

Media important for democracy

Discussion told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The media plays a significant role in ensuring country's democracy, good governance and human rights as it reflects people's opinions, said speakers at a discussion yesterday.

They were speaking at the discussion on "Investigative Journalism: Prospects and Challenges", organised by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) at Brac Centre in the capital.

The discussion was held following TIB's Investigative Journalism Award 2012, which four journalists received for the best investigative reports this year.

The four recipients are Bakul Ahmed, former reporter of dainik Jugantor, Rezaul Karim, chief correspondent of Chandpur's dainik Elshey Par, Hossain Sohel, reporter, and Krishna Sarkar, former videographer of ATN News.

One of the key purposes of investigative reporting is to ensure the government's transparency regarding incidents of power abuse, said Prof Dilara Chowdhury, former teacher of Jahangirnagar University.

"Investigative reporting is also important in ensuring good governance and rule of law in the interest of the country's

people. The civil society members must come forward to assist journalists in this regard," she added.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said the journalism profession is essential for any country's democracy as journalists discover the real story behind incidents, and that it is the main objective of investigative reporting.

Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman said journalists should have honesty, sincerity, modesty and hardworking qualities among others for good reporting.

"Journalists should achieve the required qualities and skills to accomplish honest, daring and independent investigative reporting," he added.

Matiur Rahman also emphasised training for media publishers and editors to enrich and expand the boundary of independent journalism.

Since the 1950s, journalists' contributions to the country are enormous. If everybody works in a united front for the welfare of the country, it is possible to establish a corruption free country, he added.

Sultana Kamal, chairperson of TIB Trustee Board, said if there is no love and sincerity for the journalism profession, then it is not possible to be a good journalist.



Four journalists, who received TIB's Investigative Journalism Award 2012, back row, and guests at the award giving ceremony organised by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) at Brac Centre in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



A traffic jam was created on VIP Road in the capital's Farmgate area amid the hartal yesterday when Awami League activists brought out an anti-hartal procession in the area around noon.

PHOTO: STAR

THREATS TO ENVIRONMENT

Impact assessment on dev projects must

Workshop told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Development projects that have not been assessed for possible environmental impacts can cause irreparable damage to the environment and impede people's lives and their livelihoods, said speakers at a workshop yesterday.

People's participation is necessary in granting environmental clearance to institutions and projects, they said.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (Bela) organised the workshop titled "Public Opinion on Decision-Making: The Importance of Determining Environmental Impact" at Cirdap auditorium in the capital.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bela, emphasised the need for conducting environmental impact assessments (EIA) to determine and analyse the environmental impacts of a project in a given area.

She said the Environment Protection

Act mentions the need for public hearings and environmental surveys before granting environmental clearance to an institution or a project. However, these points were never implemented, she added.

Participants at the workshop decided that Bela would formulate a draft policy on this issue, take recommendations from other environmental organisations and submit the final draft to relevant authorities.

Speakers said natural forests are being destroyed, biodiversity is decreasing, and the rights of forest-dwelling people are being violated as a result of implementing social forestation without assessing its environmental impacts.

Speakers also highlighted that development companies are grabbing land in natural places across the country.

Similarly, shrimp farming in Khulna and other areas are taking place without any consideration of the impact on the community and the environment, they added.

Ctg city public toilet water being illegally sold outside

TAREK MAHMUD, Ctg

Some unscrupulous people are making quick bucks by illegally selling water meant for use at public toilets in Chittagong city in the absence of monitoring by the authorities concerned.

This untreated water is mostly bought by roadside eateries, restaurants and residential buildings, threatening the users with different waterborne diseases while causing a shortage of water in the toilets.

According to Chittagong City Corporation (CCC), the city has 48 public toilets for 50 lakh residents. However, the toilets are mostly used by around 10 lakh homeless people inhabiting the city.

Every year CCC leases the toilets out at prices ranging from Tk 50,000 to Tk 6 lakh, depending on their location and use probability.

Of the 48, Chittagong Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Cwasa) provided 15 leaseholders licences, renewable after one year, to dig deep tube wells. Another 10

have been provided with water supply connections with a monthly billing system as per use.

Either way, getting a water supply costs the leaseholders from Tk 30,000 to Tk 40,000.

Leaseholders of the remaining 23 toilets have illegally dug deep tube wells themselves, said Cwasa sources.

In turn, the leaseholders charge from Tk 2 to Tk 10 per person for using the toilet.

On a visit to public toilets at Jamal Khan, Cheragi Pahar, New Market, Lal Dighi, Badamtali and Dewanhat, people from all walks of life were seen queuing up for water.

The leaseholders and caretakers were charging Tk 30-50 for around 20-litre capacity containers. Filling a larger 40-litre drum mounted on a three-wheeler van cost Tk 100.

Suman Ahmed, caretaker of a public toilet in Lal Dighi, said they sold 70 to 80 containers of water at Tk 50 each every day.

Amir Ali, a local resident buying

water from the toilet, said, "If we do not get water from here, we cannot manage water from anywhere else."

On what happens when the authorities pay a visit, Tipu, caretaker of a toilet, said he and the leaseholder usually "manage" the officials.

The leaseholder, requesting anonymity, said it cost him around Tk 1 lakh, mostly in bribes, to get a licence for a deep tube well.

"It is not profitable to serve only the users of the toilets," he added.

Mamun, driver of a drum-carrying three-wheeler van before the toilet, said around 200 such vans collected water from the toilet every day for distribution in nearby hotels, restaurants and roadside tea stalls.

A restaurant owner in the New Market intersection, seeking anonymity, said the water from the van was cheaper.

CCC Estate Officer Ahmadul Haq said, "The CCC only monitors whether the lessees are paying their water and electric bills. If

anyone sells the water illegally, we will take measures. However, we have not received any complaint yet."

There is nobody to monitor the public toilets, he added.

Cwasa Chief Revenue Officer Khaled Mahmud said, "Selling water meant for public toilets is illegal. Even if there is a shortage of water in residential areas, we keep supplies to the public toilets running."

"Sometimes we go on inspections to check the illegal use of water. However, it proves futile as they stop selling once we arrive and resume after we leave," he said.

"The water is not fit for human consumption and will definitely be harmful for health if consumed untreated," he added.

Cwasa has already issued letters to the lessees to stop the illegal sale of water while those who have illegally dug deep tube wells will soon be issued letters to get licences, he said.



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6. The People's University of Bangladesh, Asad Gate
7. Lalmatia Mohila College, Lalmatia
8. Best School, Dhanmondi
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12. Brac University Film Club
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