

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.

ANIKTA TAHSIN HAFSA

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



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.

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 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

'Peakly Blinders: The Immortal Man' release date announced



Netflix has unveiled the release date for *Peakly 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.

Peakly 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 Barshom and Tanzika Amin play the lead roles. The trailer also features several well-known actors, including Shahidul Alam Sachchu and Manoj Pramanik.



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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)

who enforced these rules, portraying them not as wise protectors but as foolish architects of an unworkable social system. She engages their arguments directly. When they use metaphors to justify purdah, such as comparing a woman to a precious object that must be hidden, Rokeya responds with impeccable reason. She questions why a human being, created with intellect and soul, should be equated with an inanimate object.

This was a high-stakes rhetorical move. By challenging orthodoxy on its own terms, she robbed it of its primary defence. She demonstrated that the system was not only cruel and absurd but also, by its own stated logic, fundamentally flawed. This architectural use of logic gave her work formidable credibility.

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.)

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

The announcement of NDF came just a day after National Citizen Party, Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party) 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.

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), Andaleev 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.

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.

"You were never in a position in the democratic period to have a proper discussion on the budget. The

opposition invariably boycotted the budget session, so the whole process of keeping the government accountable for their economic policies, their development practices, their corruption and all these issues were never really discussed in parliament."

As a result, the nation is saddled with misgovernance, Sobhan added. Democracy is essential though not sufficient, said KAS Murshid, a former DG of BIDS.

Bangladesh's experience shows a persistent failure to ensure credible elections, he said.

"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 added.