



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

## Asia's largest art extravaganza kicks off 19th Asian Art Biennale underway

**The Prime Minister hopes that the 19th Biennial Asian Art Exhibition will help artists to nurture their artistic freedoms and bring more social changes in the world.**

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

An amalgamation of enchanting arts and creative art forms, the 19th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh has brought together 114 countries and 493 artists under one roof at the heart of Dhaka, with the theme of "Home and Displacement". It is said to be the biggest art exhibition in Asia.

The grand opening ceremony commenced at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, on Thursday. Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the exhibition virtually, as the chief guest at the programme.

Md Abul Monsur, Secretary, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, President of the Jury Board and Artist Mr Rafiqun Nabi and Member of the Jury Board Mr Jaroslav Suchan were present as the special guests at the programme. State Minister of Cultural Affairs, K M Khalid, chaired the event and handed over the awards to

the winners, on behalf of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina emphasised on the rich history of arts, and how artists brought revolution through their bold art forms.

"Any nation's sense of self is expressed through its art culture. From the artist's canvas, country or nation's political, cultural, and natural surroundings are shown which boosts consciousness in people. Our artists have played a pivotal role in the language movement and independence for our country," said Sheikh Hasina.

"We have worked together to extend Shilpakala Academy by creating National Theater, Experimental Hall, Music and Dance auditorium, Fine Arts Auditorium, and more. We have constructed new buildings for the academy in 64 districts and have set up Shilpakala Academies in 493 upazilas," added the Prime Minister.

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19th Biennial Asian Art Exhibition will help artists to nurture their artistic freedoms and bring more social changes in the world.

Polish art critic Jaroslav Suchan reflected on the theme of the Biennale, and how artists stage their protests on their issues through art.

Rafiqun Nabi announced the names of the grand winners and special honourees. The winners received BDT

5 lacs while special honourees got BDT 3 lacs. The winners also received a crest and certificate for their outstanding work at the exhibition.

The grand prize winners are Sushanta Kumar Adhikary, Yasmin Jahan Nupur, and Nederland artiste Harold. The special honourees were presented to Fareha Zeba, Jayatu Chakma, Mamur Ahsan Mahtab, Maynul Islam Paul, Suman Chandra Das, and

Portugal artist Ana Silvia Malhado.

The month-long exhibition will run from December 8 to January 7. The exhibition will feature interesting segments including Children's corner, International art camp, Seminars (Home and Displacement), Bangabandhu and Liberation War, performance arts, sculptures, painting exhibitions, installation art and new media, among others.

## NEWS

### A godsend for children in distress

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"My entire world had turned upside down," she said.

It was then that Moriom's uncle told her about the country's first toll-free child protection helpline - 1098.

She immediately called and shared what had happened with the psychosocial counsellors of the helpline. She told them how her son only drank breast milk and requested them to rescue him as soon as possible.

Considering Ramim's young age, the team took no time to contact the local administration and sent a mobile team - comprised of the upazila women's affairs officer, upazila social services officer, child-friendly police officer, and representatives from the civil society - to Moriom's in-laws' house.

Not finding her husband there, police detained two of his family members and warned them of strict action if the child was not brought to the local police station within 24 hours.

Moriom's husband appeared at the station later, after which, through a local arbitration in the presence of family members and the local administration, he was made to sign a bond that said he would not torture his wife for dowry anymore and would take proper care of both the mother and child.

The 1098 team and local administration also stated his failure to do so will be considered an offence and they will, in that case, take legal action against him.

Moriom's story is one of the many instances of the 1098 helpline ensuring child protection since its inception in 2016.

Anyone can now report child rights' violations, child abuse or exploitation, or any other act of disruption to the protection of children by calling a 24/7 toll-free number - 1098 - from any corner of the country, from any mobile phone operator.

However, the helpline, run by the Department of Social Services (DSS) with technical and financial support from UNICEF Bangladesh, unfortunately remains unknown to many.

According to the DSS website, the helpline, operated under the Child Sensitive Social Protection in

Bangladesh, responded to more than 7.2 lakh calls in 218 categories, from July 2017 to June 2022.

Of those, more than 4.2 lakh were related to seeking information, and 56,979 callers were referred to different public and private organisations.

During this period, it stopped 2,754 child marriages and provided counselling to parents, legal assistance if needed, and in some cases, conditional financial support.

It also served 31,980 callers with psychosocial counselling, 18,753 callers with legal assistance, 12,421 callers with school-related violence and assistance, and 8,572 callers with protection from violence and abuse.

Chowdhury Md Mohaimen, manager of 1098, said this helpline is the first of its kind and has a holistic approach to protecting children.

"1098 works in both centralised and decentralised manner. For example, when a girl is sexually abused, she or anyone on her behalf can call us. We have 27 trained social workers-cum-para-counsellors, who initially receive the calls, and based on the victim's demand, they are connected to our psychosocial counsellors."

He added, "Simultaneously, they connect the mobile team, led by the upazila nirbahi officer and coordinated by upazila social services officer, along with grassroot DSS social workers, local child rights NGOs representatives, civil society members, local administration and child-friendly police officers."

"The team physically rescues the victims, takes them to local health facilities if needed and provides necessary legal assistance as per the victims' needs. The entire thing is closely monitored centrally and the case is closed only after ensuring the child is completely protected."

He added, "There was even an incident where we rescued a girl sold to a brothel. She was reunited with her family and is now continuing her education."

Apart from violence-related calls, children and their caregivers also call the helpline to report mental health issues including - suicidal thoughts, cyberbullying, school-related anxiety, gaming addiction, and more.

"Very recently, we had a case of a child domestic helper attempting

suicide by trying to throw herself off the terrace of her employer's home. Upon being informed, our mobile team was able to rescue her," said Tabir Rahman, one of the three psychosocial counsellors of the helpline.

