

Newsletter

# Kailakuri Health Care Project

(Kailakuri & the Institute of Integrated Rural Development, IIRD)



September 2010

**Happy Eid greetings. Eid Mowbarak to all our Muslim friends.**

We believe that the work of health care for the poor by the poor being done at Kailakuri is essential. Yesterday on my way back from a visit to India (unscheduled) we called in at our Nandina weekly diabetes clinic about eight miles from Kailakuri. I could not believe there were so many people there.

Antaz (whom we taught to read and write many years ago) was giving a diabetes class to an enormous room of about 60 people. Saleha (spitting image of India's Sonya Ghandi) taking weights and blood pressures. Then I found Jihiskel flat out writing up patients' data in the registration khata. At another table were our two paramedics Soronjon and Muazem, checking and advising patients and giving treatment (about half the patients are on insulin). Ujjol was in charge of the insulin. All these staff have less than school certificate qualification. Thank-you so much all of you who by your gifts make this work possible.

It is a lot of work. Over the past nine months my role has been dominated by correspondence, report writing, following finances and finding funds. Quite likely you have had the experience of having to feed, clothe and educate a large family; funds are short and you just don't know what to do. That is what Kailakuri had become like. Doug died. Libby died. The international economic situation is bad. You worry and you can't sleep. You start to become irritable and depressed. People say "Just trust God" which is very correct, but the psyche is still at work. Finally I knew I just had to get away and retreat. Our senior staff, Pijon, Roton, Sujit, Onen and Bijoy were fantastic. It was arranged, I go for a month retreat to the Digolokona, subcentre of Moriomnogor Mission, right beside the Indian border, beautifully quiet with beautiful scenery.

It took some getting there – Thursday: six hours to Moriomnogor, Friday: 1.5 hours motorcycle trip to Digolokona, a tiny village of about 15 homes, mostly Garo (Mandi), a few Bengali Muslim, rice fields, streams and forested hills.

Every day I went for walks up the hills, along the streams or to the nearby picnic centre where there is an extremely tall viewing tower from which you can see miles and miles over hills and forest. The border is only a couple of miles away, but not demarcated.

One day I decided to visit the village of Hatichara Para about a mile away over a very steep hill, Two Garo ( local indigenous minority) men took me to the home of the village leader, Bornixon. All I had with me was a shoulder bag containing a mosquito coil, a gas-lighter and some hand-written reflection notes. (I had planned to sit on the top of the hill on my way back and do some silent reflection.) I stopped at Bornixon's home longer than planned. There was so much to talk about as he has lots of relatives in our area. They gave me tea. Then I said, "I've just got to go because night will fall." It was six o'clock. He said, "I will send my son with you." I said "Don't put him to the trouble. The track is absolutely clear." And so he gave me a stout pointed staff. I set out.

The problem was that on reaching the rice field below his home I turned left instead of right! The path is going in the right direction, south-west and I thought would take me to Digolokona. But it didn't. I walked very fast because it was getting dark. Far in the distance I could hear a generator. That was encouraging. Then I saw two extremely bright lights. Hooray! This will be the Bonoful Picnic Centre. Standing on a bit of a mound, I could see buildings on the crest of the hill where the lights and generator were. That's odd. The Bonoful Picnic Centre doesn't have buildings on the top of the hill. Well it must be a camp of the Bangladesh Defence Rifles (border security force). I've got to reach that camp!

It was too dark to see anything. God was with me. I came to a road!! This will take me straight to the generator, the lights and the BDR camp. They were very powerful lights. Then another surprise. Entering the camp at the place you would expect to find a little mosque was a Hindu temple!! Then I found a couple of soldiers but they couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand them! Finally I asked, "Is this India or Bangladesh?" "It's India!" So I had arrived at a patrol camp of the Indian Border Security Force. They were very kind. There was a Ghurka soldier who could speak Bangali and another with English but for all the rest it was Hindi. I managed to explain my problem. I had been walking for two hours. They gave me a bed and fed me. They telephoned their base camp and in due course two vehicles arrived and took me there.

"What was a foreigner doing wandering through the forest at night wearing only a shirt and a lungi." Probably I had other people with me. Maybe I belong to a militant group with its training camp in Bangladesh. I had no means of identification. They gave me a bed and a mosquito net. "You will have to get up when our senior intelligence officer arrives."

