.

TIB has been awarding prizes for investigative journalism each year since 1999 for encouraging publishing of objective reports, raise the professional quality of journalists and arouse a sense of competition among them. The journalists from both print and electronic media are awarded for writing the best investigative report on corruption. The competition has already attracted the attention of investigative journalists working in the mass media.

Rajshahi Division: The International Day for Right to Information was observed by the CCCs of Rajshahi division through various programmes. Notable among these were discussion meetings, human-chains, rallies, round-table discussions and distribution of stickers. The speakers at the discussion meeting held on 28 September asked the participants of various organizations including Supro (Campaign for Good Governance), Mohila Parishad, CNRS and FPBA also spoke on the occasion. The CCC Sreemangal also observed the day through various programmes. Notable among these were rally, discussion meeting, and distribution of stickers. People belonging to different classes and professions including CCC members, volunteers representatives of the civil society, media personalities and development activists participated in the discussion arranged after the rally. The representatives of various organizations including Supro (Campaign for Good Governance), Mohila Parishad, CNRS and FPBA also spoke on the occasion. The CCC Sreemangal also observed the day through various programmes. Notable among these were rally, discussion meeting, and distribution of stickers. People belonging to different classes and professions including CCC members, volunteers representatives of the civil society, students and journalists participated in these events.

Chittagong Division: The day was observed on 28 September under the aegis of CCC Chittagong City. A rally was brought out on the occasion from the CCC office. Apart from the combined presence of the general masses and the civil society, the rally was participated by the representatives of ILMA, YPSA and USHA. The day was also observed at CCC Patiya, Chakaria, Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Chandpur through various programmes.

Sylhet Division: The CCC Sylhet organised a rally with the participation of its volunteers on 28 September. It paraded through important points of the city. After the rally, a discussion meeting was held at the CCC office, presided over by its convener Emad Ullah Shahidul Islam. A colourful rally was brought out at CCC Sunamgari on the occasion of the day. Eminent citizens including members of the civil society, media personalities and development activists participated in the discussion arranged after the rally. The representatives of various organizations including Supro (Campaign for Good Governance), Mohila Parishad, CNRS and FPBA also spoke on the occasion. The CCC Sreemangal also observed the day through various programmes. Notable among these were rally, discussion meeting, and distribution of stickers. People belonging to different classes and professions including CCC members, volunteers representatives of the civil society, students and journalists participated in these events.

Barisal Division: A discussion meeting chaired by the CCC convener Prof. Sheikh Sayedur Rahman was held at the office of CCC Pirjpur for observing the day. A rally went round main thoroughfares of the town and dispersed at CCC office after the discussion meeting. Various programmes including rallies and discussion meetings were also organised in areas under the jurisdiction of CCC Jhalakati. People belonging to various professions participated in these programmes.

Partnerships with various organizations

TIB has launched various partnership programmes with some organizations with the goal of strengthening the anti-corruption movement. The organizations include the US based multinational bank CitiBank N.A., Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), Reporters Against Corruption (RAC), Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDDS) etc. The DUDS arranged the ‘Sixth Inter-University Debate Competition 2006’ on 11-13 September. TIB and CitiBank N.A. extended support to it jointly. Besides, TIB and RAC jointly organised a round-table discussion on ‘How to make the Anti-Corruption Commission effective’ at the National Press Club on 17 September. TIB and MJF jointly arranged a round-table discussion on “Good governance in Bangladesh: Needed right to information” on 28 September on the occasion of International Right to Information Day.
Release of Corruption Database 2005 Report: Reactions from Many Quarters

According to Corruption Database 2005 study of TIB, Taka 526 crore 27 lakh 24 thousand 515 worth of financial loss was incurred in 423 out of 2128 incidents of corruption between January and December last year. The local government and rural development sector topped the corruption ranking in terms of financial losses, where financial corruption amounted to Taka 208 crore 9 lakh 17 thousand 252. After that came power and forestry sectors with corrupt transactions worth Taka 67 crore 99 lakh 39 thousand 367 and Taka 67 crore 25 lakh 38 thousand 391 respectively. In the corruption database research the corruption-related incidents were scanned from 26 national dailies during the previous one year. The report was released on 5 July at the VIP lounge of National Press Club through a press conference.

It appeared from the study that the main causes of proliferation of corruption were monopoly power, discretionary power, lack of accountability and weak administrative system. About 20% of the monitored reports were selected as samples to corroborate their genuineness. When asked about the truthfulness of the reports, 69.5% officers in charge of concerned offices gave affirmative answers in one way or another.

There was a surge of discussions in various quarters including the country’s mass media after the report was published. It was broadcast as top news of the day by various TV channels. It also created sensation in the political arena, the civil society and the general public. On the other hand, the Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Ministry rejected the TIB report through a separate press conference. Side by side, the power and environment & forest ministries rejected the TIB report through press statements.

The ruling party ministers and MPs from the ruling and opposition parties discussed at length the TIB report and the state of governance and corruption in the country on the 22nd day of 22nd session of 8th parliament on 9 July. The Ministry of Environment and Forests held a press conference on the day and the LGRD Ministry the following day where the concerned ministers rejected the report terming it untrue and without basis. They later threatened to file suites claiming damage of Taka 100 crore if TIB did not withdraw its report.

On the other hand, the chairman of TIB Trustee Board, members and concerned officials gave answers to various queries of journalists including methodology of corruption database research and TIB’s source of funding at a press conference held on 12 July at National Press Club. Regarding demand from the government side on withdrawing the report and taking legal measures, TIB Trustee Board Chairman Professor Muzaffer Ahmad said that corrections would be made if specific proofs of errors were submitted. But there was no question of withdrawing the report and TIB would confront any legal measure taken by the government through legal means.

