

# British civilisation essay



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Research paper Bangladesh A project on British History ant Civilization

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OTHER INFORMATION<sup>14</sup> CONSLUSION<sup>15</sup> LITERATURE<sup>16</sup> INTRODUCTION The  
title of the paper shows the objective of it: to present one of the members of  
British Commonwealth: Bangladesh.

So, I will try to emphasize on some of the important facts about whole British  
Commonwealth in order to get acquainted with essential information about  
mentioned institution. Then I will introduce to the essential information about  
the mentioned member of Commonwealth. In part one the tasks would be  
set in order to: • describe the history of the Commonwealth, • explain of the  
structure of the mentioned organization, • outline the modern view of it. In  
the second part I will: introduce to the history and geography of Bangladesh,  
• describe its society, political and economic situation, • find out some useful  
information about life in Bangladesh. The paper will introduce readers with  
only one country of whole Commonwealth, but they should realize that 54  
independent states are working together in the common interests of their  
citizens for development, democracy and peace. 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE  
ORIGIN AND STRUCTURE OF THE COMMONWEALTH 1. 1. A HISTORY The  
origins (with roots as far back as the 1870s) of the Commonwealth stretch  
back much further than 60 years.

In 1867, Canada became the first colony to be transformed into a self-  
governing ‘ Dominion’, a newly constituted status that implied equality with

Britain. The empire was gradually changing and Lord Rosebury, a British politician, described it in Australia in 1884 as a “ Commonwealth of Nations”. Other parts of the empire became Dominions too: Australia (1901), New Zealand (1907), South Africa (1910) and the Irish Free State (1922). All except the Irish Free State (that did not exist at the time) participated as separate entities in the First World War and were separate signatories to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Subsequently, they became members of the League of Nations. After the end of the First World War, the Dominions began seeking a new constitutional definition and reshaping their relationship with Britain. At the Imperial Conference in 1926, the prime ministers of the participating countries adopted the Balfour Report which defined the Dominions as autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate to one another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

This definition was incorporated into British law in 1931 as the Statute of Westminster. It was adopted immediately in Canada, the Irish Free State, Newfoundland (which joined Canada in 1949) and South Africa. Australia and New Zealand followed. India, Britain’s largest colony at the time, became a Dominion at independence in 1947 and remained so until January 1950, when the Indian Republic was born. 1949 marks the pivotal point at which the Commonwealth’s colonial legacy was transformed positively into a partnership based on equality, choice and consensus. 6 April 2009 marked the 60th anniversary of the London Declaration, which brought the modern

Commonwealth into being. Prior to this, the Balfour Declaration of 1926 had established all member countries as 'equal in status to one another, in no way subordinate one to another', and this was in turn adopted into law with the 1931 Statute of Westminster. However, it was India's desire to adopt a republican form of constitution while simultaneously retaining its link with the Commonwealth that prompted a radical reconsideration of the terms of association.

In April 1949, Heads of Government from Australia, Britain, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa and the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs met in London to discuss the future of the Commonwealth. The outcome was the Declaration of London. Their final communique was both innovative and bold in a number of ways. It stated that His Majesty King George VI would be recognised as 'the symbol' of the Commonwealth association, thus India could remove King George VI as head of their state but recognise him as Head of the Commonwealth.

The Declaration also emphasised repeatedly the freedom and equality of its members, not just in their relationship to the Head of the Commonwealth as a 'free association of independent nations', but also in their co-operative 'pursuit of peace, liberty and progress'. It was also at this juncture that the prefix 'British' was dropped from the title. When King George VI died, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II assumed the role of Head of the Commonwealth. After the end of World War II the Commonwealth became the natural association of choice for many of the new nations emerging out of decolonisation.

Starting with Ghana in 1957, the Commonwealth expanded rapidly with new members from Africa, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the Pacific. The symbol of the Commonwealth: the London Declaration of 1949 stated that the British monarch would be a symbol of the free association of independent countries, and as such the Head of the Commonwealth. These words meant that republics could be members – they could accept the monarch as Head of the Commonwealth without being their own Head of State. Thus when Elizabeth II came to the throne in 1952 she became Head of the Commonwealth.

Today the Queen is head of state in 16 of the 54 Commonwealth member countries, all of them fully independent in which – apart from the UK – she is represented by a governor-general.

## 1. 2. THE MODERN COMMONWEALTH

The world's largest and smallest, richest and poorest countries make up the Commonwealth and are home to two billion citizens of all faiths and ethnicities – over half of whom are 25 or under. Member countries span six continents and oceans from Africa (19) to Asia (8), the Americas (3), the Caribbean (10), Europe (3) and the South Pacific (11).

