

BANGLADESH

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
1. THE LAND	4
(a) Relief	4
(b) Drainage	6
(c) Soil	9
2. CLIMATE	9
3. PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE	10
4. THE PEOPLE	11
(a) Settlement Patterns	11
(b) Ethnic composition and distribution	12
(c) Linguistic Composition	13
(d) Religion	14
5. ECONOMY	15
(a) Agriculture	15
(b) Industry	16
(c) Transportation	17
6. ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS	17
(a) Education	19
7. HISTORY	20
8. PRESENT SITUATION	30

INTRODUCTION

Capital – Dhaka

Area – 148,393 sq.km

Population – 150.4 million

Language – Bangla, Chakma, Magh

Religions – Islam-83%, Hindu-16%, Others-1%

Literacy – 43.1%

Currency – Taka (US \$ = 68.84)

Per Capita Income – \$ 2,200 (PPP)

Mid latitude – 24.00 North

Mid longitude – 90.00 East

President – Laujuddin Ahmed

Head of Interim government – Fakhruddin Ahmed

“Bangladesh (“Land of the Bengalis”) is an independent Asian state located in the delta of the Ganges and Jamuna (Brahmaputra) rivers in the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent. The country’s official name is the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. The capital is Dhaka.

As the eastern portion of the historic region of Bengal, the area formed, along with what is now the Indian state of West Bengal, the province of Bengal in British India. From the partition of 1947 until 1971 it was, as East Pakistan, one of five provinces of Pakistan, separated from the other four by 1,100 miles (1,800 km) of Indian Territory.

Bangladesh, whose population is predominantly Muslim, is a riverine country. It has an area of 55,598 square miles (143,393 square km) and is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Bangladesh is bounded by the Indian state of West Bengal to the west and north, Assam to the north, Meghalaya to the north and northeast, and Tripura and Mizoram to the east, by Myanmar (Burma) to the southeast, and by the Bay of Bengal to the south.”¹

1. THE LAND

(A) *RELIEF*

Bangladesh constitutes the eastern two-thirds of the Ganges-Brahmaputra deltaic plain, which stretches northward from the Bay of Bengal. Except for areas of jungle-covered old alluvium in the northwest and north-centre – called, respectively, the Barind and Madhupur tracts – the plain is a flat surface of recent alluvium, having a gentle slope and generally with an elevation of 30 feet above sea level. In the northeast and the southeast the alluvial plains, called respectively, the Sylhet and Chittagong hills, running mainly north-south, that form parts of the mountain divide with Myanmar and India. Bangladesh is fringed on the south by the Sundarbans, a huge marshy deltaic forest. The land of Bangladesh is divided into five major parts. They are

Barnid Tract – The Barind tract is a triangular wedge of land in north-western Bangladesh located between the flood plains of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. The soil of this region is hard, reddish clay and the region is comparatively elevated. A depression called the Bhar Basin extends southeast

of the Barind Tract for about 100 miles between the floodplains of Ganges and Bhramaputra rivers to their confluence. The floodplains of the Bhramaputra, which lie north of the Bhar Basin and east of the Barind Tract, stretch from the border of Assam on the north to the confluence of the Ganges and Bhramaputra in the south. The area is dominated by the Bhramaputra, which frequently overflows its banks in devastating floods. South of the Bhar Basin is the floodplain of the Ganges

Madhupur Tract – In north-central Bangladesh, east of the Bhramaputra floodplain, is the Madhupur Tract. It consists of elevated plateaus, with hill locks varying in height from 30 to 60 feet and cultivated valleys. The Madhupur Tract contains sal trees, whose hardwood is comparable in value and utility to teak. East of the Madhupur Tract, in northeastern Bangladesh, is a region called the Northeastern Lowland. It encompasses the southern and southwestern parts of the Sylhet area (including the valley plain of the Surma River) and the northern part of the Mynensingh area and has a large number of lakes.

Meghna Flood Basin – In east-central Bangladesh the Bhramaputra river in its old course built up the Meghna Flood Basin, which includes the low and fertile Meghna-Lakhya Daob (the land area between those rivers). This area is enriched by the Titas distributaries and land areas and formed and changed by the deposition of silt and sand in the riverbeds of the Meghna river, especially between Bhairab Bazar and Daudkandi. Dhaka is located in this region.

Central Delta Basin – In southern Bangladesh the Central Delta Basin include the extensive lakes in the central

part of the Bengal Delta, to the south of the Ganges. The basins total area is about 1,200 sq miles. The belt of land in southwestern Bangladesh bordering the Bay of Bengal constitutes the Immature Delta. The belt – a lowland of some 3000 sq miles – contains, in addition to the vast mangrove forest known as the Sunderbans, the reclaimed and cultivated lands to the north of it. The Active Delta, located north of the Central Delta Basins and east of the Immature Delta, included the Dhaleswari-Padma Daob and the estuarine islands of varying sizes that are found from the Pusur river in the southwest to the island of Sandwip near Chittagong in the southeast.

Chittagong Region – Lying to south of the Feni river in southeastern Bangladesh, the Chittagong region has many hills, hill locks, valleys and forest and is quite different in aspect from other parts of the country. The coastal plain is partly sandy and partly composed of saline clay; it extends southward from the Feni river to the town of Cox's Bazar and varies in width from 1 to 10 miles. The region had number of offshore islands and one coral reef, St. Martin's, off the coast of Myanmar. The hilly area known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the far southeast consists of low hills of soft rocks, mainly clay and shale. The north-south ranges are generally below 2000 feet in height.

