

HEALTH

THANARBAID  
CARE

CENTRE

## THANARBAID HEALTH CARE CENTRE NEWSLETTER

EASTER

2001

Happy Easter to all from the staff of the **Thanarbaid Health Care Program (THCP)**. We hope that the event was a glorious experience for you all. Alleluia! Now in its 18th year, the program's enthusiasm still glows, perhaps from the jubilation and rejuvenation received in this Holy Week and the strength to keep moving. And moving they are. **Dr. Edric Baker** here gives a fine description of the activities, both of the inner, heartfelt goals that have been his own since he started and now accepted by those who have been participating with him for a good number of years. Let us hear from the doctor. *(Your correspondent will fill in some explanatory remarks about culture and society where they may be needed. The below lines were dictated almost word for word and I could feel Dr Edric excitement with the present situation. Though it is not all that efficient as you will read below, it does hold promise.)*

**Mohiron**, 60, illiterate, a grandma, sat on the dirt floor among all the staff, waiting to cry out to Allah, using the words of the Holy Koran and other Islamic prayers. Those who have not live in Bangladesh can **not** understand how revolutionary such an act is. *(It is morning prayer time where, sitting on Mother earth, the of THCP staff of Muslims, Hindus and Christians all gather together for reflections arising from their own religious origins and to divide up the tasks before them of serving the poor for the day. Since the beginning of his efforts to serve the rural poor, Dr Edric has dreamed of a peaceful, praiseful unity among those of different faiths and cultures while gathered in prayer.)* It is also prayer for Holy Thursday morning and **Bimol** proclaims the Nazareth Manifesto in which Jesus says – He has come to liberate the poor and release prisoners. In the group are **Shuneet, Bedena, Aunen, Sironjon, Hatem, Nikas**, key actors in the daily THCP drama.

And drama it is. **Shuneet** and the doctor (*Edric Baker's referral to himself in this newsletter.*) have been working together for years as a couple of leaders in an ambivalent, 2-way stretched relationship. This was to be tested. The week before Holy Week **Hatem's** son, **Sheik Farid** fell at the school high jump event and broke his elbow. *(There was no 3-foot thick foam plastic present to break his fall to the hard ground.)* Since he was the son of a staff member they rallied as usual to help him. It was the end of a busy workday. Young **Sheik Farid** lay stretched out before them. They needed to put him to sleep using intervenes anesthesia. **Shuneet** was the one who took charge. Try as he may in the gathering darkness, he could not insert the needle into the vein. He was frustrated. Finally, with quiet, delicate diplomacy, the doctor took the needle and succeeded. Unfortunately, the manipulation of the bones into the proper place was not good. An x-ray check showed it would have to be done again. *(The x-ray was done at a clinic almost 3 hours away, arrived at by hand-carrying the lad in a hammock or lying on a flatbed tricycle [called a van] driven over very uneven dirt and partially bricked roads)* A few days later, again at night after a heavy day's labor, the staff tried again to administer the anesthesia. Once again **Shuneet** failed. The doctor also failed and gave the needle back to **Shuneet**. In this moment a relationship of empathetic brotherhood was formed between them. Then the needle was given to other junior members of the staff, like **Sironjon** and **Nikas**. Finally the patient slept. Once again an attempt was made to set the bones properly. But it was not to be. After the same arduous journey back to that far clinic the x-ray showed poor positioning. So **Sheik Farid** was to be transferred to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. But the family has had enough of these futile medical efforts and refused to allow it. *(At the present your correspondent does not know the final condition of poor Sheik Farid whose high jump days, among other youthful activities must be over.)*

Many changes have been made for the ongoing sustainability of the THCP project. For years the staff and the doctor have seen themselves as brothers and sisters. But brothers and sisters need to talk things over. A little group now meets regularly to sort out the problems in the program. **Shuneet**, (40), **Bedena** (f), and **Aunen** are the key paramedics. **Bimol** and **Badol** are the managers of administration and finances. **Chondon** is the cashier. **Sister Libby** complained one morning that getting money from **Chondon** is like trying to get blood out of a stone. The doctor is now training a new batch of paramedics: **Redjia** (f), **Aminol, Hakim, Sironjon, Deepali** (f) and **Nikas**.

