International Anti-Corruption Day Observed

Inner Page
Call for Making Anti-Corruption Commission Independent and Effective
CCC and YES Convention Celebrated
Four Journalists Receive Awards in Investigative Journalism

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Progress in Corruption Perceptions Index Must be Sustained

The Corruption Perceptions Index or CPI of Transparency International (TI) for the year 2009 was released on 17 November. According to this index, Bangladesh occupied 13th position from the bottom by scoring 2.4 in a scale of 0-10. It put her at 139th position among 180 countries included in the list. Bangladesh’s score in 2008 was 2.1. After occupying the last position from 2001 to 2005, Bangladesh stood 3rd from bottom with a score of 2.0 in 2006, 7th with a score of 2.0 in 2007 and 10th with a score of 2.1 in 2008.

This index is used for determining the comparative positions of various countries across the world, based on the perceptions and analyses of relevant experts at national and international levels regarding the pervasiveness of corruption in politics and administration. It is assumed on the basis of the CPI index that the incidence of corruption is highest in those countries that remain at the bottom of the list with a score of 3 or less in the 0-10 scale. On the other hand, it is assumed from the index that the incidence of corruption is less in those countries that have high scores or scores approaching 10.

According to the CPI index, Bangladesh’s score has improved by three levels in 2009 compared to 2008. The progress in score for Bangladesh this year (2.4) has been 0.3, as it was 2.1 in 2008. Although the improvement may appear negligible in terms of pervasiveness of corruption, Bangladesh’s name was mentioned along with 8 other countries as the ones who made maximum progress.

However, as a country with a score of less than 3, Bangladesh’s position remains tagged with those countries of the world which are most impacted and harmed by corruption. But that does not mean Bangladesh is most corrupt or Bangladeshis are a corrupt nation. This kind of wrong interpretation is often made due to lack of proper knowledge about the CPI. Although corruption is the toughest impediment to economic growth, good governance and poverty alleviation in Bangladesh, the common people of the country are not corrupt. They are only harmed and suffer due to corruption. The country or its people cannot be called corrupt in any way because of the corruption resorted to by the powerful people and failure of the leadership and relevant institutions in curbing it.

This year’s index has been prepared on the basis of information gathered during 2008 and 2009 (up to September). It reflected the massive anti-corruption drive undertaken by the caretaker government throughout the country during 2007-08 and the expectations for change generated by important institutional and legal reforms initiated for strengthening the base of anti-corruption efforts. In addition, resolute anti-corruption pledges made by the present government – who received a huge mandate from the people in the parliamentary election held in 2008, and the continuation of numerous reform measures undertaken by the previous government have also been evaluated positively by this index.

The improvement in CPI is certainly good news. But there is no room for complacency. Nobody can deny the pervasiveness of corruption in this country. Whether this progress by Bangladesh would last or whether there would be further advancement hinges on the political goodwill of the present government, especially on effective implementation of electoral pledges. Sustaining this progress or improvement in CPI index by Bangladesh would depend on how far the present government would ensure the integrity, independence, and neutrality of fundamental democratic institutions like the Jatiya Sangsad, Anti Corruption Commission, Election Commission, Information Commission, and the judiciary, law-enforcement agencies, public administration and the Human Rights Commission. Effective role of government including establishing transparency in procurement process and strengthening local government will also be an important indicator to improve Bangladesh’s score in future.

The firm commitment and resolute stance of Bangladesh against corruption has become clear in the international arena through ratification of the UN Convention against Corruption. Bangladesh played a commendable role by supporting an effective monitoring mechanism for the convention during a conference of signatory countries held in Qatar’s capital Doha recently. This convention contains pledges for establishing corruption as a legally punishable offence and taking preventive measures against it. The challenges that lie ahead for the government are to ensure that Bangladesh’s support for the convention does not remain confined to mere pledges and bring down the intensity of corruption through its effective implementation.

The passage of the right to information act by the government with the goal of shunning a culture of secrecy, curbing corruption and ensuring transparency and accountability has been acclaimed by various quarters. The government has to move forward without any kind of fear or biased stand against corruption. If this cannot be done, then not only would the improvements in CPI become futile, the enthusiasm with which the people had voted this government to power would be replaced by frustration.

We want the present government to make all-out efforts for materialising their electoral pledge of building up Bangladesh as a corruption-free, transparent country. Only then would the progress in corruption perceptions index become sustainable.
International Anti-Corruption Day Observed

December 9 is observed as the International Anti-Corruption Day. As before, TIB observed the day through various programmes this year as well. The programmes organised at the national level included seminar, anti-corruption human-chain, cartoon exhibition, signature collection campaign, broadcast of jingles via radio, talk-show, setting up sattelite information and advice desk, distribution of stickers and t-shirts, etc. They are described below in a concise form.

Call for Making Anti-Corruption Commission Independent and Effective:
Speakers at a seminar organised on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day

The speakers at a seminar organised on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day raised demands for making the Anti-Corruption Commission independent and effective. They opined that the ACC should function in coordination with the Human Rights Commission and the Information Commission. The people and the local governments should be involved with it. Side by side, the ACC should have a strong research unit. The speakers made these comments at a seminar titled ‘Effectiveness of Anti Corruption Commission: Why and How’ held at Mohakhali’s BRAC Centre Inn auditorium in capital Dhaka on 10 December.

Chairman of the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) Golam Rahman was present in the seminar as Chief Guest. Presided over by the Chairman of TIB Trustee Board M. Hafizuddin Khan, TIB’s Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman presented the keynote paper. Those who took part in the discussion included TIB trustee Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, former commissioner of ACC Professor M. Moniruzzaman Mian and Professor Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman of Dhaka University.

In his address as Chief Guest, the ACC Chairman said that the ACC Act should be amended for strengthening it. This is because it has to approach the Cabinet Division on many matters. He claimed that the ACC was fully accountable now. He added, political cases were not acceptable to the commission and any case lodged for the purpose of harassment would be withdrawn through legal process. He further said, everybody within and outside the present government is equal in the eyes of ACC. ACC would take action only against those who were corrupt. No other consideration would be relevant in this matter.

In his keynote paper, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, the ACC has to be made independent and effective because tackling corruption is a major national challenge for Bangladesh. He opined that the ACC could be made independent and effective in the light of international experiences. He put forward a number of specific recommendations for the purpose. These included political goodwill, enhancing the legal and institutional capacity of ACC for its economic and operational freedom, raising its accountability and efficiency, acquiring credibility, determining work-priority and appropriate strategy, and above all strengthening the national integrity system.

Participating in the discussion, Professor Muzaffer Ahmad said, unhealthy competition in our society is a major cause of corruption. Corruption is widespread in society. It is not possible for ACC alone to fight corruption; the parliamentary standing committees would also have to become active and vocal against it. Professor M Moniruzzaman Mian pointed out that there are some contradictions between the ACC Act framed in 2004 and the present law. These should be reconciled through amendments. Besides, he expressed the view that the provision of Prime Ministerial approval in case of arrests of higher officials should be rescinded. Professor Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman remarked that although the ACC was very active during the tenure of the caretaker government, it lacked efficiency. He urged the ACC to pay more attention to grand corruptions instead of petty ones. Representatives of various classes and professions including development partners, the civil society and media activists were present on the occasion.

Waves : TIB Newsletter 3
Cartoon Exhibition and Prize Distribution

The opening ceremony of an anti-corruption cartoon exhibition was held at the Zainul Gallery of Dhaka University on 9 December afternoon. The Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Professor AAMS Arefin Siddique was present on the occasion as Chief Guest while renowned cartoonist of the country Rafiquunnabi (Ranabi) was present as the Special Guest. Chaired by the secretary-general of TIB Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed, the welcome address was delivered by TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman. In his address as the Chief Guest, Professor Arefin Siddique said, cartoon is a powerful medium. Corruption has to be eliminated by using this media in combination with other media. Professor Rafiquunnabi said: ‘We seek a pure and beautiful society. The cartoonists are contributing towards building that society.’

Prizes and certificates were distributed in the programme among the winners and special nominees of the Anti-Corruption Cartoon Competition 2009. This year, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions in group-A were occupied by Asim Chandra Ray, Syed Nafis Sadiq (Nabil) and Khan Abdullah Tayum. In group-B, Mehedi Haque, ASM Shahidullah Faruq and Nasrin Sultana Mitu stood 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. Besides, a total of 54 cartoons were given special nominations from the two groups. It may be mentioned that the exhibition was arranged with 60 cartoons drawn by the winners and special nominees in the two groups.

The exhibition was kept open for the general public between 12 noon and 8 pm from 10 to 16 December. The huge turnout of spectators was quite noticeable. There was also arrangement for displaying the exhibition over TIB website for the enjoyment of a global audience. Many subscribers enjoyed it online. Besides, an online survey on curbing corruption in Bangladesh was conducted from the same website.

