

QUAKER SOUTH ASIA INTEREST GROUP (QSAIG)

NEWSLETTER – Sept 2023

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

Contents

Page

2	QSAIG's activities during the past year
3	News of friends and organisations: GUP, Bangladesh JaiJagat 2020 UK
4	Nepal: news from Subhash Kattel Visit of Adrian Glamorgan, AWPS
5	Bhopal: Guardian article by Tim Edwards and Judah Passow
6	Tamwed: Oz Osborne writes....
7	Children's education in West Bengal: by Maggie Waterworth
8	'Romantic Road': info about a film 'of driving a Rolls Royce across India & Bangladesh
9	'A man is sleeping here' – Article from the Bangladesh Daily Star
10	'Recipe for Change' – Tearfund
11	News snippets from Bangladesh
14	News snippets from India
15	News snippets from Pakistan
17	QSAIG aims and organisation
18	QSAIG – how to get in touch

Will QSAIG reach its 30th Anniversary? *Comments from the Newsletter Editor*

QSAIG started as a group in the 1990's and now is approaching its 30th Anniversary. It is a 'Quaker Interest Group', recognised by the Quaker movement and needing to fulfil certain criteria in line with the Friends' charitable status. QSAIG's aims are set out at the end of this newsletter and focus on facilitating contacts between different people and groups who are interested in South Asia, raising awareness, and providing a source of Quaker support for peace and development in the region.

Nearly every year at our AGM our QSAIG members discuss whether we should carry on as an organisation or 'lay down' the activity, (as some Quaker interest groups have done in the past). The debate will no doubt continue at the next AGM (**at Westminster Meeting House on Saturday 7th October 2023 – see page 18**). Generally, the feedback from our meetings and discussions with friends and contacts is that QSAIG has a valuable role to play. But it will depend on people being willing to take on the organisational duties, and attracting new members as the 'regulars' grow older.

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, 8th Oct. 2022: For the first time, QSAIG's AGM was held entirely on ZOOM. It was hosted by Martin and Liz Schweiger and twenty people participated, including friends and contacts from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Australia and USA.

Notes of the 2022 AGM are available on the QSAIG website. The QSAIG post-holders were confirmed and undertook to continue for another year. They are:

- QSAIG website / co-ordinator, Martin Schweiger: germ.buster@phoncoop.coop
- QSAIG information co-ordinator, Norman Smith: info@qsaig.co.uk
- QSAIG newsletter editor, Rob Gallagher: gallagher.rob@hotmail.co.uk
- QSAIG membership secretary/treasurer, Anne Smith: m_anne_smith@yahoo.co.uk

Mid-Year ZOOM Meeting, April 2023: Fifteen persons joined the mid-year ZOOM meeting, which gave an opportunity to exchange news and also meet new contacts. One new contact was Dr. Leon Miller who is a research fellow affiliated with The Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia. He is involved in developing the 'Regional Peace Network', which aims to establish processes for conflict reduction, peacebuilding, and improved governance. His recent work has been in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, particularly where separatist tribal groups have been opposing the central governments. The Regional Peace Network proposes to explore ways of reconciling the different parties. Leon suggested possible future co-operation with QSAIG, and mentioned a webinar being held at Don Bosco College, Assam, on 3rd August 2023: <https://college.donboscollege.org.in/webinar-impact-of-pedagogy/>

For further information about the Regional Peace Network, Leon invited enquiries via his e-mail address: leonmonroemiller@yahoo.com

QSAIG (virtual) stall at Britain Yearly Meeting, 23rd April 2023: QSAIG took part in the Groups Fair at Britain Yearly Meeting which was entirely on-line. Two slide presentations were shown – one on QSAIG and one on global warming in South Asia. Both are available at the QSAIG website.

In hindsight, the Groups Fair was not very successful for reaching a new audience. Only two people viewed the presentations, so a re-think of the approach is needed. Feedback given to BYM after the event included the following suggestions from Rob Gallagher:

"I think an in-person stall is much easier (and more fun) to operate than a ZOOM stall. Holding a stall via ZOOM requires a different approach altogether – needs to be more planned, designed and 'packaged', whereas a physical stall can be organised quite informally. I much prefer the physical stall, but the audience is more limited. So I think

the BYM organisers should research the best ways to run ZOOM stalls, and publish guidance and suggestions for participants.”

