

Cold claims 20 lives in two districts

By Staff Correspondent

Cold has claimed 20 lives in Rangpur and Kurigram districts. UNB From Rangpur says: The shivering cold claimed 10 lives and about 30,000 slum and shoal dwellers of Gangarchahara upazila have been suffering badly, as they cannot afford to buy warm clothes.

Met Office sources said the mercury goes down to six to seven degree Celsius and the sky remains covered with deep fog which intensify at night causing frequent road accidents.

Most of the flood-affected people of the shoal areas in the upazila have no warm clothes to protect themselves from the biting cold.

Different government and non-government organisations have been distributing warm clothes among the cold stricken people but the number is too inadequate.

Local MP Sharifuddin Ahmed Jhantu distributed some warm clothes, sarees and lungis among the poor people.

The District Administration did not confirm the deaths from cold wave. They said they had distributed 2,275 pieces of blankets so far among the poor people of 83 unions and three municipalities.

Lion and Leo clubs, local Cloth Merchant Association also distributed warm clothes among the distressed people.

A correspondent from Kurigram reports: Ten persons died of severe cold which was blowing presently over the district.

The victims are: Rafiqul, 50, Chino, 55, Bhorat, 60, Krishna, 39, Jamila, 27, Kariman, 62, Reza, 2, Shahidul, 48, Mithu, 10, and Nosim, 52.

The severe cold wave is coming from the Himalayas sweeping over the district and paralysed the normal life of people is being hampered seriously. The poor people mainly the children and old are the worst sufferers.

Warm clothing, being provided by the district administration is inadequate.

Diarrhoea and other diseases have broken out in most parts of the district. Child death from diarrhoea is also taking place.

About 20,000 children in the district have been attacked by diarrhoea, bronchitis, dysentery, pneumonia and viral fever.

The district civil surgeon's office sources claimed that the situation is under full control.

Our Gopalganj correspondent reports: Winter usually sets here from

late November and lasts up to first week of March.

This year the intensity of winter has started from the middle of December and intensity of the winter reaches its climax at the close of December and continues up to the middle of February.

Eighty per cent people here are poor who lead a sub-human life. Marginal farmers, landless, labourers, fishermen, hawkers and rickshawpullers are found working bare-footed on the street with worn-out cotton and lungis for a long time eve after sundown.

Being shivered with unbearable biting cold they have been rushing to the second-hand warm clothes shops on footpaths in the town to buy woolen sweaters of lowest quality. But the lowest quality of sweaters which are being sold at Tk 25 to 30 previous years are now being sold at Tk 50 to 60 each. Because of price-hike of second-hand warm clothes, poor people cannot afford to buy those.

Middle class and fixed income groups are also found crowding around each of the warm clothes' shops on the footpaths and purchasing the second-hand warm clothes for the families after visiting a lot of shops and also bargaining a lot.

The best quality of second-hand sweaters and cardigans are being sold between Taka 80 to 120 each in place of Taka 50 to 60 previous years.

Besides, women are found busy at noon purchasing second-hand woolen clothes for their babies and for themselves.

Recently Mohammad Abdul Jalil, Superintendent of Police (SP), Gopalganj distributed 40 pieces of warm clothes among the poor people in the town.

Traders of the second-hand woolen clothes on footpaths are making wind-fall profits. This year no philanthropic organisations or affluent persons have come out to distribute warm clothes at night among the distressed people who have been lying about here and.

The shivering cold of this winter has multiplied their sufferings. Meanwhile, standing crops like potato, maize, mustard and IRRI-Boro paddy have been affected by the severe cold.

Humanitarian organisations and affluent people are urged to distribute warm clothes among the distressed people as they did in previous years to mitigate their suffering from cold.

Sweeter side of winter

From Abdul Matin Fakir



Vendors display date molasses or khejurer gur at Thana Road Bazaar in Faridpur town. Molasses sells between Tk 30 and Tk 32 a kg. -- Star photo

FARIDPUR, Jan 21: As a bone-chilling cold wave sweeps across the districts as elsewhere in the country, many people in rural areas are busy producing date molasses locally called khejurer gur, one of popular items during the winter.

Date molasses is made from date juice extracted from date trees. Date molasses is one of important ingredients for traditional cakes, besides other traditional snacks like khir, paesh, halua and naru.