(B) DRAINAGE

The most significant feature of the Bangladesh landscape is provided by the rivers, which have molded not only in physiography but also the way of live of the people. Rivers in Bangladesh, however, are subject to constant and

sometimes rapid changes of course, which can affect the hydrology of a large region; consequently, no description of Bangladesh's topography retains its absolute accuracy for long.

Each year between June and October the rivers overflow their banks and inundate the countryside, rising most heavily in September or October and receding quickly in November. The inundations are both a blessing and a curse. Without them, the fertile silt deposits would not be replenished, but severe floods regularly damage crops and ruin hamlets and sometimes take a heavy toll on human and animal populations. The rivers of Bangladesh are divided into five systems. They are

The Ganges and its deltaic streams – The Ganges is the pivot of the deltaic river system of Bengal. The river and its tributaries enclose a large area of southwestern Bangladesh, and the Ganges Delta covers an area of about 20,000sq miles. The Ganga river system is divided into two segments, the Ganges and the Padma, although within Bangladesh the entire length of the river is called Padma. The Ganges enters Bangladesh from the west and forms, for about 90 miles, the boundary between Bangladesh and West Bengal. The Padma flows southeast to join the Meghna near Chandpur and enters the Bay of Bengal through the Meghna estuary and lesser channels. Except where it is confined by high banks, the Ganges main channel changes course in every two or three years.

The Meghna and the Surma river system – The Meghna is formed by the union of the Sylhet-Surma and Kusiara rivers. These two rivers are the branches of the Barak river, which rises in the Nagar-Manipur watershed in India. The main branch of the Barak, the Surma, is joined near Azmirigang in

northeastern Bangladesh by the Kalni and farther down by the Kusiara branch. The Dhaleswari, a distributary of the Bhramaputra river, joins the Meghna a few miles above the junction of the Padma and the Meghna.

The Bhramaputra and its adjoining channels – The Bhramaputra and its adjoining channels covers a large area from north central Bangladesh to the Meghna river in the southeast. The Bhramaputra receives water from a number of rivers, especially on its right bank, and, with its notoriously shifting channels, not only prevents permanent settlements along its banks but also inhibits communication between the northern area of Bangladesh and the eastern part, where Dhaka is situated.

The North Bengal Rivers – The Tista is the most important water carrier of north-western Bangladesh. Rising in the Himalayas near Sikkim, India, it flows southward, turning southeast near Darjiling to enter Bangladesh and eventually meeting the Bhramaputra. Navigation of its lower reaches is made difficult by the shoals and quicksand that form near the junction with the Bhramaputra.

The Rivers of the Chittagong Hill Tracts – Four main the river system of the Chittagong Hills and the adjoining plains – the Feni, the Karnaphuli, the Sangu and the Matamuhari. Flowing generally west and southwest across the coastal plain, they empty into the Bay of Bengal. Of these rivers the longest is the Karnaphuli, which is dammed at Kaptai, about 30 miles up-stream from its mouth near the city of Chittagong.

None of the major rivers in Bangladesh originates within the country's territory. The headquarters of the Surma are in

India, the Ganges rises in Nepal and the Bhramaputra in China, but they, too, reach Bangladesh across Indian territory. Thus, Bangladesh lack full control over the flow of any of the streams that irrigate it.

(c) SOIL

There are three main categories of soils in Bangladesh: the recent alluvial soils, the old alluvial soils and the hill soils, which have a base of sandstone and shale. The fertile recent alluvial soils, found mainly in flooded areas, are usually pale brown, sandy, micaceous and chalky clays and loams. They are deficient in phosphoric acid, nitrogen, and humus but not in potash and lime. The old alluvial soils in the Barind and Madhupur jungles are dark brown clays and loams. They are sticky during the rainy season and hard during the dry. The hill soils are generally permeable and can support dense forest growth.

2. CLIMATE

Bangladesh has typical monsoon climate characterized by rain-bearing winds, moderately warm temperatures, and high humidity. In general, maximum temperature in the summer months, from April to September, range between 33° to 36° C. April is the warmest month in most of the parts. January is the coolest month in the winter season, which lasts from about November to March.

Bangladesh receives heavy rainfall; except for some parts in the west, it generally exceeds 60 inch annually. Large areas of south, southeast, north and northeast receive from 80 to 100 inches, and the northern and northwestern parts of the

Sylhet area receive from 150 to 200 inches. The maximum rainfall occurs during the monsoon period, from June to September or early October.

In the early summer (April and May) and late in the monsoon season (September to November) storms of very high intensity often occur; they may create winds with speeds of more than 100 miles per hour, piling up the waters of the Bay of Bengal to crests as high as 20 feet that crash with tremendous force onto the coastal areas and the offshore islands, inundating them and causing heavy loss of life and property.

3. PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE

Bangladesh in general possesses luxuriant vegetation, with villages appearing to be virtually buried in groves of mangoes, jackfruit, bamboo, betel nut, coconut and date palm. About 15 percent of the country's land surface is covered with forests.

Bangladesh has four different areas of vegetation. The eastern zone, consisting of parts of the Sylhet and Chittagong areas, has many low hills covered with jungles of bamboo and rattan. The central zone, covering parts of the country extending north of Dhaka, consists of a large number of lakes and swampy vegetation; the soil of some parts of this zone is laterite, which produces the Madhupur jungles. The area lying to the northwest of the Bhramaputra and the south-west of the Padma, forms flat plains, the vegetation of this area consists mostly of cultivated plants and orchards. The southern zone along the Bay of Bengal contains the Sundarbans, with their distinctive mangrove vegetation. In this vast forest grows many commercial valuable trees, such as the Sundri, for which

the Sundarbans are named, gewa; a softwood tree used for making newsprint and goran; a type of mangrove.