News of friends and organisations

GUP, Bangladesh www.gupbd.org

Quakers have been associated with GUP (Gono Unnayan Prochesta = People’s Development Efforts) since its foundation. This year (23rd April 2023) GUP celebrated its 50th anniversary. GUP’s Executive Director, Monzurul Islam, talked about recent activities at the QSAIG ZOOM meeting in April. NGO funding is harder to obtain these days, particularly for empowerment work and handicrafts. Microfinance is now actively supported. Around 500 GUP staff now work in 14 districts and GUP also has a Physiotherapy Hospital in Khalia. The Peace Centre is still there but not being used as much as previously. Some GUP land in Dhaka was lost when it was taken by the Government, but some new land has been purchased and a new multi-story office will be built. The tin shed buildings in Rajoir need replacing because repair costs are increasing. GUP is developing a 5-year strategic plan.

Jai Jagat 2020 UK *(Jai Jagat = ‘Victory to the World’)*

Jai Jagat 2020 UK was launched in 2020 as part of a European network supporting **Ekta Parishad**, an Indian people’s movement dedicated to non-violent action. Quakers have had close links with Ekta Parishad since the early 2000’s, and Jai Jagat 2020 UK was seen as a practical way of supporting Ekta Parishad’s Jai Jagat 2020 campaign, which focused on global action for poor and marginalized people through collective action across groups and countries. *(See previous QSAIG newsletters).*

In November 2022 the association of Jai Jagat International was laid down, in agreement with all those involved. It had served its purpose to bring all 8 European countries together for the walk to Geneva in 2020 and continued to provide the connection to Rajagopal and Jill Carr Harris (organisers of Ekta Parishad). Rajagopal and Jill visited Europe in October-November 2022 to keep this connection alive but, together with other members, recognised that the Association was no longer an effective vehicle to enable change. Jai Jagat 2020 UK also closed (in January 2023), and Stuart Morton wrote to Virginia Wollaston, one of the main organisers, thanking her and others for all that had been done. Stuart wrote:

“I feel sincerely grateful for all you and Nicholas Paton Philip did to work on Jai Jagat on many levels and in many places over a solid number of years. The recent initiative you undertook to support the African involvement in COP26 was particularly uplifting to me as very often Africa is the most needy in terms of support, networking and building a future for the people of Planet Earth.

Ever since Rajagopal came to Friends House, with Ivan Nutbrown's and Action Village India's support, in 2001(?) it became ever more clear that P.V. Rajagopal was an example that Quakers would be grateful to learn from and to which they became convinced of the Spirit-led necessity to support. Ekta Parishad was, and remains, an inspiration to so many of us; we were offered the great gift of engaging

with that movement under such trusted and dedicated leadership. Their ongoing stamina, empowered from below, lit up many from Europe and beyond. It was always about, and remains, true to the phrase "Better to shine a light than to curse the darkness".

I appreciate all the work of Nicholas and yourself, and of the UK group in which Willemina and I played a small supporting role. The support of Stourbridge Quaker Meeting and, in particular, James Bradbury, was timely and beautiful. I am grateful for the organised way that you have brought JaiJagat UK to an orderly closure.

Jai Jagat indeed!"

Nepal: news 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 been a friend and contact of QSAIG over the years, especially through the South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA), and at the time of the Nepal earthquake in 2015 he was the person through whom Quakers channelled relief funds.

Subhash joined by ZOOM in QSAIG's meetings in October 2022 and April 2023, and also met QSAIG members personally in June 2023 when he visited the UK to attend the War Resisters' International annual assembly.

Subhash is currently running Alternatives to Violence Programmes (AVP) in Nepal. The workshops take place in schools with a focus on alcohol and drugs. There is also a lot to be done on land and agrarian reform. Land-related injustice is linked to poverty and needs to be addressed. Nepal is at a crossroads as it moves from being a feudal state to a more equal society, but this is not helped by the government seeking to give land to corporate companies which use the peasants as cheap labour.

