

# QUAKER SOUTH ASIA INTEREST GROUP (QSAIG)

## NEWSLETTER – Sept 2022

<http://www.qsaig.co.uk/>

### About QSAIG:

- QSAIG is a 'Quaker-recognised body' focusing on South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and neighbouring states)
- It started in the 1990's
- It has approximately 100 members and correspondents who are interested in South Asia-related issues

### Our Aims

To assist in the building of a peaceful, just and sustainable world inspired by our Quaker faith and focusing on the South Asia region by:

- Connecting people and organisations working/interested in South Asia
- Raising awareness about issues in South Asia of interest and concern to Quakers
- Providing a source of Quaker support for peace and development initiatives relating to South Asia

### What We Do

- Members and friends take part in various events in the UK on issues and projects relating to South Asia
- We connect with friends and partner organisations overseas
- We meet annually in London, Leeds or Birmingham
- We produce a newsletter at least once a year
- Website: <https://www.qsaig.co.uk/>



### **Up-coming Event:** **QSAIG Meeting and AGM**

**Date:** Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2022

**Time:** 10am – 3pm

**Location:** Zoom only

If you would like to join, please let us know, so we can send you a ZOOM link.

Please note the meeting will be ZOOM only, and the date has changed from that originally proposed.

**Invitations from:** [info@qsaig.co.uk](mailto:info@qsaig.co.uk)

**Contact:** Norman Smith, [info@qsaig.co.uk](mailto:info@qsaig.co.uk)

**Tel:** 07947273545

# This Newsletter

After Coronavirus turned the world upside down for a couple of years, things were starting to get back to normal when the invasion of Ukraine took place, and once again nations around the world have been thrown into economic difficulty and are squaring up to each other.

In the meantime, the world continues to warm up, and record heatwaves, rainfall and flooding have been occurring around the globe.

In this context, QSAIG's activities seem little more than one small grain of sand on the beach. Nonetheless, QSAIG has a useful role to play, putting people in touch with each other and raising awareness of events in South Asia as well as in the West.

This newsletter contains a brief summary of QSAIG's activities during the past year, as well as some brief news headlines from South Asia.

News from some of the organisations and individuals we are in contact with is presented in pages 9 to 15, and also some new contacts.

The newsletter also contains two interesting articles, (i) on the return of historic artifacts to the Naga people in India (page 16); and (ii) the life's work of a Bangladeshi activist who has worked for development at the grassroots level for over 70 years (page 18).

## QSAIG's Activities during the past year

QSAIG's group activities have been fairly limited over the past year, and focused on the following:

**QSAIG AGM, 23 Oct. 2021:** The AGM was hosted in Leeds by Martin and Liz Schweiger, and held in person for the first time in two years, along with ZOOM participants. 22 people attended, from the UK as well as Australia, Malaysia and Switzerland. However, for once we didn't have anyone participating directly from India or Bangladesh. Notes of the 2021 AGM are available on the QSAIG website. The QSAIG post-holders were confirmed and undertook to continue for another year.

**Mid-Year ZOOM Meeting on 'The Third Pole', 23 April 2021:** At the 2021 AGM, it was agreed that QSAIG should focus on climate change and the role of youth in the coming year. Consequently, a mid-year ZOOM meeting was held to consider the impact of global warming on South Asia, and especially the warming of the 'Third Pole'

The Third Pole is an area of about 100,000 square kilometres covering the Himalayas and Tibetan Plateau. It is the third largest area of frozen water on the planet (though only a tiny fraction of the size of the north and south poles). However, it is the source of 10 major river systems, serving about one-quarter of the world's population – China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – 16 countries in total.

Mountainous regions are warming much faster than the global average and the impacts are potentially devastating, as this year's floods in Bangladesh and Pakistan have shown. Global warming is changing snowfall to rain and melting the ice in the glaciers. This leads to increased flash flooding, soil erosion, and higher downstream river flows in the wet season. Reduced ice also reduces dry season river flows, with serious implications for irrigated agriculture. Global warming is also increasing wet season rainfall on the plains, as well as causing sea levels to rise and increased coastal inundation and salinity.

While much of the pollution that is causing the Third Pole to melt comes from neighbouring countries, it is surprising to learn that Europe's pollution is also contributing via the westerly jet streams.



