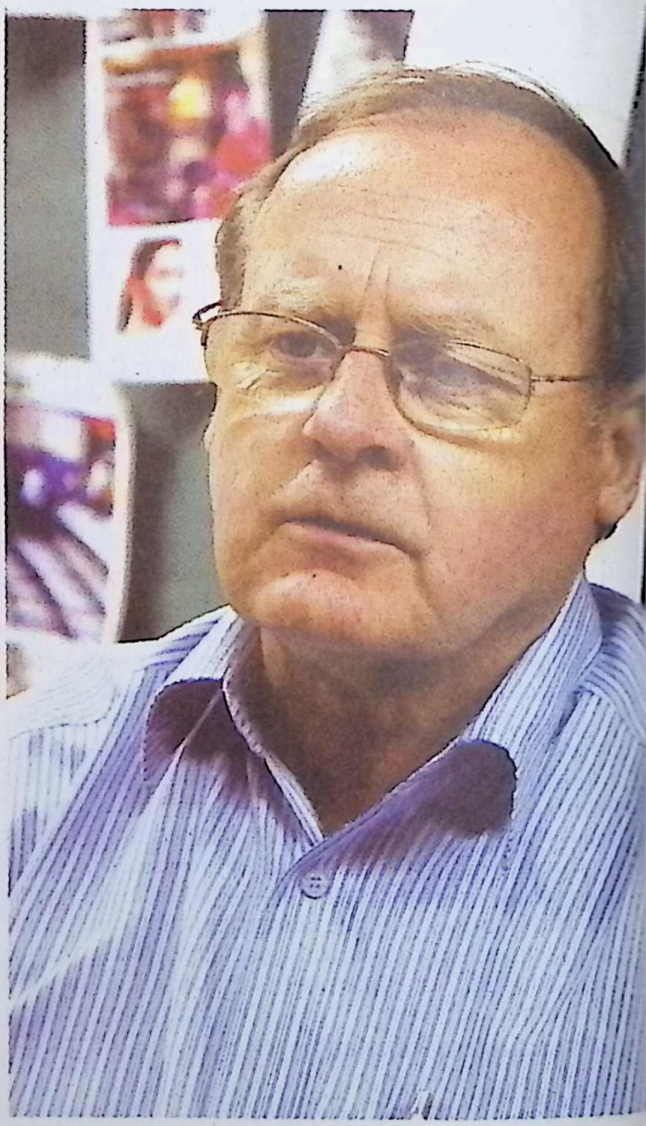
The Unknown

The war of liberation may have been fought in Bangladesh, but the fallout of the war was largely dealt with in India. Millions of refugees fled the country as the nine-month war ravaged its resources and people. They marched in long lines to the border and made their way into India, for food, shelter, clothing, housing and peace of mind. Innumerable people lost their lives in the conflict and thousands of others died in the refugee camps. But millions were also safely taken care of in those very same refugee camps as people gave their heart and soul to help those displaced by the war. One such person was Julian Francis, an aid worker with OXFAM who did more for Bangladeshi refugees than most will ever know. Julian was in charge of OXFAM's Refugee and Relief Programme which assisted over 500,000 men, women and children in refugee camps in the Indian states bordering Bangladesh. Aside from liasing with Senator Edward Kennedy he also helped put together a document titled 'Testimony of Sixty'. Recently he spoke to **NADER RAHMAN** about his experiences with refugees, camp life and his continued work in Bangladesh.



Julian Franc

What were your first experiences with the refugee camps?

The first contact with the refugees was at the Bongaon/Benapole border because by that time there was quite a fear of cholera. The west Bengal government particularly were worried that cholera would sweep through the city and were experimenting with what they called in those days 'jet injectors', which were sort of guns that sprayed cholera vaccine at high pressure through the skin so you didn't need a needle. So as the refuges were coming across the border, they were being shot with the cholera vaccine gun. The west Bengal health authorities wanted to vaccine a buffer zone around that part of Calcutta. They asked us to get one million doses which somehow we managed to arrange in less than 72 hours. There was a Ghandhian ashram i Bongaon also the Catholic Church set up a refugee camp so immediately we were supporting their work of thos sorts of organisations as well as Mother Teresa sisters i different camps. So for quite a number of weeks at th beginning when I was setting up the administration an coordination for Oxfam's programmes Mother Teres would ring me every morning with a shopping list. Sh wouldn't say good morning, she would start by sayin