Subhash continues to support the South Asia Peace Alliance. His work is now focusing on a few schools but staying with them in the longer term with training on AVP and decision making.

Visit of Adrian Glamorgan from AWPS – FWCC

Adrian Glamorgan is Secretary of the Asia West Pacific Section (AWPS) of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) and lives in Freemantle, Western Australia. He became the AWPS Secretary in August 2022.

In April/May 2023 Adrian visited the UK to attend Britain Yearly Meeting and make contact with friends in the UK and Europe. During his visit several members of QSAIG were able to meet him and talk about AWPS's work and QSAIG's modest efforts. Afterwards, Rob Gallagher drafted the following note for the benefit of QSAIG members:

“It was good to meet Adrian and so much better than a ZOOM meeting. We met for about an hour in a cafe, and then Adrian did a short video interview with Norman Smith and myself separately, on our experience of development work in India/Bangladesh and any comments that might be relevant to young Quakers.

Adrian described some of his recent work, including visiting Quaker meetings in South Korea and Japan, and we talked about QSAIG. We mentioned that QSAIG is a small group and we would like to encourage more people to get involved. Adrian asked how to do this, and we thought perhaps by (i) reaching out to the South Asia ethnic groups in the UK, and (ii) renewing our efforts of last year to make contact with UK local meetings, as there are many Quakers around the country who are interested in South Asia in some way.

We learnt a lot from meeting Adrian – for example, do people know that there is now a British Government Minister of State responsible for the Indo-Pacific region? (It's Ann-Marie Trevelyan).

We hope to follow up QSAIG's links with AWPS, and further information about AWPS and FWCC can be found at their respective websites: <https://fwccawps.org/> and <https://fwcc.world/>

Bhopal: Guardian article by Tim Edwards

Next year (2nd December 2024) will be the 40th anniversary of the Bhopal disaster. Over half a million people were affected by the toxic cloud of poisonous gases that spread over much of Bhopal when water was mistakenly allowed to enter a chemical storage tank, causing a major reaction. It is estimated that more than 25,000 people died – possibly 8,000 in the first week of the disaster, and others in the following years. Today, more than 150,000 people still suffer from disorders caused by the accident and the subsequent contamination.

The US owners of the Bhopal pesticide factory, Union Carbide, shut down the site and left it to rust. It has never been cleaned up and so the poisoning continues. In 2001 Union Carbide was acquired by Dow Chemicals, but Dow has steadfastly refused to clean up the site.

Several groups and NGO's have campaigned for justice and action over Bhopal, and their campaigns continue. The groups include:

- **Action for Bhopal**, a Quaker-initiated group working for justice and a clean-up in Bhopal, www.actionforbhopal.org
- **Bhopal Medical Appeal (UK)** – <https://www.bhopal.org/>
- **International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (USA)** – <https://www.bhopal.net/>

On 14/06/2023 Tim Edwards, the Executive Trustee of the Bhopal Medical Appeal, and Judah Passow wrote an article in the Guardian newspaper, 'Bhopal: still waiting for justice, four decades on'. Their article concluded:

“Some Dow shareholders tried to stop the merger [of Dow Chemicals with Union Carbide], knowing that a corporation assumes the assets and the liabilities of a company it buys, according to established corporate law. Indeed, soon after it acquired Union Carbide, Dow settled a US lawsuit, paying out \$2.2bn to compensate people in the US affected by Union Carbide’s use of asbestos in legacy products. But Dow maintains that it is not liable for Union Carbide’s actions in Bhopal.”

The full article can be read at the Guardian website via the following link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jun/14/bhopal-toxic-gas-leak-chemical-environmental-disaster-waiting-for-justice-union-carbide-dow>

Tamwed – Oz Osborne writes.....

Tamwed (Tamil Nadu/West Devon) is a small charity that has engaged with Friends since 2005 to assist those affected by the Boxing Day Tsunami. Many of the founders had connections with India and have visited, lived or worked there – including the Steins, who managed an NGO supported by the Quakers in Madhya Pradesh.

