

Listen to the adolescent girls

PARVEZ BABUL

I felt at times like ending my life, so that I could end my sufferings," said 16 years old Moumita (not her real name) while describing her intolerable sufferings in married life. "Our slogan of action should be, stop child marriage, save millions of valuable lives of girls," Moumita said. If research is done on the detrimental effects of child marriage, it will reveal thousands of shocking case studies of the ill-fated girls. Child marriage endangers girls' lives and limits their potential.

According to Plan International, the rate of child marriage is still extremely high in Bangladesh; 66% of girls are married before the age of 18, which badly affects thousands of girl children.

Since 1948, the United Nations and other international agencies have attempted to stop child marriage. Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of United Nations states that persons must be of 'full age' when married and that marriage should be entered into 'freely' and with 'full consent.' Child marriage is a gross violation of human rights.

Child marriage has far-reaching health, social, economic, and political implications for the girls and their communities. Early pregnancy and childbirth limit a girl's opportunities and often lead to health complications. Girls who marry early usually drop out of school and are more likely to remain less educated and poor. About half of teenage girls in Bangladesh suffer from malnutrition and anemia due to child marriage. Child marriage puts girls at risk of early and unwanted pregnancies, posing life-threatening consequences. Maternal death related to pregnancy and childbirth is an important component of mortality for girls aged 15-19.

A study shows that the girls who marry before

the age of 18 years are more likely to experience mental health problems. Marriage before the age of 18 years increases a girl's chance of developing a psychiatric condition in her lifetime. 53% girls who married before the age of 18 reported having had a mental disorder such as depression. Mental health problem is also a public health issue. In addition, child brides face life-threatening health issues such as serious obstetric complications, including fistula. The risk of fistula is as high as 88%.

Child marriage and polygamy (husbands who have multiple sex partners) play an important role in another deadly disease, cervical cancer. Pregnancy poses many challenges for young girls, ages 10-15 years are especially vulnerable, because their pelvic bones are not ready for child-bearing and delivery.

"Child marriage marks an abrupt and often violent introduction to sexual relations. The young girls are powerless to refuse sex and lack the resources or legal and social support to leave an abusive marriage," said Claudia Garcia Moreno of World Health Organization (WHO). So, child marriage is one type of 'marital rape'; we need to put an end to this crime immediately.

I had the opportunity to attend the Round Table discussion on child marriage, which UNFPA and The Daily Star jointly organised on October 29. I expressed my opinion in the conference that the policymakers and civil rights groups must listen to the voices of children and adolescents to address their problems, including ending child marriage, as a priority issue.

Article 16 of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) says that child marriages are illegal.

Considering all the deadly consequences, the Bangladesh government should never reduce the age of marriage from 18 for girls and 21 for boys. Rather, we request the Bangladeshi prime minister

to keep her promise, which she made at the International Girl Summit in London this year, to end child marriage.

We will have to include ending child and forced marriage issue broadly in our 7th Five Year Plan for women development nationally; the UN WOMEN has drafted the background paper.

Supporting and enforcing legislation to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18 years for all member countries, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said: "I urge governments, community and religious leaders, civil society, the private sector, and families, especially men and boys, to do their part to let girls be girls, not brides."

Media experts realise that the media could make the government accountable to the people to end child and forced marriage. Child marriage should be an important issue to cover in the media. Though the journalists are more diligent now, yet more journalists should be oriented on this issue to focus evidence-based news stories of both urban and rural areas from grassroots level, including coastal districts, haor, and char areas of Bangladesh. Community Radio and social media are also helpful for community mobilisation among other print and electronic media.

Therefore, let us remove the causes, and say 'No' to child marriage. Nobel Peace Laureate in 2014 Malala Yousafzai very rightly said: "One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world." We must believe it will make a change, as we want Bangladesh and other countries free from child marriage, and all the girls properly educated and empowered. Create safe and sustainable Bangladesh and the world for all the girls and women through smart and comprehensive approach with every stakeholders' active participation.

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Bangladesh blackout 2014

ABDUL MATIN

ABOUT 100 million people in Bangladesh, out of a total of 160 million, were without electricity for about 10 hours on November 1. The rest of the population has no access to the national grid. The interruption originated at 11.30 am at a sub-station in Bheramara in Kushtia district. Soon it knocked out the 400 KV transmission line that was bringing in 445 MW of power from India.

As the national grid lost about 445 MW of power, an uncontrolled chain reaction set in. All the power plants of the country were forced to shut down. Industrial production came to a halt. Captive generators partially supplied electricity to some industries, domestic houses, hospitals, airports, commercial places and other important installations.

