

# The staggering costs of child marriage

## Remove special provision from child marriage law

A World Bank report published on Tuesday revealed some predictable, but still disturbing numbers about the cost of child marriages in developing nations. The report, titled "Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report" highlighted the staggering economic cost of child-marriages, adding to the already established social costs that we are familiar with.

The report, through analysis of data of 25 developing countries, Bangladesh included, found that child marriage will cost these countries trillions of dollars in the next decade. On the other hand, if child marriage were ended, fertility rates would drop in the worst affected countries. In economic terms, this would translate to gains of over USD 500 billion annually by 2030. This is on top of the "large positive effect" this would mean in terms of education of girls and their children. The report also found that our lofty goals of ending world poverty is hampered too due to this social evil.

Coming back to Bangladesh, the report cites that almost 60 percent of the country's age-group between 18 to 22 got married before they were 18. Despite our efforts of curbing and criminalising child marriages, the practice continues. Here, we must point out yet again that the special provision to allow child marriages under special circumstances that has been added to the Child Marriage Restraint Act could undo the limited progress we had made to protect the rights of girls in this country, and give such marriages a legal sanction.

We urge the authorities once again to reconsider the amendment that was made, and realise that without a strong stance to oppose child marriage, these girls will continue to be forced into such marriages. If the human rights and moral considerations were not enough, the WB report shows that ending this practice is also the "economically smart thing to do".

# Roads of death!

## Will we never learn?

EID holidays inevitably bring us both joy and sorrow. Sorrow because there are so many road accidents taking away precious lives. We know that at least 41 people were killed on the roads between last Sunday and Wednesday. Invariably these are caused by speeding, reckless overtaking and drivers not caring too hoots about safety of passengers. Last Eid, there were 52 dead in five days during Eid holidays and newspaper reports show that some 1,215 people lost their lives over the last 135 days in various districts. Yes, we understand that traffic is particularly heavy during these holidays, but the death toll keeps rising and one tends to think that no matter what the casualty figures are or how many people are maimed, they are acceptable losses to authorities who refuse to take measures to reduce traffic fatalities.

And what of those who are injured and particularly those maimed permanently? What about their loss of a livelihood or the emotional scar of having lost the use of limbs? Who picks up the cost of injury due to the recklessness of drivers of vehicles? Given the culture of impunity these drivers apparently enjoy, how exactly will things improve and we no longer have to write about gruesome deaths and injury every Eid?

Although much hope was pinned on the draft Road Transport Act 2017, we were taken aback to see it lacking any provision for punishment for fatal accidents or accidents that cause injuries. Also, the fact that these offences remain bailable, make it easy for offenders to keep doing the same over and over again. Unless policymakers are willing to get tough with errant drivers, lives will continue to be lost.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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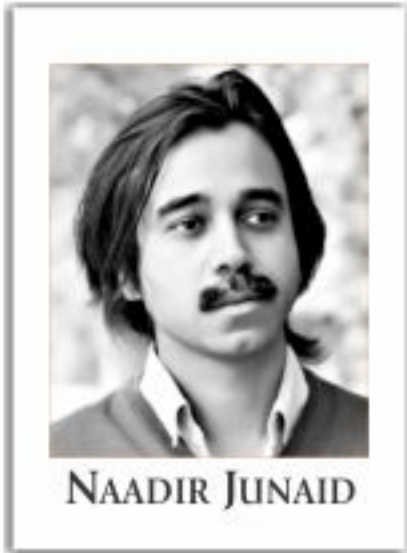
### We need a permanent solution for footpath hawkers

We were relieved to see the empty footpaths across Dhaka city after Dhaka South City Corporation's eviction of roadside hawkers. Despite vigorous efforts by the authorities, however, hawkers have once again taken over the recently-freed footpaths. Dhaka North and South city authorities have periodically taken initiatives to free the streets from hawkers and street vendors, but they continue to face obstruction from musclemen empowered by local leaders with the support of unscrupulous officials. The government should empower relevant authorities so that they can effectively enforce existing regulations and hold the culprits accountable.

However, evicting street vendors without any rehabilitation plan is degrading and inhumane. Hawkers don't just randomly set up shop in an area. They get the space from powerful entities who demand daily fees in exchange for the permission. These are the parties we should be pointing our fingers at. Evicting hawkers isn't a permanent solution. These people desperately need a source of income, and so, in a sense, they are victims here too. The government should provide designated areas for hawkers, because, in the absence of government support, people will always find a way to take advantage of them. If the two mayors of Dhaka city are truly committed to their vision of a cleaner and greener Dhaka, they would be helping their own cause and gaining much credibility by taking this issue seriously.

