

Fact Sheet:: Bangladesh

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# Fact Sheet: Bangladesh

Farhad Mirzadeh

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Bangladesh, a nation of nearly 170 million people is the world's sixth largest country and the third largest Muslim majority country. Its shared borders with India and Myanmar and close proximity to China and the critical access that it provides to the Bay of Bengal places the country in a highly sensitive strategic location.

As Bangladesh continues to experience economic growth, it garners more scrutiny over its labour standards from the international community and major trading partners, including the United States. With that being said, Bangladesh continues to be a hub for economic activity as it is rich in minerals and energy potential. For example, it has opened up its shores to foreign exploration. It is an important site for the United State's Asian pivot and the growing Chinese emphasis on Bangladesh.

The recent political impasse in Bangladesh and growing trends in militancy and terrorism raise serious concerns not only for its own stability but also the stability of the wider South Asian region. The situation becomes more complex as the NATO led international forces withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014.



## Historical Background:

- The borders of Bangladesh were a result of the Partition of Bengal in 1947.<sup>1</sup>
- Ethnic and religious tensions as well as economic concerns led to the Bangladesh Liberation war in 1971.
- As a result, Bengalis split from Pakistan and formed Bangladesh, an independent and secular nation.
- However, Bangladesh was affected by famine, poverty, and numerous military coups.<sup>2</sup>
- In 1991, a parliamentary republic was restored with an unofficial two-party system.<sup>3</sup>



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## Electoral Background:

- The day-to-day affairs are run by the Prime Minister, while the President serves a ceremonial role as head of state.
- In 1991, however, the President's powers were expanded with the introduction of the "caretaker government," making the president responsible for elections and the resulting transfer of power.<sup>4</sup>
- The role of the "Caretaker Government" was institutionalized in 1996 with the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution.<sup>5</sup>
- However, the Awami League passed the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment which abolished the Caretaker Government.<sup>6</sup>
- The next election is supposed to occur between October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013 and January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014.



## Political Instability:

- For over a year, the country has been gripped with growing unrest and strikes.
- The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, along with 18 opposition parties, has led strikes against the ruling Awami League that has nearly shut down many government functions.<sup>7</sup>
- The Courts ruled to de-register one of Bangladesh's largest political parties, Jammat-e-Islami, a party tied with Islamic interests.<sup>8</sup>
- The Courts' reasoning was that the party's charter placed God before democratic principles.<sup>9</sup>
- This has resulted in widespread protests, often violent, on the streets of Bangladesh.
- Furthermore, the rise of Hefazat-e-Islam, another party rooted in Islamic fundamentalism, continues to rise as it commits violent protests in the streets of Bangladesh.<sup>10,11</sup>
- The rising influence of these Islamic groups is evident in the growing number of madrasas, or religious schools, that are linked with extremism and violent tendencies.<sup>12</sup>



## Economics:

- Since 1991, with the stabilization of internal politics, Bangladesh has experienced strong economic growth.<sup>13</sup>
- For example, poverty rates are down by 25 percent since 1990 and per-capita GDP has doubled since 1975.<sup>14</sup>
- Goldman Sachs has included Bangladesh in the “Next Eleven,” or part of a group of countries that could be economic leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>
- More than 75 percent of the country’s export earnings are derived from the readymade garment industry.<sup>16</sup>
- The industry employs over 3 million workers, 90 percent of them being women.<sup>17</sup>
- However, international governments and human rights groups are pressuring Bangladesh for possible rights violations in this sector with regards to poor wages and long hours.<sup>18</sup>
- Recently, more than 100 garment factories were recently shut down due to strikes over low wages.<sup>19</sup>



## Environmental Security:

- According to the National Geographic, Bangladesh ranks first as the country most impacted by climate change in coming decades.<sup>20</sup>
- With over 160 million people, it is the 8<sup>th</sup> most populated country in the world, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world.<sup>21</sup>
- The Bay of Bengal, a climate change hotspot, will experience rising sea levels and changing weather patterns.<sup>22</sup>
- At the current rate, Bangladesh could lose 11 percent of its territory to rising sea levels.
- As a result, 20 to 30 million could be displaced, forcing them to migrate to already dense cities or to neighbouring countries like India or Pakistan.<sup>23</sup>



*Farhad Mirzadeh is a policy researcher and intern at the American Security Project, he is a recent graduate of the University of North Texas with degrees in History and Political Science*





## Endnotes

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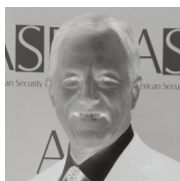
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