1

South Asia: Land, People, and Economy

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The term ‘South Asia’ came into currency only after the British Indian Empire was divided into two independent nations: India and Pakistan in 1947. Earlier the region between Himalaya in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south was generally referred to as Indian subcontinent. It included present-day India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Afghanistan. At times, Myanmar (formerly Burma) a part of the British Indian Empire until 1937, is also included in the Region. The United Nations includes Iran too in South Asia. Sri Lanka and Myanmar became free in 1948; and Maldives in 1965. And in 1971, the eastern wing of Pakistan asserted its cultural identity and seceded from it to become Bangladesh. Thus South Asia, as represented by South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), consists of seven countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives.

This chapter provides the background information on the land, people, and economy of each country of the region to enable the reader to understand the overall context in which the mega cities of the region function and play their respective roles as engines of economic growth and technological development on the one hand, and poverty and environmental destruction, on the other.

INDIA

India became independent on 15 August 1947 and declared itself a Democratic Republic on 26 January 1948. The Republic of India comprises of 28 States (Fig. 1.1), and 7 Union Territories.
Panchayats (Village Councils) constitute the grassroots level elected bodies in rural areas and Nagar (Town) Panchayats, Municipalities, and Municipal Corporations in urban areas. They together total about 645,000 units. In most states, the village panchayats have three tiers – Village Panchayats at the village level, Block Samitis at the community development block level, and Zila Panchayats at the district level. In all, there are about 600 (593 in 2003) districts, over 5,000 (5,161) cities and towns, and 638,365 villages in the country.

**Land**

With an area of 3,287,263 sq km extending from the snow-covered Himalayas in the north to the tropical rain forests of Deccan tableland.
in the south, and the fertile plains of the Indus-Ganga-Brahmaputra Rivers in between, India is triangular in shape with its apex upside down.

The climate of India is often referred to as ‘tropical monsoon’ as it is governed by the south-western and north-eastern monsoon winds originating in the Indian Ocean. Being located near the equator, it experiences warm temperature throughout the year, the highest being just before the rainy season, which commences in mid-June and ends in mid-September. Once the rains begin, temperatures come down as clouds block incoming solar radiation from heating the land surface.

Monsoon circulation exhibits an onshore flow of air during the summer and offshore airflow during the winter. The change in direction results from differential heating of land and water. The flora of the country varies with variations in climatic regimes. In the arid west, it is sparse and largely herbaceous. The wetter Ganga plain and the Himalayan Mountains support very many plant species. It is especially luxuriant in the deltaic regions of Ganga, Mahanadi, Godavari and Kaveri where mangroves and Sal trees are found in abundance.

Himalayas are known to have many varieties of coniferous trees, including cedar and pine in its northwestern sector, and tropical and subtropical vegetation in its eastern sector. The Western Ghats, where rainfall is copious, abound in evergreens such as bamboo and teak. The Deccan plateau is less luxuriant, but thickets of bamboo, palm, and deciduous trees are not scarce. India is fairly rich in mineral resources. It is a leading producer of iron ore and coal; it is also known for bauxite, manganese, mica, limonite, copper, petroleum, asbestos, chromium, graphite, phosphate rock, zinc, gold, and silver. In 2004, it produced 366 million tonnes of coal, 77.2 million tonnes of iron ore, 11.3 million tonnes of bauxite, 630,000 tonnes of manganese, 861,800 tonnes of aluminum, 341,000 tonnes of zinc concentrates, 28,800 tonnes of copper ore, 13 tonnes of silver, and 3,800 kg of gold.

The proved reserves of petroleum are not rich although the offshore sources are yet to be fully explored. India imports nearly half of its petroleum requirements. Even in the nuclear sector, India has its limitations. Its known uranium resources are small in comparison to the amount it needs for power. Thorium found in Kerala and perhaps elsewhere along the southern coast, can be used in place of uranium but its processing is not yet cost effective. India is not a signatory to Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has already exploded
atomic devices twice, and has been barred from getting uranium from countries like the USA, Russia, and Australia. The recent nuclear deal with the USA has, however, changed the scenario for the better and India can now get uranium for power generation from practically any country in the world.

People

The greatest asset of India is its young population. According to the 2011 census, it has 1.21 billion people. With the birth rate of 1.58 per cent per annum during 2001–11, it is likely to have more people than China by 2025. The density of population varies from region to region, the national average being 382 per sq km in 2011. The age and sex composition of the population has been changing rather fast. The sex ratio has further declined from 940 in 2001 to 933 in 2011, the highest (1,050) being in Kerala and the lowest (861) in Haryana. More than a third (35.30 per cent) of its population falls in the age group of 0–14 years; 59.50 per cent in 15–64 years; and the rest (4.80 per cent), in 65 plus years. It is clear that India’s population is young, and can be turned into a great asset if its quality is improved through education, training, and health insurance.

India is a liberal democracy wherein everyone has right to practice his religion. It has not forsaken its glorious past and has tried to build on that old and solid foundation a new edifice that is historic, yet at the same time, futuristic. Although 80.50 per cent of the people of the country follow Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma), there are sizable religious minorities such as Muslims (13.40 per cent), Christians (2.3 per cent), Sikhs (1.94 per cent), Buddhists (0.8 per cent), Jains (0.40 per cent), and Zoroastrians, Jews and others constitute the rest.

Adult (7 years and more) literacy in India was as low as 12.20 per cent in 1947; it increased to 74.04 per cent (82.14 per cent for males and 65.46 per cent for females) in 2011. Literacy among the youth (age-group 15–24 years) was 73.30 per cent. As compared to China and Sri Lanka (both have registered more than 90 per cent adult literacy), India is still far behind. There are wide regional differences in adult literacy. Kerala, in South India has already crossed 90 per cent literacy rate but Bihar, a northern state, has yet to cross the 50 per cent mark.

In 2010, India had over 600 universities and nearly 100,000 colleges of various types. With the entry of the private sector in higher education, the number of these institutions has increased. Accordingly,
the total enrollment of students increased from a meagre 0.1 million in 1947 to over 10 million in 2005–06.

Although epidemics of plague, cholera, malaria, dysentery, and elephantiasis are no longer major killers, they are not rare either. There is visible progress in controlling TB and polio. Life expectancy at birth has gone up from 32 years in 1941 to 68.6 years in 2007. Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births has declined from 151 in 1965 to 35 in 2007. Yet much needs to be done in areas of preventive medicine, sanitation, and nutrition.

According to a global report released by the United Nations Children’s Fund in 2006, India accounted for 57 million of the world’s 146 million malnourished children. It has the same rate of malnutrition as Ethiopia (47 per cent) and Nepal and Bangladesh (48 per cent). This is in stark contrast with the Figures for China (8 per cent), Thailand (18 per cent) and even Afghanistan (39 per cent). Indian diet is rich in protein but qualitatively very deficient in micronutrients, vitamins and minerals, particularly iron, calcium, vitamin A, folic acid and riboflavin. So it is not only the question of quantity of food children get but also, and more importantly, its quality.

**Economy**

India experimented with the socialistic pattern of mixed economy until 1985 wherein the government controlled the commanding heights of the economy (basic industries like steel and infrastructure like energy, transport and communication), and allowed the private entrepreneurs to invest in consumer goods industries. The idea was borrowed from the USSR, but it was implemented within a democratic framework that India opted for in 1947.

With the disintegration of the USSR and decreasing foreign exchange reserves, Indian economy was liberalised in the early 1990s. Most of the restrictions on the private sector have been abolished and state monopoly in mining, manufacturing and transport are being given a goodbye. Overseas direct investment (ODI) in various sectors of the economy is not only permitted but also welcomed and encouraged.