**Zubair Khaled Huq**  
By email

# Cinema that reflects life



If we examine Bangladeshi films produced thus far since 1971 we would see that most of them are not under the rubric of 'revolutionary cinema' by consciously counteracting the conventions of traditional entertainment films. A film is regarded as revolutionary when it makes a radical departure from conventional films both in terms of content and form. Filmmakers demonstrating a predilection for alternative cinema aesthetics intend to raise the critical consciousness of the spectators instead of immersing them in escapist entertainment. Entertainment-based films are representative of a specific filmmaking genre, but it is erroneous to think that all films must include glamour and glitz. There is no denying that cinema is an art form although in various countries the glut of showy and extravagant films makes cinema synonymous with a business that produces a large profit. If cinema is considered an artistic creation, it is necessary to make sure that films turn out to be aesthetically innovative and socially critical instead of prioritising audience-pleasing elements to maximise profit. One question becomes important at the moment to know the nature of Bangladeshi cinema: Do our films attempt to grapple with urgent social and political issues realistically using unorthodox cinematic techniques, thereby freeing the minds of the spectator from cultural colonisation?

Satyajit Ray, one of the most-acclaimed Bengali filmmakers, once said: "For the truly serious, socially conscious filmmaker, there can be no prolonged withdrawal into fantasy. He must face the challenge of contemporary reality, examine the facts, probe them, sift them and select from them the material to be transformed into the stuff of cinema." Directors of Bangladeshi mainstream cinema seldom resemble the socially conscious filmmakers referred to by Ray. When mainstream films depict unjust acts committed by the powerful, a larger-than-life hero soon turns up to single-handedly fight the forces of evil and claim victory. Thus, such social criticisms seem harmless in effect. Aping the gaudy conventions generally seen in Bollywood entertainment films such as song-and-dance, attractive male and female leads, romantic relationship, theatricality, villains, violence, happy ending are also commonplace in Bangladeshi mainstream cinema.

Films produced outside the commercial film industry are recognised as cinema of resistance because they reject the ideology of market-driven films. Such alternative films make political statements, either overtly or indirectly, in order to condemn social ills and point the finger at the guilty party. Formal innovation is another important attribute of alternative cinema. A closer

look at Bangladeshi feature films of the past few decades shows that only a handful of them qualify as resistance films because of their social critique and innovative form. Contemporary alternative films in Bangladesh are often replete with technical gloss but the use of imaginative and unorthodox cinematic means is a rarity. It is not possible to make an impression with films which use digital technology but remain artistically impoverished. Resistance films do not need to be cerebral or highly experimental but it is important that various images of these films convey socially critical messages. In order to

Zahir Raihan and *Matir Moina* (2002) by Tareque Masud showed how cinema can be used as an instrument to denounce long-standing political and social problems. Raihan used a metaphorical storyline to provide trenchant political denunciations of an oppressive regime. By setting his allegorical film in the past, Masud courageously criticised ill-effects of religious fundamentalism of contemporary society. Both of these films were banned initially from showing in cinemas, indicating that the governments were disturbed by their contents. By instrumentalising their films to deal with urgent problems, the directors displayed

innovative and socially meaningful films will stand out in important international festivals and receive considerable critical attention.

In Bangladesh, the constant media publicity for entertainment-oriented films and the absence of writings and discussions emphasising the importance of socially purposive cinema are turning people into passive consumers of profit-driven films. In 1968, during the student-led revolt against the government in France various scathing slogans were used. One of them still seems highly relevant: "I take part, you take part, he takes part, we take part, you all take part, they profit." If



The iconic song *Karar Oi Louho Kopat* from Zahir Raihan's movie *Jiban Theke Neya* (1970).

achieve this aim, the camera language and film's narrative must appeal to the reason and intellect of the spectator instead of offering him trivial entertainment.

If the viewers are not disturbed by the filmic events, it is unlikely that films' portrayals of social exploitation will enable them to take a stand against all forms of social oppression. Certain Bangladeshi films claiming to be alternative unreasonably highlight themes such as extramarital affairs, sexual activity, the lust of men, thereby causing titillation instead of providing painfully realistic depictions of the actual harsh conditions of contemporary society. Sometimes after showing certain social problems, such films condemn only a hoodlum or a dishonest village headman. But these petty criminals are of course not responsible for the major social and political problems. Such social criticisms thus become futile and they cannot disturb the system which perpetuates injustice.