Cartoon versus Corruption

Encouraging and instilling an anti-corruption outlook among the youths has become very urgent. TIB has taken an initiative to perform this very task. It has been organising countrywide cartoon competition and holding exhibitions during the past four years with the participation of contestants belonging to the age-groups of 13-18 and 19-35 years.

The ‘Anti-Corruption Cartoon Exhibition 2009’ was held at the Zainul Gallery of Dhaka University’s Faculty of Fine Arts on 10-16 December in this backdrop. Before that, the inaugural ceremony and distribution of prizes took place on 9 December. The humorous colours and faces in the exhibition depicted only a single shadowy subject. The messages in inks and paints conveyed some insurmountable truths in society in such a way that the audience could not help laughing.

The most noticeable aspect of the exhibition was that, a majority of the cartoonists were in their teenage years or had barely crossed 20. At an age when they were supposed to remain busy in enjoying life, they spent their valuable time in trying to comprehend and make others realize what is happening around. The participants who were above 30 also deserve mention as they are supposed to get lost beneath the piles of files or their personal/official work-loads. Despite that, they spent their time and effort in generating mass awareness about the harmful effects of corruption.

TIB organises this event basically to encourage an anti-corruption outlook among the youths. The cartoon exhibition is held mainly on the occasion of observing the International Anti-Corruption Day on 9 December.

The four judges in the panel were: Syed Manzoorul Islam, Shishir Bhattacharya, Ahsan Habib and Shahriar Khan. The first prize winner in group-A was Asim Chandra Ray, who depicted ‘Digital Bangladesh’ in his cartoon. On the other hand, the first prize winner in group-B was Mehedi Haque, who painted a corrupt physician, who was laughing while looking at his ill-gotten money.
Anti-Corruption Day Observed Jointly

The 6th human rights and anti-corruption theatre festival was held at the District Shilpakala Academy of Kishoreganj on 11-13 December with the slogan ‘Drishti amar shamukh paney’ (My vision is forward-looking). The festival was jointly organised by Bangladesh Human Rights Theatre Council and CCC-Kishoreganj. After the inauguration, a colourful procession was brought out by the members of Natyadal, CCC and YES. Led by Dr. Afsar Ahmed, it paraded the main thoroughfares of the district town. The people’s theatre group of the CCC staged the drama ‘Emon Jodi Hoto’ (If it were so) in the festival. On the concluding day, greeting mementos were presented to the participating organizations on behalf of the CCC.

A rally, human-chain and discussion meeting were organised jointly by the CCC-Jhenaidah and Anti-Corruption Cultural Alliance of the district. The second part of the programme was held at the ‘Paira’ square of the town, which comprised of presentation of people’s songs by the alliance artistes, patriotic songs, recitations, slogans and motivational speeches against corruption. Later, the anti-corruption drama ‘Protisruti’ (Pledge) was staged.

An anti-corruption street drama festival was organised at the Shahid Minar compound of Tangail on 19-21 December. Organised by the group ‘Nagar Natyadal’ with assistance from TIB, the festival was inaugurated by District Commissioner M. Bazul Karim Chowdhury. Four groups staged 6 dramas during the festival.

The TIB and ‘Bidrohi Shishu-Kishor Theatre-Panchagarh’ organised a 2-day children’s gathering at Panchagarh on the occasion of anti-corruption day. Painting competition, debate, discussion and cultural programme were arranged in the office-premises of the organization. A colourful rally was brought out on the first day, which was participated by the general mass.

Anti-Corruption Human Chain

An anti-corruption human chain was formed in Dhaka in the afternoon on 9 December. Held with the slogan ‘We want implementation of the electoral pledges against corruption’, and extending from the TSC compound of Dhaka University up to Shahbag crossing, representatives of various organizations, students, classes and professions participated in it. The participants carried various banners and festoons containing slogans like ‘Stop corruption – right now’ and expressed their solidarity by standing in a row on one side of the road.

Satellite Information & Advice Desk

TIB set up a satellite ‘Information and Advice Desk’ at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day. This program was run at DMC Hospital from 8 to 13 December. The YES group members of Dhaka provided various health-care-related information and distributed brochures published by TIB among a large number of service-recipients.
The CCC and YES Convention Calls for Making the Anti-Corruption Movement Lasting and Effective

Around two thousand members of the TIB-inspired Committees of Concerned Citizens (CCCs) and Youth Engagement and Support (YES) groups urged all concerned including the government, political leaders and civil society to make anti-corruption programmes in the country long-lasting and effective. They made this call during the annual convention of CCCs and YES groups organised by TIB at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, Dhaka, on 10 October.

Demand was also put forward for becoming pledge-bound to establish a just, well-governed and democratic Bangladesh by uprooting the poison-tree of corruption alongside creating an environment where the Anti-Corruption Commission could play an active and powerful role as an independent, efficient and effective institution engaged in curbing corruption. Emphasis was also laid on putting in place an accountable governance system in line with the electoral pledge made by the present government, who assumed office through a massive verdict of the people against corruption, as well as establishing the Ninth Jatiya Sangsad as a truly effective parliament. Side by side, cooperation of all concerned including the civil society was sought for implementation of the right to information act.

The day-long convention was inaugurated at 9 am in the morning by the Chairman of TIB Trustee Board and former advisor of the caretaker government M. Hafizuddin Khan. The deliberations started with the playing of the national anthem and the theme song of TIB. Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed and Advocate Sultana Kamal spoke at the inaugural session as panel discussants. The Chairperson of Transparency International Dr. Huguette Labelle sent a video message on the occasion. She said, “This annual convention will undertake a review of not only what you have accomplished in the past, but also look at your work agenda for this next period of time. And the innovation of this forum is exceptional; it's unique in our movement. And I want to congratulate TI Bangladesh for having started this movement.” The convention coordinator and convener of CCC Savar Mr. Jainal Abedeen Khan extended good wishes to all present.

The YES website (www.ti-bangladesh.org/yes) was formally inaugurated during the opening session. Eminent personalities including representatives from the media, NGOs and civil society were present on the occasion.

During the panel discussion, Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed said, “Corruption not only works against principles, it acts against everything including development and progress. So we all should stand up to resist corruption.” He especially urged the youths to play a vocal and active role in this regard. In her address, Advocate Sultana Kamal said, the youths are the greatest driving force. The anti-corruption programme has to be conducted by utilising the talent and strength of the youths. We all have to strive collectively for tackling corruption and we must emerge victorious in this struggle. In his welcome address at the start of the conference, TIB’s Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “The CCCs and YES are the main driving force in the movement against corruption. It has been possible to bring about positive changes in the service sectors like health, education and local government due to their concerted efforts. Strong demands are being made by all quarters for the punishment of human
Main Report

rights violations including war-crimes. We tread on the path of truth and justice. We shall not concede defeat in our movement against corruption in the face of any threats and obstacles."

Strong demands were made to the government for removing all hindrances for effective implementation of the right to information act, taking effective steps and initiatives for ensuring the security of all concerned engaged in upholding the freedom of publishing opinions and information including in the mass media, and initiation of trials for violating all kinds of human rights including war-crimes.

The convention urged everybody to work together for upholding the spirit of the language movement and the liberation war, maintaining honesty, transparency, equality and the practice of free thought, and eliminating all kinds of discriminations from the soil of the motherland including disparities among men and women. The CCC and YES members expressed their resolve to detest corruption from the core of their hearts and to collectively strive for resisting corruption effectively from their respective positions.

The participating delegates exchanged information and experiences on the programmes executed in their respective localities, and based on them, vowed to expand and strengthen the social movement against corruption at the local level. A colourful cultural programme was arranged in the evening participated by eminent artists of the country.

Reactions of the Participants at the Convention

I am highly impressed, because I could listen to many people. I could gather valuable information from different people of various localities. It is true that corruption can be contained only through publicity, not merely by framing laws, nor with force. The more we undertake publicity in the villages, the more shall we be able to achieve success in building a desired corruption-free society.

Professor Moloy Kishor Bhattacharya, member, CCC-Rangpur

We have been able to come together today; I like this, I feel joyful, but it is also true that our opinion cannot be given fully in such a short time. Therefore, I am hopeful that it will be more fruitful if conventions are held at the divisional level. Another aspect is that, I liked the discussions. Compared to the CCC members, I liked the words of YES members even more. There were many things in the discussions which could inspire us. I liked the speech of Abdullah Abu Sayeed very much.

Mr. Sk. Bahar Majumder, member, CCC-Mymensingh

I am feeling fine. It would have been better if there were arrangements for discussions by CCC and YES members on separate days instead of on the same day. Even then, overall, I am feeling very well as all of us could come together on this day.

