



Politics in Pakistan -- Pakistan Fact Sheet

Country Name: Islamic Republic of Pakistan

President: Gen. Pervez Musharraf (since 2001)

Area: 310,401 sq mi (about twice the size of California)

Population: 159,196,336 (July 2004 est.)

Location: Western part of the Indian subcontinent, bordering Afghanistan and Iran on the west, India on the east, and the Arabian Sea on the south.

Capital: Islamabad (population 210,000)

Main Cities: Karachi (metro area population 12,100,000), Lahore, Peshawar

Currency: Rupee

Principal Languages: Urdu (official language) 8%, Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Siraiki (a Punjabi variant), 10%, Pashtu 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (other official language spoken in government, commerce, military, and universities).

Ethnicity/Race: Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun, Baloch, Muhajir (immigrants from India and their descendants)

Religions: Islam (97%--Sunni 77%, Shi'a 20%), Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Parsi

Geography: The 1,000-mile-long Indus River and its tributaries flow through the country from the Kashmir region to the Arabian Sea. The northern and western highlands of Pakistan contain some of the world's highest peaks. The Thar Desert and an expanse of alluvial plains lie to the east.

Source: US State Department

History

Today's Pakistan was home to one of the oldest civilizations in the world, the Indus Valley civilization, dating back at least 5,000 years. The area experienced a series of invasions from the Persians, Greeks, Scythians, Arabs, Afghans, and Turks over many centuries. The Mughal (Mongol) Empire reigned in the 16th and 17th centuries. In the 18th century, the British colonized the region, including India. In 1947 what was then British India separated into the Muslim Pakistan (with East and West sections) and Hindu India. The split was never resolved, and India and Pakistan fought two wars, over the disputed Kashmir territory in 1947-48 and 1965. Another war in 1971 between India and Pakistan resulted in East Pakistan becoming the separate nation of Bangladesh.

People

Pakistani people have a multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic background. The population follows many different cultural traditions and speaks many different languages and dialects. Because of their history, they are a mixture of Indo-Aryans, Greeks, Scythians, Dravidians, Huns, Arabs, Mongols, Persians, and Afghans.

Society & Culture

Islam

Ninety-seven percent of Pakistanis practice Islam; it directs all aspects of their lives. Muslims are required to pray five times a day—at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. All businesses are closed on Friday, the Muslim holy day. During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims should fast from dawn to dusk—including no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing.

Family

The extended family is very important in Pakistan. It includes not only a large nuclear family, but immediate relatives, distant relatives, tribe members, friends, and neighbors. The family is the basis for social structure in society. Family loyalty plays a key role in business, including hiring and partnerships. It is considered inappropriate to ask about Pakistani wives or other female relatives.

Hierarchical Society

In Pakistan, age and position command respect. Elders are served meals first, get the best meat, and their drinks are poured for them. Elders are introduced first and catered to. Pakistanis expect the most senior person, by age or position, to make the decisions.