

# eWaves

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## OVERVIEW



### Press Statement

- Budget Silent on Corruption, Money Laundering, Opines TIB
- TIB Suggests Stricter Measures to Combat Plastic Pollution
- RPO Amendment Bill will Curtail EC's Power: TIB Raises Concern
- Journalist Rabbani Murder: Disturbing Trend of Attacks on Press Freedom



### Research Release

- Degeneration of a Humanitarian Institution: Politics Breeds Corruption



### Rebuttal

- Bridges Minister's Remarks on Peacekeepers Implicating TI Baseless, Confusing: TIB
- Bridges Minister Accuses TIB Unfairly: A Clarification



### CCC NEWS

- Citizens Demand Stronger Law Implementation to Prevent Plastic Pollution
- Dhaka YES Groups Raise Awareness on World Environment Day
- Teachers, Students Participate in Awareness Campaigns in DU
- Daffodil YES Group Organises Quiz Competition, Discussions
- Empowering Citizens: Public Hearing at Nilphamari General Hospital
- ACC, CCC Join Hands for Anti-Corruption Debate in Jhalakathi
- Madaripur Municipality, CCC Hold Pre-Budget Discussion

## Budget Silent on Corruption, Money Laundering, Opines TIB



Press Statement

**Dhaka, 2 June 2023:** Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) expresses deep concern, as the proposed budget for fiscal year 2023-24 overlooks guidelines to tackle corruption and money laundering, among the major factors behind the ongoing economic crisis, increasing income disparity, and dwindling foreign reserves.



The anti-corruption watchdog highlights that it is unclear how the upcoming budget would benefit the people when the root causes of the existing economic crisis - corruption and money laundering - are not addressed. While the finance minister has announced various policy measures to address the dollar crisis and raise foreign exchange reserves, there is no mention of steps for tackling corruption and money laundering.

In a press statement, TIB's Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman says, "It is not unknown to the government that if corruption had been controlled, even to a moderate extent, national income growth could have been at least 2-3 per cent higher, which would have been significant for the people. A budget without a strategy to curb the vicious cycle of corruption and money laundering will facilitate more corruption and money laundering."

TIB welcomes the decision not to extend the black money whitening facility, but calls on the government not to continue the opportunity to legalise black money by investing in plot and flat, as the practice is 'unconstitutional, discriminatory, and conducive to corruption'.

Dr. Zaman further mentions, "No government has been able to collect the desired level of revenue by allowing black money to be legalised in the country's economy. Rather, the government has protected corrupt black money holders and contributed to deepening of corruption."

"The moral foundation of the government's anti-corruption stance has weakened. Therefore, we hope that the government will show firmness in ensuring that this opportunity is not provided again under the pressure of some vested interest groups," he adds.

Given the escalating income inequality primarily attributed to corruption, the proposed budget lacks justification in terms of social security programme allocation, beneficiary selection, and subsidy management. Additionally, within the government's 84,500-crore (845 billion) subsidy and incentive budget, only 60,000 crores (600 billion) are allocated for public administration, leaving a mere 5,000 crores (50 billion) for social security.

TIB urges the government to address these concerns before approval of the budget, prioritising transparency, accountability, good governance, and anti-corruption measures.

## TIB Suggests Stricter Measures to Combat Plastic Pollution



**Dhaka, 4 June 2023:** On the occasion of the World Environment Day, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) raises concerns over the persistent issue of plastic pollution in the country. Despite Bangladesh being the first country to ban polythene shopping bags in 2002, the continued use of single-use plastics and laminated plastics, not covered under the Environment Protection Act of 1995, has fuelled environmental concerns.

Bangladesh accounts for 2.47 per cent of the total global plastic pollution. TIB's Executive Director, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, emphasises the urgent need for stronger measures in this regard, stating, "Although legislation has been enacted to prohibit the use of polythene, plastic pollution has not only persisted but has also escalated due to inadequate implementation."