A talk-show titled “Hello, Apnakey Bolchhi” was telecast live by BTV on 21 July centring on the TIB report. Besides, TIB Corruption Database 2005 was the theme of discussion in the talk-show “GrameenPhone Teleshomoy” broadcast by Channel-i and participated by eminent columnist Nurul Haque, TIB Executive Director and the concern researcher. The discussants explained various methodological aspects of the corruption database research.

It may be mentioned that Corruption Database is one of the many researches conducted by TIB. Newspapers are the only source of information for this study. This research programme was launched by TIB in the year 2000. Eight reports have been published so far. The main objectives of this research are: to evaluate the corruption-related reports published in newspapers in terms of their relevance for research; to analyse the incidence of corruption on the basis of sectors, the persons involved in corruption, methods of corruption and areas where it is taking place, etc.; determine the impact or losses due to corruption; to review the trend of corruption at various junctures and to assess the measures taken against corruption. The report was not centred on ministries; rather it is an assessment of newspaper stories on corruption taking place in various service sectors. This database research introduced by TIB has received international acclaim as an important tool for combating corruption.

TIB has been working tirelessly for the past ten years with popular support for building a corruption-free Bangladesh. It is natural that its reports get published in the mass media with due importance and editorial comments are also passed on them, which are helpful for a social movement. TIB is in fact helping the government by conducting research on corruption and informing the people about their rights, administrative lapses and wastage of public resources. Side by side, TIB seeks to empower the people by generating awareness on the basis of research and by pointing out the weaknesses in our administrative and political spheres. The people are of the view that the image of the country would be enhanced if the government takes effective steps on issues published in the reports.

The Anti-Corruption Commission has informed that it would investigate all incidents of corruption which took place in various ministries and sectors on the basis of corruption database report published by TIB. It has been gathered that this would commence in full gear immediately after assumption of office by the caretaker government. The Commission has taken an initiative to form a committee for working on the subject. This initiative by the Commission to curb corruption in a transparent and accountable manner is indeed laudable.
Accountability of Anti-corruption Commission essential for establishing Good Governance:
Speakers at round-table organised by TIB and RAC

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) was organized a round-table discussion in collaboration with Reporters Against Corruption (RAC) on 17 September at the VIP Lounge of National Press Club with the objective of exploring the causes of non-effectiveness of Anti-corruption Commission and ways of transforming it into an effective organization. Highlighting various aspects of the Commission’s failures, the speakers at the discussion titled ‘Anti-corruption Commission: How to make it effective’ termed accountability of the Commission as essential for establishing good governance. The speakers also put forward various recommendations for making the commission effective.

Moderated by former Adviser to the caretaker government M. Haifuzzuddin Khan, the discussion was attended by the member of Anti-corruption Commission Professor Mohammad Moniruzzaman Miah. The keynote paper was presented by the TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman. The discussants included Justice Golam Robbani, former Director of now-defunct Bureau of Anti-corruption Md. Baduzzaman, Professor Dr. Abu Ahmed of the Department of Economics, Dhaka University, Professor of Law Department of the same university Dr. Asif Nazrul, former Law Minister Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru et al.

In his keynote paper, Iftekharuzzaman said that formation of an independent Anti-corruption Commission was proposed based on the diagnostic research on Bureau of Anti-corruption conducted by TIB in 2001. In this backdrop, the government hastily passed the anti-corruption law after forming the government. Later, the government hastily passed the anti-corruption law in 2001. But they did not take any steps for the anti-corruption Commission in framing rules. The law was framed by the Prime Minister’s Office. It was not true. No staffs have been appointed on an individual basis. Although decisions on all matters are supposed to be taken in meetings of the Commission, this rule has not been adhered to in many instances. There is no transparency in the workings of the Commission, he also added.

The former Director of now-defunct Bureau of Anti-corruption Md. Baduzzaman said that political pressures could be exerted on the Bureau as it was placed under Prime Minister’s Office. Therefore, many people held the view that the Bureau would be able to function independently if it were brought outside the PMO’s jurisdiction. Formation of the Anti-corruption Commission was an electoral pledge of the present ruling party in 2001. But they did not take any steps for the purpose after forming the government. Later, the government hastily passed the anti-corruption law due to pressure from TIB and donor agencies. Consequently, many discrepancies remained in that law. He said, goodwill of the government is needed most if the Anti-corruption Commission is to be made effective.

Former Law Minister Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru said, the Commission can file cases under sections 32(1) and 32(2). But the approval of the Commission has to be attached with the people. But it was not done till now. In reality, this law framed under duress of the donors is a massive fraud with the people. Besides, section 30 says that its budget would be determined by the government. It goes counter to the spirit of the Commission. Functional independence of the Commission must be ensured alongside organizational independence.

Member of the Anti-corruption Commission Professor Mohammad Moniruzzaman gave answers to various questions raised during the discussion. He said, an all-party parliamentary committee can be formed for investigating the Commission’s work. The allegation of government interference in the functioning of the Commission was not true. No staffs have been appointed on an individual basis. Although decisions on all matters are supposed to be taken in meetings of the Commission, this rule has not been adhered to in many instances. There is no transparency in the workings of the Commission, he also added.

The speakers at the discussion identified various problems including legal lapses in making the Commission effective. Conflicts on policy matters among the Commissioners, negligence of the Commission in framing rules, lack of transparency and accountability, commercialisation of staff appointments, absence of proper leadership, dearth of accountability and goodwill within the government as well as political leadership, etc.

