

Quaker South Asia Interest Group (QSAIG)
Newsletter #12 **September 2008**

Dear Friends

Please find attached a shorter than usual newsletter, reflecting the fact that few contributions have been received. It includes a report from Stuart Morton about the South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA) Report of the Core group meeting held in Sri Lanka in late May; a short description from Bachchu about the purpose of his trip to Bangladesh, a link to a web-site describing exciting developments in Bangladesh in the energy sector, a link to an article about the recent floods in Bihar, news of Jawed Ludin who has spoken twice to QSAIG about the situation in Afghanistan, a link to the Feb 2008 issue of *EarthQuaker*, the newsletter of the Living Witness Group, which includes a review of the Oxfam report on Climate Change which we commended to Friends in the last newsletter; and a report of the fundraising activities of Settle AM for the buildings of Shanti Kendra, the Peace and Development Centre in Gono Unnayan Prochesta in Bangladesh.

Our annual meeting will take place at Friends House in London on 18th October. I hope as many as possible will be able to attend. For a number of reasons, I will be unable to continue as convener unless someone else takes on full responsibility for the newsletter. If Friends are unwilling to do the work necessary to service QSAIG, then we must answer some difficult questions. Of these, the most pertinent is 'should we consider laying ourselves down'?

Hope to see you on 18th October. If you cannot come, but would consider editing one or both issues of the newsletter in 2009 or replace me as convener, please let us know.

In Friendship

Pat Saunders
2008-09-18

Next Meeting of QSAIG
Saturday October 18
10.30 - 4: 30
Room 3, Friends House, Euston Road, London

Agenda

Abu Siddique: Sidr-affected people: coming back to normal life
(Bachchu is currently visiting that part of the south of Bangladesh which was severely affected by Cyclone Sidr last November and will give us a report
(see details on page 2)

Stuart Morton: report on QPSW activities in South Asia

News of Friends

Please come prepared to tell us of recent activities in South Asia
- your own and your meeting's

Annual Business Meeting
including convener's report, treasurers report, election of officers (convener, newsletter editor, notetaker, treasurer); programme for 2009; AOB

**South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA)
Summary of meeting of Core Group
in Sri Lanka– 25 and 26 May 2008
by *Stuart Morton***

Peace & Community Action (PCA) had worked very hard, and in a great spirit of goodwill, to help the SAPA Core Group meeting be the success that it was. It took place in a hotel north of Colombo at a time when Sri Lanka is facing huge challenges, not least a 23 year-old civil war that shows no signs of solution, and a government that sees “War to gain peace” as the way forward.

The price of food globally was rising and in our discussions we learned of the immense difficulties being faced by poor people in all the countries of South Asia.

On Day 3 we had an exposure visit to Puttalam District where we met allies of PCA and communities that had benefitted from their work. On Day 4 we took part in an exposure of SAPA to Sri Lankan civil society (on which a separate report has been written).

On Day 4 we also had the opportunity to meet some participants who had come for the Peace Education workshop, conducted by PCA with financial assistance from the Commonwealth Foundation and QPSW. Discussions flowed at all stages and some key ideas for future work developed.

Key points related to future SAPA work:

1. Outreach to Pakistan: the idea that Rajagopal might make his first visit to Pakistan to meet South Asia Partnership-Pakistan (SAP-PK) to discuss SAPA matters and to develop a training event in Sindh Province with a SAP-PK link who attended the Peace Education workshop. The possibility of the next Core group meeting being in Pakistan will be realistically assessed.

2. A Peacebuilding Trainers’ network (including nonviolence and peace education trained people) to be built. This will be helped forward by the production of a Nonviolent Trainers’ Manual and will build on the previous SAPA workshops. The aim is to establish people with

nonviolent training potential in all of 960 Districts of the South Asia region.

3. SAPA media work has a foundation from which to build. Opportunities need to be found to strengthen the SAPA media groups in each country and to find ways of supporting one another and working together on particular ideas. Donors will need to be sought for the Nepal strategy to be developed. Realism is essential in this work.

4. The idea has emerged for a 2010 Bus Yatra that will carry a large group of young South Asian people across five countries in the region on one continuous journey. It could begin in Batticaloa (eastern Sri Lanka) and end in Lahore. It would focus the governments’ attention on the poverty agenda and build a climate towards South Asian friendship and freer movement of people.

5. The Book of 100 South Asian Nonviolent action stories to be pursued with all out trainees providing one story. This will be coordinated by the SAPA Secretariat.

