

Research Study

Corruption, COVID-19 and the cost of education: In-depth analysis and pathways to recovery



Dhaka, 29 September 2021: Despite commendable government initiatives for education, the persisting problems, irregularities and corruption in the sector are demonstrated in a wide range of research data, expert observations and news reports. As educational institutions reopened after a 543-day hiatus, one of the most prolonged COVID 19-induced school closures globally, Bangladesh is witnessing first-hand what the lack of technically qualified workforce, financial misappropriation and lack of accountability can do to a country's literacy infrastructure.

The troubling picture becomes more apparent in TIB's research report titled 'Secondary Education Programme: Governance Challenges and Way Out', released on 29 September 2021 through a webinar. The research focused on transparency, accountability, irregularities, corruption and other challenges that impact the education sector. It shows how certain shortcomings in the system have a ripple effect on students, teachers, and the quality of education. Data for this research was collected from May to October 2019, and information compilation, analysis, and documentation were done from indirect sources until August 2021.

Legal and Policy Crisis

Despite repeated overhauling drives in the sector and efforts to form a comprehensive Education Act by combining all laws, regulations and orders, the much-awaited Act remains a pipedream, the draft of which has been sitting in the bureaucratic maze for almost ten years. Moreover, the promised permanent National Education Commission has not been initiated, directly impacting the education infrastructure by restraining teachers' salaries, training, and overall accountability in public and private institutions.

While speaking at the press meet, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Policy and regulation are not prioritised in the sector, and there is a persistent lack of capacity. It has been 11 years since the National Education Policy was formulated, but very little progress."

Lack of Standardised Evaluation and Training Impacting Proper Learning

As the system lacks a standardised evaluation protocol, there are deficiencies in

understanding what the students are learning in classrooms, which impedes policymakers from establishing research-backed educational infrastructures. In addition, according to a

Teacher-Student Ratio in Secondary Classrooms

45:1

BANBEIS Report 2018



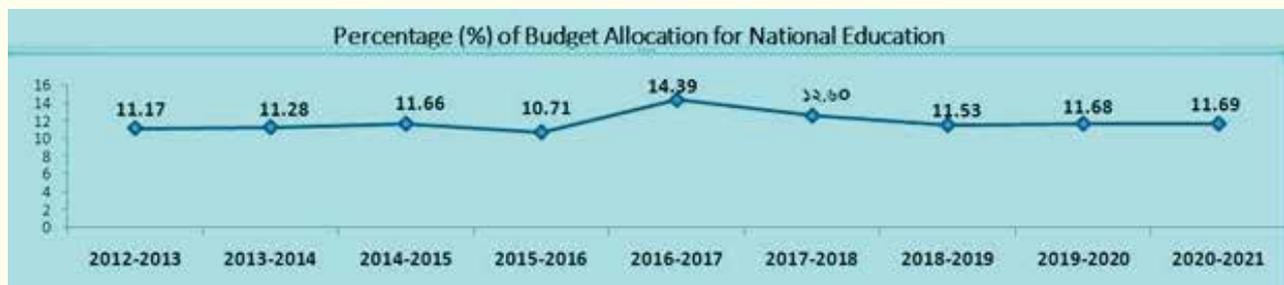
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Government planned to implement by 2018

2018 report by the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), the teacher-student ratio could not be brought down as per government expectations.

Inadequate Budget and Corruption Leading to Underpaid Teachers

UNESCO suggests allocating 20 percent of the annual budget to the education sector, but it has ranged between 10 and 12 percent in Bangladesh for the last decade. The deficit



has had a ripple effect on teachers' salaries, appointment processes and retirement benefits, which prevent educated young professionals from pursuing careers in the sector.

The Monthly Pay Order (MPO) scheme, which is the government's contribution to non-government school payroll, has been plagued by a lack of finances, corruption and political influence in workforce hiring. There is evidence of unqualified people being enlisted for the payroll by providing fake academic, computer literacy and teachers' registration certificates. Corruption and lack of proper evaluation have also impacted qualified teachers' promotions and benefits. "The benefits for teachers and promotion opportunities are minimal. Compared to other sectors, the pay scale and incentives are lesser. As a result, the possibility of advancing the secondary education sector is very narrow," commented Dr. Iftekharuzzaman.