The Commonwealth is now a unique association of 54 independent states (the newest of which, Rwanda, joined in 2009) consulting and co-operating in the common interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding. It comprises a diverse range of countries from all continents of the world (apart from Antarctica). In the 60 years since the Declaration, the relevance and value of the relationship has been reaffirmed and consolidated repeatedly. Structure: The Commonwealth Secretariat is the principal organisation of the Commonwealth.

It implements the decisions taken by the association's 54 member governments. The Commonwealth Secretariat is headed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamallesh Sharma, who took over on 1 April 2008. The Secretary-General is elected by Heads of Government for a maximum of two four-year terms. The Secretary-General is supported by two Deputies. About three-quarters of the 54 member countries are currently represented among the some 252 staff of the Secretariat. It was established by Heads of Government in 1965 and is located at Marlborough House in London.

Its sister inter-governmental organisations are the Commonwealth Foundation (also based at Marlborough House) and the Commonwealth of Learning (in Vancouver, Canada). The Secretary-General is elected by Heads of Government for a maximum of two four-year terms. The Secretary-General is supported by two Deputies. About three-quarters of the 54 member countries are currently represented among the some 252 staff of the Secretariat. The Secretariat organises Commonwealth summits, meetings of ministers, consultative meetings and technical discussions.

It assists policy development, facilitates multilateral communication among the member governments and provides policy advice and technical assistance. Its activities are supported by assessed budget and programme funds. All member governments contribute to this budget on an agreed scale based on their country's population and income. Specialised funds support specific Commonwealth activities. The largest fund is the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC).

This fund was established in 1971 to promote technical co-operation among developing countries and funds training programmes, experts in the field and advisers to fill gaps in skills in areas such as industry, economics, law, export and marketing. Priority and programme: democracy and development and the improvement in quality of life that they bring, are key priorities of the Commonwealth. The organisation has a number of different programmes, which contribute to democracy and development across all member states. Rule of law: promoting the rule of law is seen as enhancing democracy, good governance and development across the membership.

Human rights: aims to assist members in the adoption and implementation of international human rights. Economic development: assisting developing countries to improve their understanding of international trade rules and regulations, and to help them strengthen their negotiations within the World Trade Organisation. Human development: the Commonwealth works towards the Millennium Development Goals and is particularly active in education, gender and health. Rt Hon Lord David Howell was appointed Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 14 May 2010. Lord Howell was made a life peer in 1997.

He was Member of Parliament for Guildford from 1966 to 1997. Lord Howell was born in January 1936 and educated at Eton. From 1954 to 1956 he was in the Armed Forces in the 2nd Btn Coldstream Guards. He studied at King's College, Cambridge where he read Economics. The UK government believes that the Commonwealth is a truly unique organisation and the world's best soft power network. But we agree that, collectively, we must ensure the Commonwealth remains relevant, realises its great potential, and brings

strong values, development and prosperity to all its citizens. 2. BANGLADESH  
Joined Commonwealth: 1972 Capital: Dhaka

Population: 160, 000, 000 (2008) Official Language: Bangla Currency: taka (Tk)

2. 1. SOME HISTORICAL FACTS From its earliest pre-history Bangladesh has been subject to waves of migration and the incursions of regional – and later European – powers. An Indo-Aryan population, Hindu in belief, arrived between 3, 000 and 4, 000 years ago and the evidence suggests a flourishing, sophisticated civilisation. The Moghul dynasty, conquering the territory in the 16th century, spread Islam widely through the country. The following successions of arrivals were the Portuguese, Armenians, French and British, who established military and trade outposts.

In 1757 a British force defeated the local army of Nawab Siraj-ud-Dwola and set in train 190 years of British rule. In 1947 East Bengal and Sylhet (then part of Assam) came to independence out of the UK's Indian Empire, as the eastern part of the Muslim state of Pakistan. From the start, East Pakistan was beset by problems. In particular, it resented the dominance of its richer and more powerful though less populous partner, West Pakistan, from which it was geographically separated by about 1, 600km of Indian territory. Political control, language and economic policy were among the large areas of disagreement.

In 1949 the Awami League was established in East Pakistan to campaign for autonomy. Protests and violent demonstrations followed the declaration, in 1952, that Urdu was to be Pakistan's official language. Bengali was finally accepted as the joint official language two years later. By the mid-1960s,



continued under-representation in the government administration and armed forces and a much less than fair share of Pakistan's development expenditure gave rise to the belief by many in East Pakistan that the only remedy was greater autonomy and thus more control over its own resources and development priorities and politics.