*The Kyetrak Glacier in the Tibetan Plateau, 1921 and 2009 (Source: Yale, 2014)*

The ZOOM meeting concluded with ideas of what nations and individuals can do to slow or reverse this environmental catastrophe. For nations:

- The richer nations must drastically reduce their greenhouse gas emissions (and show the way for other nations)
- The Third Pole countries (and other emerging regions) must rapidly change to sustainable models of development
- Co-operation between the Third Pole countries is essential to share the scarce water resources

For individuals:

- The average UK person produces about 6.03 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per year
- The global average is about 3.4 tonnes per person per year
- To live sustainably, we should reduce our individual CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent output to about 2.1 tonnes/person/year

**QSAIG stall at Britain Yearly Meeting, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2021:** We ran a ‘virtual stall’ for the second time at the 2021 BYM, though the impact was again rather limited. A few new contacts were made. However, our activities have sparked interest further afield, and approaches have come from USA and the Quaker UN Office in Geneva (*see following pages for further details*).

\* \* \* \* \*

## Some news headlines from South Asia

The seven South Asian countries covered by QSAIG contain roughly one-quarter of the world’s population. Nearly three quarters live in India, while Pakistan and Bangladesh account for a further 20%. Only Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and Myanmar have smaller populations than the UK, but within a couple of decades the latter two may overtake the UK.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to summarise news from such a large and diverse population. The following paragraphs pick out a few headlines collected over the past year.

<b>News snippets from Bangladesh</b> <i>(from the Daily Star)</i>	
2021	22,000 millionaires in Bangladesh, according to Credit Suisse’s Global Wealth Report
Jan 2022	Senior RAB (police) staff, including the Inspector-General Benazir Ahmed, barred from USA due to RAB’s human rights record
21/1/22	A person was jailed for 7 years for making derogatory remarks about PM on Facebook
28/1/22	DSCC Mayor says Dhaka has the worst pollution in the world. In February, official monitoring confirms his comments
1/2/22	The shooting of Major Sinha (31 July 2020) by police – A landmark guilty verdict was given against the police officer in charge
3/2/22	About \$12-15bn taken out of Bangladesh every year through money laundering, according to TI-BD
<i>Continued.....</i>	

<sup>1</sup> Populations in 2020 in million: India 1,380m; Pakistan 221, Bangladesh 165, Myanmar 54, Afghanistan 39, Nepal 29, Sri Lanka 22.

