

Bangladesh: basic facts

Formerly East Pakistan, Bangladesh came into being in 1971 after a bitter civil war between the two parts of Pakistan in which India became involved.

Bangladesh has spent 15 years under military rule. Democracy was restored in 1990 but the political situation is volatile.

The two major political parties, the Awami League, which ruled until July 2001, and Bangladesh Nationalist Party which is ruling at present, do not have major ideological differences.

Bangladesh has a poor record of human rights. There are reports of assaults against women and the use of torture by police against those in custody.

The constitution guarantees freedom of the press but journalists are regularly subjected to harassment from police and political activists. In 2003 the media rights organization Reporters Without Borders described Bangladesh as “by far the world’s most violent country for journalists,” citing many assaults, threats and arrests.

- Population: 149.7 million
- Capital: Dhaka
- Area: 143, 998 sq km
- Major language: Bengali
- Major Religions: Islam, Hinduism
- Life Expectancy: 61 yrs (men), 62 yrs (women)
- Monetary Unit: 1 taka= 100 paisa
- Main Exports: Garments, fish, jute goods, leather products, pottery
- GNI per capita: \$US 400 (World Bank, 2003)

President: Iajuddin Ahmed

Prime Minister: Khaleda Zia

Ms Zia was the first female prime minister in Bangladesh and held office between 1991 and 1996. She is the widow of former president Ziaur Rahman, who was assassinated in a coup attempt in 1981. Ms Zia became the leader of Bangladesh National Party in 1984.

Leader of the opposition Awami League is Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first prime minister and then president of Bangladesh, who was assassinated in a military coup in 1975. Sheikh Hasina was the prime minister from 1996 to 2001, the first prime minister to serve a full five year term.