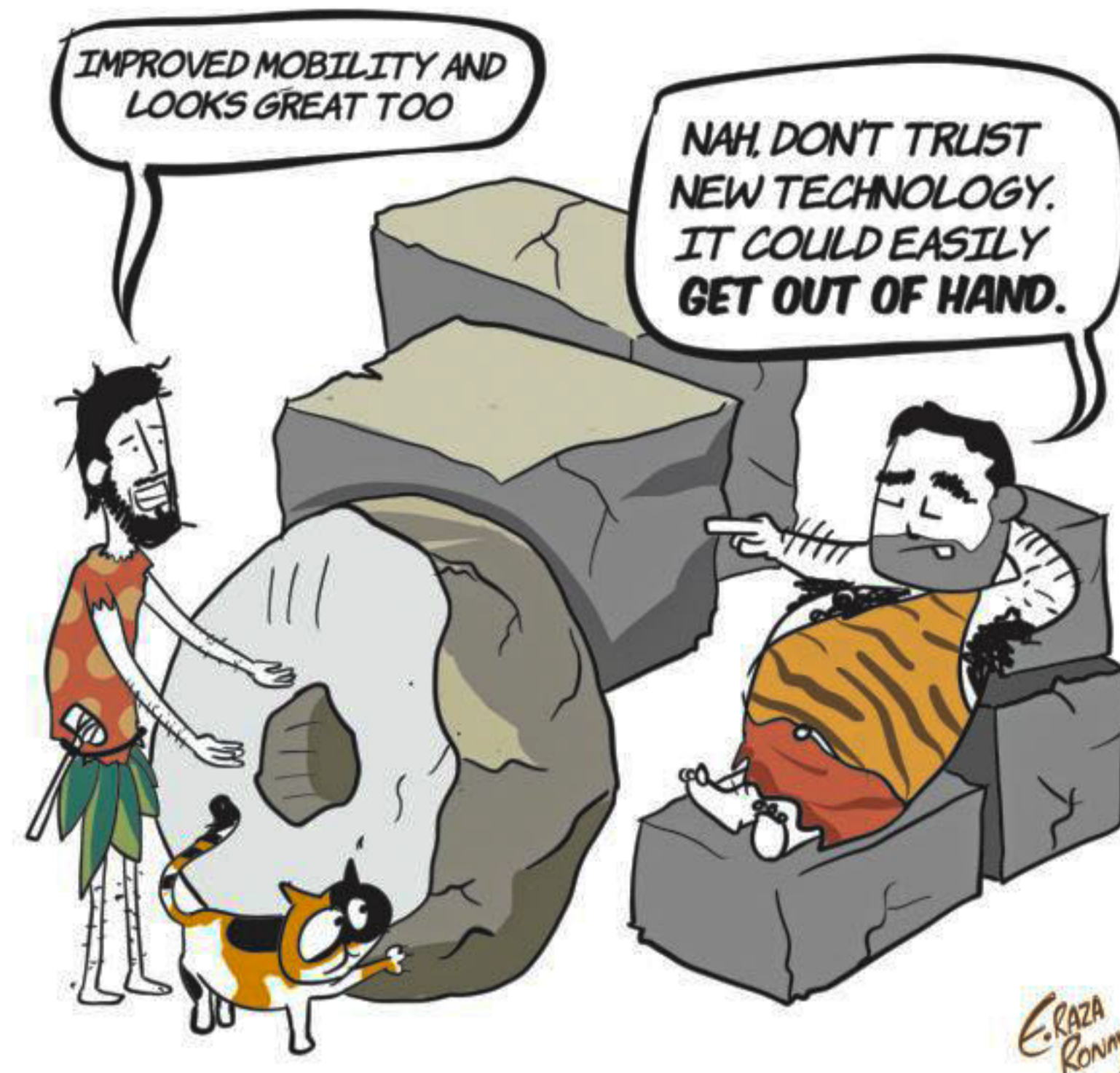


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The sudden hike in minimum call rate of mobile phone

The recent hike in the mobile phone minimum call rate is like a bolt from the blue. We generally know the price floor is fixed to save a dying venture or industry such as the government-fixed price of rice, a food staple. Are the mobile companies in our country on the verge of extinction? If the users, the main stakeholders, of these companies do not survive, will these companies survive either?

Personally, though I earn a handsome amount of money every month, I do not want to waste more money on a phone plan. This past week I have reduced my mobile phone usage by a quarter. Now, my family members and I are using other means such as internet calls and apps. This sudden hike, without prior discussion with stakeholders, will not bring any good results for either group.

The new rate ranges from Tk0.45 to Tk 2 per minute, compared to the previous on-net and off-net floor prices of Tk0.25 and Tk0.60 respectively. How logical or legitimate is to increase the price of a product or service two-fold or three-fold without taking into concern the main stakeholders? Always the mobile companies fix their own prices and the users suffer. I hope the concerned authorities will try to realise the problem of the customers and take necessary measures to mitigate this.