With the advent of winter date molasses had started arriving in markets. But the price of khejurer gur is comparatively high this season. Best quality date molasses is selling at Tk 30 to Tk 32 a kg at different markets in the town.

While producing some times molasses is given a block shape, which is called patali, weighing 250 to 300 grams each. Patali is also popular.

Date molasses is very delicious to taste. Rural people entertain guests with puffed rice and date molasses. The mixture of date molasses and puffed rice is a favourite snack.

When asked about the price like of date molasses, some shopkeeper at Gur Bazaar on Thana Road in the town said increasing production cost is responsible for high price.

Use of firewood in brick kilns threatens environment

From Our Correspondent

GOPALGANJ, Jan 21: Defying government ban a section of brick kiln owners in the district are using firewood in kilns, threatening the environment.

Besides, most of the brick fields have sprung up in areas close to human settlements, also threatening public health.

Brick Burning Control Ordinance 1992 prohibits brick field owners from using firewood in kilns. The law, however, allows use of coal in kilns. It also prohibits setting up of brick fields on croplands.

A lawbreaker will be fined 50,000 or sentenced to six months in prison or the both if firewood, except bamboo roots, is used in brick fields.

A brick field owner, on condition of anonymity, said, "We use firewood because it is cost effective and easily available."

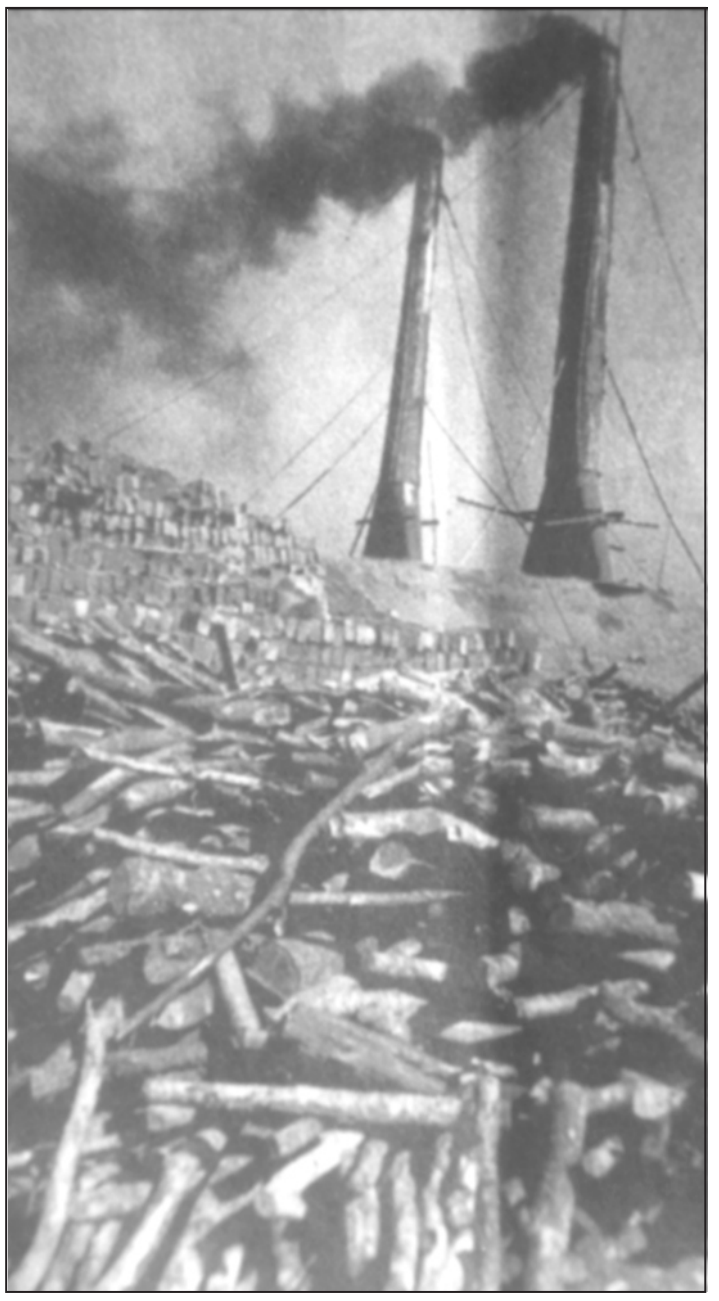
"Besides, we have to face various bureaucratic tangles to procure coal as it is not easily available", he added.

