

**OFFICIAL NAME:** People's Republic of Bangladesh

**CAPITAL:** Dacca (Dhaka)

**SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT:** Unitary Multiparty Republic

**AREA:** 143,998 Sq Km (55,598 Sq Mi)

**ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION** 130,804,500

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**LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY:** Bangladesh is a low lying riverine country located between the foothills of the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean. It is bound by India to the north, east and west, Myanmar to the southeast and by the Bay of Bengal to the south. The country is characterized by alluvial plains which are dissected by numerous connecting rivers as well as streams and the country is vulnerable to both flood and drought. The land is devoted mainly to agriculture due to its fertile alluvial soils. Hills rise only in Chittagong region of the extreme southeast and the northeastern region of Sylhet. The country is covered by lush vegetation with bamboo and palm forests mixed with monsoonal forests while the areas of the south are covered with mangroves and hardwood forests. Major Cities (pop. est.); Dacca 6,105,000, Chittagong 2,041,000, Khulna 877,000, Rajshahi 517,000, Mymensingh 186,000 (1991). Land Use; forested 15%, pastures 5%, agricultural-cultivated 74%, other 6% (1993).

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**CLIMATE:** Bangladesh has a tropical monsoonal climate with three distinct seasons. (1.) The hot summer season when rain occurs from heavy thunderstorms between March and June. (2.) The main rainy season between June and September when over 80% of the annual precipitation occurs in heavy and frequent downpours. Although the rainy season is cooler than the hot summer season it is still warm and humid. (3.) The cool winter season which is mostly dry and lasts from October to February. The average annual precipitation varies between 1,270 mm and 1,520 mm (50 to 60 inches) depending on the region. Three types of violent storms trouble the country depending on the season and they are (1.) cyclonic storms, (2.) thunderstorms and (3.) tornadoes. Average temperature ranges in Chittagong are from 13 to 26 degrees Celsius (55 to

79 degrees Fahrenheit) in January to 25 to 31 degrees Celsius (77 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit) in June.

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**PEOPLE:** Over 98% of the population are Bengalis while the remainder are Biharis, who are non-Bengalis that fled from eastern India in 1947, and other tribal groups, of which the largest are the Chakmas, Marmas, Tipperas and the Moros. Most of the tribal groups live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts while in the coastal areas there are also scattered communities of Arab, Dutch and Portuguese settlers.

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**DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS:** Density; 755 persons per sq km (1,956 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 24.4% urban, 75.6% rural (1989). Sex Distribution; 51.5% male, 48.5% female (1991). Life Expectancy at Birth; 56.0 years male, 56.0 years female (1989). Age Breakdown; 42% under 15, 26% 15 to 29, 16% 30 to 44, 9% 45 to 59, 5% 60 and over, 2% not known (1988). Birth Rate; 33.0 per 1,000 (1989). Death Rate; 11.4 per 1,000 (1989). Increase Rate; 21.6 per 1,000 (1989). Infant Mortality Rate; 98.0 per 1,000 live births (1989).

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**RELIGIONS:** The official religion is Islam with approximately 83% of the population Sunni Muslims. This makes Bangladesh the third largest Islamic state in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan. The Muslim society is divided into three distinct classes, (1.) the Ashraf (better), (2.) the Ajlaf (lower) and the (3.) Arzal (lowest). Hindus account for 12% of the population and less than 1% are Buddhist, Christian or other.

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**LANGUAGES:** The official language is Bengali with English used for official, legal and commerce purposes, and it is widely understood by most educated people.

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**EDUCATION:** Aged 25 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 70.4%, primary 24.1%, secondary 4.2%, higher 1.3% (1981). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 35.3% (1990).

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**MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993:** In 1947 British rule ended and the Indian provinces were divided into predominantly Hindu India, Muslim West Pakistan and Muslim East Pakistan. On the March 26, 1971 East Pakistan was declared the independent state of Bangladesh which resulted in a full scale civil war with West Pakistani troops. On Dec. 16, 1971 Bangladesh's independence was secured after the intervention of India in the civil war. Independent Bangladesh faced serious problems as the economy was weak and badly damaged from the independence war as well as the breaking of economic ties with Pakistan. In 1972 a constitution was adopted providing for parliamentary democracy as well as a secular state and Shaikh Mujib ur-Rahman returned to power as Prime Minister after his release from a West Pakistani jail. In 1974 severe floods caused widespread famine and property damage. In the same year the government declared a State of Emergency after internal security was threatened by Islamic fundamentalist terrorists. In August 1975 President Mujib was killed along with most of his family by a group of military officers after growing discontent escalated as a result of constitutional amendments in January that replaced the parliamentary democracy with a single party presidential rule. Also during the same year Maj.Gen. Zia ur-Rahman (Zia) emerged as the leading figure in the military government and he became chief Martial Law administrator. In April 1977 he became President and the constitution was amended to make Bangladesh an Islamic state. In May 1981 Zia was finally assassinated after another unsuccessful coup attempt. In March 1982 Lt. Gen.. Hossain Mohammad Ershad led a coup, reimposed Martial Law and took power as Martial Law administrator. In 1983 Ershad formed a new People's Party and assumed the presidency of Bangladesh. During 1983 to 1984 there were many strikes as well as riots and Martial Law was lifted in Nov. 1986. Again in Nov. 1987 another State of Emergency was imposed and the Parliament was dissolved in Dec. 1987. In Aug. and Sept. 1988 the worst floods on record devastated the country. After months of demonstrations President Ershad resigned in Dec. 1990 and was subsequently arrested on

