



PHOTO: STAR

Speakers at the discussion at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

## Social norms a major barrier

Speakers tell roundtable on stopping child marriage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parents' role as well as social norms are the major barriers to stopping child marriages and forced marriages in society. It's a violation of child basic rights, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

Besides, religious reasons are also another concern.

They made the remarks at the discussion on Care's Impact on Social Norms Programming at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka.

Care Bangladesh, in association with The Daily Star, organised the event.

Ramesh Singh, country director of Care Bangladesh, and Golam Mortoza, editor of The Daily Star Bangla, gave the welcome speech at the event.

Mahmudur Rahman Khan, technical coordinator of Research, Monitoring and Evaluation at Care Bangladesh, said their intervention reduced the hazards of child marriage by 63 percent among the girls who attended 36-40 of their sessions during the third phase of their initiative.

The initiative was implemented in 51 villages in Rangpur's Pargacha upazila.

Adolescent girls and boys, their parents, community members, religious leaders and relevant local government officials were included as intervention participants.

"We need long-term programmes. Otherwise, it will be challenging to see the immediate impact on social norms only," said Khan.

However, Muhammad Munir Hussain, programme analyst (adolescent and youth) at UNFPA stressed innovative initiatives instead of traditional programme designing.

"We are still placing close to Afghanistan in global rankings on child marriage, which is astonishing for us. The socioeconomic reality and religious factors are at work here," said Golam Mortoza.

Nobonita Chowdhury, director of the Preventing Violence Against Women Initiative at Brac, said there is no other way out without addressing the social norms through constant effort.

"We have no reason to be disappointed. We have been able to create awareness regarding the benefits of oral saline or sending girls to school.

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## High cost leads to poor response

Only 32,000 register for hajj against quota of 1.27 lakh

RASHIDUL HASAN

Only 32,000 Bangladeshis have registered to perform hajj this year so far, against the country's quota of 1.27 lakh.

Due to the poor response, the government has extended the registration deadline for the second time to March 7, the religious affairs ministry said in a circular yesterday.

Earlier on February 22, the ministry extended the deadline till yesterday.

But in the last six days, only 13,860 intended hajjis have registered, said sources at the hajj camp office.

**A Bangladeshi will have to spend at least Tk 6.83 lakh to perform hajj under government management, up by around Tk 1.61 lakh from the previous year. The minimum cost under private management has been fixed at Tk 6.72 lakh, about Tk 1.5 lakh more than that of the year before.**

As of yesterday, 7,415 people registered under the government's hajj management scheme, while 24,588 signed up under private hajj agencies.

Top leaders of Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB) and Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) said despite the huge interest to perform hajj, fewer people registered due to the high cost of hajj packages this year.

The agencies and officials at Ashkona hajj camp now doubt whether Bangladesh will be able to meet the quota this year due to the high costs.

A Bangladeshi will have to spend

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