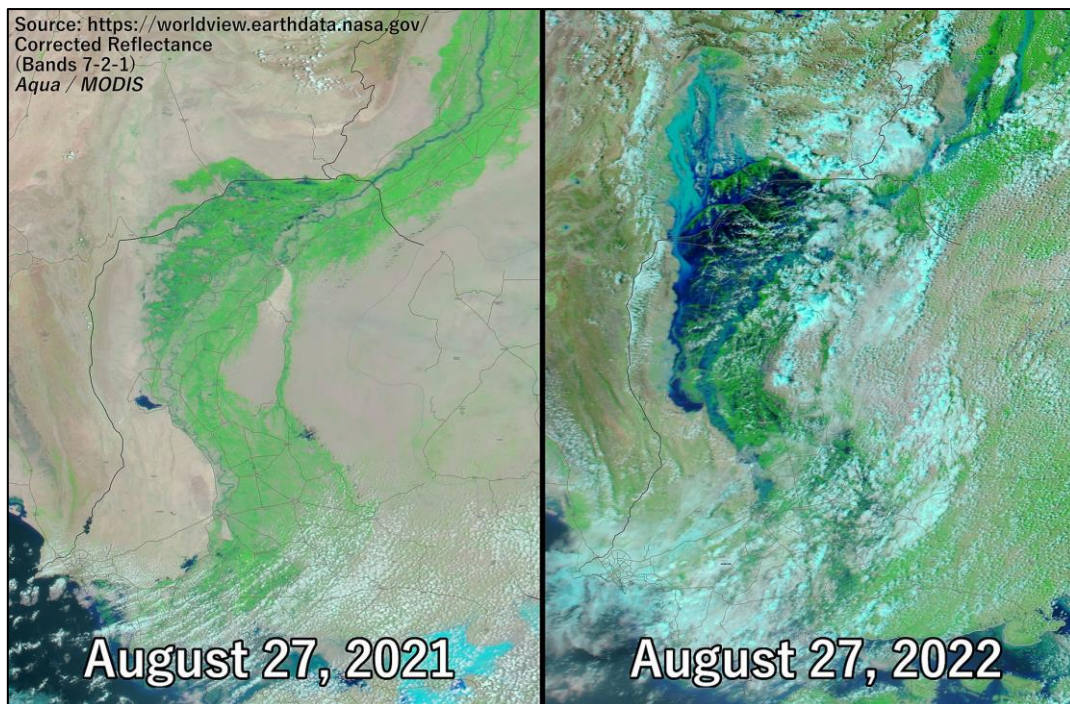
## Bangladesh - continued

- 12/2/22 70% of BD's future energy to come from coal-fired power stations
- 17/2/22 Sharif, a director of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), sacked for being too conscientious
- 18/2/22 One in five of Rohingya refugees infected with Hepatitis C
- 5/3/22 68 jails in B'desh with capacity for 42,500 inmates, but 83,600 currently in jail
- 11/3/22 BTRC issues draft regulations that will limit Facebook, WhatsApp messages. Human Rights groups campaign against it.
- 22/3/22 \$2.5bn coal-fired Payra power station opens, burning Indonesian coal. Developed as a joint venture with China
- 22/3/22 Only 6% of 3,434 corruption cases referred to Anti-Corruption Commission in 2021 were disposed of
- 28/3/22 Dhaka the world's noisiest city – UNEP report
- 17/4/22 Bangladesh is expected to graduate from 'Least Developed Country' status in 2026. The estimated cost (of losing preferential trade tariffs) could be \$5bn annually
- 12/5/22 The 'Gono Commission' (People's Commission, established by NGO's and Muslim/non-Muslim religious groups, and headed by a retired Supreme Court Justice) published its report on Fundamentalist and Communal Violence 2016-2021. The report sparked fierce criticism from some Muslim commentators because of allegations against some religious leaders
- 13/5/22 Fugitive businessman Mr. PK Haider arrested in India. He is accused of laundering Tk.10,000-11,000 crore (> USD \$1bn) out of Bangladesh (see 3/2/22 above)
- 4/6/22 Massive fire and explosion at Chittagong container depot kills nearly 50 people
- 23/6/22 Major floods in Sylhet; now approaching Rangpur
- 24/6/22 Dhaka judged world's 7th least liveable city, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. Karachi ranked 6th worst (out of 173)
- June 2022 June saw food price inflation at 8.4%. Rice prices up 11%, and rising fast
- 7/8/22 July saw the lowest rainfall in BD for 41 years
- 7/8/22 Fuel price hike of 50%. Buses withdrawn. Other prices shooting up. Foreign exchange reserves depleted. Opposition parties call a hartal to protest.

## **India** (from various English-language media sources)

- 11/2/22 Karnataka High Court bans wearing of religious dress by persons of any religion on educational campuses. This follows tension between hijab-wearing students and students wearing saffron in protest
- 11/3/22 Big swing to BJP in five state elections
- 23/3/22 India to lift all Covid restrictions on 31 March 2022
- 18/4/22 India's death toll from Coronavirus likely to be over 4 million, according to WHO, and not 520,000 as per official government figures. The Indian government strongly disputes the WHO estimates
- Aug. 2022 India set to overtake China in 2023 as the world's largest population
- 11/9/22 Journalist Siddique Kappan released on bail after two years in detention under 'anti-terrorism' laws. He was investigating the gang rape and murder of a *dalit* woman. National and international media rights groups campaigned for his release. India is currently ranked 150<sup>th</sup> out of 182 countries on RSF's (Reporters Sans Frontiers) press freedom index.

## **Floods in Pakistan**



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022\\_pakistan\\_floods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_pakistan_floods)

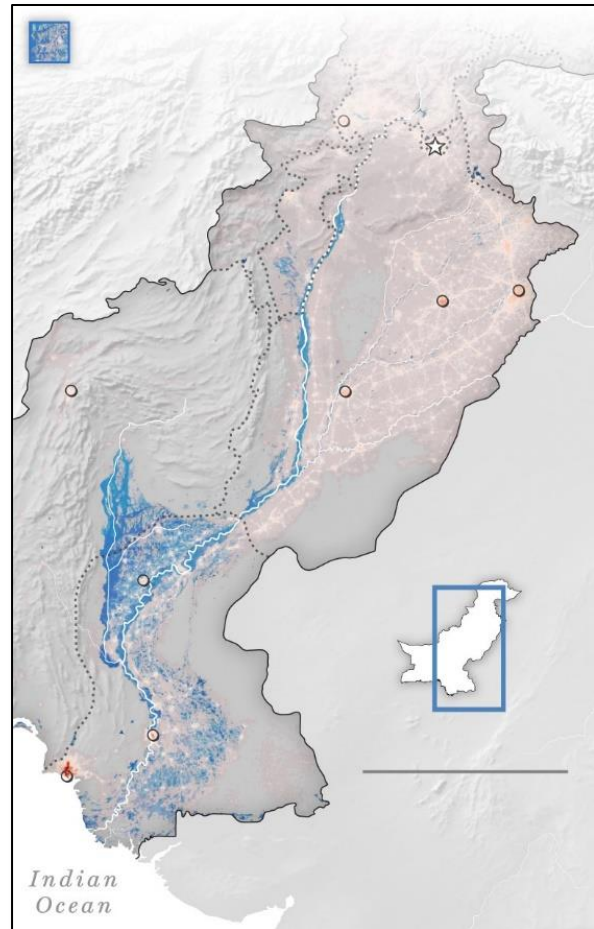
Since June 14, 2022, Pakistan has experienced the worst floods in its 75-year history. They were caused by exceptionally heavy monsoon rains after a severe heatwave. The heatwave also increased the run-off from melting glaciers in the Himalayas.