Brick fields owners procure firewood from rural areas with the help of their agents, who also occasionally bring firewood from the Sundarbans.

According to an estimate, some 43,000 kg of firewood is required to bake one lakh bricks.

People in the locality suffer from various skin and respiratory diseases due to emission of the harmful smoke from kilns, many of which do not use filter chimneys. Small plants close to kilns also perish.

When asked about the mushroom growth of brick fields, an official of the district administration said the brick field owners obtain licences taking advantage of loopholes in the existing law.



Violating rule firewood has been piled up for use in a brick kiln in Gopalganj district. Unabated use of firewood in kilns is threatening environment. -- Star photo

FFs-people grand rally in Barisal Jan 27

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Jan 21: Barisal divisional freedom fighters and mass people's grand rally will be held here on January 27.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to attend the rally as chief guest.

Chief Whip in the parliament Abul Hasanat Abdullah will preside over the meeting.

Campaign is going on in full swing in the divisional headquarters to make the rally a success.

Two killed in separate incidents

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Jan 21: Two people were killed in separate incidents in Rajshahi and Naogaon Friday.

Mujibur Rahman, 30, of Mariagram village under Paba upazila of Rajshahi district was killed by unidentified people in Puthiyapara area.

Police recovered the body from a rice mill. Mujibur Rahman was a rickshaw van puller.

Kameli alias Lipi, 25, of Goyeshpur village under Niamatpur upazila under Naogaon district was killed by a group of local people as sequel to a previous enmity over land dispute.

Police arrested Khoda Bux in connection with the killing of Lipi, a housewife.

Attack on school bldg

From Our Correspondent

FENI, Jan 21: A newly constructed school building was damaged after a gang of hoodlums attacked it at Omarpur under Daganbhuiyan upazila here on Sunday.

The hoodlums Sultana Memorial Junior Girls' School and damaged walls, windowpanes and doors of the house.

The school has been named after Sultana Islam, mother of local BCL leader Iftakharul Islam.

Local people have attributed the attack to political rivalry.

Clash at Sirajganj DC office Employees start 2-hr work abstention

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Jan 21: Karmachari Oikya Parisad, an organisation of the general government employees has started two-hour work abstention from today (Sunday) in accordance with a resolution taken at a meeting here on Thursday afternoon which was presided over by Tarek Khan.

The Parisad leaders have been demanding legal action against the guilty lawyers responsible for a clash with the employees of the local administration over a trifling matter on the DC's office premises here on Tuesday. Fifty people including pedestrians were injured in the clash. The injured include an ASP and eight other policemen.

The employees had since been wearing black badges condemning actions of the lawyers.

Meanwhile, five cases had been lodged by the conflicting parties.

The injured have been undergoing treatment at Sirajganj General Hospital.

On the other hand the lawyers have been boycotting court for an indefinite period demanding exemplary punishment to the guilty persons who had been involved in the incident.

When contacted with the local Bar Association president Amanullah Mondol, he told this correspondent that they had already accepted the compromise proposal of the Deputy commissioner.

However, a tense situation has been prevailing in the town and a strong police contingent has been deployed in the area.

Seed shortage may hit onion farming

NARSINGDI, Jan 21: Onion cultivation in the district during the current season may face a setback due to acute seed shortage, reports UNB.

Department of Agriculture Extension has taken up a scheme to cultivate onion on 1,500 hectares of land in six upazilas of the district.

Farmers said they need 10,000-kg seed to fulfil the production target, but BADC supplied only one-third seed of the total requirement.

Farmers said, "BADC seed dealers, taking the advantage, are selling seeds at an exorbitant price, throwing us in great uncertainty."

Now, one kg local variety onion seed is being sold between Tk 700 and Tk 800 against the BADC rate of Tk 600 while the Indian seed between Tk 500 and Tk 600.

The farmers apprehend that production target will not be achieved if the situation continues.

They urged the authorities concerned to ensure supply of adequate seed at fair prices to make the scheme a success.