Principal among the recommendations put forward to overcome these problems was to explore how the neighbouring countries were tackling corruption and the laws they were applying for the purpose and then a consensus may build that pressure should be exerted on the government through communications. Other recommendations included giving the Commission absolute freedom with regard to organizational structure and budgetary provision, making the other organs of the Judiciary transparent and accountable alongside with the Commission, publishing the assessment of the assets of all officials of the present Commission as well as those of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-corruption, eliciting commitment of all political parties and leaders on curbing corruption - especially while nominating candidates, formation of an all-party parliamentary committee for investigating the Commission’s work, publication of the right to information law for ensuring transparency and combating corruption, etc.

TV Talk Show
Moderated by media personality Muhammad Jahangir, the talk-show ‘GrameenPhone Teleshomoy’ was telecast live on Channel-I on 28 July and 22 September. The subject of discussion on 28 July was TIB’s research report titled ‘Corruption Database 2005’. Eminent columnist Nurul Haque, Executive Director of RAC Dr. Iftekharuzzaman and Assistant Research Officer Tanvir Mahmud participated in it. During the deliberations, the speakers said that the research was not carried out merely on the basis of newspaper reports. It was conducted by selecting news items on corruption published in 26 dailies of the country. The researchers prepared the report on the basis of final findings after verifying the information collected from newspapers as well as genuineness of the reported incidents. Whereas, 10 percent verifications are generally carried out in research projects, 20 percent of information are verified by TIB through corroborations in case of this particular research.

‘Corruption case and politics’ was the theme of the talk-show telecast on 22 September. It was participated by the Treasurer of TIB Trustee Board M. Haifuzzuddin Khan, legal expert Dr. Shaheed Malik and eminent politician Hasanul Haque Inu. They said that corruption is being used as a political tool in recent times. But no political or social initiatives have been taken for curbing corruption.
Independence and Limitations of the Election Commission: The Present Context

Parliamentary election is highly important in establishing democracy in Bangladesh. Each and every national election held after the end of the military rule in 1990 is a step towards achieving democracy. These elections are indispensable for achieving a healthy grooming of the multi-party political culture in our country.

The main pre-requisite for election in a multi-party democracy is that elections must be free and fair. According to Article 118 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, the Election Commission (EC) has been entrusted with the mandate for holding all national parliamentary and other local body elections. The EC is supposed to be completely independent in the exercise of its functions and subject only to the Constitution and applicable laws. However, from the experience of elections held so far, the question whether the EC has been able to implement its constitutional rights.

Is it being run without any political bias or influence? Has it been able to gain the trust of the people and political parties? Do the people have their trust on the election held under the non-party caretaker government in the last one and half decade? Is it really possible for the EC to conduct elections in a free and fair manner?

For getting answers to these questions we need to look back. The democratic culture could not flourish due to the introduction of different forms of government in a very short period after the independence. Such forms of government included multi-party democracy, one-party rule, and military rule. It is observed that since the independence, elections have been used for legitimising military regimes coming to power through unconstitutional avenues, and retain the power as elected governments. Since independence, rational parliamentary elections have been held for eight times—among which three under military rule and three under interim or non-party caretaker governments. Almost after every election allegations were raised from the defeated party. Such allegations included capturing polling centres and ballot box, violence, and vote rigging. Most of the elections and by-elections held under a civil government have been debated over and questioned.

Parliamentary democracy started its new course after the fall of the military regime in 1990. However, vote rigging, using the EC as a sister concern of the government and ignoring the opposition parties in different by-elections continued. From 1991 to 1996, candidates of the ruling BNP won 13 out of 23 (56.5%) by-elections, from 1996 to 2001, the ruling AL won 20 out of 31 (64.52%) by-elections, and from 2001 to 2005, the ruling BNP won 20 out of the 25 (74%) by-elections. The Magura-2 (in 1994), Patna-2 (in 1996), and Dhaka-10 (in 2004) by-elections can be specially mentioned, while in each of these elections the influence of the ruling party over the EC was reflected through indiscriminate electoral irregularities and corruption.

Over the years the feeling that ‘fair elections are not possible under a party government’ was deeply rooted among the political parties. As a result the system of non-party caretaker government was introduced through a mass movement in 1996. This system does not exist in any other democracy. The main task of this type of government is to assist the EC in holding a free and fair election. This system reveals the following impoverished nature of our political culture.

• First of all, the political parties do not have self-confidence. They advocated for the caretaker government for conducting a fair election only because they do not trust each other. Then the question may be asked, if they do not trust each other, then how the people will have trust in them?

• Secondly, the political parties and leaders do not cherish the democratic and constitutional values. They do not believe in healthy competition.

• Thirdly, because they do not rely on themselves, they also do not rely on the people. They really do not act for the people, and as a result they are not sure that the people will support their cause.

• Last but not the least, introduction of the caretaker system proves that none of the political parties have the intention of making the EC truly independent. It has been proved through the elections of 1991, 1996 (June) and 2001 that holding free and fair election is very much possible if the EC is allowed to work independently.

A brief analysis has been given below on the reasons for the EC not being able to hold elections impartially.

Independence of the EC

Although the EC is constitutionally independent, it is not reflected in its activities. According to the Constitution, election commissioners are appointed by the President following the advice from the Prime Minister. As the Prime Minister represents a certain political party, it has been observed that such appointments are made with partisan objectives, which the opposition parties have been rejecting every time.

The EC Secretariat is responsible for materialising all decisions made by the EC. This secretariat was brought under the President’s Office first in 1982, and under the Prime Minister’s Office in 1991. As a result, the government has retained complete control over this body. The Commission has no authority to appoint, promote or punish its staff. Last year allegations were made against the appointment of 300 Upazila Election Officers on the basis of their partisan identity.

