

# A special kind of stupid



NO STRINGS ATTACHED  
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

It's just me or is everyone around me going a bit cuckoo?! And I'm not talking about the lawmaker who thought it was grand to walk over a human bridge made of school students whose headmaster thought this would be a brilliant way to please the narcissistic politician. Nor am I talking about a former Union Parishad member who kept four schools shut for three days so he could keep his promise of feeding 30,000 of his voters. Both these individuals could be recommended for psychological assessment and considered unfit to be representatives of the public or of civilised society for that matter. But there is more craziness in the air, so much that it could make one think that we have dropped into a time warp that has taken us into the dark ages.

I'm talking about this 'special provision' that the lawmakers are trying to incorporate into the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2016, one that is being vehemently protested by human rights activists, lawyers and anyone who believes that girls should be given a chance to be educated and pursue their dreams rather than be forced to marry.

To add to the madness, I just read a news report that says that the government is also considering adding a clause that says that boys under 21 (the minimum age for them to marry under the existing law) can tie the knot under the special provision. In other words we will be one of those few countries that can boast of creating a legal framework so that kids can get married and skip their childhood. Just like the good old days when kings and queens got their infant princes and princesses betrothed so they would be tied together forever without even knowing it so



ILLUSTRATION: WALKFREE

that kingdoms remained intact and did not end up annihilating each other. I guess people wanted to give a 'gender equality' dimension to a provision that will affect an under-aged girl for life: if a girl child can get married why not a boy child? He should be granted the same 'privilege' and meted out the same treatment. Hold on, *what?* Have we lost our marbles? Instead of scrapping this controversial provision that will undoubtedly give excuses

to parents and guardians to marry off their minor daughters to face the consequences of early marriage, we are now going to let young boys to be coerced into marriage. So what 'special circumstances' are we really talking about that should warrant this special provision? Teenaged delinquents who stalk girls on their way to school, rape them, leading to the victim getting pregnant? When a boy and girl get caught together by the villagers and so the only way to save the girl's

honour is to get them married off so that the parents and the community can live happily ever after? Obviously we are missing the 'slight' problems that would ensue if marriage is made to be the pill to cure all ailments. Let's refresh our memories on what these problems could be. Child marriage, under any circumstances will mean the girl dropping out of school (there goes SDG 5 out the window - to empower all women and girls,

not to mention our government's commendable progress in girls' education). It will mean she will get pregnant at an age when her body is not mature and hence may lead to complications during pregnancy, underweight babies, even her death while giving birth. A girl child who is compelled to marry for whatever reason, is more vulnerable to violence from her husband and in-laws as it is always easier to dominate and torture a child. If it is with her rapist we can only imagine the psychological trauma she will go through being legally his hostage to do as he pleases. This is the pretty picture this special provision conjures. Now that boys may be included, we can also count them in the dropout rates in secondary school. After all, a married man child will be expected to earn a living, not go to school.

In this wave of madness there are, thankfully, voices of sanity. Social Action Committee, a platform of 69 human rights and development organisations in the country have joined hands to protest the special provision, reiterating that this will only encourage child marriage and jeopardise the rights of children and women. These include people who have done research on the effects of child marriage, who have worked with adolescent girls and mothers, who have legally represented battered women, many of them married when they were children and those who, on a daily basis, work, think and believe in empowering women and girls. Apparently the government and these people are on the same page as far as wanting girls to grow up as strong, self-sufficient, productive citizens. If that is so why will there be a regressive provision in such a progressive law? Sounds pretty insane to me.

The Writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial & Op-ed, The Daily Star.

# We need a new social movement against inequality



DR DHANANJAYAN SRISKANDARAJAH

OXFAM'S latest estimate that just eight super-rich people - down from 62 last year and 388 just six years ago - own more wealth than the poorest half of the world population is a clarion call to change the way we think about and try to tackle inequality.

Twenty years ago, as a young economics student, I was taught to look at the distribution of resources within and between nations. Most of the measures we looked at were averages: what is the average per capita income in a country; or what is the average rate of growth. Even when looking at inequality we used measures like the Gini coefficient that looked at distribution across a whole population. Oxfam's work shows just how poor these standard economic measures have been at tracking what has really been going on when it comes to wealth.

The vastly unequal accumulation of wealth transcends national boundaries. While we spend a lot of time comparing the size of GDPs, it is now individuals, and not states, who are accumulating wealth in eye-watering quantities.

A little bit of inequality is to be expected; indeed one could argue that it is a normal part of economic life in a market-based system. But the tragedy of the current economic order is not just the extreme levels of inequality but also the social attitudes that have normalised it. There are those who argue that

efforts to reduce inequality will stifle competition and constrain enterprise and growth. Greed is good, they say. Haven't you heard about trickle-down economics? Well, I have, and along with a growing number of others, I'm not buying it.

Even the World Economic Forum's own Global Risk Report cites severe income inequality as the single greatest threat to social and political stability around the world. Contemporary capitalism is creating deeply unstable growth. The inequality it engenders is bad for humanity, not only in the sense that it is unjust, but in that it leads instrumentally to negative outcomes for society as a whole. It is a corrosive force, hampering our fight against poverty and sowing the seeds of social unrest.

The mandates of our governments are heavily, disproportionately, influenced by the priorities of the wealthy elite. The super-rich are rigging the rules of the game in their favour.

