

Quaker South Asia Interest Group

10am – 3.30pm Saturday 12 October 2024

At Selly Oak Meeting House, 930 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6NB

Present in the room: Stuart Morton, Anne Smith, Norman Smith, Liz and Martin Schweiger.

Present on Zoom: Norman Titus, Adrian Glamorgan, Abu Siddique, Christine Kell, Tim Edwards, John McConnell, Md Monzurul Islam Chowdhury, Fran Worpe, Margaret Waterworth, Ann Kurra, Robert Gallagher. Stephanie Ramamurthy, Merryl Titus, Martin Macpherson.

Apologies: Gerald Conyham, Penny Robbins, Judith Baker, Liz and Mike Watson, Prathivadi Anand,

Meeting for Worship

Link on Zoom to **All India Yearly Meeting** taking place in Bhopal, India. This was kindly facilitated by Norman Titus and Devdas Shrisunder in India.

Able to make contact and exchange greetings

Theme is Ubuntu, following the World Plenary Meeting in South Africa. Holding Hands together. I am because you are.

Fruitful theme. Today is the last day of the yearly gathering.

4 Yearly Meetings in India. Also 4 overseas friends. Over 100 participants.

Good to see Adrian Morgan from FWCC in the meeting who told us that Indian Friends were warm and hospitable. Adrian was experiencing a lot of joy and kindness

One of the themes was the need to strengthen education in India.

Announcement of 4 deaths

William Knox

Ram Ramamurthy

Sultana Rahman

Shikdar Akhtaruzzaman (son of S A Wahab)

Tim Edwards from Bhopal Medical Appeal

Tim spent 8 months in Bhopal shortly after the disaster which occurred on 3rd December 1984. The Union Carbide factory in Bhopal released 27 tons of toxic gas from Tank 610 with no warning. Thousands died. Many were harmed, they escaped with their lives but not with their health. 3 deaths related to the gas poisoning occur

each day. Congenital birth defects are common. Union Carbide abandoned the factory with no clean up. Survivors were abandoned by politicians and government. There is still missing information about the toxicology of the gas and the contaminated ground water so treatment primarily symptomatic in nature. Use of local treatments and the development of herbal plants in an organic herb garden. Information has been deliberately withheld by Union Carbide and its parent Company, Dow Chemicals to reduce their financial liability.

A double page advertisement in the Guardian newspaper did raise money to set up a clinic which was replaced in 2004. It is now difficult to send money to India because of Govt of India regulation. Fortunately money is now being raised in India to support the Sambhavna clinic which has a hundred community volunteers. 35,000 affected people registered. Good link between the group in the UK and the project in Bhopal.

See: <https://www.bhopal.org/sambhavna-clinic/>

Higher risks in gas exposed people to Covid-19 infection and its consequences.

Chingari Trust a project established by two local women working for women survivors and their children. 20 year campaign of work with severely disabled children.

See: <https://www.bhopal.org/chingari-rehabilitation-centre/>

Justice Campaign. Report with Amnesty International. 93% paid US500 in final settlement, something agreed by Govt of India. Waste disposal system said not to be the responsibility of Union Carbide. Dow Chemicals who took it over 22 years ago also deny responsibility. Efforts now being made with US Law Makers to serve a summons on Dow to appear in Court in India. More hearings expected.

3rd December is National Chemical Disaster Awareness Day.

Merryl Titus

John McConnell, Scholarships for Street Kids (S4SK), Myanmar

Working on education for children in Myanmar for the past 17 years.

Civilian populations being punished by Junta. Lot of people now IDPs, (internally displaced persons). Hard to stay in other villages because of the need to be registered. Children cannot go to school because no certificate from previous headmasters. Junta uses conscription in a similar way to the old British naval press gangs. China is putting pressure on the ethnic armies not to fight the Junta.

A problem to every solution

A general degradation of school system – S4SK now provide a secondary school curriculum on line

Internally displaced children need education S4SK makes use of on line classes and help students to relocate.

Displaced teachers living in the forest. 6 day teacher capacity building course. Providing some support.

Long term support matters. Need to be cautious in what publicity is given so it does not draw attention to people who may be identified and harmed.

Md Monzurul Islam, Gono Unnayan Prochesta, Bangladesh

35 years with GUP.

GUP started April 1973. Peace Centre established in 1982 to promote peace and human rights. A lot of effort to take the programme forward after death of Ataur Rahman. Microfinance started with hope that surplus could fund rest of the work. However, Government of Bangladesh regulations mean that only 15% of surplus can be used for development.

Peace Library is used from 5pm to 10pm each day. 2 schools run with poor students. Total 150 students from Rajoir and Khalia.

Education support centre give children basic education and develop their own basic talents. Youth development programme. Work with elderly people, sharing their experiences with younger people.

NGO Bureau has to approve any money coming from abroad.

Md Younus, new President, is supportive of the NGO sector.

