

# DREAMS ON CANVAS:

## the silent worlds of neglected children



PHOTOS: THABIT AL BASHAR

**Psychologically, children who face difficult circumstances often use colour to express emotions they cannot verbalise. Dark colours don't only signal sadness; they can represent boundaries, containment, and a sense of control in otherwise chaotic lives. Their choices reflect how they interpret and process their world.**

Paintings often open doors to worlds we forget how to enter. As adults, our imaginations become layered with pretence and caution, but children create from a place unfiltered and intensely real. Their drawings are the reflections of what they see, fear, love, and hope for. Nowhere was this truth clearer than at *The Catcher in the Rye*, a two-day exhibition held on December 5-6 at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, showcasing the artworks of children born and raised in the country's red-light areas. It was organised by Project Pothchola, an initiative of the Give Bangladesh Foundation.

The title draws from J D Salinger's novel, where Holden Caulfield imagines himself as a guardian protecting children from losing their innocence. Similarly, this exhibition becomes a space where the children's art preserves that innocence and asserts their right to dream.

The opening ceremony began at 3:30pm with chief guest cartoonist Ahsan Habib. "Children don't pretend. They draw what they truly feel. Their paintings are honest, almost like looking directly into their eyes," he shared. The ceremony began with a heartfelt group performance of *Amra Korbo Joy* sung by the children themselves—an earnest, hopeful chorus that set the tone for what followed.

The artworks, created by children from the Astha shelter home and the Daulatdia brothel area, were arranged in segments that guided visitors through their worlds. The exhibition included paintings, installations, photographs, videos, and handmade crafts.

One section displayed photographs of Daulatdia, alongside black-and-white blurred

portraits of the children—an artistic way that preserved their dignity while making the starkness of their surroundings unmistakable. Narrow alleys, dim rooms, and minimal study materials told stories of constraint, but never of defeat.

The paintings ranged from whimsical to haunting. Some children filled their canvases with bright blues and balloon-filled skies, like *Up, Up and Away*, which showed a blue sky with colourful hot air balloons decorated with buttons. Others created abstract pieces using imagined colours. Notably, many children chose darker tones—brown, dark red, dark blue—despite having access to all colours. Dark shades appeared even in skies and trees where

The exhibition ran from 3pm to 10pm on both days at Gallery 5 of the National Art Gallery, inviting visitors to see how these children imagine home. Ashik Chowdhury, Executive Chairman of BIDA and BEZA, visited with his family and told The Daily Star, "It's very different from other exhibitions. It's very touching to see that someone's trying to save the kids and their dreams."

The video screening featured children sharing dreams of becoming teachers, doctors, and army officers. They imagined travelling the world through Doraemon's "Anywhere Door", building nice homes, and living without fear. Ahmed Fahmi, Executive Director of Give Bangladesh Foundation, shared, "Children



brighter tones are expected.

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The installation works included birds made with stones, fingerprint gardens, butterflies, fish in the deep sea, and more. A standout 3D dream house model featured a home, a school, a colorful garden, a playground, a small pond, a rooftop canvas, and two cats—capturing a complete world imagined by the children. Nearby stood the *Tree of Letters*, its branches filled with handwritten notes from the children—some sharing simple wishes, others big dreams.

born in the red light community remain absent from the very systems designed to protect them. This exhibition is a reminder that recognition is the first step toward reform. These artworks offer evidence of the potential that Bangladesh cannot afford to overlook."

*The Catcher in the Rye* was not just an exhibition; it was an invitation to witness childhood in its most honest form. Through colours, textures, and tiny handmade dreams, these children showed not only who they are, but who they hope to become. Their art asked visitors to pause, to feel, and to remember that behind every stroke lies a child trying to hold on to imagination, even while walking through the shadows of reality.

It was a reminder that innocence, once recognised, deserves not protection alone but opportunity, dignity, and a world willing to let it grow.

## 'Peaky Blinders: The Immortal Man' release date announced



Netflix has unveiled the release date for *Peaky Blinders: The Immortal Man*, the long-awaited feature film that revives the Birmingham crime saga four years after the series finale.

Written by creator Steven Knight and directed by Tom Harper, the film brings the Shelby family back into a world overshadowed by war and old enemies.

