



PAKISTAN

A COUNTRY PROFILE FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, INC.

GEOGRAPHY

Pakistan, with 310,527 square miles, is about twice the size of California. Located in South Asia, the country borders Iran to the west, Afghanistan to the northwest, China to the northeast, and India to the east and southeast. To the south lies the Arabian Sea.

Much of the country is flat. Hills prevail in the west, while portions of several mountain ranges, including a stretch of the Himalayas, are found in the north. There, 35 peaks tower over 24,000 feet. They include the 28,250-foot-high K-2, the second-highest peak in the world, only behind Mount Everest.

The diverse climate ranges from severe winter cold in the mountains to extreme summertime heat elsewhere.

The country is predominantly arid, with an average annual rainfall of less than 10 inches. The exception is the fertile valley of the Indus River, which flows from the Himalayas 1,000 miles south before emptying into the Arabian Sea.

Rainfall varies greatly, often resulting in long periods of drought followed by severe rainstorms and flooding, especially during the July and August monsoon season.

One-quarter of the land is arable; only four percent is forested. Earthquakes are common in Pakistan.

PEOPLE & LANGUAGE

Pakistan's population of over 150 million is growing at the rate of almost 2.1 percent annually.

Half of Pakistanis are under age 20. Life expectancy is 62 years.

Pakistan is made up of several major ethnic groups, with the Punjabi accounting for two-thirds of the population. Other sizeable ethnic groups include the Sindhi, Pashtun, Baluch, and Muhajir.

Women in Pakistan bear an average of six children during their lifetimes.

The government has ordained Urdu the national language, replacing English, yet, only 87 percent speak it. Punjabi is spoken by 48 percent of the population, and English is the lingua franca of the elite and most government ministries. Though Urdu is spoken by only a minority at this point, it is hoped the change will help unify the country.

Each ethnic group also has its own predominant language as well as several dialects.

MAJOR CITY CENTERS

Karachi, situated on the Arabian Sea coast, is Pakistan's largest city, with more than 13 million people. Near the Indian border is Lahore, the capital of Punjab province, and home to some three million. Other major cities include Faisalabad, Hyderabad, and Rawalpindi.

The capital, Islamabad, is located in the northeast, adjacent to Rawalpindi. The twin-city community has a population of at least one million.

Pakistan's population is concentrated in the Indus River Valley and along its major tributaries. Less than one-

third of the people live in urban areas.

POLITICAL HISTORY

Pakistan's history is intertwined with that of the Indian subcontinent. A civilization flourished in the Indus Valley from 4000 to 2500 B.C. Aryan invaders then conquered the area, establishing a Hindu civilization that dominated the region for 2,000 years.

In subsequent centuries the region was ruled and influenced by nations from the west. Little by little, the area that is now Pakistan began to adopt a cultural identity separate from the rest of the Indian subcontinent.

Islam came to the area during the first Arab invasion early in the eighth century. While the teachings of Mohammad failed to take hold in most of India, they did in the very northern regions, including the area of Pakistan. Muslim influence expanded considerably during the 300-year period of the Moghul empire, beginning in the early 1500s.

By the nineteenth century the British East India Company had established dominance in the area. The influence of the British on Pakistan culture can still

be seen in various aspects, including language, architecture, education, infrastructure, and, to a lesser degree, government.

The independence movement on the Indian subcontinent gained momentum between the two World Wars. Also during this time, the great Muslim poet and intellectual father of Pakistan, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, proposed the creation of a separate Muslim state in the areas where Islam predominated. Mohammad Ali Jinnah (Pakistan's first head of state) furthered the movement. In 1947, Britain granted full dominion status to the subcontinent, creating Pakistan—which at that time included East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)—from northeastern and northwestern sections of India.

That move precipitated perhaps the largest population transfer in history, with six million Muslims fleeing from India to Pakistan, and almost as many Hindus and Sikhs crossing the border into India. Terrible violence accompanied the transfer, leaving hundreds of thousands dead.

Pakistan became a republic in 1956. Eventually, however, East Pakistan, separated by 1,000 miles from its

western counterpart, demanded independence. Violent riots ensued.

On March 25, 1971, government troops launched attacks in East Pakistan; thousands were killed. Aided by India, East Pakistan withstood the attacks and proclaimed itself the independent nation of Bangladesh. More than one million died in the fighting.

The military took control of Pakistan's government in 1977, later executing former president and prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Bhutto had been lauded for his work in instituting major industry, banking, and land reforms, although his rule grew more authoritarian in later years. The change in government brought with it a further Islamization of the nation's institutions and legal system.

The appointment of Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, as prime minister in late 1988 marked the first time a woman had been leader of a Muslim nation. She was ousted from post in 1990.

Pakistan is governed by a parliamentary system, with an executive branch consisting of a president as chief of state and a prime minis-

ter as the head of government. The country is divided into four provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Northwest Frontier, and Balochistan.

Since its inception, Pakistan has been plagued by instability and wars with India over the disputed territories of Kashmir and East Pakistan. In recent years, millions of Afghans have poured into Pakistan to flee fighting in their own homeland.

During 2002, a series of violent acts including suicide attacks, were carried out against Western or Christian targets in Pakistan. Throughout 2002 and into 2003, India and Pakistan continued to test-fire ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. The war in Iraq that began on March 19, 2003, has been seen to have set a precedent for authorizing pre-emptive strikes on hostile states. The idea that India and Pakistan might adopt such a policy toward one another has caused international concern.

