

Metropolitan

Dhaka Day by Day

Gender Equality in the US Judiciary System

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

If there is any instrument that can bring about significant changes in the status of women in the legal system. Whether it is a developing country like Bangladesh or an advanced one like the US, laws that are geared to greater gender equality certainly make a difference. Yet implementation has always been a problem since most of these laws have been enacted in patriarchal systems where equality of the sexes has not been quite appreciated, much less understood.

Progress, however, cannot be denied for a country where women did not gain voting rights until 1920. The American woman has come a long way. This is especially true of the judicial system which now employs more and more women lawyers, advocates and judges, a trend that is certainly a step forward in the gender equality struggle.

Judge Margie Meacham, a county court judge of Rawlins, Wyoming is one of the earliest beneficiaries of this trend with almost 40 years experience in this profession. At a recent lecture held at the USIS (United States Information Service) centre in Dhaka, Meacham gave an overview of the history of the American judicial system with regard to gender equality, highlighting the important developments that have led to greater awareness and lesser sex discriminations. Later, in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star, Meacham elaborated further on the subject and also gave some impression on her visit to this country.

Meacham points out that to understand where the US is in gender equality it is important to know that the judiciary has been developing for almost 400 years. One of the pioneers of gender equality is Wyoming. Meacham's hometown, the first American territory to grant women the right to vote and serve on juries in 1870. In 1924, again in Wyoming, the first woman governor of any state was elected.

The rest of the country however was still far behind. In the 1960s, says Meacham, who held the offices of Justice of Peace and Municipal Judge consecutively at that time in Wyoming, the legal and judicial system was made up almost entirely of men. Only three per cent of the legal profession were women. In the 70s, says Meacham, thoughtful, progressive women in the legal profession realized that the existing laws, created by men, were actually detrimental to women. Some of the results were women could not obtain credit in their own name; contribution to the home and child-rearing were given no value in a divorce; often women were not believed if they claimed rape; and domestic violence and sexual harassment were terms that had not been invented. It may be mentioned that the same elements of inequality can be seen in countries like Bangladesh today.

One of the first steps towards removing these anomalies was the formation of the Na-



Judge Margie Meacham

concerned, Meacham says while some men are very supportive, there will always be those that still belong to the 'old boys club.'

On abortion Meacham's views are cautious but definite. 'Women have a right to control their own bodies,' she says. Her answer to the question whether being a woman judge it is difficult to be totally impartial if her personal views conflict with the court's decision, is a counter question: 'Am I prejudiced because I am a woman? Are men judges prejudiced because they are men?'

Meacham's visit to Bangladesh has been an interesting experience. In Dhaka she witnessed a mock jury trial put forward by the students of the law department. She also met with advocates of Ain O Shalish Kendra discussing issues of gender equality and discrimination. Meacham also visited Chittagong and Rajshahi University. Meacham sat in on a mediation between a husband and wife, where the husband had refused to take the wife to his home after their marriage. 'The mediator was very skilled and eventually the man agreed to take back his wife,' she says.

British MP due tomorrow

British parliament member Keith Vaz will arrive here tomorrow on a three-day visit to Bangladesh, reports UNB.

Vaz was re-elected to the House of Commons in 1992. Earlier, as a Labour Party nominee he was elected to the House of Commons from Leicester East constituency in 1987.

Vaz has been a member of Home Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons since 1987. He is also associated with a number of public and trade union organisations and social groups in UK.



Convocation '94 of the Bangladesh Management Development Centre (BMDC) was held yesterday. Industries Minister A K M Zahiruddin Khan attended the ceremony as chief guest.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Directorate of Technical Education

Office of the Director (Vocational)

&

Project Director

4 VTIs Project

19, Ispahani Park, Moghbazar, Dhaka 1217

Re-Tender Notice

Sealed tender is hereby invited from the bona fide Contractors/Firms for the following supply as mentioned and details below for the Office of the Director.

Earliest Money noted against the name of works are to be submitted in favour of the Director (Vocational), Directorate of Technical Education, 19, Ispahani Park, Moghbazar, Dhaka-1217 in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order from any Scheduled Bank of Bangladesh payable at Dhaka.

Without any Earliest Money the tender shall be treated as informal.

Sl. No.	Name of works	Estimated cost in Taka	Earliest money in Taka	Completion of Time	Cost of Tender schedule in Tk
1	2	3	4	5	6
1. a)	Supply of Toshiba plain paper copier machine Model-1710 or equivalent	2,12,000/-	5% of the quoted price	14 days	400/-
b)	Cannon plain paper copier machine, Model 1215 or equivalent	1,25,000/-			
c)	Supply of Back-UPS for Computer machine, Model BK 6001 or equivalent	60,000/-			

Bona fide Contractors/Firms may purchase the tender documents from the Office of the undersigned, Office of the Asstt. Secretary, Education Division, Section-5, Room No 1812, Ministry of Education, Bangladesh Secretariate, Dhaka, on all working days during office hours at non-refundable price noted against the name of works from 20.4.94 to 24.4.94.

The tender will be received by the undersigned & also by the Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Education, Building-6, Room No 1812 up to 12 Noon on 25.4.94 and opened by the authority of the respective offices at 12.05 pm on the same date in presence of the tenders who wish to be present at the time of opening of the tender. The bona fide Contractors/Firms must furnish attested copy of the experience certificate and trade licence at the time of submitting tender.

The Director of Technical Education (Vocational) reserves the right not to accept the lowest tender or reject any or all tenders or to waive any irregularity if the waiver is in their interest without assigning any reason whatsoever.

A K Md Wahidul Hoque

Director (Vocational)
Directorate of Technical Education & Project Director, 4 VTIs Project

The Women's Development Forum brought out a procession from the city's Bangla Motor area yesterday protesting the illegal and immoral issuance of *Fatwa* against women.

— Star photo

Workshop on women held in Khulna

KHULNA, Apr 20: Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Shafikh Razzake Ali said today that women are the inextricable part of the society. Their participation in the development activities is inevitable as they are playing a pioneering role in developing our socio-economic condition besides managing the house-hold affairs, reports BSS.

He was addressing as chief guest at the inaugural session of the day-long workshop on "equality, development and peace for the advancement of women" held at a local hotel here.

Presided over by Muhammad Enamul Haq, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs the function, being organised under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and UNDP was also addressed, among others, by UNDP representative Md Iqbal Karim.

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