Because of the years they have been working together, **Shuneet** and the doctor are the foundation members of the present staff. **Shuneet** comes from the nearby village of Dorati. He left school before getting his matric (High School) certificate. At that time he was brought to THCP to cook and wash clothes. He cared for the vegetable garden also. Now he is, so to speak, the associate doctor and the program in-charge in the doctor's absence. He is married to a beautiful woman. They are Mandi Christians who live right next to the Thanarbaid clinic. *(Once again, Mandis are one of the tribal people in this area who have occupied this fast disappearing forest area for more centuries than we can count.)* **Shuneet's** first son is now studying in high school. However tragedy struck them recently. The second son died last Christmas of a congenital heart disease. The doctor was called and together they all prayed around the dying boy. Now every evening his mother lights a candle on the Cross erected on his earth mound grave at the side of road, some 50 meters from their home. To their great joy the third child is a daughter, the treasure of the Mandi family. *(In the Mandi culture, known as a matrilineal society, the land of the family follows the wife or mother. The Mandi children take the family name of their mother. That is why, in a special way the daughter is their treasure.)*

Of the new personnel who joined THCP recently, **Sironjon** is a young Hindu man. He almost died of drug resistant Kala Azar (black fever) but stayed on after recovering. *(You will note that a good number of the staff comes from among those who were healed and have stayed to serve.)* **Nikas** came to the clinic, crippled with severe back pain. He made a remarkable recovery. Like **Shuneet**, he is a Mandi Christian with a beautiful daughter but unfortunately in a difficult marriage. **Redjia**, (40), a Muslim woman, is the pride and joy of the Village Visiting program. *(There are some 10 villages under this program of health prevention and education. Sister Libby (60 +) has given up her retirement from public health work in New Zealand to share her many years of experience. She accompanies these goodhearted tribals, walking and cycling around to those villages.)* **Deepali** is a desperately poor Hindu woman with husband and 3 children. They live in a one-room mud brick house with only a half a roof. **Aminol** and **Hakim** are diabetic young men who work at the **KAILAKURI** program *(for care of both diabetics and TB patients. This center is about 2 miles from the THCP clinic area. Its main purpose is in initial treatment of and then the regular distribution of both diabetic and TB medicine. Both diseases have long treatment periods. The government does supply the medicine without cost.)* **Hakim's** 13 year old wife just gave birth to their first child. *(She won't need any Barbie doll to play with.)*

The doctor is going to Dhaka. He will attend a training course on diabetics being given for government doctors. He will certainly be the only non-Bangladeshi doctor in attendance. At age 59 he will probably be the only doctor over 35. Besides trying to gather new and ongoing information, he also has to submit a report to the group, the Diabetes Association of Bangladesh, on the state of the diabetes crisis in rural areas. The little **KAILAKURI** clinic now has 230 diabetic patients and gets a new diabetic patient almost every day. If diabetic afflicted persons in the four adjacent Thanas *(Thana means a 'Police Area.)* were to come to **KAILAKURI** we would anticipate 17,000 diabetic patients *(There is no other place where they can get free government medicine.)*. The doctor's trip into Dhaka is to learn but also to gain credibility and stimulate the local medical people to do something about the situation.. Then the pressure at **KAILAKURI** would drop and we could work for the sustainability of the project in the coming years. *(Local practitioners of the medical profession are not known for their dedication to run to the hinterland to serve the poor. Indeed, are they anywhere? Please, no offence to you good doctors who do so much for this program.)*

So again, we come full circle. Revolutionary **Mohiron** cries out to Allah. Revolutionary Jesus proclaims the release of prisoners and the liberation of the poor. In the political crisis we will have to die with Jesus. *(Presently we have a government which a united opposition would like to see put out of office and have early elections. We have been having nation-wide transportation strikes and store closures for 72 hours at a time. It is not voluntary. The opposition put goons on the streets and roads to smash the vehicles that disobey their will. The party in power is use illegal force to curtail legitimate dissent. This is the political crisis the doctor is talking about.)* But the poor, the sick poor are the ones with whom Jesus is living and identifying. Thus we continue daily at Morning Prayer and in our tasks with Muslim, Hindus, Christians and whoever will join us to cry out the message. Again we wish you all a happy and fruitful Easter Season filled with joy and peace, Alleluia.

**Dr Edric's Baker / Thanarbaid Health Care Center / P.O. Pirgacha / Madhupur, Tangail 1996  
BANGLADESH.**

If anyone wishes to send email to: [mk\\_oneye@bd.drik.net](mailto:mk_oneye@bd.drik.net) it will be forwarded to **THCP**. As mentioned above the greater part of this newsletter was dictated to your present Correspondent - Fr. Douglas Venne, MM



Redjia hard at reports – the whole world is her desk .



Aunen and Shuneet on a busy Thursday when sick from-  
any where can receive help. No one is refused.



Bedena according to custom handles special women's  
diagnosis. Thursday is a busy day for all.



Here Sironjon is giving tender medical care to a patient right  
on a veranda of Dr. Baker's own little one room mud home.



The crowd does not exactly push in the gate to receive help.  
But the gate gathers no rust.



A meaningful scene. Birmol is the local administrator.  
But the shadow in the rear is Dr. Baker, whose hand has  
guided Thanarbaid Program for 18 years. He's hiding!!