Mr. Shaikh Delowar Hossain, member, CCC-Bagerhat

I was morally against corruption even before; here, I got another platform. It is a matter of satisfaction that we, CCC and YES members, could come together. I am finding many similarities between our thinking and those of the new generation. What is amazing here is that, they can think now what we could conceptualise after so many years. I liked today’s discussions; the females have spoken quite eloquently. They did not cross the time-limit for deliberations. They have proved that just as they are the best at home, they are the best in outdoors as well. In one word, I have been captivated by today’s convention.

Ms. Rowshan Ara Lutfunnahar, member, CCC-Kishoreganj

There is lack of discipline. Many people spent excess times outside. I want to say another thing; there is no need for speeches by everybody. The time-limit of speeches should be increased while the number of speakers should be reduced.

Professor Md. Shahid Ullah, member, CCC-Gazipur
I am feeling very well. I could meet many distinguished persons; it is a different kind of feeling. It would have been better if it were held at different places each year instead of in Dhaka. In that way, we could go to all CCC areas of the country and get some idea about those regions. I thank TIB for this kind of initiative.

Moushumi Akhar Shanta, YES member, CCC-Rajbari

Today's convention was an extraordinary experience. Coming to Dhaka of 41 members altogether from Barisal by bus, watching such a huge programme together, provided a different kind of enjoyment. But I want to say one thing about the programme; it would have been more enjoyable if there were cultural programmes in between sessions of speeches instead of continuous deliberations.

Sharmin Jahan, YES member, Barisal

I have been a YES member for 6 months. I am feeling so well after coming to this convention today that it occurs to me that I could have attended the previous conventions had I become a YES member earlier on. We heard from the CCC and YES members today; I liked those very much; but it would have been better if there was scope for asking questions here.

Mohammad Rashedul Haque, YES member, Lalmonirhat

I do not have the word to express how well I am feeling. The fact that we 38 CCC and YES members could journey together had been a matter of great satisfaction. After coming here, we could also meet CCC and YES members from other areas. It is an extraordinary feeling. Through this discussion today, we got the opportunity to share everything with each other. We could know the views of all.

Mohammad Raquibul Alam Raquib, YES member, Kushtia

Members’ Day Held

TIB’s Members’ Day was held on 12 December 2009. Arranged at its Gulshan office with participation of members, TIB’s Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman acted as the moderator during the gathering. He informed the participants about recent and future programmes of TIB. The members evinced interest to enhance their involvement in various activities of TIB including study-circle, training and CCC programmes. They also expressed the resolve to maintain transparency and accountability in their personal lives.
“Combined efforts of all are required alongside those of the government for solving existing problems and establishing good governance in the NGO sector. The government is sincerely trying to establish transparency and accountability in this sector.” The Adviser to the Prime Minister on education, social development and political affairs Dr. Alauddin Ahmed said this as Chief Guest at an opinion-sharing meeting entitled ‘Problems of good governance in the NGO sector and their solutions’ held on 29 October. It was jointly organised by the NGO Affairs Bureau, BRAC, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Oxfam GB and TIB at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre, Dhaka. The Executive Director of Ain O Shalish Kendra Advocate Sultana Kamal, the Chairperson of TIB Trustee Board and NGO Foundation M. Hafizuddin Khan and eminent economist and professor of the economics department of Dhaka University Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud were present as Special Guests at this daylong seminar. Chaired by the Divisional Commissioner of Dhaka Dr. Khondakar Showkat Hossain, officials belonging to various levels of the government, NGOs and eminent persons from the civil society were present on the occasion.

Dr. Alauddin Ahmed said in the meeting, “All our strengths should be turned into a massive power – in the same way when we got united during the liberation war.” M. Hafizuddin Khan said, “It is not possible for the government alone to develop Bangladesh; the strengths of the NGOs will have to be utilised here.” Dr. Wahiduddin Mahmud said, “NGOs have played a major role alongside the government in achieving notable progresses in various areas. There is need for coordination between the functions of the government and the NGOs.” In her address, Advocate Sultana Kamal said, “We all should come forward for establishing good governance by upholding the spirit of the liberation war.” Others who spoke included Khushi Kabir, Dr. Mohammad Ibrahim, Mosharraf Hossain, Khandakar Zahurul Alam, government officers from various districts and upazilas and representatives of local governments.

At the starting of the meeting, Assistant Director of Bangladesh Bank Mohammad Abdur Rab presented a paper on ‘An overview on financing of extremism: Vulnerability of the NGO sector in Bangladesh’ key substance of which is ‘Financing in terrorism: Risks of NGO sector in Bangladesh’.

During the deliberations, TIB’s Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman made a presentation on the recommendations obtained from opinion-sharing meetings on ‘Good Governance in NGO Sector: Problems and Ways of Remedy’, previously organised at five divisional headquarters, and possible measures based on those. He highlighted the recommendations on registration, monitoring and coordination of NGOs, avoidance of duplications in activities, institutional development and good governance, and the service delivery process.

Notable among the recommendations were:
- Advancing the role of coordination authority recently formed by the Ministry of Social Welfare in a more constructive and participatory manner;
- Providing clearance to NGOs for receipt and utilisation of foreign funds by the NGO Affairs Bureau on the basis of certificates issued by another registration authority; providing explanations in cases of failures to give clearance within specified time; accepting complaints including through complaints box and ensuring a mechanism for remedial measures; amending various forms for incorporating district and upazila-based activities of NGOs, work area, allocations and time-frame in order facilitate the task of monitoring; creating and updating database on NGO activities at district and upazila levels and opening up those for inspection; setting up a web-portal for NGO Affairs Bureau and publishing all NGO-related information on this site. Other recommendations included: forming executive committees and governing bodies in all NGOs; formulating governance manual for operational matters; framing recruitment rules, salary structure and procurement policy by all NGOs; sharing the reports of donor agencies with the bureau; ensuring adherence to respective codes of conduct by all NGOs; disclosure of information on a voluntary basis; amending and making the existing citizens’ charters more effective; forming an apex coordination committee with representations from the government and non-government sectors for devising policies and strategies for creation of congenial work environment, proper coordination of programmes and avoidance of duplications.
Collective efforts should be made for overcoming limitations in establishing good governance in the NGO sector after identifying those. The discussants reached this consensus during a consultation meeting on government-sponsored ‘Supervision and evaluation’ of NGO programmes. Held under the aegis of TIB, the meeting took place at the BIAM auditorium, New Eskaton, Dhaka, on 8 October. It was presided over by the Chairman of TIB Trustee Board M. Hafizuddin Khan while Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman acted as the moderator. Minister for Social Welfare Enamul Haque Mostafa Shahid was present as Chief Guest on the occasion, while the discussants included social welfare secretary Kamrunnesa Khanam, TIB Trustee Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, Director General of NGO Affairs Bureau Mustak Hassan Md. Iftekhar, representatives of ADAB and FNB, high officials of various NGOs and representatives of the civil society.

In his address as Chief Guest, the minister said, “The NGOs have a vocal presence now in the country after initially starting their humanitarian efforts out of a sense of patriotism. Although many NGOs are doing a good job, some have become involved in commercial activities as well. There are even some examples of their getting involved in anti-state activities including fundamentalism and militancy. Specific policies should be formulated for dealing with these after discussions with all concerned. We have to move forward for developing our country after consultations with all stakeholders. The government is not interested to impose any decision unilaterally. Their actual roles should be made clear to the people.”

The minister said, although between 200 and 250 thousand voluntary organizations are presently active in the country, their role has reached such a level so as to cause genuine concerns. He sought the cooperation of all for devising proper strategy on the future programmes and roles of NGOs and their relationships with the government.

Secretary Kamrunnesa Khanam said, various problems arise in supervision and accountability of NGOs, as their registration is performed by different ministries and divisions. Proper coordination is needed in the field. The existing problems can be overcome and accountability can be ensured if the whole affair is run through proper coordination among different registration authorities under an umbrella body.

Professor Muzaffer Ahmad said, it is not possible to ensure accountability properly if registration is carried out under the purview of a single organization. The task of supervising small NGOs at the local level can be delegated to the local governments. Laws can be framed for running the NGOs based on reality on the ground.

The Executive Director of TIB said, there was no scope to deny the contributions of NGOs towards development of the country. Collective efforts have to be made for removing the limitations in establishing good governance in the NGO sector after identifying those. Others who spoke on the occasion included the MIDAS Managing Director Abdul Karim, director of the Social Welfare Institute of Dhaka University Professor Mohammad Samad, ADAB Chairman Aminul Islam, FNB director Tajul Islam, Executive Director of PRIP Trust Aroma Goon, Caritas Executive Director Benedict Alo De Rozario, Executive Director of Democracy-Watch Taleya Rehman and Supro director Uma Chowdhury.

