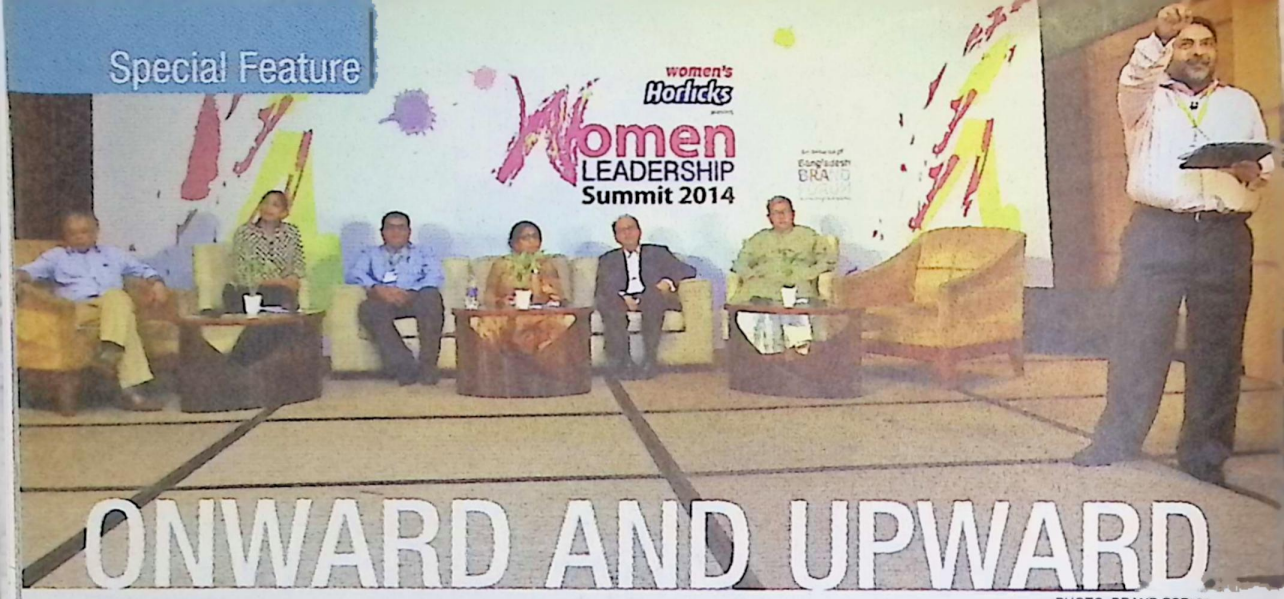


ONWARD AND UPWARD

PHOTO: BRAND FORUM

The first Women Leadership Summit of the country inspires women to reach leadership positions in various sectors

UPASHANA SALAM

A woman has several responsibilities; getting up early in the morning to wake the kids and the rest of the family, serving breakfast, taking the children to school, making arrangements for meals, serving the meals to her family, taking care of thousand chores in a single day, and then if she has the opportunity, taking some time off for herself. How in the world can she be expected to think of a career while maintaining a household? If a woman can run the operations of her house so smoothly, she can surely take the reins of a corporation and be expected to excel at that as well. This is not our opinion but a statement made by the chief economist of Bangladesh Bank, the editor of Forbes India, the managing director of a leading marketing company, the head of a marketing of a telecommunications brand, the vice chancellor of a university, and many other such experts.

The first Women Leadership Summit 2014 of the country, an initiative of Brand Forum, sponsored by Women's Horlicks, organised recently at Westin, had leading figures from around the world, inspiring women to take the first step while encouraging the society to give them the chance to prove themselves. The initiative, including over a hundred organizations and 300 participants, hoped to "inspire the winds of change," in an attempt to involve more women in the corporate sector.

What big corporates often fail to realize is that equality means more business, says Nazneen Karmali, editor of Forbes India. Having a critical mass of women at the top is a formula to ensure that your company does better than your competitors, she adds.

In the early 1980s, when women in the subcontinent were made to feel apologetic for even wanting a career, Naazneen Karmali's decision to balance work and home as well as her choice of profession set her apart from the flock. Naazneen was one of the few female business journalists reporting on India's corporations and entrepreneurs.

"I believe that women should not be prevented from doing anything. In fact, men should just learn to grow up!" says Naazneen to the enjoyment and applause of all present. Nazneen says that the problem lies in the attitude of corporate houses which leave the enrollment of women employees to the HR department who are left to employ women to only fill a quota. Thus, you see fewer women at the top.

She says that she was lucky to begin her career with a magazine like Business India, which unabashedly hired female journalists. "When my editor was once asked why he'd hire women as business journalists when their attention is bound to be split between family and work, he simply answered, "If a woman can manage a household, she can easily manage a company. Moreover, women tend to be more loyal, and so there's little chance of them leaving my firm!" This attitude from my employer boosted my confidence, and I was assured that as long as I gave in my work, I had nothing to fear," says Naazneen.

Naazneen further states that it's unfortunate that even now only five percent of women are in executive positions in the corporate sector all over the world, despite the fact that women have proven their capabilities time and again. She gives the examples of Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, who founded Biocon Limited when she was 25, Indra Nooy; the CEO of Pepsi Co and Chanda Kochhar, the CEO and Managing Director of ICICI Bank, India. However, things are not as bad as they might seem. The fact that there is a forum, an event discussing women empowerment was unimaginable in their time, says Nazneen, stating that her generation passed through the "transit lounge of gender equality."