



FIGURE 8B-1



## **REGIONS**

**Pakistan**

**India**

**Bangladesh**

**Mountainous North**

**Southern Islands**

### **IN THIS CHAPTER**

- ◆ Pakistan: A hard place to govern
  - ◆ Caste in modern India
  - ◆ India's new consumers
- ◆ Bangladesh: Survival in the double delta
  - ◆ Sri Lanka: Stability at last?

### **CONCEPTS, IDEAS, AND TERMS**

Communal tension	<b>1</b>
<i>Hindutva</i>	<b>2</b>
Caste system	<b>3</b>
Outsourcing	<b>4</b>
Informal sector	<b>5</b>
Double delta	<b>6</b>
Physiologic density	<b>7</b>
Non-governmental organization (NGO)	<b>8</b>
Micro-credit	<b>9</b>
Buffer state	<b>10</b>
Failed state	<b>11</b>
Global warming	<b>12</b>
Insurgent state	<b>13</b>



Developments in the South Asian realm, discussed in Chapter 8A, require analysis at multiple scales, Local, regional, and realmwide geographic issues, from gender to geopolitics and from refugees to religion, are closely tied to place, whether it is the Taliban in Pakistan, the Tibetans in Nepal, or the Tamils in Sri Lanka. From Kashmir to the Indian Ocean and from the textile factories of Bangladesh to the economic rise of India, this chapter provides a better understanding of the endless diversity of this realm, all in geographic context.

## REGIONS OF THE REALM

### REGIONS AND STATES

India, the cornerstone of South Asia, has a core area centered on the broad basin of the Ganges River, the historic heart of this realm (Fig. 8B-1). India is a region as well as a state, with key subregions based on cultural and other criteria to be discussed later in this chapter. To the west lies Islamic Pakistan, whose lifeline, the Indus River and its tributaries, creates a core area in the Punjab. The boundary between India and Pakistan originated with the partition of the former British Indian Empire, the tragic separation that occurred on the eve of independence in 1947 (see Chapter 8A).

In South Asia's east, the British had earlier drawn a border between (Hindu) Bengal and (dominantly Muslim) East Bengal, and that border became the boundary of what became known as East Pakistan, the political connection based on shared Islamic values. In 1971, however, East Pakistan severed its link with West Pakistan (which thereupon renamed itself Pakistan) and became independent Bangladesh.

As Figure 8B-1 shows, three separate entities make up the region defined as the Mountainous North. From east to west, these are the traditional kingdom of Bhutan, as isolated a country as the world has today; the troubled



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## MAJOR CITIES OF THE REALM

City	Population* (in millions)
Delhi–New Delhi, India	24.8
Mumbai (Bombay), India	20.8
Dhaka, Bangladesh	16.9
Karachi, Pakistan	15.1
Kolkata (Calcutta), India	15.0
Bengaluru (Bangalore), India	9.6
Chennai (Madras), India	9.6
Hyderabad, India	8.6
Lahore, Pakistan	8.2
Ahmadabad, India	7.1
Varanasi, India	1.5
Kathmandu, Nepal	1.1
Colombo, Sri Lanka	0.8

\*Based on 2014 estimates.

state of Nepal, where royal rule failed but the struggle to establish representative government continues; and, at the western end, the disputed territory of Kashmir, where the British boundary-making effort failed to resolve a complicated cultural and political situation, and where India and Pakistan have repeatedly clashed in armed conflict.

Finally, the region mapped as the Southern Islands consists of two very different countries: dominantly Buddhist Sri Lanka, where a quarter-century-long civil war ended in 2009; and the minstate Republic of the Maldives, whose official religion is Islam.

Physiographically, India mainly consists of plateau-and-basin country, but its neighbors to the north, Nepal and Bhutan, adhere to the southern slopes of the mighty Himalaya range and its rugged foothills. The waters of the Indian Ocean separate India from neighbors Sri Lanka and the Maldives in the south. And with Pakistan separated from its western and northern neighbors by the soaring ranges of the Hindu Kush and Karakoram, there are compelling geographic reasons for using the political framework to designate the regions of this realm. Culture and nature constitute formidable regionalizing factors here, even within India itself. The cultural forces that broke British India apart at the time of independence continue to exert enormous power in still-evolving South Asia.

## ■ PAKISTAN: ON SOUTH ASIA'S WESTERN FLANK

### Gift of the Indus

If, as is so often said, Egypt is the gift of the Nile, then Pakistan is the gift of the Indus. The Indus River and its principal tributary, the Sutlej, nourish the ribbons of life that form the heart of this populous country (Fig. 8B-2). Territorially, Pakistan is not large by Asian standards; its

area is about the same as that of Texas plus Louisiana. But Pakistan's population of 187.7 million makes it one of the world's ten most populous states. Among Muslim countries (its official name is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan), only Southeast Asia's Indonesia is larger.

Pakistan lies like a gigantic wedge between Iran and Afghanistan to the west and India to the east. Here in Pakistan lay South Asia's earliest urban civilizations, whose innovations radiated southeastward into the massive triangular peninsula. Here lies South Asia's Muslim frontier, contiguous to the great Islamic realm to the west and irrevocably linked to the enormous Muslim minority to its east.

Pakistan's cultural landscapes bear witness to its transitional location. Teeming, disorderly Karachi is the typical South Asian city; as in India, the largest urban center lies on the coast. Historic, architecturally Islamic Lahore is reminiscent of the scholarly centers of Muslim Southwest Asia. In Pakistan's east, the boundary of the 1947 partition divides a Punjab subregion that is otherwise continuous—a land of villages, wheatfields, and irrigation canals. In the northwest, Pakistan resembles Afghanistan in its huge migrant populations and its mountainous frontier. And in the far north, Pakistan and India are locked in a deadly and intractable conflict over Kashmir (discussed in Chapter 8A). A legacy of the time of partition, this territory is claimed by Pakistan because the majority of the inhabitants are Muslim, while India refuses to give up control because it claims that the Hindu minority would have no future inside Pakistan. This issue has plagued relations between the two countries for decades and is not likely to be resolved in the foreseeable future.

### A Hard Place to Govern

At independence (West) Pakistan had a bounded national territory, a capital, a cultural core, and a population—but few centripetal forces to bind state and nation. The disparate subregions of Pakistan shared the Islamic faith and an aversion for Hindu India, but little else. Karachi and the coastal south, the southwestern desert of Baluchistan, the city of Lahore and the Punjab, the rugged northwest along Afghanistan's border, and the mountainous far north remain worlds apart. Urdu is the official language, yet English remains the *lingua franca* of the elite. Several other major languages, however, prevail in different areas (see Fig. 8A-5), and ways of life vary enormously.

Successive Pakistani governments, civilian as well as military, turned to Islam to provide the common bond that history and geography had denied this nation. In the process, Pakistan became one of the world's most theocratic states. But even Islam itself is not unified in restive Pakistan. Almost 80 percent of the people are Sunni Muslims, and the Shia minority numbers approximately 20 percent. Sunni fanatics intermittently attack Shi'ites, leading to retaliation and establishing grounds for subsequent revenge.

To govern so diverse and fractious a country would challenge any system, and so far Pakistan has failed the test. Democratically elected governments have repeatedly



FIGURE 8B-2

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squandered their opportunities, only to be overthrown by military coups. Pakistan's recent economic boom has not filtered down to the poor; literacy rates are not rising; health conditions are not improving significantly; national institutions are weak (for instance, there are only about 2 million registered taxpayers in a country of over 180 million); and one consequence of the global antiterrorism campaign is that Pakistanis, who used to be overwhelmingly secular in their political choices, are now increasingly joining Islamic parties.

Meanwhile, too little is being done to confront a growing water-supply crisis, an insurgency festers in Baluchistan, the army is incapable of establishing control over mountainous Waziristan (where al-Qaeda and Taliban groups maintain hideouts), the issue of Kashmir costs Pakistan dearly, and relations with neighboring India (which if satisfactory would bring enormous benefits) remain conflicted.

Adding to Pakistan's woes, the second half of 2010 witnessed the worst floods in the country's history, a result of the wettest monsoon in decades. The Indus River, the lifeline that traverses the entire country from north to south, swelled beyond capacity, backed up many of its tributaries, and flooded fully one-quarter of the country. This disaster seemed to push Pakistan to the brink as the government, already facing so many major challenges, was not in a position to provide adequate relief. Asked if the crisis would threaten the current government, President Zardari commented that "I don't think anybody in their right mind would want to take over Pakistan right now." A hard country to govern indeed!

### Subregions of Pakistan

#### Punjab

Pakistan's core area is the Punjab (Fig. 8B-2), the Muslim heartland across which the post-independence boundary



ASIF HASSAN/AFP/Getty Images, Inc.

The floods that plagued Pakistan in the late summer and fall of 2010 occurred almost everywhere along the mighty Indus River, from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in the north to Sindh in the south. This photo, taken on October 30th, shows the extent of the flooded area around Jacobabad (located about 50 kilometers [30 miles] from the river's main channel on the wide Indus floodplain), near the border between Sindh and Baluchistan just north of Shikarpur (see Fig. 8B-2). From this medium-sized city alone, some 20,000 people were forced to flee for their lives. The massive flood also destroyed much of that year's harvest, further adding to Pakistan's mounting miseries.

between Pakistan and India was superimposed. (As a result, India also has a State named Punjab, sometimes spelled Panjab there.) Pakistan's Punjab is home to just over half of the country's population; in the triangle formed by the Indus River and its tributary, the Sutlej, live more than 100 million people. Punjabi is the language here, and wheat farming is the mainstay.

Three cities anchor this core area: Lahore, the outstanding center of Islamic culture in the realm; Faisalabad; and Multan. Lahore, now home to 8.2 million people, lies close to the India–Pakistan border. Founded around 2000 years ago, Lahore was situated favorably to become a great Muslim center during the Mughal period, when the Punjab was the main corridor into India. After partition in 1947, the city received hundreds of thousands of refugees and grew rapidly. Lahore did lose its eastern hinterland, but its new role in independent Pakistan sustained its growth. Punjab's relationship with Pakistan's other three provinces is one of the country's weak points. Both the governments and residents of those provinces feel uneasy about the dominance of Punjab, the populous, powerful core of the country from which most of the army is drawn.

### Sindh

The lower Indus River is the key to life in Sindh (Fig. 8B-2), but the Punjab controls the waters upstream, which is one of the issues dividing Pakistan. When the Punjab-dominated regime proposes to build dams across the Indus and its major tributaries, Sindhis (who make up almost one-fifth of the national population) are reminded of their

underrepresentation in government and talk of greater autonomy. Nationalist, anti-Pakistan rage swept Sindh following the 2007 assassination of Sindh's presidential candidate, Benazir Bhutto.

The ribbon of fertile, irrigated, alluvial land along the lower Indus, where the British laid out irrigation systems, makes Sindh a Pakistani breadbasket for wheat and rice. Commercially, cotton is king here, supplying textile factories in the cities and towns (textiles account for more than half of Pakistan's exports by value).

But the dominant presence in southern Sindh is the chaotic, crime-ridden megacity of Karachi, with its stock market, dangerous streets, crowded beaches, and poverty-stricken shantytowns, a place of searing contrasts under a broiling sun. Karachi grew explosively during and after partition in 1947, when refugee Muhajirs from across the new border with India streamed into this urban area, setting off riots and gang warfare whose aftermath still simmers. With little effective law enforcement, Karachi has become a hotbed of terrorist activity, but somehow the city still functions as Pakistan's (and Afghanistan's) major maritime outlet and the seat of Sindh's provincial government.

### Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

As Figure 8B-2 shows, this province lies wedged between the powerful Punjab to the east and troubled Afghanistan to the west, with the territory long known as the *Tribal Areas* intervening in the south. The name "Pakhtunkhwa" connotes "belonging to the Pushtuns," the Afghan-associated tribes that inhabit this subregion.

## AMONG THE REALM'S GREAT CITIES . . .

**LOCATED NEXT TO** the Indus Delta and on the Arabian Sea, Karachi is Pakistan's biggest city as well as its economic and financial center. In former days, it was the capital too, but that function was shifted far inland to Islamabad in the 1960s. Until independence in 1947, Karachi was a typical colonial port city, designed to serve British interests. This function can still be seen in the urban landscape: the city was organized around the port, and this is where you can still find the main railroad terminals. Raw materials and agricultural goods were brought in from the hinterland to be loaded onto ships headed for England's industrial complexes. The old city center lies just north of the port, and today's main business district is located just to the east of it.