India has traditionally been an agricultural country. Even today about 52 per cent of the work force of the country is engaged in agriculture, and more than 60 per cent of the people of India depend on it for their livelihood. Yet, its contribution to the GDP has secularly
declined from 61 per cent in 1951 to just 19.90 per cent in 2008–09. Contribution of the manufacturing sector to GDP was only 17 per cent. It went up to 27 per cent by 1990–91 but only to come down to 26 per cent in 2005–06 and just 19.4 per cent in 2008–09. It is the service sector which has improved its share in the GDP from 27 per cent in 1950–51 to 54 per cent 2005–06 and 60.70 per cent in 2008–09.

India has one of the best-developed transport networks in the world, but it is now inadequate to meet the needs of a fast growing economy. The state-owned railways (63,465 km long in 2005) carry the bulk of goods traffic; although only 17 per cent of the track is electrified. The road length of the country exceeds 3.9 m km but only about half of it is surfaced. In 1995, the number of cars in India was 3.8 million; by 2007, it crossed the 11 million mark. In 1996 the car-population ratio was 6:1,000; by 2006 it went up to 12:1000.

Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Vishakhapatnam, and Kochi are the five major ports, which can accommodate cargo carriers and passenger liners operating anywhere in the world. With the globalisation and liberalisation policies in full swing, a number of private airlines now operate on both domestic and international routes. There is hardly a major airline of the world, which does not touch one or the other airport of India.

On the communications front, India is moving fast. By 2003, around 20 million households were linked by telephone lines and by the end of October 2008, India had 320 million cellular phone subscribers, next only to China’s 534 million and ahead of the USA’s 257 million subscribers. India adds around 60 m new mobile subscribers each year. Only 42 million people (3.6 per cent of the total population) have internet connections. As against this, China had 214 million connections serving 15 per cent of its population, and the USA had 228 million connections serving nearly 75 per cent of its people.

To sum up, the economic resurgence of India during the last two decades has been phenomenal. It is now the second fastest growing economy of the world but the tenth largest economy in gross GDP (fourth largest in terms of PPP). It has not only ensured food security but also become a de-facto nuclear power since 1974. It has an advanced space research programme to benefit the country economically, and technologically. It plans to send people to the moon by 2016.
On the negative side of the otherwise bright scenario is increasing poverty and unemployment and declining standards of public as well as personal life. India’s poor, who constitute at least one-third of the total population, are feeling let down and may adopt violent means if corrective policies are not in place sooner than later. As structural reforms to boost economic growth intensify, development disparities would tend to increase because:

1. Private capital goes to places, regions and sectors, which are investment friendly;
2. More urbanised a region is, more attractive it is for private capital;
3. Metropolitan cities with good means of transport and communication are preferred by the entrepreneurs;
4. Backward regions, villages and small towns benefit least unless there are special programmes for their development; and
5. Modern technology, especially the ICT, is not labour intensive, and hence accelerated economic growth does not mean more employment.

PAKISTAN

Like India, Pakistan too was born in 1947 on the same day. It became an Islamic Republic in 1956 with a national parliament consisting of 150 members from West Pakistan, and 150 members from East Pakistan. In 1971, East Pakistan became an independent state of Bangladesh. With the creation of Bangladesh, Pakistan was confined to what was earlier West Pakistan consisting of Punjab, Sind, NWFP, Balochistan, part of J & K, and the princely states like Bahawalpur, which opted to merge in Pakistan (Fig. 1.2).

Land

Pakistan can be divided into five physiographic regions: the northern highlands; Indus River basin, Balochistan Plateau, mountain ranges along the Afghanistan border in the west, and the arid east. Each region has its own climatic regime, which may range from temperate in the north to hot and semi-arid in the south. Temperatures in Islamabad in the north vary from 2°C in January to 40°C in June. There are four distinct seasons: cool and dry winter (Dec.–Feb.); hot and dry spring (March–May); warm and rainy summer (June–Sept.); and retreating monsoon period (Oct.–Nov.).
Arable land is the principal natural resource of the country. About 28 per cent of Pakistan’s total land area is under cultivation and canal irrigation. The most important crops raised are: cotton, wheat, rice, sugarcane, maize, sorghum, pulses, oil seeds, fruits, and vegetables. Pakistan is not rich in mineral and energy resources. It does have some reserves of natural gas, petroleum, coal, gypsum, limestone, rock salt, chromites, iron ore, silver, gold, marble, copper, and sulfur; but none of them is large enough to meet the domestic needs. Among the exports are wood, cement, tiles, marbles, cotton textiles, and leather goods apart from sports goods, surgical instruments, electrical appliances, and carpets.

People
With 162 million people, Pakistan (in 2005) is the eighth most populous country of the world, and has one of the highest rates of population growth (3 per cent per annum). In 1901, the area that now constitutes
Pakistan had just 16 million people; by August 1947, it doubled to 32.5 million. And by 2001, it went up to 150 million. Given the present rate of population growth, Pakistan may have 180 million people by 2015, further aggravating the already very heavy pressure of population on land, physical infrastructure, and social services.

Ethnically, Pakistan is as diverse as neighbouring India. There is hardly any commonality between a Baloch and a Punjabi. The only factor that unites the people is Islam. But clashes among various sects of Islam are not uncommon. Bangladesh, despite being a Muslim country, seceded from Pakistan in 1971. The secessionist tendencies in the post-1971 Pakistan too are not absent. This is one of the reasons why it tends to promote Islamic fundamentalism. The Talibans of Afghanistan, together with various other terrorist groups of its own creation have kept the country bleeding for the last two decades. Terrorist attacks on public places killing innocent people have become only too common to be ignored. It is from here that the terrorists allegedly fan out to neighbouring countries like India and Afghanistan.

Pakistan needs a decentralised democratic set-up, not a centralised military dictatorship to remain united and prosperous. Further, it needs a liberal Islamic democracy wherein the state and religion maintain a reasonable distance.

**Economy**

Pakistan’s GDP grew at 4.78 per cent during the 1960s; 4.67 per cent during the 1970s; and 5.96 per cent during the 1980s. Until the mid-1980s, the rate of growth of GNP was higher than that of GDP, because of large remittances from abroad. From the mid-1980s, remittances from overseas decreased. The rate of GDP growth was, however, impressive considering the high rate of population growth. Accompanying the high rate of economic growth was the changing structure of the economy. The share of agriculture in GDP fell from 46 per cent in 1959–60 to 39 per cent in 1969–70, 31 per cent in 1979–80 to 23 per cent by 1992–93. The share of manufacturing rose from 12 per cent in 1959–60 to 16 per cent in 1969–70, to 17 per cent in 1979–80 and 21 per cent in 1992–93. The share of the service sector however grew faster from 42 per cent in 1959–60 to 45 per cent in 1969–70, and then 52 per cent in 1979–80, and 55.4 per cent in 1992–93.
Pakistan’s entry into the twenty-first century was not a very happy one politically as well as economically. The GDP of the country increased by just 2.0 per cent during 2008–09 as against the target of 4.1 per cent set in 2007–08. Agriculture production increased by 4.7 per cent and the services by 3.6 per cent, but the other sectors depicted negative growth. Manufacturing recorded negative (–3.3 per cent) growth. The large scale manufacturing grew by –7.7 per cent and construction sector by –10.8 per cent. The negative growth in the industrial sector was partly neutralized by 4.7 per cent positive growth performance of agriculture.

The manufacturing sector has been badly hit both by international and domestic factors. Political instability and breakdown of law and order have resulted in the loss of working hours. Acute shortage of energy has prevented industries from operating at their optimal level.