In 1970, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, won an electoral majority in Pakistan's general election on a platform demanding greater autonomy for East Pakistan. At the same time Zulfikar Ali Bhutto gained a majority in the West. Despite Mujib's victory, he was prevented by the Pakistan authorities from becoming prime minister of the combined state. The Awami League then issued its own plans for a new constitution for an independent state, as a result of which the Pakistani army took control and Mujib was arrested in March 1971 after a fierce crackdown. This precipitated civil war, with an estimated 9. million refugees fleeing to India as a result, and led to military intervention by India on the side of the Mukti Bahini (Bengali 'freedom fighters') at the beginning of December. Two weeks later, Pakistan forces surrendered and the separate state of Bangladesh emerged. Sheikh Mujib returned from captivity in Pakistan in January 1972 and became prime minister. Instability in the new state was compounded by floods, famine, the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in August 1975 – shortly after he became president – and a succession of military coups, with martial law and frequent states of emergency.

After a coup in 1975, Major-General Ziaur Rahman (Zia) assumed the leadership and in 1978 he became president. The 1979 general election brought his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to government. The country

then enjoyed a period of economic and political stability. But in 1981 President Zia was murdered in an attempted coup. In 1982 the then army chief, Lt-General Hossain Ershad, assumed power after another coup and became president in 1983. In May 1986 elections were held in violent conditions and boycotted by the BNP under Zia's widow, Begum Khaleda Zia.

Ershad's Jatiya Party (JP) won and the Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujib, boycotted parliament. Ershad won presidential elections in October 1986, and he lifted martial law and reinstated the constitution. The following year was marked by riots and strikes, a state of emergency, thousands of arrests, and house-arrest for Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina. A general election of March 1988, boycotted by the opposition, returned the JP with 238 seats, and the state of emergency was lifted. Devastating floods ensued covering up to 75% of the country and making tens of millions homeless.

2. 2. GEOGRAPHY Area: 143, 998 sq km

Coastline: 580km Capital: Dhaka The People's Republic of Bangladesh is a fertile and densely populated delta country in southern Asia bordered by the Bay of Bengal, India and Myanmar (formerly Burma). Main towns: Dhaka (capital, pop. 10. 47m in 2009), Chittagong (3. 76m), Narayanganj , Khulna , Rajshahi , Tungi , Sylhet etc. Topography: Apart from hills to the south-east, most of Bangladesh is a flat alluvial plain crossed by navigable waterways – the Ganges (Padma), Brahmaputra (Jamuna) and Meghna river systems – flowing into the Bay of Bengal. About 14% of the country is normally under water. Flooding is frequent and can be disastrous.

Climate: Tropical monsoon-type: hot and humid April to October, with the monsoon running June to September. Cool and dry, November to March. The country is vulnerable to cyclones, which can be devastating. The cyclone of April 1991 killed 138, 000 people. In November 2007, Cyclone Sidr hit the southern coastal strip of Bangladesh, also killing and making homeless thousands of people. Environment: The most significant issues are severe overpopulation, high risk of flooding in large area of country, soil degradation and erosion, ground water contaminated by naturally occurring arsenic, and poisoning of fish by use of commercial pesticides.

Wildlife: The country has a varied wildlife population, although 18 species became extinct during the 20th century and around 70 are endangered or threatened. Mammal species include 26 types of bat, the famous Bengal tiger (now virtually confined to the Sundarbans and numbering a few hundred) and the Gangetic dolphin, and reptile species include turtles, river tortoise, crocodile, gavial, python, krait and cobra. There are several ‘protected’ areas for wildlife. Transport: There are 239, 230km of roads, 9.5% paved; these roads are vulnerable to damage by storms or floods, and have many bridges.

The 4.8km Jamuna multipurpose bridge was inaugurated in 1998, linking the east and the west of the country by road and railway. A rail network of some 2,840km links the main towns. The Dhaka–Chittagong line has frequent daily services. Rail is broad gauge in the west, narrow gauge in the east, with ferry links across rivers. Bangladesh has 5–8,000km of navigable waterway, depending on extent of flooding, and a well-developed water transport

network, carrying more than 30% of domestic freight. The main ports are Chittagong and Mongla, Chittagong dealing with the bulk of foreign trade.

Shahjalal (formerly Zia) International Airport is 19km north of Dhaka. 2. 3. SOCIETY Population per sq km: 1, 127 Life expectancy: 67 years Population: 162, 221, 000 (2009); density among world's highest; 28% lives in urban areas and 12% in urban agglomerations of more than 1 million people; growth 1. 8% p. a. 1990–2009; birth rate 21 per 1, 000 people (47 in 1970), controlled by vigorous family planning schemes; life expectancy 67 years (44 in 1970). Language: Bangla (Bengali) is the official language. English is widely spoken, especially in government and commerce.

