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An ecumenical appointment with:



The **Methodist Church** 

Gillian Rose - Bangladesh September 2018

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 12th 2018 and, as usual, well overdue with a letter to you all. Weeks and days have flown by since I signed off my last letter on April 22nd. The church is well into the “green season”, and my lectionary tells me it is already the 11th Sunday after Trinity, and advent on the horizon.

Bangladesh is also in the green season with plenty of rain, flooding in places and the countryside green with the many shades of green that only nature is able to provide. Our Wednesday clinic at Anandabash is a special joy, the tiny clinic bordering on acres of acres of newly planted rice, green with the beautiful green that only growing paddy (rice) plants can provide.



Dr Khisa, the Buddhist doctor, who was with us for two years previously, taught patients to sit and gaze quietly at the green things surrounding us. And it certainly does make one feel rested and calm.

And it is the “Golden Fibre” season in the country too, that is the jute plants which have grown as high as six feet and more, are being cut down, bound into bundles, the leaves stripped off for the goats to eat and then immersed in water to rot, the farmers chest deep in murky water as they work.

A week or so later, when the stalks are soft and rotten, the plants are lifted out to the side of the roads and the fibre (jute) stripped off, washed and then dried in the air. The inside stalk is dried in the sun too and makes fuel for the household stoves all year round, nothing is wasted.

The country is in its usual political turmoil with a general election on the horizon, the horrors following the last one still vivid in people’s memories.

Several students have been killed in road accidents and schools and colleges have been closed, as students parade the streets asking the government to ensure road safety for everyone. And there is always another group waiting and anxious to attack any peaceful procession, creating anarchy and unnecessary injury and bringing the police and army out in force.

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The mango season is over, but pineapples are being harvested in the north of the country and the newspaper shows farmers, their bicycles hardly visible for the pineapples they are bringing to the central local markets for shipment to Dhaka and other centres.

There is a huge crackdown on drugs going on the country for the last two months but it does not seem to have got very far and the actual central dealers – “Godfathers” – have not yet been located. Drugs are ruining the youth of the country. Numbers of young people, mainly educated ones too, being far too great for the numbers of jobs or opportunities available. They spend their days in idleness, lounging around and they are the ones, girls as well as boys, who get tempted into drugs.

But to return to Bollobhpur.

May brought committee meetings at our out-station village clinics. Each clinic has the local committee chaired by the parish priest and we meet twice a year to share ideas and receive a report on the work done. There is great competition between the clinics, which is good, trying to be finest in patient numbers, sale of medicines, income from laboratory tests and numbers of deliveries done. And May 19th brought our monthly community health meeting, when all the field workers and representatives from the clinics come together to give their monthly reports, and to share and learn something new together.

Wednesday May 23rd brought three beautiful blooms on my night queen cactus plant, bringing everyone out of their beds at midnight to gasp once again at the amazing beauty – huge and beautiful blooms appearing from the side of the very interesting looking leaves of this strange plant. And for some it is a first viewing and patients and their attendants come along too as the news spreads.

Saturday 26th May brings our monthly staff committee meeting when the senior staff meet together to share ideas and sort out problems over a cup of tea. Our Doctor Borsha is very keen that we keep this up.



June brought examinations for most groups as we have a new intake every six months and so there are final examinations and year final examinations twice a year. I myself started this twice a year intake schedule many years ago when Bishop Mondol urged me to give more girls a chance of training and the system has worked well.

Our Doctor Borsha also took a few days off to sit the final examinations at the end of her ultrasonography training and thanks be to God she is doing well and now does routine ultrasonography scanning especially for our mothers-to-be attending the antenatal clinics. We are also set up to start doing our own caesarean operations on women needing them, but there are many hurdles. The government is trying to root out clinics providing substandard services without properly qualified staff and technicians or residential medical staff. Magistrates are checking clinics and diagnostic centres and slapping huge fines on substandard services, or wherever they find a weak point, and as we have nothing behind us, and are even wondering whether we will be able to pay staff salaries and bonus in December, we have to be very cautious!!

We are also finding it difficult to renew our hospital licence this year, the government having added extra requirements such as environmental licence, narcotic licence, things which are requiring a lot of extra expense and with every officer's hands open waiting for bribe money, yes, even the present civil surgeon does not renew licences without taking a bribe, so poor Dibakon in the office

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is struggling with a mound of new forms and papers to be filled in and extra requirements such as area maps and engineer drawings of all the building to be collected. I thank God that the hospital management committee extended his contract, at my request, else there would have been nobody to manage all this administrative work.

Pray God with us that we eventually get our licence renewed without becoming bankrupt in the effort!!



But to return to the classroom; the senior group sat their hospital final examinations and all passed well. And on Tuesday 21st and 22nd they sat their external examinations and Dr Alok from the government hospital at Meherpur came to conduct the viva examination and was pleased with them all.

