

Change of Attitude — a Precondition for Good Governance

by Mohammad Siddiqueer Rahman

How to change the attitudes of the millions involved in governance or interacting with the government? First by setting examples from the top down the line. The political leaders have to initiate the change and make others follow. There is also a need for a social movement for moral reformation, motivation and mobilisation.

HARDLY a day passes when you don't see in the newspapers or newsmagazines some headlines about delay, unnecessary harassment and corruption in delivery of services to the members of the public. Whether it is providing of an electric line connection by DSA, for giving a telephone connection by T&T, or the issue of a passport by the Passport Office, or for anything for which the members of the public have to come to a government office. Recently some specific cases were reported in a Bengali daily 'Janakantha' during the last week under the heading 'Birambana Pratipade' (harassment at every step). It is not known if any authority is taking notice of such reports or complaints or taking any action. Same situation would perhaps apply to many other offices and government agencies whether at the field level, i.e. the districts and thanas, or at the departments/directorates or in the seat of the government i.e. the ministries and divisions. As reported in the press the World Bank, the ADB and the donors often complain of procrastination, delay and bureaucratic interruption and impediments in the processing and implementation of development projects and utilization of foreign assistance. Same is the complaint of prospective foreign investors, who say that obstacles are created at every step in the way of getting the permission to invest in a project or to get the essential facilities for the purpose.

In a super controlled democracy and a highly centralised system of government, there is hardly any one who does not have to go to a government office for seeking some service, or a sanction or a permission or to get a business or a contract. Everywhere from top to bottom there seems to be a general picture of inaction and gloom, that

of apathy, harassment, delay, unnecessary procedural and technical impediments. They often ask for irrelevant information and documents. Interestingly enough a customs officer, the other day was telling "bureaucracy is synonymous with harassment." A whole sale accusation of bureaucracy may not be fair — there are good bureaucrats as well as bad bureaucrats and there are good politicians and bad politicians or good businessmen and bad businessmen. But the general image of government is at stake. Like the Gresham's Law of Economics "Bad bureaucrats drive good bureaucrats out of circulation."

Such delays and impediments are sometimes symptomatic of other demands — grease money to move the file and sign money to share the benefit or windfall. Sometimes, a price is tagged for any service even for obtaining a utility bill a customer wants to pay.

Under such circumstances a change of attitude is a precondition for good governance, and a must for development and people's welfare. Is it not possible for the persons concerned to change their attitude and start thinking how to be positive and helpful. Good governance would no doubt need administrative reforms but no amount of reforms would bear any fruit unless the decision makers and givers of service — whether a civil servant, an engineer of a

professional — change their attitude of a positive approach and a constructive vision: to be honest and helpful towards giving public service, to protect public interest, and to discharge their duties efficiently and in a responsive manner, to implement decisions and demonstrate transparency and accountability at all levels.

The change of attitude and values must start at the highest level of the government and permeate through the body politic and the bureaucracy up to the bottom level of public service. In these days of private sector initiatives and free economy one of the first things to be done for administrative reforms is to cut down the size of the government to the minimum required for regulatory or promotional purposes, that cannot be done by the private sector. For that purpose the Prime Minister and the Ministers must change their attitude in favour of greater decentralisation of functions, greater delegation of authority and greater level of devolution of power to local governments for effective people's participation in governance. But everybody wants to cling to power and authority to decide matters at his or her own level, otherwise what is the purpose of becoming a minister if he cannot exercise his authority over a small thing. So more things are coming up to the central government and the number of ministries has increased from 18 in

1982 to 35 in 1994 with 49 divisions. The size of government is increasing.

As far as I remember, in January 1991 while addressing the Secretaries of the government in the Secretariat Cabinet Room, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, the then Acting President of Bangladesh, said that when there were so many ministries and divisions in the Secretariat to deal with the business allocated to them with so many levels of officers, was there a need for a parallel Secretariat under the name of "President's Secretariat" to examine those matters all over again by the directors, director-general, secretary and the principal secretary even though these were thoroughly examined by the Ministry and the Ministers?

In a parliamentary system where the cabinet is collectively responsible for running the government, it is all the more necessary that the Prime Minister acts on the basis of examination of a case by the Ministry and recommendation of the minister rather than opening parallel files in his own Secretariat. The ministers should take a fair share of responsibilities of the ministries rather than burden the Prime Minister. In fact the strength of officers and staff of the newly constituted Prime Minister's office after the transition from presidential to parliamentary system had increased manifold. The Prime Minister was still

loaded with so many routine matters: how is he or she going to find time to think about strategic national policies and interact with the people?

