

West Bengal Hams Reunite Families

Visalakshi had been missing for 7 years. Her family gave up hope and thought she had died. They performed funeral rites for her. Then on 26 May 2017, the efforts of the hams of the West Bengal Radio Club (WBRC) paid off. Visalakshi was reunited with her family!

Residents in Kolkata found her dazed and wandering in the streets. They took her to Barasat District Hospital. The hospital staff and doctors did not understand her language (Tamil). Getting an interpreter didn't help. She had lost her memory. For the next 7-years she languished in the hospital as a psychiatric patient. Gradually, bits and pieces of her memory returned. But there was not enough to help the police locate her relatives.

In the past, the WBRC hams had located families of 7 other patients in various local hospitals. Their efforts are ongoing. One of the Barasat Hospital doctors heard of the WBRC successes. He contacted Raju (VU2JFA) for help. The WBRC hams got a recording of Visalakshi talking about herself. Even after translation, there wasn't much to go on.

Raju reported "Our club is very poor. Most of the members are young students. They cannot afford radios. But many members have cell phones. So, we make use of EchoLink on cell phones and the KM6EON-R EchoLink repeater through our affiliation with the Wanderers Amateur Radio Club."

The WBRC hams communicate between their teams at the different local hospitals. They a mix of radios, phone calls, and EchoLink via cell phone. With EchoLink, more members can actively participate using EchoLink and develop their communication skills.

In the case of Visalakshi, the WBRC hams put out a call for help. They used ham Nets on

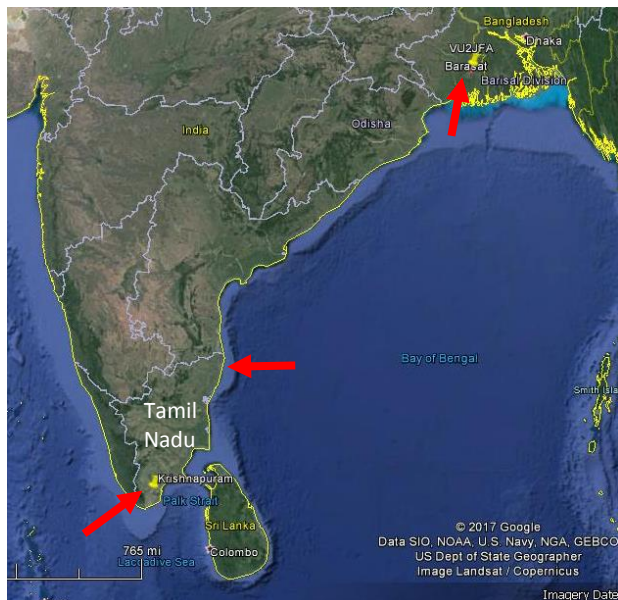


"Raju" VU2JFA (center) reuniting Visalakshi and Damodharan (her brother) in Barasat Hospital.

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radios and EchoLink in India to search for her family. They played the recording of Visalakshi talking about herself. They reported on her situation of being in the hospital for 7 years. They asked, “Does anyone know this woman or her family? Can anyone help us find her family?”

Several hams in Chennai responded and spread the word. The search spanned across Tamil Nadu. They got the information to a village administrative officer who found Damodharan, Visalakshi’s brother to helped to narrow down the search. He couldn’t believe the miracle brought about by ham radio! His sister was alive and would be coming home soon.



It’s hard to grasp the true magnitude of the WBRC effort. From a geographic perspective, India spans 3,287,263 sq. km. The population is about 1.3 billion people. To further complicate things, India has 22 official languages, 150 languages with sizable speaking populations, and a total of 1,652 recognized “mother tongues.”

The map on the left shows the relative positions (red arrows from top to bottom):

- West Bengal (Raju, WBRC, Basarat District Hospital, and Visalakshi)
- Chennai (hams assisting the WBRC)
- Krishnapuram (Visalakshi’ family)

The straight-line distance from West Bengal

to Krishnapuram is about 1,914 km (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the distance from Los Angeles to Hawaii).

A slogan often uttered in the WBRC is that “ham” stands for “Helping Always Mankind.” The words resonate with every WBRC member every day. This ham club pro-actively advocates for using ham radio to serve their community and to help those in need. 🌱

EchoLink Presentation at GERC Monthly Meeting

Joe (N6WZK) and Greg (KI6GIG) gave an introductory talk about EchoLink at the Glendora Emergency Response Communications (GERC) group’s June monthly meeting.