That is why its share in the GDP in 2008–09 has come down to 18.2 per cent, the lowest ever in the last five years. As against the target of 6.1 per cent, and performance at 4.8 per cent in 2007–08, its output contracted by 3.3 per cent in 2008–09. And the services sector too grew slower in 2008–09 (3.6 per cent), than in 2007–08 (6.6 per cent). Practically all sub-sectors followed suit. For example, finance and insurance came down from 12.9 to –1.2 per cent; and transport, storage and communication from 5.7 to 2.9 per cent.

The inflation rate averaged 22.3 per cent during 2008–09 as against 10.3 per cent in 2007–08. It has affected the poor who number 40 million very adversely. For most of these people (30 million being in rural areas rural poverty has deepened further and rural-urban disparities in income have widened, as have the regional disparities.

**BANGLADESH**

Unlike India and Pakistan, Bangladesh is a unitary state. It does not have constitutionally recognised states or provinces. For administrative purposes, the country is divided into 64 districts, 490 thanas, 4,451 unions, and 59,990 villages. Figure 1.3 shows the Divisional boundaries. Like Pakistan, it too had the misfortune of being governed by military generals for twenty years (1971–91). Zia-ul-Rehman ruled from 1971–1982, and Gen. H. M. Ershad from 1982–91. The elected governments,
under the leadership of Khaleda Zia (1991–96 and 2001–06), and Sheikh Hasina (1996–2001) completed their five-year terms of office, but the end of each term witnessed serious political turmoil. This happened in 2006 too. The general elections for a unicameral Jatiya Sangsad (national parliament) held on 29 December 2008, returned Awami League headed by Sheikh Hasina to rule the country for five years. Hasina took over as Prime Minister on 9 January 2009.

Fig. 1.3: Bangladesh, Administrative Divisions
Land

Bangladesh is surrounded by India on three sides except the south, which faces the Bay of Bengal. Its borders with India are 2,400 km long. With an area of 144,000 sq. km, 820 km from north to south and 600 km from east to west, Bangladesh can be divided into three physiographic regions: the deltaic plain, and hill tracks in the north and Chittagong Hills in the south. The alluvial plains (covering roughly 80 per cent of the country) are less than 10 m above sea level, and slope from north to south. Bangladesh is a land of rivers, which number around 700; they shape its geography and economy.

The climate of Bangladesh is similar to that of India. It has a tropical monsoon characterised by great seasonal variations in rainfall, temperatures, and humidity. It has three main seasons: a hot, muggy summer (March to June); a hot and humid rainy season (June to November); and a warm and dry winter (December to February). Bangladesh gets over 200 cm of annual rain. Natural calamities such as floods, tropical cyclones, tornadoes, and tidal bores cause heavy loss of life, and property, and disrupt power and communication systems. Because of water contamination, communicable diseases are common and widespread.

Bangladesh is not known for any major mineral deposits. However, does have natural gas and timber, the former still waiting for exploitation. According to some speculative reports, Bangladesh is sitting on a huge petroleum and gas reserve.

People

Bangladesh is estimated to have 142 m people in 2011 with average density as high as of 964 persons per sq km. According to some estimates, it will have 205 m people by 2025, making it one of the seven most populous countries of the world. Distribution of the population is not too uneven; the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Sundarbans are the only regions with sparse population. Around 80 per cent of the people of Bangladesh live in rural areas. In 1951, only 4.33 per cent of people lived in urban areas; it increased to 21 per cent in by 1999. The country has 4 metropolitan cities and 119 other cities. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh has over 10 million people.

The birth rate being high, nearly 60 per cent of the people are under 25 years; and only 3 per cent over 65 years. The annual growth of the
population is around 1.75 per cent. Literacy rate is still low (45 per cent) and life expectancy at birth has now risen to 61 years. Birth rate has come down from 47.30 per 1,000 in 1960s to 28 per 1,000 in 2005 and fertility rate from 7 children to 3.2 children per woman between 1970 and 2005, steep decline in population growth in a Muslim country like Bangladesh is largely because of the success of its family planning programme. The only other Muslim country with such a rapid decline in population in recent decades is Egypt.

The Chittagong Hills Tract in the south-east is populated by the indigenous peoples, collectively known as the Jumma. They include the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tenchungya, Chak, Pankho, Mru, Murung, Bawm, Lushai, Khyang, and Khumi. According to the 1991 population census, this region had 974,447 people of which 501,114 were tribal and the rest belonged to other communities. According to current estimates, the population of the region ranges between 1.2 and 1.5 million. The tribals (around 50 per cent) follow Theravada Buddhism. Of the rest, 45 per cent are Bengali speaking Muslims; and 5 per cent follow Hinduism, Christianity and Animism. At the time of the partition of India in August, 1947, non-Muslims constituted 98.5 per cent of the population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. 85 per cent of them were Buddhists, 10 per cent Hindus (mainly of Tripuri tribe); 3 per cent Animists, and 1.50 per cent Muslims.

Economy

Bangladesh, like other countries of South Asia, followed the policy of state controlled development ever since its creation in 1971. It, however, suffered from many disabilities such as overpopulation, shortage of capital, lack of natural resources and technical manpower. The economy grew only at a moderately low rate. To ease the situation, the country used the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) of the IMF. It did help to some extent, but only temporarily. It carried out some pro-market reforms during 1991–96, including tax reforms, and allowed FDI in the power (gas, petroleum, electricity) sector. But the domestic political troubles kept the progress slow and halting. Fortunately, remittances from non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) from Gulf countries have gone up, and the export of the traditional goods like handmade cloth has increased.
Agriculture accounts for a quarter of the GDP of Bangladesh; rice and jute, wheat, and tea are the major crops. Fertile soil and abundant water enable the country to raise three crops of rice in a year. Abundant and cheap labour, better flood control measures, greater use of fertilisers, and improved rural credit system are the main factors responsible for increased food production. The country produces around 20 million metric tonnes of rice. But the mouths to feed have also increased and hence, the overall food security situation has improved only marginally.

After agriculture, the readymade garment industry is the next mass employer in Bangladesh. Growing at a rate of over 10 per cent per annum, this industry created 1.5 million new jobs, mostly for women, during the 1990s. It happened despite several general strikes, poor infrastructure, and weak financial support. Three-fourths of exports of Bangladesh constitute readymade garments. Exports to the U.S. surpassed $1.9 billion in 1999, and touched 3 billion in 2006. One of the major achievements of Bangladesh is almost complete abolition of child labour in its garment industry. Among the major industries of the country are: sugar, tea, leather goods, newsprint, pharmaceuticals, and fertilisers. Ship-breaking is another major activity. The scrap so derived becomes the raw material for the steel industry.

Bangladesh is now very friendly to foreign investment particularly in energy, cellular telephony, textile, and pharmaceutical sectors. The country has set up Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authorities (BEPZA) to manage EPZs in Adamjee, Chittagong, Comilla, Dhaka, Ishwardi, Karnaphuli, Mongla, Sylhet, and Uttara. Exports have gone up by over 15 per cent during 2005–06. Yet, the GDP of the country is growing rather slowly (6 per cent per annum).

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is a landlocked country sandwiched between Iran in the west and Pakistan in the east. It is located at the confluence of three great civilisations: Indian civilisation in the east, Greek civilisation in the west and Mesopotamian and Islamic civilisations in the mid-west. And hence it has always been a culturally variegated, hybrid, and unsettled country. The Kushans, a branch of the nomadic Yeuhchi tribesmen of China created a vast empire in the region, including
Afghanistan, during the first century AD. They patronised Buddhism. As a witness to this cultural transformation was the world’s tallest Buddha of Banyan that Talibans, the descendants of its creators, machine gunned a few years back. The destruction of Buddha of Banyan points to the abysmal dept. to which Afghanistan has sunk today. How can one disown one’s ancestors, and destroy the art and architecture they bequeathed to them?