All the intelligence people were multi-lingual. For proof of my identity they could phone Yakub Chairman at Modhupur, I said, or else get the Bishop of Tura to phone the Bishop of Mymensingh. I gave them our Kailakuri number which fortunately I had memorized. He wanted to see what I had in my bag. There were a bit intrigued by my reflection notes. "You have written that you must follow the path of treasure. What is that treasure?" I said, "Jesus said the Kingdom of God is like a hidden treasure!" He understood. We finished at 1:30am but I didn't get much sleep. ?

Next day there was a lot of waiting around. I said I wanted a bible and to see a priest, and if there was going to be a delay to speak with the New Zealand High Commission in Delhi. They quickly produced a Garo Bible which was wonderful. They were just so friendly and kind. They wanted to get me back to Bangladesh as fast as they could but couldn't move until agreement came that the BDR would accept me, and they had to get my passport up from Dhaka.

"We will have to take you to the police station because we are not allowed to hold anyone for more than 24 hours." We drove to the thana town of Mohendrogonj in West Garo Hills. We went first to the government hospital, pretty similar to the Bangladesh equivalents. I was seen by a young Garo doctor who gave me anti-malarials and antihistamine syrup for a skin itch. The police station was like being back at home. The top officers were Bengali (Muslim and Hindu) and most of the rest Garo Christian, mainly Baptist. I was given tea and Bengali sweets.

I spent the night on the floor of the police commander's office – the only problem was they beat off the hours on a very loud gong just a few yards from my head. Someone brought a mobile phone with a Bangladesh sheem card and I was able to phone Kailakuri and speak with Antaz and Bijoy.

We were to be advised at three o'clock as to whether the BDR would accept me. The message came at four. We drove to the check post. It was a sad farewell. Then we walked 200 yards to the BDR commander. I embraced him. I felt like singing the national anthem. "Do you know him?"

asked the BSF. "Never seen him before, but he is Bangladeshi!" Then it was Pijon (come from Kailakuri)! They checked me against my passport brought by Tara Mia from Dhaka. Then we joined Sujit and Tara and went by motorcycle to Kamalpara Police Station. Again lots of questions and a written report. Jamalpur Intelligence and later on Tangail phoned.

At the end of my report I wrote, I have nothing but praise for the way I was treated by the Border Security Force and the Indian police. I feel honoured to think that my misadventure has allowed me to be an ambassador of goodwill between Bangladesh and India. They made contact with Kailakuri and notification went to Fr Homerich, the Bishop, Yakuh Chairman, Norte Dame College, the American and Australian Embassies and two cabinet ministers, then to their counterparts in Calcutta and the New Zealand High Commission in Delhi. Thanks to God all is now well and a very sincere thanks to all who labored behind the scenes to enable my speedy return.

*The above has been condensed. The full account written by Eric can be found on:*  
<https://sites.google.com/site/kailakurihealth/latest-news>

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## **THANKYOU**

A very warm thanks to those who over the past month have given generous donations to help our financial situation, most especially to Mr Gareth Morgan (Morgan Family Charitable Foundation - New Zealand) . Also Mr Bill Rose of Asia Connection (USA).

A very special message of thanks to the ten Belgian students of Praubash Baungau who fundraised and then gave up their holidays to come to Kailakuri and build us a beautiful new maternity block! Thank-you Aushim, Adam, Gil, Hannes, Camille, Loic, Shaupan, Stephanie, Virginia, Nils. We really appreciate your kindness and concern for the poor.

To take full advantage of our wonderful new facility, we could now do with a volunteer midwife to further train and upgrade our paramedic staff.

## **LATEST NEWS**

Next Monday Dr Mariko will return from Japan and with her on the same flight from Bangkok, Christine Steiner from Hamilton, New Zealand. Mariko is our lady doctor from Japan and will now look after our In-patients Department. Christine is a prospective Manager and is coming for two weeks to decide if Kailakuri is the place for her to serve. If it is, she will take responsibility for overseas correspondence, fund seeking, financial supervision and administration training. Then I will not need to take escape trips to the border anymore and there will be no more Indian safaris! Please continue to pray for us all.

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We also send a special message of concern and empathy to all our friends in the city of Christchurch, New Zealand, recently struck by a 7.1 Richter earthquake. We hope your buildings will quickly be repaired and you will quickly be able to return to normal life again.

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**WEBSITE:** <http://sites.google.com/site/kailakurihealth/>

**POST SCRIPT** *As we mail this out, news has come through that Edric has been admitted to hospital with serious malaria. Please pray for his speedy and full recovery.*