*Peaky Blinders: The Immortal Man* will release in select cinemas on 6 March 2026, followed by a global Netflix premiere on 20 March 2026.

## Raihan Rafi's 'Omimangshito' finally set for release

Raihan Rafi's much-awaited web film *Omimangshito* is finally set for release on iScreen.

Recently OTT platform iScreen announced that the web-film will be available to viewers on December 15.

In this mystery-driven thriller centred on the murder of a journalist couple, Imtiaz Barshon and Tanzika Amin play the lead roles. The trailer also features several well-known actors, including Shahidul Alam Sachchhu and Manoj Pramanik.



# NEWS

## The pen that pierced

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biting clarity, inspiring admiration for her cleverness and making her critique unforgettable. Her sharp humour invites the audience to respect her vision and see the system's flaws with new eyes. She employs satire to pierce the contradictions embedded in purdah.

One of the most striking examples is her critique of the treatment of male doctors. She exposes the absurdity of a system in which women, secluded from all unrelated men, are nonetheless forced in times of grave illness to be examined by these very men. Rokeya highlights this not as devotion but as theatrical contradiction designed to uphold a shallow form of purity while sacrificing actual well-being. Her strategic use of humour is a mark of superior intellect.

By framing her arguments through satire, she undermines the authority of the male guardians (the murubbis). The ultimate triumph of Oborodh Bashini is not just as text but as event. In giving voice to the oborodh bashini, she ceased to be one. She implemented the solution she advocated, stepping out of the metaphorical and literary

zenana to claim her place as a public intellectual and leader.

As we commemorate Begum Rokeya Day, and as the 16 Days of Activism near their end, Oborodh Bashini stands not as a relic but as a living blueprint for resistance. The stories she told are specific to a time, but the structures of silencing they represent remain familiar. The veil she sought to step out of was not only cloth but silence, ignorance and intellectual submission.

Her words, the testimony that validates, the satire that humiliates and the logic that dismantles, continue to echo, reminding us that our voices, our stories and our reason remain potent tools against modern forms of confinement that persist in our society.

To honour Begum Rokeya is to pick up the pen she wielded, to continue lifting every veil that dims the light of human potential.

(The writer is an IR graduate and a contributor at The Daily Star.)

factions appeared on the same stage at a memorial event marking the sixth death anniversary of party founder HM Ershad and called for unifying the Jatiya Party.

On August 9, the JP split again following a council session.

Founded in 1986 by president HM Ershad, the JP has a long history of factionalism, having already split at least six times.

Besides JP factions led by Manju

and Anisul, the four other factions are GM Quader-led Jatiya Party (JaPa), Andalee Rahman Partho-led Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP), MA Mukit-led Bangladesh Jatiya Party, and Mostafa Jamal Haider-led Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar).

Meanwhile, two factions, one led by GM Quader, younger brother of HM Ershad, and the other by Anisul, each claimed ownership of the party's electoral symbol, the plough.

The declaration demanded that the national target on renewable energy installation is reset to 30 percent by 2030 and 40 percent by 2041 -- which the government recently decreased.

The Bangladesh Energy Conference demanded the cancellation of the existing master plan on Matarbari-Moheshkhali Development initiatives and the formation of a fresh one that would protect the environment of those areas.

The conference also demanded at least 40 percent of national expenditure in the power sector on renewable energy, scaling back on LNG imports and forfeiting plans to install any further LNG terminals.

The declaration demanded the cancellation of any new fossil fuel-based power plant's approval up to 2035, cut import duty on all sorts of renewable products and initiate small scale solar home systems projects.

The declaration thanked the

## Khaleda still unfit to travel: medical board

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said it has asked to cancel its previously approved landing schedule at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

A senior official of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) confirmed that the company submitted a formal withdrawal request through a local coordinating agency yesterday.

Contacted by The Daily Star, the official, seeking anonymity, said, "We'll forward the cancellation request to the foreign ministry for further necessary steps."

CAAB had earlier cleared the aircraft to land at 8:00am today and depart an hour later, according to the operator's initial request submitted on Sunday.

This is the fifth postponement of the BNP chief's planned departure.

The former prime minister's health condition has remained unchanged, with her medical board keeping her under close observation at Evercare

Hospital in the capital.

Her medical board yesterday held a routine review meeting and found that her health has been improving very slowly, though no fresh deterioration was noticed as of yesterday noon.

