

# Understand Bangladesh

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# Bangladesh Today

As Bangladesh steps further into the 21st century, its leaders find their plates increasingly full of new challenges. The country's geography puts it at the sharp edge of countries affected by climate change. Meanwhile, with an ever-growing and increasingly young population, the balance must be struck between the politics of the electoral cycle and the street, secularism and Islamism, and the calls for justice left over from the country's bloody birth.

## Best 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)

**The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses** (Tazeen Murshid, 1996)

**Pakistan: Failure in National Integration** (Rounaq Jahan, 1996)

## Best Novels

**Lajja (Shame)** (Taslima Nasrin, 1993)

**Sultana's Dream** (Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, 1905)

**The Good Muslim** (Tahmima Anam, 2011)

**A Golden Age** (Tahmima Anam, 2007)

**Like a Diamond in the Sky** (Shazia Omar, 2009)

## Best 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.

## Elections & Aftermath

Politics in Bangladesh can frequently look to the outside as something of a zero-sum game, with the rival leaders Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL) and Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) carrying on the struggles led by their fathers – both prime ministers in their time – in a winner takes all contest.

This battle was seen most clearly in the 2014 election, which was fought on the street as much as the ballot box. The poll was the most violent in the country's history, with many left dead and the BNP choosing to boycott the election altogether. Sheikh Hasina was duly returned to power, but with a mandate in which only half the parliamentary seats were contested. The BNP called rolling protests to demand fresh elections and a caretaker government, but has found itself both increasingly marginalised on the street through its violent acts, and under pressure from a government that has seemed intent on clamping down on legitimate political opposition.

## War Crimes Tribunals

In 2010, Sheikh Hasina sanctioned the establishment of a special tribunal to try a handful of key suspects charged with crimes against humanity, allegedly committed during the 1971 Liberation War by collaborators of the Pakistani regime. Several leading establishment figures had been granted immunity by previous administrations, for the sake of political stability, but calls to both tackle the political culture of impunity and heal the still-open wounds of 1971 had grown ever louder.

Leading figures of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party, were put on trial and convicted, with several subsequently executed. In 2015,