

## Girls, not Brides

### Ms. Doulot MALA (Bangladesh)

“There is a need for building social awareness to check early marriage. Poverty and social insecurity of girls is the main reason for child marriage in Bangladesh. Girls face serious health and psychological problem due to early pregnancy,” said Dr. Sifat E. Syed, Psychiatrist of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

Child marriage is like a ‘Paradox’ in Bangladesh’s globally praised development story. The country was able to upscale its performance indicators in the field of politics, business, and social empowerment of women in this region. Frustratingly, rate of child marriage is highest here.

The rate of eradication of child marriage is slow in Bangladesh. Around 66 per cent of the girls get married before the age of 18, according to the data of UNICEF. Over one-third of girls get married before the age of 15, who are mostly victims of dowry and face serious health risks due to early pregnancy.

Poverty, illiteracy, security concern, tropical social custom are the major reasons for early marriage of schoolgoing girls. They face long-term health problem, psychological pressure to carry out the responsibility of child and family.

Physicians and psychologists said early marriage was a major cause of depression of middle-aged women. It is a socially-sensitive challenge that the country is trying to tackle.



In rural areas, child marriage is prevailing in an alarming form that has no actual data due to poor trend of marriage registration. Some family members prefer early marriage of school-going girls being concerned over their social security. Teen pregnancy and single young mother family is not so usual in the Bangladesh’s society. Family members consider early marriage as alternative to keep girls protected within the union of marriage before bearing a child.

Amid the situation, a recent move of the government to lower minimum age for marriage in the draft of early marriage prevention act-2014 raised concern among the members of civil society.

There is a proposal, made in the recent Cabinet meeting, to lower minimum age for marriage to 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys. Currently, the minimum age of marriage for girls is 18 years and for boys 21 years.

The Citizen's Initiatives on CEDAW, Bangladesh (CICBD), the platform of 47 non-government human rights and other like-minded organizations, have raised its deep concern over the move, citing United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children and Bangladesh Children Act that defined boys and girls below 18 years as children.

As eliminating child marriage is one of the major challenges for the present government, it should stay away from the move of lowering marriage-age. Child marriage is also a globally developing concern. In the first-ever Girl Summit-2014 in the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made firm commitment to eliminate child marriage by taking necessary steps.

Increasing literacy of girls is necessary to check early marriage. Bangladesh has made remarkable progress over the past two decades in increasing primary enrolment of girls so that over 95 percent go to primary school and more girls than boys now complete their primary education.

The Bangladesh Government is already working to strengthen national legislation and policy frameworks to eliminate child marriage. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 is going to be revised under current context by incorporating heavy penalties for violation of the act.



The new Children's Act, passed in 2013, provides enhanced measures to redress child marriage as well as to support child brides.

Bangladesh launched a new nationwide campaign titled "Girls, Not Brides" to accelerate actions against child marriage.

In addition to updating laws, the government aims to have a National Action Plan on Prevention of Child Marriage with time-bound targets.

"The government is looking forward to ensuring that, by 2021, no girl under 15 will be getting married as well as eradicating all child marriage within a generation by 2035," the PM said in the Girl Summit.

The country's policymakers need to focus more on creating awareness for marriage registration and also educate opinion leaders so that they can raise voices against child marriage.

According to the study of Bangladesh Women Parishad, all of the victims of child marriage are school-going girls. The survey found that the minimum age of the victims was 10 year-old girl. Physically, psychologically and socially, child brides face detrimental consequences. They are neither physically matured for bearing a child nor

taking care of them properly.

Child marriage slows down country's development into a healthy and prosperous nation. Bangladesh is moving towards to expedite eradication of early marriage.