



Halls Happenings

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Dear Friends,

As those of you in the northern hemisphere approach Christmas you will be getting deeper into winter now. I wonder how many people, thinking back to the very cold weather last year, are jokingly thinking "that global warming is not such a bad thing!" That is one of the problems with the global warming/ climate change debate - the terminology can sometimes seem misleading. I prefer the term climate change, as even though on average the world is warming, the natural world is such a delicate and dynamic system that, paradoxically, this general warming can cause extreme cold events, such as what northern Europe experienced last winter.

Another problem with the climate change debate is that it cannot be discussed using individual weather events but needs analysis of long term trends. Over the past few months CBSDP has been trying to look at long term trends by gathering anecdotal evidence from many of our working areas as part of a survey of how climate change might impact our work. Using a tool called seasonal calendar (a table with months along the top and issues down the side), we ask small groups of people in a village to mark which months certain issues occur now, and when they occurred many years ago, say when they were children. Issues include weather occurrences (e.g. rainy season, cold spells, very hot weather) and agricultural issues (e.g. sowing and harvesting of rice and other crops, when trees produce fruit). Results are showing there has been significant change in seasonal patterns over the past 20-30 years, and now all kinds of crops (from rice to vegetables to jute) are now planted 1-2 months different than before. But it is not even that simple - when filling out the table, there is always plenty of discussion on the variability of the seasons, where there can be drought one year and flooding the next. It seems there is much more seasonal variability now that there was before.

These results shocked me, as I realised that climate is not just something to fear in the future - it is happening NOW. I think of the individuals it is affecting - of Mr Sader, a farmer in Kanainagor, who said " *We used to be wealthy, now we survive hand to mouth*". I think of Mr Hossain, a poor farmer in Faridpur, who commented on the lack of rainfall which reduced his rice yield, saying " *It wasn't always like this. Ten years ago the seasons were regular and predictable and*



Preparing the seasonal calendar

farming was better". And I realise these two people are not isolated examples- they represent the majority of people here - people who live off the land and are struggling to come to terms with a changing climate and varying seasons.

All this makes it frustrating to see the global debate on climate change go nowhere, with discussion only around the small areas of doubt. I heard a scientist on radio recently who said we had to return to the facts we do know: that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere causes a warming effect; that the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is much higher than it was 50 years ago; that burning of fossil fuels release carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Therefore we know that human activity over the past 50 years has caused a warming of the atmosphere to some degree. It struck me that this alone should be enough to lead Christians to action. We are called to be stewards of God's creation, to look after it, and so we should try to avoid any detrimental impact where possible.

In 1 Corinthians 12: 26-27 Paul writes to the church: "If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it... All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it." We are all part of the same human family with people such as Mr Sader and Mr Hossain. As the required global action seems further away than ever, please let us pray, lobby elected representatives and act to reduce the impact on the earth from our daily actions, helping to prevent an increase in suffering.

'Tis the season....

This year, during November, Muslims celebrated Eid-ul-Azhar, during which animals are sacrificed. We've written before of our amazement at watching all the cattle being brought into Dhaka, temporary cattle markets being set up on main streets and watching 2 or 3 men being pulled down a main road by recently purchased cows or men walking through the roads near our flat surrounded by goats they are selling. At this time we enjoy Dhaka at its quietest as many people return to their village homes to celebrate with their extended families.



Cattle markets on the street

This reminds us in a way of the journeys made that first Christmas when everyone returned to their own home towns. For us this year, as the cattle arrive in Dhaka, Christmas suddenly became so much more vivid, not just a story. Just before Eid in the garage of our building, car parking spaces are used to temporarily house the cattle, and for one or two days we certainly 'hear the cattle lowing' and be reminded of a stable long ago. **What a gift we have to celebrate - Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy.... Today ..a Saviour born has been born to you! (Luke 2:10-11) We wish you all a joyful Christmas as you celebrate this good news!**