Governments are going to be neither able nor willing to tackle inequality until mass social mobilisation demands that they do so. We need to examine the attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate and increase inequality. We need to stop believing that what is happening now is normal, inevitable even. It's not. We need to make extreme personal wealth an unacceptable reality and its defenders, pariahs. What matters most in the fight against inequality is how we think. We need to establish new norms around inequality, wealth and poverty.

A growing number of civil society organisations, trade unions and faith

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groups have come together to form a new Fighting Inequality Alliance. Our aim is to build upon work already begun by grassroots movements such as Occupy to change social norms around wealth accumulation. Only a global peoples' movement can begin to counterbalance the power and influence of the 1percent. Only a growing tide of peaceful protest can challenge inequality as a global social norm and force governments to respond.

Until we achieve this change in attitude, governments will not fundamentally alter the way they manage our economies. We won't see tax havens eliminated, or all workers receiving a living wage. We won't see increased government spending on public services funded by more progressive tax systems. We won't see more transparent policymaking or meaningful strengthening of financial regulations.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**PABLO NERUDA**  
Chilean poet-diplomat, and politician.

*You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep from coming.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Easy targets
- Tankard fill
- Walk with pride
- Playwright Rice
- Eggnog server
- Blazing
- Eternal
- "My word!"
- Decimal base
- Football pass
- Respect
- Beatty film
- Resort island
- Afternoon socials
- Upshot
- Outlawed
- Aussie hopper
- Panhandle
- Inspirits
- Conjure up
- Come up
- Showed over
- Trig functions
- Brooklyn team

**DOWN**

- Play places
- Fiercely
- Influence
- Pittsburgh player
- Ogre
- Hobbit helper
- Political refugee
- Proof, maybe
- Roofing material
- Staggers
- Eastern warrior
- Important times
- Naturalness
- Branagh's birthplace
- Rome's river
- Craps natural
- 1990s veep
- Bearlike
- Contemptible ones
- Hits the sauce
- Secluded spots
- Jazz combo
- "Krazy --"

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

S	O	W	S	B	A	S	K
A	V	A	I	L	A	S	W
D	E	L	T	A	S	H	I
I	R	K	T	W	E	E	Z
E	D	I	F	I	E	D	Z
O	N	E	N	D	E	L	M
G	A	S	T	R	E		
L	O	S	T	B	E	A	S
O	P	T	C	R	E	S	T
G	E	I	S	H	A	S	I
N	O	N	C	U	E	U	N
O	N	K	E	S	P	O	K
P	S	S	T	S	S	R	S

We need a new global economy that works for the majority. But until the majority stand up and make their voices heard - until their influence overwhelms that of the wealthy elite - we will not achieve it. Already, we are beginning to see exciting new thinking around wealth redistribution, such as this from Laurence Chandy at the Brookings Institute. But, what if, instead of focusing on redistribution solutions, we look to prohibit the accumulation of enormous personal wealth in the first place? While it is commendable that some of the world's richest people including Bill Gates, Warren Buffet and Mark Zuckerberg will give

away much of their fortunes, not all billionaires will follow suit. Were we to establish new rules, or norms, around how much wealth one individual can legitimately amass, some would no doubt argue that we would damage the economic growth incentive. But, we're talking about marginal billions here. The innovators, the technology pioneers of our age, are not going to alter their investment decisions or risk tolerance should they stand to gain one billion rather than 10. All this is not quite as radical as it might sound. Take the example of inheritance taxes. While the details of this law's application may be

contested, the legitimacy of its existence is not. We accept that there should be limits to how much wealth is hoarded inter-generationally. Why not something similar at the global level? My point is this: if we limit our thinking to taxing the super-rich or trying to encourage more billionaires to behave like Gates, Buffet or Zuckerberg, we may achieve some redistribution but not address the drivers of inequality. As the world heads towards its first trillionaire, we need to change the rules of the wealth game.

The writer is Secretary General of CIVICUS, the global civil society alliance. Source: Inter Press Service

**VACANCY**

**NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY**  
*Center of Excellence in Higher Education*

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The Board of Trustees (BOT) of North South University (NSU) is looking for a competent Secretary to the Board of Trustees of the NSU Trust.

The Secretary of the Board of Trustees shall be the custodian and caretaker of the Board Office. S/he shall assist the Chairman in fixing the agenda items, preparing the working papers, drafting the minutes and communicating the decisions of the meetings to all concerned. S/he shall ensure keeping and recording all papers and documents etc. properly and safely. S/he shall receive all notices, documents and other correspondences and shall sign all correspondences on behalf of the Trust and shall exercise such powers and authorities as may be conferred on him or her by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. S/he shall interact, maintain and keep liaison internally with all concerned authorities of the University and externally with the Offices of the Honorable Chancellor, the Honorable Prime Minister, Ministry of Education (MOE), the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms and the Office of the Sub-Registrar and all other concerned authorities as and when needed.

The Secretary will be responsible for preparing annual report of the AGM, speeches and messages of various programs, statements for the Chairman, and prepare inter office memos, letters including performing administrative and other secretarial works as assigned by the Chairman, BOT.

**Qualification and Experience:**  
MBA with secretarial course and minimum 10 years of experience as a company secretary in corporate sector/multinational company/bank or similar organizations. Familiarity with various relevant Laws and Acts, including the Private University Act, Society Registration Act, Trust Act, etc. are most essential.

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