There were long queues for diesel oil at gas stations to feed the captive generators. The supply of CNG to automobiles was interrupted due to the outage, increasing the demand for gasoline. The traffic gradually thinned out. Even though electricity was partially restored in some areas in the afternoon, the streets became empty after sunset in the capital city as the restaurants and shopping places had closed down. By 4.30 pm, the power plants, which were brought online, tripped again, further complicating the situation. A shortage in supply of water was reported in some areas. Prices of candles and kerosene suddenly shot up. The internet and mobile phone services deteriorated. The electronic and newspaper media were also affected. By 9.00 pm, some areas got electricity back. The system was back to normal after midnight.

Even though the crisis seems to be over, questions on the blackout are still lingering in the minds of the people. How did it happen and why should it happen after so much investment in the power sector? To answer these questions, we need to understand how an electric power system operates. An electric power grid basically consists of power plants to generate electricity and transmission and distribution lines to carry the power to the consumers. There are numerous protective relays and other devices to regulate the system. The grid is controlled from a load dispatch center.

A power grid is a very delicate system in the sense that there must always be a perfect balance between the generation and the load or demand so as to maintain a constant system frequency which is 50 cycles/second in our region. Whenever there is an imbalance, the frequency will automatically change. If a generator fails, the load will instantly exceed the generation capacity, resulting in a drop in frequency. If the loss of generation is within a tolerable limit, it is possible to continue the operation of the grid by increasing the generation from the hot reserve capacity of the system which is available from the operating power plants and/or by resorting to load-shedding. On the other hand, if a significant load is lost, there will be excess generation in the system that will boost the frequency. In that case, the generation capacity must be reduced to bring down the frequency to the desired level.

A power grid collapses if the loss of generation or load is too large for the system to handle. This is exactly what happened on November 1. The tripping of the transmission line at Bheramara amounted to a loss of about 445 MW of power imported from India, as mentioned earlier. It is reported that the sub-station at Bheramara cannot handle any power beyond 400 MW. The loss of power at Bheramara reduced the frequency to 45 cycles/second and created an electric surge that finally caused the blackout throughout the country.

Can such blackouts be avoided in the future? An electric grid is a man-made system. It can never be perfect. Blackouts occur all over the world, including the most advanced countries even though the frequency of occurrences may vary from country to country.

It is obvious that a blackout can never be avoided but its frequency and severity can be reduced if modern protective and regulating devices are used and enough hot reserve margins are available in the system. In addition, modern smart grids with state-of-the-art technology are in use in many advanced countries that can detect and react to any situation in real time. Such systems can minimise the frequency of occurrences and severity of outages in addition to increasing the system efficiency.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission and the author of "Rooppur and the Power Crisis."

Birth Centenary | A tribute to Justice Debesh Bhattacharya

IRINA BHATTACHARYA

TODAY we commemorate the birth centenary of Justice Debesh Bhattacharya, whose life was as epochal as the time he lived in.

Debesh Bhattacharya was born in 1914. Political movements fighting for the rights of the working class were gathering momentum across the world. The first half of the 20th century was a juncture of many wars and achievements, empires vanishing and new nations emerging. Youthful Debesh Bhattacharya was not only a keen observer of these events, but was also an engaged participant in some of them.

Justice Bhattacharya belonged to an ancient zamindar family from Ellenga in Tangail. He had been a high achiever throughout his academic career. After doing his matriculation examination in 1931 from Bindubashini School in Tangail, he studied at Presidency College in Calcutta. After receiving his M.A. degree in Economics and Bachelor degree in Law from Calcutta University, he joined the Mymensingh District Court in 1941. During that time, along with law practice, he took part in the movement against the British colonial rule. He was also involved in the activities of the Communist Party.

As the country was partitioned in 1947 along religious line, Debesh Bhattacharya decided to stay back in the then East Pakistan out of his social convictions. However, the Muslim League government rewarded him by putting him in jail as a "security prisoner" in 1949 for two years.

Following his release from jail, Debesh Bhattacharya relocated his practice to Dhaka in 1952 and served as a Senior Advocate at the East Pakistan High Court. During the tumultuous pre-independence decade of 1960s, leaders of various nationalist and progressive organisations,



Justice Debesh Bhattacharya

including Bangabandhu, received substantive support and legal advice from him.

After the Independence of Bangladesh, he was appointed a judge of the newly formed Bangladesh High Court and later, in 1975, he was elevated to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. He was made to retire from this position in 1977 through a Martial Law proclamation.

Through his legal practice and academic pursuits, Justice Bhattacharya established himself as an outstanding jurist. His exceptional competence, impressive erudition and impeccable integrity earned him a distinguished place in the legal profession, especially in the field of land-related civil law. Some of his judgments related to cases of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killing, are truly remarkable and are regularly cited as precedence. His ability to provide profound judicial interpretation of complex legal issues is still widely appreciated by his peers. He joined the founding faculty of City Law College, Dhaka. He donated all his law books to Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar

Association Library, which is yet another gesture of his dedication and commitment to his vocation.

