

Campaign launched to showcase women's contribution



A campaign, “Morjadai Gori Somota” (Equality through Dignity), was officially launched on 5 March, aiming to change and improve society's current perception of women. It also seeks to prevent existing discrimination, disrespect and aggression against the country's female populace by reminding and informing people of women's contributions to the family, society and state and highlighting their importance in building a progressive nation.

Inaugurating the campaign website www.shomanshoman.org.bd and declaring it open at the Osmani Memorial Hall, President Abdul Hamid said, “Time has come to change our perception of women's work and

their contributions. Otherwise, we can't prevent discrimination and violence against women.”

Meher Afroze, State Minister for Women and Children's affairs, said her ministry would disseminate the campaign message through its departments and offices in all upazilas and districts. “Our biggest challenge is to resist the forces which had created a barrier to enacting the Women’s Policy, 2011, by giving wrong interpretations of religion,” she noted.

“Society looks down on women in this country and considers them a burden,” said Shaheen Anam, Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF). She detailed the reasons behind the violence against women despite their achievements in the social, cultural, political and economic sectors.

The MJF along with its 122 associated organisations and the Women and Children's affairs ministry primarily began the three-year campaign, funded by DFID and Australian Aid.

The countrywide awareness programme will be covered by different print and electronic media. A study on “**Women’s contributions in Economic and Domestic work**” will be conducted by the Centre for Policy Research.



President Abdul Hamid, addresses the gathering at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital yesterday.

Besides, advocacy will be carried out at the policy-making level to recognise and include women's contributions to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). “If the domestic work of women is valued and accounted for in the country's GDP, then women's contributions to the GDP will increase from 20 to 48 percent, according to research by the noted economist Dr. Abul Barakat.”

Afzal Hossain of Ad-firm Matra, communications partner of the campaign, said the publicity push will be made by national celebrities, ministers, renowned and respected personalities who will call on society to first say sorry to women for not recognising their role and then to make a pledge to change society.

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, Dr. Iftekharuzzaman, Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladesh and Monjurul Ahsan

Bulbul, president of a faction of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, expressed solidarity with the campaign and pledged their cooperation with the campaign.

Terming the discrimination and violence against women a national shame, Mahfuz Anam said, “Sometimes we don’t realise that we are committing mistakes.... This campaign is an attempt to open our eyes and to remind us to treat women with dignity.” Iftekharuzzaman said he felt ashamed as a man and as a human being as our society has failed to establish equal rights for women, give due respect and recognition to female freedom fighters and protect the religious minorities, indigenous and disabled women from harassment and attacks. “However, today I feel proud and motivated to be a part of this campaign,” he added. Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul talked about an opposing force which has been trying to create barriers to women's progress over the last few decades. He also underscored the role of the women's movement and women rights groups in making the media more sensitive and responsible with regard to news on sexual violence.

Presiding over the programme, economist Wahiduddin Mahmud elaborated how Bangladesh came to be known as a “development surprise” for the world by making progress in female education, infant and mother health and cutting population growth, areas which are under women's control. “However, we are lagging behind in areas such as women repression, early marriage of the female child and equal wages, which are not under women’s control, but rather society’s,” he mentioned.

Asaduzzaman Noor, Minister for Cultural Affairs, was present as special guest. A documentary was screened at the programme, which started with quotes from Begum Rokeya, Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore on how women were perceived by society and how it should change. It also depicted the achievements of Bangladeshi women in all sectors.