



Reaching Muslims in Asia: Bangladesh

The Land of Rivers



Bangladesh came into existence in 1971 when Bengali East Pakistan seceded from its union with West Pakistan. About a third of this extremely poor country floods annually during the monsoon rainy season, hampering economic development.¹ The country is primarily a vast plain where three major rivers converge, with some hill country in the Northeast and Southeast.

With 83% of her approximate population of 150 million Bangladesh is one of the largest Muslim population countries in the world. About 16% of the people are Hindu, and less than 1% are

Christian.² That is beginning to change, however, as God has been moving in dramatic ways through His church in the past 5 or 6 years. Tens of thousands of Bengali Muslims are following Isa al Masih each year! **Yet in spite of these encouraging signs, the majority of Muslims in vast population are in need of Gospel witnesses.**



City of a Thousand Mosques

Dhaka has been called “the city of the 1,000 mosques”, but at the start of the 21st century the capital of Bangladesh has many more than 1,000 mosques. The region was first exposed to Hinduism and then to Buddhism. Muslim raiders introduced Islam to Bangladesh from North India in the tenth century and later by the Mughal (Mogul) rulers. Most of the population today follows the Sunni and Sufi forms of Islam, which are dominated by ‘holy men’ and folk Islamic practices.

Dhaka is a busy centre of government and commerce and attracts students from all over the country. Recently identified as the world’s most polluted city, the government is struggling to manage the traffic and provide adequate housing facilities for its growing population of 11 million people. Non-governmental organisations try to help in the huge challenge of alleviating poverty. Bangladesh’s gross national product (GNP) per capita is still among the lowest in Asia, and the country depends heavily on foreign aid. Crime rates are rising and reports of hijacking, extortion, mob killings and murder can be read in the newspaper every day. Political violence is common, and rivalries between the political parties, coupled with corruption, hinder serious efforts to address the multiple problems.³

Dhaka is also home for many Bihari Muslims. They fled the riots in the Indian State of Bihar after the partition of India in 1947. Favoured by the government of Pakistan, they sided with the West-Pakistani Army when the Bengalis in East Pakistan fought for their independence in 1971. After the war the new country of Bangladesh was born and the Urdu-speaking Biharis were seen as traitors. To escape from the revenge of the Bengalis they were gathered in refugee

camps to await their repatriation to Pakistan. With the help of international relief organisations, half of them have been repatriated over the years, but 250,000-300,000 still remain in the 66 camps in Bangladesh. The Biharis in Bangladesh have a strong Muslim identity. **Only a few secret believers exist among them.**

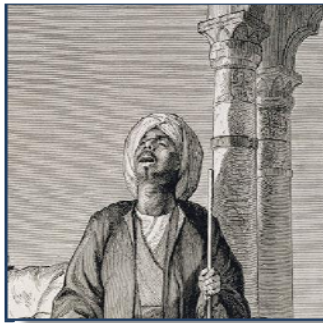
References: ¹ World Factbook; ³ www.virtualbangladesh.com; ² http://www.30-days.net/muslims/muslims-in/asia-south-central/bangladesh-dhaka;

Prayer Points:

- Pray that the churches in Dhaka will be encouraged to reach out to those who have not yet heard the Good News despite the rising intimidation which they face.
- Pray for unity and mutual trust among the national churches and the Christian organisations working in the city.
- Pray for many church-planting teams to be established that will take on the challenge of reaching out to the vast Bengali Muslim population (including the Biharis).



Resources: Adhan – the Cry from the Minaret



Have you ever heard the Adhan – the call to prayer – from a local mosque? Some consider it hauntingly beautiful, while others just find it haunting. Have you ever wondered what they are saying in that flowing Arabic chant? Find out this and much more in a new, free online resource at [CMOCanada.org](http://www.cmocanada.org). In this resource you'll find the Qur'anic admonition regarding the adhan, what the Hadiths (traditional sayings with spiritual authority almost equal to the Qur'an) *and how Believers in Jesus can answer the cry from the minaret*. In addition to this resource, you'll find other free resources recently added for your use. Blessings be upon you as you answer the Adhan – the call to prayer. **[If your pdf software doesn't support active url web links, copy and paste this to your web browser: <http://www.cmocanada.org/resources/>**

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