Information Mismanagement and Lack of Accountability Prevail

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education lacks institutional capabilities in information management. As a result, monitoring and evaluation, inspection drives,

transfers, certifications, procurements, infrastructure developments and school committees are affected by unchecked corruption and irregularities. The 54 educational institutions surveyed had faced no inspections or audits for three years to 13 years, yet they were reported to be inspected by the directorate. The recruitment process also faces massive irregularities as School Management Committees are influenced and run by political affiliates and mired in nepotism and bribery.

“The E-GP procurement is gaining traction in public spending but it is not implemented as much in the education sector, as a result irregularities and corruption prevail. The level of corruption in teacher recruitment, transfers, MPO enrolment and course approvals is worrying as it is a massive barrier to establishing a knowledge-based society. We believe that the government and relevant stakeholders should take effective steps to eradicate the gaps in good governance in secondary education.”

**-Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director
Transparency International Bangladesh**

TIB provided 20 recommendations for overcoming the challenges in the education sector. The effective implementation of the Education Policy 2010 and increasing budget allocations as per UNESCO guidelines are most prominent. The full report can be viewed here-

<https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/beta3/index.php/en/research-policy/92-diagnostic-study/6337-2021-09-29-04-02-54>

Policy Stance
**Proposed Personal Data Protection Bill could curtail
freedom of expression: TIB**

Dhaka, 16 September 2021: Expressing concern over the possible misuse of the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) said, there is a fear that it might be used as a tool to control dissents and hinder people's freedom of expression in the name of protecting personal information.

Therefore, in a statement, TIB called upon the government to take the view of all the stakeholders into account while formulating a timely and people-friendly act in a transparent manner so that none can misuse the law to create a fearful atmosphere for freedom of expression.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman stated, "In keeping pace with the growing importance of digital space in private life, similar laws have been enacted in many countries around the world, including the European Union, to protect the personal information provided on these platforms. In most cases, the main purpose of the law is to ensure the privacy of people's personal information, as well as to ensure that individuals feel safe in the virtual world. But in our case, the disappointing but true fact is that the laws that have already been enacted by using the words 'security' and 'protection' have largely proved to be repressive."

He called upon the government to make the draft Personal Data Protection Bill available on its website so that the people could give their opinions.

According to the statement, to look after the information of the people, there will be an agency named Digital Security Agency with a government official as its Director-General in the proposed bill. There will be no provision to challenge their activities. Also, satirically, the bill will include a clause that an aggrieved person can't seek justice or redress at court against them.

Terming all these as 'undemocratic' and unconstitutional, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman called upon the government to form a separate and independent commission to help an aggrieved person seek justice in case of privacy violation.

DGHS recruitment process cancellation not enough, requires investigation on corruption: TIB

Dhaka, 12 September 2021: TIB expresses concern over the cancellation of the DGHS manpower recruitment process on the ground of “ambiguity in the written exam papers” almost six months after the allegation of massive bribery and irregularities surfaced in the media.

There were allegations of large-scale bribery during the recruitment process of more than 2,500 medical technologists, technicians and cardiographers under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). Two members of the recruitment committee formed by the health ministry complained that a section of the candidates bribed Tk 1.5 to 2 million each to get passed in the written exam.

Finally, the health ministry axed that controversial recruitment. The health services division cancelled the recruitment process through a notification issued citing 'ambiguity in the written exam papers'. At the same time, the director-general of the DGHS was asked to issue a new circular for the recruitment in those posts within a short time, according to a letter signed by Anjuman Ara, the deputy secretary of the health services division.

In a statement issued today, TIB demanded an impartial inquiry into the allegations and stern punishment for those responsible for bribery and corruption.

In the statement, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “Mentioning of ‘ambiguity in the written exam papers’ in the recruitment cancellation notice does not clarify whether any corruption took place at all. Even if it happened, who were responsible for it and what should have been their punishment? – if these issues remain unresolved.” He said that right after the allegation of irregularities in the recruitment process against high ranking officials of DGHS, there should have been an action or investigation instead of only recruitment process cancellation.

“We fear that the cancellation of the recruitment process is an attempt only to keep the incident of irregularities under the carpet. This actually helped the unscrupulous syndicate to remain scot-free. At the same time, the suspicion of collusion of the so-called 'upper house' with this syndicate is also turning believable,” criticised Dr. Zaman.

Fraudulent police recruitment in N'ganj breaches trust in law enforcement, needs investigation: TIB

Dhaka, 19 September 2021: The recruitment of police constables in Narayanganj through massive fraud and possible bribery has created a risk to jeopardise the trust to the law enforcement agency, said TIB.