Although the expenditure of the EC is charged upon the consolidated fund, it is not the reality. The EC has to depend on the Ministry of Finance as it has no financial independence. The Ministry is capable of trimming the budget submitted by the EC, asking for accounts, or not allocating funds in due time. Last year the Ministry did not allocate funds for voter list preparation and finally approved an amount much lower than that was required by the EC.

Constitutional and Legal Limitations

To ensure, qualification and age limit of the Election Commissioners are not indicated in the Constitution. As a result the President can appoint anyone and any number of Election Commissioners upon the advice of the Prime Minister. In this process consultation with opposition parties is not required. As a result, the commissioners’ credibility and neutrality is at stake.

Administrative Limitations

Since independence nine Chief Election Commissioners (CEC) have been appointed. Out of them seven were from the Judiciary. The main function of the CEC is to conduct election and for this experience of administrative management is required on the part of the commissioners. It is observed that the bureaucrats having experience in administrative management in their professional career were very successful as CECs as they took very effective and crucial decisions for conducting free and fair elections.

Election Laws and Practices

Although there is a provision in the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972 to provide identity card to each voter, the EC has so far been unable to provide the same. The Commission failed to complete the Voter Identity Card project that started in 1995. Corruption was one of the main reasons for the failure of this project.

According to RPO 1972, delimitation of constituencies has to be done on completion of each population census. The EC is not abiding by this law. For the next general election scheduled in early 2007, the EC has made no move to demarcate the constituencies in line with the latest population survey that took place in 2001. The constituencies across the country have varying sizes of enfranchised population. According to the existing voter list, 62 constituencies have less than two lac voters while eight constituencies have voters above four lac.

Supreme power has been given to the EC for ensuring practices of the electoral code of conduct. However, political parties and candidates are violating every electoral code in every election without any disruption. Not a single candidate has faced prosecution for not submitting statements on election expenses till now. The EC does not carry out the responsibilities of collecting and verifying personal information of the candidates. If the EC takes its responsibilities seriously, people could have got the opportunity to elect honest and qualified candidates. Most of the individual candidates spend more than millions of taka in election, while there is a maximum limit of Tk 5 lac for each candidate. The ruling party uses government offices and establishments indiscriminately as election camps. Ministers and parliamentarians give promises to the people for supporting their party candidates in different elections. The EC does not take action against these violations of electoral code of conduct.

The non-party caretaker government cannot be a permanent solution. By-elections, puraashava and Citi corporations, and other local government elections are conducted under civil governments. Moreover, criticism and debate on the appointment of Chief Advisor of the caretaker government has already started. So the EC must be reformed turning it into an empowered and well-equipped institution. The ruling party should take the initiative for the reform measures and then the opposition party will support them for the greater interest of the country and democracy. Then the people can rely on the EC. The EC needs to be empowered to such an extent that it will take actions against any person or candidate for electoral malpractices and violations. For this, the EC Secretariat must be freed from the Prime Minister’s Office. It should be given financial independence. The CEC and Election Commissioners must be appointed on the consensus of the political parties. All these will be possible if the ruling party wants to activate this constitutional body as a free and impartial institution.

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United effort of all people can curb corruption:

Speakers at seminar organised by CCC Savar

“Corruption cannot be curbed if the weaknesses in the country’s Constitution as well as laws and regulations cannot be removed. Consequently, the people have to come forward if the state is to be made pro-active and welfare-oriented”. The speakers said this at a seminar titled ‘Our obligations for combating corruption’ organised by the newly formed CCC Savar. Describing corruption as a universal problem, the speakers said that the pervasiveness of corruption in the country was more compared to other countries. The rate of national development would increase if this could be brought down within tolerable limits. Held on 16 September at Savar municipal auditorium under the chairmanship of CCC convener Joynal Abedin Khan, the seminar was attended by the Member of Parliament from Dhaka-12 constituency Dr. Dewan Md. Salahuddin, Chairman of Savar Municipality Md. Refatul Huda, CCC member Meer Hamida Begum and eminent journalist Kamal Lohani. Among others Treasurer of TIB Trustee Board M. Hafizuddin Khan, members of TIB Trustee Board

Prof. Abdullha Abu Sayeed at the CCC Savar organised seminar

Four new CCCs formed

Four new Committees of Concerned Citizens have been formed in different districts of Bangladesh through the initiative of TIB. The 9-member CCC Gazipur was formed on 2 July with Professor Md. Ayeshuddin as the convener. The 12-member CCC Madaripur was formed on 23 July with Khan Md. Shahid as the convener. CCC Faridpur was formed on 24 July with Professor A N M Abdus Sobhan as the convener, while CCC Rajbari has been constituted with Dr. Fakir Abdur Rashid as the convener. It may be mentioned that 36 CCCs have been formed so far in different districts and upazilas of Bangladesh. The CCCs are running their activities with the goal of curbing corruption and establishing good governance in service sectors at the local level.

Training and workshop on report card survey

TIB organised a training course for the field level researchers on applying report card methodology in researches on primary and secondary education, health, land, municipality, union parishad, passport office, BRTA, central jail, railway station and agricultural offices of CCC areas in Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Chandpur and Patiya. Around 45 researchers participated in this training held at the Proshika Training Centre of Koitla, Manikganj from 3 to 5 July. Besides, a workshop on report card survey was held at the Asian SR Hotel, Chittagong on 14 July. Elaborate discussions were held at the workshop on budget, methodology and sampling techniques in report card surveys. The conveners of CCC Patiya, Chakaria and Chittagong City were present at the workshop. It may be mentioned that report card surveys are being conducted at the field level currently on secondary education, WASA and gas service in Chittagong City.

