

# Fact Sheet: Bangladesh

Farhad Mirzadeh

September 2013

Bangladesh, a nation of nearly 170 million people is the world's sixth largest country and the third largest Muslim majority country. Its shared borders with India and Myanmar and close proximity to China and the critical access that it provides to the Bay of Bengal places the country in a highly sensitive strategic location.

As Bangladesh continues to experience economic growth, it garners more scrutiny over its labour standards from the international community and major trading partners, including the United States. With that being said, Bangladesh continues to be a hub for economic activity as it is rich in minerals and energy potential. For example, it has opened up its shores to foreign exploration. It is an important site for the United State's Asian pivot and the growing Chinese emphasis on Bangladesh.

The recent political impasse in Bangladesh and growing trends in militancy and terrorism raise serious concerns not only for its own stability but also the stability of the wider South Asian region. The situation becomes more complex as the NATO led international forces withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014.



## Historical Background:

- The borders of Bangladesh were a result of the Partition of Bengal in 1947.<sup>1</sup>
- Ethnic and religious tensions as well as economic concerns led to the Bangladesh Liberation war in 1971.
- As a result, Bengalis split from Pakistan and formed Bangladesh, an independent and secular nation.
- However, Bangladesh was affected by famine, poverty, and numerous military coups.<sup>2</sup>
- In 1991, a parliamentary republic was restored with an unofficial two-party system.<sup>3</sup>



## Electoral Background:

- The day-to-day affairs are run by the Prime Minister, while the President serves a ceremonial role as head of state.
- In 1991, however, the President’s powers were expanded with the introduction of the “caretaker government,” making the president responsible for elections and the resulting transfer of power.<sup>4</sup>
- The role of the “Caretaker Government” was institutionalized in 1996 with the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution.<sup>5</sup>
- However, the Awami League passed the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment which abolished the Caretaker Government.<sup>6</sup>
- The next election is supposed to occur between October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013 and January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014.



## Political Instability:

- For over a year, the country has been gripped with growing unrest and strikes.
- The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, along with 18 opposition parties, has led strikes against the ruling Awami League that has nearly shut down many government functions.<sup>7</sup>
- The Courts ruled to de-register one of Bangladesh’s largest political parties, Jammat-e-Islami, a party tied with Islamic interests.<sup>8</sup>
- The Courts’ reasoning was that the party’s charter placed God before democratic principles.<sup>9</sup>
- This has resulted in widespread protests, often violent, on the streets of Bangladesh.
- Furthermore, the rise of Hefazat-e-Islam, another party rooted in Islamic fundamentalism, continues to rise as it commits violent protests in the streets of Bangladesh.<sup>10,11</sup>
- The rising influence of these Islamic groups is evident in the growing number of madrasas, or religious schools, that are linked with extremism and violent tendencies.<sup>12</sup>



## Economics:

- Since 1991, with the stabilization of internal politics, Bangladesh has experienced strong economic growth.<sup>13</sup>
- For example, poverty rates are down by 25 percent since 1990 and per-capita GDP has doubled since 1975.<sup>14</sup>
- Goldman Sachs has included Bangladesh in the “Next Eleven,” or part of a group of countries that could be economic leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>
- More than 75 percent of the country’s export earnings are derived from the readymade garment industry.<sup>16</sup>
- The industry employs over 3 million workers, 90 percent of them being women.<sup>17</sup>
- However, international governments and human rights groups are pressuring Bangladesh for possible rights violations in this sector with regards to poor wages and long hours.<sup>18</sup>
- Recently, more than 100 garment factories were recently shut down due to strikes over low wages.<sup>19</sup>



## Environmental Security:

- According to the National Geographic, Bangladesh ranks first as the country most impacted by climate change in coming decades.<sup>20</sup>
- With over 160 million people, it is the 8<sup>th</sup> most populated country in the world, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world.<sup>21</sup>
- The Bay of Bengal, a climate change hotspot, will experience rising sea levels and changing weather patterns.<sup>22</sup>
- At the current rate, Bangladesh could lose 11 percent of its territory to rising sea levels.
- As a result, 20 to 30 million could be displaced, forcing them to migrate to already dense cities or to neighbouring countries like India or Pakistan.<sup>23</sup>



*Farhad Mirzadeh is a policy researcher and intern at the American Security Project, he is a recent graduate of the University of North Texas with degrees in History and Political Science*