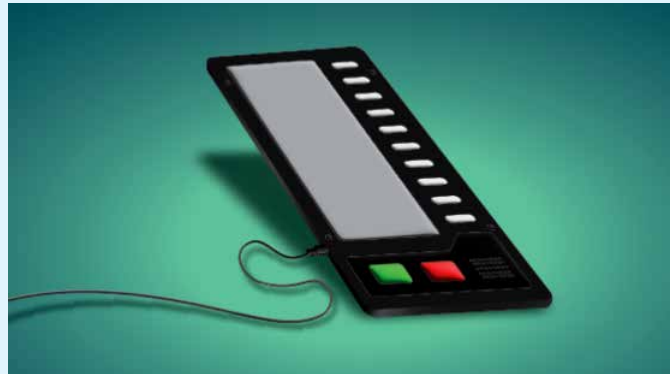
Dr. Iftekharuzzaman underscores the need for immediate regulatory actions to reduce plastic production and usage, manage plastic waste more effectively, and promote eco-friendly alternatives.

He adds, "Regulations addressing plastic pollution should minimise production and utilisation of plastic products and ensure proper waste management. Simultaneously, strict enforcement of pollution prevention laws, including imposition of pollution taxes, should be carried out."

TIB commends the government's recent directives to ban single-use plastic in district offices and institutions as well as tentative adoption of an action plan to combat plastic pollution. It urges meaningful awareness campaigns, active engagement of all stakeholders, and transparency in implementation of environmental protection activities. TIB also calls for effective accountability of lawbreakers contributing to plastic pollution.

## **RPO Amendment Bill will Curtail EC's Power: TIB Raises Concern**

**Dhaka, 9 June 2023:** Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has expressed serious concern over the proposed Representation of the People Order (RPO) amendment bill, asserting that it could significantly diminish the Election Commission's (EC) authority. TIB argues that restricting the EC's authority in the name of preventing election irregularities is undemocratic and unconstitutional.



According to TIB, if the RPO amendment bill is passed, the EC would lose the power to annul the election of an entire constituency due to anomalies. Currently, under RPO 91(A), the EC can cancel the voting process within a polling centre or an entire constituency, if coercion, pressure, threat, or misconduct undermines the integrity of a fair and open electoral process. However, the proposed bill removes this provision, suggesting that the EC would only be able to invalidate voting of a specific polling centre.

Warning that the bill's outcome is likely to 'deepen the crisis', TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman says, "In October 2022, the EC took the decision to postpone the Gaibandha-5 constituency by-election following discovery of irregularities captured on CCTV cameras. Observers expressed concern that the EC's actions might raise questions within the ruling party, and the revised bill seems to validate these concerns."

"The substitution of 'Election' with 'Poll' in the amendment is not just a change of wording; its implications could be substantial, potentially compromising the EC's ability to conduct free, fair, participatory, and impartial elections. If the EC's authority is restricted through the passage of this bill, it could exacerbate the existing concerns about the feasibility of conducting a free, fair, participatory and impartial election."

Dr. Zaman further emphasises, "Except for a few elections, it is unlikely that we can expect the EC to hold a fair and acceptable election, especially when the impartiality and self-interest-free role of the election-time government, law-enforcement agencies, and administration is highly unlikely."

Moreover, the proposed amendment offers additional opportunities for loan and bill defaulters. Currently, copies of bill payments for different services and bank loans must be submitted seven days before the submission of nomination papers. The amendment suggests allowing this submission just a day before, potentially encouraging the participation of loan and bill defaulters in elections.

TIB is urging the rejection of the proposed amendment and advocating for targeted measures in legal and institutional reforms. These measures aim to ensure impartial and

conflict-free performance of the relevant authorities, including the electoral government, law-enforcement agencies, and administration, with the overarching goal of safeguarding people's right to participate in free, fair, inclusive, and unbiased elections.

## **Journalist Rabbani Murder: Disturbing Trend of Attacks on Press Freedom**

**Dhaka, 16 June 2023:** Following the murder of Golam Rabbani, the latest victim of journalist torture and brutality in the country, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) voices profound concern over the growing menace of attacks, lawsuits, and killings targeting journalists, who bravely report on corruption and irregularities involving powerful figures. This distressing pattern of injustice prevailing over press freedom has unfortunately become the established norm in Bangladesh.