Terming it 'unforgivable' and 'heinous crime', TIB in a statement today called for an impartial, fair and thorough investigation into all those involved, including high-ranking officials, in this heinous crime that occurred two years ago.

In the statement, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said that according to an investigation published in the media, there were allegations of submitting fake and forged documents against at least 18 constables recruited to the Narayanganj Police under district quota in 2019. An investigation of Police Headquarter found evidence against them in 2020.

He further said five different people submitted land deeds with the same registration number to prove they are local residents. At least 11 people submitted land deeds registered under the same mouja, daag and khatian with the same CS, SA and RS numbers 23 days after the publication of the recruitment notice, which is totally "impossible and unbelievable".

"However, the authorities responsible for the screening either completely avoided the issue or secretly gave a positive report, which is not possible without the direct involvement of the higher authorities," doubted Dr. Zaman.

As per the media report, at least two sub-inspectors in charge of verification reported the matter to the then top district police officer who had directed them to submit a positive report considering the "humanitarian aspect".

"After submitting fake and forged documents in the police service, none holds the legal or moral right to be recruited on 'humanitarian ground'. Therefore, there should be an impartial and independent investigation on the allegation of the police superintendent. At the same time, it is necessary to check whether there was any illegal money transaction in this recruitment," said Dr. Zaman.

Observance

Int'l Democracy Day: Achieving democratic excellence requires political & institutional integrity, says TIB

Dhaka, 14 September 2021: Even after 50 years of independence, Bangladesh is yet to reach a satisfactory level in its democratic journey, is really disappointing, said Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB).

This disappointment is over the political culture, the right to vote in a transparent electoral system, and establishing strong national institutions of international standards to protect the legal and social rights of citizens, said the graft watchdog in a statement marking the International Democracy Day 2021 on 15 September 2021, while calling for political and institutional integrity to reach democratic excellence.

In the statement, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Bangladesh's progress in the recently released Global Democracy Index, positioned at 76th, advancing four steps is a temporary relief, but it is not satisfactory at all, because, with a score of 5.99, we are still in the "hybrid regime" category of the index, which cannot be called a full-fledged democracy."

He said, this score is not only due to the fact that democratic practices have not fully developed in the political structure of the country. It is because of the structural and ideological weakness of the institutions concerned, including the Election Commission (EC).

Criticising EC for its failure to play its strong role, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "The strength of a country's democratic system depends on the country's electoral system and parliamentary functions. But for the past several years, our EC has been content with just holding elections as part of its routine responsibilities. They are not concerned about whether the vote is participatory, fair, and neutral."

Shedding light on the present scenario of the country, he said, "The right to fearless, free, and independent expression is still being curtailed by various laws and policies that hinder democratic progress. Criticism of the media and the public, as well as the right to speak freely against state arbitrariness, are being curtailed by various preventive laws, including the Digital Security Act, which is playing a negative role in ensuring integrity in all cases." By immediately removing these barriers, political and institutional integrity must be ensured in all areas to ensure the democratic rights of the people, which is an election promise of the ruling political party, Dr. Zaman concluded.

International Day for Universal Access to Information 2021: September resonates with proactive disclosure of information and its accessibility

Access to information is an integral part of advocating and enabling stable governance and accountability mechanisms in any state. Bangladesh's RTI Act, 2009 preamble endorses that the right to information is an essential part of freedom of speech, conscience, and thought; guaranteed as fundamental rights in the constitution. The SDG target 16.10 also campaigns for global access to information and demands state recognition and support for this important human right statute.

Upholding the idea that access to information is also the groundwork for any functional democracy; Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has been celebrating the 28th of September as the International Day for Universal Access to Information since 2006, and has played a pivotal role in advocating, rethinking and catalysing the right and access to information as a state supported instrument.

TIB celebrated the right to information throughout the month of September, mostly via Zoom platforms considering the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic. A series of programmes, including the organisation's first ever policy contest, worked to create awareness and build capacity among people and stakeholders regarding the right to information and RTI Act-2009. The theme of this year was **"The Right to Know: Building Back Better with Access to Information"**.

-The issue of right and access to information was first raised in 2002 in Bulgaria, and the first international recognition came in 2015 by UNESCO. Back in 2019, the UN declared the 28th of September as the International Day for Universal Access to Information.