Bangladesh is said to have about 200 species of mammals, 750 of birds and 150 of reptiles and amphibians, as well as about 200 species of marine and freshwater fishes. The common animals are Elephants; which are found in the Chittagong Tracts and northeastern Sylhet and the barasingh, in the Sundarbans. Of the carnivore's animals, the royal Bengal Tiger is the best known. There are also many kinds of bears. The bulbul, the magpie robin and a wide variety of warblers are also found; some are migrants that appear only in winter. Other species of birds include the common game birds, cuckoos, hawks, owls, kingfishers, hornbills, woodpeckers and vultures. Among the eagles, the crested serpent eagle and the ring tailed fishing eagle are the most common. There are also hoopoes, herons, storks, ducks and wild geese.

4. THE PEOPLE

(A) SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The extremely high population density of Bangladesh, averaging 1,900 persons per sq miles, varies widely according to the distribution of flat land. The highest density, over 2,800 persons per sq mile, occurs in and around Dhaka, which is also the centre of the country's most fertile zone; the lowest population density, at just 100 persons per sq miles, occurs in the hills of Chittagong.

Rural settlements – The rural area throughout Bangladesh is so thickly settled that it is often difficult to

distinguish any well-defined pattern of individual villages. Continuous strings of settlements along roads are common in areas south of the Ganges and in the floodplains of the Mahananda, Tista, Jamuna (the main channel of the lower Bhramaputra), Ganges and Meghna rivers. Similar patterns are also found in the hilly regions of southern Sylhet and in the Chittagong region. Settlements are more scattered, however, in areas in southern Bangladesh along the Bay of Bengal, in the flood-plains of Bhramaputra, in eastern and southern Sylhet, and in parts of Chittagong Hill. The traditional character of rural villages has changed with the addition of prefabricated one-or-two storied structures scattered among the thatched bamboo huts. Supplies of electricity and safe drinking water are often inadequate.

Urban settlements – Although industrial development has promoted migration to the cities, still Bangladesh is the least urbanized area in South Asia. Eighty percent of the population lives in villages. There are only three major cities: Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna. Dhaka, the capital is the largest city. Chittagong, the country's major port, is second in importance. A number of industrial areas such as Kalurghat, Sholashahar and Faujadar Hat, have developed around Chittagong. Khulna, in the southwest, has become a commercial and industrial centre; the opening of the port of Chalna nearby and the growth of Daulatpur industrial area has increased its population.

(B) ETHNIC COMPOSITION AND DISTRIBUTION

Bangladesh is melting pot of races. The Proto-Australoids, sometimes called Veddas, were one of the earliest

groups to enter the area. According to some ethnologists, they were followed by Mediterranean Caucasoids (whites), also known as Aryans. Armenoids (of Indo-European stock) are believed to enter as well.

With the coming of the Muslims in the 8th century AD, new elements were introduced; persons of Arab, Persian and Turkish origin moved in large numbers to the sub-continent. By the beginning of the 13th century they had entered what is now Bangladesh. The contention that the Bengali Muslims are all descended from lower-caste Hindus who were converted to Islam is incorrect; a substantial proportion are descendants of the Muslims who reached the subcontinent from elsewhere.

Most of the tribal peoples of Bangladesh inhabit the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the southeast, the least densely settled area of the country. They are predominantly Buddhist, and some of the tribes are related to the people of Myanmar. Tribal peoples in other parts of Bangladesh include the Santals, of the Proto-Australoids group, the Khasis, the Garo and the Hajang. Apart from these tribes, the rest of the people are Bengalis – an ethnic as well as linguistic group. The Bengalis, however, are not homogeneous in origin. In general, the people of the coastal areas, with whom the Muslim merchants of the Middle East were in close touch, show physical features that seem to be the result of the admixture of local people with those of Turkish and Semitic origin.

(C) LINGUISTIC COMPOSITION

Bengali, the language spoken in Bangladesh, belongs to the Indo-Aryan group of languages and is related to Sanskrit. Like Pali, however, and various other forms of Prakrit in

ancient India, Bengali originated beyond the influence of the Brahman society of the Aryans. Bengali is the mother tongue of about 98 percent of the people. Tribal people have their own distinct dialects, some of which are related to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. English is spoken in urban centers and among the educated groups.

Bengali has two distinct styles: Sadhu Bhasa, the literary language, which contains many words derived from Sanskrit and Calit Bhasa, the colloquial language, which is the standard medium of informal discourse, both spoken and written. Until the 1930s, Sadhu Bhasa was used for all printed matter, but Calit Bhasa is now the basic form used for modern literature. There are a number of dialects. Bengali contains a large number of loanwords from Portuguese, English, Arabic, Persian and Hindi.

(D) RELIGION

“More than 89 percent of the population follows the religion of Islam, which was made the state religion by a 1988 constitutional amendment. The arrival of a handful of Muslims in Bengal at the beginning of the 13th century and the rapid expansion of their rule permanently changed the character and culture of the area. When the Muslims first arrived, the Hindus were in a overwhelming majority, but there were also Buddhists and a few animists. The Hindus remained in the majority throughout the Turko-Afghan and Mughal periods. Even as late as 1872 there were in Bengal more than 18 million Hindus, compared with about 16 million Muslims. From the 1890s onward, however, the balance began to shift in favour of the Muslims.”²

“Most Muslims belong to the Sunni sect, but there are a small number of Shiite Muslims, mostly descendants of immigrants from Iran. Hindus, who constitute about 10 percent of the population, are divided into scheduled (low) and non-scheduled castes. Members of the non-scheduled castes constitute about half of all Hindus in Bangladesh. Buddhists form less than 1 percent of the population. Of all tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Chakma, Marma and Mro are mostly Buddhists. The Kuki, Khomoi (Kumi) and some of the Mro are animists. While most of the Lushai are Christians, the Tripura are Hindus.”³

5. ECONOMY

(A) AGRICULTURE

Bangladesh is overwhelmingly agricultural country, with come three-fifths of the population engaged in farming. Jute and tea, which are principle sources of foreign exchange, follow rice as the most important agricultural products. The country produces about one-fifth of the world’s supply of raw jute. Other important agricultural products are wheat, pulses, sweet potatoes, oilseeds of various kinds, sugarcane, tobacco, and fruits such as banana, mango and pine apples.