Religion: About 80 % of Bangladeshis are Muslims, making Bangladesh one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. The Muslim community in Bangladesh tends to be accommodating to other faiths and beliefs and Bangladesh is known for its lack of communal strife. Hinduism is professed by about 13 % of the population. There are also significant numbers of Buddhists in Bangladesh. Bangladesh also has a very small Christian community. Media: Bangladesh has a lively and thriving press, with more than 100 daily newspapers and very many weeklies in circulation.

Leading English-language newspapers are The Bangladesh Observer (since 1949), The Daily Star, New Age, The New Nation, The Dhaka Courier (weekly), and The Independent. Dailies in Bengali include Ittefaq, Prothom Alo and Jugantor. Television is Bangladesh's most popular medium, especially in the cities. The country's sole terrestrial TV channel, Bangladesh Television, is a public service. Satellite and cable television have become

popular. Betar-Radio Bangladesh is the national public radio service, and Radio Metrowave is a commercial music and news station for younger audiences. Some 48% of households have TV sets (2006).

There are 23 personal computers (2006) and 4 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people. Education: Public spending on education was 2.4% of GDP in 2008. There are five years of compulsory education and eight years of free education, starting at age six. Almost all primary schools are government-managed. Secondary schools (11–16, comprising a first cycle of three years and a second cycle of two years) and higher secondary colleges (17–18) are mostly private, often government-subsidised. There are more than 17 million students in primary school and more than 8 million at secondary level.

Some 55% of pupils complete primary school (2005). The school year starts in January. In the late 1980s the government laid great emphasis on the improvement of the primary education system in an attempt to raise the rate of literacy. A scheme was, therefore, undertaken to establish one primary school for every 2,000 people in Bangladesh. A parallel system of education – Madrasah education – offers Islamic instruction from primary level up to postgraduate level. The main universities are at Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Jahangirnagar and Mymensingh (agriculture).

There are also several private universities in Dhaka, including North–South University and Independent University. The government launched an Open University Project in 1992. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 55: 100 (2007). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 74% (2008). Public holidays: Shaheed Day (International Mother Language

Day, 21 February), Independence Day (26 March), Labour Day (1 May), Bank Holiday (early July), National Mourning Day (15 August), National Revolution Day (7 November), Victory Day (16 December) and New Year's Eve.

The weekend comprises Friday/Saturday. The Commonwealth Yearbook 2011 Bangladesh Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Prophet's Birthday, Bangla Naba Barsha (Bengali New Year, around 14 April), Buddha Purnima (April/May), Shab-e-Bharat (Ascension of the Prophet), Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan, three days), Durga Puja (October), Shab-e-Qadr (Evening of Destiny), Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice, three days) and Islamic New Year. 2. 4. ECONOMY

Overview: The country has a high population density, limited natural resources and an agricultural economy vulnerable to floods and cyclones, but it nevertheless achieved economic growth averaging around 4% p. a. from the 1970s. It does also have huge reserves of natural gas and some coal. Economic policy has long aimed at the alleviation of poverty through increasing food production and expanding education, while developing an industrial and technological base, but severe floods have often frustrated development plans.

From the mid-1990s, successive governments were committed to free-market policies, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, attracting overseas investment and banking reform. More than 60 state-owned enterprises, in areas as diverse as manufacturing, agriculture, transport and communications, were identified for divestment, but progress was slow due to strong popular opposition. These policies led to an improvement in

economic performance, even in 1998 when the country was devastated by the floods that covered nearly two-thirds of the land area.

From 2000 the economy grew strongly, with growth rates peaking at over 6% p. a. in 2005–09 driven by strong exports and investment. In 2008, despite the world economic downturn, the economy remained buoyant with continuing growth in clothing exports and remittances from Bangladeshis living abroad. Trade: Principal exports are clothing, seafood and fish products, jute and jute goods, and leather goods. 2. 5. CONSTITUTION

Status: Republic Legislature: National Parliament of Bangladesh

Independence: 1971 Bangladesh is a republic with a non-executive president.

Under the Twelfth Constitutional Amendment (1991) there is a parliamentary system. The unicameral parliament (Jatiya Sangsad) comprises 300 directly-elected members from geographical constituencies for five-year terms, plus 45 seats reserved for women nominated by political parties – based on their share of the elected seats – and then voted on by sitting lawmakers. The allocation of seats reserved for women was provided by the Fourteenth Constitutional Amendment (2004). One parliamentary candidate can stand in up to three constituencies.

