

Country of the Week: Bangladesh

This Asian nation was once part of both India and Pakistan.

BASIC

Have you ever heard of the nation of

Bangladesh? Many people have not. But it is a very interesting and important nation. For thousands of years, this part of the world was known as Bengal. Its culture is very much like India's in many ways. It was even part of India when India was an English colony. **What does this mean?** (*That England controlled India.*) But many Bengali people are Muslims, while most Indians follow Hinduism and other religions. So when India became independent in 1947, Bengali Muslims joined up with other Muslims as part of Pakistan. But that didn't work because Pakistan's two

sections were 1,000 miles apart. Finally, in 1971, Bangladesh became an independent country.



Bangladesh

is one of the few countries in the world that is home to the Bengal tiger, like the one shown here. This is also one of the few countries to have a female leader. The prime minister is a woman named Sheikh Hasina — *SHAKE hah-SEE-nah*. NEXT

GENERAL

This week, we journey to Bangladesh. As

you can see, this country is located near the two most populous nations on Earth, China and India. **Which one is the most populous?** (*China.*) This part of the world has been called Bengal for more than 4,000 years. But when India gained independence in 1947, Bengal was split in two, with the eastern half becoming part of the new nation of Pakistan. This happened because the people of Pakistan and East Bengal were mostly Muslims, and most Indians followed Hinduism or other religions. But this two-part Pakistan did not work very well, partly because its two sections were separated by 1,000 miles. After years of struggle, and a very bloody war, Bangladesh became an

independent nation in 1971.

Bangladesh is one of a few countries in the world that is home to the Bengal tiger, like the one you see here. A few years ago, scientists realized that one area in Bangladesh, called the Sunderbans, had one of the largest populations of wild tigers left in the world. Since then, the Bangladeshi government has been working hard to preserve this area and its tigers. **Can you guess what country has the largest tiger population?** (*India.*) Bangladesh is also one of the few countries in the world that is led by a woman. The country's prime minister, Sheikh Hasina — *SHAKE hah-SEE-nah* — is pictured here. **Does it surprise you that Bangladesh has a woman leader?** NEXT

ADVANCED

The country of Bangladesh is tucked into a very small space next to some very large countries, but it has an important place in world politics. Bangladesh only became an independent country in 1971, though it has a history going back more than 4,000 years. This area of the world has always called itself Bangla, or Bengal, and it has been associated with India for centuries. But, like the country we now call Pakistan, most of the people who lived in Bengal were different from most Indians.

What was this difference? (*They were Muslims.*) When India gained its independence from Great Britain in 1947, Bengal was split into two parts, with the eastern half becoming part of the new nation of Pakistan. This did not work very well, however. **Can you explain from looking at the map?** (*The two parts were divided by 1,000*

miles of India.) Bengalis were also upset that political power was concentrated in West Pakistan. After many conflicts and a bitter war in which it was backed by India, Bangladesh gained independence in 1971. **Why do you think India sided with Bangladesh against West Pakistan?**

Bangladesh is one of the few places on Earth where Bengal tigers, like the one shown here, live. A few years ago, scientists discovered a significant tiger population in an area called the Sundarbans, which is the largest mangrove forest in the world. Since then, the Bangladeshi government has been working with environmental groups to preserve this area and its endangered tigers. The country's prime minister, Sheikh Hasina — *SHAKE hah-SEE-nah* — is pictured here. **Is it surprising that Bangladesh has a woman leader? Why or why not?** NEXT

Country of the Week: Bangladesh (cont'd)

More than 162 million people live in this small country.

BASIC

Even though it is only about as big as the state of Iowa, Bangladesh has the world's seventh-highest population. This means that there is a lot of crowding in its cities and towns. The picture at top shows what it is like during rush hour in Dhaka, the capital. **What is rush hour?** (*The times when people are going to work and coming home.*) The vehicles you see are rickshaws, which are like taxicabs except that they are driven by men on bicycles. **Would you like to ride in a rickshaw?**

Many people in Bangladesh are poor,

GENERAL

Bangladesh has one of the highest population densities on Earth. **What does this mean?** (*That it is one of the most crowded countries in the world.*) More than 162 million people live in Bangladesh, but the country is not even as big as the state of Iowa. The capital, Dhaka, holds more than 12 million people, making it one of the world's biggest cities. **Have you ever heard of Dhaka — or Bangladesh — before today?** The picture at top shows Dhaka during a typical rush hour, when people are heading home from work. The vehicles on the left are called rickshaws — they are like taxicabs, but they are powered by drivers on bicycles. **Would you like to ride in a rickshaw? Would you like to drive one?**

Many people in this country are poor. Most of them are farmers, but they do

ADVANCED

Can you imagine half the population of the United States being moved into the state of Iowa? That's the population density of Bangladesh. The country is slightly smaller than Iowa, but it has more than 162 million people. This gives it one of the highest population densities in the world, and virtually guarantees a high level of poverty. Its cities are extremely crowded — the picture at top shows a typical rush hour in Dhaka, the capital, which holds more than 12 million people. **Can you imagine living in a city that large?** The vehicles in the left lanes here are bicycle-powered taxicabs that are quite popular in many Asian cities. **Do you know what they are called?** (*Rickshaws.*)

Three-fourths of Bangladeshis are farmers, but farming is difficult in such a crowded

but they do not need a lot of money to survive. The national meal is rice and

fish. The picture at bottom shows a group of men getting ready to go out into the Bay of Bengal to catch fish. **What ocean do you think this bay is part of?** (*The Indian Ocean.*) Bangladeshis are very proud of their country's musicians and dancers, as well as their national cricket team. **Would you like to visit Bangladesh?** END

not make much more than they need to survive. Farming is difficult here, because Bangladesh is often hit with storms and flooding. The picture at bottom shows a group of fishermen on Cox's Bazar, the world's longest natural sea beach. They are getting ready to head out into the Bay of Bengal. **What ocean is the Bay of Bengal in?** (*The Indian Ocean.*) Most of the money in Bangladesh comes from factories where people make inexpensive clothing. Ninety percent of the workers in these factories are women, and they are not paid very much for their hard work. **What do you think can be done about this?**

But Bangladeshis are a proud people with a thriving culture. They are proud of their music and dance, and the nation's cricket players are some of the world's best. **What do you think it would be like to grow up in Bangladesh?** END

country, and the country is often hit with storms and flooding that wipe out crops in a matter of hours. This area has long depended on fishing for much of its food. As one popular phrase goes, "Fish and rice make a Bengali." The men shown in the bottom picture are leaving Cox's Bazar, the longest natural sea beach in the world, to fish in the Bay of Bengal. But the largest contribution to Bangladesh's economy is the clothing industry, where the workforce labors long hours for low pay. **Have you ever seen "Made in Bangladesh" on any of your clothing?** Ninety percent of garment workers are women.

Bangladeshis work hard, but are proud of their fascinating cultural legacy, which includes lovely music and intricate dances. **Would you like to visit Bangladesh?** END

