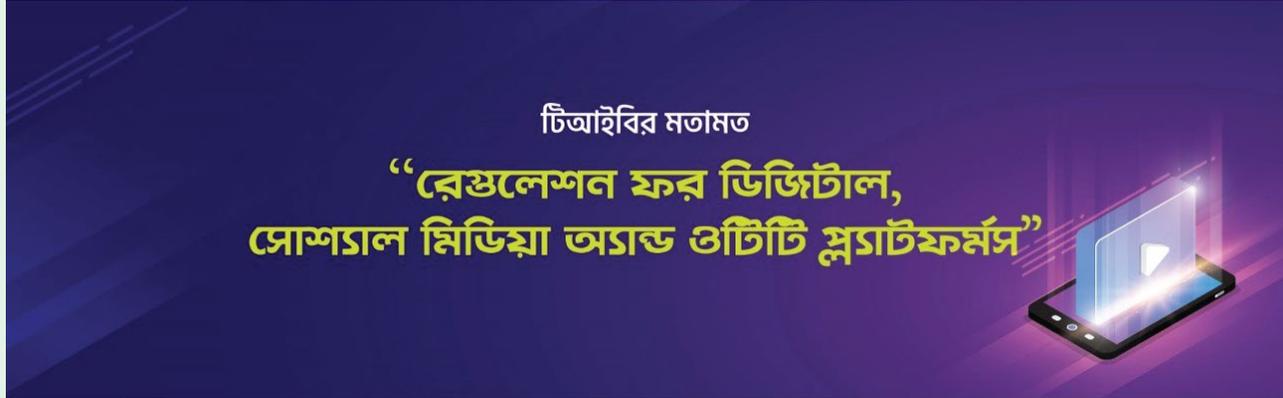


'Regulation of Digital Platforms' Policy (draft) Can Potentially Make Bangladesh a Surveillance State and Restrain Freedom of Speech: TIB



Dhaka, 3 April 2022: There are scopes for the misuse and misinterpretation of some sections in the draft policy on the Regulation of Digital, Social Media, and OTT platforms drafted by the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC). Some sections in the policy can be used to gag the freedom of expression and make Bangladesh a surveillance state. This will also put journalists, dissidents, and rights activists at risk and compel the service providers or intermediaries to practice self-censorship.

Terming the draft policy of BTRC as unconstitutional and a threat to privacy, TIB expressed its stance on Sunday at a virtual press conference.

At the press conference, TIB raised its recommendations and concerns regarding 12 sections of the policy (Section-1, 3, 4, 5, 6.02, 7.02, 6.01 (d), 7.03, 10, 12, 7, and 9).

The anti-graft watchdog said the regulation has the potential to substantially undermine freedom of expression and right to privacy, intensify surveillance efforts of the government, prompt a fragmentation of the internet, and compel intermediaries to comply with takedown requests or face draconian criminal penalties (such as fine and imprisonment), as well as the prospects of cancellation of registration or having their services blocked in Bangladesh, which poses significant business continuity risks.

BTRC's regulation is copied substantially (about 80-85%) from the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. Currently, the draft includes provisions on traceability, the appointment of resident officers, criminal liabilities on employees of intermediaries, local presence and registration requirements, content takedown regime, and censorship of speech. However, there are no intermediary liability (or "safe harbour") protections fundamental to the internet's growth and innovation as an open and secure medium of communication and commerce.

Additionally, another similar policy prepared by the Ministry of Information and

Broadcasting (MoIB) appears to be inconsistent with the regulation prepared by the BTRC. It is unclear how the policy and the regulation will interact with one another. It is equally unclear how the policy and the regulation will apply to companies that provide both curated and user-generated content and which government authority – BTRC or MoIB – will exercise jurisdiction over such companies. In a predictable and transparent regime, there should be one instrument and one nodal authority regulating service providers using the internet as a delivery medium to avoid conflict of laws.