The same is the case with the Ministries and Divisions. They don't want to part with their powers to the departments, autonomous bodies and field offices. On the other hand the powers and authorities that really belong to the departments and subordinate offices are often usurped by the Ministries. Interference in day-to-day activities of district administration is quite common. Biplab, a 20 year old student was severely injured and left half-dead by his rival group in an outlying thana headquarters. The people of the town were deeply moved and panicked. After FIR was lodged, the police became very active and gave a serious drive to arrest the accused and start a criminal case against the criminals. But after two days, all police activities came to a halt. When asked, why police was not taking any action, the SP said, because of instructions from a minister. This happened during the past democratic government and the same thing is happening during the new democratic government. How can the police and the Magistrate maintain law and order if this attitude of interference in the basic functions of administration is not changed? How can the hijackers and the terrorists be brought to book if the political leaders give them cover and support?

There has to be a change of heart of the politicians, the bureaucracy, or the others if the situation is to be saved. Can't the Prime Minister and the Ministers be saved from the constitutional functions and routines? Can't the Prime Minister get rid of so many divisions and agencies directly under her? Can't they rise above the ego of their self and party to allow normal administration to be carried on unhindered? Can't they put aside the routines and look into the fundamental question — is the people getting what they are supposed to get from the administration? Are the decisions taken by the Cabinet, the ECNEC or the Minister being implemented properly and in time? Are the complaints and grievances received from the people being redressed timely? Is accountability and transparency being established and seen by the people and whether the people at fault in governance are taken to task and punished?

How to change the attitudes of the millions involved in governance or interacting with the government? First by setting examples from the top down the line. The political leaders have to initiate the change and make others follow. There is also a need for a social movement for moral reformation, motivation and mobilisation. An intense reorientation programme for administrative values and ethics and consequential changes in the process of governance should be priority agenda. Everybody must be made accountable for dysfunction or inaction. It must start somewhere and now. Administrative culture must be built up on the basis of what the people want. Unstinted patriotism and national conscience is the need of the hour.

The writer is former Ambassador and Cabinet Secretary.

Western Zone Railway

by Md Anwarul Afzal

The inevitable tremendous increase in traffic in western zone will undoubtedly put increased load on the existing railway tracks, bridges and other operational facilities. To meet this increased demand of traffic the existence of full fledged General Manager, Western Zone with all its paraphernalia is the only answer for the future.

IT is learnt from the press that the bifurcation of Railway administration — Eastern and Western Zones with head offices in Chittagong and Rajshahi respectively — will be abolished and it will be re-shuffled by setting up of a Board with a Chairman at the helm to be stationed in Dhaka replacing the present administrative set-up of two zones. It is learnt that the re-shuffling is necessary to minimise the overhead cost, cut the number of administrative staff, centralize the administration and invoke financial viability of its functioning. On such pleas, unfortunately as many as six re-organisations had earlier been introduced, three in the Pakistan days and three after Bangladesh in 1971. The people of western zone consisting of Rajshahi and Khulna Divisions felt prey to such re-organisations because those were imposed unilaterally.

During the late President Zia's government, I had the opportunity to know the railway function at first hand as a member representing the passengers, of the National Railway Consultative Committee, then formed for the first time in Bangladesh having the representation from Parliament, passengers, civil servants, businessmen. It was during this time that the bifurcation of Railway Administration into two zones was thought over. Finally it was materialised by the Ershad government but no genuine attempt was made to give a life to this bifurcation.

Two zones started functioning in 1982. Railway Board was abolished in July, 1982. Functions of Railway Board were entrusted to Director General, Railway who is also the Secretary, Railway Division. The underlined idea of creating independent zone in western side of Railway administration was to delegate more autonomy in exercising financial powers — but in reality this did not happen. On the contrary, financial powers and major powers of procurement of materials, spares remained centralised under the Chief Controller of Stores in Chittagong. The Zonal General Manager's financial powers as per the different codes of railway were not even delegated to him. On top of this there was inadequate budget provisions. It was a great handicap in the normal day-to-day maintenance of railway track and rolling stock. Unfortunately, even after lapse of 17 years' Railway could just construct a two-storied pucca buildings at Rajshahi for general Manager's Office. Offices of most of Heads of Department are being held in tin shed barracks. To work un-