The Kushans were replaced by the Huns, a nomadic and warlike people from the Steppes of North Central Asia (Mongolia). They terrorised, pillaged, and destroyed much of Asia and Europe during the third to fifth centuries. The Hephthalites (White Huns) too were a nomadic people spread over northern China, Central Asia, and northern India during the fourth to sixth centuries AD. They were defeated by Khosrau, a Persian in 557. The Muslim Arab armies captured Khorasan in Central Asia by the end of the seventh century AD, and extended their sway to Afghanistan and northern India. Others to follow were: Samanids (875–999), Ghaznavids (977–1187), Seljukids (1037–1194), Ghorids (1149–1212), and Timurids (1370–1506). Babur, a descendant of both Timur Lang and Genghis Khan, took control of Afghanistan and captured Delhi, the capital of India in 1504.

Sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were marked by a number of changes in the political fortunes of Afghanistan. Nadir Shah of Persia invaded Kandhar in 1738, and occupied Ghazni, Kabul, and Lahore. He was succeeded by his son, Timur Shah Durrani in 1772 who, in turn, was succeeded by his son Zaman Shah in 1793. The Anglo-Afghan wars (1839–42, 1878–80, and 1919) ended British control over much of Afghanistan. It became an independent kingdom only after King Amanullah Shah ascended the throne in 1919. A treaty was signed by the then Afghan ruler Amir Abdur Rehman Khan with the British demarcating the Indo-Afghan border by Durand Line in 1893. The treaty was to stay in force for a century. The disputed land was to be returned to Afghanistan on the expiry of 100 years in 1993, in the same way as Hong Kong was returned to China after the expiry of the treaty between Britain and China. The government of Pakistan has, however, refused to do that. In view of its internal troubles, Afghanistan has refrained from raising this issue. Once peace returns to this country, the issue of Durand Line would heat up again.
Afghanistan remained stable during the four decades of the reign of King Zahir Shah (1933–1973). His brother-in-law, Sardar Daoud Khan deposed him from the throne in 1973 and proclaimed himself the President of Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (1973 to 1978). Daoud Khan was assassinated in 1978 with the overt as well as covert support of the USSR, and helped the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) of Afghanistan to rule the country. The USA and Pakistan trained Islamic Mujahidins to dislodge the PDP from power. The USSR sent its army to fight the Mujahidins but was forced to withdraw its army in 1989. The Mujahidin regrouped as Taliban (Islamic Students), and ruled over the country with an iron hand. They destroyed Afghanistan economically, culturally, and politically, and demonstrated how the world would look like if the Islamic fundamentalists ruled over it. Fearing the spread of Taliban ideology in neighbouring countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, the USA intervened in 2001, and toppled the ruling Talibans.

Afghanistan is currently led by President Hamid Karzai, who was chosen by the delegates of the Bonn Conference in 2001 to head an interim government. National elections held under the UN supervision returned Karzai as President of Afghanistan in 2004, and 2009. How long would the Karzai government survive without the backing of American and NATO troops? Half of the population of the country suffers from inadequate access to basic human needs: food, clothing, shelter, education, health, and security. Continuing military operations and political uncertainties leave the people depressed and the Talibans ebullient. The government is not strong enough to collect taxes as the warlords have assumed the role of provincial and local governments. Added to all these woes is the corruption that has debilitated almost all government organs.

Land

Afghanistan (647,500 km²) is a land-locked country between Pakistan and Iran. From the Nowshak peak (7485 m high) of the Hindu Kush Mountains in the north radiate mountain chains (ridges) in different directions; to the southwest goes the Koh-i-Baba (5,142 m high); and to the southeast, the Safed Koh range. The passes across these ranges provide access to Kabul from all directions. Important among them are: the Unai Pass and the Kotal-e-Salang connecting Kabul with central...
and northern Afghanistan, respectively; the Khyber Pass across Safed Koh in eastern Afghanistan, through which invaders like Mahmud Ghaznavi and Mohammad Ghori reached India. Other key passes that lead to Pakistan are Angoor Ada village that straddles both sides of the Afghan-Pak border, and, the Gumal River further south at Ghulam Khan village in North Waziristan (Pakistan).

Climatically, the country is semi-desert in the southern and central part and temperate in the northern part. Summers are hot except in the northern mountain areas and winters cold. The climate of the highlands is more equable. The mean temperature of Afghanistan and that of the lower Himalayas range between 10°C and 15°C. But periodic variations are quite significant. For seven months of the year (May–November) the daily range of temperature exceeds 17°C. When the cold drafts come, temperatures come down to –8 to –24°C. During winter, Kabul and other northern parts of the country remain snow covered for two to three months. In summer, the mercury may go up to 45°C–50°C, especially in the Oxus region. The southwest monsoon travels up to Kabul valley as far as Laghman, and the high spurs of the Hindu Kush mountain ranges to give heavy rainfall. The central and western parts of the country, however, get only winter rains.

Afghanistan is not known for luxurious vegetation except on the mountain sides and ridges. There is abundant growth of forests at a height of 1,800 to 3,000 m. Among the known natural resources of the country are: natural gas, petroleum, coal, copper, uranium, gold, silver, chromites, talc, barites, sulfur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, precious and semi-precious stones. Very few of these have, however, been exploited.

People

Who are the Afghans? Their national identity begins with Ahmed Shah Durrani, and his successors who ruled over the region from 1747 to 1823. He was the first Pashtun ruler of the country. The country is now multi-ethnic. Apart from the Pashtuns who live on the two sides of Pak-Afghanistan border, there are sizable groups of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and others in the southern and eastern parts of the country.

Tajiks are Persian speaking. They trace their roots back to Bactrians, Sogdians, Scythians, and Parthians. They have never been rulers of the country but are known for their acumen as administrators, teachers, doctors, artisans, merchants, and entrepreneurs. Hazaras are Shiites of
Mongolian origin; and the Uzbeks, and Turkmen found mainly in the north, are of Turkic origin. The Baluchs, numbering around 200,000, are of Iranian origin and Nuristanis who live in isolated parts of the northeast known as Kafiristan (Land of Pagans) are Indo-Iranians. Nuristan means Land of Light (of Islam). They were forcibly converted to Islam during the rule of Amir Abdur Rahman. The Kalash tribe of Kafiristan still practices its pre-Islamic religion and is now confined to the highlands of Chitral, northwestern Pakistan.

Afghanistan’s population is estimated to be 31,056,997 (July 2006). It is growing at the rate of 2.67 per cent per annum. Around 45 per cent of the population falls in the age-group 0–14 years; 53 per cent in 15–64 years; and 2.4 per cent in 65+ years. Life expectancy is as low as 46 years both for males and females. Sex ratio is not unfavourable: 1000 females for 1050 males. Afghan society is still a semi-literate society; only 36 per cent of the people are literate (51 per cent males and 21 per cent females).

Pashtuns are numerically as well as politically the dominant group; they constitute about two-fifths (40–42 per cent) of Afghanistan’s population. Of the rest, one third, Tajik constitute 27–34 per cent; Hazaras, 8–9 per cent; Uzbeks, 8 per cent; Aimak, 4 per cent; Turkmen, 3 per cent; Balochs, 1.6 per cent, and others, 2–4 per cent. Most of the people of Afghanistan (82 to 84 per cent) belong to the Sunni sect of Islam; 14 to 15 per cent are Shiites, and the remaining 1 to 4 per cent, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, and others.

In tune with its cultural diversity, Afghanistan is divided into 34 Provinces (Fig. 1.4).