Waves : TIB Newsletter 7
Opinion Survey revealed on public services and the mass media in Barisal

A press conference was held on 25 August at BNDN auditorium under the auspices of CCC-Barisal to reveal the findings of questionnaire surveys on the participating seminars on ‘Role of political parties in checking corruption’ and ‘Corruption and the mass media’ held on 16 June and 23 June respectively. Over 100 men and women from various classes and professions gave their views separately on services rendered by the government, the mass media and the newsmen. Chaired by the CCC convener Advocate Md. Ismail Hossain Negaban, the results of the surveys were presented at the press conference by Advocate Manabendra Batabyal.

Representatives from 17 national and 6 regional newspapers as well as 1 private TV channel participated. CCC members Professor M. Moazzem Hossain, Shafur Rahman Miron and TIB’s Programme Officer spoke on the occasion. The report on survey findings was prepared by CCC member Dipankar Chakraborty.

The participants in the survey gave their opinions on various subjects including schools, politics, courts, food, health, water, power, telephone etc. 71% of the participants held the view that the guardians had to incur additional expenses like payment of subscriptions during admission and recruitment of teachers of targeted schools as tutors for their children prior to admission. Around 92% participants opined that the incomes-expenditures of political parties were not transparent. 77% held the view that the quality and weight of food items were not as per specification. 78% participants opined that they did not get free health services from specified places. 47% respondents disclosed that it was possible to get away without paying telephone, water and electricity bills. 74% said that it was not possible to get telephone connection without bribes. 94% thought that no work could be done in offices without lobbying or influence of higher quarters. 91% respondents held the view that the process of appointments and promotions was not transparent. 94% said that bribes or tolls had to be paid for getting tenders or businesses.

94% respondents held the opinion that the journalists could not go outside the policies of newspapers. 87% were of the view that the journalists could not write anything according to their wish. In this context, 81% said that the journalists were not free. The newspaper policies did not give them full freedom. 91% of the respondents read newspapers regularly. Of them, 54% held the view that negative news items got prominence on the first page of newspapers. 57% said that there was no need for publishing more than ten pages in a single newspaper. 57% of the respondents read newspapers regularly. 87% were of the view that the journalists could not write anything according to their wish. In this context, 81% said that the journalists were not free. The newspaper policies did not give them full freedom. 91% of the respondents read newspapers regularly. Of them, 54% held the view that negative news items got prominence on the first page of newspapers. 57% said that there was no need for publishing more than ten pages in a single newspaper.

Influence of those people who made sudden appearances on the political scene (rather than long-time workers) was rising. Around 94% said that the workers who made sacrifices were being ignored. 93% participants opined that the corrupt politicians are not being tried. 95% identified lack of accountability as the cause of rising corruption. Around 89% held the view that only the politicians could check corruption. 89% respondents did not think that the judiciary in Bangladesh was free of corruption.

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Anti-Corruption Slogan
A decision has been taken at the CCC Savar meeting to use the slogan “Stop corruption for national interest - Right now” in all invitation cards for social and family occasions like marriage and circumcision and in all letters sent by the CCC. This decision was unanimously taken at the monthly CCC meeting held on 15 July.

AI - Desk at the Union Parishad of Jessore
A satellite Advice and Information Desk (AI-Desk) has been set up in a room of the Union Parishad (UP) by Fatehpur Union Parishad in collaboration with CCC Jessore in order to provide information on education, health etc. to the union-level population of Jessore district. An opinion-sharing meeting was held on the subject at the UP office on 14 August. The UP Chairman, members, local people, members of CCC Jessore and TIB officials participated in the meeting. The villagers have been inspired by the easy availability of information at a far-flung rural area.

Advice and Information Desk (AI - Desk)
In order to reach the services of Advice and Information Desk (AI-Desk) to the doorsteps of the people, separate Participatory Interest Group Discussions (PIGDs) were held in 30 CCC offices during June and July with participation of CCC members, volunteers and local professionals. The main objectives of these discussions were to identify problems, seek opinion for solving problems and selecting issues for preparing fact-sheets. Representatives from the poor and marginalised segments of society also placed their views on various issues at the local, national and international levels. It was found that a majority of participants held the view that information on local hospital services, education and land were needed most. A 4-hour long training programme for volunteers was arranged in 29 CCCs (excluding Chittagong City) for the purpose. Its main objective was to impart training on the methodology of preparing fact-sheets.
Welfare-oriented initiative of Rangpur Volunteer Group: Advice and Information Desk can change people’s lives

The magnitude of corruption is gradually rising as the common people do not have much idea about the services rendered by service providing organizations. Consequentiy, free exchange of information and mass awareness is required for checking irregularities and corruption. To meet this demand, the CCCs and the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) are providing advice and information to citizens free of charge with this goal in mind. As a part of this initiative, the CCCs are trying to reach the general citizenry through Advice and Information Desk (AI-Desk). One such source for free information and advice is Advice and Information Desk run by CCC Rangpur. This has, therefore, achieved notable success due to adoption of realistic plans and their implementation by CCC Rangpur and volunteer group. Some service providing organizations were identified at first where the citizens are likely to face harassment while receiving services due to mismanagement, irregularities and corruption. One such organization is Rangpur Medical College and Hospital.

