Transparency and accountability in all spheres of the state needed

Editorial

Bangladesh has achieved much progress in some areas during the past few decades. The position of Bangladesh has improved in the global human development index. The average longevity of our people has increased. Child mortality rate has decreased. Food-grain production has gone up. Newer possibilities have emerged in the field of information technology. But terrorism, corruption and poverty are still major challenges for us. We can confront this challenge only through establishing transparency and accountability.

Good governance is the prerequisite for achieving transparency and accountability at all levels of the state. Corruption in the form of bribery continues to rise in all service-oriented institutions of the state. One-third of the total credit given by the nationalised banks remains unpaid for a long time. There is political involvement in extortion and tender manipulation. People are being abducted one after another for ransom. Innumerable people are dying due to frequent launch disasters. Copying and distribution of fake certificates are spreading in the educational arena. Opportunities for employment are shrinking and unemployment is on the rise. The judiciary is not succeeding in ensuring rule of law. Even its neutrality is in question. The integrity of the lower courts is in serious doubt. Politics is getting more and more violence-prone and unstable. In Parliament, the Treasury and the Opposition are in continual conflict instead of developing a cooperative relationship. Questions are being repeatedly raised regarding the neutrality of the Speaker. The problem of quorum has become a routine matter. Less important issues are getting prominence in parliamentary deliberations. Election pledges are not being implemented properly. No one is seen to be accountable for this deteriorating state of affairs.

Public organisations, including civil society, have not been able to generate sufficient pressure on the political parties and the government for ensuring their accountability. Different quarters complain that many important demands are not getting proper attention of the government which enjoys absolute majority in Parliament. In this age of globalisation confronting the instabilities and uncertainties prevailing in the politics and economy of Bangladesh is a big challenge for us. We need visionary leaders, national consensus and participation of all in our nation-building activities for overcoming terrorism, corruption, poverty and dependency. Unadulterated patriotism is required for achieving these goals. And only through determined and unremitting effort can we ensure transparency and accountability in all strata of the state and build a Bangladesh free of corruption.
The proposed bill on the Independent Anti-corruption Commission lacks the essence of establishing a truly independent and powerful commission. Speakers at a roundtable discussion on 9 September organized by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) at the CIRDAP auditorium in the capital opined that the bill should be passed in parliament after removing its shortcomings and limitations. The roundtable was addressed by leading intellectuals, bureaucrats, civil society representatives, political leaders, lawyers, journalists and members of the civil society.

Chaired by Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, Member of the TIB Trustee Board, former Chief Justice Mostafa Kamal opined that the country would have no need for setting up an anti-corruption commission had the parliamentary system been effective. The public accounts committee is enough to curb corruption. But it is our collective failure that the country has had no effective Parliament since 1935.

Former Chief Justice Mostafa Kamal opined the country would have no need of setting up an anti-corruption commission had the parliamentary system been effective. "The public accounts committee is enough to curb corruption. But it is our collective failure that the country has had no effective Parliament since 1935," he said.

Opposing the TIB suggestion to include the chief justice in the selection committee, Justice Kamal directed his comments toward politicians, saying, "Please do not drag the chief justice into this anymore... the judiciary has already been given a political label through the provision of nominating the chief justice to head the caretaker government. Enough is enough." He added that the chief justice is appointed so that he can head the caretaker administration.

Expressing his utter frustration, the former Chief Justice said that setting up an anti-corruption commission would be useless without cleaning up and overhauling other parts of the administration. "I cannot be optimistic about such a measure that seeks to curb corruption with people who themselves indulge in corrupt practices."

"If we think the members of the proposed commission are angels, then they will have to work with the devils, and one day we will find they are retreating from their position," he said, underscoring the need for overall restructuring of the field level administration, including the police and magistracy. Justice Kamal found many loopholes in the proposed bill to set up the anti-corruption commission.

Renowned lawyer Dr Kamal Hossain noted that nothing about an independent prosecution department has been incorporated in the Anti-Corruption Commission Bill 2003. Citing the example of the Election Commission, which has to depend on the government for funds to run its affairs, he said that the Anti-Corruption Commission would not be able to function properly if it had to depend on the government for funds.