Donation

From Our Correspondent

MOULVIBAZAR, Jan 21: The Moulvibazar Chamber of Commerce and Industries (MCCI) has donated a 20 inches colour television to Seba Institute, Moulvibazar, a nursing training centre recently.

A meeting on this occasion was held at Seba Institute, Moulvibazar with Civil Surgeon of the district Dr Ahmedur Reza Chowdhury in the chair. MCCI President and Industrialist Al-haj Ragib Ali attended the function as guest. It was addressed, among others, by MCCI leader Abdul Wadud and Syed Siddiqui Hasan, in-charge of Seba Institute Swarna Teressa, trainee Sema Das.

News snaps

Computer Fair in Comilla

COMILLA, Jan 21: A five-day national level 'Computer Fair' first of its kind, begins here on January 26, reports UNB.

Comilla Computer Society organised the fair. To make the fair successful a preparatory meeting was held at IDB Bhaban in Dhaka on January 2. Officials of Bangladesh Computer Council and the organisers attended the meeting.

Employment Bank branch opens

CHAPAINAWABGANJ, Jan 21: With a view to providing soft term loan to the unemployed youths to help create employment opportunities the 49th branch of employment bank was opened here on Sunday, reports UNB.

State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Prof Zinatun Nesa Talukdar inaugurated the branch as the chief guest. The chairman of Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank and the Managing Director of the employment Bank were present. On the inaugural day three youths were given Tk 85,000 loan.

Standing Boro crops submerged

BENAPOLE, Jan 21: Standing Boro crops on a vast tract of land were submerged by waters following the closure of a sluice gate over the Betna river in Jikargachha upazila, reports UNB.

Flood hit farmers of Banmandar and Tepra area of the upazila alleged that an influential quarter cultivated fish closing the Sankarpur sluice gate on January 13 causing flash flood and water stagnation in the area. A large number of affected farmers submitted a memorandum to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer to open the sluice gate to save their Boro fields. Tension was mounting in the area.

Bumper mustard output expected

MADARIPUR, Jan 21: A bumper production of mustard is expected here this year, due to favorable climate and enthusiasm of the farmers, reports BSS.

According to official sources, mustard has been cultivated on a total of 15,400 hectares in the district. The production target has been fixed at 13,860 tons.

Jessore Bar Assoc executives

From Our Correspondent

JESSORE, Jan 21: The annual general election of Jessore District Bar Association was held recently at the reconstituted committee for Advocate Advocate (Bachchu) President and tary respectively were Md Ishaque and Mahabub Alam were elected General Secretary. Others elected to different posts were Md Ishaque and Mahabub Alam were elected General Secretary. Others elected to different posts were Md Ishaque and Mahabub Alam were elected General Secretary. Others elected to different posts were Md Ishaque and Mahabub Alam were elected General Secretary.

IRRI-Boro farming programme

MEHERPUR, Jan 21: A total of 22,000 hectares will be brought under IRRI-Boro cultivation in the Meherpur district in this Rabi session, reports BSS.

According to an official source, 7,500 hectares will be brought under cultivation in Meherpur Sadar, 7,500 hectares in Gangni and 7,000 hectares in Mujib Nagar upazilas. BADC already supplied 12 tons of IRRI-Boro seeds among the farmers. A total of 6,200 shallow tube-wells and 35 deep tube-wells will also be installed to supply irrigation water in IRRI-Boro lands. Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation will sell 2,575 tons of different varieties of fertilisers among the farmers.

Road link restored

MUNSHIGANJ, Jan 21: Road communication between capital Dhaka and Munshiganj has been restored after 12 days of disruption caused by the collapse of a bridge on Mauwa-Louhajang road in Louhajang upazila, reports UNB.

The bailey bridge, collapsed on January 6, was opened to traffic on Thursday after necessary repair works.

Loan fraudulence detected

BOGRA, Jan 21: Some 60 farmers of Garhidah union in Sherpur upazila are going to be punished for the crime they did not commit, reports UNB.

According to the farmers, they were served with notices for the repayment of the loan allegedly taken by their ex-UP Chairman Alauddin forging their signatures. They alleged that the chairman took Tk 2.42 as loan from BRDB against their names forging their signature in 1980-81. The amount has now inflated to Tk 5.16 lakh due to interest. Alauddin concealed all the official letters issued to the farmers over the years asking them to repay the loan. The farmers came to know about the loan only when the BRDB filed the certificate cases against them. Meanwhile, the chairman was learnt to have confessed his guilt and committed to repay the loan with interest.