Karachi has grown enormously over the years, from around 100,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century to about half a million in 1950 to 15.1 million today. This undoubtedly is Pakistan's "world city" because it dominates the country's linkages to the global economy (even more so than Mumbai does for India). Karachi is home to most of the foreign multinational firms, accounts for about three-quarters of international trade, and produces about 20 percent of Pakistan's GDP. It has the busiest airport and two seaports that together handle more than 90 percent of all transoceanic trade (the newer port of Qasim was built east of the metropolis in the 1970s). The city's economic importance is manifest in a major central business district (Saddar) with an imposing skyline.

But this is a city besieged with serious problems. Rampant and unplanned growth has resulted in congestion and pollution. Many people live in grinding poverty, and the contrast with the small but very wealthy urban elite is stark. Compared to most other cities in this realm, street crime is rampant. Karachi sits near the bottom in rankings of the

Why should there be a zone designated "Tribal Areas" in a country otherwise subdivided into provinces? The designation began during colonial times when the British assigned a special status to the obstinate Pushtun villages and their chiefs living in the remote hills and mountains along the Afghan border. The "Tribal Agencies" were the responsibility of an official "agent" who exercised control over the local chiefs through ample reward and harsh punishment—and little or no accountability. There were seven of them, some very small, several large enough to appear on a relatively small-scale map such as Figure 8B-2. North and South Waziristan were among the largest.

The Tribal Areas have had a certain degree of autonomy ever since British times, and the Pakistani government's reach into these parts is quite limited to this day. The province's mountainous physical geography reflects its remoteness and the isolation of many of its people.

## KARACHI

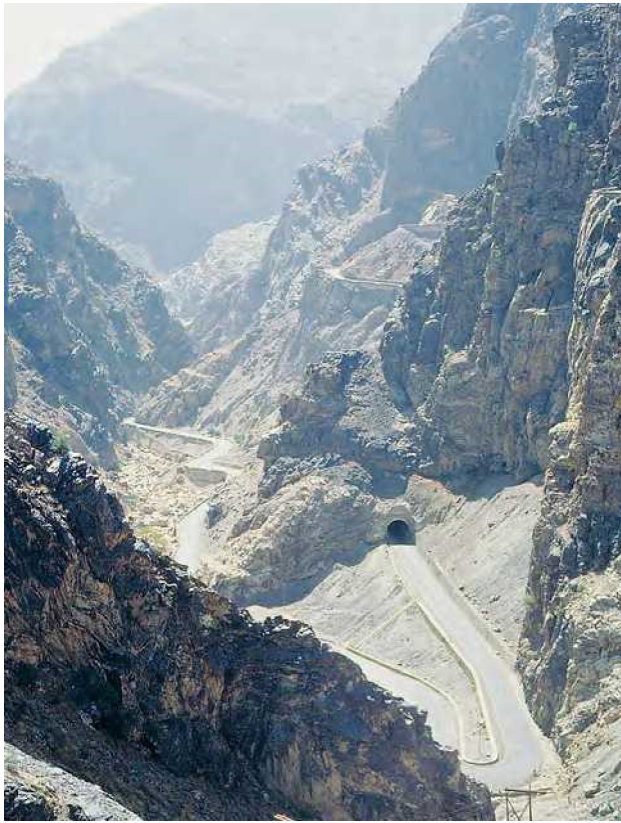


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world's "most liveable" cities. The great majority of its residents are first- or second-generation immigrants from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds (a large number of them originally hailing from northern India prior to the 1947 partition), and recent years have witnessed growing communal tension and violent conflict (more than 2500 people were killed in such violence during 2012 alone). In addition, the city is widely described as a nurturing ground for Islamic fundamentalists and increasingly serves as a base for Taliban leaders and followers. Karachi's image as Pakistan's most cosmopolitan center is being fatally threatened.

Mountain passes lead to Afghanistan; the Khyber Pass, already noted as the historic route of invaders, is legendary (see photo). Coming from Afghanistan, the Khyber's road leads directly to the provincial capital, Peshawar, which lies in a broad, alluvium-filled, fertile valley where wheat and corn drape the countryside.

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and later during the Taliban regime, several million Pushtun refugees streamed through the Khyber and other passes into refugee camps in this area. Following the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan in late 2001, the great majority of Pushtuns returned home. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains a conservative, deeply religious, militant province, where Islamic political parties and movements are proportionately stronger than in any other part of the country and where the obstruction of national policies (including antiterrorist operations) is a common goal.



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The Khyber Pass that links Afghanistan and Pakistan across the Hindu Kush. One of the most strategic passes in the world, it was no easy passage for invading armies in times past. Nowadays, the roads and tunnels facilitate the movement of refugees, drugs, and weapons, and they are used by militant separatist forces from both sides of the border. Pakistan's North West Frontier Province [now renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa], and especially the city of Peshawar, are hotbeds of these activities.

Pakistan's northwest frontier is critical to the U.S. war in Afghanistan as well as the wider campaign against Islamic terrorism, because it is extremely difficult to monitor the cross-border movements of Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. The area is a hotbed of terrorist activity and training camps. The United States constantly prods Pakistan to try to secure the province militarily, but it is not clear to what extent Pakistan is willing—or able—to comply.

### Baluchistan

As Figure 8B-2 indicates, Baluchistan is by far the biggest of Pakistan's four provinces, accounting for (not including Kashmir) nearly half of the national territory but inhabited only by an estimated 13.5 million people or barely seven percent of the country's population. For a sense of its terrain, take a look at Figure 8A-1; much of this vast territory is desert, with mostly barren mountains that wrest some moisture from the air only in the northeast. Sheep raising is the leading livelihood here, and wool the primary export. In its northern extremity, Baluchistan abuts the Tribal Areas and Afghanistan. The provincial capital,

Quetta, lies in this zone. This province, in fact, could easily be called the "South West Frontier Province."

Baluchistan is of considerable economic-geographic importance. Beneath its parched surface lie possibly substantial reserves of oil as well as coal, and already the province produces most of Pakistan's natural gas. The major new seaport of Gwadar on the southwestern coast not only handles raw materials from Baluchistan but is also a transshipment point for oil and gas from Iran and the Caspian Basin, destined for markets in East Asia (China was a major investor in the construction of this port).

But Baluchis are dissatisfied with the central government and complain that Pakistan is dominated by the Punjabis. Ninety percent of Baluchis have no energy supply and eight out of ten do not have access to clean water. For decades, short-lived local rebellions have signaled dissatisfaction with the government, but more recently the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) has instigated a more serious and durable insurgency. Since 2006, an estimated 600 Punjabi settlers in Baluchistan have been killed. And local Sunnis are also venting their frustration on 'immigrant' Shi'ite Muslims who originally hail from Central Asia. A bombing attack in early 2013 killed 86 Shi'ites in the city of Quetta, and the president of Pakistan flew in to express his sympathy to the victims' families. The regional problem of Baluchistan is compounded by the presence of Afghan Taliban leaders in their hideout in Quetta (Fig. 8B-2) and by the fact that the Baluchi population spills over the Pakistani border into Afghanistan and Iran. Hence, Pakistan's government must also be wary of irredentist support for the Baluchis from abroad.

### Pakistan's Prospects

Pakistan is a country of enormous cultural contrasts, where the modern and medieval exist side by side, where you hear residents of one province call those of another (but not themselves) "Pakistanis," and where a sense of nationhood is still elusive among many people whose loyalties to their family, clan, and village are stronger.

Pakistan has experienced so many cycles of progress and failure that confidence is in short supply. And yet, against all odds, there are areas of progress: a combination of expanded irrigation and Green Revolution farming techniques has, during the past decade, enabled Pakistan to export some rice (although wheat imports continue), and the country's manufacturing and services sectors have shown substantial growth. Exports include not only cotton-based textiles but also carpets, tapestries, and leather goods. Domestic manufacturing continues to be quite limited, but Pakistan does have its own steel mill near Karachi. Meanwhile, the authorities struggle to control Pakistan's growing production and trade in opium and hashish. Neighboring Afghanistan remains the world's dominant source of this illegal commerce, and the spillover effect continues; but Pakistan has many remote corners where poppy fields yield high returns and trade routes are well established. In this as



in so many other spheres, Pakistan displays the contradictory symptoms of a state in transition.

This western flank of South Asia is the realm's most critical region, today more so than ever before. Islamic Pakistan's coherence and stability have now become crucial at a time when the global struggle against terrorism is entangling its leaders with Western power and priorities. The role of Pakistan's government in this struggle is disputed and resented by many of its own people, who express their distaste by voting for militant Islamic parties and voicing support for the resurgent Taliban movement. Militancy and instability are no longer confined to the northwest or the far north: the cities of Lahore and Karachi have been targeted repeatedly in recent years by terrorists. The government blames the Taliban.

Islamic militants are far from a majority but their recourse to violence and the politics of intimidation are casting a deepening shadow across Pakistan. In 2011, the former governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, who had returned to his legal profession, was shot dead on a street in Islamabad—because he had spoken out against the country's pernicious blasphemy laws. He had done so in connection with the case against his client, a poor Christian woman whom a court had condemned to death for blasphemy (swearing). The killer, one of Mr. Taseer's own security guards, was later showered with rose petals by groups of lawyers (!) outside the courthouse in Islamabad. However, liberal critics in Pakistan were quick to voice their fears of a wholesale revival of religious intolerance across the country.

Geographically complex Pakistan confronts many difficult challenges, and it is easy to envision a number of ways in which the country could descend into disastrous turmoil. Pakistan's future hangs in the balance and with it the stability of South (as well as Southwest) Asia.

## ■ INDIA: GIANT OF THE REALM

If you have been reading the press and watching television over the past few years, you have seen the increasing attention being paid to India—not just in North America but around the world. Examples of news coverage include the purportedly growing “strategic partnership” between the United States and India, the outsourcing of American jobs to India, the rapid rise of a new Indian middle class, and the emergence of large Indian companies that are making their presence felt around the world. Undoubtedly, India is on the move—but will it really become the next economic superpower?

Certainly India has the dimensions to make the world take notice. Not only does it occupy three-quarters of the great land triangle of South Asia: India also is poised to overtake China to become the most populous country on Earth before the middle of this century. According to some estimates, India will possess the fourth-largest economy in the world by 2020 (after the United States, China, and Japan). Already, India is the world's biggest democracy, a federation of 28 States and several additional Territories with a population of nearly 1.3 billion.

That India has endured as a unified state is a politico-geographical miracle. The country contains a cultural mosaic of immense ethnic, religious, linguistic, and economic diversity and contrast; it is truly a state of many nations. Upon independence in 1947, India adopted a democratic, secular, federal system of government, giving regions and peoples some autonomy and identity, and allowing others to aspire to such status.

India's pluralist as well as democratic complexion cannot be fully understood without considering the huge influence of Mahatma Gandhi, the great spiritual and political leader who played a central role in the achievement of independence from the British. More than anyone else, he symbolized tolerance, reason, nonviolence, and perseverance—the basic principles upon which the Indian freedom struggle and the new state were founded. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's founding prime minister, also exerted enormous influence through his strong, unshakable beliefs in democracy and secular government. It is also worth noting that those beliefs and principles can be said to be firmly embedded in Hindu culture. After all, Hinduism is in some ways an extremely open, diverse, and introspective religion and way of life.

## Political Geography

### A Federation of States and Peoples

The map of India's political geography shows a federation of 28 States, 6 Union Territories (UTs), and 1 National Capital Territory (NCT) (Fig. 8B-3; Table 8B-1). The federal government retains direct authority over the UTs, all of which are small in both territory and population. The NCT, however, includes most of the Delhi/New Delhi urban region and now contains more than 17 million inhabitants.

This form of political spatial organization is mainly the product of India's restructuring following independence from Britain. Its State boundaries reflect the broad outlines of the country's cultural mosaic: insofar as possible, the system recognizes languages, religions, and cultural traditions. Indians speak 14 major and numerous minor languages, and while Hindi is the official language, it is by no means universal (see Fig. 8A-5). At the time of independence, Hindi was the most widely spoken native language, but it was the mother tongue for only about one-third of the population. It is telling that the famous Midnight Speech of Prime Minister Nehru at the moment of independence in 1947 was given in English—Hindi or any other language would have been very divisive and politically impossible. Thereafter, English swiftly became the new country's *lingua franca*.

