PHOTO: STAR

Participants at a roundtable, "Meeting of media leaders to discuss how to reduce child marriage: Can the independent media jointly launch a campaign?", organised by The Daily Star at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. From left are Sajjad Sharif, managing editor, Prothom Alo; Salehuddin Ahmed, managing editor, The Daily Star; Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, editor in chief, Boishakhi TV; M Shamsur Rahman, managing editor, Independent Television; Naem Nizam, editor, Bangladesh Pratidin; Golam Sarwar, editor, Samakal; Khandaker Muniruzzaman, acting editor, Sangbad; Shykh Seraj, director and head of news, Channel i; Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher, The Daily Star; Mahbubul Alam, editor of The Independent; Shyamal Dutta, editor, Bhorer Kagoj; MA Malek, editor, Dainik Azadi (Chittagong); Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, editor in chief, Manab Zamin; Mozammel Hoque, editor, Daily Karatoa (Bogra); Imdadul Haq Milan, editor, Kaler Kantho; Sheepa Hafiza of Brac; Rashed Ahmed, news editor, Maasranga Television; and Selim Bashar of Radio Today.

CURTAILING CHILD MARRIAGE

Leading journos vow to work in unison

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Editors, chief executives and journalists representing different print and electronic media yesterday expressed firm resolve to work in unison in raising awareness to reduce the high rate of child marriage in Bangladesh.

Speaking at a roundtable organised by The Daily Star at its premises in the capital, they expressed readiness to publish and air news and special programmes to create awareness in society to mitigate the curse of child marriage.

The commitment came against the backdrop of the stark reality that one-third of Bangladeshi women now aged between 20 and 24 years were married off by the age of 15 and two-thirds by the age of 18.

Such incidence of child marriage has its natural ramifications, a particular one being that 43 percent of children born in Bangladesh suffer stunted growth.

Such conditions paint a rather worrying picture of the future of Bangladeshi society and calls for greater involvement by the media in underscoring the negative effects of early marriage.

These and similar observations emerged at the roundtable, "Meeting of media leaders to discuss how to reduce child marriage: Can the independent media jointly launch a campaign?"

The leading media professionals agreed that concerted efforts were called for in order to deal with the issue, especially in light of the threats to the health of young women as well as their offspring that child marriage might give rise to.

The roundtable took note of various reasons behind the incidence of early marriage in Bangladesh, notably familial concerns over secure futures for girls unless they were married off young, the question of dowry and education and other aspects related to underage girls.

Commenting on the situation, Mahbubul Alam, editor of The Independent, thought that ways could be found to handle all impediments in tackling child marriage through a campaign undertaken collectively by the print and electronic media.

While acknowledging the government's role in curbing the occurrence of child marriage, he pointed out that the media could come forth with its own suggestions for a solution to the issue.

Shykh Seraj, director and head of news at Channel i, informed that his news organisation had already undertaken a campaign against child marriage in a number of unions falling under 20 districts.

Prothom Alo Managing Editor Sajjad Sharif informed that a survey by his news organisation revealed that while readers were drawn in very large numbers to political stories, readership ratings for success stories in diverse social areas were equally high.

As such, the media could surely engage itself in making a success of its anti-child marriage campaign, he said.

For Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, editor in chief of Boishakhi Television, an important step towards challenging child marriage was a development of linkages between media practitioners and field level activists engaged in tackling the issue.

The point was taken somewhat further by Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh.

She suggested that the media mull over popularising the campaign against child marriage by developing relevant programmes on the issue in television serials as well as education-based programmes.

In his remarks, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, made it clear that girls who are below the marriageable age give birth to children who could not but grow up stunted and therefore in a bad state of health.

A stunted child, he added, could only be a burden for society and in turn the long-term result could be a society that could not expect to achieve much for itself.

Shyamal Dutta, editor, Bhorer Kagoj; Khandaker Muniruzzaman, acting editor, Sangbad; Golam Sarwar, editor, Samakal; Naem Nizam, editor, Bangladesh Pratidin; Imdadul Haq Milan, editor, Kaler Kantho; Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, editor in chief, Manab Zamin; M Shamsur Rahman, managing editor, Independent Television; Salehuddin Ahmed, managing editor, The Daily Star; M Sanaullah, chief operating officer, ABC Radio; Rashed Ahmed, news editor, Maasranga Television; MA Malek, editor, Dainik Azadi (Chittagong); and Mozammel Hoque, editor, Daily Karatoa (Bogra); were present.

Shaheen Anam, executive director, Manusher Jonno Foundation; Sheepa Hafiza of Brac; Nayyar Iqbal, deputy country director, Save the Children; and representatives from United Nations Population Fund, Unicef, Care Bangladesh, and Plan Bangladesh were also present.

JP to avoid stage-managed polls: Ershad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Jatiya Party will not take part in a stage-managed election, said the party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday.

Although people want a peaceful parliamentary election, there is doubt whether one will be held or not. People lost faith in the Election Commission and it has become controversial, he said.

"We are ready to participate in the election but the Election Commission must be strong and neutral and has to rise above controversy," he told as chief guest an iftar and doa mahfil organised by Chittagong city unit of Jatiya Party in Chittagong Club of the port city.

The programme was chaired by the Chittagong city unit President Solaiman Alam Sheth.

PHOTO: STAR

Guests release balloons in the capital's Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh yesterday prior to a seminar organised by Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum marking International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, to be observed on August 9. Story on Page 4

Adulterated soybean oil seized in Ctg

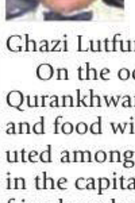
STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Police seized around 1,800 litres of adulterated soybean oil with some machinery at a factory in Amjurhat Bazar area of Patiya upazila in Chittagong yesterday.

Patiya police around 12:30am also seized nine drums full of sub-standard soybean oil and a huge number of fake labels of "Taza". But factory owner Shahadat and his workers, however, managed to flee the scene, said police.

Death anniversary

CITY DESK



Today is the 11th death anniversary of Air Commodore Ghazi Lutfur Rahman.

On the occasion, Qurankhwani will be held and food will be distributed among the destitute in the capital. Relatives, friends and admirers have been requested to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.