Concern over dumping of polythene

MADARIUR, Jan 21: Indiscriminate dumping of polythene bags has seriously polluted the environment in the town, reports BSS.

Most of the people generally throw away polythene bags in the drains, roads, canals, ponds and other open spaces carelessly, which eventually clog the drains, pollute water and create unhygienic condition in the air. Expressing concern about the dangerous effect of the polythene dumping, the experts said it could even destroy the fertility of the soil. They urged the concerned authorities to take immediate measures to make the common people aware of the use and disposal of polythene bags and the bad effects of its dumping.

Man killed in road accident

MANIKGANJ, Jan 21: A man was killed and 26 people were injured in two separate accidents on Dhaka-Aricha highway on Monday-Tuesday, reports UNB.

Quoting witnesses, police said 26 people were injured when a Dhaka-bound minibus fell into a roadside ditch at Uthli on Tuesday morning. Eight of the injured were admitted to Uthli Health Complex. In another incident, a van-puller, A Majid, 40, died instantly when a speeding vehicle hit his van on the eastern side of Tara Bridge on Monday morning.

Workshop

THAKURGAON, Jan 21: A workshop on 'production and use of biogas and organic fertiliser was inaugurated at Jagannathpur Youth Training Centre here on Tuesday, reports UNB.

State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Shatish Chandra Roy opened the workshop as chief guest. Abdus Salam, Deputy Director of Local Agriculture Department, chaired the occasion. Some 185 officials, block supervisors, farmers and NGO representatives from upazila and district levels took part in the workshop organised by Agriculture Extension Department. The speakers stressed the need for use of biogas for solving the fuel crisis.

Robber arrested

MYMENSINGH, Jan 21: Police and forest guards in a special drive Monday night arrested a notorious robber from Bijoypur forest in Muktagachha, reports UNB.

The arrested, Manik Sangma, 40, is the accused in 58 cases, mainly for stealing forest resources, in Muktagachha and Madhurpur upazila. Police said Sangma is the boss of a gang of 30-40 armed dacoits.

Wheat for uplift schemes

SATKHIRA, Jan 21: The government has sanctioned 940 tones of wheat for the implementation of 133 development schemes in the district during the current financial year, reports BSS.

The schemes include repair and maintenance of rural roads and earth filling of playgrounds of different educational and religious institutions. The schemes will provided job opportunities for poor day labourer.

Abuse of women by husbands common in Bangladesh

SATKHIRA, Jan 21: "Why are you staring? Why don't you get up and serve meal?" shouted Malek to his wife, Rina (not their real names). A day earlier she was beaten by her farmer husband over a trifling matter that forced her to bed.

"It's not the first time. Many a time in my conjugal life he beat me," said Rina, 32, a woman with dark skin and curly hair.

"Once I had to get admitted into hospital after my husband beat me. And now I feel pain in my waist during full moon and adumbration," she said and showed torture marks on her hands and forehead.

"Twelve years back, Rina, the only daughter of her parents, married middle-aged Malek of Shyamnagar upazila in coastal Satkhira district following a couple of years' love affair. But within only a few months the marriage turned a nightmare.

"Whenever I say something that goes against his opinion, he abuses me either physically or verbally," informed the young housewife who once found her husband Malek a romantic, devoted and sincere man. "Is this the man whom I loved?" exclaimed a now disillusioned Rina.

Such physical and verbal abuses not only happened to Rina. The sad tales of torture on women, mainly by their illiterate husbands, are common in Bangladesh. Marriage is hardly a passport to happiness for many a rural Bangladeshi woman; rather, it is an invitation to agony.

The womenfolk in the countryside silently endure repression unleashed by their husbands or in-laws, as most have a vulnerable status in society.

"Most women in our society are illiterate. As they don't get strong support from family and society during their period of crisis, they turn more helpless and vulnerable," said Safia Azim, a teacher of the Department of Psychology of Dhaka University.

On behalf of Naripakkha, a non-government organisation, Safia conducted a 'Pilot Study on Violence Against Women in Bangladesh' that showed about 60 per cent of Bangladeshi women are physically assaulted by their husbands.

