

Bangladesh – an over-populated country

Almost the whole of Bangladesh is made up of the Ganges delta and the wide floodplains of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. Therefore, the country is frequently flooded – both by river floods and by coastal floods, which occur as a result of **storm surges** caused by **cyclones** approaching from the Bay of Bengal. Floods have caused the deaths of more than a million people there in the last 200 years.

Bangladesh has few natural resources and relies on farming. Of the 73.8 million labour force 45% work in agriculture – mainly as subsistence farmers. Minerals like iron ore are the basis of the manufacturing industry, and raw materials such as this are so expensive that industries based on imports would not be profitable.

Bangladesh has the seventh largest population in the world – 158 million – but only ranks 94th in the world in terms of land area, so it has a high population density of more than 1000 people per square kilometre. The net migration rate is negative at –1.57 per 1000.

Muslims make up 85% of the population. Some leaders do not advocate the use of contraception. With a high birth rate of nearly 23 per 1000, and a high death rate of 5.7 per 1000 (resulting in a population growth rate of 1.6%), Bangladesh has far more people than its resources can

support. Its GDP is only US\$1700 per person, which is far too low to provide a good standard of living. Its exports of garments, tea, seafood, jute and leather are worth only US\$16.24 billion a year. An estimated 40% of the population are under-employed. Many exist on low wages for a few hours' work a week.

There are also not enough schools and hospitals. Only 48% of the population are literate, and education is provided for only eight years of a person's life. Most people have no qualifications. Access to health care is also poor. For example, the infant mortality rate is 5.07%.

The outlook for the future is not good:

- ➔ The agricultural land on the floodplains of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers is already over-cultivated.
- ➔ There has been widespread deforestation for firewood on the foothills of the Himalayas – increasing the flood risk.
- ➔ The capital, Dhaka, is heavily congested with traffic and has overcrowded housing – often lacking basic amenities.
- ➔ The cost of repairing damage to infrastructure after flooding is a frequent drain on the economy.