*Continued.....*



Homes surrounded by floodwaters in Sohbatpur city in Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan Province.  
Picture source: *Washington Times*, 30/08/2022

By early September, some 1,400 people had lost their lives. On 25 August, Pakistan declared a state of emergency. The Minister of Climate Change said around one-third of the country was under water affecting 33 million people, with an estimated loss of over US\$30 billion and rising.



Picture source:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/31/pakistan-floods>

## **The Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka**     *See also William Knox's letter*

Sri Lanka has faced its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948. Inflation is running at more than 50%; people are struggling with power cuts and shortages of basics; and in May 2022 Sri Lanka defaulted on its sovereign debts for the first time in its history.

Until the mid-2000s, Sri Lanka's debt was owed mainly to multilateral lending agencies, but under President Mahinda Rajapaksa this was re-oriented towards foreign investors and lenders. Sri Lanka's first international sovereign bond was issued in 2007, with high interest rates to incentivise investors. However, according to critics, the money was often used to fund vanity projects rather than projects of national utility.

In 2020 Chatham House published a report that concluded that Sri Lanka's debt crisis was primarily 'a result of domestic policy decisions and facilitated by Western lending and monetary policy'.

In the past three years, several factors have aggravated the situation. Tourism, an important part of the economy (approximately 10% of GDP), was badly hit by the Easter bombings in 2019, and then by the Covid pandemic. Government policies and mismanagement have made things worse – for example, tax cuts introduced in 2019 under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa (younger brother of Mahinda) lost the government income of more than \$1.4bn (£1.13bn) a year.

When Sri Lanka's foreign currency shortages became more serious in early 2021, the government responded by banning imports of chemical fertiliser and told farmers to use locally sourced organic fertilisers instead. This led to widespread crop failure. Sri Lanka had to supplement its food stocks from abroad, adding to the foreign currency shortage.

In May 2022, street protests started in the capital, Colombo, and spread across the country. President Rajapaksa fled to Singapore, and before stepping down he made Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe acting president. Mr Wickremesinghe declared a state of emergency across the country and imposed a curfew in the western province. Negotiations are now underway with foreign lenders, including the G7 countries, the World Bank, the IMF and also China, about restructuring the debts and further loan assistance.

However, as the NGO Human Rights Watch has pointed out, '.....the new government of President Ranil Wickremesinghe seems more focused on suppressing dissent than on solving the economic crisis....The conditions the IMF places on this loan could either exacerbate the political and economic hardship or provide desperately needed relief while addressing the underlying causes'.

### **Sources:**

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/05/sri-lankas-economic-crisis-and-imf>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-61028138>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%93present\\_Sri\\_Lankan\\_economic\\_crisis#Russo-Ukrainian\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%93present_Sri_Lankan_economic_crisis#Russo-Ukrainian_War)



## Sri Lanka – Ideas for interaction and support

*from William Knox*

William Knox lived and worked in Sri Lanka from 1994 to 2009 doing community peace work. He was with Quaker Peace & Service for six years, and then other organisations for the remainder of that time. Recently he wrote to QSAIG with ideas for possible interaction and support to friends and contacts in Sri Lanka:

*"Over the last few months, as the situation in Sri Lanka has been deteriorating, I have been agonising as to how people like me, who have a deep attachment to the country and its people, but now live in comfort elsewhere, can support Sri Lankans both in short term survival and in bringing about long-term change in society.*