Economy

Afghanistan is one of the world’s least developed nations. More than 60 per cent of its people live below the poverty line (less than US$ 2 per day). Apart from political unrest and terrorism, severe drought during 1998–2001 further worsened the economy of the country. In 2002, Afghanistan had 11 million-strong labour force (out of a total estimated population of 29 million), one fourth of it being unemployed. About 300,000 persons are added to this idle labour force each year. The inflation rate is high, and despite the devaluation of the Afghani in 2002, and replacement of 1,000 old Afghani by 1 New Afghani, it is the US dollar and Indian rupee that is the legal tender in Kabul.
The Soviet invasion in 1979 and the civil war that followed destroyed much of the country’s precarious agricultural base and limited transport and communication infrastructure. It drove out six million people to Pakistan, Iran, and other parts of the world. Loss of labour and capital led to precipitous fall in gross domestic product since the 1980. According to the IMF, the Afghan economy grew by 20 per cent in 2003–04, largely because of the international aid, and good weather conditions. American aid (estimated to be US$ 4.4 b) pumped during 2002–04, equaled the total GDP of Afghanistan.

The Afghan economy continues to be overwhelmingly agricultural, despite the fact that only 12 per cent of its total land area is arable, and less than 6 per cent is cultivated. Agriculture suffers from many constrains: it is totally dependent on erratic winter snows, and spring rains; irrigation is primitive; and the use of modern techniques and inputs such as tractors, fertilisers, and pesticides, is scarce. Wheat is the main cereal crop of Afghanistan. With the return of more than 4 million people who had left the country, the labour situation is improving even if only gradually. According to some estimates, the output cereals has gone up to 4.5 million tonnes in 2007.
Once the Soviets withdrew from the country, opium became a major source of income for many Afghans. Afghanistan was the world’s largest producer of opium during the 1990s. It was the mainstay of the Talibans who earned around $40 million per year from taxes on opium. According to UN sources, two million people (9 per cent of the total population) were engaged in opium cultivation in 2005 producing 92 per cent of the world’s heroin valued at $120 b. This is another major problem Afghanistan has to cope with.

Afghanistan is endowed with a number of natural resources, important among them being natural gas, petroleum, coal, marble, gold, copper, chromites, talc, barites, sulfur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, and precious and semi-precious stones. According to the U.S. Geological Survey estimates (2006) it has around 36 trillion cubic feet ($1.0 \times 10^{12} \text{ m}^3$) of natural gas, 3.6 b barrels ($570 \times 10^6 \text{ m}^3$) of oil, and condensate reserves. All these potentials are waiting for development in the future.

NEPAL

Sitting in the lap of the Himalayas, the erstwhile Kingdom of Nepal is a country of mountains and valleys. To its north is Tibet, now a province of China, and to the west, south, and east are the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Sikkim respectively. Nepal’s population in 2001 was 27.70 million, a sizable part of it being in the Terai region adjoining India.

Nepal’s history is as old as that of India. Archeological evidences point to man’s presence in Kathmandu Valley in prehistoric times. References to Nepal in some of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain epics and scriptures, establish its antiquity to over 5,000 years. The Sakya clan that produced Sakyamuni Buddha ruled over the valley in 563–483 BC.

Among the dynasties that ruled over Nepal included Gopala, Ahira Kirata, Lichchavi, Malla, and Gorkhas. Yakshya Malla, the grandson of Jayasthiti Malla, ruled over the Valley until almost the end of the fifteenth century. The last Malla rulers were Jaya Prakash, Tej Narsingh, and Ranjit who ruled over Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur respectively.

Prithvi Narayan Shah ascended the throne of Gorkha principality in 1743 AD. He was the ninth generation descendant of Dravya Shah
(1559–1570), the founder of the ruling house of the Gorkhas. In 1744, he occupied Nuwakot, between Kathmandu and Gorkha, and then captured all the strategic points in the hills surrounding the Kathmandu Valley. The Valley’s communication with the outside world was cut off. King Prithvi Narayan Shah captured Kathmandu in 1768, and brought together diverse religio-ethnic groups under one nation. His foresight not only guided the country’s socio-economic development for a long time, but also formed the bedrock of its foreign policy.

In 1846, the Rana clan of Nepal seized all powers from the King and ruled the country on his behalf. After a century (1950), the King fled to India and returned only after the Ranas, who ruled over the kingdom for 104 years, gave back to the king the powers they had usurped. The King, in turn, introduced multi-party parliamentary system of government, which was replaced by the Panchayat System in 1960. The multi-party democracy was restored in 1990.

King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev ruled Nepal from 30 January 1971 to 1 June 2001. He, along with his family, was assassinated on 1 June 2001. Gyanendra, the younger brother of late King Birendra, ascended the throne on 4 June 2001 but he could not secure the confidence of the people. After a prolonged popular movement, an elected Constituent Assembly abolished monarchy in mid-2008. The Kingdom of Nepal thus became the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal on 28 May 2008. Ram Baran Yadav was elected the first President of the Republic, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ its first Prime Minister. Prachanda failed to get the vote of confidence of the Constituent Assembly also functioning as the parliament of the country. A coalition government with Madhav Kumar Nepal as Prime Minister took over the reigns of the country on 29 May 2009.

Land

Known for its majestic Himalayas (Him = snow; Alaya = abode), Nepal is spread over 147,181 sq km measuring 800 km from east to west, and 100 to 200 km from north to south. It is a landlocked country, surrounded by India on three sides, and China’s Xizang Autonomous Region (Tibet) in the north. It is separated from Bangladesh by a 15 km wide strip of the Indian state of West Bengal, and from Bhutan by 88 km stretch of the Indian state of Sikkim. Nepal is dependent on India for access to the sea.
Nepal’s physical diversity ranges from the Terai plains in the south to 8,850 m high Mount Everest in the north. As one moves northward, elevation increases as successive hills and mountain ranges of Middle and Inner Himalayas touch the Tibetan Plateau. Nepal is traditionally divided into three major physiographic regions: the Mountain Region (Parbat), the Hill Region (Pahar), and the Terai (wet lands) Region. The Parbat Region constitutes the central part of the Himalayan ranges. It originates in the Pamirs, in Central Asia, and includes eight of the ten highest peaks of the world including Mt Everest. The region is characterised by rugged topography and inclement climate. The snowline starts at 5,000 m elevation. It is sparsely populated. The altitude of the Pahar region varies from 1,000 to 4,000 m. The lower hills and valleys (below 2,500 m elevation) are densely settled. Here is a fine example of nature and man working together to create a massive complex of intensively cultivated terraces. Kathmandu Valley is part of this region. It is the most fertile and urbanised area, but like the Parbat region, it is also food-deficit.

The Terai region, also known as Madhesh, is the northern extension of the Gangetic plain in India and lies parallel to the Shivalik hills all along the Indo-Nepal border. Its elevation varies from 300 to 1000 m. above the mean sea level. The Shivalik range forms its northern boundary. It is crisscrossed by several rivers like Kosi, Narayani, and Karnafuli Gandak. Climatically, Terai is hot and humid (tar = damp). Once, it was a densely forested malarial zone, but today it is the most densely populated and economically richest region of Nepal. Most of the cities of Nepal are located here.

Nepal’s climate changes with its altitude. Terai is the only area whose climate conforms to latitude. Thus, Nepal has five climatic zones: tropical and sub-tropical (below 1,200 m elevation); cool, and temperate (1,200 to 2,400 m elevation); cool (2,400 to 3,600 m elevation); sub-arctic (3,600 to 4,400 m elevation); and Arctic (more than 4,400 m). Rainfall too increases with altitude. June to September is the rainy season.

People

Nepal has approximately 30 million people (2008); 15 million in 1980 and 19 million in 1990. It is growing at the rate of 2.6 per cent per annum. The regional share of population is 45 per cent for the Terai
region with annual growth rate of 4.2 per cent, 46 per cent for the Hill Region with annual growth rate of 1.7 per cent, and 9 per cent for the mountain region with annual growth rate of 1.4 per cent.