Saturday June 30th and the senior group, who sat their final examinations 6 months ago, gather in the office to collect their hard earned certificates and say goodbye. Times have changed, as Dibakor noticed. There used to be many tears shed when it became time to say goodbye. Tears are now a thing of the past, some even begin ready to argue when arrears in monthly training fees were collected!!!! I put it all down to the “mobile phone age” which has changed everything. It would have been better if the thing had never been invented!!

July 1st and spring cleaning in the girls hostel, as the rooms are cleaned and each get moved up a room to prepare for the new group due to arrive this month, and on Monday 16th July they are arriving with boxes and bedding, eager to begin their training with us.



three sets of twins.

The majority of the group are Santal Tribal girls from the north of the country, but there are also three girls from the Oraw Tribal group, who as yet have little access to further training. The Santal girls are mainly already Christians but the Oraw girls are of Hindu background and have not yet had the opportunity to hear the Christian message. Pray God that they hear and believe during their three year training with us. There are now 4 girls in training and two Oraw boys doing the laboratory training. And on the wards the incubators are full of tiny occupants, most incubators doubling up to provide care for two babies, and there are

Sunday July 22nd and I managed a day in Khulna after many months. This was especially to fetch two sacks of paraffin and stearic for our candle-making group, necessary replacements and chemicals for the laboratory, and equipment and supplies for the wards. This meant a visit to old friends at the “Medicine Supplies” shop which was an added pleasure. And finally to fetch the laboratory equipment from the Khulna clinic which has finally closed down after we pulled our girls and laboratory boys out and brought Kalpona back to Bollobhpur.

Kalpona keeps well in new now almost immobile state, and has two 1st year nurses care for her on 2 weekly rotation. She has a small TV in her room where many girls gather after duty in the evenings to watch the serials which give her pleasure. Her father died recently and we hired a micro and took her to her village home for the 40 day prayer meeting where her elderly mother and a brother now live alone. Her other two brothers live and work in the capital of Dhaka.

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August 2018 has rushed by with routine clinics ward work, patients to be admitted and cared for, new tiny arrivals hoping for a warm space in an incubator, new arrivals for terminal care in the Geriatric unit, fondly known as "G Ward".

August 4th – 6th brought the annual audit, late this year, and from a new firm of auditors who have never been to us before. The team comprised a senior student in his last year and a new 1st year student. They not only efficiently managed the audit, but thoroughly enjoyed their visit too, never having done their work in our sort of surroundings with everyone going out of their way to organise their meals and their comfort.

And, amazingly, my night queen cactus suddenly delighted us with five beautiful blooms on the second night of their stay, and I dragged them and Subir, our accountant, out of their rooms at midnight to enjoy the beautiful bloom with us. They were thrilled and amazed and took photographs to share with their families and office colleagues on return.

We just hope and pray that we will get a good audit report to share with everyone. Here we are all honest and try hard to keep everything in order but mistakes can happen. Staff Nurse Shilpi, who has the charge of the medicine store room, was pleased to receive a clean sheet!! Also out clinic staff at Ratanpur and Karpasdanga village clinics the same.



Wednesday August 22nd brought the annual "Korbani Eid" for the Muslim community when thousands of animals are killed and the meat eaten in memory of Abrahams sacrifice of Isaac on a mountain in the land of Morich all those thousands of years ago. But they deny that the sacrifice was of Isaac (i.e. to be of Isaac) the Muslim people celebrate Ishmail. People pay an amazing price for a sacrificial animal which has been prepared at great cost by the owner. The largest bull on show this year was 6½ feet in height and weighed 2080kg. But who, if anyone, and for what price, purchased "Raja Babo".

On the home front, as I come to a close, a pair of tiny sunbirds arrived at the beginning of the nesting season, about three months ago, stripped all the cobwebs off the verandah and build a tiny hanging nest on one of the lines where Mary hangs her washing; just adjacent to where I am sitting writing now and where I spend my quiet time in the early mornings. Indeed it was in the early morning time that I watched the amazing nest building.

Two eggs were hatched out and our laboratory student boys watched their progress, as, more amazingly, the nest was built at a busy place where they boys come for their meals and the domestic staff gather for their morning tea break. One chick fell from the nest and died, the other flew, the nest disintegrated, fell down and was no more.

But even more surprisingly, the pair suddenly reappeared a week ago, and very speedily and effectively brought building material from outside and have built another nest hanging from the very same place. So whether sun birds raise families twice a year remains to be seen.

Sunday 26th August 2018 and I am forgetting that today is my birthday and again I stand amazed that I should have the privilege to be here in such a beautiful place and enjoying a wonderful life of service at my age. Please pray for us all and for our little hospital and girls and boys in training.

Our Doctor Borsha is on a week's holiday and visiting India with her husband. She is due to return today. We thank God for her every day.

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It is a beautiful windy day as I come to a close with short spells of rain to keep everything clean washed. Three dogs are keeping guard as I write, and my cat and her kittens are on the table eating puffed rice.

May God bless you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John" or "Johnnae".