der a tin roof structure during summer in the hottest place of the country i.e. Rajshahi — it is left to anybody's imagination! It is not the zone system but the inadequate budget allocation is the main cause of the lack of desired optimum functioning of GM, western zone. Besides, concentration of the power in the capital is also responsible for inefficient functioning of GM and the departments under him. In this regard we may cite the example of diesel locomotive back-shop at Parbatipur constructed with the assistance of aid from Saudi Fund For Development (SFD). This is the most modern, sophisticated Diesel Locomotive Repair Workshop — very rare in the sub-continent. It is designed to undertake the most complicated repair and maintenance of diesel locomotive which could not be done previously in the country. Unfortunately, the workshop remains unutilised since its inception due to lack of adequate budget provision. The back-shop can turn out minimum four BG or MG locos per month i.e. minimum about 40 to 50 locos in a year. But it is working far below the target. It seems that there is a conspiracy to undermine this prestigious back-shop of the country about which even 10 per cent of the people of the country know nothing.

In western zone 50 per cent of railway officers do not hail from North Bengal. Rajshahi is an old city with tremendous educational facilities right from primary level to highest levels in all branches of education with University, Medical, Engineering, Agricultural, Arts colleges and so on. Yet such railway officers do not keep their families there. A lot from families, they live in Railway Rest House. It shows a sort of their apathy to the interest of North Bengal. Despite all these problems and lack of minimum working environment, the zone's system has taken its roots (in western zone). Besides, the people of the area have now got used to it and they are, to an extent, getting the benefit of the decentralisation. It is true Bangladesh is a small country. Yet the economy of the western part of the country is greatly influenced by the bifurcation of the country by the mighty Jamuna River. Many problems relating to the zone are being solved locally without making capital. People are the direct beneficiary of the system.

With the completion of Jamuna Bridge by the middle of next year and much publicised Rupsa Bridge in Khulna, the entire traffic pattern of western zone will be changed. Deposits

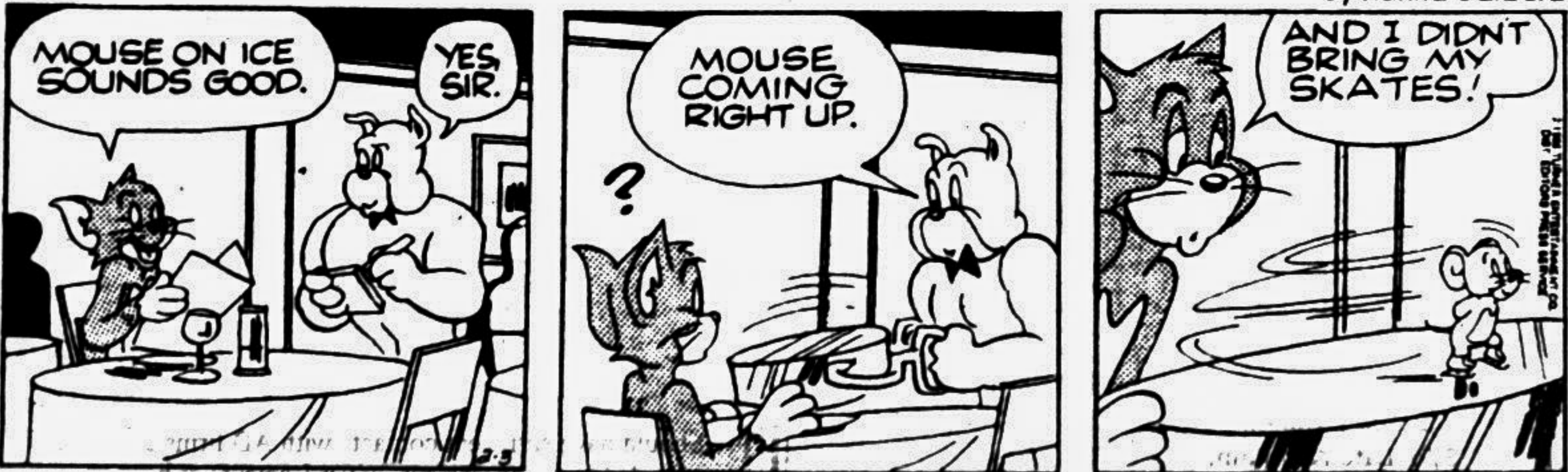
believed to be in abundance in North Bengal of mineral resources like coal, hard stone, lime stone, cement etc., when explored, will assume a heavier traffic nature. Density of population will increase there with the increase in demand for goods and services. In our country plying of 60 wagons of a goods train cost only one gallon of oil for one mile. For the same weight for goods as carried by 60 wagons, 240 trucks are needed. 21 gallons oil as fuel for covering one mile only. So the railway transportation of goods is cheaper. Besides transit facilities with the neighbouring country in future will increase the traffic tremendously. So the inevitable tremendous increase in traffic in western zone will undoubtedly put increased load on the existing railway tracks, bridges and other operational facilities. To meet this increased demand of traffic the existence of full fledged General Manager, Western Zone with all its paraphernalia is the only answer for the future.

