

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Kazi Mohammad Ashraf does not let disability hamper his work.

If people with disabilities are employed in "regular" jobs, they will become more visible to the society. Instead of judging them for their disability, people will begin to see them for their abilities.

ting for my Bachelor's exams. After I graduated, I applied for a teaching post at the university but was rejected on the grounds of being blind. Well-respected teachers of the university told my classmates that even though I had good results and was a good student, I wouldn't be able to teach because of my impairment," Chowdhury says.

He is positive, however, that things will change for the better with greater awareness and a shift in social attitudes.

At a roundtable discussion titled "Livelihoods for Disabled People: Opportunities and Challenges" organised recently by The Daily Star, Executive Director of the CDD, AHM Noman Khan stated that only around five percent of people with disabilities are employed in the country. Citing the example of bank loans, Khan said that people with disabilities who have received vocational training should be given loans so that they can be self-sufficient.

"Employment for people with disabilities is necessary to not only ensure a livelihood but to also instill confidence and sense of worth in people with disabilities. We did not agree with the government's decision of offering bank loans to all people with disabilities at zero percent interest. This decision could be exploited by many. However, we want people with disabilities who have had training to be given an opportunity to avail such loans," Khan said.

Kazi Mohammad Ashraf types away at his computer, looking up from his work only when visitors approach him for directions and other queries. A graduate of the University of Dhaka, Ashraf works as a senior receptionist at the CRP and is considered a dedicated, proficient employee of the organisation. Ashraf is paralysed from the waist down but this does not hinder his work as he is wheeled on a bed to his work station by a helper.

"I used to be a businessman until my accident. After receiving unsatisfactory treatment at a government hospital, I came to CRP where I was given physical treatment and vocational training to help me rehabilitate into the society," he says.

After being released from CRP, Ashraf went back to his village but returned after two months when he found an opportunity to work at the CRP.

"It was difficult for me to adjust in the mainstream society. I had to deal with people's percep-