



Above: Dr Mannan treats a Rohingya woman. Below: a drawing by child refugee who fled persecution

ROHINGYA AID EFFORT

Lancashire pair self fund Bangladesh trip

Doctors treat Myanmar refugees after trauma

A 40-day-old baby died from dehydration after her mother trekked more than three hours to try to get help from a clinic at a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh.

The death, which would not have happened in the UK, shocked two Lancashire GPs who had travelled to the country to volunteer in a health facility.

Fleeing persecution

Dr Abdul Mannan and his friend Dr Al Amin paid for their own flights and expenses so they could join the volunteers at the clinic. On arrival at Kutupalong camp at Cox's Bazar, they were greeted by a sea of flimsy, hastily erected bamboo huts housing the refugees who had fled persecution in Myanmar.

Mannan's Haslingden practice has 5,000 patients. In Camp 4 there were 250,000 refugees, fleeing persecution in their home country.

"In the morning it was like running a busy accident and emergency department," he said. "In the afternoon, I would be able to be more of a GP and when there was time I would talk to the patients and find out their stories.

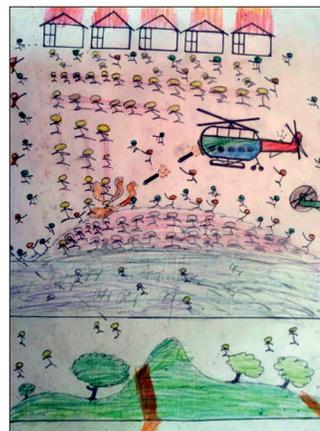
"When they started to talk to me I was concerned that they were telling me things and it was raw, but I could not follow it up by advising them to seek help for their PTSD or mental health problems because there was none.

"The only thing I can do now is make sure that their stories are known." On the first day he treated a woman in her thirties for high blood pressure but, enquiring further, she revealed that she, her husband and their three children fled to the hills after a Burmese militia attacked their village.

As they crossed a deep gully they dodged bullets and her two-year-old baby fell from her arms.

Mannan said: "It was a choice of searching for her baby and all her family dying. She chose to save her other children and the family continued to flee towards the Bangladeshi border. It took them seven days to reach it.

"This was a rotten and earth-shattering decision that no human, let alone a mother,



should have to make. She lives now not knowing where her baby is and if it is alive or dead."

Before they left the UK, the doctors spent four weeks raising more than £12,500 to buy medical equipment, testing machines and medicines to take with them.

"Doing their level best"

Mannan said: "The official figures say there are more than 800,000 refugees from Rohingya in Bangladesh; unofficially it is estimated that there are 1.2 to 1.3 million. For a poor country such as Bangladesh they are doing their level best. I will never criticise the United Nations because without them it would be even worse.

"The same stories were told to us over and over again. The militia would take over a village and round up all the men of working age. The first 20 they shot dead, the next 20 they hacked with machetes and the next 20 were put in a prison that resembled a concentration camp.

"Not everyone in Burma is a bad person and there are lots who are sympathetic to the plight of the Rohingyas who have lived there for hundreds of years, but the world needs to have a feel for what is going on there. It is dreadful."

Mannan and Amin volunteered with MedGlobal at the facility, run by the charity Obat Helpers, which has trained 74 Rohingya refugees as clinical support workers. As the rainy season approaches and the camp will be harder to reach by outside volunteers, they will have an increasingly important role to play in looking after the health of the refugees.

Before they left Bangladesh the doctors raised an extra £1,000 to buy uniforms and equipment for the support workers.

Mannan added: "When my plane descended into Manchester I said: 'Home sweet home.' The UK is such a wonderful place; I wish we appreciated it more."

CATHERINE SMYTH