Films like *Jiban Theke Neya* (1970) by

courage and responsibility as socially committed artists. At the same time, their films rejected conventional cinematic strategies associated with entertainment-based cinema. In Bangladesh, such revolutionary films are rarely produced. On the contrary, the abundance of glitzy elements and puerile humour in contemporary Bangladeshi films and television soap operas demonstrate that attempts are made to rear the spectators on a regular diet of entertainment.

Films avoiding song-and-dance formula but, nonetheless, drawing on glamour attract huge turnouts in cinemas in Bangladesh these days. But such glitzy films prioritising escapist entertainment only bring financial benefit for the producers. They do not help audiences develop a critical consciousness of the actual causes of social injustice. We also need to keep in mind that Bangladeshi films cannot occupy an important position in the realm of world cinema through the constant production of spectacle-like films. Only formally

cultural products aim to culturally colonise minds to revel only in entertainment rather than raising a radical consciousness, people will hardly realise the subtle forms of exploitation permeating today's consumerist society. In order to encourage the filmmakers to make decolonising films it is necessary to give them the opportunity to logically criticise social problems. Mrinal Sen, Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak made their overtly political films during the anti-state Naxalite movement in West Bengal. Their films were not banned by the Indian government. In Bangladesh, can we make sure that socially critical statements in cinema will not be removed by the Censor? If we are to witness the growth of cinema in Bangladesh, it is absolutely imperative that the establishment provides filmmakers with artistic freedom and film scholars and the media help people perceive the importance of socially responsible cinema.

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# Surge in diplomacy, action in mediation



practitioners and scholars from around the world will explore ways and means to promote mediation as a prominent conflict prevention and resolution method.

The profile of mediation has been rising globally since Turkey and Finland led the way at the United Nations through the "Mediation for Peace" initiative. The initiative culminated in the establishment of the Group of Friends of Mediation. The Group now has 53 members, including 48 states and five international organisations. There has also been substantial improvement in international capacity for preventive diplomacy and mediation within the UN, regional and sub-regional organisations and civil society. The Group has become the leading platform at the UN to promote mediation. It has initiated the adoption of four UN General Assembly Resolutions, which lay the ground for the development of the normative and conceptual framework of mediation. The Group has also contributed to the 2012 "United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation", a fundamental document for those who practise and study mediation worldwide.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has expressed his willingness to further develop UN's mediation support capacity. His efforts are most commendable. We call on all UN member states to support UNSG Guterres' broad vision and efforts to prevent and solve today's conflicts. Turkey has been doing her part. Turkey is situated next to a vast region where acute active and frozen conflicts persist. Prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts is a central feature of Turkey's enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy. Turkey undertakes various efforts in a wide geography from Africa to the

Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus. She sees peacemaking in a humanitarian-development nexus. This year, Turkey has again become the most generous nation in the world in terms of per capita humanitarian assistance.

Turkey has been hosting the Istanbul Conferences on Mediation since 2012. These landmark conferences are designed to bring together numerous practitioners and scholars in the field of conflict prevention and mediation activities. The aim of these conferences is to promote synergies between theory and practice and help increase scope, reach and effectiveness of the international

The latter is especially pertinent since we have come to sadly witness extreme tendencies in various forms of political, social and religious animosities. The rise in attacks in Europe against Muslims and migrants is a case in point. Prevention is key. However, prevention would be possible only when societies recognise and learn to respect differences and engage in genuine dialogue and interaction. I believe that mediators who are well-equipped with the cultural codes of conduct in a given conflict situation can reach remarkable success. For that, we need to train more mediators including the youth while



SOURCE: EDU2REVIEW

community's mediation efforts. I must pay tribute to the efforts of mediators engaging daily in conflicts worldwide.

This year the conference will explore how mediation methodology and practice can take better account of the needs of the day. In this regard, two questions in particular would be scrutinised. One is the potential of mediation in all stages of a conflict continuum, namely from prevention to resolution and all the way to peace agreement implementation. The second key question would be the models for greater employment of mediation as a preventive tool in contexts where political, ethnic, religious biases create an environment of hostility.

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Our challenges to make peace the overwhelming reality on a global level are immense. However, we should be able to see the opportunities within those challenges. The readiness and willingness of the international community to build capacity in peaceful resolution of conflicts including mediation must be a priority. As we prepare to welcome participants of the Fourth Istanbul Mediation Conference, I call on the international community to take action in mediation.

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The writer is Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.

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