

The role of media in implementing the National Integrity Strategy

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The National Integrity Strategy (NIS) is a comprehensive set of goals, strategies, and action plans aimed at increasing the level of independence to perform with accountability, efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness of state and non-state institutions in a sustained manner. It is a holistic approach toward good governance, which is very much related to the concept of a corruption-free service system in public and non-public institutions.

Although 'Corruption' is a frequently used word, most commonly it is defined as "abuse of entrusted power for private gain". General people believe that in many cases public offices at all levels misuse their positions for personal gain or to serve a few people.

Keeping the citizens' perception in mind about corruption, the government of Bangladesh formulated NIS outlining the vision titled 'A happy and prosperous Golden Bengal" and the mission identified as "Establishment of good governance in the state and the society".

Bangladesh first introduced NIS in 2012 in line with the guidance and directives of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After the independence of the country, Bangabandhu, while addressing a public meeting advised to citizens "The nation must be united against corruption. If public opinion is not mobilized, corruption cannot be stopped by enforcement of law alone."

This directive of the Father of the Nation became the intrinsic spirit of our NIS focused on establishing a corruption-free welfare state aiming to ensure equal opportunity for every citizen enjoying the benefits of prompt public service delivery without any hindrance.

NIS is an exclusive approach to fighting against corruption or abuse of entrusted power. We must have the courage to say "Wrong is wrong even if everybody is doing it". On the other hand, we should have that much mental strength in promoting the spirit "Right is right even if no one is doing it".

The spirit of the Constitution is that Bangladesh would be a just and fair society. Meantime, several laws have been enacted, organizations set up and systems and processes developed for the prevention of corruption. But all those initiatives couldn't reduce corruption at the desired level. That's why the necessity of comprehensive preventive measures was perceived.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) treaty also recognizes the importance of both preventive and punitive measures in this regard. According to article 5.1 of the UNCAC, a comprehensive approach must be taken at the national level to prevent corruption. As a signatory to the UNCAC, it has become obligatory for Bangladesh to formulate a strategy to combat corruption.

NIS is a strategy of the government of Bangladesh to prevent corruption and promote integrity in all affairs of individuals, organizations, society, and the state. It is a social movement against corruption. Integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. NIS document expresses 'integrity' as behavioral excellence influenced by ethics,

morality, and honesty which is supported by time-tested norms, values, customs, and principles of a society.

It has always been a common perception that the media is a watchdog of the government. This means the media holds government officials and governments accountable. Media checks on the government for possible corruption and/or wrongful or illegal acts. This watchful function of media is what labels it the fourth estate.

Media reflects the norms, culture, and values of a society. Media can lead to evolution and revolution of mind and heart of the people fostering information, literacy, and awareness in the nation. Broadly speaking, the relationship between culture and the media is one of inclusion.

For a better understanding of the role of the media in implementing the NIS, discussion about some facets of public-society- government-media dynamics is essential. Similarly, it is very important to clarify and find out how media influences government and society and how media forms and cultivates public opinion in favor of implementing NIS through using different tools.

To my understanding, there are three essential roles of mass media in government. First of all, mass media helps people understand the operations of government; secondly, mass media participates in political decisions; and thirdly, mass media holds government officials accountable.

The present government under the prudent leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina is working relentlessly to bring about a positive change in the society and the governance. To that ends, the government firmly values the freedom of the press as the fourth estate after the executive, legislature, and judiciary in running the statecraft.

And, therefore, the media industry in the country is flourishing day by day. Currently, more than 1300 dailies, 1900 periodicals, 45 TV channels, hundreds of radio stations, and online news portals are operating across the country in meeting citizens' demand for information under the policy support of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Press Information Department (PID), one of the vital organizations under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, has been working sincerely to bridge between the government and the media since its inception. PID, along with other responsibilities demarcated in its citizens charter, is shouldering the responsibility of registering online media including online news portals, online news portals of daily newspapers, ePaper, online news portals of radio channels, and online portals of private TV channels, which have strategic contributions to creating mass awareness about continuous social changes happening by the influence of different political, economic, socio-cultural and technological factors.

Our mass media is enjoying the full right of expression and free flow of information. The people are also enjoying the right to information in the true sense. To materialize the commitment of the government to the Right to Information for every citizen, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting enacted 'The Right to Information Act, 2009' and the National Online Mass Media Policy 2017. The Press Accreditation Policy, 2022 is also ready for final approval. As a result, mass media is flourishing as a booming industry catering to the citizen's demands for information.

The role of mass media in nation-building and development is becoming a much-talked-about issue not only in Bangladesh but also all over the world. As the technology and tools of ICT is gradually updating due to influenced by the innovation of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), a different form of non-conventional media like-satellite television channel, internet protocol television (IPTV), Internet Protocol Radio (IP Radio), Community Radio(CR), YouTube, Facebook, mobile app, online social media, etc. are getting popular in our country. They are also playing a pivotal role in creating social awareness as a change agent. This sort of mass media including social media is playing a very significant role in developing people's opinions and promoting creativity and innovation.

The mass media is playing a critical role in accelerating good governance and controlling corruption as well. They are also fiddling an important role in creating awareness, informing, and educating the public on various issues. Particularly, the mass media can strengthen the implementation process of NIS by raising awareness among citizens through proper reporting on the incidence of corruption, its causes and consequences, and possible remedies.

Citizens' sensitization is an essential part of the motivation process, which needs to focus on. The media can sensitize the citizen about their rights with the emphasis on the Right to Information, Citizens' Charter, and Grievance Redress System of the government. Reporting on the incidence of integrity to recognize the honest people of the society by the media, especially social media can play a catalytic role. This will heighten the confidence and trust levels of the society for maintaining and applauding integrity, honesty, and dedication. Unfortunately, there is a deep-rooted attitude of normalization of corruption in people's daily experience and thus stands as a major obstacle against the attempt to counter corruption. Considering the importance of challenging such widespread attitudes of civic passivity and disenchantment against corruption and malpractice, media can play a vital role by creating a national discourse on positive terms about the value of integrity, transparency, and accountability.

The Cabinet Division is encouraging the different stakeholders by arranging seminars and symposiums, workshops, and independent studies on the issue of NIS implementation and its various tools. Among the stakeholders, the media workers particularly the journalists are considered as one the frontliners. Arrangement of multi-sectoral meetings including the seminar for the mass media representatives will be an effective platform to continue the effort of motivating government officials and journalists to work together in implementing NIS for the betterment of our society.

Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA) is working closely with the government of Bangladesh to introduce the concept of NIS through multi-sectoral involvement. As a trustworthy development partner, JICA is extending its continuous financial and technical support and partnership with the Cabinet Division to popularize the concept of NIS in our bureaucracy to ensure transparency, accountability, and good governance while rendering public service. To ensure accountability and transparency of the government, the Cabinet Division is implementing some social accountability tools like the Citizens' Charter, Grievance

Redress System (GRS), Right to Information(RTI), etc. which contribute effectively to implementing the NIS program.

It is firmly believed that greater collaboration between media and government would create new avenues for the cooperation and dynamic further in achieving our common goal of establishing a just, fair, and corruption-free society in line with the political philosophy, ideal, and spirit of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The mass media including social media has a great responsibility to be aware of the common people about their rights and duties as citizens. The role and contribution of journalists in implementing NIS by raising people's awareness about its tools and strategies is a significant issue. As an enlightened section of society and a watchdog of the government, journalists from the print, electronic, and online media must play a crucial role in educating people on how to cope with changing scenarios and their mindset in favor of nurturing honesty, integrity, and a corruption-free value system in the society for the greater interest of the country and the future generation.

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