TIB has made a number of recommendations for overcoming the prevailing problems in the NGO sector. Notable among these are: prior to formation of an independent NGO Commission, taking necessary measures including provision of incentives for infrastructure development, increasing manpower and logistic facilities and enhancing efficiency and empowerment of NGO Affairs Bureau and other organizations involved in providing registration/clearance to NGOs in order to enable them to discharge their responsibilities properly; ensuring effective role of the governing board members for enhancing accountability of the chief executives; use of governance manuals; maintaining balance of power between the governing body and the management in order to ensure accountability; ensuring participation of workers and service-recipients in the decision making process; reducing the disparities between the salaries of higher officials and lower-level ones, especially the field-workers; opening up for public view the approved budget (year-wise and sector-wise) for all NGO programmes; proper evaluation of NGOs while carrying out internal audits of NGOs by recognised audit firms as well as by the donors themselves; taking measures for adherence to the stipulations made in the right to information act etc.
Four Journalists Receive Awards for Investigative Journalism

Mass Media Urged to Ensure Transparency and Accountability

TIB’s investigative journalism award 2009 for reporting on corruption has gone to: chief news editor of The Daily Star Syed Ashfaqul Haque and senior reporter of the same daily Julfi  kar Ali Manik, Khulna bureau chief of the Daily Drishtipat published from Satkhira Muhammad Nuruzzaman and the staff reporter of the TV channel ETV Dipu Sarwar. During discussions held on the occasion, the speakers urged the mass media to uphold transparency and accountability.

A programme was arranged for awarding prizes on 5 November at the BRAC Centre Inn of capital Dhaka’s Mohakhali. The Minister for information and cultural affairs Abul Kalam Azad was present on the occasion as Chief Guest. Chaired by the chairman of TIB Trustee Board M. Hafizuddin Khan, the Editor of the Daily Prothom Alo Motiur Rahman presented a paper on the challenges of investigative journalism in Bangladesh as the main discussant. Eminent journalists ABM Musa and Nawazish Ali Khan took part in the discussions. Those who were present on the occasion included member of the TIB Trustee Board Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, media personality Muhammad Jahangir, Managing Director of Drik Shahidul Alam, and teacher of Jahangirnagar University Dr. Dilara Chowdhury, Dhaka University teacher Robayet Ferdaus, a large number of journalists, development activists and professionals. Prizes were distributed among the winners of investigative journalism competition. Each prize was worth Taka 60 thousand. The winners were given prize-money, certificates and crests.

In his address as Chief Guest, the Information Minister congratulated the prize-winning journalists. The mass media is becoming increasingly vocal for highlighting the subject of corruption to the nation and the investigative journalists are playing an important role in this regard, he said. The main responsibility of a journalist is to find out the truth and publish those with honesty, neutrally and factually. We should remember, as the sphere of freedom for the mass media expands, the question of accountability of journalists increasingly comes to the fore. Only a responsible journalism can maintain the quality of journalism. Attention should be paid so that the journalists would not deviate from their moral and professionally responsible positions. He urged the mass media to come forward for establishing transparency and accountability in order to ensure good governance in the country.

In his keynote paper, Motiur Rahman said, it depends on the editor and publisher whether an investigative report would see the light of day. So they have to maintain honesty in their professional positions by remaining above all kinds of influences. The news media is a powerful place from where we can provide guidance to the government on running the country. The journalists will have to discharge their responsibilities with honesty and courage.

The title of the joint investigative report by Syed Ashfaqul Haque and Julfikar Ali Manik of The Daily Star was ‘Grafts reign supreme in import trade.’ In this serial report, they unravelled various aspects of how the government is losing at least 1 thousand crore taka each year due to misuse of pre-shipment inspection (PSI) facility through collusion between importers, politicians and tax officials. The report was published from 20 to 23 May 2008 in The Daily Star. Muhammad Nuruzzaman received prize in the loca category his investigative report on corruption at Khulna Medical College Hospital. His report was serialised from 1 to 12 February 2008 in the Daily Drishtipat published from Satkhira. Captioned ‘Khulna Medical College Hospital is a paradise for corruption’, the report highlighted the corruption resorted to by concerned doctors, officials, union leaders, brokers and medical representatives of Khulna Medical College Hospital. In his report the reporter narrated corruption in appointments, transfers
and issuance of medical certificates, misdeeds of middlemen and medical representatives in the hospital, pilferage of medicines and operation equipments and the menace of employees union.

Although an NGO of Pabna had earned the confidence of the landless by providing leadership to their movement, they were subsequently cheated by a section of officials of that NGO. The leaders of that NGO spent the money brought for the landless for their own consumption. Even expensive homes, flats and cars were bought. At one stage, the donors stopped their funding on charge of corruption. This investigative report was prepared by Dipu Sarwar. It was broadcast by the ‘Ekusher Chokh’ programme on ETV on 31 July 2008 with the title ‘Financial corruption by an NGO of Pabna’.

It may be mentioned that TIB has been awarding this prize since 1999 for the flourishing of professional excellence in investigative journalism on corruption in Bangladesh. This year, a total of 65 entries were submitted including 43 in the national category, 15 in regional category and 7 in electronic media category. The 4-member panel of judges constituted to evaluate the entries included eminent journalists Syed Badrul Ahsan, Shyamal Datta, Nawazish Ali Khan and Dhaka University professor Dr. Sumaya Khair. A total of 528 entries have been submitted for the competition since 1999. TIB has awarded investigative prizes to 35 journalists for their best reports. An announcement will soon be made regarding invitation of entries for the 2010 competition. Details can be obtained from the TIB website www.ti-bangladesh.org.

Investigative Journalism Training will be offered by
TIB and Dhaka University’s Mass Communication and Journalism Department

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and the Mass Communication and Journalism Department of Dhaka University will impart training on investigative journalism in the area of corruption for media workers of the country working at local and national levels. With this objective, a memorandum of understanding was signed by TIB and Dhaka University at a ceremony held in Dhaka on 13 December.

Held at the office of the Vice-chancellor, the agreement was signed by the Treasurer of Dhaka University Dr. Mizanur Rahman and the TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman. Chairperson of the Mass Communication and Journalism Department Dr. Geetira Nasrin, senior teachers of the department, Senior Programme Manager of TIB Mohammad Imam Uddin and Assistant Programme Manager Wasim Reza Chowdhury were present at the signing ceremony.

Speaking on the occasion, the Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Professor AAMS Arefin Siddique welcomed this initiative and said, “By participating in this kind of programme, Dhaka University will be able to play an effective role in the anti-corruption movement.”

Under this training programme, workshops will be held in six divisions of the country. The main objective of organising this programme is to enhance professional excellence of corruption-related investigative journalism in Bangladesh, encourage media workers to prepare investigative reports on corruption and raise their efficiency. It is hoped that the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism will play an important role in establishing good governance through increased transparency and accountability in the country by motivating media-workers for the purpose.
Bangladesh lies in the middle range of the ‘transparency in political financing’ index. This was disclosed during the publication ceremony of the research report titled ‘Transparency in Political Financing in Bangladesh’ at Mohakhali’s BRAC Centre Inn on 25 October. A round-table discussion titled ‘Transparency in Political Financing: Challenges and Ways of Overcoming those’ was organised by TIB on the occasion. Presided over by the chairman of TIB Trustee Board M. Hafizuddin Khan, it was moderated by the Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman. The Chief Election commissioner Dr. ATM Shamsul Huda was present as Chief Guest, while eminent personalities including parliament members, politicians and representatives of the civil society were present on the occasion.

Those who took part in the discussion included Rasheda Begum Heera MP, Professor Moniruzzaman Mian, former secretary Abdul Latif Mandal, Professor Dr. Dilara Chowdhury, journalist Muhammad Jahangir, ASM Rab of JSD, Ayub Ali Khan, Khushi Kabir of non-government organization ‘Nijera Kori’ and Sharmin Murshid of Broti. The research report was presented by Senior Research Fellow of TIB Shahzada Akram at the start of the discussion. The research was carried out to establish a standard for transparency and accountability in political financing and undertake publicity for the purpose. TIB took up this project under the aegis of Transparency International (with the ‘Crinis’ project) in 3 countries of South and South-East Asia (Nepal, Indonesia and Bangladesh) in order a devise an index for corruption in political financing.

According to the findings of this research, Bangladesh’s overall score was 4.5, which was considered medium and optimistic; but there is scope and need for more improvement. If comparison is made with other two countries, Bangladesh’s score is higher than Indonesia (3.7) and Nepal (2.8). With relation to the 10 indices used in the report, the situation was satisfactory only in case of reporting coverage (score 9.2). On the other hand, inadequate scores were obtained in accounting (score 2.8), submission of accounts (score 3.2), reliability of reports (score 2.0), disclosure of information (score 2.2) and punitive measures (score 2.2). There is scope for lot of improvement in these areas. Bangladesh is ahead of others in the areas of reporting coverage, preventive measures, state control and monitoring by civil society. But in some areas like accounting, submission of reports, depth of reports and reliability, the scores of Nepal and Indonesia were higher than that of Bangladesh. It was observed that much room existed for improvements in the area of reliability in all three countries. It can be claimed overall that there are lapses in supervision and transparency of political financing in all the three countries.