A good number of children received services from the helpline after facing cyber harassment during the pandemic, as a large number of students had to enter the cyber world for online education, he said, adding that many children and their guardians were not prepared for it.

"We tried to solve the issues, and maintain maximum confidentiality, without even involving parents, and referred many to Cyber Crime Investigation Division, CTTC of DMP," said Mohaimen.

According to the DSS website, 866 awareness campaigns had been conducted in the past six years, including school-based campaigns and parent meetings, while it published a few advertisements in the media, to promote the helpline among children and their caregivers.

A major setback for the helpline was the insufficient number of social workers (around 3,000) countrywide, against 4,554 unions. But, considering the demand, very recently, the government has taken an initiative to recruit 6,000 more people.

Mohaimen further said, "Besides, sometimes it gets difficult to send a mobile team in hard-to-reach areas, especially if the calls come at or after midnight."

Currently, the helpline is working to build the capacity of its workforce by providing them with sensitivity training, which can help them handle children with care and give them protection based on their demands.

The 1098 authorities have recently signed an MoU with Dhaka University's clinical psychology department to train some community volunteers in villages, so that they too can play a significant role in protecting the children of their area.

The helpline was first piloted in 20 wards under eight police stations of old Dhaka in 2010.

As it received positive responses from the children, who were able to recognise their rights and have their safety ensured, it was launched officially in 2016.

### Bureaucrats

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directed the LGRD ministry to dispose of their (writ petitioners) two applications for creating "an accounting and audit department" at the municipality offices in two months.

On March 23, 2020, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court also upheld the HC directive, but the LGRD ministry has not disposed of the applications.

Thus, a contempt of court petition was filed, following which the HC issued the rule against the LGRD secretary, said Mohammad Siddique Ullah Miah, lawyer of writ petitioners.

Yesterday, the HC bench said some secretaries do not abide by court orders, but feel embarrassed to appear before court when directed to.

The bench fixed January 10, 2021, for the next hearing of the rule, during which Abdur Rahman will have to be present, Deputy Attorney General Wayesh-Al-Haroni told The Daily Star.

### US envoy, UN

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peaceful protests since July 2022, causing deaths". He said he previously raised concerns with Bangladesh in a communication in 2021, following similar reports of lethal use of force by law enforcement.

On Wednesday, one man was killed and over 50 others, including four journalists, were injured as BNP activists and police clashed in the capital's Nayapaltan.

Yamini Mishra, Amnesty's regional director for South Asia, said, "This incident shows that the Bangladesh authorities have very little regard for the sanctity of human life and sends a chilling message that those who dare to exercise their human rights will face dire consequences."

Authorities must put an end to excessive use of force when responding to large-scale demonstrations and only respond in a manner that is consistent with international standards, Mishra said.

### Cases filed, but no progress

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approve without the board's approval.

On different occasions, former ACC chairman Iqbal Mahmood said they were trying to trace the whereabouts of the money and it was one of the reasons for the delay in the probe.

The ACC also mentioned it in its report submitted to the HC on November 28.

Probes in other loan scam cases have made next to no headway.

Since January 2021, the ACC has filed 37 cases against fugitive and former managing director of NRB Global Bank Proshanta Kumar Halder aka PK Halder in connection with the misappropriation of upwards of Tk 3,000 crore from three financial institutions.

So far, the ACC could submit a probe report in one case, said ACC's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan.

During the hearing of a bail petition in one of the 12 cases filed over embezzlement of Tk 1,175 crore by the Bismillah Group, the High Court on November 27 slammed the ACC for its failure to catch the big corruptors.

"They [major loan defaulters] are misappropriating thousands of crores. Why aren't you bringing them to book? Will the big loan defaulters remain untouched? The commission is busy catching small-time loan defaulters, but not the major ones,"

### Father of Jubo Dal leader

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hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Some unidentified youths took Shahdat to Wari Police Outpost and claimed that he was involved in the clash at Nayapaltan, he said.

### Scientists find 2m-yr-old DNA

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They found the DNA fragments in sediment from the northernmost part of Greenland known as Kap Copenhagen, said the University of Copenhagen lecturer.

The fragments "come from an environment that we do not see

said the bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khizir Hayat Lizu.

The HC also expressed disappointment for the ACC's failure in submitting a fresh charge sheet though the trial court had ordered the investigation officer to submit one in 2015.

Of the 12 cases, the ACC got a verdict in only one case.

A little-known Hall-Mark Group put state-owned Sonali Bank in the spotlight after its erstwhile Ruposhi Bangla Hotel branch lent the company and five other firms Tk 3,547 crore between 2010 and 2012 based on fake documents.

A total of 40 cases were filed and so far, the ACC got the verdict in only two cases.

Some 15 cases were filed against Mahbulul Haque Chisty, former chairman of Farmers Bank audit committee, for swindling about Tk 3,500 crore from the bank, which has since been renamed Padma Bank, and five cases against Crescent Group for laundering about Tk 1,746 crore.

"These cases are under investigation," Khan said.

Investigations as well as disposal of the cases are taking time for want of documents and witnesses and legal complexities, said Jahurul Haque, ACC's commissioner (investigation).

"We are trying to expedite probes," he said, seeking cooperation from everyone.

Later, Shahdat was handed over to Wari Police Station. As his involvement in the clash was not proved, he was released, the OC further said.

"We will file a murder case," Faysal said.

anywhere on Earth today," he added. Frozen in a remote unpopulated area, the DNA had been very well preserved. New technology enabled the scientists to determine that the 41 fragments were more than a million years older than the oldest known DNA, from a Siberian mammoth.