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An alarming upswing in child marriage

NILIMA JAHAN

At least 41.6 percent of young women in Bangladesh were married before they had turned 18, reveals the latest government survey.

The survey — Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023 (BSVS-2023) conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and released on Sunday — also shows a rising trend of child marriages over the previous three years.

In the survey conducted in 2022, at least 40.9 percent of women were found to have been married before turning 18, in 2021 the number was 32.4 percent, and in 2020, it was 31.3 percent.

BSVS 2023 also found that 8.2 percent of young women had gotten married before they were 15. The number was 6.5 percent the year before.

The survey was on over 3.08 lakh households across the country and on married women who are now between 20 and 24.

It found that child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas with 44.4 percent of women getting married before the age of 18.

Under the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, the legal age for marriage is 18 for women.

The BBS survey, however, differs significantly from the data of the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (DBHS) 2022 conducted by the National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT).

The NIPORT survey found that 51 percent of girls are married before they turned 18.

MARRIED BEFORE 18		MARRIED BEFORE 15	
YEAR	PERCENTAGE	YEAR	PERCENTAGE
2023	41.6	2023	8.2
2022	40.9	2022	6.5
2021	32.4	2021	4.7
2020	31.3	2020	4.9

According to a Unicef report released in May last year, the prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh is the highest in South Asia and the eighth highest in the world.

Child marriage perpetuates a cycle of poverty by cutting short the girls' education, pushing them into early and repeated pregnancies, and limiting their employment opportunities.

Although the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023 did not analyse the reasons behind the rise in child marriage, experts blamed poverty, safety concerns, and customs.

Shaheen Anam, executive director of the Manusher Jonno Foundation, said, "The main drivers include social norms, in which marrying off daughters is perceived as a solution due to concerns about elopement; safety concerns, stemming from the belief that marrying off daughters at a young age provides security and safeguards their well-being in uncertain circumstances; and poverty, which is particularly prevalent in climate change affected and remote areas where families see it as one less mouth to feed."

She also blamed the lack of proper enforcement of the law and mostly dysfunctional committees and authorities, who have been mentioned in the action plan to prevent child marriage.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 mandates establishment of child marriage prevention committees at national, district, upazila, and union levels, consisting of government officials, local representatives, non-government officials, and community leaders.

Shaheen Anam said although some upazila nirbahi officers are proactive in trying to stop child marriages, the work is limited on raising awareness among parents about the negative effects of child marriage and advocating girls' education.

The increasing trend of child marriage also results in a very high rate of adolescent pregnancies.

As per BSVS 2023, the rate of girls, aged between 15 and 19, giving

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RED HOT CHILLI PEPPERS! ... Blocks of red stretch across the Kalitola ghat over the Jamuna in Bogura's Sariakandi upazila as tonnes of red chilli were being dried there recently. Char areas in this upazila and neighbouring Sonatal upazila are famous for chilli, accounting for five percent of the country's entire chilli production. According to the DAE, around Tk 1,000 crore worth of chilli are being cultivated on about 7,500 hectares of land this year. PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHOBU

MV ABDULLAH
Pirates bring in food as stock start to deplete

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

As food stock in the hijacked Bangladeshi ship MV Abdullah was depleting, pirates recently started bringing in food.

An official of Bangladesh Merchant Marine Officers' Association (BMMOA), who is closely monitoring the situation, confirmed that the pirates brought in some food. The ship had a stock of food for 25 days when it was hijacked on March 12.

Contacted, Mizanul Islam, media adviser of KSRM Group, said food was still available for the crewmen and there was no crisis till date.

KSRM is the parent organisation of the ship's owning firm SR Shipping Ltd.

Mizanul said, "If necessary, the pirates would arrange food for the crew members."

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Defying UNSC, Israel steps up assault on Gaza

Rafah residents fear imminent ground assault; 66 more Palestinians killed

AGENCIES

Israeli forces yesterday stepped up assault on Gaza defying a ceasefire demand by UN Security Council.

The forces also fought Hamas fighters

around several hospitals in the besieged Palestinian territory as US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin called on Israel to protect civilians.

At least three homes in Rafah were bombed overnight, raising new fear among the more than a million people sheltering in the last refuge on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip that a long-threatened ground assault could be coming.

Talks in Qatar towards a truce and hostage release deal, involving US and Egyptian mediators, have brought no result so far, with Israel and the

Palestinian group blaming each other.

The soaring civilian death toll has also strained the relationship between Israel and its top ally the United States.

Israeli plans to push its ground offensive into the far southern city of Rafah, which is packed with displaced civilians, have only added to the tensions.

Gaza has endured almost six months of offensive and a siege that has cut off most food, water, fuel and other supplies, and the UN has warned that its 2.4 million people are on the brink of a "man-made famine".

In yesterday's heavy bombardment, Israel hit Gaza City in the north and Rafah, where a fireball lit up the sky over the city crowded with up to 1.5 million people, most of them displaced by the offensive.

» Protecting Palestinians a moral imperative, US tells Israel

» Battles rage on in and around three Gaza hospitals

» Death toll in enclave rises to 32,490

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'Why don't they burn Indian saris of their wives?'

PM says pointing at BNP leaders over 'boycott India campaign'

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sought to know the numbers of Indian saris in possession of the wives of BNP leaders who have called for boycotting Indian products.

"Why are they [BNP leaders] not bringing those saris from their wives and burning those?" she told a discussion at the Awami League office in Dhaka's Tejgaon yesterday.

The ruling party organised the event on the occasion of the Independence and National Day.

Hasina, also the AL president, said the wives of the BNP leaders who would boycott Indian products should not wear Indian saris.

"I will believe they [BNP leaders] have truly boycotted Indian products only when they will burn all those saris," the premier said.

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BUSINESS

Stocks keep bleeding

The stock market has been going through a bear run for the last two months despite petering out of election-linked uncertainty, signalling that the worries about the macroeconomic challenges are far from over.

The falling trend comes after the regulator lifted the floor price, handing investors the long-awaited freedom to sell shares at their will, a liberty they could not enjoy for the 18 months to January this year owing to the artificial measure.

The selling spree among foreign investors who fear that the local currency might fall further following a 25 percent depreciation in the past two years and the concern among local investors that the key indexes would slide more are hurting the overall sentiment.

Thus, the DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange, gave up 680 points, or 10 percent, in the last two months.

STORY ON B1



Steel rods being openly carried on a truck with a car trailing right behind in the capital's Shahbagh. One strong jerk, and the rods could easily slide off and pierce right through the vehicle at the back. Timber and rods are often carried with no precautions in place, increasing the risks of accidents.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Fakhrul slams govt for 'silence' over killing of youth by BSF

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday condemned and protested the killing of a Bangladeshi youth and injuring of another one by the Indian Border Security Force.

"The 'dummy' government and its ministers have been mum even after shooting of a Bangladeshi dead and picking up of another one," Fakhrul said in a statement.

A youth named Al Amin was killed by the BSF along the border in Naogaon's Porsha upazila on Tuesday while Liton Mia, 19, was shot near the Durgapur border in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila and was later taken away by the BSF.

"They have not uttered a single word, let alone lodge a protest or take any action... The lives of the Bangladeshi citizens are insecure due to the subservient policies of this 'dummy' government. They don't even hesitate to weaken the country's independence and sovereignty to stay in power," the statement read.

Fakhrul said the two incidents took place on the Independence and National Day of Bangladesh.

"Such incidents of killing and injuring people on the glorious Independence Day undermine the self-esteem of the nation."

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