As Figure 8B-3 shows, the territorially largest States lie in the heart of the country as well as on the massive southward-pointing peninsula. Uttar Pradesh (200 million, according to the 2011 census) and Bihar (104 million) together cover much of the Ganges Basin and also form the core area of modern India. Maharashtra (112 million), anchored by the great coastal city of Mumbai (known as Bombay before 1996), also has a population larger than



FIGURE 8B-3

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that of most countries. West Bengal, the State that adjoins Bangladesh, contains more than 91 million residents, 15 million of whom live in its urban focus, Kolkata (known as Calcutta before 2000).

These are staggering numbers, and they do not decline much toward the south. Southern India consists of four States linked by a discrete history and by their distinct Dravidian languages. Facing the Bay of Bengal are Andhra Pradesh (85 million) and Tamil Nadu (72 million), both part of the hinterland of the city of Chennai (formerly

Madras) and located on the coast near their joint border. Facing the Arabian Sea are Karnataka (61 million) and Kerala (33 million).

As Figure 8B-3 indicates, India's smaller States lie mainly in the northeast, on the far side of Bangladesh, and in the northwest, toward Jammu and Kashmir. North of Delhi, physical and cultural landscapes change from the flatlands of the Ganges to the hills and mountains of spurs of the Himalaya. In the State of Himachal Pradesh, forests blanket the hillslopes and high relief reduces living space;

TABLE 8B-1

## India: Population by State, 2011 (in millions)

State	Population
Andhra Pradesh	84.7
Arunachal Pradesh	1.4
Asom (Assam)	31.2
Bihar	103.8
Chhattisgarh*	25.6
Goa	1.5
Gujarat	60.4
Haryana	25.4
Himachal Pradesh	6.9
Jammu and Kashmir	12.6
Jharkhand*	33.0
Karnataka	61.1
Kerala	33.4
Madhya Pradesh	72.6
Maharashtra	112.4
Manipur	2.7
Meghalaya	3.0
Mizoram	1.1
Nagaland	2.0
Odisha	42.0
Punjab	27.7
Rajasthan	68.6
Sikkim	0.6
Tamil Nadu	72.1
Tripura	3.7
Uttar Pradesh	200.0
Uttarakhand*	10.1
West Bengal	91.3
National Capital Territory**	16.8
Union Territories	3.8

\* Established 2000

\*\* Established 1993

less than 7 million people live here, many in small, comparatively isolated clusters.

The map becomes even more complicated in the distant northeast, beyond the narrow corridor between Bhutan and Bangladesh. The dominant State here is Asom (Assam), home to just over 31 million, famed for its tea plantations and important because its petroleum and gas production amounts to more than 40 percent of India's total. In the Brahmaputra Valley, Asom resembles the India of the Ganges. But in almost all directions from Asom, things change.

North of Asom, in sparsely populated Arunachal Pradesh (1.4 million), we are in the Himalayan offshoots once again. To the east, in Nagaland (2.0 million), Manipur (2.7 million), and Mizoram (1.1 million), lie the forested and

terraced hills that separate India from Myanmar (Burma). This is an area of numerous ethnic groups (more than a dozen in Nagaland alone) and of frequent rebellion against Delhi's government. And to the south, the States of Meghalaya (3.0 million) and Tripura (3.7 million), hilly and still wooded, border the teeming floodplains of Bangladesh. Here in the country's northeast, where peoples are restive and where population growth still soars, India confronts one of its strongest regional challenges.

### India's Ever-Changing Map

In view of the country's enormous diversity and its federal democratic structure, it should not surprise us that India's political map is the product of endless compromise. The newly devised framework in 1947, based on the major regional languages, proved to be unsatisfactory to many communities in India. In the first place, many more languages are in use than the 14 that had been officially recognized. Demands for additional States soon arose. As early as 1960, the State of Bombay was divided into two language-based States, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Later, in 1966, Hindu-dominated Haryana was carved out of Punjab to give Sikhs (and Punjabi speakers) more self-control.

As noted above, India's northeast harbors numerous ethnic groups in a highly varied, forest-clad topography. The Naga, a cluster of peoples whose domain had been incorporated into Asom State, rebelled soon after India's independence. A protracted war brought federal troops into the area; after a truce and lengthy negotiations, Nagaland was proclaimed a State in 1961. That paved the way for other politico-geographical changes in India's problematic northeastern wing. In the State of Manipur, separatist groups continue to challenge Indian authority after more than three decades of conflict (few tourists ever come to this remote outpost on the doorstep of Myanmar, over 1600 kilometers [1000 mi] from New Delhi).

Devolutionary pressures have continued throughout India's existence as an independent country. In some of the cases, the federal government and the military come down hard on the insurgents, but in other cases the government is more inclined to negotiate. In 2000, for instance, three more new States were recognized: Jharkhand, carved out of southern Bihar State on behalf of 18 poverty-stricken districts there; Chhattisgarh, where tribal peoples had been agitating since the 1930s for separation from the State of Madhya Pradesh; and Uttarakhand (originally named Uttaranchal), which split from India's most populous Ganges Basin, core-area State of Uttar Pradesh on the basis of its highland character and lifeways (Fig. 8B-3).

At the time of writing, India's central government is in protracted negotiations about carving a new State of Telangana out of the northwestern sector of Andhra Pradesh. Telangana is an inland area that sees itself as marginalized by coastal elites. The proposed State would contain more than 35 million people, cover approximately one-third of Andhra Pradesh, and its capital would be Hyderabad—one of India's leading technopoles and its sixth-largest city. Other demands for independent Statehood persist, particularly

the proposal to subdivide almost unmanageable Uttar Pradesh (2011 population: 200 million) into four new States.

During the past several years, there have been troubling signs of yet another challenge to India's federal government: communist- (avowedly Maoist-) inspired rebellions that seem to be transforming into a coordinated revolutionary campaign. It is known in India as the *Naxalite* movement, named after a village in the State of West Bengal where it was founded in the 1960s. Mainly active in India's poorest and most disaffected States—such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and Andhra Pradesh—the Naxalites appeal to the poor and other minorities (especially tribal people), whose plight is blamed on India's elites and neo-liberal economic policies. According to Indian observers, they remain active in one-third of India's more than 600 districts (the administrative unit below the State) and maintain a violent presence in about 90 districts (Fig. 8B-4). They blow up railroad tracks, attack police stations, and intimidate villagers (see photo). Stability is key to India's economic prospects, and this is what the Naxalites try to undermine. The Indian government has declared the Naxalites to be the country's greatest internal security threat and has embarked on a major counteroffensive. This appears to

have had some success: the 2010 death toll associated with Naxalite violence surpassed 1100, but in 2011-2012 it fell to about half that number.

### Communal Tensions

The term **communal tension** [1] (communal disharmony) refers to the several different categories of conflicts that recur among India's highly diverse sociocultural groups. Most commonly, these conflicts have a base in (politicized) religion, but they can also be caste-based (castes will be discussed shortly).

### The Sikhs

The Sikhs (the word means “disciples”) adhere to a religion that was created about five centuries ago to unite warring Hindus and Muslims into a single faith. They rejected what they considered to be the negative aspects of Hinduism and Islam, and Sikhism gained millions of followers in the Punjab and surrounding areas. During the colonial period, many Sikhs supported the British administration of India, and by doing so they won the respect and trust of the colonialists, who employed tens of thousands of Sikhs as soldiers and police officers. By 1947, there was a large Sikh middle class in the Punjab. Today they still exert a strong influence

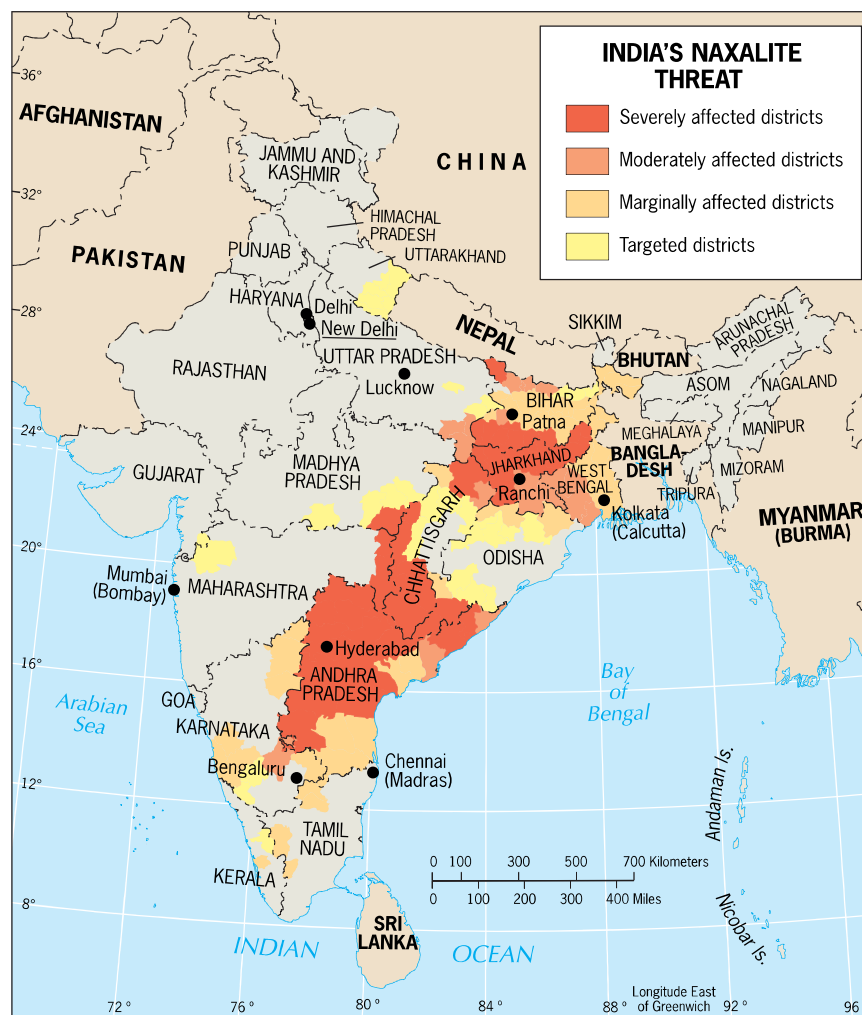


FIGURE 8B-4

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AP/Wide World Photos

Although the Maoist Naxalite rebels denied involvement, Indian authorities blamed their leadership for planning and executing the carefully timed destruction of two trains in May 2010, their most audacious terrorist attack through mid-2013. In this dramatic photo, the cars of the rust-colored train, struck by an explosion on the track about 150 kilometers (90 mi) west of Kolkata on the way to Mumbai, lie crushed against those of the oncoming blue train, which could not stop to avert even greater carnage. More than 150 passengers were killed and many more injured. The State of West Bengal, where this tragedy occurred, is a hotbed of Naxalite antigovernment activity.

over Indian affairs, far in excess of the approximately 2 percent of the population (about 25 million) they constitute.

For a period after India's independence, the Sikhs created India's most serious separatist problem, demanding the formation of an independent state they wanted to call *Khalistan*. The government sought to defuse the situation in 1966 by dividing the original State of Punjab into a Sikh-dominated northwest—which would retain the name Punjab—and a Hindu-dominated southeast (Haryana; see Fig. 8B-3). But the conflict intensified again in the 1970s when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a “national emergency” and imposed strong centralized rule across the federation. Tensions culminated in an attack by federal military forces on Sikh rebels holed up in the Golden Temple in the city of Amritsar, Sikhdom's holiest site (see chapter-opening photo). In the wake of this attack, Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards in 1984 and more violence followed. Since the 1980s, both sides have worked to gain better understanding.

### The Muslims

When India became a sovereign state and the massive population shifts across its borders had ended, the country was left with a Muslim minority of about 35 million widely dispersed throughout the country. By 1991, that minority had grown to nearly 100 million, representing 11.7 percent of the total population. The current Muslim population is es-

timated to exceed 200 million (roughly 15.4 percent), and it continues to grow faster than the overall Indian population. Muslims are in the majority in Jammu and Kashmir, Asom, and West Bengal, while their largest absolute numbers are in the big States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra. To India's great geographic advantage, the Muslim minority is not regionally concentrated, avoiding what otherwise could lead to a dangerous secessionist movement.