Speaking at the virtual press conference, TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftexharuzzaman said, “BTRC has the authority to regulate sensitive/controversial content. The main objective of the policy should be that. But our fundamental rights to freedom of expression and secrecy must also be protected. The policy only talks about regulation but does not mention any steps to enable an atmosphere where constitutional rights are protected. The legal sections lack proper definitions of many things, and the authority can misuse this to target individuals, which will bring in multifaceted problems for people.”

TIB Executive Director also pointed out the draft policy’s mandate to breach end-to-end encryption of messaging services, which will invade privacy for individuals. Bangladesh will turn into a surveillance state if the draft policy is enacted. “Bangladesh had a lot of potential in the Digital Bangladesh drive, and this draft policy goes against such progress. We urge the government to learn from the best practices and reshape the draft policy.”

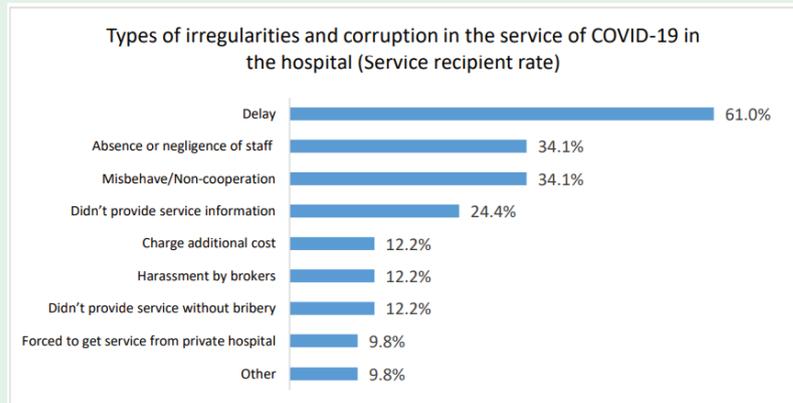
Service recipients face additional costs and discrimination at hospitals during the pandemic: TIB



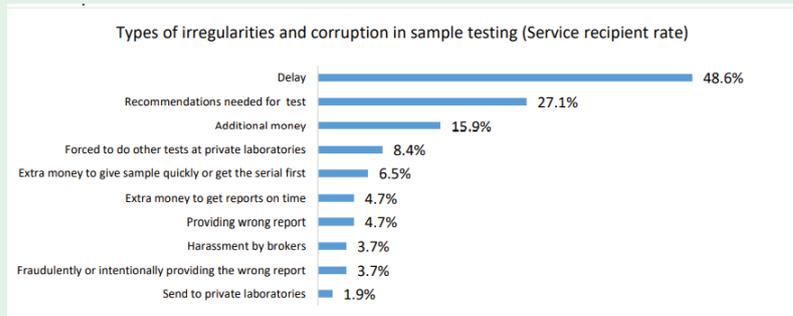
Dhaka, 12 April 2022: While receiving treatment at government and private hospitals during the COVID 19 pandemic, 22.2 percent of service recipients were the victims of different irregularities and corruption, including the payment of additional charges, negligence from medical personnel, service delay, and non-cooperation.

In a study titled ‘Governance Challenges in Tackling COVID-19 Crisis: Inclusion and Transparency’, TIB revealed the findings on Tuesday at a virtual press conference. This is the fourth consecutive research report on the governance and challenges during the pandemic.

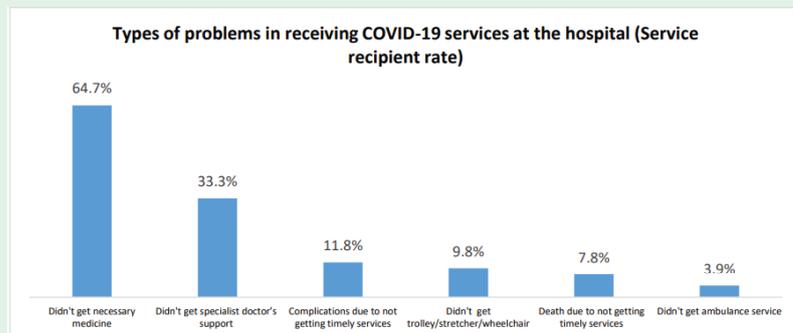
Highlighting the irregularities in receiving hospital services, the study said that 12.2 percent of service recipients paid additional charges ranging from BDT 400 to 10,000 at government hospitals. Besides, 61 percent of service recipients received delayed treatment, while 34 percent faced misbehaviour or non-cooperation from the hospital staff.