Merryl Titus, Bhopal

Not able to attend all India yearly Gathering because unable to get leave. Pleased to hear Tim talking about Bhopal Gas Tragedy. Consequences continue.

Film produced about the Bhopal Gas Tragedy which is well worth seeing.

Schools are working well. No current update but expects Adrian Glamorgan to visit them shortly.

Rob Gallagher, currently in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

23 million people in Dhaka, increase 1 million per year.

Transport plan done with a team of consultants, 45 years of work in this area. Many recommendations remain copied from earlier projects. Need to encourage people in Govt to take a different approach to transport.

Change in Govt means uncertainty at present. Political process on hold. A lot of jockeying for position. Slows things down because of a need for reassessment. Civil servants are reluctant to make big decisions at the moment to avoid future criticism. Very fluid situation.

Climate change is mentioned but so far little action. Climate change used to help bid for funds but does not result in action. More coal fired power stations being brought into use in Bangladesh

Nagaland, Martin Macpherson.

Naga Working Group, is part of the International Conciliation Group. Over 20 years of work. No in-person meetings since before Covid but contact has been maintained with the largest of civil society groups. Forum for Naga Reconciliation. Armed factions. Main players Issac Movia group plus 6 others. On going discussions with Government of India.

Sticking points are there although some general agreement in place but some groups want to fly the Naga Flag and want a separate Constitution which is so far been resisted by Govt of India. India now wants a 1,000 mile fence around Burma which will cause problems for Nagas who have been used to free movement.

Naga workers returning from work in the mines in a truck was ambushed by Indian Army, 6 killed. More people died in the protests that followed. No prosecutions have followed. Other conflicts occur. Eastern Naga land is deprived and there are discussions about the need for more autonomy. 33% reservation for women in elections has been enforced and some women now in Nagaland parliament.

We need to be sensitive about open discussions about Nagaland because of the risks to people who may be named or identified.

Abu Siddique talking about Fazlul Haq, a pioneering development worker.

Recently published work is "Seeking Justice for the Destitute" in English and Bengali. Fazlul Haq set up the Legal Aid Association in Madariapur in 1978.. He was a lawyer. For rural people it is difficult to use the legal system, taking too long and too expensive. Better to use mediation.

Seeking Justice for the Destitute is published by Amazon: Link is:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Search-Justice-Destitute-Autobiography/dp/B0DCJX911X>
£6-26 for paperback, £2-35 for Kindle edition.

Call for thoughts about the use of the Peace Centre to be sent to Abu Siddique before he visits in January 2025. Martin to send Subhash's contact details.

Christine Kell **SCAD.** (Social Change and Development)

Tamil Nadu link for 20 years. Poor and marginalized. Set up by a Catholic Priest, Cletus Barbu who married a social worker. "Service to humanity is service to God" is the strapline for SCAD.

Work in 500 villages. Farming, fishing, salt pans. Salt pan work done by women who go blind and because of carrying heaving loads of salt on their heads get spinal problems. Volunteers support women's self-help groups. An Engineering College and a Polytechnic have been set up and the income from these raise funds for SCAD.

Orphan elders because young people leave the area to seek work and effectively contact is lost.

See Website: www.SCAD.org.in

Margaret Waterworth.

Speaking from Mumbai. 35°C with lots of sunshine and rain.

3 days of creative drawing and drama. Lots of drama on peace with a focus on the life of Ghandi. Ghandi still seen as so important. May be able to send a video. Duga Puja is one month long, very colourful and noisy. Sombre mood in the background because a doctor was raped and murdered while working in a hospital in Kolkota. Hospitals lack security, no rest rooms in government hospitals. 6 doctors now on hunger strike. Silent marches demanding security, very dignified.

Information about Memorial Meeting for Ram Ramamurthy.

We warmly invite you to join us for a Memorial Meeting for Worship in remembrance of our beloved N Ramamurthy. As we gather to honour and celebrate Ram's life, we invite you to join us in a time of reflection, sharing, and worship.

Date: 16th November 2024

Time: 14.30 to 15.30

Venue: George Fox Room, Friends House, Euston Road, NW1 2BJ

Followed by tea and cake.

We hope this gathering brings comfort and peace to all as we come together to celebrate a life lived with love, generosity and kindness.

Please feel free to share this invitation with others who knew Ram. If you plan to attend in person kindly let us know by 10th November 2024.

This is a blended meeting for worship so can also attend online. If you wish to attend online please can you also let us know by 10th November so we can send you a link.

Just respond to memorialforram@gmail.com

If you wish to make a donation for Ram you you can do so here. All donations are going to Scholarships for Street Kids,

KInd regards

Stephanie, Sita, Krishna and Anandi

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**Date and venue of Meetings in 2025**

Saturday 12 April 2025 am on Zoom

Saturday 11 October 2025 Meeting plus AGM

(To explore the use of Westminster Meeting House.)