The month-long programmes included a two-day long training workshop of Designated Officers (DO), a one-day long workshop on RTI for indigenous youths and TIB YES members, RTI policy contest, cartoon launch on RTI and CCCs' country-wide engagement to celebrate the day. Each workshop was designed with a question-answer session, group work and workshop evaluation with everyone's active participation.

DO training

TIB and Information Commission on 13-14 September jointly organised the two-day long training workshop titled "The Role of the Designated Officers in the Effective Implementation of RTI-2009" to upscale stakeholders' awareness and capacity on the effective implementation of the RTI Act. Twenty-nine DOs from different government institutions under Rajshahi division participated.

The Chief Information Commissioner Martuza Ahmed and TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman participated in the discussions at the inauguration of the training workshop. Information Commissioner Suraiya Begum conducted a session on the first day on RTI Act 2009, and MRDI Executive Director Hasibur Rahman conducted his session on the responsibilities of the DOs on the second day.

Speaking as the chief guest, Chief Information Commissioner Martuza Ahmed said, “DOs help build a bridge between the authorities and the people and thus, they contribute to upholding democracy by ensuring the free flow of information.”



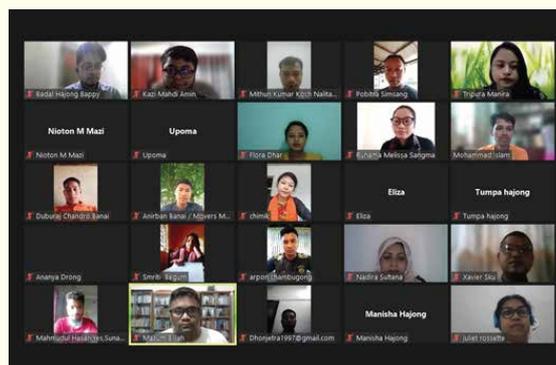
He also emphasised on disclosing information proactively, uploading organised information on the websites, and acquiring proper knowledge of the RTI Act, 2009.

In his welcome speech, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “The RTI Act is a big achievement, however, its implementation is a big challenge as well since the culture of secrecy still exists.”

“Honourable Prime Minister termed the Act as innovative, whereas, implementation of this Act will contribute to ensuring good governance as well as protect corruption. The non-government organisations, along with the government, are trying to carry the Act forward but this is still not enough. The designated officers are the ones who can make the Act’s application more successful,” he added.

RTI training for indigenous youths and YES members

On September 22, 2021, TIB with the joint effort of Indigenous Peoples Development Service (IPDS) organised another workshop on the right to information where 40 youths from indigenous communities and TIB YES groups participated to build capacity and grow awareness on the topic and its field-level implementation. IPDS president Sanjeeb Drong and TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman spoke at the event.



In his welcome speech, Sanjeeb Drong said, “Keeping someone away from information is paramount to corruption. Keeping the hill people away from their rights is paramount to corruption as well. The state needs to be more inclusive. If indigenous people like Munda, Khumi, Pankho, Lusai, Garo, Chakma can live peacefully, then the state will be peaceful as well.”

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “The RTI Act is different from any other existing Act in the country. Usually, Acts are formulated to keep everything accountable to the government, but the RTI Act is a tool for the people to make the government accountable.”

RTI policy contest

With the participation of public and private university students from 48 educational institutions of the country, the first round of the RTI policy contest was held on September 19, 2021. At the outset of the contest a workshop was arranged to orient the participants about the contest. . The participants presented their papers at the final round on September 28, 2021. Receiving the results from the five judges TIB Executive Director announced “Team Plugged In”, as the winner, a team of two Dhaka University IER students Shariar Pranto and Iffat Haque.

Policy proposal for effective enforcement of RTI Act 2009

Editor, Doinik Ajker Patrika and Former Chief Information Commissioner Dr. Golam



Rahman, CPD Executive Director Dr. Fahmida Khatun, DU Associate Professor Dr. Asif Shahan, MRDI Executive Director Hasibur Rahman, and Research Initiative Bangladesh Assistant Director Ruhi Naz were the members of panel of judges.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Golam Rahman said, “Among 1100 Acts in the country, people can use the RTI Act directly to hold the government accountable. Therefore, the state must inform people more in this regard. Proactive disclosure of information must get more priority also.”

Cartoon launching

On same the day, a cartoon on RTI was launched in congruence with the theme of the day. The cartoon depicted how access to information is integral part to the fight against corruption and how people can empower themselves with the RTI Act to ensure strong governance and transparency.