The study said service recipients had to pay an additional BDT 116 to 642 at government hospitals and BDT 4,425 at private hospitals on average for a sample test. In some cases, private hospitals compelled them to run additional tests.



TIB conducted a mixed-method study between August 2021 to March 2022. Experience surveys of 1,850 service recipients from 44 districts over the phone; exit poll surveys of 4,015 vaccine recipients at 105 vaccine centres in 43 districts; phone survey of 425 cottage, small and medium entrepreneurs; interviews of 671 people from 48 marginalised communities in 43 districts; interviews of public health experts, and journalists; and the information and reports published on the websites of various government, non-government offices and the media (print and electronic) were used in the survey.



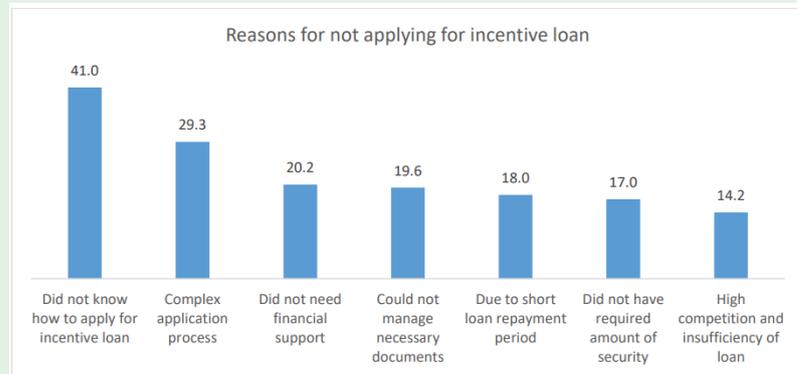
The study also highlighted the challenges of marginalised peoples' access to vaccination and other discriminatory practices during the pandemic. It pointed out the unfortunate condition of the migrant workers while seeking health services and the lack of transparency in different govt. projects on COVID-19, and the poor condition

Marginalized People	People without vaccination	Number of areas	Number of the observed area
Bede	More than 80%	4	8
	More than 60%	2	
	Less than 50%	2	
Transgender	More than 80%	5	15
	More than 60%	2	
	Less than 50%	8	
Harijan	More than 60%	3	12
	Less than 50%	9	
Dom	More than 60%	3	12
	Less than 50%	9	
Banshfor	More than 60%	1	4
	Less than 50%	3	

Based on the opinions of the local leaders of each marginalized area (December 2021)

and limitations of loans to cottage, small and medium entrepreneurs.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, "Bangladesh was somewhat successful in handling the pandemic but lacks in good governance indicators, especially in terms of inclusion and transparency."



"The national vaccination plan was to reach every doorstep, including people in remote areas, ageing populations, disadvantaged groups and homeless communities. But in reality, there were no major steps to achieve that goal. Only 45 percent of marginalised populations have been vaccinated, far less than the national average of 75 percent, which is a matter of concern," he added.

"Moreover, disadvantaged people faced discrimination, negligence and misbehaviour while getting vaccinated. We have also seen that the government did not take proper measures to increase awareness and inspire marginalised people to participate in vaccination drives," said Dr. Zaman.

He also criticised the health minister for not disclosing the specific and detailed description of COVID-19 management cost to the public and for speaking in general about the issue.



"Analysing different reliable sources of information, we calculated that the overall costs of vaccination activities including its procurement should be in between BDT 13 thousand crore and 17 thousand crore (approximately), but the minister said it was BDT 40 thousand crore," he said adding, "This massive difference raises questions if the government is willfully resisting the disclosure of information on the cost to hide corruption and irregularities while continuing their culture of secrecy and blocking information."