After supporting community organisations in different parts of South India, Tamwed became partners with the **ISLAND Trust** that works with tribal people in the Nilgiri Hills around the former hill station of Ootacamund (Ooty). Coincidentally, this was near the home of Marjorie Sykes, a Quaker teacher who went to India in the 1920s and joined the Indian independence movement, spending most of the remainder of her life there doing good works. The Stein children (including my wife) went to boarding school in Ooty not far from the ISLAND Trust base.



Harvesting from the forest or cultivating food and medicinal crops for the family or for sale is being reintroduced. Tribal people drink a traditional concoction of herbs, which they are sure contributed to their success in surviving the Covid epidemic.

For the last 12 years, we have supported projects that improve the welfare, livelihoods and environment of tribal groups living in remote villages who have yet to benefit from India’s economic progress. The Badaga, Toda, Kota, Kurumba and other indigenous groups (Adivasis) risk losing their culture to this so-called progress and have much to teach us about values and relationships – with each other and the environment. Many, having lost their land and way of life, rely on part-time labour such as tea picking for an income and on basic food rations provided by the Government for those living in poverty. Gradually, tribal people are losing their independence which was highlighted during the Covid epidemic when they were found to have lost the resources needed to survive independently. Tamwed’s supporters rallied to fund aid delivered by the ISLAND Trust who were alarmed to find a particularly isolated and marginalised group of Adivasis in villages outside our project area. We decided to shift the focus of our Tribal Futures programme to respond to the immediate

and long-term needs of Paniya and other groups living close to the border with Kerala. Here, project staff have linked with another NGO, the **Nilgiris Wynaad Tribal Welfare Society (NWTWS)** which was founded by John Wilson from a Quaker family who was a qualified nurse and studied psychiatric training at the Quaker Retreat in York. John sadly died in 2021 but his legacy continues with NWTWS. In the early days of our project work in this new area, we are keen to build on his and others' legacies in a sensitive way. We have done more than just fund project work over the years - many of us having visited and shared our professional skills and personal interests. We have found that our relationship has mutual benefits and taught us great respect for indigenous people who have often been subject to cruel treatment.

Oz Osborne, Tamwed: www.tamwed.org info@tamwed.org

Children's education project in West Bengal: from Maggie Waterworth

Margaret Waterworth is an education specialist and QSAIG member who has been involved with the **Vikramshila Education Resource Society**, based in Kolkata, for over a decade. Vikramshila leads initiatives in pedagogy, curriculum development, teacher development programmes, children supplementary learning centres and child protection. After the QSAIG AGM in October 2022, Maggie sent the following news:



"We are supporting parents and children through drama in the Sundarbans project with TDRO (Trickle down and Ripple out), a project in partnership with local government schools in West Bengal and people in the Republic of Ireland.

Children write the script on issues like environment, land rights, careers and so on and perform for their local communities/villages, followed by discussions led by the children in English and Bengali.

We are involved with 5 schools from classes 5 to 8 in the Basanti District and villages around Jharkhali. About 1,500 children take part in group work and peer to peer learning; no textbooks or rote learning.

Local partners are West Bengal Forestry Commission , WB Primary and Senior Schools Board based in Kolkata, school heads and principals, and local Panchayat leaders.

Vikramshila is using creative writing stories on-line now, all developed during COVID when we conducted ZOOM sessions with teachers and with 16 English medium schools under West Bengal Board. I have written stories to replace the ones in the text book that were old fashioned and based on rote learning. Task sheets are included and then the children write their own stories/poems/ playlets. Getting and keeping the relevant language is essential.

Thank you for a really informative meeting and allowing me to keep in touch with all the work that is going on.

In Friendship, Maggie (and best wishes to the whole QSAIG group)

<http://www.vikramshila.org/index.htm> supports education for children from under-resourced and at-risk sections of society

In case you missed it.....

Film: 'Romantic Road' – about a leading London lawyer and his wife motoring across rural India in their battered 1936 Rolls Royce, to get to a human rights festival in Bangladesh.



