

ASIA: SOUTH & AFGHANISTAN

The Himalaya Mountains have been a natural barrier between Mongoloids speaking the Tibeto-Burman languages of Central Asia and Caucasoids speaking the Indo-Aryan languages of South Asia. Invasions and occupations have added many languages and dialects to South Asia's native tongues. English is the unifying language spoken in politics, business, education, and science. India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan formerly made up most of the British-Indian Empire. In 1947, predominantly Hindu India was granted independence. Pakistan was created as a homeland for Muslim minorities. East Pakistan seceded in 1971 to become Bangladesh. Afghanistan and the Maldives are also Islamic nations. Nepal, like India, is Hindu. Bhutan and Sri Lanka have Buddhist majorities. South Asia is the most densely populated area in the world. The huge populations are confined to coastal areas, river deltas, and the basins of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers in India and Bangladesh and the Indus River in Pakistan. These countries have agricultural economies that depend upon the critical timing of summer monsoon rains. Local populations continue to grow rapidly, primarily because of a declining death rate due to improved health care and sanitation. There is a significant loss of life from animal attacks. Tigers, leopards, elephants, rhinoceroses, and poisonous snakes are just a few of a vast variety of wild and dangerous animals that fill the jungles of the subcontinent. An "abominable snowman" is reputed to be alive in the Himalayas, but its existence has never been proved.

AFGHANISTAN

Area: 253,000 sq. mi. (655,270 km²). Population: 17,000,000. Capital: Kabul, 925,000. Government: One-party republic. Language: Pashto, Dari. Religion: Islam. Exports: Natural gas, hides, dried fruits, and cotton. Climate: Dry, with continental extremes. Landlocked Afghanistan is a starkly beautiful mountainous nation. The only fertile land is found north of the Hindu Kush Mountains that cross the heart of the country. South of these towering peaks is a barren desert. For most of the 1980s the nation was gripped by a bloody civil war in which the Soviet Union intervened on behalf of the communist government in power. The rebel faction was made up of many different Muslim groups fighting to preserve a feudal way of life. These "Mujahadeen" (holy warriors), armed by the U.S., fought the Soviets to a standstill. Such religious-based resistance to centralized authority has been a common thread throughout Afghanistan's history. By the time the Soviets pulled out in 1989, well over a quarter of the civilian population had fled to Pakistan and Iran. For centuries, Afghanistan was considered the gateway to the riches of the Indian subcontinent and was the customary route for invading armies. The famed Khyber Pass across the Hindu Kush is still the major road for Afghan exports traveling to the Pakistani port of Karachi.

BANGLADESH

Area: 55,575 sq. mi. (143,940 km²). Population: 115,000,000. Capital: Dhaka, 2,500,000. Government: Republic. Language: Bengali. Religion: Islamic 85%; Hindu. Exports: Jute, tea, fish products, and hides. Climate: Tropical with very heavy rainfall. Bangladesh is essentially a huge delta (the world's largest) formed by five rivers, including the Ganges and Brahmaputra. The boat-filled countryside is subject to annual flooding brought on by some of the heaviest rainfall on the planet. Cyclone-driven tidal waves are an added threat; one such wave killed over a quarter of a million people in 1970. During the British occupation of India, Bangladesh was the Bengali-speaking Muslim eastern half of the state of Bengal. It became the eastern portion of the newly formed Pakistan in 1947. Except for the Islamic religion, the two halves of the coun-

try, 1,000 mi. (1,600 km) apart, had nothing in common. After years of exploitation by the government in the West, East Pakistan seceded in 1971. The West attacked, but with the aid of India, Bangladesh ("Bengal Nation") was created. The nation's agricultural output is no match for the burgeoning population; this is one of the world's poorest and crowded areas. Bangladesh is the world's top producer of jute fibers used to make rope and sack-cloth.

BTUTAN

Area: 18,145 sq. mi. (46,980 km²). Population: 1,600,000. Capital: Thimphu, 24,000. Government: Monarchy. Language: Dzongkha (Tibetan dialect). Nepal. Religion: Buddhist 70%; Hinduism. Exports: Timber, fruit, and whiskey. Climate: Very wet; temperature varies according to altitude. This remote Himalayan kingdom wedged between India and Tibet is the closest thing to the fabled Shangri-la. Bhutan's (booahn) name means "land of the dragons," and the mythical animal graces the country's flag. Most of the population lives in the foothills and river valleys. About two-thirds of the people are Buddhists of Tibetan ancestry. Many monks live in hundreds of fortress-like monasteries. Until the 1960s, Bhutan was an isolated, almost totally illiterate nation. A program of modernization is now in progress. Road and air travel to India has been improved. India serves as Bhutan's protector.