If a candidate wins in more than one constituency a by-election or by-elections are called. Parliament may sit no longer than five years.

Constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority of parliament.

Executive power is with the prime minister, who heads a council of ministers (the cabinet), and whose advice is necessary for all presidential acts. The

head of state is the president who is elected by the national parliament for a five-year term. The presidency is a largely ceremonial role, although the president appoints members of the cabinet and the judiciary and has the power to dissolve parliament.

The Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment (1996) requires a nonpartisan caretaker administration to oversee the election process. In November 2007 the caretaker government declared the independence of the judiciary from the executive, following a directive issued by the Supreme Court in December 1999 – in accordance with Article 22 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. Previous elected governments of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Awami League had effectively filibustered implementing the directive. Politics: Head of state: President Zillur Rahman.

Head of government: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Ruling party: alliance, led by the Awami League. International relations: Bangladesh is a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, Non-Aligned Movement, and Organisation of the Islamic Conference, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, United Nations and World Trade Organization. 2. 6. OTHER INFORMATION Local laws and conventions: Local laws reflect the country's Muslim beliefs and should be respected at all times, especially during the holy month of Ramadan or when visiting religious sites.

During Ramadan, when Muslims fast between sunrise and sunset, visitors should avoid eating, drinking or smoking in public, as it is likely to cause offence. Women should wear trousers or long skirts and should dress



modestly at all times. There are severe penalties for possession and trafficking of illegal drugs and some drug-related offences are punishable by death. Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left and car hire is available with an international driving permit.

The rail network is slow and old, though upgrading is currently taking place. The main train line is between Dhaka and Chittagong, and there are a number of daily services. Domestic flights are also available and connect Dhaka with most of the other main towns. A ferry operates from Dhaka to Khulna four times a week. There are inexpensive bus services which connect most of the towns and villages. In urban areas buses are generally overcrowded, but cycle-rickshaws are widely available. Taxis are the best and safest means of travelling short distances.

Healthcare: Medical facilities are poor outside the capital and visitors are advised to take out comprehensive health insurance that includes medical evacuation. Humidity and pollution in downtown Dhaka, especially at certain times of the year, can cause breathing problems. There is a risk of malaria in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and dengue fever is prevalent; visitors must take adequate precautions to protect themselves at all times, and pack insect repellent and suitable clothing to discourage mosquito bites. Tuberculosis and Hepatitis B and E are also present.

Drinking water must be boiled or sterilised. CONSLUSION Commonwealth countries work together in a spirit of co-operation, partnership and understanding. This openness and flexibility are integral to the Commonwealth's effectiveness. Emphasis on equality has helped it play

leading roles in decolonisation, combating racism and advancing sustainable development in poor countries. Despite of this though more than half of Bangladeshis, rural and urban, still live below the poverty line, there has been an improvement in living standards over the past decade.

This support network of countries and organisations is involved in a diverse range of work, from helping trade negotiations, building the small business sector and encouraging women entrepreneurs to supporting the quality and quantity of teachers. The textile trade has been one factor in the growing emancipation of Bangladeshi women, many of whom now enjoy an independent income. Women are now included in official employment statistics and are the main customers of the Grameen Bank, the most successful rural bank.

As well as working with each other, member countries and organisations have also built alliances outside the Commonwealth. Commonwealth ideas have been taken up by the World Bank on Small States, by the World Health Organization on the migration of doctors and nurses, by the International Labour Organization on the migration of teachers. The Commonwealth is part of the world that it serves, sharing the same interests as those of its citizens: democratic freedom and economic and social development. Bangladesh's major economic sectors are jute production, textiles, and agriculture.

Its climate can wreak havoc – in 1991 a massive cyclone killed more than 140, 000 people. Finally, Bangladesh remains a developing country with poor infrastructure. Tourist facilities outside major cities and tourist areas are minimal. Nevertheless Bangladesh will become an attractive destination of ‘

Social Business’ in near future setting an example for rest of the world, as it has totally different objectives with special focus on solving society’s most pressing problems, instead of making money.

This was stated by Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank and innovator of social business, at the inaugural session of a conference at media bazaar auditorium, BICC the city on October 28, 2011, Dhaka, Bangladesh. LITERATURE 1. Background Note: Bangladesh, US Department of State, May 2007. [interactive] [Viewed 2011-10-22]. Available at: 2. Bangladesh Today, Asia Report N°121, International Crisis Group, October 23, 2006. [interactive] [Viewed 2011-10-10]. Available at: 3. Bharadwaj, G (2003). “ The Ancient Period”. In Majumdar, RC. History of Bengal. B. R.

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