Released 2021

Director: Oliver McGarvey

Stars: Jan Grey, Rupert Grey, Mojibur Rahman Mahir

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6099468/>

A man is sleeping here: Scenes from Dhaka footpaths on a winter night

From an article in Bangladesh Daily Star, Mon Jan 9, 2023 , by Sumon Ali



Photo: Star

It was 2:00am in Dhaka. The bone-chilling winter breeze was blowing ferociously. The roads were quiet. A few trucks occasionally sped through the capital's deserted streets. This reporter noticed a man trembling inside a plastic bag, trying his best to seek refuge from the cold near Panthapath intersection.

"All I have is a mat, a thin blanket, and a plastic bag. I'm still having trouble falling asleep. This is no way to live," he said.

Nearby, 6-year-old Tara was sleeping with her mother. They sell flowers during the day. At night, they sleep on the footpaths with the help of two thin blankets. "Why are you still awake?" the reporter asked Tara. "How can I sleep in this cold?" she promptly replied. When asked about her father, she simply said, "He's dead." No emotions were present on her face. Her mother Masuda added, "We make an average of Tk 200 per day." She and Tara recently moved to Dhaka from Barishal, leaving two of her children behind. "We send a portion of the money home. We hardly manage three square meals a day with the remainder," she added.

This correspondent talked with 10 people from different places of the capital on Thursday night, from 12:00am to 2:30am. They all had similar stories to tell.

Shuvo, a 16-year-old, was curled up on the footpath near Karwan Bazar. He has been staying there for three years. After his father remarried following his mother's death, he fled his Manikganj home and came to Dhaka. Shuvo was shivering while talking. He just had a plastic bag as his bed, while he used his shoes as a pillow. He wrapped himself up with a lungi, in absence of a blanket. "Last year, I got a blanket as a donation. That was stolen. I have nothing to shield myself from the cold right now," he said. "I barely get anything to eat.

Sometimes, passers-by help me out by giving me some money. Occasionally, I collect plastics and sell them." "Today, I couldn't manage any food. I'm starving and shivering," he added.

Mohammad Mohsin, 40, has been living on the streets for about 14 years. His story is a little different. When he was a schoolboy in Jamalpur, he fell in love with a girl. Her name is still written on his hand. At the age of 14, Mohsin and his high-school sweetheart ran away to Dhaka. He then started working as a garment worker. However, the girl eventually returned to her family and married elsewhere. Depressed, Mohsin barely attended his workplace and was eventually fired. That's how he ended up in the streets. After moving to and from various footpaths, he is now staying on one at Karwan Bazar. The man doesn't have a blanket or warm clothes of his own.

Jahid Hasan, who works as a staff at a tea stall, has shared one of his winter outfits and a blanket with Mohsin. He himself has been staying on the footpath following his mother's death in 2014.

Such are the stories of the footpaths.....

A Recipe for Change

Ingredients:

- Eight world leaders*
- Global food problem*
- Prayer*
- Truth-loving people and their voices across the UK*
- Justice*

Take eight world leaders and a global food problem.

Throw in your prayers, your support and your voice.

Combine until justice has seasoned mixture. Put in the oven.

Turn up the heat until justice has risen.

Serves: 7 billion

Act now, because no one needs to be hungry.

www.tearfund.org/if

News snippets from Bangladesh *(mostly from the Daily Star)*

Environment

- 17-12-2022 Coal consumption in Bangladesh to increase this year by 75% due to completion of a new coal-fired power stations at Payra. Six other new coal-fired power stations are expected to be built. Bangladesh will also import electricity from new coal-fired power stations in India (e.g. Adani power station).
- 22-12-2022 Ramphal coal-fired power plant is nearing completion. Protests from environmentalists over possible threats to the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest.
- 16-02-2023 Dhaka yesterday was the second most air polluted city in the world after Lahore.
- 02-05-2023 Dhaka's air quality worst in the world today. Jakarta and Yangon were second and third.
- 22-06-2023 Dhaka ranks 7th worst in world on **City Liveability index** (Economist), same as 2022. Still, it's better than six years ago, when Dhaka was second-worst in the world.
- 19-04-2023 Extremely high temperatures affecting South Asia.
- 21-08-2023 Bangladesh introduces genetically-modified cotton – the second GM crop to be adopted, after GM Brinjal in 2014. The modified cotton includes a bacteria gene that discourages bollweevils.