Sayedur Rahman
Farajipara, Khulna

Let's become tech savvy

Nowadays, technology is commonly available for people of all ages. Both experts and novices feel at ease using new and updated technologies. People show their interest in solving any kind of crises by pressing a button. But pressing a button is not a denouement of dilemmas society faces. On the other hand, the "button" can be utilised by not swallowing everything broadcast on TV or social media. The article titled "Almost Useful Life Hacks: Are you or a loved one a technology failure?" published in Star Weekend on August 17 is an attempt to make tech users aware of fake information, links, unnecessary deals and offers etc. One should choose appropriate and better ways to solve relevant difficulties, therefore, let us become tech-savvy by avoiding sharing and clicking on unproductive links.

Joshinta Areng
Notre Dame University Bangladesh, Dhaka

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.

TRIBUTE

THE LAST LETTER

War heroine Rama Chowdhury, a fighter till the end

আমি একমুখী ঝাট বহুত বাঁচতে চাই।
আমার অনেক কাজ করা আছে।
অনেক ভুল পত্র পাঠে, তাইদেবকে
আমি ফেরাবত ফেরি স্বপ্নে। আমি
স্বপ্নে মাটির নিচেই যাই। আমি
মাটির উপরবাসি, আর উপরবাসি
আমার দেশমাতাকেই।

বিনয়রুতা
বঙ্গদেশবিনী,
চট্টগ্রাম।
১৯-১০-১৬ স্না।

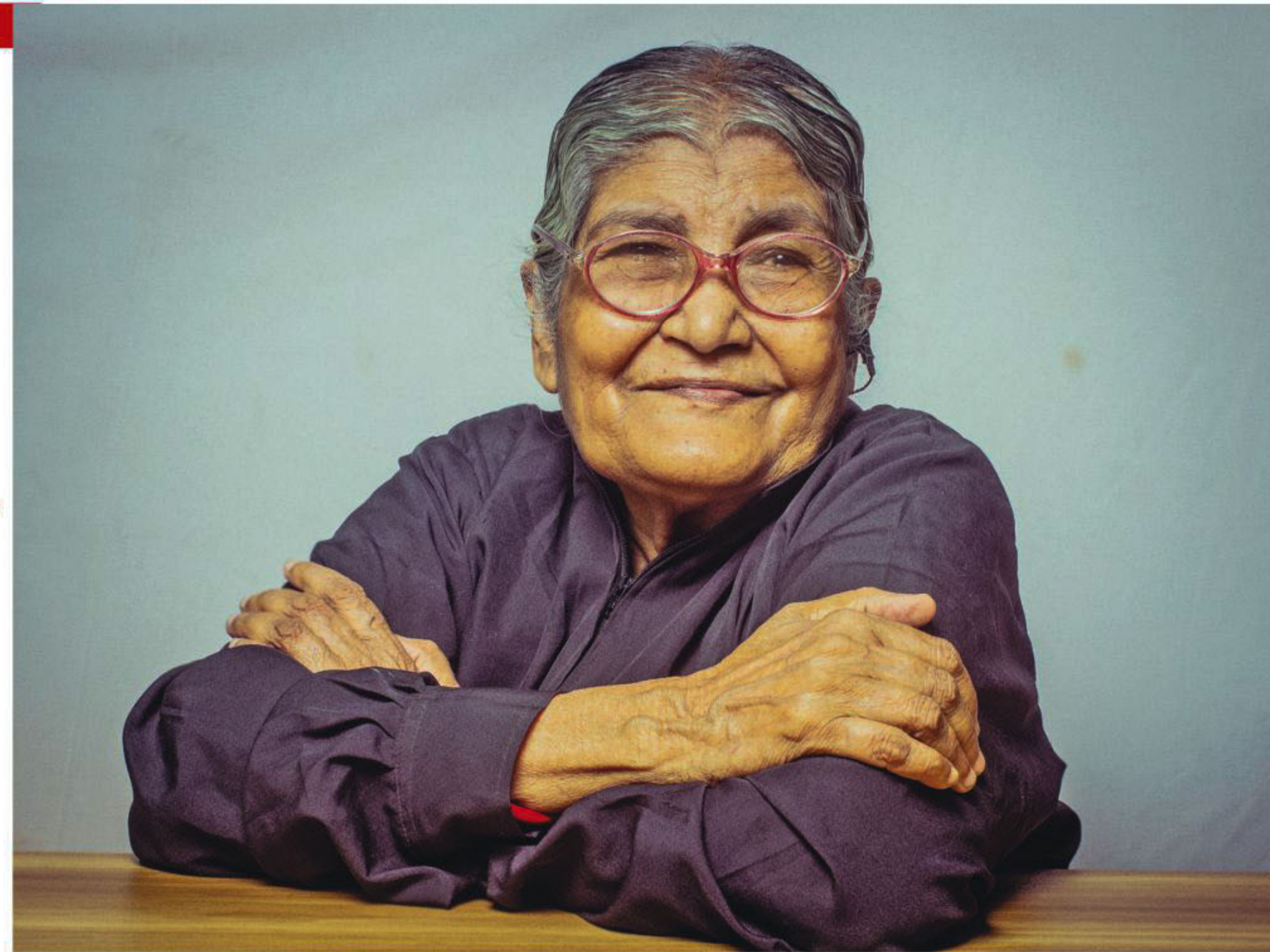


PHOTO: MASHRUK AHMED

'Ekattorer Janani' and freedom fighter Rama Chowdhury breathed her last after a long battle with illness on September 3. She was born in 1936 in Popadia village of Boalkhali upazila in Chittagong and went on to obtain her MA in Bengali Literature from Dhaka University in 1961. She was the headmistress of Cox's Bazar High School in 1962. When the war broke out in 1971, Rama refused to take refuge in India even though her husband insisted on it.

