Chemical Engineering from BUET, but her father had other plans for her. Tasneem's father, who was also a civil servant, believed that his daughter could bring about a change in the civil service sector. He encouraged her to take the Bangladesh Civil Services exams, which she topped. Tasneem then went on to join the foreign services in 1993, and was appointed as joint secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2009, a post that she currently holds.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Nazneen Sultana

"Even as a student of BUET, I would find myself in a class filled with boys and very few girls. But being in the minority was never a deterrent. This is a man's world and I knew that I needed to succeed to prove my worth," says Tasneem.

It's a tough world if you want to be good at everything, says Tasneem, but one should never stop trying to be the best, be it in your professional life or your personal one. "There is a very delicate balance between one's professional and family life, and a woman needs to know how to maintain this balance. Your work is a priority but so are your children, your parents, your spouse. If you are a woman, you need to be great at your job but you also need to take care of your family's needs. A woman needs to have three times the energy of a man," adds Tasneem.

In stereotypical settings, the mother-in-law makes the loudest fuss when her daughter-in-law decides to work outside of home. This, however, did not hold true for Senior Secretary to the government and member of the Privatisation Commission, Rokeya Sultana. Her mother-in-law was her staunchest supporter, as she motivated her to continue working even after her marriage. Both her mother and her mother-in-law were married off before they could complete their education, and they made sure that Rokeya's dreams were not left unfulfilled. Even during her childhood, her parents ensured that both their children were given equal opportunities and rights.

> "If you want to see more women in decision making posts, you need to change the way a woman views herself and her abilities."

"My brother inspired me to be independent and well-informed. My family was very supportive of my decision but this is not the case with many women. They have to depend on their will and determination to succeed in the public services," says Rokeya.

Rokeya studied English Language and Literature at Dhaka University, before attaining the second position on her BCS exams. She then joined the Audit and Accounts Cadre. She was the only woman from the 11 people selected for the department on the basis of merit. Rokeya's list of achievement is long and varied; she has been the deputy secretary of the Economic Relations Division, the joint secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, and the additional secretary and chief controller of the Import and Exports department. She had also been the secretary of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, as