



ONUCI's peacekeepers present their countries: Bangladesh

Bangladesh came into existence in 1971, when East Pakistan seceded from West Pakistan. The vast majority of its 138 million people, some 98 percent, are Bengalis and speak the Bengali language, according to Banbatt Operations Officer Major Akbar Amin. About 83 percent of Bangladeshis are Muslims. The next major religion is Hinduism, with 16 percent, while other religions include Buddhism and Christianity.

The population is 82 percent rural, while 18 percent live in urban areas.

Bangladeshi daily life is rich in traditions and festivals that reflect the unique culture and social practices of the people. Indigenous customs and festivals, preserved and nurtured over many years, centre mainly around agricultural practices, according to Banbatt Information Officer Major Ayub Khan. They include *nabonno* (the festival of the new harvest) and *pawhela boishakh* (the Bengali New Year).

Religion has also played a distinct role in shaping traditional Bangladeshi life, according to Major Khan. Prominent Islamic festivals like Eid-ul-Fitr, which follows the month of Ramadan, and Eid-ul-Adha are celebrated. Hindus celebrate Holi, the Festival of Colours, also known as the spring festival, in the first week of March. Durga Puja is celebrated during October, and statues of the goddess astride a lion, with her ten hands holding ten different weapons, are placed in every Hindu temple.

A major festival is the *Pawhela Boishakh* or Bengali New Year, marked by singing, processions, and fairs. Traditionally, businesses start this day with a new ledger, clearing out the old, Major Khan said. The Bengali Calendar, whose starting date was made to coincide with the start of the Islamic calendar, is based on ancient sub-continental calendars, which were codified and standardized about six centuries ago, he added.

National occasions such as Independence Day, Victory Day, and Language Martyr's Day now also form an important part of Bangladesh social life. Social customs like birth, naming ceremonies, marriage, and death also have a distinct Bangladeshi flavor with each ethnic and religious group having its own unique way to mark these traditions, Major Khan said.

Although cinema has always been a popular form of entertainment, it was not until 1956 that the first full-length feature film was produced in Bangladesh. At present the industry is capable of producing around 60 feature films per year. Music in Bangladesh can be divided into three distinct categories - classical, folk and modern. The highly popular folk

music, nurtured through the ages by village poets, is rich in devotional mysticism and love-lore, while modern Bengali Music has blended Western and Middle Eastern traits with traditional forms.

When it comes to food, Bangladeshis claim most of the food served in many Indian restaurants around the world is theirs. A typical Bangladeshi meal consists of beef or sometimes mutton, chicken, fish or eggs and vegetables cooked in a hot spicy sauce with mustard-oil, watery yellow lentils (*dal*) and plain rice, Major Khan said. Fish is part of the staple diet.



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