Agriculture has in the past been wholly dependent upon the vagaries of the monsoon. A poor monsoon has always meant poor harvests and the threat of famine. Among the remedial measures adopted has been the construction of a number of irrigation projects designed to control floods and to conserve rainwater for use in the dry months. The most important are the Karnaphuli Multipurpose Project in the

southeast, the Tista Barrage Project in the north, and the Ganges-Kabasdak Project, to serve the southwestern part of the country.

(B) INDUSTRY

The excessive – until recently almost exclusive – dependence on agriculture leads to seasonal unemployment among peasants, as well as to a low standard of living. To counteract this balance, a policy of industrialization was adopted after 1947 and was pursued through five-year plans. The main obstacle to its fulfillment has been the comparative lack of mineral resources.

Oil in marketable quantities has not been struck anywhere in Bangladesh. The country's first oil well, near Sylhet, was discovered in 1986. Natural gas is used mainly in the manufacture of fertilizer and thermal power. More than half the proven gas reserves are in the Comilla area, and nearly all the rest in Sylhet. Some deposits of coal have been found in northwestern Bangladesh in the Rajshahi area. Smaller deposits of coal exist in northwestern Sylhet. The Chittagong Hill Tracts contain some brown coal and lignite. Limestone is found in the Sylhet and Chittagong areas. Radioactive minerals have been detected in sand deposits along the beaches south of Cox's Bazar. Bangladesh electricity is produced by thermal and hydroelectric processes. The main source of hydroelectricity is the Kaptai Dam in the Chittagong Hill Tract.

Because the export of raw jute is not highly remunerative, efforts were made between 1947 and 1971 to establish mills to produce and export jute products and thus earn foreign

exchange. Since the 1971 the export of jute has contributed most of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Next to jute, Bangladesh's main exports are tea, hides and skins. Among the minor exports are newsprint, ready-to-wear garments and board mill at Khulna. Bangladesh has fertilizer factories, textile mills, sugar factories, glassworks and aluminum. A shipyard has been opened at Khulna for repairing and reconstructing ships, and a steel factory is located in Chittagong.

(c) TRANSPORTATION

Central to the country's transportation system are networks of waterways, roads and railways, the latter built mostly during British rule. Inland waterways are important, providing low-cost transport and access to areas where land transport would be costly. They carry most of the domestic and foreign cargo. Chief seaports are Chittagong and Chalna, and there are international airports at Dhaka and Chittagong. The forms of transport used on Bangladesh's roads range from automobiles and buses to the bullock cart. Town and city dwellers both rely largely on the cycle rickshaw and two types of motorized transport, known locally as auto and tempo, both of which are three-wheeled.

6. ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

“While the constitution of 1972 specifies a parliamentary form of government under a prime minister and a president elected by a national assembly, its implementation has been interrupted by coups. In 1975 a military coup led to a regime of martial law, and, though the form of government that obtained thereafter was a mixture of presidential and

parliamentary systems, power effectively remained with the army. Following another coup in 1982, the constitution was suspended and the country was placed under martial law. In 1986 martial law was lifted and parliamentary elections were held, but in 1987, following a series of strikes and riots, the government dissolved the parliament. A new parliament was elected in 1988.”⁴

“Bangladesh has continued with substantially the same judicial system as had been in operation when the territory was a province of Pakistan and which owes the origins to the system in operation under the British Raj. The 1972 constitution divided the Supreme Court of Bangladesh into Appellate and High Court divisions and mandated a complete separation of the judiciary and executive branches. During the subsequent authoritarian regime, however, the power of Supreme Court was greatly reduced. In 1977, a Supreme Judicial Council was established to draw up a code of conduct for Supreme Court and High Court judges, who may be removed from office by the president upon the council’s recommendations.”⁵

The highest judicial body is the Supreme Court. Justices are appointed by the President. The judicial and law enforcement institutions are weak. Separation of powers, judicial from executive was finally implemented on the 1st of November, 2007. It is expected that this separation will make the judiciary stronger and impartial. Laws are loosely based on English common law, but family laws such as marriage and inheritance are based on religious scripts, and therefore differ between religious communities.

“The two major parties in Bangladesh are the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Bangladesh Awami League.

BNP is led by Khaleda Zia and finds its allies among Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and Islami Oikya Jot, while Sheikh Hasina's Awami League aligns with leftist and secularist parties. Hasina and Zia are bitter rivals who have dominated politics for 15 years; both are women and each is related to one of the leaders of the independence movement. Another important player is the Jatiya Party, headed by former military ruler Ershad. The Awami League-BNP rivalry has been bitter and punctuated by protests, violence and murder. Student politics is particularly strong in Bangladesh, a legacy from the liberation movement era. Almost all parties have highly active student wings, and students have been elected to the Parliament.”⁶

(A) EDUCATION

The foundation of the educational system in Bangladesh was laid down during the period of British rule; the system has three levels – primary, secondary and higher education. Primary education, which is free but not compulsory, is for children up to about 10 years old. Secondary education is divided into three levels – junior secondary, high school and higher secondary – with public examinations being held at the conclusion of each level of schooling. Schools in cities and towns are generally better staffed and financed than those in rural areas.

