

Staff reporter

Bangladesh will renew its firm commitment for eliminating child marriage at the first-ever Girl Summit in London on July 22, foreign office sources said Saturday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will lead the Bangladesh delegation at the summit being hosted jointly by British government and UNICEF.

She leaves Dhaka for London on Monday morning.

The sources said Hasina will attend the High-Level session of the Summit on Tuesday and interact with First Lady Chantal Compaore of Burkina Faso, a West African Country and Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan.

The session will be moderated by UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake at Walworth Academy.

The Summit is aimed at mobilizing domestic and international efforts to end female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage within a generation.

Before joining the main session of the meeting Hasina will hold talks with her British counterpart David William Donald Cameron at 10 Downing Street when the two leaders are expected to discuss bilateral issues.

This will be Hasina's first visit to any European country since winning the January 5 parliamentary election to become the prime minister for the second consecutive five-year term.

Under Hasina's guidelines the government has made good progress in advancing rights of women and young girls that has seen a decrease in the trend of child marriage in the country.

Officials said Bangladesh government views child marriage as a development concern that slows down the country's socio-economic progress.

The government is looking forward to ensure that, by 2021, no girl under 15 will be getting married as well as eradicating all child marriage within a generation - by 2035.

At the summit Bangladesh will also focus on the progress it has made in reducing maternal mortality, improving maternal health and promotion of girl education.

Government sources said the number of women dying in childbirth between 1990 and 2013 fell by 70 percent with an opportunity to achieve the MDG target.

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress over the past two decades in increasing primary enrolment of girls so that over 95 percent start primary school.

More girls than boys now complete their primary education.

The country has trained more health and family planning workers than any other country. The result is that the average women now have only 2.3 children compared with more than 6 previously.

The government is working to strengthen national legislation and policy frameworks to eliminate child marriage. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 is now under review to address the current context in which child marriage takes place and stipulate penalties for violation of the act.

The new Children's Act provides for enhanced measures to stop child marriage. A new nationwide campaign was recently announced to accelerate action on child marriage called "Girls, Not Brides".

A national forum for social norm change was recently established with activities going all the way down to community level.

The Prime Minister will attend a community program of Bangladeshi expatriates living in the UK on Wednesday.

She is expected to return home on Thursday morning.