As the year comes to an end, it provides us an opportunity for reflection. Thinking back over the last year, we have been to a number of baptisms, birthdays, weddings and funerals. Sharing in these significant life events has allowed us to further develop our relationships with neighbours, friends and colleagues and help us feel more a part of the community here. Just last month we celebrated with Rev Ashish over the birth of his son. A few months earlier he had told us of his excitement and anticipation of a new baby. Last month, his pregnant wife didn't feel well and so travelled by motorbike to the nearest mission hospital. Later that same night she gave birth, two months

prematurely. Mother and son were transferred to a hospital in a large town 2 hours away and a couple of days later to the children's hospital in Dhaka. Sarah visited and was amazed at the tiny (weighing only 2 lbs), perfectly formed little boy who already in his first week of life had been through so much. We rejoice with the family to the answers to prayer for this little boy and his mother. Please continue to pray for Rev Ashish and family.

In September we attended the baptism service of Arnob. His parents work with us, and their older boy used to play with Rebecca when she used to come with us to work. So we were delighted to attend the baptism service, and to rejoice with them before God for the new life.



We've been to a few weddings this year too - that of work colleagues and a neighbour. Weddings are big events here with many guests being invited, more for the meal than the actual service. One highlight for us was also attending the 'Guy Holud' of our colleague. As you can see it was quite a yellow/orange affair - bright in colour and lots of good fun! It took place in the home of the brides relatives and allows the brides family to help in the "preparation of the bride" before her wedding day. A yellow turmeric paste is put on the skin as a symbol of purity but also as it gives the skin a lovely glow. (It did take quite awhile for us to get the yellow off our skin!) There is the offering of sweets and fruit to the Bride-to-be which Reuben loved taking part in, mostly for what he got out of it I think!

Last month we also attended a colourful wedding reception of one of our neighbours which was a great opportunity to meet with others living in our building. Earlier in the year we also had the chance to meet with them all, sadly for the funeral of our Landlord. The downstairs garage was covered in white fabric and mats to seat all who had come for the funeral. An area was partitioned for women, allowing them to sit separately from the men. Since then it has been easier to visit with our Landlord's wife and feel we are slowly developing a friendship with her and others in the building. Please do continue to pray for this.

Education

The end of the year in Bangladesh schools is similar to the end of term rush in the UK - class parties, prize-giving days and productions! Here it signals the end of the school year with children beginning their new academic year in January. This month pupils will have their Eid holidays, followed by the end of year exams and then the end of year events. One of the highlights for me is the presentation of results and small gifts for the pupils of St Thomas Community School just before Christmas.



This is one of the schools Sarah visits each week, based on the compound in the veranda of the church in Old Dhaka. It caters for children from the surrounding slum areas and provides them with an education, uniform and a daily 'tiffin' (snack). The parents often comment that one of the things they really value is the care their children receive in the school and the safe open space the children have to play in, very unusual in the overcrowded city of Dhaka!

We came across a lovely Bangladesh hymn recently. We'd like to share the words from one verse as a prayer for all of us for the year ahead.

*Come, Holy Spirit, come,
Come into our hearts,
Be our helper in all we do.
Give us the mind of Christ,
Give us the strength of Christ,
Give us the love of Christ,*

Finally, as this is our last letter before Christmas, we wish you a very Happy and peaceful Christmas as we celebrate our Saviour's birth.

Join us in thanking God for....

- His constant care and provision for us, which we so often take for granted.
- The joy of human life - for Arnob and Rev Ashish's son.
- CBSDP's partnership with Tearfund in the Climate Change work.
- Opportunities for celebrations.
- The pupils and staff of St Thomas Community School.

Please pray for....

- The people struggling to cope with the effects of climate change.
- Please continue to pray for good communication and effective working relationships and practices within our work.
- A quick resolution to the backlog of paperwork preventing the government approving our development projects and releasing funds for the work.
- The recruitment of staff for a new church school opening in Dhaka in January.
- Rev Ashish and his family.
- That our friendships with our neighbours will continue to develop.

With love from the five of us.....

David, Sarah, Rebecca, Reuben & Matthew