The position of Muslims in Indian society is not easy to separate from India's relations with Pakistan, from the issue of Kashmir, and from acts of Islamic terrorism that have bedeviled India in recent years (particularly the attacks on Parliament in 2001 and Mumbai's upscale hotels in 2008). At present, India

holds the unenviable distinction of being the most frequently targeted country in the world for terrorist acts. As a result, relations between Muslims and Hindus are deteriorating. Concern over linkages between foreign (read Pakistani) terrorists and local Muslim subversives is changing Hindu attitudes and tactics, a topic elaborated in the next section.

The most serious threat to Muslim integration into Indian society arises from their comparatively low level of education and inferior economic standing. Official statistics show that less than 4 percent of Muslims nationwide have completed secondary school. And according to one recent government report, Muslims in general have now become as poor as the members of India's lowest-ranked Hindu castes.

### Hindutva

Hindu extremism or fundamentalism may seem like a contradiction in terms, but a movement has come to the fore in recent decades that seeks to remake India as a society in which Hindu principles prevail. *Hindutva* [2], or Hindu-ness, is variously expressed as Hindu nationalism, Hindu heritage, or Hindu patriotism. It has been the guiding agenda for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a powerful force in national politics and in big States like Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh. *Hindutva* fanatics want to impose a Hindu curriculum on schools, change the flexible family law in ways that would make it unacceptable to Muslims, inhibit the activities of non-Hindu religious proselytizers, and forge an India in which non-Hindus are essentially outsiders.

This naturally worries Muslims as well as other minorities, but it also concerns those who understand that India's secularism—its separation of religion and state—is indispensable to the survival of democracy. Moderate Hindus and non-Hindus in India oppose such notions, which are as divisive as any India has faced. It is easy to see how Hindu hardliners and Islamic revivalists can fuel each other's agendas and maintain a vicious cycle of conflict. Recent State and national elections have seen a decline in the fortunes of the BJP and, more importantly, an internal



## From the Field Notes . . .



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“It is a Friday afternoon as we make our way through a main thoroughfare in one of Mumbai’s biggest slums. Dharavi ‘houses’ approximately half a million people on less than 2 square kilometers! About 20 percent are Muslims and the overwhelming majority of all others are dalits. Increasingly, the Muslims live spatially segregated in their own tightly knit neighborhoods. There are several mosques but little space inside them. So the men, taking a break from work nearby, place their mats alongside the road and prepare for prayer outdoors. Having a faith is important to people living and working in Dharavi’s filthy and impoverished environs, especially for the Muslim minority.”

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party struggle between moderates and *Hindutva* hardliners in which the moderates have seemed to prevail. Overall, Indian voters have not rushed to embrace this radicalization of Hinduism, a confirmation of the continuing robustness and vitality of India’s democracy.

### The Persistence of Caste

Hinduism’s benign and admirable properties combine with a system of social stratification that is generally derided in the West (and by a large number of Indians as well). Under Hindu dogma, *castes* are fixed layers in society whose ranks



## From the Field Notes . . .



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“Varanasi, on the banks of the holy Ganges River. I was able to get up close to the Hindu priests performing the *aarti* (fire) ritual, just after sunset. The ritual follows ancient conventions and choreography, drawing thousands of devotees and spectators. Varanasi is India’s holiest city, said to have been created by the god Shiva. Archeological evidence indicates that Varanasi (also known as Benares) has existed for more than 3000 years, making it one of the oldest living cities in the world. Consider this: for more than three millennia, every day of every year, Hindus have descended the stepped banks of the holy Ganges River here to pray and worship, to find solace, to wash away their sins and purify their souls, and to cremate their dead. Daily life on the banks of the Ganges is a moving spectacle, for Hindus and non-Hindus alike.”

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are based on ancestries, family ties, and occupations. The **caste system** [3] has its origins in the early social divisions into priests and warriors, merchants and farmers, and it is also thought to have had a racial basis (the Sanskrit term for caste, *varna*, means color). More specifically, caste became associated with specific professions and, over the centuries, its complexity increased until India had thousands of castes, some of them with a few hundred members and others containing millions.

Hindus believe in reincarnation, and a person is thought to be born into a particular caste based on his or her actions in a previous existence. Hence it would not be appropriate to counter such ordained caste assignments by permitting movement (or even contact) from a lower caste to a higher one. Persons of a particular caste could perform only certain jobs, wear only certain clothes, and worship only in prescribed ways at particular places. They or their children could not eat, play, or even walk with people of a higher social status.

The *untouchables* occupying the lowest tier of all were the most debased, wretched members of this rigidly structured social system. Indeed, the term “untouchable” acquired such negative connotations that it was replaced several times. Mahatma Gandhi, a powerful critic of the system, introduced the term *harijans*, meaning children of God. But more recently this label was thought to have a condescending connotation, and it gave way to the term ***dalits*** (the oppressed), indicating a greater sense of awareness and assertiveness among them.

In the isolated villages deep in the countryside, dalits still suffer from severe discrimination and harsh treatment by higher castes. Children often are made to sit on the floor of their classroom (if they go to school at all); dalits are not allowed to draw water from the village well because they might pollute it; they must take off their shoes, if they own any, when they pass higher-caste houses; and they cannot take jobs in professions other than the one they were born into (sweeping, cleaning, and the like).

Today, dalits are estimated to constitute more than 15 percent of all Hindus while Brahmins, the highest caste, account for a comparable share. The rest of the population occupies a wide range of in-between castes. The Indian government officially abolished castes at independence, but the system has proven difficult to dismantle. Many dalits have chosen to convert to other religions, most notably Buddhism. It is estimated that nearly 90 percent of Buddhists in India were originally dalits, but it seems that even after converting they do not lose this stigma.

Successive Indian governments have now introduced an elaborate system of affirmative action on behalf of *Scheduled Castes* (the official government label for dalits). This effort has had more effect in urban than in rural areas of India. In any case, dalits now have reserved for them places in the schools, a fixed percentage of State and federal government jobs, and a quota of seats in national and State legislatures. These jobs are often highly desirable

because they tend to be white-collar and much better paid than those generally available to dalits.

Because of the huge number of minorities in India, affirmative action schemes have become increasingly complicated over time and are at the heart of seemingly never-ending debates. In addition to the existing quota of 15 percent of federal jobs for dalits, the central government is considering whether it should reserve public-sector jobs for Muslims and other religious minorities such as Sikhs. In another proposal now under discussion, one-third of all Parliament seats would go to women. This was protested by some Muslim organizations that feared there would not be enough eligible Muslim women, and they subsequently demanded a sub-quota for them. In the world’s largest and most diverse democracy, politics can be a highly complicated affair!

Just how far India’s political pendulum can swing was shown in the 2007 provincial legislative elections in Uttar Pradesh State, where a dalit party won an absolute majority and where a woman named Mayawati Kumari was the first dalit to become a chief minister of one of India’s major States. It was a stunning victory that made headlines throughout the country and shook up the political establishment, revealing the growing power of the lowest castes and marking a turning point for India’s representative government. But most lower-caste Indians are still faced with very limited opportunities, widespread discrimination, and abject poverty. In traditional India, caste provided stability and continuity; in contemporary India, it constitutes an often painful and difficult legacy.

### Economic Geography

The most commonly cited, and most clearly evident, regional division of India is between north and south. The north is India’s heartland, the south its Dravidian appendage; the north speaks Hindi as its *lingua franca*, the south prefers English over Hindi; the north is bustling and testy, life in the south seems more measured and less agitated.

### East and West

But there is another, as yet less obvious, but potentially more significant divide across India. In Figure 8B-5 draw a line from Lucknow, on the Ganges River, south to Chennai, near the northern tip of Tamil Nadu State (see Fig. 8B-1). To the west of this line, India is showing signs of economic progress, the kind of productive activity that has brought Pacific Rim countries such as Thailand and Indonesia a new life. To the east, India has more in common with the less-promising countries that also face the Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma). The manufacturing map may seem to suggest that much of India’s industrial strength lies near Kolkata, but the heavy industries built here by the state in the 1950s are now outdated, uncompetitive, and in steady decline. The State of Bihar represents the stagnation that afflicts much of India east of our line: by several measures it ranks among the poorest of the 28 States.

Compare this to western India. The State of Maharashtra, the hinterland of Mumbai, leads India in many



FIGURE 8B-5

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categories, and Mumbai leads Maharashtra. Many smaller, private industries have taken root here, manufacturing goods that range from umbrellas to satellite dishes and from toys to textiles. Across the Arabian Sea lie the oil-rich economies of the Persian Gulf countries. Hundreds of thousands of workers from western India have found jobs there, sending remittances back to families from Punjab to Kerala. More importantly, many have used their foreign incomes to establish service industries back home. Outward-looking western India, in sharp contrast to the inward-looking east, has begun to establish additional ties to the outside world. Satellite and fiber-optic cable links have propelled Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore) to become the center of a burgeoning software-producing complex that reaches world markets. Maharashtra's economic success has also spilled over into Gujarat, its northern neighbor, and even landlocked Rajasthan (the next State to the north beyond Gujarat) is experiencing the beginnings of what, by Indian standards, is a boom.

### Life Is in the Harvest

Agriculture provides more jobs in India than any other employment sector, and India's fortunes (and misfortunes) remain strongly tied to farming. Fully two-thirds of the population still lives on (and from) the land, spread in and

around the country's hundreds of thousands of villages. There, traditional farming methods persist, yields per unit area remain among the world's lowest, and hunger and malnutrition still afflict millions even as grain surpluses accrue. The relatively few areas of modernization, as in the wheatlands of the Punjab, are islands in a sea of stagnation. Land reform has essentially failed; roughly one-quarter of India's entire cultivated area, including much of the best land, is still owned by less than 5 percent of the country's landholders, who have great political influence and obstruct redistribution. Perhaps half of all rural families own less than 1 hectare (2.5 acres) or no land at all; and an estimated 135 million live and work as tenants, always uncertain of their fate.

As everywhere, agriculture depends very strongly on physiography and climate, and agricultural fortunes vary significantly across the country. In India, the monsoon is absolutely critical, its abundance and timing a reliable predictor of the harvest. Figure 8B-6 displays India's agricultural geography and the map reflects the rainfall patterns and monsoonal cycle depicted in Figure 8A-3. Rice dominates all along the Arabian Sea-facing southwestern coast (on the rainy side of the Western Ghats) and in the monsoon-drenched peninsular northeast; where drier conditions develop, wheat and other grains prevail.



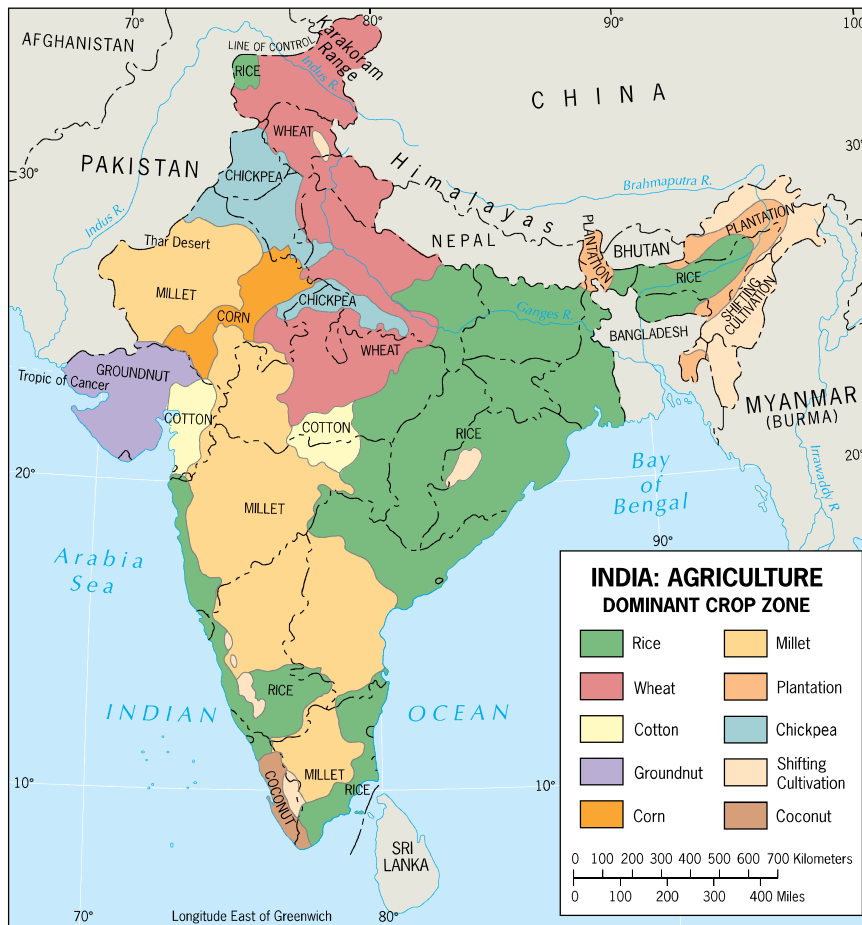


FIGURE 8B-6

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## From the Field Notes . . .