Economy

- 05-12-2022 Bangladesh Bank to open 'Crisis Management Cell' to expedite issuing of Letters of Credit for import of essential commodities, due to a shortage of US dollars held by banks
- 13-12-2022 Bangladesh Taka has lost one-quarter of its value in just over a year (Tk 83/dollar in Sept. 2021, now Tk 103/dollar). In the late 1970's the value was about Tk 15/dollar.
- 12-11-2022 BD seeks £2bn in WB aid. WB puts forward a whole long list of institutional, social, economic and trade reforms
- 03-12-2022 Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan all expected to graduate from LDC (Least Developed Country) to 'Developing Country' status soon. They will face challenges due to higher cost of borrowing, reduced tariff preferences, etc.

Social

- 07/02/2023 Bangladesh population is nearly 170 million, compared with about 70 million in 1971. Annual growth rate is falling (2.8% in 1981, 1.5% in 2011, 1.2% in 2022).

Continued.....

News snippets from Bangladesh *(continued)*

- 18-07-2023 Adult literacy in Bangladesh is only 60%
- 04-05-2023 Child marriages: BD has the highest proportion in S. Asia (and 8th highest in the world) – 51% of females getting married are under 18. Over 20% are under 15.
- 23-05-2023 The Bangladesh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 stipulates that girls must be aged at least 18 to be eligible for marriage, and boys 21. In the UK, under the 2022 Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act, 16- and 17-year-olds are no longer allowed to marry or enter a civil partnership, even with parental consent.
- 12-04-2023 Caesareans are now 45% of all births in Bangladesh. Most are unnecessary. WHO reckons 10-15% is the 'ideal' rate. UK has a rate of about 25%, Sweden about 17.5%, and the European average is about 25%, East Asia average is about 34%. However, worldwide the proportion is steadily growing.
- 28-06-2023 World Happiness Index 2023: Bangladesh was ranked 118/137 countries surveyed (but higher than India (126) and Afghanistan (137)). All of the QSAIG countries are in the bottom quarter of the index, except for Nepal (78/137). Finland, Denmark and Iceland are ranked 1, 2 and 3. UK is ranked 19 (higher than France, Singapore, Spain and Italy).
- The 'World Happiness Index' was compiled by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The Index uses six key factors to measure happiness — social support, income, health, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption.

Politics and Governance

- 03-05-2023 Bangladesh ranked 163 out of 180 countries in the world for press freedom, down one place from last year. India was ranked 161, Pakistan 150, Sri Lanka 135, Nepal 95th. Only Myanmar in South Asia has a lower ranking (173rd). Bangladesh and India's ranking are in the 'very serious' category.
- 05-04-2023 CPD study estimates that tax evasion costs Bangladesh between \$4bn – \$22bn each year. Bangladesh has by far the lowest GDP-tax ratio in South Asia, except for Afghanistan.
- 18-12-2022 Bangladesh Bank ignored rules, allowing four business groups to borrow huge sums.
- 03-08-2023 An investigation by the Daily Star alleged that the owner of one of Bangladesh's biggest business groups has amassed a business empire in Singapore worth at least \$1bn. although there is no record of him taking any permission from Bangladesh Bank (BB) to invest or transfer any funds abroad.
- 13-12-2022 Major BNP demonstrations in Dhaka and other major towns and cities. Some top BNP leaders imprisoned for allegedly inciting riots.

Continued.....