The price of ticket for services in the outdoor department of Rangpur Medical College and Hospital was previously Taka 5.50. But the patients had to pay Taka 6 on the pretext of lack of change. As a result the sellers used to get an additional 50 paisa. When it came to the notice of the volunteer group, they published a fact-sheet on the subject (30 April 2006) as it appeared to be important to them. It presented important information on TIB’s activities, chart of service fees applicable for the Medical College, the enquiry and emergency departments. It was then distributed in Rangpur town and hospital. A campaign was then undertaken by setting up a satellite AI-Desk on the premises of Rangpur Medical College and Hospital. The patients and service recipients could now know correct information through this campaign. As a result, they protested and refused to pay additional fee while purchasing tickets. When the matter came to the notice of the hospital authority, the Director issued an order (memo no. Rachimaha/rang/pasha:/06, date: 24/5/06) which stipulated that Taka 6 would be taken as price for the ticket, but the additional 50 paisa would be deposited at the social welfare department through receipts on a daily basis, which would be spent for the welfare of the poor and the distressed. As a consequence, the chances of survival of those patients who could not continue their treatment previously due to lack of fund would now have a better chance of continuing treatment and thereby survive.

Cycle Rally against Corruption by Volunteers

15-members of CCC Chakaria volunteer group’s organised a cycle rally with a pledge to build a corruption-free happy and prosperous Bangladesh. Hundreds of people thronged beside the road to watch the rally on 13 September, which started from Chakaria and ended at Pekua Upazila. The rally was inaugurated by the CCC convenor Engineer Rafiquil Hoque. Apart from the CCC members, innumerable people attended the event. Starting from the Magbazar CCC office located in Chakaria municipal area at 8 in the morning, the cycle rally crossed 12 unions of Chakaria and Pekua upazilas and ended at 6 in the evening after crossing 40 kilometres. The volunteers who participated in the rally then attended an opinion-sharing meeting with the students of 15 prosperous Bangladesh. Hundreds of people thronged beside the road to watch the rally on 13 September, which started from Chakaria and ended at Pekua Upazila. The rally was inaugurated by the CCC convenor Engineer Rafiquil Hoque. Apart from the CCC members, innumerable people attended the event. Starting from the Magbazar CCC office located in Chakaria municipal area at 8 in the morning, the cycle rally crossed 12 unions of Chakaria and Pekua upazilas and ended at 6 in the evening after crossing 40 kilometres. The volunteers who participated in the rally then attended an opinion-sharing meeting with the students of 15 educational institutions as well as people belonging to various classes and professions. The cycle rally was organised mainly to generate awareness among the younger generation against corruption. It had substantial impact on the local people.

Recognition accorded to honest government officer of Chandpur

The volunteer group of CCC Chandpur undertook an exceptional programme styled ‘In search of an honest man’. A questionnaire was sent to 90 officials of the district asking who in their opinion was an honest and corruption-free officer. The survey elicited maximum votes for Upazila Education Officer Md. Zia Uddin Ahmed as an honest officer. The CCC member Quamruzzaman Choudhury handed over the award to this honest official. Officials of various departments, teachers, members of the civil society including the District Primary Education Officer Suman Kumar Barua were present at the prize-giving ceremony. Expressing his feelings after getting the prize, Mr. Zia said, “This prize would make the upazila education department more dynamic and inspire everybody to raise the quality of service”.

CCC Jamalpur volunteers active in deterring black-marketing of tickets

A mass awareness campaign was held at the Jamalpur railway station under the aegis of volunteer group of CCC Jamalpur on 17 July morning. The volunteers exchanged views with the concerned people regarding the roles played by station authorities and GRP police in stopping black-marketing of tickets. A leaflet on the role of the people in stopping black-marketing of tickets was circulated among the mass people on the occasion. When this news was published in the local newspapers, the district administration arranged an opinion-sharing meeting with the CCC members, volunteers, railway authorities and GRP police on 6 August noon. Held at the office of district administration, the meeting encouraged the CCC and the volunteers to take more initiative to stop black-marketing of tickets. Assurance was also given that all necessary measures would be extended to this noble and participatory venture of the volunteers. It may be mentioned that this exceptional initiative of the CCC and volunteers of Jamalpur was launched on 23 March 2005.

Initiatives to observe International Anti Corruption Day

TIB has undertaken various activities to observe the International Anti Corruption Day on 9 December. Notable among these are: TV advertisements; telecast of special TV programme; essay, debate and cartoon competition; awareness-raising cultural exhibition; publication of stickers, posters, desk calendar, diary, brochure, etc. Besides, there is a plan to hold a seminar at the national level. Initiatives would also be taken to organize awareness-raising cultural programme with the cooperation of students studying in various public and private universities. The TIB volunteers have plans to form human-chains at various CCC areas on the occasion of the day. There are extensive plans to hold various programmes including seminars and rallies in Dhaka and the CCC areas. Side by side, TIB has started campaigning to collect signatures of people with the goal of signing and ratifying the Anti-Corruption Convention of the United Nations. This would be presented to the government later so that the government takes appropriate action in this regard.
Female Members of the Union Parishad: Status and Empowerment

Going beyond their traditional identities of daughter, wife, mother - women have now developed self-identities as job-holders, main earners of the family, political leaders, patriots and initiators of social movement since long. The women community has always played a notable role in shaping the history of this country and would continue to do so. The conscious and promising women have repeatedly surged forward with movement for establishing their rights after overcoming mountains of obstacles. But traditional negative outlook and values have repeatedly hindered the pace of women’s advancement.

Full participation of women in social, economic and political fields and their empowerment is required in order to ensure their honour and independence. Although they have maintained a distance from the seats of power, women are always active, directly or indirectly, in the larger political arena. Although women have a vocal presence in politics, from the grassroots up to the national levels, in reality women’s empowerment is still being questioned. Though the country’s Prime Minister and the main opposition leader are females, elected women members representing the women community are indeed few. Among the elected local government institutions, the Union Parishad (UP) has maintained its traditional presence even today. Some changes have also been brought about in its institutional structure in line with the demands of time. Principal among these is the participation and direct election of females in UP elections.

