

QUAKER SOUTH ASIA INTEREST GROUP (QSAIG)
NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2014

Dear QSAIG Friends

I hope that some of you receiving this may manage to meet Liz and Martin Schweiger at the QSAIG stall on the evenings of Tuesday 5th and Wednesday 6th August at the Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath. It will be in the Big Top at the Groups' Fair. If any of you can help to person the stall please make contact with Liz or Martin at the Gathering.

Please note the advert at the bottom of the Newsletter (on page 10) of the next QSAIG meeting in Leeds on October 18th when we look forward to gaining insights from John McConnell about Myanmar and the “Scholarship for Street Kids” charity.

I hope that you find the articles from Bangladesh, India and Ekta Parishad's perspective on the new Indian Government of particular interest. News of Ekta Parishad being one of the Quaker Nobel Peace Prize laureates for 2014 is also included, as are initial plans for Ekta Parishad's leader, Rajagopal's visit to the UK in October and again in November.

Uplifting tributes to the life of our Indian Friend, Dilawar Chetsingh are also included.
In friendship

Stuart Morton

Convenor, QSAIG, Editor, QSAIG Newsletter stuartm46@gmail.com

Letter from Dhaka, 14th July 2014

Rob Gallagher

A few weeks ago in England I started writing a research proposal on urban Bangladesh, to take to potential funding agencies when I came here in early June. I looked up some basic statistics on urbanisation in Bangladesh, and although I was aware of the general picture, the details still gave me a shock. Dhaka is now the world's 11th largest mega-city, with about 17 million people (depending where you draw the boundary!) It is also the world's most crowded large city. Meanwhile, the rest of Bangladesh is urbanising rapidly – in 1978 when I first worked here there were nine cities over 100,000 population; now there are over 40. Rural villages are turning into small towns all over the country, and the pace is accelerating.

I am writing this from Rayerbazar in Dhaka, a neighbourhood which is like a newer version of Old Dhaka. The new 10-storey building I am staying in is just one of dozens of new high-rise buildings in the area, as elsewhere across Dhaka. The neighbourhood is literally teeming, yet somehow it works!

A few days ago I visited the university department where I first worked as a VSO volunteer. An old colleague introduced me to his fellow teachers, who all seemed about the age of my daughters! He asked me, in front of his colleagues, what struck me most about Bangladesh now compared with when I first arrived. That was a tough question to answer on the spot. I said firstly, people's confidence had grown. Back in the 70's, people were always apologising to foreigners for Bangladesh (“we are a poor country”). Now, because of economic development, education, overseas travel and work, TV, computers, internet, etc. people are

more confident of their own abilities and no longer in awe of people from richer countries. My old colleague asked me, again in front of the other teachers, what differences I found between people in the UK and Bangladesh. With no time to ponder the question I replied spontaneously that I didn't see any basic difference between the people, and moreover that when conditions were much the same people tended to behave the same – I gave an example of the London Underground in the rush hour. My colleague, who has one daughter living in Germany and another in the USA, agreed with me. Interestingly, of seven staff in the room, only one did not have relatives living permanently overseas. They also told me, when I asked who was the main teacher for urban transport, that they'd had six or seven such teachers in recent years who had all gone overseas to do PhD's (with scholarships) but hadn't come back. A mini-example of how the 'brain-drain' adversely affects Bangladesh.

I am currently reading the Koran out of interest and wanting to learn more about the similarities and comparisons between Islam and Christianity. I had thought of making this the subject of this letter, but then I felt it was much too soon to offer comments until I'd read the Koran translation more thoroughly. It is also difficult to offer comments on such a sensitive subject, so the article remains an idea for another QSAIG newsletter.

**“BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD’
as applied to teacher support based education and training. An overview of a new scheme to improve teaching and learning in government schools, India.**

Margaret Waterworth

Editor: Margaret wrote an article on her work with teachers in West Bengal in the May 2013 Newsletter. This article brings further insights into the Indian education system.

