

# Women's leadership forum opens at AUW

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Visiting US diplomat for women's issues Melanne S Verveer inaugurated a 10-day Grassroots Women's Political Leadership Forum at the Asian University for Women (AUW) in Chittagong yesterday.

The forum is bringing together 71 elected women representatives of different local government bodies from six Saarc countries. They will interact with each other, share and exchange their views and receive training in different areas so that they could play stronger leadership roles in politics.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Verveer said women were entering politics in greater numbers around the world. "In India, a lot of women have been elected from Panchayet to top level, but those gains have been uneven and often those successes are unrecognised," she said.

Verveer, who is the US ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues,

pointed out that women's political leadership could make a difference for their community. A World Bank study shows that when women are in a higher level of decision making, there is less corruption, she said.

Quoting US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, she said, "We could never be successful putting 50 percent of our population behind."

About the forum which is co-sponsored by the US Department of State and the AUW, Ambassador Verveer said, "We are pleased to work with the Asian University for Women, which is doing much to advance women's progress through education and its leadership programmes."

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury said the future of South Asia depended on women, where women's political role was gaining prominence. Political representation of women is important for changing their lives, as it gradually allows their participation in decision making,

she added. Rokia Afzal Rahman, a former adviser to a caretaker government, said whenever women got an opportunity to show their credibility, they did the best.

When offered microcredit, they showed that they could do business, in some respects better than men, she said, adding that then their families started to show respect to them and they had power in decision making at family level.

Matiur Rahman, editor and publisher of Bangla daily Prothom Alo, said the Prothom Alo formed a partnership with the AUW six months ago to award full free scholarships to 10 financially insolvent but talented women from across the country each year so that they could study in the leading university.

This year 10 students have been selected by the AUW for scholarship from 154 applicants from all over the country, he said.

The scholarship papers were handed over to this year's awardees at the programme. Vice Chancellor of AUW Fahima Aziz and President and CEO of AUW Support Foundation Kamal Ahmad spoke on the occasion.

The participants of the forum which will conclude on September 19 are women who have recently been involved in grassroots political services in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal,

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