The colonial attitude to analyse problems and find out solutions needs to be avoided particularly in our country plagued with enormous limitations. Equal treatment in respect of allocation of funds, foreign assistance, authority, delegation of power, supervision etc. have been the only answer to the problems. And to do that, the Budget — preferably a separate railway budget — should show distinctly the income, expenditure, foreign assistance, aid allocated and used between the two zones. It may be mentioned that besides the allocation of fund in the railway budget, the Eastern zone has always been in receipt of separate foreign assistance, which are never shown in the Railway Budget. The railway budget should consist of two separate chapters — one for western zone and the other for the eastern zone. It may be mentioned that western zone always shares 30 to 33 per cent of railway Budget.

The cry for a revolutionary change bears little weightage when 85 per cent of the country's budget is financed with foreign aid and loan and 60 per cent or more of it goes back to the donor countries or catered away by administrative and other agencies. In revamping the Railway, on the recommendation of ADB, the government's decision to abolish the Western Zone will be a retrograde step which the posterity will never forgive.

The writer is an ex-Member National Railway Consultative Committee.

Tom and Jerry



IAN FLEMING'S James Bond



Humiliation of VC BCL calls for expulsion of those involved

By DU Correspondent
Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of ruling Awami League, yesterday called upon the university authorities to expel those who were involved in the incident of humiliating the Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof A K Azad Chowdhury.

The call came at a BCL rally, held in front of the DUCSU building. The rally was addressed, among others, by BCL president Enamul Haq Shamim, secretary general Ishaque Ali Khan Fanna, DU unit president Bahadur Bepari.

The activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) humiliated the VC at the Jasimuddin and Zia hall premises on Aug 12 when he went there to supervise the rehabilitation process of displaced activists of different student fronts.

JCD accuses VC of harbouring BCL 'terrorists'

By DU Correspondent
Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of opposition BNP, yesterday accused the Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University Prof A K Azad Chowdhury of giving shelter to 'terrorists' belonging to Chhatra League (BCL).

The accusation was made at a JCD rally, held at the entrance of the Arts Faculty building of the university. The rally was addressed, among others, by Shahiduddin Chowdhury, Anney, Habib-Un-Nabi Shohel, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, Nasiruddin Asim.

The JCD leaders said that it would not accept the report of the probe committee, formed to investigate the incident of the humiliation of the VC, as it was formed with people belonging to Awami League.

The JCD leaders urged the authorities to dissolve the probe committee.

Abdus Sattar awarded

By Staff Correspondent
Bangladeshi artist Abdus Sattar was awarded the Purchase Prize Award at the International Print Exhibition '97, held at the Portland Art Museum, USA, said a press release.

The award-winning picture will be kept at the Portland Art Museum. Some 481 participants from 71 countries took part in the exhibition.

Sattar is a professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, and the head of the Oriental Art and Mural Painting Department. He has already received six international awards, including two Grand Awards (gold medals), and eight national awards for his art works.

VCs exchange views with Kibria

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria emphasised austerity in expenditure and rationalisation of subsidies given to various sectors of the country's universities, reports UNB.

The minister made the suggestion when vice-chancellors of various universities met him at his office yesterday and raised various problems facing university teachers and higher education.

The delegation of VCs exchanged views with the minister on the universities' revenue and development budgets and timeliness of higher education and different problems prevailing there.

They apprised him of some complications in implementing existing policies for improving standard of education and flourishing talents.

They mentioned a complicity in providing enhanced salaries of the teachers having doctoral degrees or special qualifications in light of the autonomy of universities.

In some cases, the VCs said, the teachers were being subject to deprivation.

In response, the minister stressed that the problems could be overcome through a tripartite meeting between Education Ministry, Universities and Auditor General's office.

Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) VC Prof Iqbal Mahmud, Jahangirnagar University's Prof Amirul Islam Chowdhury, Dhaka University's Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, Rajshahi University's Prof Abdul Khaleque, Bangladesh Agricultural University's Prof Muhammad Hossain, Chittagong University's Prof Abdul Mannan, VC of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology Prof M Habibur Rahman, Khulna University's Prof Nazrul Islam and the Pro-VC of Bangladesh Open University were present.



