

WHAT'S ON

Sufia Kamal Birth Anniversary
Venue: Bengal Shilpalya, H-42, R-12, Dharmodi Date: June 24-29 Time: 12pm-8pm

National Recitation Festival
Venue: National Theatre Hall, Shilpakala Academy Date: June 26-July 2 Time: 4pm onwards

Recitation
Artist: Pragna Laboni Date: July 1 Time: 6:30pm

Fete de la Musique
Organiser: Alliance Francaise de Dhaka Venue: Alliance Francaise de Dhaka, Dhaka University Date: June 30-July 1

Theatre
Play: Chandrika Troupe: Dyish Bangla Theatre Venue: Experimental Theatre Hall, Shilpakala Academy Date: June 27 Time: 7pm

Solo Art Exhibition
Artist: Mustapha Khalid Palash Venue: Dhaka Art Centre, R-7 A, H-60, Dharmodi Date: June 17-July 1 Time: 11am-8pm

Theatre
Play: Chaka Troupe: Bihari Date: Experimental Theatre Hall, Shilpakala Academy Date: June 30

Musical Soiree
Celebrating Hemanta Mukhopadhyay Singer: Sela Barua Venue: Conference Lounge, National Press Club Date: June 28

Saving Our Antiquities

A move involving students as vigilante



Students and teachers of Mahasthangarh take part in a rally after the launch of the campaign; Dr. Enamul Haque (inset-centre) at the rally.

AKRAM HOSEN MAMUN

Bangladeshi archaeologist and art historian Dr. Enamul Haque (also the founder director general of Bangladesh National Museum) is internationally renowned. His contribution to the establishment and further development of the National Museum is immense. In recognition of his contribution to museology, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata awarded him a D.Lit. (Honoris-causa) degree. On May 21, this year, he officially started an awareness generating campaign to protect the archaeological heritage of Mahasthangarh, in Bogra. Interestingly, the people he targeted to work with are students of SSC (class 9-10) and HSC (11-12).

What's the reason for involving teenagers in this significant project? "It's the moral integrity an individual has at that age which attracts me," said Dr. Haque. "We, as a nation, have gained notoriety for being corrupt. But I believe that the young minds that I have chosen for the voluntary work haven't been contaminated by corruption and politicisation that pervades the society," he added.

In 2002, Dr. Haque was invited by the World Bank to give a lecture on "utilising the education system for the preservation of cultural heritage". The basic premise of his theory was that law enforcement agencies including police, RAB, military, customs and the department of archaeology have not been successful to save our national treasures from being smuggled outside the country. "It's simply not feasible to try to stop all the smugglers at the air or sea ports. If you really want to do something, you have to stop them at the roots." The proposed method was to utilise students of universities, colleges, schools and madrassas as vigilantes or whistleblowers.

"In my speech at World Bank," he recalls, "I asserted that young minds are intrinsically imaginative and their patriotism is untainted. And these virtues can be used to protect our national heritage. All we need to do is trigger off this vigilante spirit."

He started to materialise his plans through the inception of a project called, 'Sangskritik Satyagraha', in May

this year. The project kicked off in Bogra. Dr. Haque conducted training for students through seminars and symposiums; talked to the teachers, informed and trained them well. "I hope to groom something like 5000 cultural police. These youngsters believe that the country is their mother and they'll prevent any attempt to steal their ornaments." The slogan of the project is: "Nijer sampad niyek rokha koro" (Amulyo ratno shye hok chhoto boro") (protect your treasures, big or small).

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that the relics are solely theirs and they are the ones who should be protecting them. We have primarily recruited 180 members. And when 180 people keep an open eye, the smugglers will have a hard time stealing the relics," said an excited Dr. Haque.

The number of people involved in the business of smuggling is substantial in Mahasthangarh. It's very important to create awareness to prevent them. The students have taken a vow to protect our heritage by informing the local museum or us if and when they come across incidents of artefacts being stolen in the area. There are specific guidelines for them. I don't want the students to actively confront the crooks; all they need to do is to inform us or the authorities."

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