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Child marriages endanger girls' lives, says Malaysian Medical Association

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By Raynore Mering



The Malaysian Medical Association has joined the call to end child marriages in the country. — AFP pic

KUALA LUMPUR, July 2 — The Malaysian Medical Association has joined the call to end child marriages in the country, expressing concern over the mental and physical health of young girls who end up pregnant.

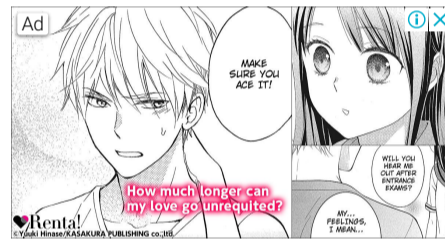
Its president Dr Mohamed Namazie Ibrahim said in a statement today, girls who are pregnant at a very young age are twice at risk of death and disability than older women.

The latest Malaysian maternal mortality report, he said, showed that adolescent deaths from pregnancies nearly tripled from 3.1 per 100,000 live births in 2009 to 8.6 per 100,000 live births in 2012.

"Every year in Malaysia, there are 13,000 to 17,000 teenage births and its incidence are of particular concern especially in the lower socio-economic groups and rural areas in certain states where it had reached epidemic proportions," he said, adding a majority of teen pregnancies were unintended.

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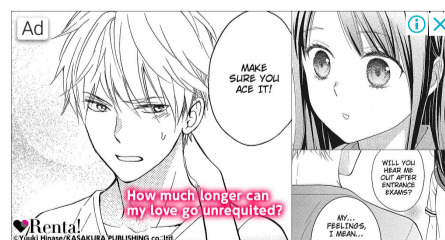
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Child marriage is currently in the spotlight after a 41-year-old Kelantanese man took an 11-year-old Thai girl as his third wife in southern Thailand last month.

Kelantan police have ruled out any criminal element in the marriage.

Pointing out that Malaysia is a signatory of the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Dr Mohamed Namazie stressed that child marriages or marriage without the consent of both spouses is a human rights violation.

He also said the Malaysian Penal Code says sexual intercourse with a child below 16 years old — with or without consent — is illegal.

“This is because our lawmakers had in their wisdom decided that a child below that age is deemed incapable of making a mature decision regarding such a life-changing event.”

Dr Mohamed Namazie said child marriage and adolescent pregnancies were a manifestation of inequality as they often occurred among marginalised, poor and uneducated girls in rural communities.

“We must immediately strive to uphold every girl’s right to reach her full potential unhindered by gender inequality, discrimination, coercion, violence, adolescent pregnancies and child marriage.

“We must offer them a safe and healthy transition to adulthood and ensure that every girl be the best she can be,” he said.

Yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail said the controversial marriage on June 18 was unlawful as the girl’s father was not approved by the court as her custodian (wali).

Under Islamic family law enactments in all states, the minimum age of marriage for males is 18 and 16 for females.

Below those ages, marriage is only permitted if the couple’s parents consent and if the Shariah court gives permission. There is no minimum age of marriage for Muslims.

Child rights groups are urging the Pakatan Harapan government to implement its election pledge to set the legal minimum age for marriage at 18 and outlaw child marriages.

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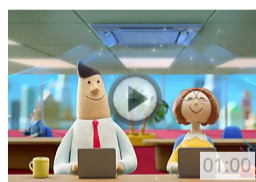
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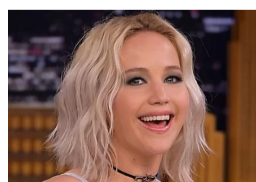
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