TIB vehemently calls on the government to demonstrate its commitment to journalist protection by ensuring the exemplary punishment of those directly and indirectly involved in the Golam Rabbani murder.

Sources within the media and Rabbani's family reveal that a public representative of Sadhurpara Union Parishad in Bakshiganj upazila under Jamalpur harassed him due to his news publications. Tragically, he was brutally tortured and killed while returning home after fulfilling his professional duties. Additionally, on April 11, Rabbani was assaulted by a local Jubo League leader, as reported by various news outlets.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, TIB's Executive Director, says, "Attacks on journalists have sadly become routine when exposing abuse of power, corruption, and injustice. Lack of action and, in some cases, tacit support from the authorities in preventing the attacks on journalists have emboldened assailants. The recent killing of journalist Golam Rabbani exemplifies the desperation of those in power to conceal their corruption and injustice."

He also underscores the need for exemplary punishment for all involved parties, stating, "Those responsible for the torture of journalists often enjoy impunity, especially if they have ties to positions of power. To address this crisis in free journalism, the government must ensure exemplary punishment for all parties involved in the murder of journalist Golam Rabbani."

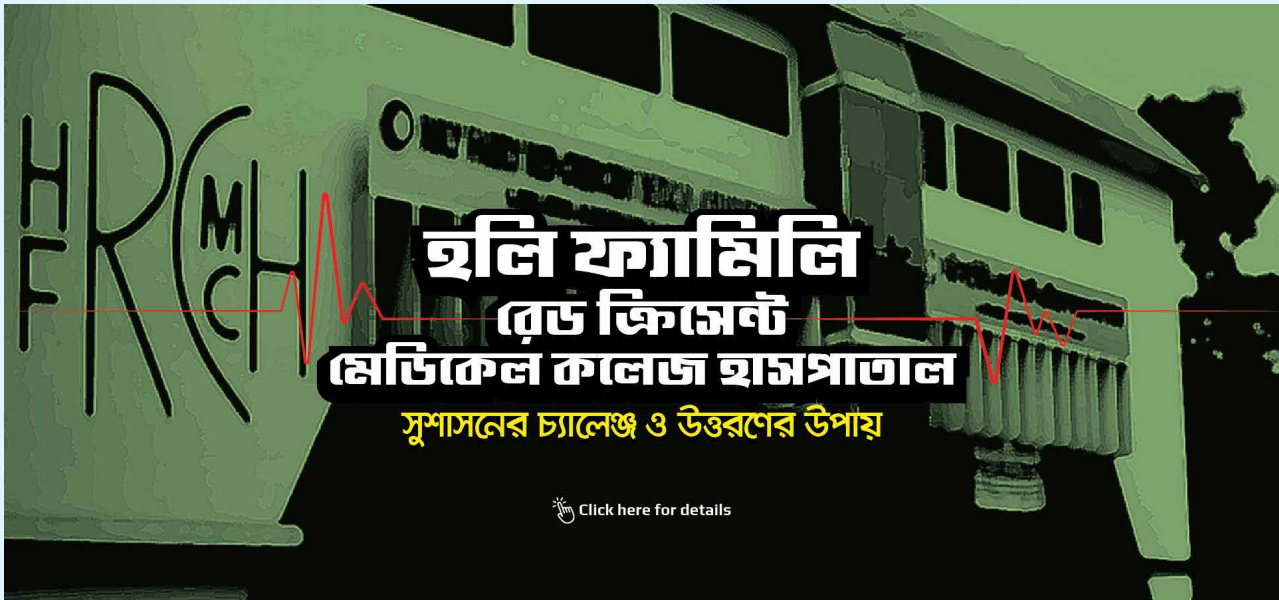
Bangladesh's ranking in the 2023 World Free Media Freedom Index has dropped to 163 out of 180 countries. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman mentions, "Bangladesh's performance in

journalist safety is disappointingly low, contributing to its descent in global rankings. The alarming frequency of journalist torture highlights the urgent need for change. The government must rectify this situation and ensure justice for journalists.”