This oft quoted phrase was spoken by Mahatma Gandhi to his fellow ashramites during their study sessions in Ahmedabad. I have seen the phrase painted on Secondary and Higher Secondary Head Teachers' walls in Government schools in West Bengal. It sits alongside Gandhi's photos and alongside photos of Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore. There are few other dignitaries on display. Whatever the display, it is dusty and usually the walls are crumbling.

The headteacher sits on a towelling covered chair and peers into the gloom and dust of his surroundings. His duty is to take in the unit tests results, advise teachers on the next set of tests and make decisions on promotion for pupils between classes. On a day to day basis Government Schools work through the Class text book systematically and teach according to the texts given in the books. Because the timetable is so tight, and teachers may be expected to do other duties supervising the school premises during elections and act as electioneers, there is no time to deviate from the system of text to test.

However there are some teachers who find the time and have the inclination to be innovative in their classes and introduce more activities. In West Bengal they have formed the English Language Teachers' (ELT) Forum and they work together to share good classroom practice and ideas. They meet informally without any funding or Government supervision. They say they feel quite rebellious! I have been involved with this group and have found them to be

innovative and lively.

NCERT – National Council for Education, Research and Training - 2005, a document that pre-dates the Right to Education Act 2007 said that all teachers must make their lessons more 'activity based'. This is a dilemma for the average Government school teacher. Their training is scant around the idea of being innovative in the classroom and heavy on subject knowledge, understanding Government Education department's rules, regulations and requirements. This system is well embedded in their training programmes – all theory and little practical application.

There have been many attempts to 'change the system' particularly from the NGO sector. They run huge numbers of schools mainly using an informal curriculum but including the promotion by class and teach to text book system. Just recently the Open University in conjunction with the Department for International Development (DfID) – has developed a teacher in-service training programme – TESS (Teacher Education School based Support). It is a very accessible and flexible approach aimed at providing serving teachers opportunities to introduce activities and thinking skills into their classroom. It is non-threatening, and as the title suggests, supportive. It gives clear guidelines about good teaching and learning methodology, and actual examples of how to implement these structures in the classroom.

TESS does not interfere with the 'status quo'. It supports and encourages new approaches using existing schemes of work and curricula. Programmes are being written for support in Language teaching, that is mother tongue, state language and Hindi, science, maths and English language and literacy. Apart from lesson plans and ideas on assessment, the programmes give reading lists, appropriate books, materials and resources. All in all, it is a most professional and well constructed programme.

I am pleased to say that it has been accepted by many states in India. Teachers and trainers from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh attended workshops in June to prepare and plan some of the initial materials, and hopefully, once finalised, this material will be used for the now compulsory CPD - professional development programme – for all teachers India.

West Bengal has accepted the programme and will run it through their SCERT teams – State Council for Education, Research and Training. Some members of the ELT are also members of SCERT so the programme will be in good hands. I am looking forward to guiding some of this programme through its initial stages with the team. It's going to be a fast track delivery and nearly 70,000 teachers need it in West Bengal alone.

In West Bengal their introductory mantra to teacher training is from the Mahatma who is especially revered there due to his defining role in the Quit India movement and the aftermath of partition – a period still vividly remembered by many seniors in Kolkata. They acknowledge his mistakes but also they recognise his strengths, as a man who acted on his well thought out principles and beliefs which he was only prepared to change when he was proved wrong.

Other states like Assam and Orissa will be in the this second Phase of TESS. It is the first real approach to tackling the needs of the thousands of children to reach their potential in Government schools and have opportunities to go forward for further and higher education as do many of their counterparts in the private and elite schools of India.

**EKTA PARISHAD AND SEWA (SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION) NOMINATED
BY THE AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE FOR 2014
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE**

Stuart Morton

Ekta Parishad and SEWA are people's movements and organisations that work with and for marginalised people in India. In a nine page letter sent to the Nobel Peace Prize Committee they were jointly nominated by the American Friends Service Committee for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize. This nomination is put forward on behalf of Quakers worldwide; Quaker Peace & Social Witness representing Britain Yearly Meeting is a significant voice in this process, Quakers (AFSC and Friends Service Council -FSC) having been Nobel Laureates in 1947. This year there have been the highest number of candidates ever – 278 in total. Of these forty seven are organisations. The announcement of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize laureate is in early October.