Noted economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said that it was not possible to form an independent anti-corruption commission without a consensus among the political parties. "It is necessary to include an opposition representative in the selection committee to ensure its credibility," he said. He urged the government to consider TIB's proposal in this regard.

Suranjit Sengupta MP said that the present problem of corruption was a political one and it could be solved in a meaningful manner only if the government showed any political will. But the Parliament was not functioning properly. Opposing the idea of making it a constitutional body, Suranjit, an AL lawmaker, said that constitutional bodies like the Public Service Commission and the Election Commission could not work independently. He opined that the people would not accept the commission if there were representations from the opposition party.

The roundtable discussion was participated by three former Advisers to the Caretaker Government: M. Hafiz Uddin Khan, S M Shahjahan and Abdul Muyeed Chowdhury. Muyeed Chowdhury, proposed the inclusion of an opposition representative in the selection committee. He also proposed appointment of the Chief Justice as chairman of the selection committee.

Dr Kazi Kholiquzzaman, President of Bangladesh Economics Association, said that even if the Chief Justice were appointed chairman of the selection committee of the commission, the expected results would not be elicited until the separation of the judiciary was complete.

Renowned economist Dr Atiur Rahman called for separating the judiciary from the executive for the smooth functioning of the proposed commission and said that it should be empowered to investigate corruption in the banking sector and the customs department.

Prof M M Akash of Dhaka University said that recruitment of commissioners by the President from a panel of candidates, as proposed in the draft bill, might not be a fair policy.

Dr Mohabbat Khan of Public Service Commission viewed that political commitment was necessary to include an opposition representative in the selection committee. He also proposed the inclusion of an opposition representative in the selection committee.

TIB Trustee Board said all the recommendations made at the discussion would be conveyed to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Law.

Anticorruption commission should be truly an independent strong body
necessary to eliminate corruption from the country. Again, all governments prefer the corrupt people for appointing to some posts.

Dr. Shahdeen Malik, a noted legal expert, said that the bill is a half backed one and there are specific provisions in the law that makes it a problematic one. He opined that article 27 of the draft bill goes directly against the presumption of innocence of the accused. "Presumption of innocence is a fundamental right of a citizen and the whole foundation of modern justice is built on this idea."

Dr Asif Nazrul said that Section 27 (2) of the bill, which was tabled in the Jatiya Sangsad on July 10, should be dropped as the ruling party could victimize its political opponents by utilizing this section.

Among others who participated in the discussion included former lawmaker Tasmima Hossain, former Comptroller and Auditor General Syed Yusuf Hossain, former Principal Secretary S.A. Samad, journalists Muhammad Jahangir and Muzzamel.

Renowned lawyer Dr Kamal Hossain said Anti-Corruption Commission would not be able to function properly if it will have to depend on the government for funds.

Corruption Database: Loss of Taka 576.58 crore due to 216 incidents of corruption

It has been found from the newspaper-based report 'Corruption Database' of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) that a total of 874 corruption-related reports were published in 21 newspapers between January and June 2003. 216 of these reports had mentioned about financial losses of the government. The amount of losses could be gathered in 216 of these incidents. The financial loss to the government due to these incidents stood at Taka 5 hundred 76 crore 58 lakh 82 thousand 809.

Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid, Chairman TIB and Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, Member of the TIB Board of Trustees presented the report at a press conference held at the National Press Club on 29 September. Abdul Alim, Research Associate and other TIB officials were also present at the occasion.

The police department, as in the past, again topped the list in terms of number of corruption cases, but the taxation department outclassed all in terms of amount of money. 37.3% of the cases involved the administration of direct and indirect taxes. Other than the police (22.4%) and taxation departments, education (12.9%), local government (10.1%) and health and family welfare (6.6%) were also found to be the most corrupt departments. Corruption took place in the forms of abuse of power, embezzlement and bribery.

TI Survey

If citizens had a magic wand the world over, they would most like to eliminate corruption from political parties

Three out of ten respondents singled out political parties as the institution from which they would like to eliminate corruption if they were given a magic wand, according to the Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer, a new survey of the general public in 47 countries on all continents.