Alongside the government, the election commission, political parties, the mass media and the civil society can play a powerful role in establishing transparency and accountability in political financing in Bangladesh. TIB has made a number of recommendations for strengthening the roles of these institutions and making them effective. Principal among these are: Providing assistance to the political parties on behalf of the state during elections and framing a policy for the purpose; mandatory disclosure of donations made by private companies, mass media and individuals; monitoring the electoral expenses of political parties and their candidates and putting in place mechanisms for taking legal measures by election commission in case of violations of election laws; publication of the annual reports, updated income, expenditure and wealth statements of all political parties on its website by the Election Commission; conducting investigative research on political financing by civil society organizations and maintaining surveillance in order to reduce electoral expenses and financing; publication of investigative reports by the news media on election financing; and above all, voluntary disclosure by the corporate sector regarding grants (financial or services) given to political parties.
Irregularities and Corruption in Constructing Embankment in Haor area of Sunamganj

A roundtable discussion was held under the auspices of Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) Sunamganj on 22 December 2009 at Shaheed Abul Hossain auditorium on the theme ‘constructing embankments on Haor: Accountability problem of Sunamganj Water Development Board and its Solution.’ Chaired by the CCC convenor Prof. Parimal Kanti Dey, District Commissioner of the district Zahiruddin Ahmed was present in the discussion as Chief Guest. Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman and Executive Engineer of Water Development Board (WDB) Abdul Hakim were present as Special Guests.

According to research findings, many problems, irregularities and corruption exist in the process of embankment construction by the Sunamganj WDB. Notable problems which have been identified are: not giving importance to local geographic realities, conjecture-based assessment, over-estimation, non-participation of local people in construction monitoring, participation of non-local contractors, lack of accountability on the part of contractors and PIC members, sanctioning sub-leases by violating rules, and non-adherence to tender provisions or guidelines in work. As a consequence, scope for corruption and irregularities is being generated at different stages of the embankment construction process. Between 250% and 400% over-estimations are resorted to in case of equipments for embankment construction during invitations of tender. As a result, the contractors got the jobs by bidding 55% less on an average during the past two years. A section of corrupt officers and employees of Sunamganj WDB extracts bribes from the contractors at different stages of the tendering process. They aided in the award of works through nepotism and submitted imaginary reports without proper examination during implementation. On the other hand, the irregularities committed by the contractors included: failure to complete construction of embankment on time; not using required materials in construction of embankment; giving sub-contracts illegally; not working in accordance with the tender documents through collusion with officers-employees; drawing bills by claiming incomplete work as complete, etc. The extent of corruption is even more in ‘variation’ or ‘emergency’ works. Notable among these are: giving work-order without feasibility study; formulating plan for ‘variation work’ by corrupt officials in exchange for bribes; fixing the rate for work through understanding between contractor and the PIC; and drawing bills before completion of work through collusion with a section of WDB officials.

Constructions of embankments were undertaken during 2005-06 and 2006-07 financial years through the PIC formed under the ‘Project formulation and implementation policies 2005’ based on realities in the haor area. But irregularities and corruption also exist in works implemented through the PIC. Notable among these are: not informing the members and local people about the actual allocation and expenditure of the project; not working according to directives; politicisation and nepotism; extracting bribes from the PIC by a section of corrupt officials of Sunamganj WDB, etc. As a result, corruption is spreading at the local level and a section of middlemen are emerging in the process.

In this backdrop, the recommendations made by Sunamganj CCC and TIB for establishing transparency and accountability in the embankment construction projects in Sunamganj include: framing haor-friendly policies; considering area-based market-price for preventing over-estimation; effective implementation of the PIC system; submission of wealth-statements by the officials of WDB; framing ethical conduct rules for the WDB officials; taking punitive measures against corrupt officials; regular audit and surveillance of embankment construction at the field level; involving the local people in the construction and monitoring of embankment construction; public hearing for social audit and budget-tracking of all information related to construction of embankment; signing of an integrity pledge/agreement by Sunamganj WDB with the local people.

Opinion-sharing with Cartoonists

An opinion-sharing meeting was held with the cartoonists at Dhaka’s Ramna Restaurant on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day. Around 50 young cartoonists including cartoonist Ahsan Habib as well as TIB Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman participated in it. Discussions were held on the problems and prospects of cartoonists. The cartoonists expressed their interest about formation of an anti-corruption forum. At the same time, they praised various programmes of TIB.
28 September was the International Right to Information Day. The day was observed in the country this year in the backdrop of the adoption of Right to Information Act. The convener of the right to information forum Shaheen Anam said on the occasion, “There can be unprecedented progress in establishment of democracy and good governance in the country if this law is implemented properly. As in other countries of the world, there will be specific progress in establishing transparency and accountability in Bangladesh as well.”

On the occasion of observing the day, the right to information forum said, “The government has framed the Right to Information Act in accordance with its electoral pledge, which is undoubtedly a praiseworthy initiative and a big achievement. But the sincere goodwill of all stakeholders including top-level government-functionaries in proper application and implementation of this law is much more important. Advances shall have to be made through adoption of a precise implementation strategy and action-plan. Action-plan and implementation strategy can be formulated through involvement of all including relevant ministries, the civil society, non-government organizations and the mass media. All concerned have to be motivated for the purpose.”

Expressing anxiety over harassment of media workers at various places of the country, one of the founders of the right to information forum and Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman said, “The mass media plays an effective role in dissemination of information. A bridge is built between the government and the people through publishing accurate and reliable information. So there should not be any hindrances to dissemination of information. Especially, an environment should be created in which the media workers can discharge their duties without any fear and obstruction.

Mentionably, on 28 September of 2002, Freedom of Information Network at Sofia City in Bulgaria decided to celebrate this day as ‘Right to Know Information Day’ in order to ensure the right to information. Since then, this day is being observed with importance in different countries of the world. This day is being observed in Bangladesh since 2006 with the initiative of various organizations including TIB.

SEMINAR

A seminar was organised by the YES group of East-West University on 1 November for observing the day. Held at the auditorium of the university and entitled ‘Right to Information: Our Responsibilities and Challenges’, the Vice-Chancellor Dr. Mohammad Sharif was present as Chief Guest while the TIB Executive Director was the Special Guest. The keynote paper was jointly presented at the seminar by the YES members AFM Fahmidur Rahman and Md. Samiul Muyeed. Teachers and students of different departments including the Adviser of the YES group Quamrul Hasan was present on the occasion.

In the keynote paper, Samiul Muyeed analysed how right to information could be ensured in Bangladesh in the light of experiences of different countries of the world. Fahmidur Rahman presented the theme of direct role of right to information in establishing good governance. The Vice-Chancellor Dr. Mohammad Sharif said, “the youths are the sources of power; consequently they have to take the responsibility for building a corruption-free Bangladesh”. The TIB Executive Director said, "we have to come out of the culture of secrecy". Right to information is the principal tool for raising the living standard and knowledge of the people and above all, in establishing people’s ownership over the state. Quamrul Hasan urged the youths to say ‘No’ to corruption. Besides, the discussants demanded effective implementation of the Right to Information Act in Bangladesh. Prizes were distributed among the winners of anti-corruption slogan competition organised on the occasion of right to information day.
Right to Information Act: Reactions of the Students

Free flow of information has proved to be a principal precondition for institutionalisation of democracy, establishment of good governance and prevention of corruption. The government has earned acclaim and kudos of all by passing this law in the first session of the Ninth Parliament, showing respect to its electoral pledge. The expectations of the people have increased manifold as a result. TIB tried to know the views of the students regarding the Right to Information act. The opinions of some pupils studying in different educational institutions of the country have been presented below. The interviews were taken by Shyama Rozalin…

Atiq Jewel  
*Physics Dept, Shahjalal University of S & T*

The adoption of Right to Information Act 2009 by the government has opened up a new dimension to realizing the rights of the people. Its proper application will carry us forward a long distance. The Information Commission will have to play an effective role in applying this act; because, if the authorities do not cooperate, then this act will be futile.

Titul Biswas  
*MBA, Jagannath University*

As citizens of an independent sovereign country, people have the right to know important information about the country. I believe, this right will be ensured through passage of the right to information act 2009.

Shahreen Tamanna  
*International Relations Dept, Dhaka University*

I hold the view that mere passage of act is not enough. Before anything else, the people will have to be made aware about the right to information act. Only if the people know this act and remain conscious about the subject will it be possible for them to apply this act.

