

PARTNER PLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



The **Methodist Church** 

Gillian Rose - Bangladesh September 2010

Bollobhpur Hospital
PO Kedargonj
District Meherpur
Bangladesh

Gillian Rose is an
Ecumenical Partner of the
Church of Bangladesh Group

Dear friends in Scotland

Sunday August 15th, and three months since I singed off my last letter to you in May.

The weather has continued to be hot and humid, and the thermometer has not dropped below 90°f in my room. This is the rainy season, the two months when Bangladesh almost disappeared under the flooding caused by the torrential monsoon rains, and the temperature cooled accordingly. But although we get news of rain from other parts of the country, Meherpur is suffering from a drought like situation, and for three days, the whole village community has taken to the streets and lanes of the village, singing and praying and pleading with God for some seasonable rain.



For this is the main rice-planting season of the calendar, when by rights the fields go under water and are nice and muddy to receive the paddy (rice) seedlings. Rice is grown in water, the plants needing 3 to 4 inches of water for fruitful cropping. In the winter season this is achieved by irrigation of the fields from shallow wells, a very expensive business, which forces up the price of the harvested rice. And not only is it expensive for the fuel used in the irrigation pumps, but the amount of water pumped up for crop survival is depleting the water source, and the level of water is falling year by year, a forbidding omen for the future. It is said that to produce 1kg of rice, a total of 3000 litres of water is used in the irrigation process, a mind boggling figure!

And another offset is that all the tube wells in the households of the area dry up, and people can no longer obtain water for daily use. And this problem we find especially in the hospital and the student nurses hostel, where obviously a lot of water is used every day, a problem I mentioned in my last letter.

Well into the rainy season as we are, there should no longer be water problems, but only one of our tube wells has started to produce water again, and we are still heavily reliant on our two new ring wells, the Dorothy well and the St Ninian's well, which give arsenic-free drinking and cooking water for our patients and our girls. And how grateful we are to God and to you all for these blessings.

But to recap.....

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June 2010 rushed by in a flurry of examinations. The senior group sat their hospital final examinations at the beginning of the month, closely followed by their immediate juniors sitting their half year midwifery examinations. This is a good group and all passed their examinations well, and have now commenced the 3rd year of training, and are proud of their new red striped caps. This group includes Julia, Rina, Ripa and Shulekha who are being sponsored by Linktown Church, Kirkcaldy, and Tara, who is one of the group being sponsored by St Paul's, Chippenham. We are grateful to you all.

The senior group also did well in their hospital final, and went on to complete their external final examinations at the end of the month, and now await the results. The government doctor who came to conduct the viva examination was pleased with them too, as they had all prepared for the examination well, even commenting "excellent" at the end of my weakest student Prianka's turn!!

In contrast the 1st year group who sat their end of the year examinations hoping to obtain their orange striped 2nd year cap, are a weak (or lazy group!) and several will need to resit.

The month ended with "all change" in the village clinics, the senior girls, who will be leaving at the end of the month, being replaced by their immediate junior. And on Friday June 25th, at the crack of dawn, Babu and I pack eight excited girls into a hired microcar, for the long eight hour drive to Haluaghat and on to the Baptist Mission hospital at Joyranikura, where they will spend three months of the last six months of their training getting operational theatre and surgical nursing training and experience. We are gratefully to Dr Tapoch and Dr Lucy who run the hospital there for accepting them and training them. We decided two months was inefficient time and so now the groups will be divided into two, and will stay for three months. I was humbled and awed to see the complete selfless dedication of Drs Lucy and Tapoch, and their determination that this small village hospital should continue its service to the poor and needy. Please keep them in your prayers, and that a similar dedicated doctor may become available for Bollobhpur Hospital. At present we are still without a doctor and run with the help of visiting government hospital doctors.