*I have been in touch with a few contacts in the country. It is difficult as, quite naturally, they have more immediate concerns than dealing with well-meaning offers of support from outside. Nevertheless, I feel there's been enough progress to persist until a clear way forward is found.*

*As a result of feedback from contacts, my original thinking has changed, i.e. it seems that the main focus now should be on providing support for day to day needs. The rest can come later. So my aim now is to find individuals/organisations to work with. Ideally, they should work with more than one community and obviously be capable of carrying out such work.*

*Once such recipients of support have been found, I would hope to rally others to join supporting them as well.*

*If anyone from QSAIG has any ideas for supporting people in Sri Lanka or would like to join in these efforts in any way, please do contact me at [ewvknox@gmail.com](mailto:ewvknox@gmail.com).*

*And finally, it doesn't come as much of a surprise that Sri Lanka has to a great extent dropped out of the news since the crisis started. I thought it might be an idea if QSAIG could have the whole or part of a future meeting devoted to Sri Lanka. If such an idea appeals, I would suggest it would be worthwhile if at least two or three of us had something to contribute to such a meeting."*

William would be glad for feedback on his suggestions for supporting/interacting with people and organisations in Sri Lanka, and also his proposal for a special QSAIG meeting or part-meeting. Please contact: [ewvknox@gmail.com](mailto:ewvknox@gmail.com)

## Nepal: News of Non-Violent Social Movements

*from Subhash Kattel*

Subhash Kattel is a peace activist in Nepal with many years of experience in training and supporting non-violent social movements. He has also been a friend and contact of QSAIG over the years, especially through the South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA) – <https://southasiapeacealliance.weebly.com/index.html>

He recently wrote to QSAIG friends with news of his involvement in workshops under the Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP):



*Namaste QSAIG Friends,*

*2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022*

*I am back to Kathmandu from Pokhara after completing an Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) workshop. It was a 'Training for Facilitators' (T4F) workshop. We had 26 participants, consisting of: the main leaders of a local organization; community workers; and public-school teachers. It was an inclusive group of diverse caste, ethnicity, gender, age, and educational-economic-cultural background.*

- The organization's leadership wanted to continue and deepen the practice of cultures of peace among themselves.*
- The community workers planned to introduce AVP in communities where they are supporting organic farming to mitigate climate change. They plan to organize six AVP basic workshops in the community during the next two months.*
- The public-school teachers were keen to introduce tools of practicing nonviolence and peace in their classroom. The younger teachers were keen to try 'facilitating' the*

*learning process in the classroom like it was done during the workshop, instead of 'teaching' the students as usual, because the experiential learning approach offered in the workshop was much more effective for their learning than teaching.*

*In friendship, Subhash*

### **AVP Workshop in Kathmandu, Gokerneshower Municipality, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

*We facilitated an Alternatives to Violence Program (Practical Steps for Peace) mini-Workshop with Gokerneshower Municipality staffs in Kathmandu on 14th June, with a group of about 60 people.*

*Ms. Sushmita Kuinkel, who now works at the Municipal Office, was moved so much when she participated in an AVP Basic workshop about five years ago and now she wanted to share such experience and skills with her colleagues to enhance their capacity.*

*Afterwards, participants commonly said, "This workshop enables us to provide our service more effectively with care to the people." A few of the Municipal Ward Secretaries were so impressed that they decided to plan full-length workshops in their community and allocate budget for that accordingly for the coming year(s).*

*Again, the AVP process and approach proves its universality that people in all walks of life everywhere want to learn how to live non-violently, peacefully and constructively.*

Subhash is also involved with an organisation called Community Self Reliance Centre (CSRC) working for land and agrarian rights/reform in Nepal. Climate change is one of the cross-cutting issues. The organization is the largest non-violent social movement in Nepal and has been active for the last 30 years or so, together with a people's organization named 'National Land Rights Forum'.



*Demonstration by land-poor people in ten locations in Nepal – about 40,000 people participated in the event organised by CSRC. Source: <https://csrcnepal.org/>*

Subhash plans to write regular news items about CSRC'S work and is happy to share these with QSAIG and people interested to learn more. Subash, who is also connected with Friends Peace Teams in Asia West Pacific <https://friendspeaceteams.org/>, and War Resisters' International <https://www.wri-irg.org/en>, is looking for resources to support the Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) workshops in Nepal, and would be interested to be in touch with any potential supporters/donors.