There are more than 600 colleges, most of them affiliated with the University of Dhaka, University of Rajshahi or the University of Chittagong. The demand for higher education has continued to rise. One of the problems that has continued to impede educational progress is political unrest among students.

7. HISTORY

“Bangladesh has existed as an independent state only since 1971, yet its national character dated to the ancient past. This identity consists in three distinctive attributes – a land, a language and a religion. The land is shaped by the two great rivers, the Ganges and the Bhramaputra, which join the central Bangladesh to become the Padma. They are the greatest of a series of rivers winding down to the Bay of Bengal. This region has always been isolated from the north Indian plain. In early times eastern Bengal was called Vanga, while western Bengal was known as Gauda.”⁷

“The Buddhism that under the Mauryan emperor Asoka’s patronage spread across the whole subcontinent in the 3rd century BC was driven out after the decline of Maurya power, as Brahmanical Hinduism re-established its hold. In remote eastern Bengal, however, Buddhism lingered on under the Pala kings (8th–12th centuries) until their overthrow by the Senas, who worshiped the Hindu god Vishnu. The Senas encouraged the settlement of high-caste Hindus as lords of the land, but this did not greatly affect the general population. Then, in about AD 1200, Muslim invaders from the northwest overthrew the Senas, and Islâm found a mass following among the Vanga people. In the eastern part of the country – Noakhali, Chittagong, and Sylhet – Arab traders also spread Islamic teaching. Whereas in northern India the strength of caste Hinduism was enough to withstand centuries of Muslim dominance, culminating in the Mughal dynasty (16th–18th century), in eastern Bengal, Islâm became the religion of the majority.

As Mughal authority declined, the Suba, or Dominion,

of Bengal – including Bihar and Orissa – became semi-independent. The threat to the Muslim rulers of the Suba came first from the east from Arakanese pirates and Portuguese raiders, and in 1608 the capital was moved from Râjmahâl to Dhâkâ. When further invasion threatened from central India from the rising power of the Marâthâ kingdom, the capital was shifted to Murshidâbâd in 1704. It was during this period that the English East India Company established its base at Calcutta. From 1757 the British were the dominant political power in Bengal.”⁸

“The province of Bengal was almost impossible to administer, even though Assam was made a separate province in 1874. In 1905, largely at the initiative of the viceroy, Lord Curzon, two new provinces were created: Western Bengal, with Bihâr and Orissa, and Eastern Bengal and Assam. The division, made on a geopolitical rather than an avowedly communal basis, followed one of the Branch Rivers of the Ganges from Râjmahâl in the north to the sea. It gave Eastern Bengal, with its capital at Dhâkâ, a population of 31 million, all but 6 million being Bengalis. Behind Curzon’s move, besides greater efficiency, was the intention of encouraging the Bengali Muslims as a counterweight to the “seditious” Bengali Hindus.”⁹

The partition elicited vociferous protest in Western Bengal, especially in Calcutta. The Muslims notables, still loyal to the British, decided that they needed to organize. Their principle leaders were in northern India, but in December 1906 they gathered at Dhaka under the patronage of Nawab Salimullah and set up the All-India Muslim League. Their efforts secured separate electorates and separate constituencies for the Muslims under the 1909 Reforms, but the campaign against the partition of Bengal went on, and in

1912 the province was reunited (Bihar and Orissa being separated and Assam reverting to separate status).

“Despite the separate electorates, the Muslim League had no majority in any province. In reunited Bengal, where Muslims formed a majority of the population (33 million in a total of 60 million), they received 117 seats in the Bengal Legislative Council numbering 250. It was necessary to adopt coalition tactics. The politician most adept at this was Fazl ul-Haq, Chief Minister of Bengal from 1937 to 1943. He set up his own Peasants and Tenants Party, but he was also active in the Muslim League from its inception. When in 1940 the Muslim League held its annual gathering at Lahore, Fazl ul-Haq proposed a resolution calling for “independent states” for the Muslims. The press labeled this the “Pakistan Resolution,” but for Fazl ul-Haq and many others it implied a plurality of states. Distrusted by the influential Indian Muslim politician Mohammed Ali Jinnah (the first governor-general of Pakistan [1947–48]), Fazl ul-Haq was expelled from the league. In his place Khwaja Nazimuddin became Chief Minister. Nazimuddin, a relative of the nawab of Dhâkâ, was loyal to Jinnah but lacked political finesse. He was displaced in 1945 by the more sophisticated Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy. Suhrawardy was the main architect of the Muslim League’s success in Bengal in the 1946 election. He became Chief Minister of Bengal in 1946.

After protracted negotiations it became clear that the Congress Party (Indian National Congress) could not expect to preserve a united India. A major factor was the intense intercommunal conflict in August 1946 known as the “Great Calcutta Killing.” On his arrival as the new viceroy the following year, Admiral Lord Mountbatten drafted a plan to partition the subcontinent.”¹⁰

The boundaries of East Pakistan, which the region became, were determined by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, Chairman of the Boundary Commission, as there was total disagreement among his Hindu and Muslim Colleagues. The boundary he defined did not follow any clear natural feature, as in the 1905 partition, nor was it wholly based on communal proportions. On both sides of the new boundary, those who believed themselves a threatened minority moved into what they perceived as a place of refuge. Along with Muslim Bengalis arriving from Hindu majority districts, there were many Muslims who came from Bihar. One district, Purnea had an actual Muslim Majority and had been claimed by Jinnah. About one million Biharis settled in the new state.