June 26th and having spent the night at St Andrew's Mission, Haluaghat, we are again up at dawn in the pouring rain, with the six girls who have completed their training, for the return drive to Bollobhpur. It is an interesting drive through wooded areas carpeted with pineapples! Our driver stopped the car to ask the price, and although we were told they were not for sale in this way, one pineapple was quickly sliced and passed through the window, and we all enjoyed the juicy fruit as we drove on.

The drive includes the new 4½ kilometre bridge spanning the Jumana river in central Bangladesh, and we had the privilege of seeing a train pass by on the opposite side of the bridge as we crossed. Amazing. And further on, the Lalon Shaha Bridge, another beautiful new bridge, a road bridge spanning the river alongside the Harding rail bridge, a feat of British India. So journeys are no longer interrupted by frequent ferry crossings as before "in the old days". I for one loved the ferry crossings!!

We arrive back to find that the rain has not reached the Meherpur area yet! We had a good driver and we are grateful for their help in ferrying our girls in training around.

Sunday June 27th 2010 and another crack of the dawn start. This time to Khulna for the clinic change there, and to bring oxygen and medical supplies from the markets there.

Kolpana keeps as well as she can with her increasing disability, and still manages her little

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laboratory with the help of the two 1st year nurses who are there to assist her at home and at work.

We go to Khulna in our own hospital car with driver Sunil. The car is old and expensive to run now, and runs on expensive octane or petrol which is the reason for using a hired vehicle for longer distances.

Tuesday June 29th brings our weekly antenatal and general clinic at our Karpasdanga village centre, 10 miles or so from Bollobhpur. This is a busy well used clinic, and we see over 100 general patients and the same number of expectant mothers. Michael brings three of his students to provide laboratory tests alongside, and Kilon registers a record medicine sale.

Likewise we run four other village clinics with laboratory services which are being increasingly taken up by village people who can not afford the prices of the new sophisticated diagnostic centres and private clinics that are springing up in all the towns and large villages. This seems to be a service that we can expand to meet a growing need.

We return at 5pm, in time for the Medicine and Community Health test for the girls who will be leaving tomorrow. This is to see how much they have managed to learn in the weekly "Medicine test" that they do every Sunday of their training and from the monthly community health meetings, that they attend. And it is good to see that they have gained a lot of knowledge which will help them in the new work they will be going to.

Wednesday June 30th and another busy clinic at Anandabash, a large sprawling village near the border with India. This clinic services three large border area villages and people also come from other more distant places, and especially for the laboratory services that Michael and his students provide.

Diabetics is becoming a common problem in the villages of Bangladesh, and is an expensive problem for them. But we bring routine blood tests and medicines almost to their doorsteps and many who have dropped out of treatment because of the difficulty of access, now register with us and recommence their treatment.

Alongside, the expectant mothers for the area book in at the Antenatal clinic and come for their routine check up. They save up to take 250/- on their antenatal cards, and this entitles them to a free hospital bed and a free delivery. They only need to pay for any medicines required during their hospital stay (250 Taka = £2.50)

Back to the hospital in time to call the senior girls to the office, where they sign for their hard earned certificates and make their tearful farewells. Soon we will be hearing from them of the new work they are doing. I am grateful to God for the privilege of being able to train them. None will remain idle. All will quickly find employment stand of their own feet and will be able to help their families and younger brothers and sisters with their schooling. Please keep them in your prayers as they step out into their new lives.

July 1st brings a surprise parcel from our friends at St Ninian's, Kirkcaldy. With what excitement the staff gathered around as it was opened! And how thrilled we were to discover the very things we needed – small cardigans for our sick and new babies especially needed for the tiny premature ones. Please accept thanks from us all and from the babies. It seems strange in this intense heat to be thinking of cardigans, but the scene will suddenly change and everyone will appear in scarves and mufflers, and our babies eiderdowns will come out of storage.