He ended up leaving her. A fighter to the end, Rama was tortured by the Pakistani army on May 13, 1971 who also torched her house at Popadia. After the war, she was homeless as none of her relatives or neighbours gave her shelter and she had to live in the open with her three children and often went hungry. Her two sons died soon after the war. Despite monetary troubles, she never accepted any offers of financial assistance including the one made by

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2013. To make ends meet, Rama took to writing and penned 18 books, including *1001 Din Japoneer Padya*, *Bhab-Boichitre Rabindranath*, *Agun Ranga Agun Jhora* and *Ashru Veja Ekti Din*. *Ekattorer Janani* (Mother of 71) details her memory of the nine-month war. Birangana Rama Chowdhury was laid to rest at Popadia village beside the grave of one of her sons. Below is a handwritten letter to the country by Rama where she pens her

love for Bangladesh, her will to live for a hundred and more years and her undying spirit that wants to continue working for this nation. Rama's letter was sent to *Star Weekend* by photographer Mashruk Ahmed. Under a personal multimedia project 'The War is not over yet', Mashruk Ahmed is collecting photographs, war memorabilia, videos and memories shared by freedom fighters since 2016. Rama Chowdhury's letter dated October 19, 2016 is part of the project. ■

MIGRANTS RIGHTS

The last two years have witnessed thousands of Bangladeshi female workers, who were tortured, abused or cheated, return home from the Middle East with painful memories.

While the government does not seem to have an exact count of the number of returnees, various research-based agencies claim that at least 300 to 400 women have been coming back every month since 2017 because of ill treatment.

The Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB) and the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) are the government wings that are responsible for bringing back any migrant worker suffering abroad.

Today there are safe homes in a number of embassies in the Middle East where women can take shelter in case they are treated badly. Workers, both men and women, are given training on how they can contact the embassy if they are in any sort of trouble before they leave and are made more aware. The systems put in place to protect Bangladesh's migrants seem to have improved in the recent past. However, the support from the government, it seems, ends the moment a migrant worker steps out of the Bangladesh airport.

Till date, the government is yet to constitute a system that can counsel the workers and support them mentally and emotionally. Considering the fact that many migrant workers have been tortured and harassed at their workplaces abroad, researchers believe that the workers are in dire need of psychosocial counselling.

"One has to understand that these migrant workers return home with broken dreams. They spend a lot of money, take a lot of loans and then go abroad. Many of them are tortured and some are raped. In this kind of a situation one needs to give them hope and help them rise again," explains Kamal Chowdhury who is the Programme Coordinator at the Nasirullah Psychotherapy Unit in Dhaka University.

"After returning, many migrants suffer from trauma. Many can't sleep at night and have anger issues. Some of them have relationship troubles and aren't able to communicate properly," he adds.

In the absence of a government policy, a number of NGOs have come in to fill the void. The BRAC Migration Programme is one of them. The programme, which is a year old, has 10 counsellors who work with patients across the country.

Speaking to *Star Weekend*, Mahmuda Akter, the counsellor in charge of the returnees living in Dhaka, explains why they need more than just 10 therapists.

"The number of cases that we have to deal with from

HELD CAPTIVE IN ONE'S OWN MIND

Little help for migrant workers in need of therapy

NAIMUL KARIM



ILLUSTRATION: MANAN MORSHED

wake up confused in the mornings, not knowing what had happened or how it happened. She got pregnant and was sent back. When she first came to me, she told me that she was from Ghana and that she had just come to visit Bangladesh. Her head was all messed up," narrates Mahmuda.

"Another patient of mine was tortured so badly that she could not tell the airport authorities anything. While all her co-passengers had left, she was roaming around aimlessly at the airport. That's when we got a call and brought her to us. She wouldn't speak in Bangla. She only spoke and sang in Arabic. The case was too severe and we had to send her to the National Institute for Mental Health and Hospital," says Mahmuda.

It's not just the female migrants who need help but men as well. SM AL Jubair, the programme manager of BRAC's Migration Programme, explains that they have counselled over 25 returnees from Europe.

"There was a 20-year-old man who had gone to Libya from Dhaka in hopes of reaching Italy. Unfortunately, he got stuck there because of the war. For the first one year

Continued to page 5

the Middle East are limitless and they are the most difficult to solve," says Mahmuda. "I once met a woman from Saudi Arabia who used to be given sleeping pills and then raped after. She would

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