BNP's media cell, quoting Khaleda's personal physician Dr AZM Zahid Hossain around 8:00pm, said her condition remains the same.

A member of the medical board Dr Zubaida Rahman, wife of BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and Khaleda's daughter-in-law, was at the hospital from 3:30pm for around eight hours and held several meetings with both local and foreign doctors. She also met Khaleda.

Doctors have not given permission for the former prime minister to travel as her current condition is not well enough for long haul flights, the medical board said.

On December 6, Zahid, also a member of BNP's Standing

Committee, said preparations for her travel had been made at the highest level, but her condition must be suitable for the journey.

On the advice of her medical board, Khaleda was admitted to the hospital on November 23 after being diagnosed with infections affecting her heart and lungs.

She is also suffering from pneumonia and is currently receiving treatment in the hospital's Coronary Care Unit.

Khaleda, 80, has long been battling multiple health complications, including liver cirrhosis. She has a permanent pacemaker and has previously undergone stent placement for her heart.

Meanwhile, special prayer programmes were held for the BNP chief in different parts of the country.

Party leaders and activists continued to gather outside the hospital yesterday, despite repeated instructions from the party not to crowd the premises.

## Nat'l Democratic Front launched

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the chief guest, Ruhul Amin Howlader, secretary general of Anisul led JP faction, delivered the opening statement.

The announcement of NDF came just a day after National Citizen Party, Amar Bangladesh Party (ABP) and Bangladesh Rastro Songskar Andolan forged another alliance ahead of the national polls.

In mid-July, leaders of four JP

factions appeared on the same stage at a memorial event marking the sixth death anniversary of party founder HM Ershad and called for unifying the Jatiya Party.

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The declaration thanked the

interim government for the new renewable energy policy, merchant power policy, tender for 5,238MW of renewable energy and initiation of 3,000MW rooftop solar systems.

Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission Chairman Jalal Ahmed differed on the demand of not approving a new LNG terminal, saying if the government decides to install a terminal, it will take at least two years to procure and another two years to install.

"We are already using the full capacity of the existing two terminals. The demand would increase in future if we want to keep our industrial production stable and we would need more gas," he said.

In a separate session, the organisers have presented a Citizens' Manifesto where the representatives from different political parties also pledged to ensure energy transition.

Energy transition is no longer a theoretical concept; it has become a fundamental political and existential question for the nation, said Moazzam Hossain Alal, adviser to the BNP chairperson.

"There is no alternative to national

consensus on reducing the abuse of natural resources," he said.

It is now imperative to implement strong reforms and establish a special tribunal to hold the perpetrators accountable in the power sector, said Hasnat Qayum, president of Rastro Songskar Andolon.

Representatives of the National Citizen Party, Ganashaghati Andolon, the Communist Party of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Socialist Party also joined the discussion.

## Mob beats man

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Mizan's father, Abdul Motaleb, said that Mizan was intercepted on his way to the market by Boli and Kiron, as they tried to snatch his money.

However, Boli's family members claimed that he was killed following a previous rivalry.

Police said the deceased's family members claimed Boli was going to his elder sister's house in the morning. On his way, he was attacked by a teen gang with whom he had an enemy, according to his family.

No case was filed till filing this report around 9:00pm.

This correspondent could not contact the victim's family members.

## Elite-dominated parliament source

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He said the people elected to power carry out legislation and practise accountability largely within the framework of their interests.

The electoral reforms commission has failed to address how the electoral process can be democratised and how people who are not wealthy can compete and get into parliament.

Bangladesh never had a functioning parliament with a strong opposition holding the ruling party accountable by debating issues that needed to be discussed, said Sobhan, chairman of Centre for Policy Dialogue.

"Without resolving this democratic deficit, development will repeatedly suffer, as elites resist genuine democracy while citizens continue

to demand it, creating a cycle of instability and setbacks," he added.

Bangladesh's democratic decline is also rooted in voters not doing due diligence, repeatedly choosing parties over qualified candidates, said Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur.

"This empowers winner-takes-all politics, weakens accountability and turns leaders into irreplaceable figures. Intellectuals remain silent, institutions lose moral courage and civil servants obey any order."

Without citizens' careful voting, principled resistance and institutions refusing unconstitutional directives, true democracy cannot emerge, he said.

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