



In focus with drishtipat

change Bangladesh... one step at a time

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Inside this issue:

<i>Form Drishtipat Desk</i>	2
<i>Eevent Update Continued</i>	2-3
<i>Update on Journalist Saiful Haq Mithu</i>	3
<i>We Need Your Help!</i>	3

Drishtipat Membership:

Visit www.drishtipat.org for campaign updates. Please remain vigilant and contribute to the website.

Don't forget to register at the website, it takes just 5 minutes!

Drishtipat Photo Gallery:

<http://drishtipat.org/modules.php?name=Gallery>

Discussion Board:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/drishtipat/messages/>

Event Update

Drishtipat London

"Muslim Or Heretics" Film Screening

Drishtipat London hosted Naeem Mohaiemen and premiered Muslims Or Heretics in London. The show took place in Brick Lane, the heartland of Bangali community, which attracted a full house crowd. The movie was followed by a question and answer session. The session proved to be challenging at times as it was often difficult to steer away from the theological debate and focus on whether the state has any business in deciding who is a Muslim and who is not. Most of the audience was outraged after watching the film. Questions were raised about what is being done by the local groups to stop the spread of fundamentalism in Bangladesh. Asif Saleh, the founder of Drishtipat, was also present to answer questions about Drishtipat's other campaigns. Every one complemented director Naeem Mohaimen's effort to take up such a courageous campaign and holding multiple film screenings in Dhaka.

"Abar Ashibo Phire" Film Screening

As part of its membership drive, Drishtipat London organized a free screening of the award winning film "Way Back Home" (Abar Ashibo Phire), a documentary based on a true story of the plight of the refugees of India-Pakistan partition in 1947. The event was co-sponsored by a South Asian secular organization, Awaaz. The audience commended the director for bringing forward a subject that has not been addressed before. The audience consisted of mostly an immigrant population who could relate to the protagonists' longing for home.

Drishtipat New York

"Abar Ashibo Phire" Film Screening

A documentary film, Abar Ashibo Phire, by director Supriyo Sen was screened in New York on September 13 at the Pioneer Theater. Drishtipat co-sponsored the event with 3rd I NY and Prohini. Abar Ashibo Phire is a son's narration of his parents' journey back to their childhood home in present-day Bangladesh. Supriyo Sen takes his parents back to their village home in Barisal 50 years after they migrated to India. His parents relocated to Calcutta after the partition of undivided India. The film's subject touches on the issues of partition, the displacement of several million people, and the affect it had on the lives of those who were displaced. After the screening there was a discussion session at a nearby restaurant where the attendees shared their thoughts on the documentary. The audience was very moved by the film; they reflected upon their own experiences of leaving home and journeying to a foreign land. It was a full house event that gave the audience a rare opportunity to sense the emotional turmoil created by the partition of India and see how generations of Bengalis have been affected by it.

From the Drishtipat Desk

Dear Members,

2004 has been another milestone year for Drishtipat. With your help we have successfully raised funds for 1971 women war veterans and victims, raised funds to aid journalist Shaiful Haque Mithu's treatment, and we have campaigned for the right of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Bangladesh to freely practice their faith. Internally, we have focused on strengthening the organization through local chapters; at the end of the year, our membership has grown by 25%.

Whatever success human rights volunteers and donors may have achieved, it is just a drop in the ocean relative to the volume and scale of rights abuses across the world. In Bangladesh, the lack of accountability and institutional controls allow an atmosphere where abuse is often tolerated, no matter who is in power. In fixing one set of problems, we see short-term solutions that are equally bad—such as the alleged extra judicial killings by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) this year.

“Whatever success human rights volunteers and donors may have achieved, it is just a drop in the ocean relative to the volume and scale of rights abuses across the world.”

We must continue to do what we can to give voice to those who need it most, but we must work smarter not just harder. We need to strengthen those partners in Bangladesh who are working to create the institutional controls that protect human rights and deter abuse. In 2005, Drishtipat will work as a platform to channel a greater amount of resources to address critical gaps in Bangladesh's human rights infrastructure. To increase our ability to affect change, we must reach out to greater numbers of people both in Bangladesh and abroad, and set up a general fund that can attract both institutional grants as well as private donations.

