tion of me as a disabled person. Most people fail to understand that we too have the ability to do something. We may be physically disabled but our mind is the same, we can still contribute to the society. We just need a suitable environment with disabled-friendly facilities that will allow us to reintegrate into the society," Ashraf says.

Social inclusion is an integral part of the reintegration of people with disabilities into the mainstream community. 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. Moreover, if provided with employment opportunities, people with disabilities can definitely contribute to the economy.

hand-operated elevator for the building. He has designed a similar elevator for the School for Special Needs Children at the CRP.

Babul got married after his accident and even has a son who is currently pursuing further education. He doesn't let his physical disability weigh down his enthusiasm for life. He does the household shopping for his family, volunteers at the CRP and continues to run his business.

"Some people might be disturbed by my wheelchair when I carry out everyday tasks but that is not my problem. I don't think I am disabled because I have the ability to contribute to the economy and care for my family. People work with their brain; legs are only for mobility," Babul adds.





Double amputee Emdad Hossain Mollik uses his mouth to paint breathtaking pictures like the one shown above.

"There are many good examples of disabled people working in garment factories. The productivity of the disabled people is often greater. We saw in many of our projects that women who are deaf and cannot speak are looking after cattle in a much better way. People with visual impairments are doing well in kitchen gardening. We need to mention these positive examples," said consultant Julian Francis at the aforementioned roundtable organised by *The Daily Star*.

Engineer Sultan Mohiuddin Babul lost the use of his legs more than 28 years ago, after falling from a mango tree. He was devastated for over a year after that but eventually realised that he still had the chance to restart his life.

"I set up an electronics repair shop near my house and ran it for ten years. After that I joined CRP as an electronics trainer and worked there for another ten years. I was also elected President of the Spinal Cord Injuries Association of Bangladesh in December 2012," says Babul with a smile.

Work is underway on a building owned by Babul. As he needed to oversee the work being done by construction employees, Babul designed a

The government has a huge hand to play in mainstreaming people with disabilities. There are policies for the welfare of people with disabilities but limited measures have been taken to implement them.

"The government needs to reduce corruption, enhance monitoring, ensure proper allocation of resources and rehabilitate people with disabilities within their communities so that they are well-integrated into the society. People with disabilities have the right to employment and it's the government's job to ensure that their rights are met," said Palash Kandu.

We can't just say that people with disabilities are welcome to the "normal" world without bothering to assess their needs or understanding how we can make it easier for them. True inclusion will only take place when the society treats people with disabilities equally. People with disabilities will no longer feel disabled if we stop making them feel that way. Give them the chance to prove themselves by offering them the same opportunities enjoyed by the rest of the society and you will see that they truly can. ■