



A doctor examining a sick child at a refugee camp near Calcutta.

Rewarding Experience At Refugee Camp

BY OUR STAFF REPORTER

BANGALORE.

Some of the refugees from Bangla Desh, now housed in camps in and around West Bengal, are so happy with the rations and medical aid they have been receiving that they even expressed preference to staying on in the camps rather than returning to lead an uncertain life in their homeland.

Dr. Ravi Narayan, Dr. Vikram and Dr. Gouri, of Bangalore who volunteered to serve in a refugee camp in Neelganj, 26 miles from Calcutta, told me here that the authorities were doing their best to cope with the endless stream of evacuees from East Bengal. A regular supply of food rations, drinking water and medicines were maintained.

... the time they went to the camp there were 5,000 refugees, who almost doubled in the two months they served at the camp.

Life was well organised in the camp. Some of the refugees knew English and served the authorities as interpreters. These doctors were able to pick up some Bengali in a week and converse with the patients.

The common ailments they had to treat were cholera, diarrhoea and pneumonia. Skin diseases were also prevalent in the camp. Some had bullet injuries. There were a number of pregnant women who had to be taken care of.

Malnutrition was a serious problem among most of the children in the camps. Cholera

was the major killer in the camp. But it was controlled as the newcomers were inoculated at the border itself.

The young interns were happy that they were able to treat the unfortunate patients independently. It was quite challenging and academically profitable, Dr. Ravi Narayan said.

Before leaving for Neelganj, they had collected drugs from practitioners in the city, medical representatives, from a service organisation called the Caritas and the Catholic Hospital Association of India.

The dispensary they were in charge of in the camp was organised by the Caritas. Every day from eight in the morning till 6.30 p.m. they attended to as many as 250 patients.

"The refugees are very much like our villagers. They take medicines only if they feel unwell. When they feel better they just stop taking their medicines. After a few days they came again with a recurrence of previous symptoms. They expect instant cure," Dr. Ravi Narayan said.

There was cultural activity too in the camp. Some of the evacuees used to sing well. In fact as a token of their appreciation of the services rendered free by the young physicians, the refugee youths had organised an evening of singing and dancing.

Dr. Gouri said one thing that they noted was the will among the evacuees to survive.