More than 80 per cent of the economically active population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities, and the remaining 9 per cent in manufacturing and services. For administrative purposes, the country is divided into 14 administrative zones (Fig. 1.5).

Economy

Nepal was an isolated agrarian society until World War II. It had very few schools, hospitals, roads, telephone and electric connections, and industrial units. It started opening up in the 1950s. Following the footsteps of India, and with its assistance, it embarked on a planned development in the 1950s. Currently, it is in the midst of its tenth five-year plan. Foreign aid accounts for more than half of the development budget of the country.

Agriculture is the principal economic activity; it employs 80 per cent of the population and accounts for 37 per cent of the GDP. Being a mountainous country, only 20 per cent of its land area is cultivable.

![Fig. 1.5: Administrative Zones of Nepal](https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms).
Urbanisation in South Asia

Of the remainder, 33 per cent is forested; the rest is mountainous. Rice and wheat are the main food crops. The Tarai plains are food-surplus. Handicrafts and small-scale manufacturing units constitute the industrial base of the country. It has made substantial progress on transport, communication, hydro-power, education, and health fronts. A number of primary schools and health centres have come up, but more needs to be done especially because accessibility in rugged terrain is limited. Tribhuvan University offers opportunities for higher education through a series of campuses. Several private universities have also entered the higher education sector of the country. A major achievement on the health front is the control of malaria in the Tarai region. Telecommunication services link all the cities and now mobile phones have spread all over the country making even the most inaccessible areas within reach.

With the growth of the carpet and garment industries, Nepal’s merchandise trade balance has improved since 2000 AD. Strong export performances, including earnings from tourism, and external aid have helped improve the overall balance of payments situation. Nepal receives substantial external assistance from India, EU, Japan, and various UN Agencies.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Bhutan is a democratic monarchy. It emerged from isolation in the 1970s, and is now on the way to smooth and painless modernisation in tune with its culture. The area of the Kingdom is exactly the same as that of Switzerland; its physical geography too is quite similar. To its north is Tibet; and on the other three sides are the Indian states of Sikkim, West Bengal, and Assam.

The area that now constitutes Bhutan was occupied by a number of warring chiefs until AD 1600. It was unified by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594–1652 AD), a Tibetan Lama and military leader. He united Bhutan both culturally and militarily and introduced a dual system of government wherein the control of the country was shared jointly by Je Khempo (spiritual leader) and a Desi Druck (administrator). Interestingly, this system more or less continues to this day.

Bhutan had two centres of power during the last quarter of the nineteenth century: Paro and Trongsa valleys. A sort of civil war
between the two kept the kingdom disturbed until Ugyen Wangchuck, the Penlop (governor) of Trongsa, brought peace in 1885 with the help of the British. The kingdom became a British protectorate in 1910. It was, however, not accepted by the people of Bhutan as they believed that only the reincarnation of the Shabdrung was the rightful ruler of the country. When the Shabdrung appealed to Mahatma Gandhi to intervene and terminate the Wangchuck dynasty, he was assassinated allegedly by pro-royalty agents.

Independent India signed a new treaty in 1949 under which Bhutan was recognised as a sovereign kingdom with special relations with India. The third Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who ascended the throne in 1952, made sustained efforts to modernise the country. Among his most important reforms was the establishment of the National Assembly – the Tshogdu – in 1953. He introduced land reforms, abolished slavery and serfdom, and separated the judiciary from the executive branch of the government. Modernisation of defence, transportation, education, health, etc. was also attempted. Dzongkha was made the national language. Road links with India were given a priority and an all-weather road linking Thimphu with Phuntsholing, the overland gateway town on the southwestern border with India, was completed in 1962. When Jigme Dorji Wangchuck passed away in 1972, his 17 year old son Jigme Singye Wangchuck became the new Druk Gyalpo with effect from June, 1974.

Despite the objections of the National Assembly, both the third and fourth kings of Bhutan shed their absolute powers and took the country forward on the road to democracy. The veto power was restored by the National Assembly to the fourth King Jigme Sinye Wangchuck, but the King convinced the Assembly in 1998 to end his absolute veto power to make the nation a real democracy. In December 2005, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced his decision to abdicate in favour of his son Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, a young man in his twenties by 2008, but he decided to abdicate two years earlier in 2006. The young king has successfully steered his country towards the twenty first century. His goal is to attain the highest GNH (Gross National Happiness) rather than the conventional GDP (Gross Domestic Product) for his country. Incidentally, Bhutan is rated as the 8th happiest country in the world. It stands first in South Asia in Gross National Happiness (GNH).
Land

Bhutan is spread over 47,000 km² and has a population of about 2.50 m (2.30 m in 2001). It is bereft of any water bodies except rivers. The terrain of the country is mountainous with some fertile valleys and savanna grassland. Only 2 per cent of the land is arable, 6 per cent is under permanent pastures, 66 per cent under forests, and the remaining 26 per cent is snow covered and barren.

Located in the heart of the towering Himalaya, Bhutan is a land-locked kingdom. To its north is China (470 km long border), and to the south, east and west is India (605 km long border). Bhutan has 300 to 1,370 m high mountains in the north and west. The more populated central region varies in elevation from 120 m around Trashigang in the east to 5,190 m in the high mountain passes. The altitude at Thimphu, the national capital and Paro the next important town is 2,347 m and 2,133 m respectively.

The climate of Bhutan varies from tropical in the southern foothills and plains to temperate and cold in the Himalayan ranges in the north. Altitude, rather than latitude, governs the climate of the country. Tropical climate prevails in the Himalayan foothills in the south. It is the home of luxurious tropical vegetation, and many species of animals. The inner Himalayan region is temperate; it is rich in deciduous forests. Further north, the high Himalaya region is very thinly populated, but the steep mountain slopes are home to many species of animals, including snow leopards and musk deer.

Bhutan is not very rich in natural resources. Timber, hydro-electric power, gypsum, and calcium carbide are its main resources. The most important resource of Bhutan is its natural beauty. It is a tourist paradise, but the people are very sensitive to their cultural heritage and would not barter it with money. The kingdom, therefore, does not welcome those pleasure-seeking tourists who pollute the natural environment and are insensitive to the cultural values people cherish. Only 18,000 tourists were allowed to enter the kingdom in 2006. Soil erosion and limited access to potable water constitute the two immediate problems of the kingdom.

People

Lhopu, a small tribe in south-west Bhutan speaking a Tibeto-Burman language, constitutes the original inhabitants of Bhutan. They were displaced from Tibet. The ethnic group that forms a majority in Bhutan
is Ngalop. It is concentrated in the central and western valleys and the tribals are similar to Tibetans in physical look, language and culture. Half of them are Bhoti. The people of Nepalese origin constitute 18 per cent of the total population. Religion wise, Lamaistic Buddhists form a majority (75 per cent), and Hinduism accounts for 25 per cent. Dzongkha is the official language of the kingdom.

Tantric Buddhism is the main religion of the kingdom. It is believed that Guru Rimpoche (Padmasambhava) introduced it in the eighth century AD. But it appears to have been in practice much earlier. Kyichu in Paro and Jambey in Bumthang were built in AD 659. Perhaps Padmasambhava further developed it and established a number of temples and monasteries, including the famous Taktshang monastery built on a cliff face above the Paro Valley, and Kurjey Lhakhang in Bumthang.

In July 2001, Bhutan was estimated to have 2,049,412 people. Its population was growing at the rate of 2.17 per cent per annum. The birth rate stood at 35.73 per thousand, while the death rate at 14.03. The sex ratio stood at 1,050 males per 1,000 females. Life expectancy at birth was 52.79 years (males: 53.16 years; and females: 52.41 years). Infant mortality was 108.89 per 1000 births. Literacy rate was low: 42.2 per cent of the people were literate in 2001.

