



Bangladesh Handout

Bangladesh is located in South Asia, bordering the Indian Ocean's Bay of Bengal, between Burma and India. With more than 150 million people, it is the eighth most populated country in the world.

Together with the neighbouring Indian state of West Bengal, Bangladesh makes up the ethno-linguistic region of Bengal. The name Bangladesh actually means 'Country of Bengal' in the Bengali language. This region has an ancient, historic and rich cultural heritage. Currently, 90% of the people are Muslim. Bangladesh is situated on deltas of large rivers that flow from the Himalayas down to the Bay of Bengal. These rivers have created some of the most fertile plains in the world.

Bangladesh is now widely recognised to be one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, as it will cause increased rainfall, rising sea levels, tropical cyclones and floods, seriously affecting agriculture, water and food security, human health and shelter. The Bangladeshi climate is tropical, with a mild winter from October to March, and a hot, humid summer from March to June. A warm and rainy monsoon season lasts from June to October, and comes with natural calamities, such as floods, tropical cyclones, tornadoes, and tidal bores occurring almost every year. A cyclone that struck Bangladesh in 1991 killed some 140,000 people. In 1998, a severe flooding killed 1,000 people and 30 million more lost their homes. Two-thirds of the country was underwater.

The Royal Bengal Tiger is Bangladesh's national animal, and its home is the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world. The Magpie Robin is the national bird, and is used widely in Bangladesh as a symbol, for example on currency notes. The Mango tree is the national tree.

Bangladesh is one of world's largest producers of rice, potato, mango, pineapple, onion, banana, jute, and tea.

Dhaka and Chittagong, the country's two largest cities, are among the world's fastest growing cities.

Cricket is one of the most popular sports in Bangladesh, followed by football. Kabaddi, a wrestling sport, is a very popular game there, especially in the villages. Often called the 'game of rural Bengal', it is now the National Game of Bangladesh. The game involves two teams occupying opposite halves of a small field. The teams take turns sending a 'raider' into the opposition's half, where the goal is to tag or wrestle members of the opposite team before returning to his side of the field. The raider must first take a deep breath before entering the opposition's half, and continuously chant the word Kabaddi during the whole raid, without taking in another breath. The goal of the defenders is to stop the raider from returning to his home side before taking a breath.

In Bangladesh, the Aflatoun programme takes place in rural and urban communities all over the country, both at primary and secondary school level. The primary schools often have one room in a rented bamboo or tin shed house with several windows, with the earth floor covered in beautiful carpets. The walls and ceiling are decorated with art made from recycled and natural materials, as well as the student's drawings and personal essays.

Aflatoun's Bangladeshi friends enjoy singing and dancing. They like to sing the rhyme, We Are All Friends, which is featured in the Aflatoun books.

Each child saves in an Aflatoun bag. Every week, they bring their bag to class, count their savings together, and fill in the information in their savings book, which they made themselves! The average amount saved monthly per student is 38 taka (around 40 euro cents).

Aflatoun's friends spend their savings on stationery, treats, and gifts for younger brothers and sisters. Some of them use the money to buy small animals.

In their Aflatoun classes, the students learn about saving and spending accounts; prioritising what to spend; encouraging the habit of saving; negotiating with shopkeepers; identifying notes and coins; helping parents in keeping accounts and when they need money; helping people in need; being kind to younger children and not bullying them; respecting their elders; working in a team; and telling the truth.