Rajagopal P.V. and his wife, Jill Carr Harris have expressed their immense gratefulness in this regard on behalf of the Ekta Parishad workers who are uplifted by this nomination.

Ekta Parishad's future plans can be found in the notes below.

EKTA PARISHAD'S (EP) PERSPECTIVES
Notes from Ekta Europe Meeting
on 21/22 June 2014 in Cologne

Rajagopal, Aneesh (Ekta Parishad's [EP's] lead advocacy activist) and Puspha of the women's wing, Ekta Mahila Manch, reported on the outcome of the General Election in India and EP's plans for the next 5 years.

General Election - The outcome of the election was not a surprise, but the majority was. It was expected that BJP would need alliances, but that is not the case. EP will attempt to keep all its contacts with the BJP open.

Before the election EP had an impact on the Committee on dalit issues and there has been some dialogue since the election. At a recent meeting, EP's Ramesh had the first speech. Some politicians who are now Ministers walked in Jan Satyagraha (JS) 2012 so EP will remind them, for example the new Tribal Affairs Minister. The new government has said it will pass all pending bills and the President's speech included the Land Policy Act. The PM has also mentioned the Land Policy Act, so that still seems to be on the table.

There are 48 dalit and 37 adivasi MPs in the new parliament. EP will liaise with them and the 62 women who were elected. Of the 44 Congress MPs elected, 8 are dalits and 8 are adivasis; they will be a target for EP.

With regard to Prime Minister Modi – on the one hand he is not part of the established hierarchy; he was not imposed like the previous PM who was not even a member of parliament. He knows poverty and deprivation – so he understands. On the other side – he buys into the development/growth/ corporate agenda. He is keen to compete with China and has set a growth target of 9.5%. This will mean more outside investment so people will lose

land to industrialists. So the struggle continues.

Threats to Ekta Parishd - Congress is not a cadre-based party, so has little organisational base and is not threatened by social movements. The BJP and RSS have people at all levels and will want to destroy voluntary organisations and social movements which are in competition. This will be a big grassroots challenge. EP needs to build cadres quickly before right wing cadre take control.

A recent Intelligence Bureau (IB) report says that there is a international conspiracy against India to prevent it developing and – names Greenpeace, Amnesty, etc. This could lead to an end to foreign funding for voluntary organisations/social movements and limit their ability to function.

Ekta Parishad Plans and 25th Anniversary - So far 3.2 million people have got land since JS2012. EP has to find ways of promoting farming on that land and developing what it calls a non-violent economy.

After JS2012, EP has been rebuilding to deepen the commitment of senior activists and reorganise committees. There have been consultations at Parasnath (Jharkhand) and Katni (MP). The women's wing, Ekta Mahila Manch (EMM) and Artik Manch (economic wing) have been re-vitalised to support the new strategy 'Back to the village' which emphasises local economy and social economy.

A series of events are planned for EP's 25th Anniversary to celebrate its work so far and also lay the ground for future actions:

- **September 2014 - International Youth Camp** at CESC (Tamil Nadu) and Katni (MP)
 - 1-5 October 2014 – beginning of EP's 25th anniversary - function at Tilda, Chhattisgarh
 - November 2014 – Baiga rights march in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The main issues will be:
 - Forest Reserves Act (FRA) not being implemented:
 - Removal of false cases – previous action led to 250,000 cases being dropped
 - Baiga Development Authority – a government programme with huge funding but no impact – EP will study and report
- **February 2015 – footmarch from the Nepal border to Patna**, the capital of Bihar . The Bihar and Baiga yatras are part of this one year celebration and the Baiga yatra is seen as a model for other states.
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Jai Jagat (Victory to the World) 2020 Campaign - for the next few years, EP will prioritise three areas: a. cadre building b. Co-ordination at head office c. Activists' support

The “Back to the Villages” strategy will enable EP to expand its network and have 1 million people on the road in 2020. The events planned for the build up are noted on EP's website and include: Training grassroots activists, fund collection and grain banks in villages; a special training programme for women activists on International Women's Day 8 March 2016; 2019 an international 15 month march from Delhi to the UN at Geneva.