6. Moving from a group of NGOs to a South Asia Peoples’ Movement: each Core group member to seriously assess how the nonviolence movement can be broadened and deepened in their countries. How can we move beyond the NGO groupings to tap into poor peoples’ social movements and interact with them? Ekta Parishad is a living example but we need to find other allies and activists who are looking for connections and ideas.

7. Freer movement of people: our work constantly faces the problem of moving people of goodwill across the country boundaries. We remain reactive on this issue, trying to ensure that our members can meet one another. Has the time come for SAPA actively to become involved in partnership with others who lobby for change? How would we do this?

8. SAPA is already connecting with a number of regional organisations, such as the South Asia Network for Social &

Agricultural development (SANSAD - Anil Singh) and Charter for Human Responsibilities (Sudha Reddy), and with organisations within countries that are already regionally networked, such as the Movement for Land & Agricultural Reform (MONLAR -Sanath Fernando) and Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka. How do we develop these regional possibilities so that their work and ours are able to support one another?

9. There is a great potential for a dynamic person to become the SAPA Secretariat Officer or Connector. The work will be interesting and offer great personal development. We need to work to find the right person to take SAPA forward under the guidance of the Core group and with the strong assistance of Rita Roy, who is working part time for the SAPA Secretariat.

10. What progress did the Sri Lanka meetings make? We continue to feel the benefit of thinking creatively together, sharing our experiences and working together as we did on the SAPA Sri Lanka day with civil society. Going to Sri Lanka for the first time as SAPA was an experience that opened our minds and hearts to Sri Lanka and its people. We demonstrated regional solidarity even though the politics and bureaucratic obstacles tried to prevent this togetherness. We have greatly benefitted from the caring attitude and hard work of PCA and its team, led by Thayaparan. Further small steps have been made – and meeting and interacting with the Peace Education trainees was a great gift to us all.

11. A new global potential has emerged for SAPA to be linked to a nonviolence movement. This possibility came through the presence in our meeting of Louis Campana and Christophe Gigri from Gandhi 2008 International, based in France. Louis and Christophe will be working to bring together a Global nonviolence alliance/network in which SAPA has agreed to be the organisation connecting South Asia into the initiative. We look forward to further developments particularly as Gandhi 2008 International

has become an Associate Member of SAPA.

Present:

Khondoker MD. Nurul Islam (Shaukat) – GUP Bangladesh;

Shobha Gautam – Institute for Human Rights & Communication, Nepal (IHRICON)

Kapil Dev Kafle – IHRICON Nepal

T. Thayaparan PCA Sri Lanka

Stuart Morton – QPSW U.K.

Rajagopal PV – Ekta Parishad India

Babulal Sharma – SAPA member, India

Louis Campana – Gandhi 2008 International, France

Christophe Grigri – Gandhi 2008 International, France

Liz Riley – PCA Sri Lanka

Nishantha Kumara – PCA Sri Lanka



Rajagopal and Shradha Kashyap (Ekta Parishad) with Abdul Khaliq (American Friend Service Committee- Afghanistan)

Cyclone Sidr

Dr. Abu Siddique (Bachchu) used to work for GUP and is now based at Reading University. He will speak to us on 18th October about his trip to Bangladesh, whose purposes he describes as follows:

“On 8 September 2008, I am planning to visit Bangladesh for 25 days to understand the effectiveness of transitional development for the people who were affected by the Sidre on 15 November 2007. According to my experience, in spite of huge mobilisation of relief and rehab-

ilitation, natural disaster-affected people seldom have complete opportunity to come back to their normal lives. The principal problem is that the affected people become 'forgotten developmental objects' as soon relief activities are ceased to hold as the providers have limited ideas about what types of help should be provided to help the people to return to their normal lives. Basing on this idea, I will be looking for the information that how developmental activities are pursued for the affected people's 'coming-back-to-normal-lives'. I plan to meet the affected people, the Government and NGO personnel who are working on the development for the Sidre-affected people.

Climate Change

Climate Change by Melanie Jarman, published 2007 by Pluto Press, from the series *Small Guides to Big Issues*, supported by Oxfam.

Go to the February issue of the newsletter of the Living Witness Project <http://www.livingwitness.org.uk/eQ/eQfeb08.pdf> which contains an excellent review of the above book. This group was founded as Quaker Green Concern in 1986. The newsletter also contains articles by some of those involved in the group's early years, including one by me.