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“In late 2012, I visited a small village in Rajasthan, a couple of hours away from the city of Jodhpur. A farmer took me to the small plot where he grows wheat, then showed me his home, made of mud with a roof of wood and straw. In this semiarid environment, people eat mainly wheat and other hardy grains, and far less rice. The farmer’s wife and their children sit around the fire making thin round breads called *chapati*. The hospitality of these Rajasthanis is matched by the colorfulness of their dress.”

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Even though the country produces an ample variety of crops, yields are often too low as a result of inefficient land ownership and small farmers' lack of access to inputs such as fertilizer, irrigation equipment, and machinery. If there is any to sell, getting produce to market is yet another struggle for millions of farmers. In 2010, almost half of India's 600,000-plus villages could not be accessed by truck let alone automobile, and in this era of modern

transportation animal-drawn carts still far outnumber motor vehicles nationwide.

### Manufacturing and Information Technology

India's industrial sectors have significantly improved over the past two decades, but the pace of change is still too slow to meet the country's needs. The map of manufacturing geography (Fig. 8B-5) is a legacy of colonial times, with

## AMONG THE REALM'S GREAT CITIES . . .

**IN SOME WAYS**, Mumbai is a microcosm of India, a burgeoning, crowded, chaotic, fast-moving agglomeration of humanity. Shrines, mosques, temples, and churches evince the pervasive power of religion in this multicultural society. Street signs come in a bewildering variety of scripts and alphabets. The Victorian-Gothic architecture of the city center is a legacy of the British colonial period (see photo in Chapter 8A). Creaking double-decker buses compete with ox-wagons and handcarts on the congested roadways. The throngs on the sidewalks—businesspeople, holy men, sari-clad women, beggars, clerks, homeless wanderers—spill over into the streets.

In precolonial times, fishing folk living on the seven small islands at the entrance to this harbor named the place after their local Hindu goddess, Mumbai Devi. The Portuguese, first to colonize it, called it Bom Bahia, "Beautiful Bay." The British, who came next, corrupted both names to form *Bombay*, and so it remained for more than three centuries. In 1996, the government of the State of Maharashtra, with support from the federal authorities, changed the city's name back to Mumbai.

With 20.8 million people spread across the metropolis, this is India's second-largest urban region. Think of Mumbai as a combination of New York and Los Angeles—India-style. This is the country's commercial and financial center with most of the banks, the leading stock exchange, and most foreign multinationals. And it is also India's most glamorous city, owing in no small part to the presence of Bollywood, center of the Hindi film industry that produces more motion pictures (for more viewers) than anywhere else on Earth.

The 2009 movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, a box office hit around the world, focused on the darker side of this megacity, the approximately 8 million slum dwellers who struggle to make a living alongside the movie stars and the burgeoning middle classes. In part because its peninsular geography imposes strict limits, Mumbai is an extremely crowded city; its overall density is about seven times that of major U.S. central cities, and its slums exhibit much higher densities than that. Anyone visiting the city is bound to be overwhelmed by the sheer scale of its poverty, which stands in sharp contrast to the lavish, hugely expensive homes of the rich.

Mumbai is very much a product of colonial times. During the Industrial Revolution, England needed raw materials at low prices and India was a leading supplier, especially of

## MUMBAI (BOMBAY)



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cotton. Much of the raw cotton was processed in the textile mills of Bombay and then shipped to London, Manchester, or Liverpool to be converted into finished products. From the 1860s on, Bombay became one of the most important colonial cities and a vital node in the far-flung British Empire. The imprint of that era is still visible in the architecture of the Fort District in the far south, the port, the railways, and the textile mills lining the rail corridors farther north.

Today not much is left of the textile industry in the urban economy. Instead, Mumbai has become the country's most important world-city with its growing sectors of finance and producer services that include accounting, advertising, and consulting.

coastal Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai anchoring major industrial zones, and textiles—the entry-level industry of disadvantaged countries—dominating the manufacturing scene. Other industries, such as steel, machinery, and building materials, have become much stronger, and some of the companies involved have even become major global players. For example, Mittal Steel (now officially called ArcelorMittal) and Tata Steel rank among the dozen largest steel producers in the world.

These changes were made possible through major policy changes during the 1990s, when India liberalized its economy following four decades of stifling overregulation and inefficiency. Along with many other developing countries, India embraced neoliberalism: trade barriers came down, state companies were privatized, and foreign investment was encouraged. Although it is not yet clear what the impact will be on India's massive working class, there is no doubt that many companies became far more competitive and profitable. This, in turn, increased the government's tax revenues, allowing it to invest in, among other things, badly needed infrastructural projects. Since 2000, India's economy has grown faster than ever before, with much of the growth emanating from its information technology sector.

India's information-technology (IT) industries, clustered in metropolitan Bengaluru (Bangalore), Hyderabad, Mumbai, and New Delhi, draw much international attention, in part because of the large-scale **outsourcing** [4] of U.S. jobs to India. Leading Indian software companies

such as Infosys, Wipro, and Cognizant are now household names all across urban India. The growth of software and IT services has been spectacular and now accounts for about 8 percent of GDP and no less than one-quarter of merchandise exports. But this sector employs only around 2 percent of the workforce, with about ten times as many people holding government jobs.

What India needs far more, in terms of employment growth, are manufacturing industries competitively selling goods on world markets, putting tens of millions to work, and transforming the economy. Clearly, India is very different from China. The two may have comparably-sized populations, but the Chinese economy employs 12 times as many workers in manufacturing and it has a much larger urban middle class. India, on the other hand, has shown spectacular growth; but too much of it is confined to IT and benefits only a small, highly educated urban elite.

### Urbanization

India is well known for its enormous and teeming cities, but the country is not yet an urbanized society. Only about 31 percent of the population currently lives in cities and towns—compared to an average of roughly 80 percent across the developed world. But whereas rural-to-urban migration has long stabilized at a low level in the West, the rate of urbanization in India is much higher. People by the hundreds of thousands are arriving in the already overcrowded cities, swelling urban India by about



## From the Field Notes . . .

"With the help of a real estate agent, I toured some of the new residential developments in India's biggest city, Mumbai. The new urban middle class wants better and more spacious hous-



ing, but given the lack of space in the city it has to be a high-rise far away from the center. From a new construction site I looked out onto the northeastern edge of the city, marked

by an already completed condominium complex. These homes are of a much better quality than the average dwelling in Mumbai, containing most of the luxuries taken for granted in the United States. Two-bedroom apartments sell for about U.S. \$75,000 and up—a huge sum of money even for India's upwardly-mobile, affluent classes and totally beyond reach for the city's masses. Half of Mumbai's 21 million residents live in sub-standard housing, and many in the kind of slums you see in the foreground, nestled up against the coveted middle-class residences. As the new middle class takes off, the contrasts are getting sharper."

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3 percent annually—twice as fast as the country’s overall population growth. Not only do the cities attract as they do everywhere, but many villagers are also driven off the land by desperate conditions in the countryside. As these migrants manage to establish themselves in Mumbai or Kolkata or Chennai, they help their relatives and friends to join them in squatter settlements that often are populated by newcomers from the same locality, bringing their language and customs with them and cushioning the stress of relocation.

As a result, India’s cities display staggering social contrasts. Squatter shacks without any amenities crowd cheek-by-jowl against the walls of modern high-rise apartment buildings and condominiums (see photo). Hundreds of thousands of homeless people roam the streets and sleep in parks, under bridges, and even on sidewalks. As crowding intensifies, social stresses multiply.

Figure 8B-3 displays the distribution of major urban centers in India. Except for Delhi–New Delhi (24.8 million), the biggest cities have coastal locations: Kolkata (15.0 million) dominates the east, Mumbai (20.8 million) the west, and Chennai (9.6 million) the south. The overriding influence of these coastal cities is a colonial legacy. But urbanization also has expanded in the interior, notably within the core area. In 2014, even though only 31 percent of its citizens were urbanites, India had more than 50 metropolitan areas containing populations of at least one million.

When you arrive in any Indian city, you are struck by the abundance of small shops everywhere—tiny businesses wedged into every available space in virtually every nonpublic building along every street. Even the upper, walk-up floors are occupied by shops, their advertising signs suspended from windows and balconies. According to a study by the Indian government’s Department of Consumer Affairs, India has the highest density

of retail outlets of any country in the world: a total in excess of 15 million shops (compared to well below 1 million in the United States, where the marketplace is 13 times richer). After farming, the retail sector is India’s largest provider of jobs.

What keeps all these small stores in business? Most of them earn very little and can afford to stay open only because they are part of what economic geographers call the **informal sector** [5]—they are essentially unregistered, pay no rent and probably no taxes, utilize family labor, have been handed down through generations, and keep going because India’s economic geography, bound by longstanding protective government regulation, has been slow to change. When you are in India you may wonder how so many shops can survive, but the answer is in the throngs of people on the sidewalks (spilling over into the clogged traffic in the streets). Not many of these people are well off, but all of them need basic goods and some can afford small luxuries, and so the shops tend to be busy all day.

This bustling retail scene notwithstanding, the newest statistics confirm that change is under way, especially in the cities. India’s middle class, now estimated to include over 300 million people (equal to the entire U.S. population), is expanding rapidly, and something quite new is beginning to appear in the urban landscape: shopping malls (see photo below). As recently as 2000, this vast country containing more than one-sixth of humankind did not have a single shopping center. But only five years later the 100th had opened its doors, and today more than 1300 are in operation. You will see American fast-food restaurants among the establishments in these malls as well as the brand names of numerous other foreign companies, proving that globalization has already breached India’s walls.



## *From the Field Notes . . .*



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“As I set foot into this spacious (and partially air-conditioned) mall from the steamy and crowded Andheri Link Road in Mumbai, I thought of the implications—is this the future in a land of small family-owned shops where ‘retail’ has a different and historic meaning? Infinity Mall, an upscale shopping center opened in 2005 in suburban Mumbai, caters to the megacity’s new middle class. My Indian friend Pankaj thought it was all for the better. ‘On the weekends my wife and I often come here. There is a nice food court and the shopping is great. These are the things you Americans want and these are the things we Indians want.’ Malls are now springing up across India’s major cities, transforming urban landscapes as well as consumer behavior.”

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## AMONG THE REALM'S GREAT CITIES . . .

## KOLKATA (CALCUTTA)

**THE NAME “CALCUTTA”** seems to invoke all that can go wrong in large cities: poverty, disease, pollution, congestion, and lack of planning. The city was renamed Kolkata in 2001, one in a series of cities in India whose names were “decolonized” and returned to vernacular pronunciation. But that may have done little to change its reputation. It wasn't always so.

Calcutta's heyday began in 1772 when the British made it their colonial capital. The British chose the site, 130 kilometers (80 mi) up the Hooghly River from the Bay of Bengal and less than 9 meters (30 ft) above sea level, not far from some unhealthy marshes but well placed for commerce and defense as well as accessibility to the famous tea plantations in the northeast. When the British East India Company was granted freedom of trade in this populous hinterland, the British sector of the city was drained and raised, and so much wealth accumulated here that Calcutta became known as the “city of palaces.” Outside the British town, rich Indian merchants built magnificent mansions.

But even in those times the city knew incredible poverty and deprivation. Beyond the “palaces” lay neighborhoods that were often based on occupational caste, whose names are still on the map today (such as Kumartuli, the potters' district). Almost everywhere, on both banks of the Hooghly, lay the huts and hovels of the poorest of the poor. Searing social contrasts characterized Calcutta and the city was notorious for its lack of hygiene and frequency of epidemics.

The twentieth century was not kind to Calcutta. In 1912, the British moved their colonial capital to New Delhi. The 1947 partition that created Pakistan also created then-East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), cutting off a large part of Calcutta's hinterland and burdening the city with a flood of refugees. The Indian part of the city had arisen virtually without any urban planning, and the influx created almost unimaginable conditions.