“At independence, Suhrawardy lingered in Calcutta, and Nazimuddin became Chief Minister of East Pakistan. From the beginning, the link between the two parts of Pakistan was tenuous; indeed, their only common interest was fear of Indian domination. Jinnah and his advisers believed that unification might be achieved through a common language, Urdu, which was used in the army and administration. The Bengalis perceived this as a threat. Their other major grievance was that their export products, jute and tea, provided most of Pakistan’s foreign exchange; yet the central government mainly stimulated development in the West.”¹¹

“The Bengalis began to feel that they had no real power in Pakistan. When Jinnah died, Nazimuddin became governor-general; but when Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister, was shot in October 1951, Nazimuddin took over, installing a Punjabi, Ghulam Mohammad, as governor-general. Although Nazimuddin had a majority in the legislature, Ghulam Mohammad dismissed him in April 1953. The East Bengal

electorate demonstrated its dissatisfaction when an election was held in March 1954. A “United Front” was formed, including the extreme right (religious fundamentalist) and left (quasi-Marxist). Its main leaders were the aged Fazl ul-Haq and his revamped Workers and Peasants Party and Suhrawardy, who made his comeback with a new party, the Awami League. The Front won 300 seats, while the Muslim League retained only 10. The Front ministers were dismissed after two months. Ghulam Mohammad appointed Major General Iskander Mirza governor of East Bengal. He announced a tough regime, and his task was simplified by the quarrels among the different elements of the United Front. The deputy speaker was killed in an assembly brawl.

In 1956 Pakistan at last obtained a proper constitution in which both wings were equally represented. Thus far, Prime Ministers had come and gone; Suhrawardy, who took office in September 1956 with a motley group of supporters, lasted only one year. In 1958, government by politicians was superseded by a military regime.”¹²

“Bengali discontent festered, finding a spokesman in Mujibur Rahman (known as Sheikh Mujib). Like previous leaders, Mujib belonged to a landed family. Mujib was one of the founders of the Awami League in 1949 and, after Suhrawardy’s death, became its leading figure. Jailed repeatedly by the military, he acquired an aura of martyrdom, but he was an orator, not a statesman. He announced a six-point demand for autonomy. When in December 1970 President Yahya Khan ordered elections, the Awami League won 167 of the 169 seats allotted to East Pakistan, or Bangladesh as it was now popularly called, in the National Assembly. This gave the League an overall majority in a chamber of 313 members.

In West Pakistan, however, the Pakistan People's Party, led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, won 81 of 144 seats; Bhutto saw himself as Mujib's rival.

Throughout March 1971 President Yahya Khan negotiated at length in Dhâkâ with Mujib while government troops poured in from West Pakistan. Then, on March 25, the army launched a massive attack in which there were heavy casualties, including many students. Mujib was arrested and flown to West Pakistan. Most of the Awami League leaders fled and set up a government-in-exile in Calcutta, declaring Bangladesh an independent state. Internal resistance was mobilized by some Bengali units of the regular army, notably by Major Zia ur-Rahman, who held out for some days in Chittagong before the town's recapture by the Pakistan army. He then retreated to the border and began to organize bands of guerrillas. A different resistance was started by student militants, among whom Abdul Kader Siddiqi with his followers, known as Kader Bahini, acquired a reputation for ferocity.

Some 10 million Bengalis, mainly Hindus, fled over the frontier into India. The Indian government watched the struggle with alarm. The Awami League, which they supported, was a moderate middle-class body like the Congress Party; but many guerrillas were leftist. The United States and China, for different reasons, were committed to a united Pakistan; India and the Soviet Union wanted a Bangladesh dependent on India. Eventually, on Dec. 3, 1971, the Indian army invaded the territory of its neighbour. The Pakistani defenses surrendered on December 16. Mujib was released from jail and returned to a hero's welcome, assuming leadership of the new Bangladesh government in January 1972."¹³

“Mujib preached a secular state, and the new national anthem was a poem by Tagore. In 1973 an election gave Mujib a landslide majority, but the euphoria soon turned sour. Prices escalated, and in 1974 a great famine claimed 50,000 lives. Faced with crisis, Mujib became a virtual dictator; corruption and nepotism reached new depths. On Aug. 15, 1975, Mujib was assassinated along with most of his family.

Right-wing, pro-Pakistan army officers were behind the killing, but there also have been allegations of U.S. support. The reconstructed army split into rival factions. Some of those who had fought in the resistance were politicized, especially the soldiers. The 1,000 officers and 28,000 soldiers who had been serving in the West since 1970 were not repatriated until 1973–74; they were allegedly pro-Pakistan and jealous of the fighters whom Mujib had favoured. A third military group comprised those who had worked with the Pakistanis in their brutal repression. A second coup in November 1975 brought Major General Zia ur-Rahman into power. Despite his own resistance record he turned against India and favoured those considered pro-Pakistan. A referendum held in May 1977 gave him an enormous vote of confidence. This did not prevent several military coup attempts, however, and on May 30, 1981, he was assassinated by radical officers. The prompt action of the chief of staff, Lieutenant General Hossain Mohammad Ershad, foiled their plans, and the conspirators were hanged.

The civilian vice-president, Abdus Sattar, was confirmed as president by a nationwide election in 1981, but he was ill, and real power was exercised by Ershad and a National Security Council. On March 24, 1982, Ershad ejected Sattar and took over as chief martial-law administrator. In December 1983 he assumed the office of president. To legitimize his authority

he called elections for a National Assembly, and formed his own National Party. The election of May 1986 was contested by many parties. The National Party won 210 of the 330 seats in the legislature, just short of the two-thirds majority required to pass a fundamental law to legalize the martial-law regulations and revert to constitutional practice.