A two-day meena bazar, organised by Eton International School, began at the school premises in Dhanmondi yesterday. — Star photo

Reception accorded

KHULNA, Aug 18: State Minister for Relief and Disaster Management Talukdar Abdul Khaleque said here on Sunday that the government was making all-out efforts to solve the problems of shrimp project owners and exporters, reports BSS.

He called upon the shrimp exporters not to be misled by propaganda of the vested group. Speaking at a reception accorded to him by Whip S M Mustafa Rashidi Suja at Natun Bazar here, he said, the government is determined to promote industrialisation for quick economic development so that people could reap the benefit. The people, he said, should cooperate with the government in implementing development programmes.

The reception arranged by Natun Bazar shrimp traders was presided over by local leader Badaruzzaman. Whip S M Mustafa Rashidi Suja, freedom fighter Kamaruzzaman Tuku, businessmen Ferdous Alam Farazi, Haji Rezaul, Kazi Belayet and Salam Sikdar also addressed the reception.

Scholarships distributed

Health and Family Welfare Minister Salahuddin Yusuf urged the country's physicians to help the present government in implementing the programmes undertaken by the ministry for rendering better health care services to the common people, reports UNB.

The minister was distributing scholarships to the medical students, arranged by the Dhaka Medical College 1956 Club, held at the auditorium of the National Centre for Hearing and Speech at Mohakhali yesterday.

The minister lauded the initiative taken by the club for distribution of scholarships to the poor and meritorious students and expressed hope that this noble initiative should be followed by other organisations of doctors and physicians who are serving the humanity in the country.

Tk 20.3 cr British grant for ELTIP

Britain's Department for International Development (DFID, formerly ODA) has approved a grant of 2.9 million pounds sterling (approximately Tk 20.3 crore) over a three year period towards the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) of the Government of Bangladesh, says a press release.

Acting British High Commissioner Miriam McIntosh signed the Exchange of Letters at a ceremony at the Economic Relations Division (ERD) Office recently. ERD Secretary Dr A H M Mashur Rahman signed it on behalf of the Bangladesh government.

The project aims to improve the standard of teaching and learning of English language in Secondary and Higher Secondary Education. The Ministry of Education will be assisted in developing English Language Teaching (ELT) in three key interdependent areas — curriculum development, teacher training and assessment.

Beg honoured with IPC fellowship

Veteran photographer Manzoor Alam Beg has been awarded fellowship of the India International Photographic Council (IIPC), says a press release.

A specially constituted international honours committee of IIPC unanimously decided to award Beg in recognition of his outstanding contribution and services in the field of photography, the release added.

Beg will be presented with the award at a ceremony in New Delhi today.

Berger Paints art contest

Berger Paints has announced its 2nd 'Berger Young Painters Painting Competition' to promote young painters of our country, says a press release.

The 1998 Berger Corporate Calendar will be done with the first six selected paintings from the competition.

The prizes for the competition are: First prize — Tk 25,000, second prize — Tk 20,000, third prize — Tk 15,000 and Tk 10,000 each for 4th, 5th, 6th positions.

Subject for the painting: Open; medium: Oil, size: 24 inch x 24 inch. For preliminary entry, 5R size colour photographs of the paintings should be sent.

Participant must be Bangladeshi national, age: 18 to 25 years. To confirm age, participant must submit a copy of SSC certificate, certified by a first class gazetted officer, with a colour photograph.

All primary selected painters will be notified by mail of their selection. They should then send the main paintings at their own expense. All paintings must be properly framed, and the participant must write his/her name, father's name, address, age, along with bio-data and name in English, at the back of the painting.

Weather

Day temperature may rise

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers with temporary gusty wind may occur at a few places over Chittagong, Barisal, Khulna and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places over Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions in next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Met Office also forecast that day temperature may slightly rise over the country during the period.

In an outlook for the subsequent two days, weathermen predicted an increasing rainfall activities.

The country's highest temperature yesterday was recorded 35.5 degree Celsius at Sylhet and the lowest 23.5 degrees at Comilla.

The sun sets today at 6:29 pm and rises tomorrow 5:29 am.

Maximum and minimum temperatures and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius	Humidity in percentage
Dhaka	Max 34.6 Min 26.8	Morning 71 Evening 75
Chittagong	35.4 26.1	80 76
Rajshahi	33.8 27.6	77 72
Khulna	33.7 27.2	71 69