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For the nearer to the equator that you get, times and seasons change quickly, like scene changes at a theatre. We get little dawn and negligible dusk. Night turns to day, and day to night almost at the click of a switch. And similarly the seasons change over from one to another like curtain changes in a play. One day you are trying to keep warm at night under a quilt, and a few days later you need no bedding at all, just a pillow and a mosquito net to keep the marauders at bay!!

Thursday July 8th and the girls hostel has been spring-cleaned and everyone moved up a room, to free the last room for the seventeen new girls who arrive with bedding and boxes to begin their training today. They include tribal girls from the Santal villages near Rajshahi, Garo tribal girls from Haluaghat and the surrounding area, girls from Khulna in the south, from the low lying villages of the Barisal area, and several from Bollobhpur and our local village. One girl who was scheduled to come in January next also arrived and was squeezed in, making 18 girls in all in the new group.

Please keep them in your prayers as they settle in and for Staff Nurse Hannah as she teaches them for the first three months preliminary training school

And on Friday June 9th, Monju and her small son Mark, arrived to spend some time with us. She has been at their family flat in Dhaka, unable to go out, hardly able to see to look after herself with husband out at work all day. Water supply in Dhaka is in crisis, also power and gas supplies, so life is not easy for the well and able. The bathroom is outside and shared by several families, and likewise the kitchen. This is a picture of the typical way of living for working families in Dhaka. And so Monju's husband has brought her back to us for a break, for him as well as for her, as he has to bear the brunt of all the household work, cooking, cleaning and washing etc. We are glad to have them back, but sorry that the little family has to split up again. The girls take it in turn to look after her and Mark, who is a lively toddler now, and nearing his second birthday.

July 8th – 10th 2010 brought an exciting event for us – a seminar on “climate change” for our Community Health staff, senior nursing staff and the senior students. This is a subject we have been wanting to explore for a long time, and we are grateful to Arun, our Community Health Supervisor for organising this for us.

We are all busy in the mornings with satellite clinics, community clinics, ward work and our-patients work. But by 3pm everyone had managed to come in from all our centres, for three hours of teaching and discussion. And we learnt a lot in the three days – thought provoking issues.

And June and July have been busy months on the hospital wards. An influx of small babies being sent for care from distant hospitals and clinics. Sadly many are much too small to be saved. Each room in the new wing has been full; several suicidal poisoning cases have spent long stays, finally recovering and going home well. How happy we all are when this happens. All the general beds have been full, with patients on the verandah's and extra beds pushed in.

Still without our own doctor, we now have a government doctor coming in daily to do an evening ward round which is good. And recently we had a day's visit from a Christian doctor from district Chittangong. He seemed interested, but has yet to apply for the post, but we hope on! Unfortunately his visit coincided with one of our days of no electricity and no fans working in the sweltering heat.

He told me he had never worked outside of a town, and he lives in an air-conditioned apartment!! But God moves in mysterious ways, so we hope on! Please pray with us for the person of God's choosing to become available.

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And the month ends with exciting news, for July 30th Friday brought our Sister Nilsury's longstanding dream true, and we were able to wave goodbye as she set off for Kumondini Hospital, Tangail, for the two year B.Sc (Nursing) course. Her husband, Michael, who runs the laboratory, has graciously allowed her to go for the residential course. Better qualified senior nursing staff will enable us to get government approval for our nursing school. Thank God with us that we have been able to give her this opportunity and remember her as she studies.

In the meantime Staff Nurse Hannah has returned from her 3 month Physiotherapy training, and is putting her knowledge to good use and is passing on her expertise to community staff and students.

These trainings are obviously a big expense and we are grateful to you all for gifts that enable us to advance, and for your prayers that make all things possible. I am hopeful too that a new friend for SK Foundation, Netherlands, is arranging two new incubators for us, which will be wonderful.

But time and space allow no more, so I must bring this to a close. The Muslim month of fasting – Ramadan – has commenced, and Tom, my dog, is howling at the new moon! Mini has three delightful new kittens, adding more joy to life.

God is good and gracious, and may his blessing be upon you all.

Silvia



the new girls