Jill Carr-Harris spoke on the activities of Ekta's 'International Initiatives' programme

which will run up to JJ 2020. These will include, in September 2015 a World Forum on Access to Land (a one week programme in India or Brazil). In July 2014 Rajagopal and Jill will be in Georgia as part of the preparation for October 2019 march from New Delhi to Geneva.

Campaigns/honours - On 30th July 2014 in Delhi, the Jains will award EP the Tulasi International Peace Award.

EP is a member of a new network in India, Jan Awas (people's noise) to create democratic space. Anna Hazare is leading a new movement, 'Real Independence Struggle', which will be launched on 9th August to commemorate the 'Quit India' movement against the British in 1942. EP is supporting this initiative.

EP is part of the 'Our Land Our Business' campaign against the World Bank.

The Swiss-made film Millions Can Walk is being shown at film festivals globally during 2014, including a mobile film festival on human rights in Scotland (in late September – details not yet available). Ran Singh Parmar, EP's President, might be in the UK at that time.

QUAKER PEACE & SOCIAL WITNESS IN BRITAIN

Judith Baker has recently been employed by QPSW to take up the work of Conciliation Support Coordinator in QPSW with the main focus being on conciliation work in a specific part of the South Asia region. She follows on from Martin Williams who recently retired from the work having taken up the position in January 2011. Email: judithb@quaker.org.uk

The future of other possible South Asia regional peace work of QPSW continues to be explored by QPSW through its Overseas Peacebuilding Committee. Tracey Martin, who is a member of that committee, hopes to attend the QSAIG meeting in Leeds in October to bring Friends up-to-date with the exploration. The Committee has, in particular, been keeping in mind the needs of Pakistan and the importance of Ekta Parishad. Gerald Conyngham's contract with QPSW in this work ended in December 2013 and it has yet to be decided whether he will be replaced.

DILAWAR CHETSINGH- A FAITHFUL FRIEND

Written by Rajan Chetsingh, Dilawar's brother, who lives in London, and sent to American Quaker Journals.

CHETSINGH Dilawar Chetsingh, 75, died on May 31, 2014, at Noida, New Delhi, India. Dilawar was born at the Friends Mission Hospital, Itarsi, India to Doris and Ranjit Chetsingh on October 26, 1938. He had a carefree childhood at the Friends Rural Centre, Rasulia. After schooling in India and at Friends School, Saffron Walden, England, he studied History at University and went into Indian Government Service. Dilawar later used his retirement to the full, continuing to give significant help and support to individuals, and taking on responsible honorary positions in four organisations concerned with religious, educational and social work. He was a key member of the General Conference of Friends in India, where he is remembered as "a loving elderly figure who was always there to help and guide with a smile on his face". From 2004-2012 he served as Clerk of the Asia West Pacific Section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, and concurrently on the Central Executive Committee. An FWCC colleague

recalls his "perseverance and non-confrontational and even temperament.. Dilawar undertook administrative work for the Lott Carey Baptist Mission in India, becoming its President, with responsibility for four secondary schools in Noida as well as AIDS and leprosy clinics, and attending the Biennial Conference of the Mission in the USA. Dilawar loved to travel and to interact with people. He always had plenty of questions to ask them. He was a keen and knowledgeable birdwatcher. Tributes since his death emphasise how his names set the benchmark for his life. His first name, Dilawar, can be translated Greatness of Heart, and his second name, Kripal means Merciful, Compassionate. These qualities in his character remain present to his wife, Snehlata, his daughter Kripa and her family in England, his son Ranjit in Canada, and relatives and friends worldwide.