Kolkata today counts 15.0 million residents, and the city is in some ways left behind in India's modernization. It was surpassed by Bombay (now Mumbai) in the industrial



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era, and the current information age belongs to Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore) and Hyderabad. But despite its poverty and urban problems, Kolkata still has a reputation as India's true cultural capital, home of the poet Rabindranath Tagore (who in 1913 became the first non-European Nobel laureate), the well-known 1950s art-film maker Satyajit Ray, and the late great musician Ravi Shankar (legendary maestro of the stringed instrument known as the sitar).

The Indian government forced another breakthrough reform in late 2011: foreign supermarkets such as Walmart were for the first time permitted to enter India, albeit under strict limitations, such as mandatory joint ventures and with access limited to cities of more than one million population. But this move provoked major protests across the country where it is (rightly) perceived as a direct threat to the myriad small-scale, mom-and-pop stores. Yet most economists argue this incursion is for the best because the big chains will bring greater efficiency and lower prices.

Nonetheless, if 300-plus million middle-class Indians can afford to visit a mall, more than 900 million Indians cannot—and the gap widens by the day. Can India's ongoing economic transformation be accomplished without severe social dislocation?

### Infrastructural Challenges

India is now in the midst of realizing an unprecedented series of infrastructural projects, ranging from super-highways to state-of-the-art airports. One of these mega-projects is the construction of a nationwide four-lane

superhighway—the Golden Quadrilateral—linking the four anchors of the urban system (Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata), and in the process connecting 15 other major cities along this all-important route (Fig. 8B-3). The impacts of this project are multiple: it is expanding urban hinterlands; commuters are using it to travel farther to work than ever before; several once-remote rural areas now have a link to markets; and it is accelerating the rural-to-urban migration flow that will continue to transform India in the decades ahead.

Improving India's infrastructure, however, is hardly enough to overcome all of the serious impediments to the country's economic advancement. Take another look at Figure 8B-3 and note that the Golden Quadrilateral crosses a number of State boundaries. In the United States, we are used to seeing thousands of trucks on the interstate highways, crossing from one State into another without slowing down; there are truck-weighing stations along these expressways, but in the newest ones all the truck has to do is slow down enough for electronic surveillance to record its passing.

In India, truck drivers face a very different experience. It can take as long as nine days, including more than 30 hours waiting at State-border checkpoints and toll-booths, for a loaded truck to travel from Kolkata to Mumbai via Chennai, or less than the distance from Los Angeles to New Orleans on Interstate-10. Drivers are subject to daunting piles of paperwork as well as incessant demands for bribes, and when mechanical problems occur it may take days to get a truck back on the road. It will take more than expanding India's highway network to improve the overall circulation the country so desperately needs.

### The Energy Problem

If you have a friend in (or from) India, you know someone who is familiar with power outages. They are a way of life in India, where electricity demand routinely exceeds the available supply, where governments cannot bring themselves to require customers to pay for the actual cost of the power they consume, and where power grids, generating equipment, and other associated infrastructure are in bad shape. On top of all this, keep in mind that hundreds of millions of villagers still have no electrical supply at all.

And yet electrical power is crucial to India's modernization. Already, some foreign companies doing business in India are importing their own generators, and others are discouraged from investing in factories and other facilities because the power supply is so unreliable. Most of India's electricity is generated in thermal plants burning coal, oil, or natural gas; about 20 percent comes from hydroelectric sources, and about 2 percent from nuclear plants. The problems are many: India has substantial coal deposits, but the railroads cannot handle the transport to power plants. So India must import coal, but the ports do not have the required capacity. And India possesses only

limited oil and natural gas reserves. Add to this an increasingly inadequate national power-supply grid in a country with a still-exploding population and even faster-growing demand, and you have trouble.

A major remedy, of course, lies in increased oil and gas imports, but here India runs into geopolitical problems. Although the U.S. government was motivated to give India leeway in the nuclear arena, the United States made it clear that it does not like India's plan to buy Iranian natural gas via a pipeline across Pakistan. India's other options lie in interior Asia, but those sources are more distant and pipeline construction would involve additional diplomatic complications. Once again, the other alternative—importing oil and gas via tankers and ports—is constrained by inadequate infrastructure. Energy is going to remain a problem for some time to come.

### India's Prospects

So what lies in store for India? Some economic geographers suggest that India might leapfrog China and move quickly from an "underdeveloped" to a "postindustrial" information-based economy. Certainly India has the requisite intellectual clout. But to reach India's hundreds of millions of potential wage-earners, India also needs a vigorous expansion of its secondary industries, those that make goods (other than textiles) and sell them at home and abroad. Here's how it may happen: when an economy churns along the way China's has over the past three decades, labor and production costs tend to escalate. That causes manufacturers to look for places where cheaper labor will reduce such costs. India, with its long history of local manufacturing, huge domestic market, and vast reservoir of capable labor, would then take its turn on the world stage.

India's prospects are brightening, if not yet in the dramatic terms used in popular-media hype. A middle class 300-million strong demands goods that range from cell phones (in 2012, India had over 900 million subscribers encompassing 73 percent of the population) to motor bikes (more than 30,000 are now sold every day). During the past few years, Chennai has already become a leading Indian automobile center: Korean and German cars roll off its assembly lines not only to be marketed in India but also to be shipped to foreign consumers.

India's economy today ranks as the world's fourth-largest and is expected to move up to third place by 2020. Over the past several years, the Indian economy has grown by an average of 6 percent annually—less than China's, but far ahead of growth rates in most other parts of the world. China's dramatic growth resulted from decisions at the top, a transformation both planned and implemented in controlled detail. In India the economy is growing from the bottom up, accompanied by all the traditional chaos that makes it a country like no other. As with China's provinces, some of India's States will advance ahead of others, and the country's already incredible socioeconomic

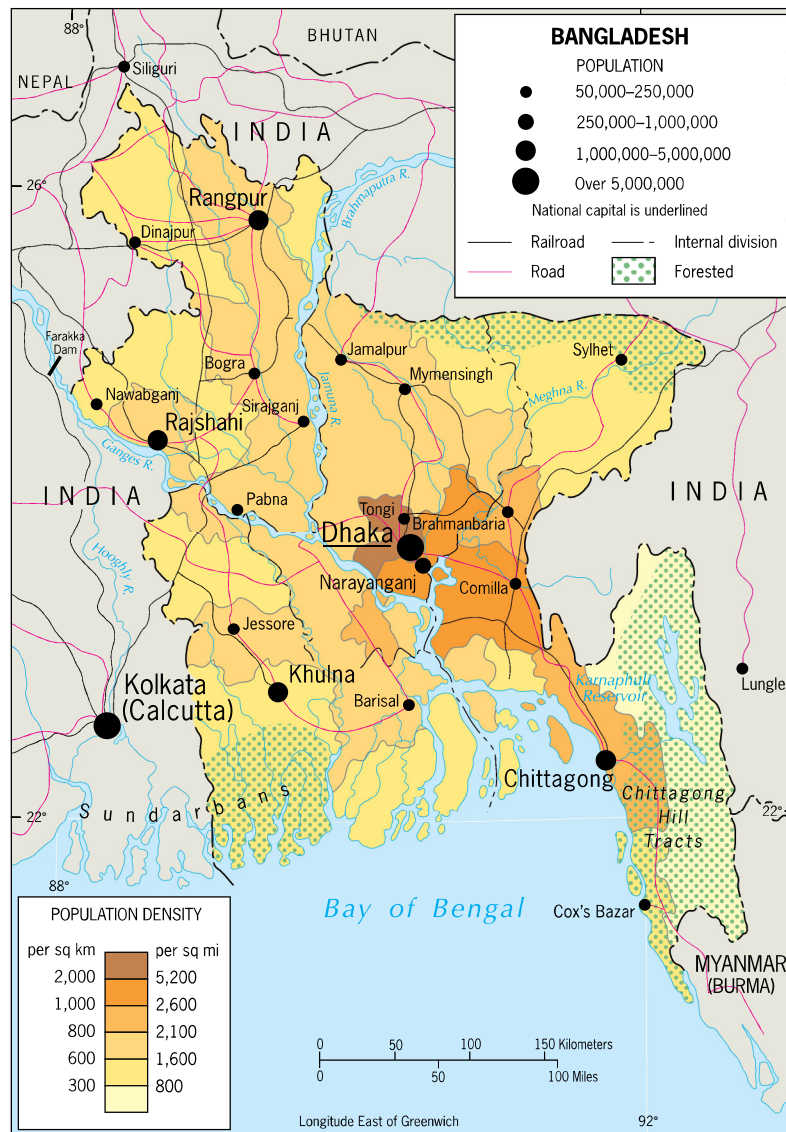


FIGURE 8B-7

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contrasts will intensify. But over time, India could achieve what China hitherto has not: an economic and cultural geography of consensus.

### ■ BANGLADESH: CHALLENGES OLD AND NEW

On the map of South Asia, Bangladesh looks like another State of India: the country occupies the area of the **double delta** [6] of India's great Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, and India almost completely surrounds it on its landward side (Fig. 8B-7). But Bangladesh is an independent country, born in 1971 after its brief war for independence against Pakistan, with a territory about the size of Wisconsin. Today it remains one of the poorest and least developed countries on Earth, with a population of 158.1 million that is growing at an annual rate of 1.6 percent.

Bangladesh remains largely a nation of subsistence farmers. Barely one-fourth of the population lives in urban

settlements, and more than half of the workforce is engaged in agriculture. Dhaka, the megacity capital, and the cities of Chittagong, Rangpur, Khulna, and Rajshahi are the only urban centers of consequence. Moreover, Bangladesh has one of the highest **physiologic densities** [7] (people per unit area of arable land) in the world: 1743 people per square kilometer/4514 per square mile.

### A Vulnerable Territory

Not only is Bangladesh a poor country; it also is highly susceptible to damage from natural hazards. During the twentieth century, two of the deadliest weather disasters in the world struck this small country. The most recent of these occurred in 1991 when a cyclone (as hurricanes are called in this corner of the world) killed more than 150,000 people. Smaller cyclones strike several times every year and almost routinely kill anywhere between dozens and thousands of people.

## AMONG THE REALM'S GREAT CITIES . . .

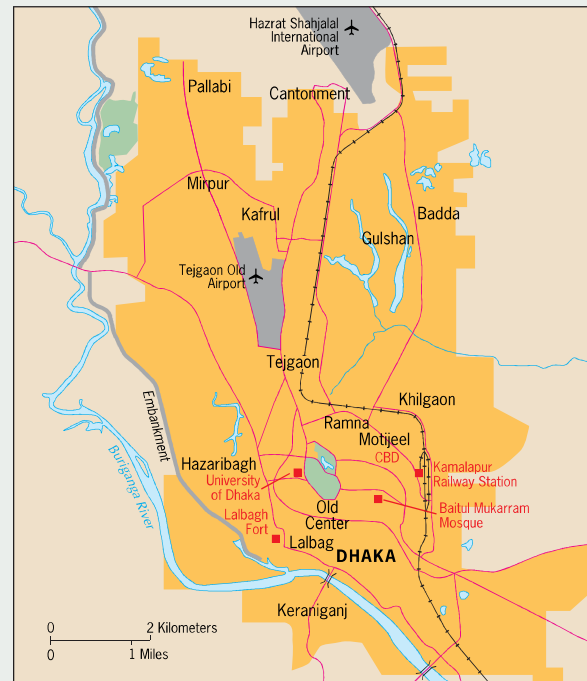
# DHAKA

**DHAKA** (formerly spelled Dacca) is situated in the heart of Bangladesh in the northern sector of the double delta formed by the Ganges and Brahmaputra. It is the economic, political, and cultural focus of the country, and with a population of 16.9 million it is by the far the biggest city.

Known as the “city of mosques and muslin” (a type of cotton), the modern history of Dhaka began in the early seventeenth century when the area came under the rule of the Islamic Mughals, along with what is today northern India. Dhaka occupied an advantageous position on the main waterways, and to this day the local Buriganga River is at the center of the city’s activities. The oldest section of Dhaka lines the north bank of the waterfront. The British turned the place into a provincial capital of sorts, and their legacy can still be seen in some of the colonial architecture near the old center alongside the remaining Mughal structures. At independence in 1947 the city became the administrative capital of East Pakistan, and in 1971 it became the seat of government for the newly formed state of Bangladesh.