CCC News

CCC and YES groups observe the day with active RTI enforcement

Meanwhile, with much exuberance, Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) in association with district administration observed the day across the country to create awareness on the RTI Act within communities. CCCs with the support of YES, Swajan, YES Friends groups organised different programmes including webinars, discussion meetings, rallies, orientation events, and RTI campaigns.

In addition, 45 CCCs conducted a web portal study to observe the status of government offices' web portals on the eve of the day. In September 2021, a total of 8,222 districts and upazila level government offices' web portals were observed by the YES and YES Friends members of respective CCCs and the findings were shared with respective authorities accordingly.

Civic Engagement: RtK Day Observation at a Glance				
Major Events	No of Events	No. of participants (Approx.)		
		Male	Female	Total
Webinar/Discussion Meeting	43	1,964	770	2,732
RTI Orientation	6	118	98	216
Rally	3	159	73	231
RTI Campaigns	30	2,675	1,083	3,755

CCCs observe RtK Day to popularize the RTI Act, 2009 Speakers emphasize keeping the web portals up to date

With an aim to popularize the Right to Information Act, 2009, the Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) observed the Right to Know Day on 28 September 2021 jointly with the district and Upazila administrations. Considering the COVID 19 context and health safety, few CCCs emphasised arranging in-person events on a limited scale and other CCCs organised events online to popularize the RTI Act, 2009 this year. Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Inspector General of Bangladesh Police from respective ranges, Deputy Commissioners (DC) of respective districts, ADCs, Upazila Nirbahi Officers, locally elected representatives were present or connected in these events.



As a part of marking the RtK Day, CCCs conducted a study on web portals of the government institutions of 45 areas and conducted advocacy with a set of recommendations with the respective authorities to keep the web portals up to date. Besides this, online training sessions were arranged on the RTI Act, 2009 by CCC's initiatives in which a large number of Youth Engagement and Support (YES) & YES Friends members and local students participated.

Speakers in a webinar

Engaging youth can make climate finance projects fruitful

Climate change issue should be considered as an alarming issue as it has negative impacts on the young generation. It is linked with building up a good future of a nation. The responsible authorities should ensure good governance in climate financing considering national well-being. Youth can play an exemplary role in this process. Dr. Iftekaruzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) said this in a webinar held on 20 September 2021. A number of 11 Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) of Khulna region organised this webinar jointly titled 'Challenges of Climate Finance Governance and Responsibilities of Youth'.

President of CCC, Bagerhat Professor Chowdhury Abdur Rab presided over the event while Dr. Dilip Dutta, Professor of Environmental Science from Khulna University, Md. Emdadul Haque, Deputy Director of the Department of Environment, Khulna, Md. Muntasir Rahman, Assistant Biochemist of the Department of Environment, Barisal and Ferhana Ferdous, Director of Civic Engagement division of TIB discussed various issues as key discussants in this event. Newazul Moula, Research Fellow of TIB, presented the key issues of the discussion.



Authorities to ensure health service despite limitations

Respective authorities are trying to ensure the delivery of health services despite different limitations. Citizens trust the local level health authorities for getting their health services properly, Dr. Mohammad Wahiduzzaman, Superintendent of 250 Bedded District Sadar Hospital, Brahmanbaria made this comment as chief guest in an opinion sharing meeting with CCC held on 08 September 2021. Dr. Mohammad Ekram Ullah, Civil Surgeon of Brahmanbaria presided over the online meeting titled 'Challenges and Way Forward of the Health Sector during Coronavirus Pandemic'. CCC, Brahmanbaria organised the meeting.

Civil Surgeon informed in the meeting that an RTPCR Lab will start its services soon in Brahmanbaria. Ferhana Ferdous, Director - Civic Engagement from Transparency International Bangladesh said, it is important to ensure awareness of citizens about their roles and responsibilities to get proper health services.



Emphasis to increase delivery of services through online during Coronavirus pandemic

Speakers in an event asked union parishad authorities to increase the delivery of services through online platforms during the Coronavirus pandemic. They argued that union parishads are the nearest service delivery institution to local citizens. That is why it is needed to increase online services for its citizens during this pandemic.

Speakers emphasised this in an online discussion meeting titled 'Developed Services of Local Government Institutions: Expectations, Challenges and Way Forward' held on 13 September 2021 organised by Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Lalmonirhat.

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