Reaching for new heights

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One thing women all across the world have to face to get to leadership positions is the tacit opposition they face from the men. Therefore although a deserving male candidate may easily get the support of his male and female colleagues to get to the top position, an equally deserving female candidate will have to prove her worth and commitment to a much larger extent than him.

Unfortunately the power struggle at the corporate level is not the only thing a woman has to worry about. In most cases she also has to achieve a fine balance of family and work to feel completely successful. So it is an understatement to say that women have to overcome far more difficult challenges than a man to get to leadership positions.

To commemorate International Women's Day, the heads of missions of Canada, India, Norway, Switzerland and Sweden hosted a special event at the Canada club on March 6, 2006. The theme of the event was to highlight this commonly overlooked area of women's involvement in society, that is, women in leadership positions.

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The event of 6th March brought together many such successful women leaders to discuss how more women could take up such roles and how they overcame their personal challenges to get to where they are now.

Apart from the heads of five missions, there were also three women leaders who had chosen unconventional areas to demonstrate their leadership skills. Najma Akhter, a trade union leader in the garments industry, Dr. Hyat, an elected Poura Shava Chairman and Rokia Rahman, a well-known business personality. Besides the panellists women leaders from a variety of sectors were invited to take part in the discussion programme.

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Shaheen Anam, the team leader of Manusher Jonno reminded everyone about the significance of the history of the women's movement in Bangladesh which involved such revolutionary women ('sheroes' as opposed to heroes) as Begum Rokeya, Pritilota, Sufia Kamal, Noorjahan Begum etc. and many before and after, who continue to strive for equality, justice and opportunity for the women of the country.

"Women's economic empowerment, participation in public life, increase in labour force, school enrolment, decrease in maternal mortality are all achievements that we acknowledge", she added. However she also admitted that even now women face many barriers at home and in the society and that there is a long way to go.

Veena Sikri, the ambassador of India speaking about whether the present growth of her country had an impact on women's empowerment said that India was the biggest paradox in this case. "On the one hand we have constitutional equality for women and on the other there is large-scale exploitation and oppression." She agreed