ECONOMY

Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy, employing more than half the work force. Not long ago, Pakistan had one of the lowest

crop yields in the world, but intensive farming practices and the introduction of high-yield grains enabled it to become a net food exporter.

Cotton textile production and apparel manufacturing are Pakistan's largest industries, accounting for about 64 percent of total exports. Other important exports include rice, wheat, and sugar. Fishing is a major industry along the coast.

Much of Pakistan's industry is tied to its agricultural output. Textile manufacturing is the chief industry, while others include food processing, chemicals, fertilizer, pharmaceuticals, steel, petroleum refining, tires, cement, and transport. Pakistan's most notable resource, aside from its arable land, is natural gas. Iron ore and newly discovered oil reserves of yet unknown quantity are other important natural resources.

The U.S. accounts for about one-tenth of Pakistan's foreign trade. Half of the nation's foreign exchange earnings come from money sent home by expatriates working outside the country, many in the Middle East.

Pakistan's economy is hampered by a large and expanding population, a highly stratified and tra-

ditional society, and a low level of literacy. Per capita income is about \$2,100 in U.S. currency.

EDUCATION

The Pakistani government is working to improve the educational system in the country; there is only about a 45.7 percent literacy rate, and the country has under-equipped educational facilities and a shortage of teachers. Less than half of children attend school, and many quit early to help with farming.

Recent government efforts include establishing more primary schools in rural areas. At the secondary level, there has been a push to train more technicians to help expand the nation's industrial base.

Pakistan's educational system includes five primary grades, five secondary grades, and four college years. Pakistan has some 80 universities. At the college level, performances on exams are given much weight.

During the 2002/03 academic year, more than 8,000 students from Pakistan attended colleges and universities in the U.S. Three out of every five Pakistani students here are undergraduates.

CULTURE

The influence of Islam in Pakistan has affected everything from food and drink to architecture to apparel. Even laws are based on the principles of the Muslim faith.

Social life in Pakistan revolves around the family. Extended families and several generations often live together.

Males and the elderly are accorded great respect. The eldest male in the household exerts considerable influence over the other family members. Women in rural areas have little social freedom, while in cities they generally enjoy far greater opportunities.

Arranged marriages, marked by elaborate wedding celebrations, are still the practice. Marriage signifies the joining of the two families involved. Pakistan has a low divorce rate.

Hospitality and socializing skills are important traits. Men and women generally do not socialize together.

Ethnic, cultural, and Islamic sectarian tensions among the different groups in Pakistan have inhibited national unity. Another division exists between urban and rural dwellers. Many in the cities are

educated and have adopted some Western practices. Millions of those in the countryside, however, make a living as farmers and herders in much the same way as their ancestors have for centuries, using animals for transportation and living in mud or clay structures.

Sports are a passion for many Pakistanis. The country is a world leader in field hockey and cricket competition, while squash, soccer, badminton, and tennis are also popular.

Polo actually originated in Pakistan. Traditional martial arts such as wrestling, swordsmanship, and dagger fighting are also still practiced.

Many in the cities enjoy attending movies. In rural areas, plays based on myth and legend are popular forms of entertainment.

HOLIDAYS

The country's national holidays include:

Pakistan Day (March 23), May Day (May 1), Independence Day (August 14), Defense of Pakistan Day, commemorating the 1965 war with India over Kashmir (September 6), the Anniversary of the Death of Mohammad

Ali Jinnah (September 11), and the Birth of Mohammad Ali Jinnah (December 25).

Muslim holidays are celebrated according to the lunar calendar. The most important include Eid-ul-Fitr, a three-day feast marking the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, and the Feast of Sacrifice (Eid-ul-Azha). The birth of the Prophet Mohammad is another major holiday.

RELIGION

Islam, the state religion, claims 97 percent of Pakistanis. Around 77 percent are Sunni Muslims.

Religion has a profound impact on daily life. Most Muslims in Pakistan are intensely devoted to the ideals and practices of Islam. Pakistan's Muslim religious leaders have spoken out against the dangers of modernism and have called for the preservation of traditional religious values.

Hinduism is still strong in Sindh, even though many Hindus have emigrated to India. Overall, Hindus make up a little more than one percent of the population. Some tribal groups practice traditional religions. Despite Islam's dominance, freedom of reli-

gion is guaranteed by law.

CHRISTIANITY

It is estimated that Christians make up less than three percent of the population in Pakistan. Evangelicals, however, are few in number. In general, Protestants are more concentrated in rural areas, while Catholics are found more in the cities.

The first Christian missionaries appeared in the region as early as the eighth century, but significant Christian growth did not take place until around the turn of this century. Since 1969, the government has increased its control over Christian institutions and activities of foreign missionaries for fear they are winning too many converts.

The vast majority of Christians come from the Punjabi ethnic group and are primarily former Hindus. Many, however, have been born into the Christian community and lack a genuine spiritual life.

Social pressures conspire to severely limit conversions within the Muslim community. Also, recent reports from Christians inside the country reveal an increase in the harass-

ment of Christians by Muslim reactionaries. Consequently, very few national Christians are involved in outreach to their Muslim countrymen.

Church growth has been spotty, and in some places the church is shrinking. Also, many areas and peoples in Pakistan have yet to be reached with the Gospel.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Embassy of Pakistan
3517 International Court,
NW, Washington, DC
20008
202-243-6500
www.embassyofpakistan.org

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