

**Geography of Bangladesh.** By HAROUN ER RASHID. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978. xvi, 579 pp. Maps, Bibliography, Index. \$20.00.

Less than a decade ago, a nation-state for the Bengali-speaking Muslims was born out of the barrel of a gun. The immediate economic, social, and political problems of that country, now of about 80 million people, have drawn the attention of many scholars of development. The book under review, written by a Bangladeshi economist and economic geographer who is currently working for the FAO in Rome, is a useful addition to the burgeoning literature on that nascent nation, which is making determined efforts toward economic and political stability.

The book is written in the British tradition of regional commercial geography, i.e., a gazetteer account of landforms, geologic structure, hydrography, climate, soils, flora, fauna, agricultural products, cropping patterns, fisheries, animal husbandry, mineral resources, transport and communications, trade, distribution of population, rural settlements and towns and cities. The chapter on the historical background is judiciously written, in light of the rocky relationship of Bengali Muslims with the Pan-Islamic movement in the subcontinent, as well as with Bengali Hindus. The chapter on the people, dealing mainly with racial characteristics, dress, food, and language, is too short and chiefly devoted to the autochthonous. The chapter on rural settlements provides a distribution of main types like linear, scattered, semi-nucleated, and nucleated. The idea that the systems of settlements and the morphology of the villages may reflect something more than the influence of the local physical environment is not mentioned by the author; neither is the index of rural house types explained. One-fourth of the book is devoted to physical features and the bulk of the remaining pages to economic activities: 125 pages to agricultural products alone. Primary data sources like the census, the agricultural census, government reports, and accounts of British officials and travellers are cited. There are 100 tables, 55 maps, and a bibliography in the book. Unfortunately, the maps are poorly reproduced, and there are many typographical errors throughout.

If the objective of the book is to look into development and planning, it is not reached until the two short chapters toward the end. Even then attention is given to discussing calculations of indices like GNP and generalizations about the need to plan for development. I can only agree with the author's contention that agriculture will remain the basis of Bangladesh's economy for a long time to come and that development would be faster and cheaper through investments in agriculture than through heavy reliance on industrial growth. But Rashid's prescription for obtaining new agricultural technology and increasing scientific orientation for the whole society is hard to understand. He seems oblivious to the questions of unemployment, underemployment, landlessness, and insecurity of land ownership. When landholdings are miniscule and when actual tillers in Bangladesh have to give up to one-half of their crop, according to some estimates, to absentee landlords, reliance on technology is not justifiable. Economists and other students of development in the Third World need to consider the basic structural inequalities and ways to ameliorate these instead of talking about GNP, per capita income, and mindless importation of technology.

The book is short on analysis of the economic and social systems of Bangladesh; but it provides a useful inventory of physical milieux and economic activities. It is larger in size but similar in concept to two other regional geographies of Bangladesh—those of Nafis Ahmad and B. L. C. Johnson.

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