Political parties were revealed in 33 of the countries surveyed to be the institution from which citizens would most like to eliminate corruption. This preference was most acutely expressed in Argentina and Japan, where more than half of all respondents picked political parties. The courts were identified by one in seven respondents worldwide, most notably in Peru and Indonesia, where they were unprompted by one in three. The police were singled out by one in nine respondents worldwide, and by one in three in Hong Kong, one in three in Portugal, one in five in South Korea, and one in five selected medical services.

"The people of the world are sending a clear message to political leaders: they have to rebuild the trust of ordinary people," said TI Chairman Peter Eigen. A total of 40,838 people were surveyed in 47 countries in the Voice of the People total of 40,838 people were surveyed in 47 countries in the Voice of the People survey, a general household survey conducted by Gallup International in July 2002. The survey included a series of questions on behalf of Transparency International, specifically the TI Global Corruption Barometer survey. In addition, Transparency International, specifically the TI Global Corruption Barometer survey. In addition, in 1,315 adults were surveyed in the Palestinian Authority by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in April 2003, the results of which are not included in the overall totals.

Muzzamel Jahangir and Muhammad S.A. Samad, journalists Muzzamel Jahangir and Muhammad S.A. Samad, journalists Muzzamel Jahangir and Muhammad S.A. Samad.
To unite people to resolve local problems

Professor Muzaffer Ahmad urged the Union Parishad Chairmen

Noted economist Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, Trustee of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), said the chairmen and the members of Union Parishads can solve the local problems through united efforts.

He was addressing arranged a tea party in honor of the newly elected Chairmen and Members of Nalitabari on 22 June at the Taraganja Pilot High School. TIB and the Nalitabari CCC organized the function.

Professor Muzaffer Ahmad was present as chief guest. He urged the Union Parishad Chairmen and Members to unite people to resolve local problems. "I dreamt of a Bangladesh that would be ruled by 4,484 UP. The UP chairmen and members can also contribute to maintaining law and order, healthcare, education, agriculture, environment and other economic activities" he said.

Chaired by the CCC convenor M A Hakam Hira, those who spoke on the occasion included Upazilla Nirbahi Officer, Nazmul Hasan Khan, Municipality Chairman Abdul Hakim Ukil, Programme Officer of TIB Ekram Hossain, Officer in Charge of Nalitabari Thana Elahi Baksh, Chairmen of Jugania and Poragao Union Parishad Dr. Moazzem Hossain Acha and Sahaz Uddin, CCC member Professor Probhat Chandra Paul.

FROM NEWS PAPER PAGES

Forest officer misuses funds

A forest officer of Bagerhat Sadar circle has been transferred due to allegation of corruption. The order came after a series of accusations against the officer, who is working as an assistant conservator of forest. He seems to have succeeded in having the order cancelled. The allegations include corruption and misuse of financial power and funds for personal benefit and pleasure.

Source: The News Today

Official arrested for defalcation of money

Shahjahan Ali, a booking officer of the Sylhet railway station, was arrested by police after 37 days of his absconding from Sirajganj district on July 19. He was brought to Sylhet on July 20. Railway sources said Shahjahan has embezzled Tk. 66 lakh ticket money and went into hiding.

Shahjahan Ali was discharged from job for his negligence of duties.

Source: The Independent, 22 July 2003

Fake garment factories availing govt benefits

Eleven ready-made garment factories have been detected by the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) that exist only in paper not in reality, and they have been fully exploiting the benefits of the import and export offered by the government to the RMG sector, according to official sources. The BAC suspects that more such garment factories exist and they have also been enjoying the government benefits illegally for a long time.

Source: The New Nation, 24 July 2003
Focus Group Discussion on Advice and Information Centre

Three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held on 1 July at the Mymensingh AIC office and the Local Press Club. Participants at the press club included journalists FGD. Women activists of the area took part in the AIC office FGD. The discussions were arranged to elicit suggestions from the participants for further effectiveness of TIB’s Advice and Information Centre (AIC). Valuable recommendations were made for more and better publicity for the AIC office & identification of the needs of the people the AIC wishes to serve. TIB Research Officer Sydur Rahman Molla was present at the FGD as moderator.