The figure came from interviewing a total of 719 women, living with their husbands, in capital Dhaka and in rural areas, and from the police, court and hospital records.

Another study carried out by ICDDR,b in 1994 also showed a pathetic picture. It revealed that about 14 per cent mothers in Bangladesh die due to violence, six per cent of them victims of intentional violence.

The Naripakkha report compared violence on wives in Bangladesh with those of the developed countries where ratio of women reporting physical violence by their husbands between 20 and 30. It, however, added: "In some

studies conducted in parts of South Asia, Japan and South America, similar findings have been reported."

In the year 2000, some 772 women were killed in 1,109 recorded incidents of repression throughout Bangladesh. Of them, 100 were killed for dowry, stated a report of the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) reviewing the human rights situation across the country.

During the period, the Bureau of Human Rights of Bangladesh (BHRB) recorded 1,120 incidents of suicide, most being the repressed women.

Repression and denial of basic rights cause the number of female being less than male in Bangladesh like other developing countries of the world.

An article by Novel Laureate Amartya Sen, "More than 100 million missing," showed that ratio of male and female in developed countries is 100:106 where the proportion is 100:96 in developing countries.

Of the missing 100 million population, 3 million are from Bangladesh due to disparity in male/female ratio as well as females deprived of equal right to food, medical care and education, explained a local human rights activist.

In five years till December 2000, a cell under the Women Affairs Directorate named 'Cell to Prevent Repression on Women' registered 13,448 complaints filed by oppressed women in Bangladesh following family dispute, demand for dowry, physical abuse, second marriage or divorce. Of these, 1,266 complaints were lodged with the cell in 2000.

Violence on women is the violation of human rights. Bangladesh constitution has given equal rights to women. Article 27 of the constitution says, "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled with equal protection of law."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, to which Bangladesh is a signatory, guaranteed women's right. It states: "Every people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reasons and conscience and should act with each other in a spirit of brotherhood."

But contrary to these laws and declarations, violence on women is going on alarmingly in Bangladesh as in many other developing countries.

The UN Report 2000 on Human Development in South Asia says, despite pledges by governments to improve equality between the sexes at a landmark 1995 women's conference, few meaningful gains have been achieved for women in South Asia where female literacy of 40 per cent is the lowest regional rate in the world.

Safia Azim observed that more or less most of women have experienced physical or psychological assault by her husband. "Generally, most of them endure such assaults silently. The women do not seek legal action unless the husband abandons her along with children," she said.

Rina's father told this correspondent, "when my only daughter was physically tortured, I decided to take legal action against my son-in-law. But later I changed my mind considering the fate of her three children."

Violence on women has bad impact at all levels individual, community and state. "Physical or verbal assault not only upset the women mentally and push them to feel insecure, but it also has a traumatic impact on their children's mental growth," said Prof Mahmuda Islam, chairman of the Department of Sociology of Dhaka University.

Noticing injustice on their mothers, children gradually tend to feel insecure and frustrated leading them, in some cases, to engage in anti-social acts, she observed.

In an effort to reduce violence on women and secure their rights, the United Nations adopted a new rule in December 2000. Under the rule/treaty, a woman whose complaints are not addressed in her home country can submit them to the official of the world body. Some 166 countries, including Bangladesh, ratified the treaty a new addition to the 1979 UN convention barring abuse against women.

"This is a historic step forward in giving women the right of redress ... at the international level," said assistant secretary-general Angela King, special adviser on gender issues to the United Nations in her reaction, published in media.

Human rights organisers in Bangladesh also termed the treaty "a milestone on the road toward gender equality," as women can now submit sex discrimination, sexual harassment and other complaints to the United Nations.

To reduce violence against women, especially the housewives, Safia Azim suggested changing the attitude towards women.

"We've to accept them as human being with all access to rights enjoyed by a male. A female child has to be provided with equitable health, nutrition, education and other support like her male brothers and friends. We've to groom them in a way so that they feel socially valued; this valuation should not be judged in the context of marriage," she said. "If we can ensure this, repression on women would reduce substantially."

Director of the Cell to Prevent Violence on Women, Nazma Hamid, emphasised on change of attitude by adolescent boys who ultimately will enter into wedlock. "If they would be made aware about the rights of women, they would play a role in reducing violence on women," she said.

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