Pronab Chowdhury  
*Bangabandhu Govt. University College, Gopalganj*

The people will be benefited by this act. But its implementation will have to be ensured. Its successful application will bring overall change, especially in the area of curbing corruption.

Asfedul Haque  
*BBA, Dhaka University*

I hold the view that the right to information act 2009 will ensure transparency and accountability in all areas. It was a demand of time, so the government should take care in applying this act.

Liton Das  
*Botany department, Jagannath University*

Eight organizations can be mentioned who shall remain outside the purview of this law. This provision shall not be applicable in cases of corruption or violation of human rights by these organizations or institutions. But the people will have to be made aware regarding which information are relevant for corruption and human rights; otherwise, these eight organizations will take advantage of this provision and can refrain from providing information to the people.

Md. Rezaul Haque  
*Social Welfare Dept, Jagannath University*

Although the Right to Information Act exists in many countries of the world since long, this act has been made effective in Bangladesh only recently on July 1. Though late, it is a matter of optimism that the government has made the right to information act effective. I hope this act would not remain confined to mere passage and the government would extend all cooperation for implementing it.

Md. Shah Alam  
*Department of Chemistry, Jagannath University*

The Right to Information Act is very important in the context of Bangladesh. Its application is very urgent especially in curbing corruption. I am eager to see its impact on social life very soon.

Subrata Biswas  
*Political Science Department, Bangabandhu Government University College, Gopalganj*

The people will be benefited if necessary information can be obtained at all places. There will be changes among people as a result. But the government must ensure that everybody gets benefit in accordance with the act’s objectives.

Susanta Mondol  
*Philosophy Dept, Bangabandhu Govt. University, Gopalganj*

The people will now be able to raise questions. But they must be made conscious for getting optimum benefit from this act and the government will have to demonstrate goodwill through commendable examples.

Rony Das  
*Botany Department, Jagannath University*

Most citizens of our country are illiterate. How much they will be able to appreciate this act is a matter of concern. I therefore think that the print and electronic media should play a powerful role alongside the government in generating awareness about it.

Ahmed Shibly  
*Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology*

I believe, our civic life will get benefit from all the provisions of this act. As a result, any individual will be able to obtain any information necessary for him or her. As a majority of our government officers are corrupt, this act will help us in saving ourselves from the corruption.
Anti-Corruption Initiatives at the Local Level

Khulna’s Mayor Face to Face with the People:
The CCC-Khulna arranged a ‘Public representative face to face with the people’ session on 21 November. It was organised in collaboration with the Greater Khulna Development Coordination Committee, Sujan, Khulna Nagorik Forum and Rupantar Forum at Khulna Press Club auditorium. City Mayor Talukdar Abdul Khaleque was present on the occasion and spoke about the role of city-corporation in establishing transparency, accountability and good governance in local government institutions. He said, ‘Corruption will not be allowed by any means within Khulna City Corporation.’ He assured that complete transparency will be maintained in any recruitment by the city-corporation. Chaired by the CCC convener Prof. Md. Zafar Imam and moderated by CCC member Md. Anawrul Quadir, the Mayor expressed his resolve to groom Khulna as a digital city so that all activities of the city corporation are run on the basis of transparency, accountability and people’s participation.

Positive Changes at Digarkanda Government Primary School, Mymensingh:
Through a meeting held on 23 April 2007, the authorities of Digarkanda Government Primary School of Mymensingh, the guardians, CCC and YES members identified prevailing problems in the school and pledged to overcome those. The Chairman of school managing committee and the Headmaster were sent to Gaibandha through CCC initiative to inspect the Shibram Primary School, which has set an example in raising the quality of education. By utilising the experiences of Shibram School and their own capacity, the school authorities then started to work with new zeal. A number of improvements have already taken place. At present, 5 teachers are working in this school which was suffering from acute teacher-shortage. Dearth of benches has also been addressed. The class-attendance rate of pupils has been raised to 88% and the process of restarting the stipend programme has been completed. Previously the rate of passing the examination was 79% which later increased to 100% due to this intervention. The drop-out rate of students has declined to 19% from the previous 23.7%. Power connections have been given to school class-rooms. The school managing committee has been reconstituted. The guardians are now much more active regarding attendance and educational quality of their children. The mothers’ gathering, teacher-guardian meeting and school managing committee meetings are being regularly organised through CCC initiative.

CCC-Natore in Save the River Movement:
A human chain and rally were organised by CCC-Natore on 27 October where people gathered at Dilalpur primary school ground under Walia union (beside Chandana river) to demand eviction of illegal occupiers of Chandana, Baral and Khalishdanga rivers of Lalpur upazila and conservation of the environment. Around 500 poor people, who have been victimised, participated in the programme spontaneously. Around 150 students formed the human chain. After the human chain and gathering, the CCC representatives exchanged views with the upazila executive officer and assistant commissioner (land) of Lalpur. The administration was requested by the CCC to ensure that the common people could use the river water for their essential work. They sought renovation of the river and punishments for those land-robbers who did not allow the poor people to use river-water.

Integrity Pact Signed by Boulai Union of Kishoreganj:
The elected public representatives are signing integrity pacts with the people with the goal of running their programmes with transparency and accountability. This pact was signed by the Boulai union parishad under sadar.
The programme arranged on the occasion was chaired by the veteran teacher of Boulaí village Harish Chandra Bhowmik. Others who spoke on the occasion included the sadar upazila executive officer Md. Nure Alam Siddiqui, convener of Kishoreganj CCC Maya Bhowmik and member of the union citizens’ committee Md. Noor Mohammad. Later the pact was signed by the Boulaí Union Parishad (first party), Union Citizens’ Committee (second party) and the CCC-Kishoreganj (third party).

Public Representative Face to Face with the People in Jhalakati:
Joint initiatives by the people and the councils are needed for strengthening local governments and making them transparent and accountable. A ‘Public representative face to face with the people’ programme was arranged at the auditorium of No. 4 Keora union parishad on 19 November with assistance from the CCC Jhalakati. The speakers at the programme called for involvement of the general masses in development activities for strengthening local governments and ensuring their transparency and accountability.

Chaired by the Headmaster of Naikathi Secondary School Portosh Kumar Roy, the Vice-chairman of Jhalakati upazila Ishrat Jahan Sonali was present as the Chief Guest while the general secretary of Jhalakathi Press Club Kazi Khalilur Rahman and joint-convener of CCC-Jhalakati Ms. Kamrunnessa Azad were present as Special Guests. Others who spoke on the occasion included former UP member Ezandar Ali Khan, Narendranath Babari, teacher Niranjan Howlader, UP member Anwar Hossain Babu, Maksuda Begum and Sakina Begum. The UP Chairman Md. Moyeen Talukdar replied to various queries from the public and informed everybody about various limitations of the UP, its future plans and ongoing programmes. He sought cooperation of all for the purpose. Around 200 people attended the ceremony including officials of government and private organizations, rival candidates in UP elections and NGO workers.

CCC-Chandpur Signs Integrity Pledge:
An integrity pact was signed by the CCC-Chandpur and the Hajiganj upazila parishad on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day. Besides, a cycle rally was brought out from the Shapath Square of Chandpur which terminated at Hajiganj upazila. The rally was joined by the students of Baburhat College and Balakhal College. After the rally, the integrity pact was signed at a programme held at the Hajiganj rotary centre by the CCC-Chandpur and Hajiganj upazila parishad. The Chairman of the upazila parishad Professor Abdur Rashid Majumdar signed on behalf of the parishad while the CCC convener Professor Monohar Ali signed on behalf of the CCC. The CCC will undertake joint programmes with the Hajiganj upazila parishad for bringing in dynamism in the programmes of Hajiganj upazila parishad alongside waging movement against corruption. The Chief Guest and Deputy Commissioner of Chandpur district Biswas Muhammad Azimuddin watched the proceedings on behalf of the administration.

Integrity Pact on Education Signed in Lalmonirhat:
An integrity pact signing ceremony took place at the Fulgachh Government Primary School under Mogalhat union of Lalmonirhat on 24 November. It was signed by the Government Primary School authorities (teachers and SMC), guardians and local citizens, and the CCC as the first, second and third parties – with the objective of enhancing the quality of education services in the school. An environment of transparency, integrity and accountability has been created in the school through this pact. All concerned were unanimous in the view that they would make all-out efforts in accordance with government regulations for bringing all children above 6 years living in the area under the purview of primary education. They will take necessary initiative for informing all concerned about the conditions for receiving stipends, amount of money given and what should be done for the purpose. They will receive assistance from the upazila education authority, UP and the upazila parishad for overall development and improvement of educational environment of the school. The Headmaster and the SMC will take necessary measures so that the teachers can discharge their assigned responsibilities properly. The CCC (third party) will extend necessary information, strategy, advice and cooperation to the first and second parties on involving the local patrons of education, including guardians and relevant authorities, for ensuring integrity, transparency and accountability as well as proper utilisation of resources in all activities of the school.