News snippets from Bangladesh *(continued)*

- 30-12-2022 Top BNP leaders denied bail. Yet some people accused of multi-million frauds easily obtained bail.
- Feb 2023 New President of Bangladesh selected by AL
- 18-07-2023 Turnout in Dhaka 17 By-Election was just 11.5% The AL candidate won. The independent candidate was attacked!
- 14-04-2023 10th anniversary (23rd April) of Rana Plaza collapse in Savar. 1,138 garments workers were killed when the eight-storey building collapsed. One day before the collapse a TV channel recorded footage showing cracks in the building. Workers were evacuated, but later the same day the owner said the building was safe and the workers were told to return or lose a month's pay.
- The building was constructed in violation of numerous planning laws and building regulations. 41 people, including government officials, were charged with murder. To date (2023) no-one has been found guilty, and only the owner Sohel Rana is in jail (though on a separate charge of failing to disclose his personal wealth to the Anti-Corruption Commission).
- 7-3-2023 Gas explosion at Siddique Bazar, Dhaka kills 25 and injures 100. The disaster (one of many) resulted from corruption in multiple areas: illegal gas connections, lack of inspection, non-enforcement of building rules, illegal use of basement for commercial purposes.
- 20-05-2023 2,162 convicts are currently on death row in prisons across the country. Most are on death row for five years or more, pending appeal, and some for 10-15 years. More than three-quarters are from lower-income groups. Some of the crimes do not meet the criteria of 'most serious crimes' as defined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which Bangladesh joined in 2000. In Bangladesh, capital punishment can be given for economic crimes such as selling goods on the black market, smuggling and foreign currency crimes.
- However, the number of executions is much lower than the number of convictions – 30 people were executed in the eight years from 2011-2019, though this was a significant increase on twenty years earlier (11 executions in the nine years 1991-2000).
- In addition to official executions, 'extrajudicial killings' should also be considered. In three-and-a-half years (Jan. 2017 to July 2020), 1,426 custodial deaths took place, according to Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK). (Daily Star, 03/10/2020). Many were so-called 'shoot-outs' or 'cross-fire' (where a prisoner is shot in the field while attempting to escape, or killed in 'cross-fire' with alleged assailants). Yet hardly any police officers are killed in these 'shoot-outs'. (Daily Star, 22/08/2020).

Continued.....

News snippets from Bangladesh *(continued)*

- 12-11-2022 Deaths due to "crossfires" and "gunfights" have dwindled following the sanctions slapped on RAB's top brass by the United States. Ain o Salish Kendra counted just three deaths in "crossfires" with law enforcement agencies this year (2022). (*RAB = Rapid Action Battalion*)
- 10-07-2023 Bangladesh government is considering introducing a Universal Pension.
- 17-08-2023 The National Pension scheme launched. The aim is to bring all citizens aged above 18 under its coverage.

Other Snippets

- 06-05-2023 Two minor tremors jolted Dhaka recently. A major tremor (over 6.9 magnitude) would lead to over 865,000 buildings collapsing in the Capital, and possibly kill quarter of a million people and injure as many.
- 11-04-2023 Dr. Zafrullah Chowdhury died, aged 81. Huge outpouring of sadness and respect from all sections of society.

News snippets from India

- 14-11-2022 The world's population reached 8bn on 15th Nov. 2022. India, with 1.43bn or nearly 18% of the global population (2023 figures), has now overtaken China. The growth is concentrated in India's poorer northern states: Kerala in the south has already stabilised and passed its peak population.
- Over half of the world's projected increase will occur in just eight countries: India, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and Tanzania.
- 17-12-2022 In a war of words at the UN, India's foreign minister accused Pakistan of being the "epicentre of terrorism" while his counterpart hit back that Narendra Modi was the "Butcher of Gujarat".
- 22-12-2022 Modi will not fly over Pakistan airspace en route to a conference in Kyrgyzstan, due to a dispute with Pakistan earlier in the year (February 2022) when Muslim militants attacked an Indian convoy and killed 40, which was followed by an Indian airstrike on a 'terrorist training camp' in Pakistan.
- 17-01-2023 The BBC aired a two-part TV documentary on Modi and the 2002 anti-Muslim riots in Ahmedabad during his state premiership (available on BBC i-player until January 2024: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0dkb144>)
- Feb 2023 Indian police raid the BBC offices in Delhi, ostensibly checking for tax evasion, but possibly in response to the BBC documentary.
- May 2023 Someone in India launches a civil case against the BBC for defaming Modi.