TIB also provided ten recommendations to overcome the challenges in COVID-19 management, which include – setting up ICU beds, RT-PCR laboratories and other

infrastructure utilising the government and project fund to develop the COVID-19 medical facilities in each district; taking no charge for sample testing at government labs and minimising fees at private labs; ensuring vaccination of all the marginalised people as early as possible; simplifying the incentive loan application process for micro, small, and cottage industries; and making information regarding the source of vaccine, purchase price, distribution cost, stock and distribution, public.

Detailed documents of the research study can be found here -

[Governance Challenges in Tackling COVID-19 Crisis: Inclusion and Transparency - Transparency International Bangladesh \(TIB\) \(ti-bangladesh.org\)](https://www.transparency.org/publications/governance-challenges-in-tackling-covid-19-crisis-inclusion-and-transparency)

TIB responds to comments by the Principal Secretary on COVID-19 vaccination programme research and TIB's funding

Dhaka, 17 April 2022: The statements made by the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus regarding the data on corruption related to the [COVID-19 Vaccination Study](#) and his comments implying that TIB is funded by the Australian mining company BHP are not correct, and they are rather misleading, factually incorrect, and presumptuous.

The Principal Secretary stated that TIB's research findings show an average BDT 69 bribe for each vaccine procurement, but this statement is entirely misleading. The research study titled '[Governance Challenges in Tackling COVID-19 Crisis: Inclusion and Transparency](#)', published on 12 April 2022 by TIB, included the data BDT 69 on average bribes based on results from exit-polls conducted in vaccination centers. This is in no way related to vaccine procurement. It is to be noted that 3,393 people participated in the exit polls by random sampling. Of the participants, 2 percent of vaccine recipients faced some form of irregularities or corruption, which mainly include time consuming processes, prioritization of influential political persons and government officials, misbehaviour, and deprivation of vaccines despite adequate supplies. Among the persons who faced irregularities, 10.1 percent people paid an average of BDT 69 bribes in order to avoid crowds and get vaccines fast, stated the research study. This reinstates that this mentioned amount is in no way related to vaccine procurement.

The Principal Secretary had also mentioned that the Australian mining company is related to TIB's funding, which might have been based on wrong information or assumptions. TIB has never received any funding from BHP, nor has it ever tried to do so. BHP was never introduced to or contacted by Transparency International Bangladesh. TIB is mainly funded by the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). All information related to TIB's funding is readily available at the organisation's official website.

To avoid any misunderstanding over TIB's funding or data related to the study findings, TIB

is interested in sharing any required information and conducting consultancy & advocacy programmes if necessary.

TIB's response to Health Minister's press briefing on the study 'Governance Challenges in Tackling COVID-19 Crisis: Inclusion and Transparency'

Dhaka, 26 April 2022: Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has conducted three research studies analysing different aspects of the government's steps taken to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in light of the governance challenges in the sector. The research study '[Governance Challenges in Tackling COVID-19 Crisis: Inclusion and Transparency](#)' was released on 12 April 2022. In response to the release, honourable Health Minister Zahid Maleque made some comments on the research report on 25 April 2022 at 12pm in a press briefing organised at the meeting room of the Health and Family Welfare Division. TIB shows gratitude to the minister for going through the research study with due importance.

In the press brief, the minister said that the government had to spend BDT 200 billion for the vaccination programme and not the previously mentioned BDT 400 billion. This is both a correction from the government's earlier statement and proof that TIB's research analysis was accurate. According to the TIB study, the estimated cost of vaccine procurement and the inoculation programme is between BDT 129 to 167 billion, which is even less than half of the BDT 400 billion stated by the health minister. In the press brief, the minister also clarified that the costs were announced to be BDT 400 billion earlier due to a misunderstanding. He commented that the stated BDT 400 billion was the total summation of government's expenses and the vaccine grants from different countries. However, TIB did not understand why the "value" of the free vaccines were calculated and shown as expenses. TIB expects that the Ministry of Health would present more accurate and detailed accounts on vaccination procurement and the inoculation programme.