Information Fair Organised in Jessore:
CCC News

The students of Bidirpur Government Primary School under Chapai Nawabganj were not ready for participation in the first-ever completion examination 2009 for class five students held throughout the country. Only two could pass in all subjects from among 36 students in a model test centrally organised in the upazila. In this situation, The YES and YES Friends members of Chapai Nawabganj CCC were requested by the school managing committee to assist in the preparation of students for passing the model test. The YES and YES Friends members motivated the class five students and organised a model test for the examinees. Tests were taken from 10 to 13 November in the subjects of English, Mathematics, Social Science and Bengali. A total of 20 female-students and 16 male-students participated in the exam. The results of the model test were announced on 18 November in presence of concerned guardians, members of the SMC and teachers. The pass percentage was 42.86%.

The Chapai Nawabganj CCC organised a review meeting for the purpose of announcing the results and raising the quality of education. The convener of the education sub-committee of the CCC Md. Mozammel Haq provided guidance to the teachers and guardians by remaining present. It was observed that the pupils could prepare themselves better if the teachers took more initiative. The SMC thanked the CCC and YES group and urged continuation of such efforts in the future.

Floral Wreaths Laid on the Tomb of Freedom Fighters in Brahmanbaria:
Different programmes were organised under the aegis of Brahmanbaria CCC on the occasion of celebrating the Victory Day on 16 December. The YES members of Brahmanbaria went to Kollapathar of Kasba by bus; they laid floral wreaths on the tomb of 51 martyred freedom fighters who gave up their lives during a frontal battle with the Pakistani invaders during the 1971 liberation war. They offered special prayers for salvation of the departed souls of the valiant freedom fighters. The superintendent of the Kollapathar graveyard A. Karim narrated the history of sacrifice of the valiant freedom fighters at Kollapathar. He urged them to establish themselves as patriotic, corruption-free and good citizens by becoming imbued with the spirit of the liberation war.

Jhenaidah Municipality Signs Integrity Pledge:
The authorities of Jhenaidah Municipality has signed an Integrity Pledge with the objectives of transforming it into an ideal one through collective efforts by ensuring good governance, transparency and accountability in its work and by enhancing service quality. The signing ceremony was held on 21 October at the Jhenaidah Municipality. This exceptional event was attended by the municipal mayor, councillors, officials and CCC members. The municipal mayor pledged to ensure participation of the citizens in framing budget, inform people about the municipal services, attach importance and priority to problems faced by the people, install information boards containing necessary information and maintain transparency and accountability in the workings of the municipality.
YES Activities in Dhaka

16 institution-based YES groups have been formed in Dhaka by TIB during the year 2008-09. These groups are organising various anti-corruption programmes for keeping up the momentum of the anti-corruption movement. An orientation programme was arranged by the YES group of University of Liberal Arts on 5 November to brief the YES members about TIB and YES. On 9 November, a study-circle was organised by the YES group of Institute of Education and Research on the subject of UN Convention against Corruption. The YES group of Rokeya Hall arranged a documentary film-show on 16 November titled ‘Story of a girl: Tale of a girl deprived of her rights.’ A study circle was simultaneously held on ‘Women and Corruption.’ The YES group of the Institute of Social Welfare and Research organised a study circle on the theme ‘Right to information’ on 21 November.

The YES group of Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall organised a book-based quiz competition on 18 November with participation of 60 female students. The YES adviser and house tutor Taslima Khan was present on the occasion. The prize distribution ceremony took place on 21 November, which was attended by the hall provost Dr. Gulshan Ara Latifa, YES adviser and TIB official Sajjad Hussain. An orientation session was held simultaneously on the same day for briefing the YES members about TIB and YES.

A study circle on ‘Implementation of the right to information act: What should be done’ was held at the auditorium of Institute of Social Welfare and Research on 21 November under the auspices of the YES group of Institute of Social Welfare and Research. The teachers and students of the institute, YES adviser, TIB officials and YES members were present on the occasion. The keynote paper was presented by Nowshin Tabassum; YES adviser and teacher of the institute Mohammad Hafiz Uddin Bhuiyan took part in the discussion. The students articulated their views on the right to information act during the open discussion. In the concluding part, the TIB official replied to various queries from the students and thanked everybody for organising such an event.

The YES group memebrs of Stamford University organised a signature campaign against corruption at their Siddheswari campus on the occasion of International Day against Corruption on 9 December. The teachers, students and officials of the university gave signatures along with their opinions and expressed solidarity with the anti-corruption programme.

A wall-magazine was published with write-ups, poems, stories and essays by the students on the occasion of the day. A photography exhibition on the liberation war was organised by the YES group on 17 December on the occasion of glorious Victory Day. This daylong exhibition displayed 36 photographs.

3-day Traffic Awareness Programme: A 3-day traffic awareness programme was undertaken from 17 to 19 November jointly by the YES groups of Northern University Bangladesh, IBAIS University, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh and Stamford University for generating awareness among the public about the severe traffic-jams in metropolis Dhaka. A human chain was formed on the inaugural day of the programme. Besides, awareness-oriented leaflets were distributed and people were requested not to park their vehicles indiscriminately. The programme was conducted at different traffic signal points of Dhanmondi’s Satmasjid Road. The programme was acclaimed by the general public and they expressed the hope that such programmes would continue in the future.

Dhaka YES People’s Theatre Group Holds Production-oriented Drama Workshop: A production-oriented drama workshop was organised by the Dhaka YES People’s Theatre Group from 23 to 29 December. Selected 14 members from the Yes groups of Dhaka participated in the workshop. Assistant Programme Manager in the outreach and communications section of TIB Dilruba Begum Monalisa acted as the moderator during the workshop. Theatre personalities Shankar Shaojhal and Motahar Akand conducted two sessions as guest moderators. On the last day of this production-oriented workshop, the participants staged their improvised drama ‘Sharisha Therapy’ (Mustard Therapy). The main themes of the drama were education, health and right to information. The Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, YES group adviser of Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall Taslima Khan, team-leaders of the YES groups and TIB officials were present at the technical show. It may be noted that this is the first theatre group formed by TIB with members from the YES groups of Dhaka city.
Legal Assistance Needed for Curbing Violence against Women

By S. Toukir Ahmed

Violence against women indicates the destruction of human values and human rights. It is therefore the responsibility of all citizens to become vocal against violence against women. It can be prevented through legal assistance and waging social movement.

According to a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly, torture and violence against women imply behaviour through which women are harmed physically, mentally, sexually or economically; when threats are issued against women for causing such harms; when the freedom of women are curtailed; when they are harmed through enticements or when they are deprived from developing an independent outlook. According to a decision of the UN General Assembly, the 'Prevention of Violence against Women' day is observed each year on 25 November. The principal causes of violence against women are degeneration of social and cultural values, legal weaknesses, absence of rule of law, poverty and lack of employment opportunities, and dearth of institutional initiatives for curbing violence.

The forms and types of violence vary from country to country. For example, women's repression for dowry, child marriage by force, women's trafficking, sexual harassment, depriving women from receiving nutrition and healthcare, physical and mental torture, and absence of educational opportunities, etc. Although many people can comprehend the outcome of violence, its horrendous impact deserves special mention.

The outcomes of tortures are death, handicaps, permanent sickness, mental imbalance, suicide, incapacity, involvement in cases and quarrels, suffering social abuse and loss of prestige. This kind of situation is not only unfortunate for a nation and society; it is a major hindrance in achieving progress and growth.

According to a report published by the UN Fund for Population Activities on 12 November 2008, the women community in Bangladesh remain silent about repression they undergo at home due to fear of being undermined socially or out of shame. As a consequence, the government, the public representatives and the law enforcement agencies do not realize this.

Among the laws against women’s repression in Bangladesh, numerous amendments have been made to The Dowry Prohibition Act 1980, Prevention of Cruelty against Women Act 1983, The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1984, and according to sections 312-314 of Bangladesh Penal Code, many amendments has been made about divorce and property. But violence against women can be contained in many other ways apart from legal means. As the local governments, chairmen, members, public representatives at the grassroots play an important role in ensuring the right of reproductive health, their help should be taken while applying law. These entities need to be officially assisted by the government. The role of the law enforcement agencies is also very crucial in resisting women’s repression. Above all, social measures have to be strengthened for preventing women’s repression. We can generate public opinion against women’s repression by waging a social movement. Accordingly legal assistance for containing violence is greatly needed.