charges of plundering the nation. He was finally imprisoned for 10 years for possession of illegal firearms. In Feb. 1991, elections saw the formation of a the first civilian government in nine years and in August a constitutional amendment was approved returning the country to a Westminster-style parliamentary system of democracy. On April 30, 1991 a cyclone with winds up to 235 km/h (146 mph) hit Chittagong and Cox's Bazar causing some US\$2.7 billion dollars in damage while 4.5 million people had lost their homes or property and 131,000 were killed. The US responded to the disaster by diverting homeward bound Gulf War troops to join the relief effort. In May 1991 further tornadoes and widespread flooding further compounded the country's problems and continued throughout most of the year. In April 1992 Bangladesh signed a repatriation agreement with Myanmar (Burma) and held eight rounds of talks in an attempt to persuade 265,000 muslim refugees to return to Myanmar, although they refused to return until the human rights situation improved. In July 1992 Zia's government announced a US\$1.7 million deficit budget for the 1992-93 fiscal year and on August 30, 1992 defeated an opposition motion of no-confidence in nonperformance of curbing lawlessness. In Sept. 1992 the government passed an ordinance in an attempt to stop campus terrorism where universities produced the activists of the national political parties. In Nov. 1992 an agreement allowing more economic and political power for the Chakma insurgents in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was signed after 17 years of sporadic fighting. Also during the year, relations improved with India after a small land corridor that Dacca needed to gain access to two small enclaves was handed over in June ending a 18-year dispute. On Jan. 24, 1993 a bomb exploded during a rally of the opposition Awami League while two days later a dawn-to-noon nationwide strike paralyzed the economy. Further opposition strikes were held in July and August to protest alleged government corruption. In March 1993 a border attack by Myanmar soldiers on a Bangladesh village further strained relations over the refugee situation. Also during the year, former President Ershad was sentenced to up to 10 years in prison on charges from corruption to possession of illegal firearms while foreign and trade relations with Malaysia, India, China and Pakistan also improved.

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**CURRENCY:** The official currency is the Taka (Tk) divided into 100 Poisha.

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**MAIN TRADING PARTNERS:** Its main trading partners are the USA, Mozambique, Iran, Pakistan, Sudan, Japan and other West European countries.

**MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS:** Cattle, Coal, Fish, Glass Sand, Jute, Limestone, Natural Gas, Peat, Rice, Salt, Sugar Cane, Tea, Timber, Tobacco, Wheat, White Clay.

**MAJOR INDUSTRIES:** Aluminum Works, Fertilizers, Fishing, Glass works, Jute Mining, Paper and Leather Processing, Shipyards, Sugar Refining, Tea, Textiles.

**MAIN EXPORTS:** Jute, Leather, Tea, Frozen Fish, Porcelain wares, Fertilizer, Cement, Textiles.

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**TRANSPORT:** Railroads; route length 2,817 km (1,750 mi) (1989), passenger-km 5,244,000,000 (3,258,000,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 660,000,000 (452,000,000 short ton-mi) (1989). Roads; length 176,876 km (109,906 mi) (1989). Vehicles; cars 39,169 (1989), trucks and buses 51,247 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 308 (1990), deadweight tonnage 620,634 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 2,201,000,000 (1,368,000,000 passenger-mi) (1990), cargo ton-km 93,903,000 (64,314,000 short ton-mi) (1990).

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**COMMUNICATIONS:** Daily Newspapers; total of 51 with a total circulation of 710,000 (1992). Radio; receivers 4,650,000 (1994). Television; receivers 350,000 (1994). Telephones; units 268,400 (1993).

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**MILITARY:** 115,500 (1995) total active duty personnel with 87.5% army, 6.9% navy and 5.6% air force while military expenditure accounts for 1.5% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).