

## Tomorrow's leaders

Tulip Siddiq on inspiring young women to build their careers







## N Anita Amreen

Yesterday Scholastica hosted the first ever "Inspiring Women" event at their Uttara campus' STM hall. This Speed Careers event saw groups of 7-15 students meeting in small groups to engage in lively conversation with 24 leading women from sectors that ranged from banking, NGO, education, government, creative industries and more. Modelled on a long running campaign from the UK, the event brought together many successful women from around the country to talk to over 200 female students from nine schools. This event was supported by British MP Tulip Siddiq, a British-Bangladeshi Labour Party politician who was joined by her husband, Chris Percy. Principal Brig Gen (Retd) Kaiser Ahmed along with Madiha Murshed, Managing Director of Scholastica, hosted the

The event was held to help young women from all backgrounds to broaden their horizons and raise their aspirations for girls and young women. Young women often rely on female role models from a range of sectors, positiond of responsibility and stages of their life to help to combat stereotypes about occupations - but too often girls miss out on the opportunity to learn about the wide range of jobs out there. Inspiring Women was held to essentially combat this particular problem.

"When I was young I studied in this very school, and never once did I imagine that I would return to this floor as a British MP. It's a great feeling being able to spend some time with all of you who have made it here today. After I won the election this year,

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I was telling my husband that in my first visit to Bangladesh, I really want to join a programme with the youth of Bangladesh," Tulip said in her warm welcome speech to the audience. She went on to stress on the need to inspire the youth, especially female students, to help them figure out their career paths and ensure it's a path they choose to follow.

"From a very young age, I just knew I wanted to be an MP and I wanted to join the world of politics. However, that doesn't mean all of you need to have the same dream. You don't have to join politics, just follow the career path of your choice. Be it law, engineering, being a doctor, or even if you want to be a sportsman - focus on that. Whichever subject you like, just follow your desires and study that but remember to maintain a balance with everything else," she added.

Before the speakers took ten minute rounds to speak to each group of students, Tulip answered questions during a brief press conference, reflecting on her path to

the electoral win, her family background and it's effect on her choice of career. She talked about a few challenges she faced, including the backlash that comes with being part of such a famous political family.

"In the household where I was born, I grew up hearing stories about my Nana, about our Liberation War and the struggles he faced as he led the country to independence. I also grew up watching my mom and khala always discussing the people of Bangladesh, how to work for them, how to improve their wellbeing. If we would sit down to eat, or even have an evening snack, conversation always wound around how to help the people of Bangladesh - this was essentially, my childhood," she shared. While her aunt Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her mother Sheikh Rehana are her role models, she also looks up to Speaker of the House Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury and mountaineer Wasfia Nazreen as women who really inspire her.

When asked about the issue of child marriage, Tulip stated that lack of education

is the root of the problem. "If you don't educate children from a young age and teach them independence, it's difficult to end child marriage. While we do have laws in Bangladesh, what is more important is to ensure that these laws are enforced. The UN once said "Educate a son, you educate a family. You educate a girl, you educate an entire village" - I really believe in that saying."

To conclude the session, Tulip spoke about how advanced Bangladesh is in terms of female leadership, sharing both her joy and pride in being a Bangladeshi woman who could make her country proud.

"Our country's Prime Minister is female, our country's Speaker of the house is female, our opposition party leader, too, is female. In Britain, we have no such thing. Our Prime Minister is male, Speaker of the house is male - they are all great, but let's take a moment to notice how there aren't as many leading politicians who are female. As Bangladeshis, it's a matter of pride for us to note just how many of the stars of the country are female you too, can shine. Believe in yourself." The speaker list for the event included Advocate Tarana Halim, Member of Parliament of State Minister for Posts and Telecommunication Division, Zara Mahbub, Head of Communications and Service Quality, BRAC Bank, Rabab Fatima, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador designate to Japan, Eeshita Azad, Head of Arts, British Council among others. Tulip expressed her interest in holding similar events in the future to aid in inspiring young women around the country and helping them to choose their careers.