

MAYOR DR. SALINA HAYAT IVY (ASIA)



Councillor Dr. Salina Hayat Ivy is Mayor of Narayanganj City Corporation in Bangladesh.

What made you decide to enter local government?

The local government system has the opportunity to work directly in improving the quality of life of the people. In this regard, my father's words and actions inspired me. My father, Ali Ahmed Chunka, devoted himself to the country and humanity throughout his life, following the example of Bangabandhu. The Language Movement, Six-Point Movement, Mass Uprising of '69, the Great Liberation War, Bangabandhu's family's murder, along with demanding justice for the liberation of the country and people's rights inspired him. He was elected as the chairman of the then Narayanganj Municipality in 1973 to serve the people, which he did until his death in 1984. Since my childhood, I have seen my father motivated by patriotism and how to love people regardless of their race, caste, and religion. After my father's death, I went to the Soviet Union (USSR) to study MBBS to fulfill his dream and later emigrated to New Zealand. I devoted myself to the development of Narayanganj City for patriotism and humanity and, in 2003, participated in the Narayanganj municipal elections and was elected chairman. Later, when Narayanganj City

Corporation was formed in 2011, I was elected as the first woman city mayor of the country and am currently serving the city's residents as a public representative for the fourth time.

What has been your most rewarding experience as a councillor/leader/local government practitioner?

During the past 20 years, I have had positive and negative experiences. My positive experience is the acceptance of the people. If you love people selflessly and rise above personal interests and work for the wider interests, many difficult tasks become easy; and if you can convince people of your aims. At the end of the day, they understand that the work is for the welfare and good of all people.

What advice would you give to other women considering entering local government?

Firstly, women should acquire practical knowledge in addition to formal education. They should be self-reliant as human beings without thinking of themselves as a woman. Women have to be very self-confident, courageous and individualistic in the existing social system. They should embrace patriotism, honesty and sincerity, as well as having a keen interest in serving the people. Lastly, believing that the service of creation is the service of the Lord.

Why do you think it is important to increase the number and voice of women in local government?

Almost half the total population of the country is made up of women. The development of the country and the nation is not possible by leaving this large sector behind, so the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has taken various steps to develop, empower and make women economically independent. Women are well-established in various fields today because of his timely action. I think it is important to increase the participation of women in the local government system as well as strengthen the voice for the material development of the country.

As a woman, what has been your biggest hurdle in becoming a councillor – and in your daily public life?

There is a family tradition of working for people because of politics. I have always had family and social support. However, in our religious, social, and political environment and surroundings, I have had to face many obstacles. I was able to overcome all adverse situations with the love and support of the people.

What has helped you the most to continue in your role?

I have received people's sincere cooperation, advice, good guidance, and support while working. This played a vital role in my work. If people act with a positive attitude and selflessness, and when people understand that it is being done for their needs, they cooperate and no problems will appear. An example of the active cooperation of people in good work concerns the heart of Narayanganj city and 18 acres of abandoned railway land, built under the shadow of influential and illegal occupiers. It became a paradise of crime, including terrorism, drugs, extortion and anti-social activities. Due to the constant dumping of waste in the Jallapar part of the gymnasium, the reservoir became a breeding ground for mosquitoes and a dumping ground for garbage. After being elected as a public representative in 2003, I embarked on a plan to build a park there, for the enjoyment of local residents. After years of communication with various departments, the implementation of the park was not possible. However, by ignoring the lawsuits, attacks, and bloodshed of influential people, with the active support and cooperation of the people, we have been able to build an eco-friendly Sheikh Russell Park with dense green shade, and clear water, with the city corporation's own funding. 58 acres approximately. The interior of the park includes: Sheikh Russell's mural, a walkway around the lake, an art building, a school, street lights, a seating pavilion, various native species of greenery, a viewing deck, a ghatla, an open stage, a bridge, a playground, Boat club, swimming pool, water garden, water body, skating zone, cycle lane, gymnastics club, restaurant, lotus pond, etc. This is now one of the popular tourist attractions of the city.

As a councillor/leader in your community, how can digital technology be used to increase women's political inclusion?

In this era of information technology, there is no alternative to using digital technology to provide better citizen services quickly, easily and at affordable cost. Narayanganj City Corporation is working to deliver all its civic services to people's doorsteps to maintain the continuity of the current government's motto of building a digital and smart Bangladesh. As a result, people are giving full support to the elected representatives due to uninterrupted service delivery. Elected representatives are also encouraged to work with public support.

What innovative practices have you found useful in encouraging more women to become more involved in local government in your country?

The use of information technology should be increased to motivate the participation of women in the local government system and measures should be taken to facilitate citizen services through



innovative initiatives. Adequate training measures should be taken at various organisations and levels to make women skilled and trained in IT. Also, they are facing problems working in the present time, due to the lack of adequate opportunities for information technology in the previous education system. Time is an important factor in providing adequate training opportunities in public and private institutions. A change in social mindset is needed to make women more interested in the local government system. It should be noted that the current government, through the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, is implementing various measures including training to develop women as entrepreneurs through the project titled 'She Power Project' with the aim of making women economically and socially independent.