The kingdom is divided into 20 districts for administrative purposes (Fig. 1.6).

Fig. 1.6: Administrative Districts (Dzongkhags) of Bhutan
Economy

Ninety per cent of the people of Bhutan are engaged in subsistence farming and animal husbandry. It receives substantial support from India, and other countries. UN agencies too help Bhutan develop its economy. The volume of private investment in industry, tourism, etc. has gone up substantially. Given the present political dispensation, its economic future looks bright. With the commissioning of export oriented Chhukha power project in 1987–88, the growth rate of its GDP went up to 6.8 per cent.

The GDP of Bhutan now exceeds US$ 2.5 billion (PPP). When translated into per capita, it touches $ 1100 per annum. The sources of the GDP are: agriculture, 38 per cent; industry, 37 per cent, and services, 25 per cent (2000 AD). The main export of Bhutan is hydroelectric power. Tourism is the other major source of income. Among the main imports are: fuel and lubricants, food grains especially rice, machinery, vehicles, and fabrics from neighbouring countries. Major import partners are India (77 per cent), Japan, UK, Germany, USA, and China. The external debt of the country stood at $235 million in 2001.

Bhutan has 3,285 km of roads of which 1,994 km are paved and 1,291 km unpaved (1996). It has two airports. Its capital, Thimphu, is served by a ‘City Bus’ service, which operates throughout the day. These are plans to construct a light tram along the banks of the Wang Chhu; it would be efficient as well as environment-friendly.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka was known to the Greeks as Taprobane; to the Arabs as Serendib; and to the Portuguese as Ceilão. The Portuguese name was transliterated in English as Ceylon. In 1978, the official name of the country was changed to Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Archaeological evidence points to the existence of human beings in the western plains, and south-western slopes of the Central Hills of the island in paleolithic times. The earliest-known inhabitants of the island are Veddahs who had migrated from India. Sri Lanka has always been known for its human development record. The first public hospital was opened as early fourth century BC at Mihintale. Queen Anula in 47–42 BC was the first female ruler of Asia. It had trade relations with
Egypt and Mesopotamia as early as 1400 BC. In recent years, Sri Lanka was the first country in the world to have a female prime minister. She was Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, widow of Solomon Bandaranaike, prime minister of the country during 1956–59.

Sri Lanka was ruled by the Simha (Lion) dynasty from BC 543 to AD 1815. The island was frequently invaded by South Indian kingdoms especially the Cholas. It was also invaded by Kalinga (modern Orissa) and Malay kings. Buddhism was brought to the country from India in the third century BC by Bhikkhu Mahindra, the son of the Mauryan Emperor, Ashoka the Great.

The British East India Company established its control over the island in 1796, and declared it a Crown Colony in 1802. The Kingdom of Kandy fell in British hands in 1815; they unified the island and established a series of tea, cinnamon, rubber, sugar, coffee, and indigo plantations. This brought a large number of indentured labourers from Tamil Nadu, India. Sri Lankans launched a freedom movement to oust the British in the 1930s. It was spearheaded by the Youth League and was supported by the Buddhist scholars. It won its freedom on 4 February 1948.

The most critical problem the country faced was the civil war spearheaded by the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) in the northern and eastern provinces. LTTE wanted a Tamil homeland with Jafna peninsula as its core. When peace by peaceful means failed, Sri Lanka went for an all out war and defeated the rebels. Now there is peace in the country. Let us hope that it will continue forever.

Land

Located south-east of peninsular India, Sri Lanka looks like a teardrop on the map of the sub-continent. The Gulf of Mannar and Palk Strait separate it from India. It is a country of plains with mountains only in the south-central part. Rivers, especially the Mahaweli Ganga are the main source of fresh water. According to Hindu mythology, India and Sri Lanka are linked by a land bridge (Ram Setu) believed to have been built by Lord Ram when he invaded Sri Lanka to secure his wife Sita abducted by Ravana. It is also known as Adam’s Bridge. The remains of this bridge still exist as a chain of limestone shoals partly below, and partly above the sea level.
Sri Lanka, located as it is between latitudes 5 and 10 North, has a tropical climate moderated by moisture bearing winds from the sea around it. The mean temperature ranges from 16 °C in Nuwara Eliya in the Central Highlands, where frost may occur for several days in the winter to as high as 32°–38°C in Trincomalee on the northeast coast. The mountains and the south-western parts of the country receive an annual rainfall of 2,500 mm; the south-eastern, eastern, and northern parts receive 1,200 to 1,900 mm; and the coastal areas in the north-west and south-east get only 600 to 1,200 mm of rain per annum. October–January constitute the rainiest months.

People

The Sinhalas constitute the largest ethnic group (82 per cent) in Sri Lanka. Among the minority groups, are Tamil Hindus (9.4 per cent), Muslims (7–8 per cent), and others (1 per cent). Among the Tamils are the Sri Lankan Tamils (4.3 per cent of total population) who have been living in the country since ancient times, and Indian Tamils (5.1 per cent of the total population) who are Sri Lankan citizens but were brought by the British as indentured labour. Most of the Muslims live in the eastern part of the country. They are also spread in cities all over the country. Then there are small ethnic groups like Burghers (of mixed European descent) and Malays from South-East Asia. There is a small population of the Wanniyala-Aetto also known as Veddahs. They are believed to be the descendents of the oldest indigenous ethnic group settled in the country.

Sri Lanka is the home of two main cultures: Sinhala and Tamil. The former has its core in the ancient cities of Kandy, and Anuradhapura, and the latter in Jafna peninsula in the north. About 70 per cent of Sri Lankans profess Theravada Buddhism. Other religious groups are: Hindus 15 per cent, Christians 8 per cent, and Muslims 7–8 per cent.

For Administrative purposes, the country is divided into 9 Provinces (Fig. 1.7).

Educationally, Sri Lanka is far more advanced than any other South Asian country. More than 90 per cent of the people are literate and 83 per cent of them have secondary level education. It has a number of universities. A number of private institutions have come up to offer specialised courses in technical and managerial fields like engineering, computer science, business management, and law.
Economy

The Sri Lankan economy has traditionally been built around the export of plantation crops like tea, rubber, and coconut. It exports some minerals too. During the last few decades, it has diversified its economy and laid emphasis on food processing, textiles, telecommunications, and finance. As a result, the share of plantation crops in its exports has steadily declined from 93 per cent in 1970 to just 16.8 per cent in 2005. In the mean time, the share of textiles and garments has gone up to 63 per cent.

The GDP growth of the country has oscillated between 5.5 per cent per annum in the early 1990s to 3.8 per cent in 1996. It was 5.3 per cent during 1997–2000. With the reversal of economic policy from...
privatisation to government control since 2004 with a view to help the rural and suburban small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and to protect the domestic economy from foreign competition, Sri Lankan GDP recorded 7 per cent growth in 2007. Per capita income of Sri Lanka ($1,350) is fairly high in terms of South Asian standards. The only country ahead of it in this respect is Maldives.

Sri Lanka has a fairly good network of railways linking all the cities and towns of the country. The first railway line was opened in 1867 between Colombo and Kandy. Sri Lankan road network exceeds 11,000 km. A number of new highways such as Colombo-Katunayake Expressway, the Colombo-Kandy (Kadugannawa) Expressway, the Colombo-Padeniya Expressway and the Outer Circular Highway around Colombo Metropolis, are being built to bolster the economy. The Ceylon Transport Board is responsible for operating public bus services across the island. The country also maintains 430 km of inland waterways.