The writer is a journalist and YES member, CCC, Chittagong
Bangladesh Improves in the Corruption Perception Index 2009

Transparency International (TI) has released its annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2009 on 17 November. Bangladesh has improved in comparison to the previous year. The results show that Bangladesh, having scored 2.4 has been ranked 13th from below, which is 139th among 180 countries included in the index this year. In the same position with the same score with Bangladesh this year are Belarus, Pakistan and Philippines. Somalia remains at the bottom of the list with lowest score (1.1). TIB arranged a press conference at the Conference Hall of Dhaka Reporters’ Unity on the release of this index. Chairman of TIB trustee board M. Hafizudduin Khan and member of the same Professor Muzaffer Ahmad were present in the press conference. Executive Director of TIB Dr. Iftekharuzzaman presented a paper on CPI. According to the list Afghanistan and Myanmar are in the 2nd and 3rd position and Sudan and Iraq in joint 4th from below.

New Zealand has been ranked at the top, scoring 9.4. Denmark occupies the second position with 9.3 score. Singapore achieved the third score from top jointly with Sweden scoring 9.2 who have been perceived as the least corrupted countries in the league of top 10 form the very beginning. After occupying the last position from 2001 to 2005, Bangladesh stood 3rd from bottom with a score of 2.0 in 2006, 7th with again a score of 2.0 in 2007 and 10th with a score of 2.1 in 2008.

According to the CPI index, Bangladesh’s position has improved by three steps in 2009 compared to 2008. This is notable that comparing the score of 2008 (2.1) with that of this year (2.4) Bangladesh’s progress is 0.3. Although the improvement may appear negligible in terms of pervasiveness of corruption, Bangladesh’s name was mentioned along with 8 other countries, Belarus, Guatemala, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Syria and Tonga as the ones who made maximum progress. However, as a country with a score of less than 3, Bangladesh’s position remains tagged with those countries of the world which are most impacted and harmed by corruption. But that does not mean Bangladesh is most corrupt or Bangalshis are a corrupt nation. Although corruption is the toughest impediment to economic growth, good governance and poverty alleviation in Bangladesh, the common people of the country are not corrupt. They are only harmed and suffer due to corruption. The country or its people cannot be called corrupt in any way because of the corruption resorted to by the powerful people and failure of the leadership and relevant institutions in curbing it.

This year’s index has been prepared on the basis of information gathered during 2008 and 2009 (up to September). It reflected the massive anti-corruption drive undertaken by the caretaker government throughout the country during 2007-08 and the expectations for change generated by important institutional and legal reforms initiated for strengthening the base of anti-corruption efforts. In addition, resolute anti-corruption pledges made by the present government – who received a huge mandate from the people in the parliamentary election held in 2008, and the continuation of numerous reform measures undertaken by the previous government have also been evaluated positively by this index.

“Whether or not the improvement achieved by Bangladesh will be sustainable and whether further progress will be achieved will depend on the government’s will and capacity to deliver, especially in ensuring integrity, independence, impartiality and effectiveness of key institutions like the Parliament, Anti-corruption Commission, Election Commission, Information Commission, Judiciary, law enforcement agencies, the public service and the Human Rights Commission” said Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh. He also said “The government’s performance in ensuring integrity in public sector management, especially transparency in public procurement will be among key factors influencing Bangladesh’s score in coming years. Equally important will be the extent of progress in enforcing the Right to Information Act and in strengthening the local government”.
Third conference to implement UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) was held by the member countries in Doha, the capital of Quatar. Including the member countries of the convention, governments of 141 countries were invited in this conference held from 9 to 13 November. The key objective of this conference was to adopt a review mechanism, which will help to verify whether the government is implementing anti-corruption activities which they promised to the people by signing the convention. The convention failed to adopt a review mechanism that is needed for effectively tackling the devastating effects of corruption.

Barrister Shafique Ahmed, Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs headed the Bangladesh delegation to the Conference. Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) attended the Conference. Representatives of the UNCAC Civil Society Coalition of over 350 non-governmental organizations from 95 countries of the world who attended the conference were particularly disappointed that the agreed mechanism does not contain adequate measures to ensure transparency, inclusiveness and effectiveness called for by most of the participating States.

Barrister Shafique Ahmed, Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs called for a transparent, inclusive and effective Review Mechanism for the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Addressing the opening session on 9 November of the Conference he also said, “Bangladesh supported the participation of all stakeholders including the civil society.”

Consideration of an effective Review Mechanism was one of key agenda items of this important UN Conference held in Doha, Qatar. Most of the participating States Parties were in favour of an effective review mechanism. After a week of intense negotiations the States agreed to a review mechanism to monitor implementation of the of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Under the new mechanism, the States will be monitored every five years to review their performance against obligations to the UNCAC. Findings, based on self-assessments and peer reviews by experts, will be compiled in country review reports. The executive summary of these reports will be made public.

“Under pressure from a handful of countries, the conference ended without an effective review mechanism, which could have ensured that governments fulfill their obligations”, said Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). The mechanism has specifically failed to meet the demand for full publication of country reports, meaningful participation of civil society organizations, and in-country review visits, he said.

The blocking countries stood against the much-needed provisions of disclosure and inclusiveness which surprised many participants in the conference. “Unwillingness to publish full reports and to engage civil society in the review process reflected the failure of the blocking governments to take their own people into trust”, said Dr. Zaman.

However, the Bangladesh Government, which has come to power with a huge public mandate to fight corruption, and has followed up by adopting the Right to Information Act, will have nothing to hide, and allow publication of reports in due course, Dr Zaman expected. He called upon the Government to engage with all stakeholders, particularly citizens at large in all efforts to translate into reality the commitments made under the Convention which are also fully consistent with the government’s election pledges.

The UNCAC is the only international convention that includes a comprehensive package of institutional, legal and policy measures to tackle corrupt practices, including bribery, embezzlement and money laundering. It obliges 142 States Parties to prevent and criminalize corruption, promote international cooperation to recover stolen assets, provide technical assistance and information exchange. A strong review mechanism is indispensable to ensure compliance of commitments made by the states. The UNCAC came into force in December 2005, and Bangladesh became a State Party to it in February 2007.
TIB PUBLICATIONS

TIB has produced and distributed various communication materials at different times with the goal of enhancing people’s involvement and strengthening the social movement against corruption. Apart from the materials prepared on the occasion of different days during 2009, research reports have also been published regularly during the year.

Various communication materials like leaflets, stickers, greeting cards, brochures, catalogues, t-shirts, bags and caps were produced this year on the occasion of International Mother Language Day, Women’s Day, Right to Information Day, Anti-Corruption Day, Rokeya Day, etc. Brochures were published on Dhaka YES groups and traffic awareness; a fact-sheet was produced on the layout and information about the outdoor department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital; an analytical fact-sheet was published on the Corruption Perceptions Index 2009; and a booklet was published on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day with write-ups from the YES group members of Dhaka. The TIB desk-calendar and note-book were published towards the end of the year. A research monograph and policy brief on ‘Transparency in political financing’, and a book on the expectations of citizens from the parliament and its members were also published. The annual report for 2008 was published in the middle of the year. Besides, TIB’s quarterly newsletter and ‘Nagorik Prottay’ (citizens’ resolve) have been published regularly.

Launching of ‘Readers’ Queries’ in Waves

I liked all the sections of ‘Waves.’ But I always felt the absence of one section; and that is ‘readers’ queries.’ So I sincerely request the board of editors of ‘Waves’ to immediately launch a section on ‘readers’ queries’ in the ‘Waves.’

Nasir Uddin, YES member, CCC-Rajbari

Pages Should Be Increased

I read the ‘Waves’ regularly. Its editorial, research news and TI news are quite significant and I like those. The page numbers of ‘Waves’ should be increased. At the same time, the readers would be benefitted if research-oriented articles on corruption and good governance as well as write-ups by eminent persons are published.

Alka Nandita, IVS Bangladesh, Dhaka

TIB to Shift to New Office-Building from January

The TIB office will be shifted to Dhaka’s Banani from January 2010. The new office address is: House no. 141, Road no. 12, Block-E, Banani. The existing telephone numbers will remain unchanged. It may be mentioned that the TIB office has been housed at the present Gulshan address since 2003.

Executive Editor : Mohammed Imam Uddin

Executive Committee : Lovely Yeasmin Jeba, Shahzada M Akram, Mohammad Rejaul Haque, Saifullah Tareq Khaleda Akter, Shahanaz Momotaz Bithe, Khandoker Shohel Rana, Wasim Reza Chowdhury and Tanha Mahjabeen

Waves : TIB Newsletter

Progress Tower (5th floor), House-1, Road-23, Gulshan-1, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh.

Phone: 9887884, 8826036, Fax – (880-2) 9884811

E-mail: advocacy@ti-bangladesh.org, Website: www.ti-bangladesh.org