During the presentation, the GERC members were told of how the West Bengal Radio Club

Note: For more details of the meeting, see ["Footprints" 2017 Jun Vol 1 No 3](#)

(WBRC) made use of the KM6EON-R EchoLink node for training, practice, nets, and emergency communications (EmComm). GERC members were intrigued by the WBRC EchoLink activities. Many members shared the common notion among US hams that EchoLink cannot be used for EmComm. This belief is fueled by the assumption that in a disaster Internet will not be available. The Telinipara Ghat ferry pier disaster in West Bengal proved that EchoLink could get through when HF and VHF radios could not. This situation was complete the reverse of the old saw "When all else fails, ham radio gets through." For the WBRC, seems to have developed a corollary "...and when ham radio fails, go to plan B. For them, Plan B was EchoLink VOIP gets through!

Up until a few years ago, the weekly GERC net included an EchoLink option for check-ins. But GERC founder Mark N7YLA moved out of the Los Angeles area. He set up and ran the GERC simplex EchoLink node. Since then, no other member established an EchoLink simplex node. Unfortunately, the KM6EON-R is not well located to serve the GERC group. Perhaps after the presentation, a GERC member will set up an EchoLink Simplex Link node so hams can join the weekly GERC net by EchoLink and Simplex. 🌱

Note: For more details of the meeting, see "[Footprints](#)" 2017 Jun, Vol 1 No 3

Water Rescue Rope Series Available






International disaster experts estimate that the 21st century will see South and East Asia as suffering the most from natural disasters. The combination of high population density and high poverty create a deadly mix for calamity. Floods are often annual events that claim many lives. Many people in the region do not know

To swim. The recent West Bengal Telinipara Ghat disaster points this out. An old ferry crossing pier collapses. About 150 men, women, children and elderly are suddenly dumped into a fast flowing 0.7 km wide river. Fisherman and onlookers rush to help. But many are drowning victims. Some onlookers are so distraught and eager to help, jump into the water in a vain attempt to try to save others. Yet some of these hopeful rescuers do not know how to swim.

The West Bengal Radio Club has as long standing track record of helping their community in times of calamity. To support their efforts to education and empower people to help those in need, GECO created a 3-part series on making and using water rescue ropes. With this simple rescue tool, non-swimmers on land can learn how to save survivors in the water. The lessons are available free for individual and educational use.

Sticky Notes

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	Grassroots Emergency Communications Operations Water Rescue Rope: Part 1 Making the Kit © 2017, KIGIG. All rights reserved.
	Grassroots Emergency Communications Operations Water Rescue Rope: Part 2 The Team & Safety © 2017, KIGIG. All rights reserved.
	Grassroots Emergency Communications Operations Water Rescue Rope: Part 3 Learning to Throw © 2017, KIGIG. All rights reserved.

The lessons rely on a combination of using off the shelf materials and readily available local materials. For some items, (e.g. life vests) it is hard to find a low-cost / no-cost alternative. However, human ingenuity being what it is, we leave it to local people to do the best to plan their own rescue. Their actions may not be up to international

boating standards. We hope our lessons instill a basic understanding of the concepts. This can lead to local people making better choices relative to their circumstances.

We develop lessons that give students a chance to move knowledge from the classroom to the community. This is consistent with our belief that having a personal connection to learning is an effective way to educate people. Students can easily learn to make and use a water rescue rope. Say there are 100 students in the school. If only half of them are successful with these lessons, there will be 50 more possible volunteers to save people during the next flood.

A key advantage of these kinds of practical lessons is simple. Abstract classroom theory meets the real world. Making a water rescue rope takes the abstracts of math, physics, and fitness and makes them real. Math is used to measure the rope and judge distances. Physics is used to apply the necessary forces to achieve a desired trajectory for the rope to reach the survivor.

Young students get to see and feel the action of community service and helping Others. While many lament the poor behavior of youth, few seem to take the time to be a good example. When young people only see troubles and negativity around them, those are deemed as normal. Giving them more good examples brings more positive into their lives. They can be a part of making a positive difference in their community.

Help empower youth to become better citizens. Set a good example. Learn to make and use a water rescue rope. Then teach others to do the same. This will help better prepare your community for the annual flood season. What you do now can save a life tomorrow! 🌱



Note: The GECO lessons are available at <http://www.neighborhoodlink.com/GECO/pages> in the left column: look for the section “Plan Your Own Rescue”. If the link above does not work, copy and paste it in the URL section of your browser.