As part of the great double delta, Dhaka lies close to sea level and is prone to flooding during the summer monsoon. Every so often, major cyclones barrel in from the Bay of Bengal and cause massive human and material devastation. The greatest disaster in modern times was triggered by Cyclone Bhola in 1970 that killed as many as 500,000 of the country’s citizens, destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes, and flooded most of the city.

Dhaka has grown rapidly in recent decades as it attracted large numbers of migrants from rural areas, and the city gradually expanded northward. At the time of partition, many Hindus left and Muslims arrived, and now more than 90 percent of the population adheres to Islam. Religious



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fanaticism is not as widespread as it is in Pakistan. The main schism here is between the tiny rich minority and the enormous poverty-stricken majority. Dhaka is also known as the bicycle-riksha capital of the world: some 400,000 colorfully painted rikshas criss-cross the thoroughfares of this city on a daily basis—surely the cheapest mode of urban transportation on the planet.

The reasons for Bangladesh’s vulnerability can be deduced from Figures 8B-7 and 8A-1. Southern Bangladesh consists of the deltaic plain of the combined Ganges–Brahmaputra river system, integrating extremely fertile alluvial (river-deposited silt) soils that attract farmers with the low elevations that endanger them when the water rises. Moreover, the shape of the Bay of Bengal forms a funnel that steers cyclones and their storm surges of wind-driven water to barrel into the double delta’s coast. Without money to build seawalls, floodgates, elevated shelters in sufficient numbers, or adequate escape routes, hundreds of thousands of people are at continuous risk, with deadly consequences.

The country’s relations with neighboring India have at times been strained over water resources (India controls the Ganges River, which is the lifeline of Bangladesh), cross-border migration (8 percent of the population is Hindu), and transit between parts of India across Bangladesh’s north (refer to Fig. 8B-5 to see the reason).

### Limited Opportunities—Creative Development Strategies

Even though geography seems to offer Bangladesh limited options and the country overall remains very poor, it should be noted that in recent years this country has achieved some remarkable successes. Since 1990, life expectancy in Bangladesh increased by ten years and now exceeds that of India, despite Indian incomes being considerably higher. Second, primary school enrollment among girls today is double that of 2010 and the female literacy rate is steadily improving. And third, since 1990 infant (<1 year) mortality rates have been halved and child (<5 years) mortality rates as well as maternal mortality rates have dropped by three-fourths. According to these indicators, Bangladesh outperforms India and also fares much better than Pakistan.

Interestingly, these improvements were achieved in the absence of notable economic growth. Indeed, incomes in Bangladesh are considerably lower than in India and



even Pakistan does better in this regard. Bangladesh is an overwhelmingly Muslim society but in some ways it has also been a very progressive one, particularly when it comes to the role of women. For example, 30 seats in the national legislature are reserved for women. Much of this success is attributed to the role of **non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** [8] that, independently of (but supported by) the national government, have promoted programs to improve the quality of life. An important example concerns family planning programs in which women play the lead role (free contraceptives and education). The fertility rate in Bangladesh fell rapidly from 6.5 in 1975 to 3.4 in 1994 to 2.3 in 2012. Consider this: when Pakistan and Bangladesh split in 1971, each had a population of around 65 million; today, their populations are, respectively, 188 and 158 million.

NGOs also were the key providers of so-called **micro-credits** [9], small loans at favorable terms to the poor, along with guidance and counseling, allowing them to invest in the means to secure a proper and sustainable livelihood. Often, such loans have gone to small farmers to buy a piece of land or construct a farmhouse, or to starter entrepreneurs to buy machinery or transport equipment. The success of micro-credits has spread from Bangladesh around the disadvantaged world and is now widely considered a key instrument in economic development strategies.

Over the past several decades, Bangladesh has become known as the “textile capital of the world.” Many of the cheapest clothing items you see sold under popular labels from big-name marketers are made in factories in Bangla-

desh that are unsafe and where the minimum wage is little more than a U.S. dollar a day. Western companies impose strict production quotas and deadlines, and factory owners and managers force their laborers to work long hours under often dangerous conditions. There are no unions to protect workers; terrible fires and building failures are not uncommon. In April 2013, a factory building in the Dhaka suburb of Savar known to be unsafe collapsed, killing more than 1,000; terrified workers had alerted police and other officials about widening cracks in the structure but were ordered to stay on the job. Globalization may have made Bangladesh’s garment industry a valuable contributor to the nation’s commercial economy, but those low prices you see advertised in the Western media come at a high cost to the poor and the powerless in the countries of the global periphery.

## ■ THE MOUNTAINOUS NORTH

As Figure 8B-1 shows, a tier of landlocked countries and territories lies across the mountainous zone that walls India off from China. One of them, Kashmir, is in a condition of near-war (see Chapter 8A). Another, Sikkim, was absorbed by India in 1975 and made into one of its federal States. But Nepal and Bhutan retain their independence.

### Nepal

A **buffer state** [10] between India and China, Nepal exhibits an internal politics that is increasingly a reflection of

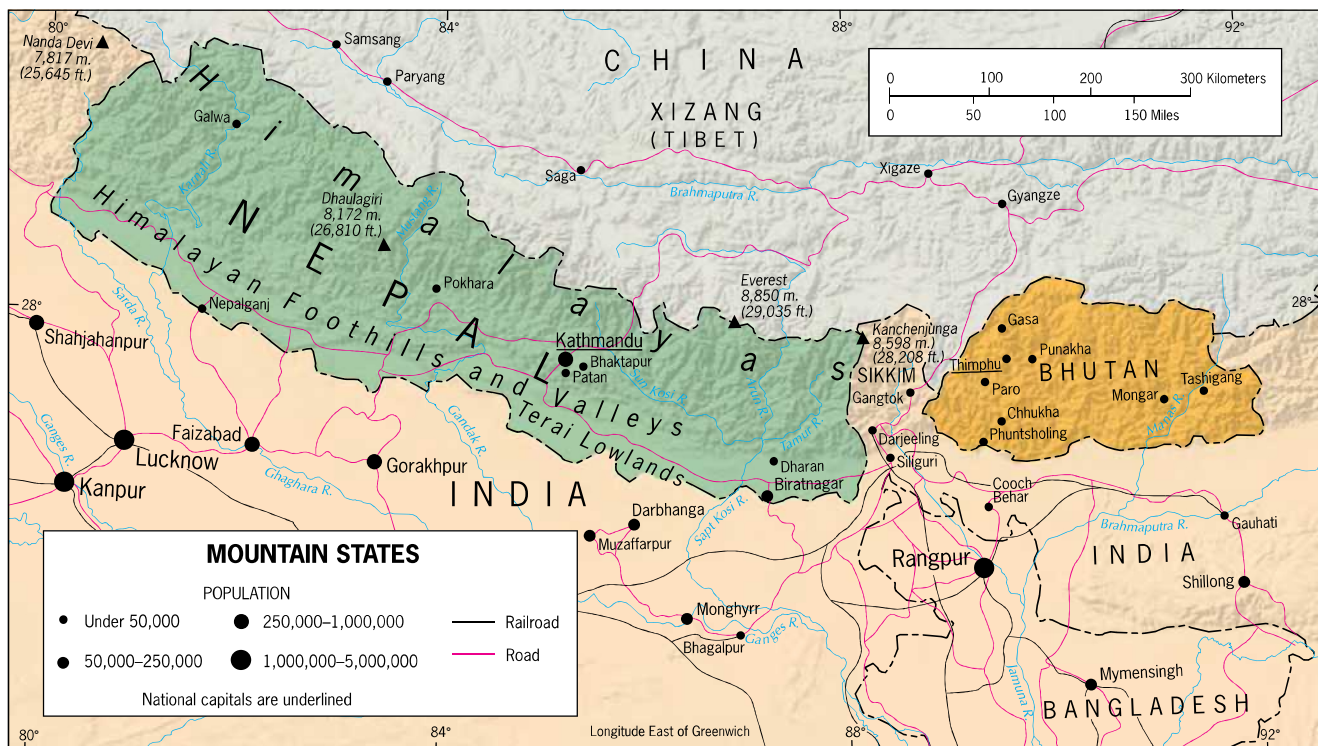


FIGURE 8B-8

the competitive influences of these two giant neighbors. Culturally and, until recently, economically, Nepal lies within India's sphere of influence, but China is making its presence felt ever more strongly. Maoist groups are supported by China but loathed by India, resulting in fractious and contentious governance. China, as it does just about everywhere in the world nowadays, is using its economic clout as leverage to gain heightened political influence.

Nepal, located just northeast of India's Hindu core, has a population of 32 million and is the size of Illinois. It has three geographic zones (Fig. 8B-8): a southern, subtropical, fertile lowland called the Terai; a central belt of Himalayan foothills with swiftly flowing streams and deep canyons; and the spectacular high Himalaya itself (topped by Mount Everest) in the north. The capital, Kathmandu, lies in the east-central part of the country in an open valley of the central hill zone.

Nepal, birthplace of Buddha, is materially poor but culturally rich. The Nepalese are a people of many origins, including India, Tibet, and interior Asia. About 82 percent are Hindu, and Hinduism is the country's official religion; but Nepal's Hinduism is a unique blend of Hindu and Buddhist ideals. Thousands of temples and pagodas, ranging from the simple to the ornate, grace the cultural landscape, especially in the Vale of Kathmandu, the country's core area. Although well over a dozen languages are spoken, 85 percent of the people also speak Nepali, a language related to Indian Hindi.

This is a troubled country that suffers from severe underdevelopment, with the lowest GNI in the realm. It is the only country in the realm with a declining income per capita over the past two decades. It also faces strong centrifugal social and political forces. Environmental degradation, crowded farmlands, and soil erosion, as well as deforestation, scar the highly corrugated countryside. The soaring Himalayan peaks form a world-renowned tourist attraction, but expenditures by tourists in Nepal, always relatively modest, have been cut back because of the recurrent disorder associated with a Maoist-communist insurrection and the collapse of the country's monarchy.

Nepal's cultural and political geographies have long been in turmoil. Strong regionalism divides the country both north-south and east-west. The southern Terai with its tropical lowlands is a world apart from the foothills of the Himalaya in the central interior, and the peoples of the west have origins and traditions different from those in the east. An absolute (Hindu) monarchy held Nepal together until 1990, when antigovernment demonstrations and resulting casualties persuaded the king to lift the ban on political parties. But chaos soon resumed, the king was assassinated, and by 2002 Maoist rebels controlled nearly half of the country, turning Nepal into a **failed state** [11]. The ruling king (the brother of the former king) was effectively forced from his throne in 2006, the insurgents were brought into the political system, and in the following year a new constitution formalized the abolition of the monar-

chy and the reinvention of Nepal as a secular federal republic. Peaceful elections in 2008 confirmed the capacity of Nepal's new system to accommodate the still-powerful centrifugal forces in the country, however it remains to be seen if the new government can deliver on the demands of the country's highly diverse communities and constituencies.

## Bhutan

Mountainous Bhutan, with a population of about 750,000, lies wedged between India and China's Tibet (Fig. 8B-8), the only other buffer between Asia's giants. In landlocked, fortress-like Bhutan, time seems to have stood still. Bhutan long was a constitutional monarchy ruled by a king whose absolute power was unquestioned by his subjects. But in 2007 the reigning king, who had recently succeeded his father, and perhaps with an eye on what had happened to the monarchy in nearby Nepal, decided to order his subjects to vote for a political party in a newly created democracy. Thus in 2008 Bhutan went from an absolute monarchy to a multi-party democracy on the orders of its monarch, and Thimphu, the capital, became the seat of a new national assembly.

In the mountainous countryside, the symbols of Buddhism, the state religion, dominate the cultural landscape, and the government's development policies stress the importance of spiritual fulfillment alongside the satisfaction of material needs. Still, there is social tension driven by the presence of a Nepalese (Hindu) minority, and a Bhutanese refugee population remains housed in camps in eastern Nepal. Add to this a still-unresolved boundary issue with China and the possibility of rising material expectations, and newly democratic Bhutan faces some pressing challenges.

Regarding economic geography, forestry, hydroelectric power, and tourism all have much potential here, and Bhutan possesses considerable mineral resources. But isolation and inaccessibility continue to preserve traditional ways of life in this mountainous nation.