News snippets from India *(continued)*

- March 2023 Ruhul Gandhi, the leading face of India's opposition Congress party, given a two-year jail sentence for defamation. The case was brought by a lawmaker from the ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) over comments Gandhi made that were deemed to be insulting to the prime minister, Narendra Modi, and every other person in India with the surname Modi. The jail sentence will prevent Gandhi from standing in the next general elections in April/May 2024.
- Gandhi appealed to the Gujarat High Court but it refused to stay his conviction, saying there were 'non-existent grounds' for an appeal and citing the need for "purity" to remain in politics.
- 04-08-2023 Gandhi's conviction was suspended by the Supreme Court, which agreed to hear his appeal. In a preliminary ruling, a bench of three judges said no reason had been given by the judge for giving Gandhi the maximum punishment. While Gandhi's comments were "not in good taste" and he "ought to have been more careful while making public speeches", the conviction not only punished Gandhi but also voters who had elected him to represent their constituency.
- 23-08-2023 India became the first nation to successfully land a spacecraft near the lunar south pole with its Chandrayaan-3 mission. (Chandrayaan = "Mooncraft" in Sanskrit). Chandrayan-1 orbited the moon in 2009 and sent a probe to crash on the moon's surface. Chandrayan-2 sent a craft to land on the moon in 2019, but it crashed.
- India has also had a space probe orbiting Mars since 2014 (it was launched in 2013).

News snippets from Pakistan

Politics:

- 10-04-2022 A no confidence motion in the Pakistan National Assembly results in Prime Minister Imran Khan being removed from office.
- 21-10-2022 Imran Khan barred from public office by the Election Commission of Pakistan for allegedly fabricating information.
- 09-05-2023 Imran Khan arrested on corruption charges, leading to widespread protests and rioting. On 15th May the Islamabad High Court declared the arrest illegal and ordered his release. He was re-arrested on 5th August, but an appeals court suspended his conviction and three-year prison term and granted bail.

Continued.....

News snippets from Pakistan *(continued)*

Politics:

- 10-08-2023 National Assembly was dissolved by President Arif Alvi on the advice of the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. According to the Constitution, elections must be held within 90 days (i.e. 10th November 2023). However, the results of the 2023 digital census were approved by a committee headed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on 5th August 2023, and this was given as the reason for delaying the elections until February 2024.
- 21-09-2023 Election Commission announces that national elections will be held at the end of January 2024.

Environment:

April/May 2023: A record-breaking heat wave affected many Asian countries in April-May 2023, including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, China, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam and Laos. Several regional temperature records were set. A study by the World Weather Attribution found that the heat wave was made at least 30 times more likely by climate change, and had raised temperatures by at least 2 °C in many parts of Asia. *(Source: Wikipedia)*

Pakistan's intense heat wave lasted from March to June. Nine cities recorded temperatures greater than or equal to 40 °C (104 °F) on 23 April. On 21 May, Jacobabad in Sindh Province (north Pakistan) reached 49 °C (120 °F). The city is one of the hottest places on earth, with summer temperatures regularly rising to a mean temperature of 37 °C (99 °F). It has been cited as one of the world's most vulnerable places to global warming, and one where the difference between 1.5°C and 2°C can be the difference between life and death. *(Source: Wikipedia)*.

- 20-06-2023 According to the WHO's Air Quality Index, the four cities with the world's worst air pollution today were, in descending order: (1) Dhaka, (2) Lahore, (3) Delhi, (4) Karachi.

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 – both Quakers and non-Quakers – 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 7th October 2023

Time: 10.30am – 3.30pm, UK time

Location: (1) IN PERSON: Westminster Meeting House, 52 St Martin's Lane, London, WC24EA; (2) ON ZOOM

Invitations from: info@qsaig.co.uk

Contact: Norman Smith, info@qsaig.co.uk

Tel: 07947273545

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:

- QSAIG information co-ordinator, Norman Smith: info@qsaig.co.uk
- QSAIG website / co-ordinator, Martin Schweiger: germ.buster@phonecoop.coop
- QSAIG newsletter editor, Rob Gallagher: gallagher.rob@hotmail.co.uk
- QSAIG membership secretary/treasurer, Anne Smith: m_anne_smith@yahoo.co.uk

QSAIG Membership Subscriptions

We request members, new members and donors to pay QSAIG on-line or by cheque in the post:

Subscriptions: £10 for those working, and £5 for the unwaged

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Privacy and Data Protection Requirements

If you no longer wish to receive communications from the Quaker South Asia Interest Group, please contact Anne Smith at m_anne_smith@yahoo.co.uk and your details will be removed from our list.