For details about Oxfam's current campaigns on climate change, go to http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/climate_change/index.html . (pls)

Signs of Hope

See also the web-site of the Grameen Bank's programme for renewable energy in Bangladesh for very hopeful signs of activities which both enhance the well-being of the poorest households and contribute significantly to greenhouse gas mitigation. <http://www.gshakti.org/> (pls)

Shanti Kendra

Settle AM has been raising money for the building of a new peace library and the refurbishment of older buildings at the GUP Peace and Development Centre (Shanti Kendra). The original target was

£12,000 but with inflation and currency devaluation, the total cost has risen to nearer £20,000. We had raised £13,300 by early July and more has come in since. Also a Friends Meeting in Texas is raising funds after two of their number visited GUP, having discovered the Quaker connection via Google and the Settle Meeting website.

Nonetheless, more is needed. The appeal has been extended to the end of 2008. For further information and excellent photographs of work in progress (as at last July) see the links to the GUP pages on <http://www.settlequakers.org.uk/12.html> which at time of writing still records the end of September as the deadline, though it has in fact been extended. (pls)

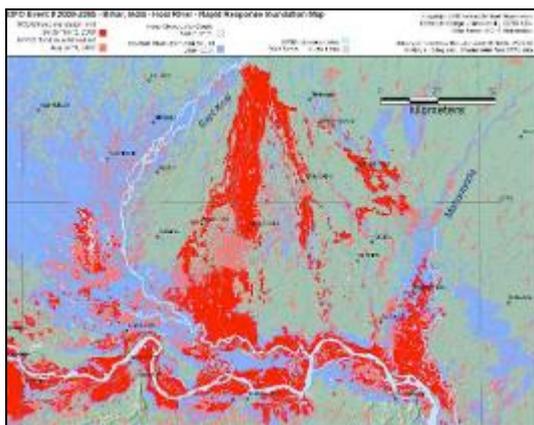


New Peace Library in September 2008.

Floods in Bihar

The recent floods in Bihar which have been responsible for 42 deaths and the displacement of a million people appear to have been caused by a dramatic change in the route of the Kosi River. This map from the Dartmouth Flood Observatory at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~floods/images/20083365BiharUpdate.jpg> shows the normal pattern of flooding in blue and the current year's flooding in red.

Some observers fear that this might lead to a permanent change in the course of this river. See, for example, an article by Dipak Gyawali, former Bihari Minister for Water Resources, who now heads the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation and is hydropower expert at <http://www.kantipuronline.com/interview.php?&nid=159078> .



He argues that it is unlikely that the river will return to its recent course once the monsoon is over because “the breach now is no longer a rupture in the side embankment that can be plugged once the water level goes down... What we are seeing is the main stem of the river itself flowing through [the breach], capturing [a] centuries-old channel and changing its course. To change it back is like damming the Koshi anew with a new barrage, in addition to making the river do a ‘high jump’ of at least four meters to flow along its recently abandoned bed. Believe me, it won't be too happy doing that now or in the coming years, and will find some way to continuously breach the embankment in other weak spots, and no engineer can guarantee that this won't happen, although they will have lots of fun playing with all kinds of expensive toys ‘to tame the Koshi’.”

It is early days to be confident that the changed course will become the established one, but my own work on the morphological changes in nearby Bengal leads me to think he may be right. The huge sediment loads and strong monsoon rains make it impossible to ‘tame’ rivers such as the Koshi and the Tista (which changed course dramatically in 1787) and the much larger rivers such as the Ganga and Brahmaputra (which itself changed course in stages over the 40 years following the changes in the Tista). (pls)

Jawed Ludin

Jawed spoke to two QSAIG meetings in 2001 and 2002, giving us valuable insights into the conflict in Afghanistan. He was later head of staff for President Karzai. We have just learned from a recent article which he has written in *The Guardian* about the situation in Pakistan that he is now the Afghan ambassador in Oslo. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/27/pakistan.usforeignpolicy> (pls)

Bangladesh 1971

An exhibition of photographs about Bangladesh's war of independence at the Side Gallery in Newcastle continues until Saturday 18th October. Details about the exhibition and accompanying events can be found on <http://www.amber-online.com/sections/side-gallery/pages/current-exhibition>

From the press release:

“They had risked all to hold on to this moment in history. The scarred negatives, hidden from the military, wrapped in old cloth, buried underground, also bore the wounds of war. These photographers were the only soldiers who preserved tangible memories of our war of liberation. A contested memory that politicians fight over, in their battle for supremacy. These faded images, war weary, bloodied in battle, provide the only record of what was witnessed. Nearly four decades later, they speak.”

Shahidul Alam, Drik Picture Library

Links to other web-sites

Those of you who have received paper copies and any others unable to get access to the web-sites described above are welcome to write to me and I will send printed copies in the post.

Address: Pat Saunders, Post Horn Books and Research services, Belle Hill, Giggleswick, North Yorkshire, BD24 0BA.