Discussion Meeting at Nalitabari

The Nalitabari CCC officials met with the local education authorities on 18 August. The discussion focused on ways to eradicate irregularities in the primary education sector. The meeting was presided over by Nalitabari Upazila Education Officer Altaf Hossain, CCC Convener M A Hakam Hira, Member Samedul Islam Talukder and Upazila Assistant Education Officer Mizanur Rahman and Saiful Islam. Bureau Inspector Alam, and bank officials Khan Ahsan, M/S Apparel Sources Ltd. its Managing Director Saiful Islam, and others.

4 ex-bank staff gets 8 years in prison

Four former officials of the Chawkbazar branch of the Pubali Bank in the Dhaka city have been sentenced to eight years rigorous imprisonment in a fraud case. A client of the bank was also sent to three years in jail. Mohammed Azizul Haq, judge of the Special Court for Dhaka Division, delivered the verdict 28 July. The court found the five guilty of misappropriating Tk. 14,43,248 from the bank in February 1998. Source: The Daily Star, 28 July 2003

Bribe taker was beaten

Angry officials and employees physically assaulted the District Account Officer of Kishoreganj for his alleged corruption and demonstrated in front of the Deputy Commissioner demanding his immediate dismissal from service. The employees told the DC that Tofail Ahmed Bhuiyan, Account Officer, was wholly corrupt. He used to extort heavy bribes in payment of bills by raising various objections and also harass them in different ways. Source: The Daily Prothom Alo, 30 July 2003

3 bankers among 5 sued for fund embezzlement

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) on 1 August filed 15 case against two businessmen and three officials of Uttara Bank charges of embezzlement of about Tk. 135 million (13.5 core). The accused named in the first information report (FIR) are Abdullah Al Mamun, Chairman of M/S Apparel Sources Ltd. its Managing Director Saiful Alam, and bank officials Khan Alhasan ertazul Islam, Mizanur Rahman and Saiful Islam. Bureau Inspector Harunur Rashid filed the cases alleging that all the accused embezzled Tk. 13,49,35,297 in connivance with each other during the period from June 6, 2001 to December 12, 2002, violating rules and regulations for granting loans. Source: The Daily Manabjamin, 6 August 2003

UN treaty to combat corruption

United Nations has said a treaty to combat corruption worldwide should be ready by autumn following major breakthroughs in negotiations on the return of assets obtained through bribery and embezzlement to the country of origin and on a series of preventive measures. “We are very close to an agreement,” said Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the Vienna-based UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The progress came at the just concluded Sixth Session of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Negotiation of a Convention against Corruption. Source: Press Trust of India 12 Aug 2003

Corruption at DFP

An investigation by the Ministry of Information has opened up the Pandora’s Box of corruption at the Department of Film and Publication (DFP) where some officials have been found involved in swindling the public coffers out of thousands by producing fake bills, manipulating tender and resorting to other illegal activities. These corrupt officials have drawn over Tk 18 lakh in bills against four documentaries and three video films without actually making those, one of the finds reveals. Source: The Daily Sangbad 8 August 2003
Officer Merajuddin spoke at the meeting. The meeting was held at Garkanda Government Primary School. Over 100 headmasters and teachers of primary schools, CCC members, and Assistant Education Officers were present in the meeting.

Workshop at Jamalpur The Jamalpur CCC and TIB organized a workshop on 'the Role of the Citizens for Establishing Transparency and Accountability at the Local Level' on 25 June at the Jamalpur Regional Agricultural Research training centre. Adv. Mohammad Nazrul Islam (Dulu), convenor of CCC Jamalpur presided over the workshop. Around 50 representatives from various professions were present at the workshop.

Programme Specialist of TIB Abu Zayed Mohammad was the facilitator of the workshop.

People's play 'Lal Sabujer Deshe' staged The play 'Lal Sabujer Deshe (The Land of Red and Green) was performed on 25 June at Shambuganj bazar of Mymensing. An audience of around seven hundred enjoyed the show.