Ershad retired from the military command the following August, demonstrating his confidence that the army was now under control. He called a presidential election for October, but the main opposition parties – the Awami League, now led by Mujib’s daughter, Sheikh Hasina Wajad, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, headed by Begum Khaleda Zia ur-Rahman, wife of the slain president – boycotted the election. Ershad received 84 percent of the total.

The opposition parties began a campaign of strikes and demonstrations to force Ershad’s resignation. In the late 1980s the poor state of the country’s economy brought greater pressure on Ershad, and in December 1990, after weeks of violent antigovernment demonstrations, he finally agreed to step down. A caretaker government, headed by Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, was chosen by the opposition parties.”¹⁴

“In the parliamentary elections, held just two months later on February 21, 1991, the center-right BNP won a plurality of seats and formed a coalition government with the Islamic party Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, with Khaleda Zia, widow of Ziaur Rahman, obtaining the post of Prime Minister. Only four parties had more than 10 members elected to the 1991 Parliament: The BNP, led by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia; the AL, led by Sheikh Hasina; the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), led by Golam Azam; and the Jatiya Party (JP), led by acting

chairman Mizanur Rahman Choudhury while its founder, former President Ershad, served out a prison sentence on corruption charges. The electorate approved still more changes to the constitution, formally re-creating a parliamentary system and returning governing power to the office of the Prime Minister, as in Bangladesh's original 1972 constitution. In October 1991, members of Parliament elected a new head of state, President Abdur Rahman Biswas.

In March 1994, controversy over a parliamentary by-election, which the opposition claimed the government had rigged, led to an indefinite boycott of Parliament by the entire opposition. The opposition also began a program of repeated general strikes to press its demand that Khaleda Zia's government resign and a caretaker government supervise a general election. Efforts to mediate the dispute, under the auspices of the Commonwealth Secretariat, failed. After another attempt at a negotiated settlement failed narrowly in late December 1994, the opposition resigned en masse from Parliament. The opposition then continued a campaign of Marches, demonstrations, and strikes in an effort to force the government to resign. The opposition, including the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina, pledged to boycott national elections scheduled for February 15, 1996.

In February, Khaleda Zia was re-elected for the second term by a landslide in voting boycotted and denounced as unfair by the three main opposition parties. In March 1996, following escalating political turmoil, the sitting Parliament enacted a constitutional amendment to allow a neutral caretaker government to assume power conduct new parliamentary elections; former Chief Justice Mohammed Habibur Rahman was named Chief Advisor (a position

equivalent to Prime Minister) in the interim government. New parliamentary elections were held in June 1996 and were won by the Awami League; party leader Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister.

Sheikh Hasina formed what she called a “Government of National Consensus” in June 1996, which included one minister from the Jatiya Party and another from the Jatiyo Samajtantric Dal, a very small leftist party. The Jatiya Party never entered into a formal coalition arrangement, and party president H.M. Ershad withdrew his support from the government in September 1997. Only three parties had more than 10 members elected to the 1996 Parliament: The Awami League, BNP, and Jatiya Party. Jatiya Party president, Ershad, was released from prison on bail in January 1997.

Although international and domestic election observers found the June 1996 election free and fair, the BNP protested alleged vote rigging by the Awami League. Ultimately, however, the BNP party decided to join the new Parliament. The BNP soon charged that police and Awami League activists were engaged in large-scale harassment and jailing of opposition activists. At the end of 1996, the BNP staged a parliamentary walkout over this and other grievances but returned in January 1997 under a four-point agreement with the ruling party. The BNP asserted that this agreement was never implemented and later staged another walkout in August 1997. The BNP returned to Parliament under another agreement in March 1998.

In June 1999, the BNP and other opposition parties again began to abstain from attending Parliament. Opposition parties have staged an increasing number of nationwide

general strikes, rising from 6 days of general strikes in 1997 to 27 days in 1999. A four-party opposition alliance formed at the beginning of 1999 announced that it would boycott parliamentary by-elections and local government elections unless the government took steps demanded by the opposition to ensure electoral fairness. The government did not take these steps, and the opposition has subsequently boycotted all elections, including municipal council elections in February 1999, several parliamentary by-elections, and the Chittagong city corporation elections in January 2000. The opposition demands that the Awami League government step down immediately to make way for a caretaker government to preside over parliamentary and local government. Khaleda Zia won a second term in 2001. Her coalition included several Islamist parties, a fact which was criticized by those who feared post-9/11 Islamic radicalism and de-secularization in Bangladesh. Islamist violence targeting courts and imposing social strictures became a serious problem as Zia's term wore on. It came to a head in 2005 with the first suicide bombing and a coordinated bombing. This problem abated as two parties were outlawed and a care taker government was formed.”¹⁵

8. PRESENT SITUATION

“After a caretaker government was formed election was scheduled for the end of 2006, however it did not take place. The caretaker government was accused of BNP bias by Hasina and her coalition, who fomented nationwide protests and shutdowns. In January 2007, the head of the caretaker government stepped down, many believe under pressure from the military.

Fakhruddin Ahmed, former World Bank economist, was selected to replace him and has committed himself to rooting out corruption and preparing a better voter list. Emergency law was declared and a massive campaign to crack down on corruption is underway. By July 2007 some 200,000 people had been arrested. The government says it will hold elections before the end of 2008.

In April, Ahmed's administration attempted to reform the political parties by exiling Hasina and Zia, but they backed down amid domestic and international protestations. Hasina, who had been visiting her children in US, was allowed to return but she faced serious charges, including involvement in the assassination of four political rivals. In July, she was taken into custody after two businessmen testified that she had extorted 80 million taka (US\$1.16 million) from them. This provoked angry protests from her supporters; even her bitter rival Khalida Zia, as well as six British MPs and MEPs, called for her release. Khaleda herself faces charges of tax evasion. Meanwhile the Bangladesh Military has expressed their interest in controlling the country with statements like "own brand of Democracy" and making changes in the constitution to allow military participation in politics. They are also assisting the interim Government of Bangladesh in a drive against corruption which seems to be mostly targeted against the politicians. The military has also imposed censorship of the national media and closing down/hampering private TV stations.

