

Editorial

Gender equality should be upheld

Saturday 12 April 2008, by [New Age \(Bangladesh\)](#) (Date first published: 9 March 2008).

Our failure as a nation to ensure equal rights for women as for men in all spheres and at all levels is, we believe, a cause for great disappointment and collective shame. While there is no doubt that we have taken some measures towards gender equity since our national independence, there still remains much left to be done. Even to this day, our country does not have uniform inheritance laws for all Bangladeshis that give women equal entitlement as men and nor can a Bangladeshi woman pass down her nationality to her children. In our view, unless such discrepancies in our laws are addressed to put an end to manifest discrimination against women, we will never be and cannot claim to be a modern, civilised and democratic state. In this regard, we appreciate the policy decision of the incumbents to revisit the issue of inheritance and to bring about uniform laws which will apply to all Bangladeshis irrespective of their religious affiliation or beliefs and ensure that women have equal entitlement to property as men. We hope that the government will its policy to reality by way of getting the relevant laws amended and enforcing them properly.

However, it is extremely disappointing, though not at all surprising, that at a time when the government is apparently considering steps to reduce discrimination against women in our laws and customs, some obscurantist organisations have come together under the banner of 'Islami Uttaradhikar Ain Shanrakkhan Andolan' to protest and resist the government's attempts to promote gender equality. A few hundred obscurantists on Friday staged demonstrations in front of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque to condemn what it termed the 'western idea of gender equality.' The organisations that joined the protest rally include the Islami Shashantantra Andolan, Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh, Islami Chatra Andolan and Khelafat Majlish. The activists have also warned

the government of 'dire consequences', if it proceeds with its plans.

We believe that there is nothing 'western' about the idea of ensuring equal rights for all human beings, irrespective of gender or other characteristics and differences. Rather, it is not only unjust but inhumane to promote or protect the marginalisation of certain groups on the basis of such things as gender, ethnicity, religion and ability - physical or financial. Bigotry should find no space in our society. Hence, we urge the current regime to pay no heed to the demands of the obscurantists. Instead, it should stick to its plans and prove its commitment to equity and social justice by bringing necessary changes to laws that are inherently discriminatory towards women.

P.S.

* From New Age, March 9, 2008. Circulated by South Asia Citizens Wire | April 10-11, 2008 | Dispatch No. 2502 - Year 10 running.