## ■ THE SOUTHERN ISLANDS

As Figure 8B-1 shows, South Asia's subcontinental landmass is flanked by several sets of islands: Sri Lanka just off the southern tip of India, the Maldives in the Indian Ocean to the southwest, and the Andaman Islands (which belong to India) marking the eastern edge of the Bay of Bengal.

### The Maldives

The Maldives consists of more than 1000 tiny islands whose combined area is just 300 square kilometers (115 sq mi) and whose highest elevation is less than 2 meters (6 ft) above sea level. Its population of 340,000 from Dravidian and Sri Lankan sources is now virtually 100 percent Muslim, with one-quarter of it concentrated on the island of the capital named Maale. The Maldives might be unremarkable, except that, as the table in Appendix B shows, this country has the realm's highest GNI per capita. The locals have translated

## VOICE FROM THE

## Region



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Ahmed Rasheed, 28 years of Age, The Maldives

"I live with my wife and 1-year old daughter in Hithadhoo, one of the southernmost islands of the Maldives. I was born in the north in Maale, the capital, and went to school there through the 10th grade; that is how far education goes for most of us. I moved down here to work at one of the nearby resorts as a water sports instructor, mainly surfing, boating, and parasailing. Every morning I take the ferry to the resort and in the evening I return home. I enjoy my work and I love the islands, the water. The rest of the world looks at the Maldives like a paradise and it is my home! There is much talk about how global warming and rising sea levels will affect us, about the vulnerability of the coral reefs, and other environmental issues. I sometimes hear the fishermen say that the catch is not as good as it used to be. For me personally it is actually hard to see the impact; perhaps these things just go so slowly.... What I read in the papers or see on television scares me more than what I see with my own eyes. There is even talk of all of us being forced to move sometime in the future. I have never been out of my country and cannot imagine having to leave. I don't think it will happen in my lifetime and I hope my daughter will live all of her life here too."

their palm-studded, beach-fringed islands into a tourist mecca that attracts tens of thousands of mainly European visitors annually. The tourism sector, accounting for nearly one-third of national income, took a hit during the recent global recession; nonetheless, by 2011 national economic growth had rebounded to a level near 4 percent.

The Maldives' low elevation (80 percent of the country lies less than one meter [3 ft] above sea level) has been singled out repeatedly in assessments of the future impact of **global warming [12]**, which will likely result in rising sea levels. Scientific research indicates sea levels worldwide have been rising at a rate of 3.5 millimeters (0.14 in) per year since the early 1990s. Those fears became sudden reality on December 26, 2004 when the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami generated near Indonesia (discussed in Chapters 10A and 10B) swept

over the islands, killing more than 100 residents as well as tourists and destroying resort facilities along the shore as well as inland.

This country faces social and political challenges, too. Its nascent democracy was dealt a blow in 2012 when the first democratically elected President, Mohamed Nasheed, was deposed in a *coup d'état* involving the country's former dictator and radical Islamists.

### Sri Lanka: Paradise Lost and Regained?

Sri Lanka (known as Ceylon before 1972), the compact, pear-shaped island located just 35 kilometers (22 mi) across the Palk Strait from southernmost India, became independent from Britain in 1948 (Fig. 8B-9). There were good reasons to create a separate sovereignty for Sri Lanka. This is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim country: the large majority of its population of 21.7 million people—some 70 percent—are Buddhists. Furthermore, unlike Pakistan or India, plantations dominate Sri Lanka, and commercial farming still is the mainstay of the agricultural economy.

The great majority of Sri Lanka's population is descended from migrants who came to this island from northwestern India beginning about 2500 years ago. Most of them probably walked there, as the island was connected to southeast India with a land bridge (now submerged as Palk Strait) that was also known as *Rama's Bridge*. Look closely at Figure 8B-9 and you can easily see the Sri Lanka-end remains of that shallow bridge, part of which was destroyed by a cyclone in the fifteenth century. The migrants brought with them the advanced culture of their source area,

Sinhalese Buddhist monks visit the famous ruins of the twelfth century Hatadag Temple in the ancient city of Polonnaruwa in north-central Sri Lanka. The temple that once stood here was also known as the "tooth relic temple" because it was said to have treasured an actual tooth of the Buddha.



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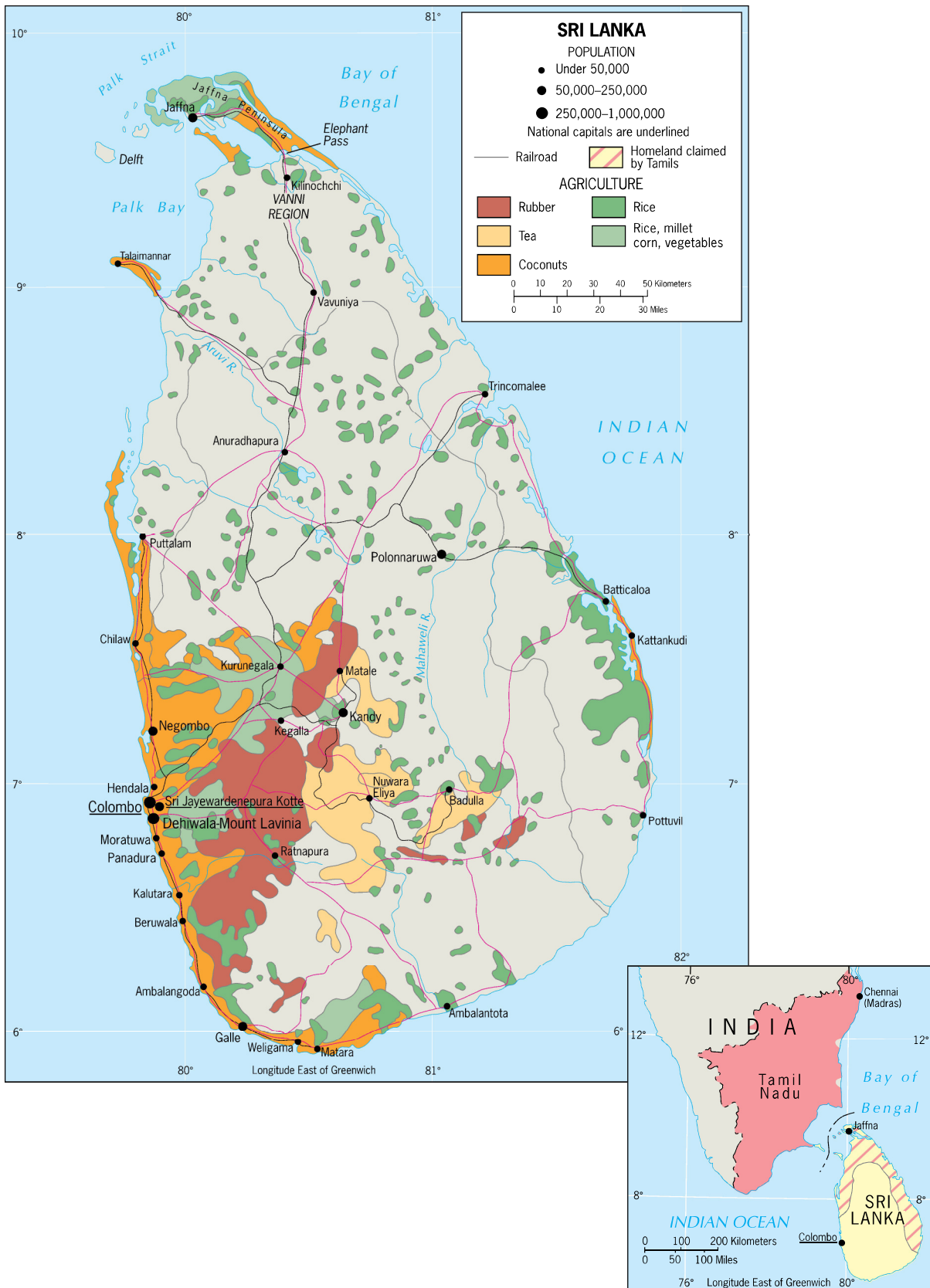


FIGURE 8B-9

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## From the Field Notes . . .



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“Sri Lanka is a dominantly Buddhist country, the religion of the majority Sinhalese. Most areas of the capital, Colombo, have numerous reminders of this in the form of architecture and statuary: shrines to the Buddha, large and small, abound. But walk into the Tamil parts of town, and the cultural landscape changes drastically. This might as well be a street in Chennai or Madurai: elaborate Hindu shrines vie for space with storefronts, and Buddhist symbols are absent. The people here seemed to be less than enthused about the Tamil Tigers’ campaign for an independent state. ‘This would never be a part of it anyway,’ said the fellow walking toward me as I took this photograph. ‘We’re here for better or worse, and for us the situation up north makes it worse.’ But, he added, Sri Lankan governments of the past had helped create the situation by discriminating against Tamils.”

[www.conceptcaching.com](http://www.conceptcaching.com)



building towns and irrigation systems, and introducing Buddhism. Today, their descendants, known as the Sinhalese, speak a language (Sinhala) that belongs to the Indo-European language family of northern India (Fig. 8A-5).

The Dravidians who lived on the mainland, just across Palk Strait, came much later. During the nineteenth century the British brought hundreds of thousands of Tamils across the Strait to labor on their tea plantations, and soon a small minority became a substantial component of Ceylonese society. The Tamils brought their Dravidian tongue to the island and also introduced their Hindu faith. At the time of independence, they constituted more than 15 percent of the population; today they total just over 11 percent.

When Ceylon became independent, it was one of the great hopes of the postcolonial world. The country had a sound economy plus a democratic government, and it was renowned for its tropical beauty. Its reputation soared when a massive effort succeeded in eradicating malaria and when family-planning campaigns reduced population growth while the rest of the realm was experiencing a population explosion. Rivers from the cooler, forested interior highlands fed the paddies that provided ample rice; crops from the moist southwest paid most of the bills, and the capital, Colombo, grew to reflect the optimism that prevailed.

In the midst of this glowing scenario, the seeds of disaster were already being sown. Sri Lanka’s Tamil minority soon began proclaiming its sense of exclusion, demanding better treatment from the Sinhalese majority. Although the government recognized Tamil as a “national language” in 1978, sporadic violence marked the Tamil campaign, and in 1983 full-scale civil war broke out. Many in the Tamil community demanded a separate Tamil state to encompass the north and east of the country (see Fig. 8B-9 inset map), and a rebel army calling itself the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) confronted Sri Lanka’s national forces.

The Tamil Tigers first took the Jaffna Peninsula in the far north (Fig. 8B-9), next they extended their control over the Vanni Region just to its south, and soon they started publishing maps that revealed their ultimate demand—the entire northern and eastern periphery of Sri Lanka would become the secessionist state of *Eelam* (shown by the striped zone in the inset map). Not only had an **insurgent state [13]** formed in northeastern Sri Lanka: the Tigers backed up these demands through terrorist attacks in the capital, Colombo, and unleashed combat in many parts of the state they were seeking to establish.

From 2002 until 2007, the government and the LTTE engaged in a repeatedly interrupted cease-fire as well as what appeared to be half-hearted negotiations about

the country's possible partitioning. But in the end the Colombo government decided on a powerful, iron-fisted offensive that broke the Tamil resistance. On January 2, 2009, President Mahinda Rajapaksa announced the capture of the strategic town of Kilinochchi and proclaimed that the threat of partition in Sri Lanka had ended. An international outcry over the tactics of the Sri Lankan military was followed by expressions of concern over the future of Sinhalese-Tamil relations in this obviously still-fractured country. The United Nations in 2011 concluded that there had been major human rights violations by both sides. Today, the Rajapaksa government continues to be accused by the opposition of nepotism and a turn to dictatorship. The early years of this decade have seen peace but reconciliation is difficult. Sri Lanka's promise, based in natural endowment and geography, could still be fulfilled but political challenges must first be overcome.

### POINTS TO PONDER

- Pakistan is crucially important to the stability of both Southwest and South Asia, yet it is becoming increasingly difficult to govern and faces growing religious fanaticism and political turmoil.
- India's IT sector accounts for one-quarter of all exports, but employs only 2 percent of the national workforce.
- If India proceeds with plans to reserve 33 percent of its Parliament seats for women, it would have more than two and a half times the number of female legislators than the 113th (2013–2015) U.S. Congress.
- Nepal, struggling to emerge from failed-state status, is the only country in South Asia in which per capita incomes have declined in recent years.