Workshop on production-based peoples' theatre The Committee of Concerned Citizens of Nalitabari has formed a people's theatre group in order to generate awareness about and against corruption at the grassroots level. It held a 10-day-long workshop, TIB's second production-based people's theatre from 21 to 30 July 2003. The play is called tran (Relief). The workshop also carried out trainings on theatre games, speeches, voice projection, meditation, choreography, improvisation, character building and acting. 22 young local participants attended the workshop.

Upazilla Nirbahi Officer of Nalitabari Nazmul Hasan Khan inaugurated the workshop. Among others CCC Convener of Nalitabari M A Hakam Hira, Convenor of the peoples' theatre sub-committee Muhfuzur Rahman, and CCC member, Samedul Islam Talukder were also present. The play Tran was staged on the Taraganj High School Auditorium on 31 July. About a thousand local people enjoyed the per-
The main instructor of the workshop and scriptwriter as well as director of the play was dramatist Jewel Kabir Akash. TIB’s Theatre Coordinator Kamal Hossain Mintu provided extensive assistance in organizing the workshop.

Peoples Theatre play 'Relief' staged Two performances of the peoples theatre play Relief were performed on 27 August at Fakirpara Primary School premises and at Rabardem Bazar of Nalitabari. Staged by the Nalitabari People’s Theatre Group of TIB, this play depicted the irregularities, mismanagement and corruption in relief distribution in the country. An audience of around eight hundred spectators enjoyed the two shows.

Orientation and discussion meeting of study circle TIB has formed six-study circle with the objective of nursing democratic practice at the local level, curbing corruption, ensuring transparency and accountability. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is giving technical and financial support for this initiative. Initially, TIB has embarked upon a 6-month pilot programme at Nalitabari Upazilla of Sherpur and Madhupur Upazilla of Tangail. The subjects are transparency and accountability in primary education and primary health care. Two orientation ceremonies were held on 4 July at Poragaon and Baghber Unions of Nalitabari. Representatives from various classes were present at the programmes. The Convenor of Nalitabari CCC M A Hakam Hira presided over the ceremonies. Two other orientation ceremonies were held on 5 and 6 July at Jalsatra and Dhanbари Unions of Madhupur. The Convenor of Madhupur CCC Professor Golam Samdani presided over these programmes.

A training programme was arranged for the Facilitators and Organizers of the Study Circle project to give them a clear idea about the issues. Twelve

In order to improve the standard of healthcare and overall management of the hospitals and health centers the five CCCs organized around forty Focus Group Discussions. The FGDs were held at different places of greater Mymensingh from 13 to 27 August. Representative from various professions were present. The participants pointed out many irregularities in hospital management and made subsequent recommendations for reform. Maltreatment of the patients, scarcity of medicine, negligence of nurses and doctors towards the patients, uncleanness of the wards, beds and toilets, lack of pure drinking water and food, bribery in order to get treatment-all these were discussed.

Kishoreganj: The Kishoreganj CCC organized eight Focus Group Discussions at different places of the sadar upazilla from 13 to 27 August. CCC member and Convenor of Advocacy Activities of Health Service Advocate Saiful Hoque Molla (Dulu) was present at the FGDs. Field Organizer of TIB Rafiquil Islam acted as moderator.

Mymensingh: Eight FGDs were also held from 14 to 27 August at different places of Mymensingh. 15 patients per FGD, who had received service from Mymensingh Medical College Hospitals within the last one year, were present in the group discussions. CCC member Sharifuzzaman Parag was present at the FGDs as moderator.

Muktagacha: The Muktagacha CCC organized eight FGDs from 14 to 26 August with the goal of improving the quality of health-care services of their upazilla. Important recommendations were made at the FGDs. Field Organizer of TIB Akhi Kunda acted as moderator.

Madhupur: Eight similar FGDs were held at different places in Madhupur from 17 to 25 August. TIB Programme Officer Ekram Hossain and CCC members Dr. Mir Forhadul Alam (Moni) and Sre Coomer Guha Neogi were present at the FGDs as moderators.

Jamalpur: The Jamalpur CCC organized eight FGDs at different places of sadar upazilla from 30 July to 20 August. CCC members Md. Hasanur Rahman Khan and Adv. Shameem Ara Begum were present at the FGDs as moderators.

