lives because of their impairment and not because of "our" lacking. If a person on a wheelchair can't attend a meeting because he can't climb the stairs to the meeting room, the blame is immediately put on the wheelchair and not the stairs. A person with disability is, thus, defined by what they can't do as opposed to what they can.

"Social attitude and perception about physical disability is yet to change. Our society is not an inclusive one. We don't offer an all-encompassing environment for people with disabilities to ensure their smooth transition into the mainstream society. People's understanding about this issue is extremely poor," says Palash Kundu, Donor Liaison Officer of CRP.

Last year, CRP offered vocational training to around 300 people with physical disabilities. Other organisations like the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) also offer specially designed training opportunities for people with physical disabilities to establish inclusive practices within the mainstream society. Despite this, people with physical impairments find it difficult to find jobs outside of NGOs and development organisations.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Engineer Sultan Mohiuddin Babul owns a business, volunteers at the CRP and even does the household shopping for his family.

"People with physical disabilities face crushing discrimination when they search for jobs and even within their own families. Even though organisations like CRP and CDD offer training to them whereby they are trained according to their skills and potential, we find that very few people are employed when they seek to reintegrate in the society," says Kandu.

Kandu says that the organisations that employ persons with disabilities seem satisfied with their performance. And why shouldn't they be? After they are vocationally trained, people with physical disabilities become proficient in their work, they don't switch jobs as quickly, they take lesser number of breaks, they don't get involved in fights or strikes and they are regular and consistent in their jobs.

Monsur Ahmed Chowdhury has proven to the country and the world that a person's physical impairment does not define his or her identity. A former member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, Chowdhury is well-regarded internationally for his commitment to the welfare of people with disabilities. Currently working as a trustee of Impact Foundation Bangladesh, Chowdhury, who lost his sight in childhood, helped the National Foundation for Development of the Disabled Persons create its initial conceptual framework.

"The society usually rejects people with disabilities, believing that they won't be able to cope with the rest because of their impairment. How can you say that someone won't be able to perform if you don't even give them the chance to prove themselves?" Chowdhury asks.

"I usually host a radio programme where I interview successful people with disabilities. One of the people I interviewed was born without arms. But that didn't stop him from working. He uses his toes to type at the computer and is quite good at it. His employer had to only lower the table he worked at to suit his convenience. This positive enabling environment helps him contribute to the economy while allowing him to be self-sufficient," he says.

Chowdhury himself has had to suffer social stigmatisation for his impairment. Instead of helping him integrate in the mainstream, people were always ready to blame his impairment for the way the society treated him.

"While I was sitting for my Masters examinations, the then controller of Dhaka University asked me to prove that I was visually impaired by providing a medical certificate. The irony is that this kind of demand was not made when I was sit-