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'Ban child marriage now'

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[Print](#) ^[1]

KUALA LUMPUR (Sept 24, 2013): It is time Malaysia banned child marriage and amended its civil and syariah laws accordingly, an MP said in a statement today.

"Child brides are more vulnerable to physical, sexual and mental abuse," Kulai MP Teo Nie Ching said, pointing out the "horrifying and heart-breaking" death of an eight-year-old Yemeni girl from internal injuries sustained on her wedding night.

Closer to home, a 40-year-old man, Riduan Masmud from Sabah, married his 12-year-old rape victim, who became his second wife in May.

Teo said child marriages are more common than thought, citing the 2000 Population and Housing Census data on child marriages.

A total of 6,800 girls aged 15 and below were married, with the highest incidence among Malays (2,450), followed by other bumiputras (1,550), Chinese (1,600), Indians (600) and other races (600).

Further, 235 children aged between 10 and 14 years were already widowed and 77 were divorced or permanently separated.

Teo also called for the standardising of the legal age as it currently stands at 18 for Muslim males, 16 for Muslim females, and 18 for non-Muslims.

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