Explanation from TIB in response to minister's claims over "tarnishing" government's achievements

The positive achievements of the government in handling the COVID-19 pandemic have been highlighted in TIB's research studies with due importance, and it was the same in this research study (see page 7 & 13 of main report). In order to curb corruption and help create an atmosphere of good governance, TIB conducts research and advocacy programmes related to sectors of public interest at both national and local levels. The main objective of these programmes is to help the government as it is committed to establishing good governance and control corruption. As a result, there is no scope of accusing TIB of tarnishing the country's image, or making the country's achievements questionable, or confusing the country's people.

TIB's response to criticism of the survey method in the study

All research studies conducted by TIB follow globally accepted practices and standards of

statistical sciences. To achieve quality and procedural excellence, the data collection in the study followed different methods. Firstly, with the help of locals, field data collectors employed in 43 districts of 8 divisions created a list of people who received healthcare, carried out COVID-19 tests, and received vaccines. From the list, 1,800 service recipients were selected for interviews in a randomised method. Keeping in mind the chance of infections in close contact scenarios, the interviews were conducted through phone calls. Telephone-based interviews are accepted in statistical sciences. Therefore, there is no provision to say that right information is not available from telephone interviews. Secondly, randomly selected 4,015 vaccine recipients from 105 vaccine centres gave face to face interviews (exit polls) right after receiving their vaccines. Thirdly, qualitative data and assessments were provided by 671 people from 48 marginalised communities. In total, around 6,500 people participated in this research study data collection process. All the surveys conducted for this research followed standardised statistical research methodologies and the sample size represents service recipients related to COVID-19 healthcare. Moreover, information from different government and private organisations' websites and reports on media (print and electronic) were used as secondary sources and their references are mentioned in the study. All information collected from multiple sources during the research period was reviewed and analysed. There is no chance to say that the results of this research are incorrect. Rather, every information stated in the study is fact-based and aligns with the information and analysis.

TIB will establish direct contact with the honourable Minister of Health and conduct advocacy programmes following the minister's approval in order to address other issues raised by him in the press conference.

Instead of saying the TIB study is "incorrect and ill-motivated", the COVID-19 pandemic can be controlled effectively if the gaps identified by the study are addressed and the recommendations are implemented. The main objective of TIB's COVID-19 related studies is to assist the government with research-based analysis to make public services more transparent and accountable. TIB expects that relevant authorities will accept the results of the study impartially and impersonally while focusing on developing their capacity, transparency, and accountability so that the government's COVID-19 mitigation steps can be successful.

Sweden, TIB sign 5-year grant agreement to strengthen fight against corruption

Dhaka, 4 April 2022: Sweden, represented by the Embassy of Sweden in Dhaka, and Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) signed a 5-year Grant Agreement on 4 April 2022 to strengthen the existing cooperation in preventing corruption. This is the fourth time Sweden has partnered with TIB to provide grants for the anti-corruption agenda.

Under the agreement, TIB will implement its core project, "Participatory Action against Corruption: Towards Transparency and Accountability" (PACTA), during 2022-2026.

The signing ceremony was held at the Embassy of Sweden in Dhaka with the Head of Development Cooperation at the Embassy, Ms. Christine Johansson and Executive Director of TIB, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, as signatory parties, respectively.



The PACTA project's overall objective is to contribute to curbing corruption as a means of developing a more inclusive, equitable, and non-discriminatory society consistent with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The project will assist in enabling further participation of people in the fight against corruption with greater outreach initiatives. Information technology-based community monitoring mechanisms in the project will also make service delivery more accessible and transparent as data on governance deficiencies will be collected more thoroughly, ultimately ensuring social accountability in public services.

While signing the grant agreement, Head of Development Cooperation at the Swedish Embassy, Ms. Christine Johansson said, "Preventing and curbing corruption is very important to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the Swedish government has always prioritised it. I am really happy that we renewed our longstanding partnership with TIB today."

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman expressed his gratitude for Sweden's continuous support and said, "We are honoured and inspired that Sweden and TIB signed the grant agreement for the fourth time to be a part of social change. This can strengthen the social movement against corruption in Bangladesh and enable transparent and accountable good governance alongside inclusive development based on equity."

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