MALDIVES

Maldives or Divehi is an archipelago extending for 750 km from north to south, and 120 km from east to west. It stretches from 7° 10' North to 0° 45' South latitudes. The archipelago consists of a double chain of twenty-seven atolls consisting of approximately 1,200 coral islands (Fig. 1.8). The atolls sit on a submarine ridge running from north to south for about 1,000 km. The ridge and the coral reefs that have developed over it, permit safe navigation from either side of the Indian Ocean at its southern end.

The modern history of Maldives begins with its discovery by the Portuguese traveler Dom Lourenço de Almeida in 1507. The islands were occupied by the Portuguese and forced to pay a tribute to Goa, the centre of Portugal’s South Asian base.

The British occupied Ceylon in 1815. The Sultan entered into a treaty with them in 1887 according to which he recognised the suzerainty of the British sovereign and agreed not to enter into any treaty with any other country except through Great Britain. This arrangement continued even after Ceylon became independent in 1948. New agreements reaffirming these provisions were signed in 1953, 1956, and 1960.
Fig. 1.8: The Atolls of Maldives
Maldives gained independence from Britain on 26 July 1965. The British government retained the military base in Gan and communication centre in Hitaddu. The Sultanate was abolished in March 1968 and the country became a Republic. Ibrahim Nasir, who had increasingly dominated the political scene of Maldives became its first president with Ahmed Zaki as prime minister. Nasir and Zaki were elected to their respective positions once again in 1973 for a five years. He was replaced by Maumoon Gayoom who remained President of the country for almost three decades (1978 to 2007). Mohamed Nasheed was elected as President in 2008.

In October 2008 Gayoom was defeated by Maldivian Democratic Party candidate Mohamed Nasheed in the first multiparty presidential elections held in 30 years. President Nasheed took the oath of office as head of the executive branch of governor on 11 November 2008. Nasheed resigned on 7 February 2012 under very peculiar circumstances. Vice President Dr Mohamed Waheed was sworn in as President. The current unicameral Majlis, elected in May 2009, is composed of 77 members serving 5-year terms. The next Majlis will be held in 2014.

Land

Maldives is a land of atolls. It is so atollic that the term atoll is derived from a Dhivehi word ‘Atholhu’. Sufixes like ‘Madulhu’ and ‘Mathi’ mean atoll. Thus, Kolhumadulhu means Kolhu Atoll. Major atoll groups and islands of Maldives are:

1. Thiladhimmadhulhu group,
2. Miladhummadulhu group,
3. Faadhhippolhu group
4. Maalhosmadulhu group
5. Male Atoll group
6. Ari group
7. Felidhu Atoll group
8. Mulaku Atoll
9. Nilandhe Atoll Group
10. Kolhumadulhu
11. Haddhunmathi
12. Huvadu Kandu (Suvadiva Channel)
13. Huvadu Atoll
14. Fua Mulaku Island
15. Addu Atoll

Very few of the islands of Maldives are more than 5 sq km in area; they average only 1–2 sq km, and are no more than 2–3 m above the sea level. Some of the atolls are 50 km long and 30 km wide but none of the individual islands within them is longer than 8 km. Each atoll has 5 to 10 inhabited, and 20 to 60 uninhabited islands. Some of the atolls, however, have just one large, isolated island such as Fua Mulaku.

Surrounded and infiltrated by the sea, Maldives is covered with tropical groves of breadfruit scrub and coconut trees, and is green all the year round. Among its main products are: fish, taro, banana, and coconut. Due to the infiltration of brackish seawater, the soil is poor and agricultural potential is limited to just 2,600 ha (10 per cent of the total land area) and that too mostly in the Fua Mulaku Island.

Coral reefs can grow only in fresh water. In Maldives Sea, a layer of freshwater floats over the sea surface; it permeates the limestone and coral sands and creates necessary conditions for coral formation. Residents depend on groundwater or rainwater for drinking purposes. If global warming and climate change continues, this enchanting island country would be in the frontline of the lands to be swallowed by the sea.

People

Who are the people of Maldives? The early settlers were sun-worshipping seafarers called the Redin. Even today some of the Mosques of Maldives face the sun and not Mecca, as they were built on the foundations of Redin temples. Theravada Buddhism became the dominant religion of the people in the fourth century AD. The very name of the country is derived from the Sanskrit word maladvipa, meaning ‘garland of islands.’ The last Buddhist king of Maldives adopted Islam in 1153, and called himself Sultan Muhammad al Adil. His dynasty lasted until 1932, when the Sultanate became an elective office.

According to the first systematic census of population held in December 1977, Maldives had 142,832 people, nearly 40,000 more than what it was estimated to have in 1967. By 2005, its population increased
to 349,000. Growing at the rate of 3.5 per cent per annum, the population of Maldives has doubled every 20 years. Given the high birth rate of 44 per 1000, it would have more than 500,000 people by 2020. Rapid population growth poses a serious problem for a country with scanty resources and adverse geographical conditions, but given the religious background of the people, the government finds it difficult to initiate any meaningful programme of population control.

Male, a small island of about two sq. km is most densely populated. In 1990, it contained a quarter (55,130) of the total population of the country. Most of the 1200 islands being uninhabited, any estimate of average density of population is meaningless. Of the 200 inhabited islands, twenty-eight had less than 200 inhabitants each in 1988; 107 had 200 to 500 inhabitants each; and eight had 500 to 1,000 inhabitants each. About 25 places had more than 1,000 inhabitants each.

In the field of education, Maldives has made significant progress, raising its literacy rate to over 98 per cent. Today, primary education is universal and around 7,000 students finish secondary school every year. But the young men and women who pass out from secondary schools do not have opportunities for higher education, especially in managerial and technical fields. To fill this gap between demand and supply, the Maldivian Government has decided to upgrade the existing Maldives College of Higher Education into University of Maldives, and provide more financial aid to help students seek admission in foreign institutions.

**Economy**

The economic base of Maldives is narrow relying on just two sectors: tourism (accounting for 25 per cent of the GDP) and fishing accounting for only 5 per cent of the GDP. Both are dependent on external demand and hence are vulnerable. The fishing industry is passing through a very difficult time. The geography of the country demands decentralised economy so that even remote atolls can benefit from development. The government is trying to diversify the economy, improve the transport and communications system, and augment the social services. The Outer Islands Electrification Project is being expanded to cover the islands not included in the earlier project.

Notwithstanding the small size and vulnerability, the Maldivian economy has so far done fairly well because of increasing tourist inflow,
and growing external demand for fish. This has raised the living standards of the people significantly. Maldives is very close to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals set for 2015, and is likely to graduate as a Middle Income Country (MIC) by 2011.

The development constraints of Maldives are the same as that of other island countries. With limited scope for agriculture, absence of mineral resources, and vulnerability to natural disasters, it cannot plan big. The Asian tsunami of 26 December 2004, took away around 62 per cent of the GDP. The government has concentrated on improving banking, air and sea transport, international shipping, communications, and electricity, and on further developing fisheries and tourism. With the liberalisation of the economy, the private sector has now started playing a greater role in tourism, trade, transport, and fisheries. Around 70 per cent of all development expenditure has been financed by external resources, the major portion of it being grants.

Fiscal revenues constitute: taxes 48 per cent, and profit transfers from public enterprises, 52 per cent. As there are no taxes on personal income, capital gains, business profits (other than a bank profit tax), wealth, or real estate, the bulk of the tax revenue comprises of import duties (64 per cent) and tourism tax (28 per cent). On the expenditure side, social services account for around 41 per cent, and payments on economic services account for 16 per cent.

Food security is a major concern of the country. Its population growth is high, and the agricultural base is poor. Shortage of potable water, frequent oceanic storms, and disastrous implications of looming climatic change, are other very serious problems. If the ocean level goes up by 1 meter, the country would practically disappear from the world map.

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