Subject: Quality of health service
participants attended the programme held at Proshika Regional Human Resource Development Center, Mymensining between 9 and 11 July 2003. Programme Specialist of TIB Abu Zayed Mohammed, Research Director of NDI Abdul Momen and Programme Associate of TIB Samapika Halder took part as instructors.

Press Conference National Democratic Institute organized a press conference on study circle on August 13 at National Press Club. Representatives of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), Democracywatch, Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP) and Association for Environment And human Resource Development (AFEAHRD) were present. Four local NGOs have involved over 400 citizens many at the grassroots level in 35 study circles. James V Oliver, Director of Democracywatch and Chairperson of Bangladesh Study Circle Steering Committee, Dr. Shanaj Karim, Senior Research Officer of TIB, Dr. MA Bari President of AFEAHRD, Mohammad Nasiruddin Ahmed, Executive Director of GUP spoke at the press conference.

Meeting on Primary Education The study circles organized twenty meetings on Transparency and Accountability in Primary Education at Nalitabari of Sherpur and Madhupur of Tangail on 16-28 July. Researcher of National Democratic Institute (NDI) (NDI) Zahid Hasan, Convenor of Nalitabari CCC M A Hakam Hira, Convenor of Madhupur CCC Professor Golam Samdani, Programme Associate of TIB and Coordinator of study circles Samapika Halder were present during the discussions.

Letters

Anti-corruption commission

It is always refreshing to read TIB newsletter. The editorials are important and sensitive to the socio political situation in our country. I extend my thanks for the editorial published of June 2003 regarding the strengthening of Anti-corruption commission. The demand for an independent, neutral and effective anti-corruption commission for curbing the all-pervasive corruption in the country is a long-standing one. TIB has been striving hard to propagate the justifications for this demand and to bring it to the notice of the government.

Aion

South Rayerbag, Dhaka

Wanted Corruption-free Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been ranked the most corrupt nation in the world for three consecutive times. It is a matter of great shame. It is clear from her speeches that the Prime Minister is very concerned about the image of the country. Curbing corruption should be given the first priority if the image of the country is to be salvaged. If this can be done, then terrorism, financial irregularities, poverty would all diminish. We want a corruption-free Bangladesh.

Alauddin Swapan

Shaheed Shahidullah Kaiser Sarak, Feni

Nurjahan Murshid passes away

Nurjahan Murshid, renowned leader of women renaissance of Bengal and one of the major organisers of the War of Liberation, passed away on 1 September in a city hospital. She was 79. She was suffering from prolonged Diabetes. Mrs Murshid was buried at Banani graveyard. David Nussbaum, Managing Director of Transparency International, Members of the TIB Board of Trustees and its employees expressed their deep shock over the death of Nurjahan Murshid, wife of TIB’s Chairman Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid. Leaders of different socio-political organizations including Leader of the Opposition and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina condoled the death of Begum Nurjahan Murshid.

Born on May 19, 1924, in Taranagar of Murshidabad district, Nurjahan Murshid had schooling in Barisal and Calcutta before she did her master's from Calcutta University. Her appointment as headmistress of Syedunnessa Girls’ High School in Barisal in 1946 marked the beginning of a distinguished career in women’s education that took her to different educational institutions including Kamrunnessa School, Vairunnisa Noon School, Holy Cross College and Dhaka University.

Before partition of the subcontinent, she joined All India Radio as a broadcaster and the first female officer, and continued in the same post in Radio Pakistan following partition. Her active participation in politics saw her elected as a female lawmaker on United Front ticket in the 1954 parliamentary elections in the then Pakistan. In 1970, she was again elected to parliament from Awami League.

Married to Khan Sarwar Murshid in 1948, Nurjahan Murshid along with her husband made significant contribution to the cause of Liberation War. She met with the then Indian president VV Giri and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for the recognition of Bangladesh. To that effect, she also delivered a speech in both Houses of the Indian parliament prompting the Pakistan military junta to sentence her to 14 years in prison in absentia and confiscate all her properties.

In 1972, she joined Bangabandhu’s cabinet as state minister for health and social welfare and was elected member of the country’s first elected parliament in 1973. She left behind her husband, two sons, two daughters and many admirers to mourn her death.