Despite sustained domestic and international efforts to improve economic and demographic prospects, Bangladesh remains a developing nation, in part due to its large population. Its per capita income in 2006 was US\$2300 (on

purchasing power parity basis) compared to the world average of \$10,200. Yet, as the World Bank notes in its July 2005 Country Brief, the country has made significant progress in human development in the areas of literacy, gender parity in schooling, and reduction of population growth.

Jute was once the economic engine of the country. Its share of the world export market peaked in the Second World War and the late 1940s at 80% and even in the early 1970s accounted for 70% of its export earnings. However, polypropylene products began to substitute for jute products worldwide and the jute industry started to decline. Bangladesh grows very significant quantities of rice (chal), tea (Cha) and mustard. Although two-thirds of Bangladeshis are farmers, more than three quarters of Bangladesh's export earnings come from the garment industry, which began attracting foreign investors in the 1980s due to cheap labour and low conversion cost. In 2002, the industry exported US\$5 billion worth of products. The industry now employs more than 3 million workers, 90% of whom are women. A large part of foreign currency earnings also comes from the remittances sent by expatriates living in other countries.

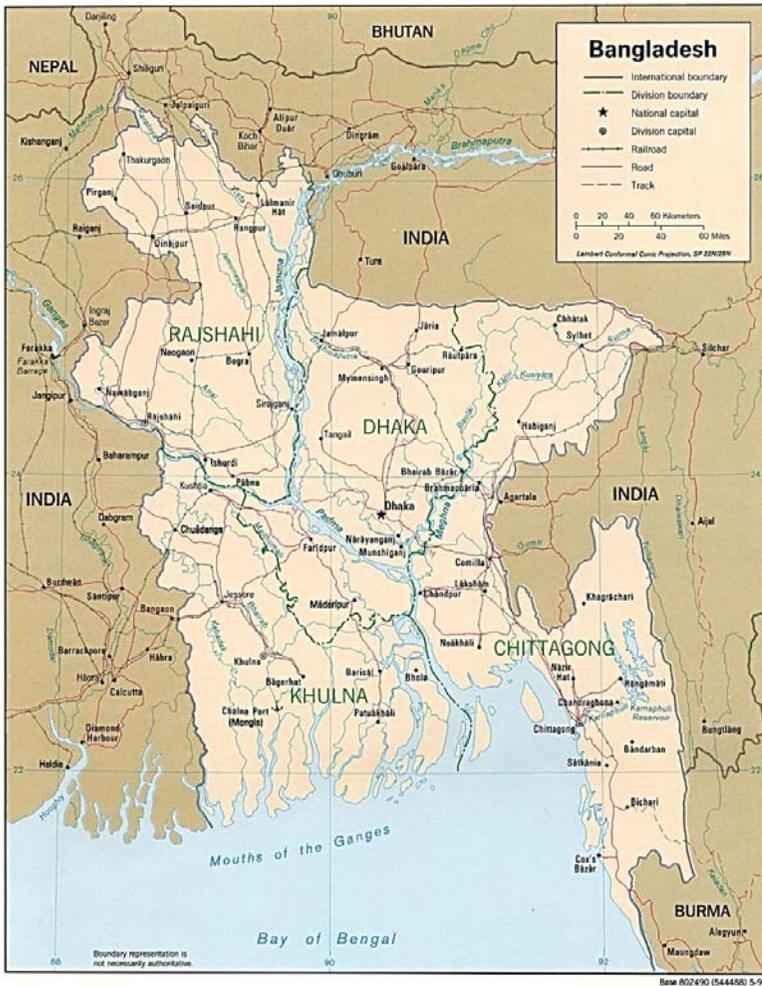
The economy of Bangladesh is often cited to be agro-based because of its dependency on agriculture. Obstacles to growth include frequent cyclones and floods, inefficient state-owned enterprises, mismanaged port facilities, a growth in the labour force that has outpaced jobs, inefficient use of energy resources (such as natural gas), insufficient power supplies, slow implementation of economic reforms, political infighting and corruption. According to the World Bank, "among Bangladesh's most significant obstacles to growth are poor governance and weak public institutions."

Despite these hurdles, the country has achieved an average annual growth rate of 5% since 1990, according to the World Bank. Bangladesh has seen expansion of its middle class, and its consumer industry has also grown. In December 2005, four years after its report on the emerging “BRIC” economies (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), Goldman Sachs named Bangladesh one of the “Next Eleven,” along with Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and seven other countries. Bangladesh has seen a dramatic increase in foreign direct investment. A number of multinational corporations, including Unocal Corporation and Tata, have made major investments, with the natural gas sector being a priority. In December 2005, the Central Bank of Bangladesh projected GDP growth around 6.5%. One significant contributor to the development of the economy has been the widespread propagation of microcredit by Muhammad Yunus (awarded the Nobel peace prize in 2006) through the Grameen Bank. By the late 1990s, Grameen Bank had 2.3 million members, along with 2.5 million members of other similar organizations.”¹⁶

Political Map



Phycial Map



List of References:

S.No.	Books	Page No.
1.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	711
2.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	715
3.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	715
4.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	716
5.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	716
6.	Wikipedia Internet	
7.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	717
8.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	718
9.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	718
10.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	718
11.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	718
12.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	718-19
13.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	719
14.	Britannica Macropedia Vol. 1	719
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