Dr. Zaman calls for justice, saying, "From the Sagar-Runi murders to the recent Golam Rabbani killing, any means may be employed to silence the media's voice. The Digital Security Act (DSA) is often used as a tool for this purpose. The government must rectify this situation, ensuring thorough investigations into killings and torture, and repealing the overly restrictive DSA without delay.”

TIB reiterates the government's commitment to implementing eight recommendations related to journalist safety, supported during the third review of Bangladesh under the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2018. This commitment aligns with Bangladesh's constitutional pledge to uphold freedom of the media.

## Degeneration of a Humanitarian Institution: Politics Breeds Corruption



Research Release

**Dhaka, 15 June 2023:** In a disheartening revelation, the Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College Hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh, has become ensnared in political interference and corruption, jeopardising its humanitarian mission. Once a beacon of affordable medical care, dedicated to upholding values like neutrality, freedom, volunteerism, unity, and universality, the hospital now grapples with mismanagement, irregularities, and abuse of power.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has recently conducted an in-depth investigation into the institution's governance, laying bare distressing findings. The

hospital, once esteemed, now contends with financial strains, staff retention issues, and outdated medical services. TIB's probe exposed its weak legal and policy frameworks, allowing political figures to assume influential roles within the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).

According to the TIB's findings, lack of organisational structure concentrated power in the hands of the chairperson, granting him unilateral control over management, hiring, development, and finance-related issues. This environment became a breeding ground for irregularities, with allegations of bribery in the recruitment of medical professionals. Political considerations led to an inflated administrative staff, exacerbating the shortage of critical medical personnel.

Besides, patients have raised concerns about doctors coercing them into private consultations, diverting consultation fees away from the hospital. Reports of patients pressured to seek external pathological reports for commissions have surfaced.

The hospital board's disregard for procurement rules allowed a third party, JMI Hospital Requisite Manufacturing Ltd., to profit from operating their dialysis machines, neglecting the hospital's own equipment.

Dependent on the government's aid and grants, the hospital's lack of financial transparency has eroded trust among stakeholders, resulting in a significant decline in earnings.

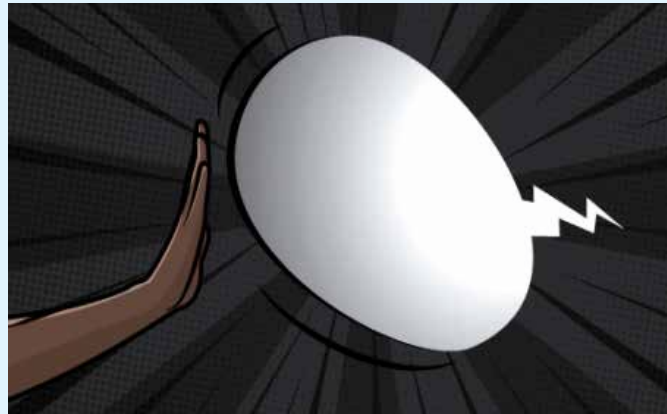
TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman expresses profound disappointment, highlighting the normalisation of opacity and unaccountability within the institution. The arbitrary use of the chairperson's powers has led to biased practices, promotions, and financial decisions - influenced by political consideration. Subsequently, the hospital's ability to compete with other institutions is at stake, and it is gradually succumbing to weakness. Urging a decentralisation of power, he emphasised the need to align the hospital with the values of the global Red Cross/Red Crescent movement.

In response to the crisis, TIB has proposed a comprehensive set of 14-point recommendations. These include implementing a structured organogram, amending the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society Order 1973 to limit the chairperson's powers, and ensuring unanimous board decisions guide expenditures. The call for accountability extends to local administration, stakeholders, and Red Crescent/Cross societies to rectify the dire situation.

## **Bridges Minister's Remarks on Peacekeepers Implicating TI Baseless, Confusing: TIB**



**Dhaka, 20 June 2023:** Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) strongly denounces the unfounded and perplexing remarks made by Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, implicating Transparency International (TI) in an alleged undermining of Bangladesh's role in the UN peacekeeping missions.



In a statement, TIB expresses deep concern, labelling the accusations as illogical and unfounded, and mentions that such baseless statements from a high-level minister exemplify desperation and a lack of responsibility.

TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekhharuzzaman says, "TI and TIB have never engaged in matters related to the UN peacekeeping missions. The allegations are baseless and motivated. It is particularly troubling that the minister has wrongly linked TIB with BNP, a claim devoid of any basis."

"We want to emphasise that TI and TIB are strictly non-partisan organisations, maintaining impeccable political neutrality. The minister's remarks are confusing and demonstrate lack of political prudence and responsibility."

Referring to a recorded version of the minister's remarks, where he has mentioned TI, Dr. Zaman expresses disappointment that the state-run BSS and other news outlets have erroneously, if not purposely, implied TIB instead of TI. Such mix-ups have occurred in the past and are undesirable.

It is noteworthy that another international human rights organisation recently called for scrutiny of the Bangladeshi peacekeepers in the UN missions, a statement reported in local media on 12 June 2023.

TIB has become an unwitting victim of the reaction to that statement by a high-level political leader, which is unacceptable and self-defeating. TIB calls upon all stakeholders to adopt more informed and responsible practices on such important matters in the future.



## **Bridges Minister Accuses TIB Unfairly: A Clarification**

**Dhaka, 21 June 2023:** Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has addressed a letter to Minister of Road Transport and Bridges and Awami League General Secretary, Obaidul Quader, expressing strong objection to baseless and misleading allegations involving TI and TIB.

In the communication, TIB has highlighted the irrationality and unfounded nature of the minister's attempts to assign responsibility to TIB wrongly for issues

entirely unrelated to TI/TIB's scope. TIB firmly asserts that the allegations made by the bridges minister against TI/TIB are entirely without merit.



On June 20, TIB issued a press release addressing the concerns raised by the bridges minister's statements and clarified the organisation's stance. Furthermore, on the same day, various media outlets reported statements of TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, refuting the bridge minister's claims of TI/TIB's involvement in the Shapla Chattar issue.

Dr. Iftekharuzzaman says, "We believe that the honourable minister may be in a state of confusion. In our letter to him, we have pointed out that he has continuously accused us of allegations that have no connection whatsoever to TI or TIB. Such unwarranted accusations are unexpected from a senior government minister and one of the leading figures in the ruling political party."

"In our letter, we have reminded the honourable minister that another human rights organisation based in the United States issued a statement, calling for an investigation into the Bangladeshi peacekeepers in a UN peacekeeping mission. Blaming TI or TIB in response to this is not only absurd but also ridiculous. Additionally, the minister's claims of TI/TIB's association with the BNP are entirely baseless," he adds.

TIB anticipates constructive criticism or suggestions from the bridges minister as a seasoned political figure and a high-ranking government official, rather than unfounded allegations, on matters pertaining to TIB's activities.

## Citizens Demand Stronger Law Implementation to Prevent Plastic Pollution



The Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) has called for strict implementation of relevant laws and policies to prevent plastic pollution. This demand was made during events organised to mark the World Environment Day on 5 June 2023. CCC observed the day by organising a human chain, rally, discussion, competitions for youth, tree plantation, etc.

Speakers at the events highlighted the harmful effects of plastic pollution on the environment and called for avoiding plastic use in daily life. They also emphasised the need for stronger implementation of relevant laws and policies to resist illegal production, marketing and use of plastic to reduce pollution.

CCC, Active Citizens Group (ACG), and Youth Engagement & Support (YES) members along with representatives from various organisations were present at these events.

## Dhaka YES Groups Raise Awareness on World Environment Day

In a bustling city like Dhaka, plastic pollution and poor number of trees impact the environment, degrade health, and make life more challenging. For addressing these issues, Dhaka Youth Engagement & Support (YES) group, one of the TIB's volunteer clusters, observed the World Environment Day on 5 June 2023, by pointing out the city's problems for raising awareness among the public.

From collecting plastic materials to sweeping streets, planting trees to displaying wall magazines, and holding human chains and discussions to organising signature campaigns on environmental issues, the youth group organised all the events with high spirits.

Volunteers gathered with the mindset to engage people from all walks of life in the movement to save the environment, the main objective of SDG-13. Dhaka YES groups engaged people in their programmes with the powerful message and campaign #BeatPlasticPollution, widely used on this year's World Environment Day across the globe.