Women’s representation in the Union Parishads is a vast arena for women’s empowerment. There was no scope for direct election of women as UP members prior to 1997. The female members were then nominated by UP chairmen or upazila officers. Consequently, although they received recognition as nominated members, they could not play any role in giving opinion or making decision in administrative programmes of the Union Parishads. Their only job appeared to be fulfilling the requirement for quorums in various meetings. This aspect was highlighted in various studies on local governance and ultimately took the shape of a movement to establish rights. Various women’s organizations, human rights bodies, socially conscious forums from the grassroots up to the national level raised questions about the roles, position and empowerment of nominated female members of the UP. Two important commissions formed in 1993 and 1996 with the goal of strengthening local government system made strong recommendation for direct election of women members in one-fourths of seats reserved for women. The women members were elected through direct ballots for the first time in 1997, in accordance with the local government act. But even here, there was discrimination. The general members were elected for each ward, but the women members from reserved seats were elected for three wards. In this arrangement, although the sphere of work, involvement, responsibilities of women members increased, there was no change in their salary-allocation, conveyance etc. Through this process, women members elected from three wards were controlled and dominated by the three general members elected from those wards. The female members could not protest many unethical words and deeds of male general members because of their numerical disadvantage, lack of experience in social and political activities and weak economic foundation. As most chairmen were male, they tended to support the male members because of male-oriented mentality or greed for power.

Although the roles of women members were not stipulated in the Union Parishad ordinance of 1983, a list of specific tasks to be performed by women members was drawn up by the government later through various orders and directives. But though initiatives were taken for active participation of women in the council through formation of 12 standing committees and inclusion of women members in those committees, those committees have remained more or less on paper only. Besides, the women members also lagged behind in many respects because of weaknesses in flow of information within the local administration.

Scope for women’s participation becomes limited in the social power structure owing to restrictions imposed on their outdoor movements by prevailing male-dominated morality. Although in some instances, women members are given the opportunity to play the principal role in arbitrations related to women, the pressure of male-oriented mentality can be clearly traced in the decision making process. The signature of women members is compulsory in the final bills of project implementation committees; but many women members are not aware of it. Again, many of the standing committees are not formed as males do not want to see a female member as the chairperson of those committees. As a result, the female members are deprived of enjoying and applying their due rights.

If taking away the rights of citizens through abuse and misapplication of power is a kind of corruption, then it can be said without any hesitation that the women members of Union Parishads fall prey to corruption on a routine basis. The women members of reserved UP seats receive the same honorarium as that of general members, although they represent a larger area compared to the latter. As a result, they face transportation and financial difficulties. They have to incur additional expenses for communicating with the voters, which becomes impossible for many. Consequently, it becomes difficult and even risky for many to maintain close contacts with the population. But these hindrances are often identified as their failures. As a result, the women members have gradually become embittered and disillusioned. Compared to 1997, the participation of women in reserved seats has come down by 12% in the 2003 election.

Good governance is the principal prerequisite for democracy. The base of good governance becomes weak if individual interests are advanced or other people’s rights are curtailed through application of individual or institutional powers. Simultaneously, there is a concomitant rise in unfairness, injustices and discriminations. Extending from the family to the society and state - Good governance entails ensuring a corruption-free humane expanse. It implies establishment of transparency, accountability, participation and rule of law at all levels.

Therefore, in order to establish a strong local government through equitable and just participation of men and women, the active participation of women members must be ensured in the decision making process of local governance. A conducive environment should be created for the proper application of their rights. Above all, the existing ordinance should be thoroughly amended in order to make the roles and responsibilities of women members more specific and clear.

Therefore, let us raise our voice in a chorus alongside the courageous women who have come forward in the local government system, “let women’s empowerment be the basis of human rights”.

Writer : Lovely Yeasmin Jeba and Shahanaz Montaz Bithe, TIB officials.
CULTURAL NEWS

Regular Shows of People’s Theatre

Regular shows of the drama ‘Janatar Shakti’ (People’s Power) produced by CCC Nalitabari People’s Theatre Group was staged on 30 July, 26 and 27 August. There was a huge turnout of spectators in all the shows. The Mymensingh People’s Theatre Group is continuing regular shows of their fifth production ‘Aar Na’ (No More). The Group staged their drama at Boira Union on 4 September in presence of almost 600 people. The CCC Muktagacha People’s Theatre Group is also continuing their people’s theatre programme in order to reinforce awareness against corruption. Regular shows of their drama ‘Akasher Shimana’ (Boundaries of Sky) were staged on 4, 24 July and 23 August. The presence of spectators was quite noticeable in each of the show. The CCC Kishoreganj People’s Theatre Group is holding regular shows of their production ‘Arekta Juddha’ (Another War). They arranged three consecutive shows on 22 July, 5 and 10 August. The theatre activists attempted to make a lucid presentation on the impact of corruption and how to get rid of it in this drama. The inaugural show of the first production of newly formed CCC Pirojpur People’s Theatre Group titled ‘Prottasha’ (Expectation) was staged at local Morshed Smriti Shishu Niketan on 4 September. The CCC convener Professor Sheikh Sayedur Rahman was present as chief guest. The inaugural show of the drama ‘Grash’ (Morsel) produced by the People’s Theatre Group of CCC Jhenidah was held on 6 July. They arranged regular shows of the drama after that. Till now, the drama has been staged 9 times at various locations of Jhenidah. The first production of the CCC Rangpur People’s Theatre ‘Andhar’ (Darkness) is based on the lives of common people in Monga-affected areas of Rangpur. The theatre group is continuing their work on a regular basis as a part of their anti-corruption programme. The drama has already been staged fifteen times.