## Endnotes

1. Encyclopedia Britannica. "[Bangladesh.](#)"
2. Encyclopaedia Britannica. "[Bangladesh.](#)"
3. MD. Saidur Rahman. "[Institutionalization of Democracy in the Political Parties in Bangladesh](#)". North South University, 2010.
4. The Economist. "[Generally trusted.](#)" August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010.
5. Ole J. Forsburg, PhD. "[Bangladesh's New Amendment.](#)" Electoral Forensics. June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011
6. Shakhawat Liton. "[How the controversial 15th Amendment curtailed people's power.](#)" The Daily Star. September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
7. AlJazeera. "[Bangladesh paralysed by opposition strike.](#)" May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
8. The Indian Express. "[Bangla on the boil after HC calls Jamaat-e-Islami illegal.](#)" August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013.
9. Wall Street Journal. "[Bangladesh Court Strikes Down Jamaat-e-Islami's Electoral Registration.](#)" August 1, 2013.
10. Sabir Mustafa. "[Hefazat-e Islam: Islamist coalition.](#)" BBC. May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
11. Julien Bouissou. "[Bangladesh's radical Muslims uniting behind Hefazat-e-Islam](#)" The Guardian. July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
12. Tahmima Anam. "[An education: Inside Bangladesh's madrasas.](#)" The Guardian. May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011.
13. Jyoti Rahman and Asif Yusuf. "[Economic Growth in Bangladesh: experience and policy priorities.](#)"
14. The Economist. "[The path through the fields.](#)" November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.
15. Kathryn Koch. "[Opportunities and challenges in the 'Next Eleven'](#)" Jakarta Post. April 21, 2012.
16. Achim Berg, Saskia Hedrich, and Thomas Tochtermann. "[Bangladesh: The next hot spot in apparel sourcing?](#)" McKinsey&Company. March 2012.
17. Nazneed Jahan Chowdhury and MD. Hafij Ullah. "Socio-Economic Conditions of Female Garment Workers in Chittagong Metropolitan Area – An Empirical Study." Journal of Business and Technology (Dhaka). Issue 02, July-December 2010.
18. Ferdous Ahamed. "[Improving Social compliance in Bangladesh's Ready-made Garment Industry.](#)" National Library of Australia. 2013.
19. Voice of America. "[Bangladesh Garment Worker Protests Shut Factories.](#)" September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
20. Don Belt. "[The Coming Storm.](#)" National Geographic. May 2011.
21. CIA World Factbook. "[Bangladesh.](#)" Last updated August 22, 2013.
22. Sydney Morning Herald. "[Rising sea level settles border dispute.](#)" March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
23. Young People in Social Action. "[Climate Displacement in Bangladesh.](#)" May 2012.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



### **The Honorable Gary Hart, Chairman**

Senator Hart served the State of Colorado in the U.S. Senate and was a member of the Committee on Armed Services during his tenure.



### **Norman R. Augustine**

Mr. Augustine was Chairman and Principal Officer of the American Red Cross for nine years and Chairman of the Council of the National Academy of Engineering.



### **Lieutenant General John Castellaw, USMC (Ret.)**

John Castellaw is President of the Crockett Policy Institute (CPI), a non-partisan policy and research organization headquartered in Tennessee.



### **Brigadier General Stephen A. Cheney, USMC (Ret.)**

Brigadier General Cheney is the Chief Executive Officer of ASP.



### **Lieutenant General Daniel Christman, USA (Ret.)**

Lieutenant General Christman is Senior Vice President for International Affairs at the United States Chamber of Commerce.



### **Robert B. Crowe**

Robert B. Crowe is a Partner of Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough in its Boston and Washington, DC offices. He is co-chair of the firm's Government Relations practice.



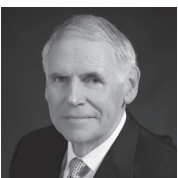
### **Lee Cullum**

Lee Cullum, at one time a commentator on the PBS NewsHour and "All Things Considered" on NPR, currently contributes to the Dallas Morning News and hosts "CEO."



### **Nelson W. Cunningham**

Nelson Cunningham is President of McLarty Associates.



### **Admiral William Fallon, USN (Ret.)**

Admiral Fallon has led U.S. and Allied forces and played a leadership role in military and diplomatic matters at the highest levels of the U.S. government.



### **Raj Fernando**

Raj Fernando is CEO and founder of Chopper Trading, a technology based trading firm headquartered in Chicago.



### **Vice Admiral Lee Gunn, USN (Ret.)**

Vice Admiral Gunn is the President of the Institute of Public Research at the CNA Corporation, a non-profit corporation in Virginia.



### **Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy, USA (Ret.)**

Lieutenant General Kennedy was the first woman to achieve the rank of three-star general in the United States Army.



### **General Lester L. Lyles, USAF (Ret.)**

General Lyles retired from the United States Air Force after a distinguished 35 year career. He is presently Chairman of USAA, a member of the Defense Science Board, and a member of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board.



### **Dennis Mehiel**

Dennis Mehiel is the Principal Shareholder and Chairman of U.S. Corrugated, Inc.



### **Stuart Piltch**

Stuart Piltch is the Co-Founder and Managing Director of Cambridge Advisory Group, an actuarial and benefits consulting firm based in Philadelphia.



### **Ed Reilly**

Edward Reilly is CEO of Americas of FD International Limited, a leading global communications consultancy that is part of FTI Consulting, Inc.



### **Governor Christine Todd Whitman**

Christine Todd Whitman is the President of the Whitman Strategy Group, a consulting firm that specializes in energy and environmental issues.

The American Security Project (ASP) is a nonpartisan organization created to educate the American public and the world about the changing nature of national security in the 21st Century.

Gone are the days when a nation's security could be measured by bombers and battleships. Security in this new era requires harnessing all of America's strengths: the force of our diplomacy; the might of our military; the vigor and competitiveness of our economy; and the power of our ideals.

We believe that America must lead in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with our partners and with all the tools at our disposal and address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this we must forge a bipartisan consensus here at home.

ASP brings together prominent American business leaders, former members of Congress, retired military flag officers, and prominent former government officials. ASP conducts research on a broad range of issues and engages and empowers the American public by taking its findings directly to them via events, traditional & new media, meetings, and publications.

We live in a time when the threats to our security are as complex and diverse as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, climate change, energy challenges, and our economic wellbeing. Partisan bickering and age old solutions simply won't solve our problems. America – and the world - needs an honest dialogue about security that is as robust as it is realistic.

ASP exists to promote that dialogue, to forge that consensus, and to spur constructive action so that America meets the challenges to its security while seizing the opportunities that abound.



American Security Project

[www.americansecurityproject.org](http://www.americansecurityproject.org)