

Zonta International's 18th Biennial Conference kicks off in Dhaka

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: The 18th Biennial Conference of Zonta International District 25 began in Dhaka on October 31 under the theme "Empowering Women through Service and Advocacy across the Globe."

The three-day regional event has brought together over 150 delegates from Zonta Clubs across Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, reaffirming the organization's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment in South Asia.

A press meet held earlier at a city hotel highlighted Zonta's ongoing initiatives in the region. Zonta International and Zonta International Foundation (ZIF) Board Director and District 25 Liaison Ztn Phillipa Jacobs Lory and Dr Zareen Delawar, Governor of Zonta International District 25, briefed the media on the conference agenda and community

programs.

Speaking at the media briefing, Phillipa Jacobs Lory said the Dhaka conference is a reflection of Zonta's mission to unite women across borders for positive change.

"The 18th Biennial Conference in Dhaka reflects our collective commitment to empowering women through service, advocacy, and leadership," she stated. "At a time when women's voices are more vital than ever, this platform will inspire collaboration, innovation, and action across borders."

She added that the conference celebrates Zonta's achievements while reaffirming its shared responsibility to create a world where every woman has equal access to education, opportunity, and respect.

Governor Dr Zareen Delawar highlighted Zonta's ongoing community-based programs in Bangladesh, focusing on education, safety, skills development, and climate justice.

"Zonta has been working tirelessly to bring real and sustainable change to the lives of women and children," she said. "We are proposing that the government make education free up to the Higher Secondary Certificate level, while also supporting scholarships for students pursuing STEM education abroad."

She added that Zonta provides legal, safety, and defense support to women facing violence, and has successfully stopped child marriage in a village of Kurigram.

"In Chattogram's Delpara, we run a school for 200 children of fishermen, which also serves as a cyclone shelter," Dr Delawar noted. "In Mirsharai, our pati (mat) project enables women to make and sell mats, returning the investment interest-free after earning a profit."

On environmental work, she said: "We're supporting eco-friendly innovations like a pen that grows into a plant when discarded, and advocating for climate justice in Jashore and Mymensingh. Our members also organize tree plantation and rainwater harvesting programs to promote sustainability."

She added that Zonta plans to adopt a village in Bangladesh, providing education for children and vocational training for women.

The conference includes plenary sessions, leadership workshops, and discussions on women's economic empowerment, climate action, and the prevention of gender-based violence. Delegates will also engage in networking and cultural programs to strengthen inter-club partnerships.

The inaugural ceremony at The Westin Dhaka was attended by Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, former Adviser to the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh, as Chief Guest, along with Ambassador Lulzim Pllana of Kosovo and renowned designer Bibi Russell. The event featured cultural performances and a fashion show directed by Tootli Rahman celebrating Bangladesh's rich heritage.

Founded in 1919, Zonta International is a global organization of professional women dedicated to empowering women through service and advocacy. With over 13,000 members in more than 1,200 clubs across 65 countries, Zonta works to improve the legal, political, economic, educational, and professional status of women worldwide.

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