



# Understand Bangladesh

## **BANGLADESH TODAY ..... 148**

Bringing you up to date with recent hot topics in Bangladesh's highly charged political scene.

## **HISTORY ..... 150**

From Bangladesh's Buddhist foundations, through British colonialism and on to becoming one of the largest Muslim populations on earth: we've got the history of this fascinating region fully covered.

## **ENVIRONMENT..... 156**

The landscape, geography and wildlife of one of the greenest countries on the planet.

## **ARTS & LITERATURE..... 160**

Discover the artistic soul of Bengal; from Bangla beats to the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore.

## **BANGLADESH CUISINE ..... 163**

Find out what you'll be eating and how you'll be eating it with our quick-look food primer.



## population per sq km

BANGLADESH

INDIA

USA



↑ ≈ 30 people

# Bangladesh Today

Two court trials of huge political significance dominated the most recent term of office for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She was installed for her second nonconsecutive term as the country's leader after her Awami League (AL) party won a landslide victory in the December 2008 elections. Less than two months later, she was forced to deal with one of the country's most shocking events of recent times.

## Border Guards Mutiny

Bangladeshis watched in horror in February 2009 when live TV broadcasts reported on a soldier mutiny at Dhaka's headquarters of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), a paramilitary force (since renamed Border Guards Bangladesh) primarily engaged in the country's border control.

Rebel soldiers, who were demanding the removal of army officials plus equal rights and pay, went on a 36-hour killing spree that left 74 people dead, including the BDR director-general Shakil Ahmed, 57 BDR officers and seven civilians. Bodies were disposed of in nearby sewers and shallow graves, and similar mutinies spread to regional BDR headquarters across the country, until the rebel soldiers eventually surrendered.

The incident triggered the largest trial in the history of Bangladesh's judicial system. At the time of research, more than 2000 soldiers had been jailed under the BDR Act for their part in the mutiny, with more still awaiting trial. More than 800 core suspects are being tried in a specially appointed civilian court, established under the Bangladesh Criminal Procedure Code, and could face the death penalty.

The trial process itself came under scrutiny when reports emerged that suspects were being subjected to torture and that at least 47 of those on trial had died while in custody. The New York-based Human Rights Watch has made strong calls for the trial in its current form to be aban-

» Population: 142,319,000 (9th largest)

» GDP per capita: US\$1,700

» GDP growth rate: 6.3%

» Unemployment rate: 5%

» Employed in agriculture: 45%

» Literacy rate: 47.9% (male 54%, female 41.4%)

» Life expectancy: 70 years

» Population below poverty line: 31.5%

## Top News Sources

**BD News 24** ([www.bdnews24.com](http://www.bdnews24.com)) The country's first online newspaper.

**Daily Star** ([www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net)) Bangladesh's best English-language daily.

**Thorn Tree** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree)) The Bangladesh branch of Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree forum is easily the best place for up-to-date travel-related news on the region.

## Top Nonfiction

**A History of Bangladesh** (Willem van Schendel, 2009)

**Banker to the Poor** (Dr Mohammad Yunus, 2003)

**Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier** (Richard Eaton, 1996)