Stuart Morton had informed QSAIG members of Dilawar's death. Stuart wrote a letter to Dilawar's family and copied it to a number of Friends in Britain whom Dilawar had known. Included in his letter was the following:

"I had met Dilawar on many occasions in India and the UK as part of my work for Quaker Peace & Social Witness (1996-2011)..... He was truly a wonderful F/friend. His thoughtfulness and very helpful words when, as was often the case, I needed such wisdom and support, was a treasure to me personally and to the wider work of Friends in South Asia. In my experience he always spoke with a deep respect for others, with the aim to seek a broader understanding that might lead towards a beneficial action. His service to others, his appreciation of his family, his interest in life (including birds), his concern and commitment to Friends in India and worldwide, and to the development of FRC Rasulia, were shinningly obvious to me.His guiding hand will be greatly missed."

The letter of June 6th 2014 from Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)

Dear Friends,

On behalf of FWCC, we share in the sadness of the death of our beloved Friend Dilawar Chetsingh. He was a warm and generous person, dedicated to the service of Friends, most recently as clerk of the Asia-West Pacific Section (2004 – 2022) and concurrently as member of the FWCC Central Executive Committee. His father, Ranjit Chetsingh, served as FWCC General Secretary from 1954 to 1955. Dilawar lived in Noida, near Delhi, but his work brought him into F/friendship with people around the world.

His wife, Snehlata and their daughter Kripa and her husband Mark Armritanand from London and their son Ranjit Chetsingh from Toronto gathered in their home for a funeral prayer service shortly after Dilawar's death on May 31.....

We have received many messages from Friends. Here are a few expressions...

He was a source of inspiration to the whole Quaker community of our country. I lost my best friend and guide in every aspect of my life. I will remember him as a loving elderly figure who was always there to help and guide with a smile on his face. As a trustee of Friends Rural Centre, his contribution to take the Centre to a new height included the remarkable work of amending the constitution. The Centre has lost a dear and trusted friend indeed.

Please join us in prayer for the departure of Dilawar from this earthly abode, as well as for his grieving family, and the worldwide circle of Friends who have been touched by his life and ministry. He will be sorely missed.

It was my pleasure to meet Dilawar Chetsingh during his time serving as the Clerk of FWCC (AWPS), in my role as convener of the Nominations Committee. I found him to be very helpful in sharing his knowledge of the history and practice of the Section, and in enabling more opportunities for connection and mutual understanding among the diversity of Friends in the region. I was especially impressed by the tireless effort he put into hosting the 2008 Section Gathering in Bhopal, to ensure that arrangements for visiting Friends were in place, and that we had the chance to explore the concerns of Friends Meetings in India during our time there. I greatly valued Dilawar's support during the recent selection process for the AWPS Secretary. His wisdom and knowledge helped us in interviewing the applicants and assessing their skills against the needs of the Section. I shall miss his lively presence among us.

I was very fond of Dilawar and I will miss him. I always found he had the right balance between serious attention to the business at hand and an earthy sense of humour when appropriate.

He took me to the Gandhi memorial garden and regaled me with stories of his birding. Please know that Friends in our working group in Philadelphia are holding Sneh and her children in the Light as we remember Dilawar's kindness and steadfastness.

Dilawar was a person of wisdom who gave great service to Quaker work in India and to the wider Quaker world through, in particular, the Asia West Pacific Section of FWCC. His guidance to me personally while I worked for Quaker Peace & Service (later Quaker Peace & Social Witness) was of real significance to the work.

From FWCC on behalf of Friends around the world, we thank God for Dilawar's presence on this earth, and we pray for his eternal rest with God.

Yours in faith, hope, and love,

Signed: Ramon Gonzalez Longoria (FWCC Presiding Clerk), Gretchen Castle (FWCC General Secretary), Patricia Macgregor (AWPS Clerk) and Ronis Chapman (AWPS Executive Secretary)

NEWS OF SOUTH ASIA FRIENDS/CONTACTS

BANGLADESH:

Gono Unnayan Prochesta (G.U.P.) has developed a website which, writes Martin Schweiger, "describes its programme nicely". <http://www.gupbd.org>

Dolly Rahman, widow of Ataur Rahman, has retired from GUP and remains active in family matters and some voluntary work.