AVP contact details: <https://avp.org.np/contact/>

\* \* \* \* \*

## TAMWED and Tribal People in the Nilgiri Hills, South India



Tamwed is a small charity, based in Cornwall and well supported by Friends, that partners an NGO working with tribal people in the Nilgiri Hills of South India. The NGO is the Island Trust (<https://www.tamwed.org/the-island-trust/>) and has been working with communities in the Nilgiri Hills since 1984.



*Project staff at the Island Trust*

Source: <https://www.tamwed.org/the-island-trust/>

TAMWED's August 2022 newsletter gives an update on their activities, and an extract is quoted below:

*We revise our Tribal Futures programme at the start of each year but recognise that we need to be flexible which was reinforced by Covid when we prioritised support for the communities that had been affected the most. The aim of this year's programme is:*

*‘To build resilience in the most needy of tribal communities in 22 villages of Kotagiri Block in the Nilgiris so they become less dependent on outside support when exposed to events such as the pandemic or climate change. Our priority is to improve the capacity of tribal communities to enable them to become increasingly self-sufficient for food, healthcare and other necessary assets and amenities while protecting and nurturing the local environment. This will be achieved with respect for the welfare and traditions of indigenous groups’.*

Some of the main programmes include:

- Working on health and vocational training with the Paniyas, a tribal group who have been heavily exploited in the past as bonded labourers and low-paid labourers. The name ‘Paniya’ means literally ‘workers’ and they are the poorest-of-the-poor among the tribal communities
- Support with Human and Land Rights Issues
- Climate awareness and climate responses
- Various educational support, including distributing books and materials to small tribal schools (see photo below)



*The Island Trust’s educational programmes include distributing books and materials at small schools, vocational training, and connecting students at a local Social Work College with the tribal schools and villages, for mutual learning. Source: TAMWED / Island Trust Newsletter, August 2022*

For further information about TAMWED and the Island Trust, please contact [info@tamwed.org](mailto:info@tamwed.org)

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## Friends Girls School, Sohagpur, India

In May 2022 QSAIG received correspondence from Jayant Singh who is Clerk for a local meeting in New York. He wrote to let us know about Friends Girls School in Sohagpur, which is in Madhya Pradesh State about 80km south-east of Bhopal. His local meeting in New York supports the school, which has a long history dating back to 1874 when Friends first came to the area. Some friends in England may already know about the school and other Quaker schools in India. If you would like to learn more, there is an interesting short history at the school's website: <https://friendsschoolsohagpur.com/>

\* \* \* \* \*

## Communication from Hank Pellissier of the Humanist Global Charity, USA

Hank wrote to QSAIG in April 2022 to introduce the Humanist Global Charity, of which he is a founder-director, to suggest possible co-operation and partnership with QSAIG. Hank (or Henri in full) is an attender at Quaker Meetings in Berkley and San Francisco. The organisation does a lot of good work in 49 nations, and while QSAIG briefly thanked him for the approach, we haven't yet considered how we could best interact. Something to perhaps discuss at the forthcoming AGM?

From: **Henri Pellissier** <directors@humanistglobal.charity>  
Date: Fri, Apr 8, 2022 at 10:44 PM  
Subject: USA nonprofit provides charity to India, Nepal, Bangladesh  
To: [info@qsaig.co.uk](mailto:info@qsaig.co.uk) <[info@qsaig.co.uk](mailto:info@qsaig.co.uk)>

Hello – I am the director of a mid-sized nonprofit in San Francisco East Bay: Humanist Global Charity <https://humanistglobal.charity>. We provide \$300 grants around the world, and we work a lot in India, Bangladesh, Nepal. Here are links to projects we are doing in those nations:

<https://humanistglobal.charity/india-food-school-supplies-for-children-in-iyotinagar-slum-kolkata>

<https://humanistglobal.charity/nepal-orphans-cooking-dumpling/dumplings-workshop-to-support-14-orphans>

<https://humanistglobal.charity/bangladesh-orphans-need-books-shoes/dhaka-orphanage-needs-books-school-shoes>

*Continued on next page.....*

We would love for your group to assist us as partners

I am a Quaker attender in Berkeley and San Francisco, and I attended meeting for a year in Monteverde, Costa Rica

Hank Pellissier

**Humanist Global Charity**

**99 Pinehurst Road, PO Box #6**

**Canyon, California 94516 USA**

**Directors@HumanistGlobal.Charity**

<https://HumanistGlobal.Charity>

**501c3 / EIN # 46-3953105**

## Contact with Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, Director, Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva

Nozizwe is the Director of QUNO Geneva. She heard about QSAIG's online meeting in April 2022 which focused on climate change in South Asia, and sent the following note:

*"I am very pleased to meet Norman and look forward to hearing more about the group and learning about issues in South Asia. As the new Director of QUNO Geneva, I am keen for our work to be meaningful and known to the people on whose behalf we speak at the UN and other multi-lateral institutions. I am also interested to get feedback on the issues that matter for the people, in their locations."*

QUNO has fully staffed offices in Geneva and New York, and the Geneva office has staff working on specific areas, including:

- Climate change and sustainability
- Peace and disarmament
- Human rights and refugees

QUNO works world-wide and often behind the scenes, building trust by bringing together people from a range of backgrounds. Its strength also lies in its long-term persistence.

Further details are available at: <https://quno.org/how-we-work>

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## Judith Baker shares the story of the process of repatriating Naga ancestral remains from the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford

The following is a blog written by Judith Baker, Conciliation & Peacebuilding Support Coordinator, and Ecumenical & Interfaith Officer of Britain Yearly Meeting. It appeared in the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2022 edition of Quake Magazine and is reproduced here with Judith's kind permission.

### **The legacy of colonialism: dialogue and the return of ancestral remains**

A request from the other side of the world asks me to share with Quakers and other churches the story of a process dealing with the unfinished business of colonialism.

Many museums in Britain contain cultural objects taken during the colonial era, but it was still something of a shock to find that a museum near me houses human remains from Naga people, from my friends. The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford had reached out to Naga anthropologists and the process of returning these objects in the most culturally appropriate way possible has begun.



*Pitt Rivers Museum is returning Naga ancestral remains. Image credit: Pitt Rivers Museum*

There have been long friendships between Quakers and the people who live in the mountainous border area between Myanmar and India, the Naga Hills. Many Nagas



remember that Horace Alexander visited the Naga Hills in the 1950s and Marjorie Sykes was part of peace missions in the 1960s. Current Quaker work includes a small group of appointed Friends 'quietly accompanying' a Naga civil society group (at their request) working non-violently to end violent conflict in the region.

## **The return of human remains**

Our Naga friends have asked us to share this article about their collaborative work with the museum: [\*The Unfinished Business of Colonialism: Naga Ancestral Remains and the Healing of the Land\*](#). The aim is to create awareness and to build critical solidarity and understanding. This striking article is by two Naga anthropologists working with the Pitt Rivers Museum. Dr. Arkotong Longkumer of the University of Edinburgh and Dr. Dolly Kikon of the University of Melbourne have worked with Naga civil society, elders, researchers, church leaders and the museum in an exploratory dialogue. They explain how far that dialogue has come and the mountain of work still to do.

The Naga ancestral remains collection in the Pitt Rivers Museum includes human skulls and bones. The museum's aim is to return over 200 pieces of Naga ancestral remains to the lands from which they came. The museum also wants to work with the Naga Research Team to be part of a process of displaying cultural objects in a culturally sensitive manner, prioritising reconciliation and co-curatorship.

## **Quaker action**

A minute from this year's Yearly Meeting asks us as Quakers to examine the history of [\*involvement by Quakers in the slave trade\*](#) and in the profits from it, and consider how to make meaningful reparations. A Yearly Meeting minute from last year commits us to become an anti-racist church. Quaker Peace & Social Witness is actively examining all work with a decolonising lens. If decolonising is the freeing of minds from colonial ideology then this touches all that we do. Quakers are not free from the mindset of colonial practice which has shaped our world.

The Library of the Society of Friends has started to explore work on decolonising collections and increasing accessibility. This is an evolving area of practice and currently the focus is on peer learning, raising staff awareness, and addressing elements of work such as reviewing the language used in catalogue descriptions.

## **Working with others**

Other churches are actively examining these questions too. The Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (on which Quakers are represented) of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland have been running a series of webinars exploring reparations. Their recent webinar covered the [\*restitution of African and Caribbean artefacts\*](#) and can be watched again online.

The article shows how much work needs to go into changing the way we in Britain, including Quakers, think about our role in fostering and perpetuating the colonial approach to history and attitude to objects from other cultures. We all – including me – have so much to learn.