Throughout 1980s, Debesh Bhattacharya was deeply involved in the fight for restoration of democracy and in the struggle for upholding human rights in Bangladesh. He was the Founding President of Bangladesh Enemy (Vested) Property Act Repeal Committee. Sadly, his strong voice to annul this discriminatory provision did not find response from any of the governments during his lifetime. Justice Bhattacharya was a member of Gono Adalat (People's Court) set up to try the war criminals of 1971. If he was alive today, he would have been very happy to see that the perpetrators of crimes against humanity are finally receiving punishment. Justice Bhattacharya was a community leader with deep secular values. In the wake of the amendment of the Constitution of Bangladesh providing for state religion, he along with others launched the Hindu Boudha Christian Unity Council to fight for equal rights of the religious and ethnic minorities.

Justice Bhattacharya was also a tough advocate for women's rights, particularly for the Hindu women. He took up his pen in support of modernising Hindu Personal Law by incorporating provisions for divorce and right of inheritance for Hindu women. His efforts were consistently blocked by conservative sections of the society. Even now, after 30 years, these rights for (Hindu) women are yet to be guaranteed by the state.

He was a generous philanthropist. His name is associated with a number of educational and social institutions across Bangladesh. In his native village Ellenga, he established, among others, a high school for girls in his mother's name around 50 years ago. He was president of a number of prominent social and welfare organisations including Gandhi Ashram Trust in Noakhali, Prabartak Sangha,

Chittagong and Ramkrishna Mission, Dhaka.

I remember him as a very modest and liberal person with a vision and outlook about Bangladeshi society far ahead of the time he lived in. He used to read widely and had a broad and varied interest in books. In his library in Rankin Street, Wari you could find volumes of Rabindranath Tagore and Manik Bandyopadhyay standing along with Adam Smith or Aldous Huxley, next to old issues of Life magazine neatly bound on the bookshelves. The works of William Shakespeare were one of his favourites. During his time in jail as a political prisoner, he asked my mother-in-law to bring him the complete works of Shakespeare. This volume, which was "censored and passed" by Dhaka jail authorities, is still in our home and is treasured by our family.

Justice Bhattacharya very much liked to recite Tagore's poetry and was also himself a poet. A collection of his poems was published in 1998 under the title *Kalpokabbo Manjusha*.

Debesh Bhattacharya was married to Chitra Bhattacharya. This gracious and erudite lady stood by him during the most difficult times in their lives. Chitra Bhattacharya (Boudi, as everyone called her) was an active social worker and women's rights activist. We felt proud, when in 1996, she was appointed a Member of Parliament from Tangail's reserved seat for women.

Many persons have dreamt dreams, but only few can show by example and actions what it is possible to achieve in their own time. The life and works of Debesh Bhattacharya are a true illustration of the achievements of his generation. Today, we express our admiration for and pay our respect to this distinguished jurist and salute the immense self-sacrifice and the inspiring legacy he has left behind.

The writer is daughter-in-law of Justice Bhattacharya.

QUOTABLE Quote

Put your heart, mind, and soul into even your smallest acts. This is the secret of success.

Swami Sivananda

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- Blocks
- Reporter's exclusive
- Diabolical
- Aussie gal
- Lima's land
- Polio need
- Dixieland instrument
- Fortitude
- Winning spell
- Dove cry
- Skating category
- Climber's spike
- Commotion
- Praline nuts
- Basil who played Sherlock Holmes
- Turkey feature
- French race site
- Folding money
- Halloween color
- Resting on
- Police ID
- Theater award

DOWN

- Office div.
- Declare
- Catalan painter
- Sleep
- Leap part
- Paparazzi target
- Dressing ingredient
- Flamenco cry
- Butter square
- Painter's wear
- Cote cries
- Twice tetra
- Lunch hour
- Ages and ages
- Prepare for a bout
- Unveiling cry
- Mob action
- Phnom-
- Wind driven vehicle
- Marshal's group
- "M. Butterfly" playwright
- Spre
- Aware of
- Light gas
- Spot
- High hit
- Memorable time
- Demented

Yesterday's answer

10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49

CRYPTOQUOTE

Q XT ZGA X DYGSMB A GV TW BQYBMTNAXZBRN. Q XT X DYGSMB A GV TW SRBQNQZGN.

— NARDFRZ BGIRW

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE BEST TIME TO PLANT A TREE WAS TWENTY YEARS AGO. THE SECOND BEST TIME IS NOW.

— CHINESE PROVERB

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BEETLE, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? NOTHING RIGHT NOW. GREG! MORT WALKER. HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'RE DONE DOING NOTHING?

HENRY by Don Trachte

LEARN HOW TO WIN FRIENDS ONLY LET. LEAD.