INDIA

Area: 1,270,000 sq. mi. (3,289,300 km²). Population: 825,000,000. Capital: New Delhi, 4,000,000. Government: Republic. Language: Hindi and English (official); 850 other languages and dialects. Religion: Hinduism 83%, Muslim 11%. Exports: Iron ore, tea, cotton, hides, textiles, and rubber. Climate: Tropical with three seasons: cool, hot, and wet. India, the world's largest democracy, is a third the size of the US but has more people than any country except China. Paradoxically, this poor, predominantly agricultural country is rapidly becoming a major industrial nation and is one of the leaders in producing scientists and skilled technicians. India is unified by the Hindu religion but divided by over 800 languages and dialects. The Hindu religion, one of the world's oldest, supports a caste system with a rigid class structure that determines how the members of each caste shall live. One can never leave the caste of birth. There are four main castes, each with hundreds of subcastes. A person's standing in society depends upon his or her caste. Fifteen percent of Hindus are "untouchables"; their unfortunate position is below the entire caste system. Modern laws prevent discrimination based on caste, but age-old traditions die slowly and class distinction remains a way of life. All Hindus believe in reincarnation in which it is possible for a human to return as an animal in the next life. Therefore, most Hindus do not eat meat. Cows are considered sacred and are allowed to wander through the business districts of major cities and to graze on valuable farmland. Other religions are represented in India: Muslims (14%) live mainly in the north; Christians (3%) live in the northeast; bearded, turban-wearing Sikhs (2%) have violently demanded greater autonomy in the northern state of Punjab; Buddhists (1%) were once in the majority; and Jains (1%) extend the reverence for life to all living creatures. Southern Indians are dark-skinned descendants of the Dravidians, the earliest known inhabitants of India. They were driven south by the Aryans, the ancestors of the light-skinned northern Indians. They represent completely different cultures.

India is bordered on the north by the Himalayas. The fertile region just to the south is the world's largest alluvial plain. This densely populated region consists of three river basins: the Indus, the Brahmaputra, and the temple-lined Ganges. Pilgrims come to bathe and spiritually cleanse themselves in the sacred waters of the Ganges. The triangular Indian Peninsula is a tropical plateau (The Deccan Plateau) rimmed by mountain ranges called the Western and Eastern Ghats. Ten cities in India have over 1 million residents. Many have modern sections, built by the British, that are currently occupied by wealthy or politically influential Indians. Thousands of homeless people bed down on the streets of the major cities. At Agra, in northern India, stands the

Taj Mahal, one of the world's most beautiful structures. The white marble building was built as an Islamic tomb for a Indian prince and his wife. The Indian nonviolent movement for independence from Great Britain, led by Mohandas Gandhi, set an example for the American civil rights activists of the 1960s. But India has not been nonviolent in boundary disputes with China and Pakistan. After many battles between India and Pakistan over the beautiful state of Kashmir, a United Nations-mediated treaty established the current boundary lines. In 1990, tensions flared again as India accused Pakistan of aiding the Muslim separatist movement in Kashmir.

MALDIVES

This Islamic nation, consisting of 2,000 coral atolls, lies about 300 mi. (480 km) southwest of the tip of India. Most of the 200,000 people, who inhabit 200 of the islands, are descendants of Sri Lankans. Male (35,000) is the capital. Fish, coconuts, and tourism are the main industries.

NEPAL

Area: 54,588 sq. mi. (141,383 km²). Population: 18,500,000. Capital: Kathmandu, 210,000. Government: Monarchy. Language: Nepali 50%; many others. Religion: Hinduism 90%, Buddhism 10%. Exports: Food products, timber, and hides. Climate: Varies from alpine to tropical. The Himalayas (which include eight of the world's ten tallest peaks) occupy 90% of Nepal (nup pawl). The terrain consists mostly of mountain slopes. The country is less than 100 mi. (160 km) wide. It drops from snowy Himalayan peaks to a swampy, tropical plain on the southern border. Nepal is the birthplace of Gautama Buddha (560 ec), the founder of Buddhism. The famous Sherpa guides accompany many mountain-climbing expeditions originating in Nepal. The country's renowned Gurkha soldiers have distinguished themselves in the British and Indian armies—Nepal is the only state in the region to have successfully resisted British occupation. Democracy and the hope of prosperity are coming to this very poor, mountain kingdom.

PAKISTAN

Area: 310,400 sq. mi. (803,936 km²). Population: 115,000,000. Capital: Islamabad, 225,000. Government: Republic. Language: Urdu. Religion: Islam. Exports: Natural gas, cotton products, textiles, carpets, and rice. Climate: Very dry and continental. In a land where monsoon winds blow hot or cold but almost never wet, Pakistan is completely dependent on the mighty Indus River, and its six major tributaries. The rivers provide water for the world's largest irrigation system. The Indus Valley was the site of many advanced ancient South Asian civilizations. The largest industry is cotton and cotton goods. Most exports pass through the former capital, Karachi (5,250,000), on the Arabian Sea. Pakistan is a nation of many ethnic groups, each with its own language; fewer than 10% of the people speak Urdu, the official tongue. The nation was created as a homeland for Muslim minorities living in British India. Though a conservative Islamic nation, where the public presence of women is severely restricted, Pakistan elected Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of a former leader, as Prime Minister in 1988. She was removed from office in 1990 amid charges of corruption and incompetence.

SRI LANKA

Area: 25,330 sq. mi. (65,605 km²). Population: 18,500,000. Capital: Colombo, 600,000. Government: Republic. Language: Sinhala; Tamil. Religion: Buddhist 75%; Hinduism 18%. Exports: Tea, rubber, coconuts, and graphite. Climate: Tropical. Sri Lanka (see tanr, kurr), formerly Ceylon, is a beautiful tropical island linked to the Indian mainland by "Adam's Bridge," a 20 mi. (32 km) chain of sandy islands. The Buddhist Sinhalese majority (75%) and the Hindu Tamil minority (18%) originally came from India. Several Tamil groups have been waging a guerrilla war for an independent state in the north. The factional war has destroyed Sri Lanka's earlier promise of becoming an economically prosperous nation. Most people live in the wet and hilly southwest region which is ideal for growing tea—Sri Lanka is the world's number two producer and the leading producer of high-quality graphite.

