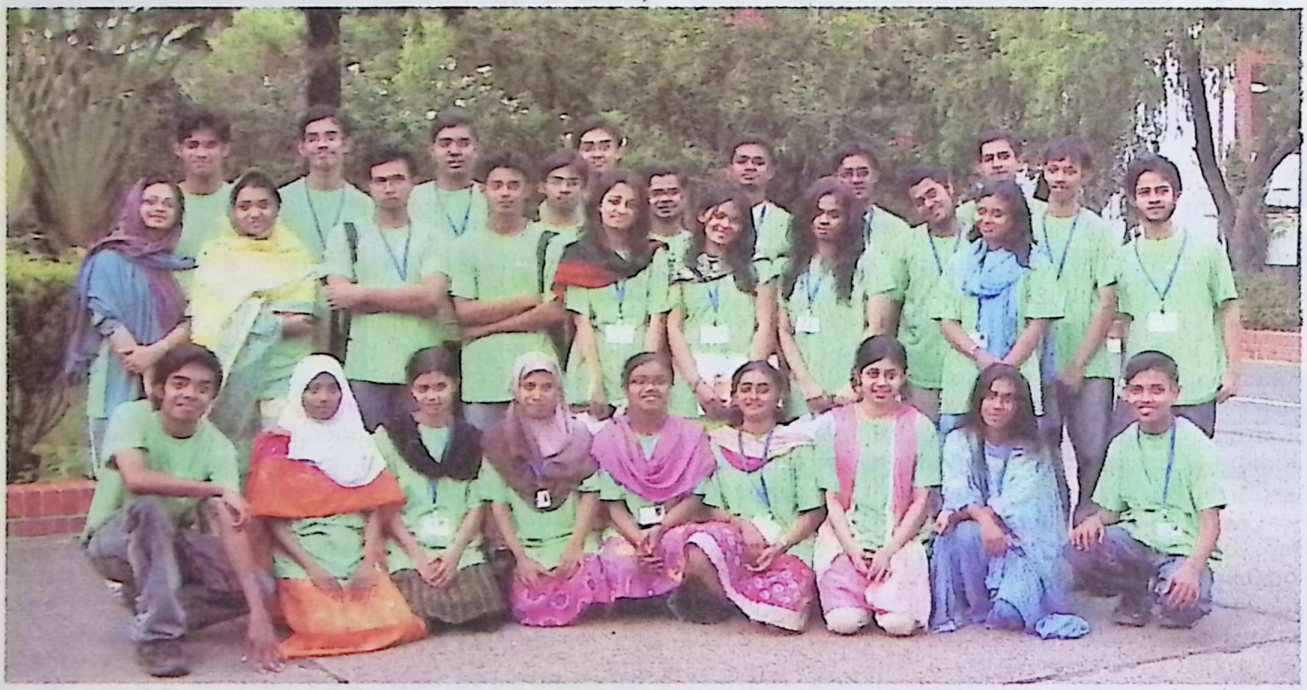
Youth Leaders: They are the answer for change in Bangladesh

Hasib Shaikh



ON November 4, 2008, the United States of America embraced 'change' by electing Barrack Obama as the 44th President of America and while I was waiting for the bus in the morning after the election, there were two African American women having a conversation about Obama's victory. Both had the positive view that his presidency will help bring change and a better life for the under-represented population of America. As the year comes to an end, Bangladesh has yet to have leaders strong enough to help the under-represented population of this country, such as the bosti residents.

Shammi Quddus is a third-year undergraduate student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). She is a strong-willed woman from Chittagong who wants to work for the betterment of Bangladesh - bring in knowledge that institutes like MIT has to offer and use them to solve the problems of Bangladesh. When she visited Bangladesh this summer, I was invited by her to witness the beginning of change made possible by thirty ordinary human beings for the underrepresented population of Bangladesh: the bosti residents.

Ejaj Ahmed is an alumnus of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. His Master's Policy exercise at Harvard was on youth leadership. When we met, he told me, "A good leader is somewhat like a good doctor. Just as the doctor must diagnose the patient accurately to ensure effectiveness of the prescribed drug, the leader must also be able to diagnose problems, internal and external voices and values, to come up with effective solutions." He visited the largest slum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil this January to do research on youth leadership.

Shammi too wanted to do something for the greater good of Bangladesh. In her opinion it is our lack of committed leaders and their inability to communicate with one another - i.e. intolerance and dogmatism in leadership seems to be one of the biggest problems of Bangladesh.Ahmed and Shammi decided to bring a total of 30 students from three different backgrounds for them to be the foundation of BYLC. After organizing their thoughts into a proposal, BYLC became a recipient of the Peace prize and also received financial and technical support from MIT Public Service Center which allowed the learning institute to begin its month long journey from