Production based People’s Theatre Workshops in CCC areas

Chapai Nawabganj: A production-based workshop on people’s theatre was organised by the People’s Theatre Group of CCC-Chapai Nawabganj on 5-9 August. Thirteen theatre activists participated in this workshop held at the local Horticulture Centre auditorium. A technical show of the Group’s first production ‘Ekti Notun Shurer Prottasai’ (In the hope of a new sun) was presented on the concluding day of the workshop.

Brahmanbaria: A production-based theatre workshop organised by CCC Brahmanbaria People’s Theatre Group was held from 12 to 16 September. Held at the local ARD Training Centre, the 5-day long workshop was inaugurated by eminent musician of Brahmanbaria and Bangladesh Ustad Afzalur Rahman Khan. Participated by 15 theatre workers, a technical show of the Group’s first production was staged on the last day of the workshop.

Rajshahi: A production-based theatre workshop organised by the People’s Theatre Group of CCC Rajshahi City was held between 29 August and 2 September at local Barendra Institute. The 5-day long workshop was inaugurated by the convener of CCC Rajshahi City Advocate Ghulam Arief Tipoo. Fourteen theatre workers participated in it, Eminent litterateur Professor Hasan Azizul Haque was present on the concluding day as the chief guest. The first technical show of the group was staged on the day.

Chandpur: A production-based theatre workshop organised by the People’s Theatre Group of CCC Chandpur was held from 19 to 23 August. Held at the local Rotary Bhaban auditorium, the convener of CCC Chandpur Prof. Monohar Ali inaugurated the workshop. Participated by 15 theatre activists, a technical show of the theatre group’s first production was staged on the last day of the workshop.

Jessore: A production-based workshop of the People’s Theatre Group of CCC Jessore was held on 10 to 14 September. Held at the local Jessore Institute Natyakala Sangsad, the workshop was inaugurated by a member of CCC Jessore Dr. Mustafijur Rahman. Fourteen theatre activists participated in the workshop. A technical show of the Group’s first production was staged on the last day of the workshop.

It may be mentioned that certificates were distributed among the theatre activists on the concluding day of each workshop. The officials of TIB’s Advocacy Division’s Towfiqul Islam, Duranta Biplob, Md. Zahidul Islam, Mithun Shahrir and Khandaker Shoheel Rana were in overall-charge of running the workshops.

Palagan and Gambhira

Two shows of traditional Pala song, which is part of local folk culture, were organised by CCC Nalitabari on 12 July and 23 August. The members of the group depicted the people through songs and reasoning the impact of corruption on various service sectors of the government including health, education and local government, their impact on the general populace and means of getting respite from them. There was noticeable presence of spectators in each of the show. Gambhira songs are part of the folk cultural heritage of Chapai Nawabganj. This group is working to raise anti-corruption awareness among the people and encourage them to resist corruption by using this media. The Gambhira group staged a show at TSC auditorium of Dhaka University on 13 September on the concluding day of CitiBank-TIB 6th Inter-University Debate Competition. More than one hundred spectators enjoyed the show. Besides, the group is regularly holding Gambhira shows at various locations of Chapainawabganj.
Vibrant Youths Can Eradicate Corruption

A nationwide anti-corruption movement has to be waged alongside administrative and political initiatives in order to remove the terrible malady called corruption from society and country. Our talented youths can play a leading role in this task. It is only the youth who can curb corruption by generating anti-corruption values in the country. The speakers said this during the ‘CitiBank-TIB Sixth Inter-University Debate Competition 2006’. This competition was held at the TSC auditorium of Dhaka University during 11-13 September with the slogan ‘Durjoy Tarunno Durniti Rukhbe’ (The valiant youths must combat corruption).

Organised through the initiative of Dhaka University Debating Society and joint support of CitiBank N.A. Bangladesh and TIB, students from various public and private universities of the country took part in the deliberations on various issues like corruption, good governance, law, justice, democracy, economy and global politics. Although the debaters presented differing arguments on various issues, they were unanimous on the need for eliminating corruption from Bangladesh for ensuring economic growth and good governance.

The final round of the competition was held following a parliamentary style. The debating team Aparajeyo Bangla of Dhaka University emerged champion by defeating the Rajshahi Medical College debaters in the final round, the topic of contention being ‘Administrative corruption is more dangerous than political criminalisation’. Sabbir Ahmed of the champion team was adjudged the best speaker. On the other hand, Manzur Al Matin of the Law Department, Dhaka University, was selected as the best debater in the individual debate contest on the theme ‘Durjoy Tarunno….’. The Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Professor SMA Faiz was present at the concluding function as the chief guest. Pro Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University AFM Iftikharuzzaman, Citigroup Country Officer-Bangladesh Mamun Rashid, DUDS moderator Prof. ASM Atiqur Rahman and editor of The Daily Samakal Abed Khan. The guests distributed prizes among the winners. A Gambhira team from Chapal Nawabganj presented traditional Gambhira songs at the concluding function.

Al-Amin Raquib, Sobujbag, Patuakhali

Nominate honest and qualified candidates

Our country and its people are today tied up in a horrific web of corruption. The same scene is observed after each election; whichever party goes to power forgets their electoral pledges and becomes concerned about their own future rather than worry about the country’s development and prosperity. And because of this rat race, instead of development, the country becomes a depot of corruption. The countrymen expect from the two major political parties that they would nominate honest and qualified candidates instead of owners of black money in the coming national election.

Al-Amin Raquib, Sobujbag, Patuakhali

Notable Programmes: September-December 2006

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