## **Teachers, Students Participate in Awareness Campaigns in DU**

Emphasising strict enforcement of laws to handle plastic pollution, five different Dhaka YES groups from Dhaka University (DU) organised various activities, where a number of DU teachers participated and expressed their concerns over use of plastic materials. They also raised awareness regarding reluctance to implement existing laws to stop use of plastic.

The lively events, rallies, and discussions were arranged by the YES groups from the Department of Development Studies, Institute of Education and Research (IER), Institute of Social Welfare and Research, Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall, and Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall of DU.

The volunteers started the day by planting trees at the institutions and dormitories, where the YES groups are based. The institutions' directors, YES group advisors, and house tutors of the halls were present during the tree plantation programme.

Later, the youth group organised a human chain on the Aparajeyo Bangla premises, where the teachers spoke on the policies required to prevent plastic pollution and called upon the government to take effective steps. Besides, a signature campaign was held, where the participants expressed their commitment to prevent plastic pollution. A wall magazine on environmental issues, prepared by the IER department YES group, was also put on display.

At the end of the human chain programme, leaders, deputy leaders, and other members of YES groups undertook campus-cleaning activities in the DU Arts Building area. Around 100 participants, including teachers, YES members, and other students attended the events.

## **Daffodil YES Group Organises Quiz Competition, Discussions**

The YES group of Daffodil International University orchestrated an engaging anti-corruption quiz competition and a discussion to mark the World Environment Day. Enthusiastic students from various departments participated in the quiz, while teachers actively engaged themselves in the discussion session.

## **Empowering Citizens: Public Hearing at Nilphamari General Hospital**

Nilphamari General Hospital and the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), Nilphamari, collaborated to organise a public hearing on 13 June 2023 with the goal of establishing a citizen-centric hospital model. Service recipients expressed their concerns over the organisation's healthcare system as well as proposed recommendations for ensuring transparency and accountability. The hospital authority committed to addressing the highlighted issues.

Dr. Md. Abu-Al-Hajjaj, the Hospital Superintendent, presided over the event, with key

guests including Nilphamari Sadar Upazilla Chairman Shahid Mahmud and Civil Surgeon Dr. Md. Hasibur Rahman. CCC President Tahminul Haque Bobi moderated the hearing.

## **ACC, CCC Join Hands for Anti-Corruption Debate in Jhalakathi**

In a collaborative effort, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) of Jhalakathi and Jhalakathi District Administration organised an anti-corruption debate competition on 12 June 2023 at the Jhalakathi Deputy Commissioner's office.

The topic of the debate was 'Lack of rule of law is the main reason for the spread of corruption'. Students of Jhalakathi Government College argued in favour of the motion, while those of Jhalakathi Government Women's College opposed it.

Jhalakathi Government Women's College emerged as the champion and Jhalakathi Government College as the runner-up. Atiya Rahman from Jhalakathi Government Women's College was recognised as the best debater.

Mohammad Mamun Shibli, Additional District Magistrate of Jhalakathi, was the chief guest and moderator of the competition.

The event was presided over by Shahid Imam, a freedom fighter and member of DUPROK, and conducted by Mizanur Rahman, TIB Area Coordinator. Distinguished guests, including Md. Ruhul Amin, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General); Md. Kamruzzaman, Deputy Assistant Director, ACC Integrated District Office; Md. Nazrul Islam Talukder, General Secretary of DUPROK; and Satyaban Sen Gupta, a freedom fighter, delivered speeches on the occasion.

## **Madaripur Municipality, CCC Hold Pre-Budget Discussion**

Madaripur Municipality, with CCC Madaripur's support, hosted a pre-budget open discussion on 13 June 2023 to involve citizens in shaping the municipality's budget for sustainable development. Some 160 participants, including government officials, politicians, lawyers, journalists, and civil society members attended the programme.

Mayor Khalid Hossain Yad presented the draft budget for 2023-2024 and emphasised citizens' involvement in the budget preparation process. In an open discussion, the participants shared their views on issues like community development, anti-corruption efforts, transparency, strengthening local government, waste management, etc.

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