Abu B. Siddique (known to Friends as "Bachchu")

has written a wonderful tribute to Ataur Rahman, the inspirational leader of GUP, entitled "Mohammed Ataur Rahman: a dedicated soul for peace". On August 7th we commemorate the

12th anniversary of his passing. This article can be found at

http://shagarsideation.blogspot.co.uk/2014_04_01_archive.html

Bachchu has also written the following to the editor:

“Hunger not only comes with the famine, but also resides in our societies. The United Nation Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reports 852 million people are undernourishment in developing countries. About a quarter of these people are in India. West Bengal has many of them. Institute for Indian Mother and Child (IIMC) serves them almost every day.

When IIMC's founder Dr. Sujit Kumar Brahmochary began his philanthropy medical service in a remote village in 1989, he treated many mothers and children who were suffering from chronic hunger, and this experience ultimately became the foundation stone for IIMC. The other name of chronic hunger is chronic malnutrition--two sides of the same coin. Their interplay in poor people's body is alarming, deadly. How?”

<http://shagarsideation.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/a-foundation-for-empowerment.html>

NEPAL:

Subhash Kattel, who reflected on the condition of his country wrote in the January 2014 Newsletter has been continuing to dedicate his life to nonviolent peacebuilding. For example, he was involved in running AVP workshops in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Tanahun, Parbat and Surkhet for a six wn July 2014. While there he enjoyed meeting Roberta Bacic, a former coordinator of WRI in its London based office, now living with her husband, Clem McCartney, in Northern Ireland. His extensive work in coordinating the Alternatives To Violence (AVP) programme in Nepal enabled him to successfully respond to an invitation to attend the International AVP gathering in Dublin. Afterwards he has been asked to visit Quaker Meetings in Ireland to raise funds for the Friends Peace Teams Asia West Pacific.

INDIA:

Manan Ganguli is a leader in Fourth World Action – reaching the poor and the forgotten. If you would like to be in touch with, and/or support this organisation please consult the website below. Manan will be able to send you electronic copies of the newsletter. He wrote to the editor in February that he had just spent four months in India, mostly “in the village”. He had also travelled to places such as Chhattisgarh in connection with human rights' issues. “Some of us are working on a network of health and human rights activists in India.” He was again in India from May to July doing further work on that network. See www.fourthworldaction.org

NEWS OF EVENTS IN BRITAIN

RAJAGOPAL P.V. OF EKTA PARISHAD will visit Britain on two occasions, in October and November. Plans are still being finalised and further details can be gained from Action Village India or Stuart Morton. Likely dates and places where Rajagopal will be involved include:

Saturday 25th October Action Village India AGM in London

Sunday 26th October Possible opportunity to meet Rajagopal in Birmingham

Monday 27th October Public meeting in Birmingham (6.30 – 8 p.m. provisionally)

Tuesday 11 November Small Meeting House, Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. Public Meeting organised by Action Village India and Quaker Peace & Social Witness

We hope that Rajagopal will be able to meet as many of his supporters as possible, but it is also an important time to add strength in numbers and commitment to Ekta Parishad's work. Please encourage attendance at these meetings once dates, times and venues are finalised.

The QSAIG website: We are grateful that Martin Schweiger has initiated the QSAIG website. This Newsletter, a number of previous editions of the Newsletter and notes of our October 2013 meeting can be found at: <http://www.qsaig.co.uk/news-and-events>

QSAIG ANNUAL MEETING in Leeds

Saturday, October 18th 2014 (10 a.m. - 4.30 p.m)
at the home of Liz & Martin Schweiger,
12 Montagu Place, Oakwood, Leeds LS8 2RG

Speaker: John McConnell

“Scholarships for Street Kids” in Myanmar

Sharing of news, experience and plans for action.

Please come, and encourage others also to come.

Let Liz and Martin Schweiger know you are coming so that suitable amounts of food can be prepared.

liz.schweiger@phoncoop.coop