We encourage you to visit our message board on Yahoo Groups, as well as our redesigned website that provides increased transparency into our progress. We need your energy, your time, your ideas and your donations! Please continue to help spread the word.

Happy New Year!

Drishtipat Team

Drishtipat New York (continued)

“My Migrant Soul” Film Screening

In celebration of International Human Rights Day on December 10, and the Victory day of Bangladesh on December 16, Drishtipat New York organized a film screening of My Migrant Soul at Columbia University, New York. The film screening was accompanied by a panel discussion with Dr. Rounaq Jahan and Mr. Hasan Ferdous.

My Migrant Soul, directed by Yasmine Kabir, won the Best Documentary award at the Film South Asia Festival 2001. The documentary tells the story of Shahjahan Babu, a Bangladeshi worker, who left his homeland for a better future in Malaysia; only to find himself being exploited and living a life without hope. This documentary is a collection of Babu's letters and audio taped narratives to his mother in addition to interviews of his mother and family members.

The audience was very much moved by Babu's story. The discussion with the guest speakers started with Dr. Jahan providing a brief overview of the current situation of Bangladeshi migrant workers and their rights based on the Bangladeshi legal system. Then she discussed the flaws of the legal system and explained how manpower agents continue to exploit underprivileged workers. Mr. Hasan Ferdous continued the discussion by talking about the general human rights issues in Bangladesh. He discussed why the government of Bangladesh still has not signed the migrant workers' convention and its impact on the status of migrant workers. The progress in this area is severely hindered by political machinations. There are several vested interest groups that do not want these issues to be addressed. Mr. Ferdous urged all Bangladeshi expatriates to continue to voice their concerns and to work towards a better civil society in Bangladesh.

Drishtipat Washington D.C.

"Muslim Or Heretics" Film Screening

The Washington DC chapter of Drishtipat organized a film screening and panel discussion to speak out for religious freedom of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Bangladesh. On December 3, 2004 Drishtipat DC held the event at the George Washington School of International Affairs. The event consisted of the screening of the documentary film "Muslims or Heretics," and followed with an interactive panel with the director of "Muslims or Heretics" Naeem Mohaiemen and a representative from the local Ahmadiyya Mosque, Professor Mian Wasim. The audience raised many important and thought-inspiring questions to Mr. Mohaiemen and Mr. Wasim. It was an eye opening experience for all who attended. The audience also voiced their appreciation for Naeem Mohaiemen for confronting such a controversial issue in a very effective manner.

Update on Journalist Shaiful Haq Mithu

When we get involved in a project, we hope for the best results. Desired results are often hard to reach; but so far, with the help of our donors and volunteers, we have been successful.

Now we are finally seeing success in the case of Shaiful Haq Mithu, the Janakantha reporter who was badly injured by local goons for a particular honest news piece about injustice. Drishtipat had gathered funds with the help of the Community to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and helped pay for Mithu's medical bills, for the necessary surgeries. Today Mithu is on his way to recovery. While he is still undergoing many medical procedures, he has come a long way from where he stood a year ago. Mithu wants to return to journalism once he recovers fully. Drishtipat wishes him a bright and healthy future.

We Need Your Help!

Grants Team

Drishtipat has a growing number of chapters around the world including in Bangladesh. We have now reached the level where we need to formalize many of our activities. As a part of this effort, we are seeking to build grant management capability and need volunteers who have experience in grant writing, application submission, and being institution liaisons. This provides an excellent opportunity for the volunteer to network with a global community of activists (including those at the forefront at the grassroots level in Bangladesh) while contributing to the human rights causes in Bangladesh. If you are interested, please write to info@drishtipat.org.

Web Team

As part of our ongoing effort to build infrastructure for human rights issues, Drishtipat is considering a project to create a well managed website for Ain O Shalish Kendro. We are looking for two volunteers with intermediate web designing skills to help with the project. If you are interested, please write to info@drishtipat.org.

Other Opportunities

We are also looking for volunteers to help with public relations, fundraiser, event planning, event organizing, and local chapters. Our United States local chapters are located in Chicago, New York, and Washington D.C. Our worldwide local chapters are located in Canberra, Australia; Dhaka, Bangladesh; and London, U.K.

If you are interested in any of these areas, please write to info@drishtipat.org.