Judith Baker, Quakers in Britain, August 2022

## Fazlul Huq, Bangladesh – seeking righteous justice for the poor

### *A review of his autobiography, by Abu Siddique (Bachchu)*

Bachchu wrote the following article on Advocate Fazlul Haque, who campaigned in East Pakistan and then Bangladesh for rights and justice for the poor. He was a friend and associate of Atuar Rahman Khan, the founder of the NGO Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP), and is still active today. Bachchu wrote:

*“My review is about a book which is the autobiography of Advocate Fazlul Haque. It is written in Bengali, detailing his life and work for destitute poor by providing free legal assistances. I read the book number of times as it reminded me of my work with GUP and of the people who took huge interest in helping the people who lost their dear ones and the properties during the independence struggle of Bangladesh.”*

### Seeking Righteous Justice for the Poor

**Recently I had** a pleasant surprise – I came across an autobiography written in Bengali by Advocate Fazlul Haque. He is still alive, and well-known as the Founder-Secretary of Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA) in Bangladesh, which helps thousands of poor people every year with legal assistance. I personally know him as he played an active role in the national committee of my former employer organisation, Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP), and we are inter-connected as our families lived in Madaripur town for a long time. From this close acquaintance, I thought I knew him well.

**But reading the autobiography,** I now know much better about his early life, social attachments, and commitment to helping the poor with legal assistance. He was born in the late 1930s in a village called Payarpur, but later his family settled five miles away in Madaripur town. The village seemed remote because one could only travel by boat or on foot. It was a time when life used to play tug-of-war with life-threatening diseases: typhoid, malaria, smallpox and cholera, and the diseases often won. He grew up as a lanky boy, though with poor health. Local schooling was limited, and only improved when Madaripur became a sub-divisional town.

**He led a challenging** student life. Beside study, he was an active member of a ‘progressive political party’ which aimed to bring social and political change by and for the ‘proletarian’. This often involved him in acrimonious debate, arguments, and sometimes brawls with other political party members.

**He made a drastic decision** to change his educational institution from Madaripur to Lahore in West Pakistan (now Pakistan), thinking to concentrate on study as well improve his health condition. After securing his B. A. Degree from Muslim Anglo Oriental College he returned to East Pakistan and achieved his law degree at Dhaka University. In 1966 he became a professional

lawyer but first had to learn court formalities as a junior lawyer, and he also spent some time reigniting his political activities.

**Probably the best turn** in his professional life was when he decided to provide legal assistance to people who had limited access to justice. The opportunity came in 1972 when Bangladesh was struggling after the war of independence. He needed to match his idea of legal assistance for the destitute with on-going assistance being offered to the war-affected people, and was fortunate to become friendly with Dr. Robert Anderson and Mohammed Aatur Rahman. They were working to establish GUP as an organisation for long-term development. Both were visionaries, and they helped Fazlul Haque crystallise his idea for legal assistance to the poor.

**It was a new concept**, providing free legal assistance, but Fazlul Haque was determined and he initiated Madaripur Legal Aid Association (MLAA) involving local young lawyers and social activists. Much was the enthusiasm, but little were the financial and material capacities. Nevertheless, he started using his own income and resources and other friends' contributions. The period of struggle was shortened when Asia Foundation, Community Aid Abroad and other funding organisations came forward with assistance.

**He and Mohammed Aatur Rahman**, the then Chairman of MLAA, took a ground-breaking initiative to organise an international conference on 'Role of Legal Aid Society in South Asian Countries'. They received a huge cordial response from national level judges, lawyers, social activists, development specialists and many others. Once financial assistance was confirmed they organised the conference on 13-16 December, 1981. Participants came from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, UK, and Bangladesh. The conference created a momentum at both national and international levels for appropriate legal assistance at the grassroots level.

**Finally, the autobiography** details the progressive activities of MLAA and Fazlul Haque's involvement in numerous conferences, workshops and symposiums, and establishing sister organisations and reviewing laws for the benefit of disadvantaged people in different parts of the world. He is now in his 80's, still working for making law more people-oriented. At the end of the autobiography, Fazlul Haque says that in Bangladesh the people of influential class are pretentious about the necessity of changing laws, which were indeed tailored by the British colonial government, and continue using them to keep up the oppressive social system. As a nation, we need to build up our own opinion in favour of the change. Unless the law is made impartial, unprejudiced and fair, law remains as a weapon of exploitation.

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*Editor's note: We hope that Advocate Fazlul Haque may join the next QSAIG ZOOM meeting. He can be contacted at: [fazlul@mllaabd.org](mailto:fazlul@mllaabd.org)*

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## QSAIG – Get in Touch

We are always interested to hear news of friends and groups in South Asia and Europe. If you have anything you would like to share, please do get in touch with:

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***Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP), Bangladesh***



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