

# Bam pa! Bam pa!

## Making sure you jump into Bangladesh left foot first.<sup>1</sup>

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### BEFORE LEAVING

#### Visas

- Get a visa from a Bangladesh embassy on the US-side for at least 6 months longer than you think you'll need it. It won't cost more, and gives you a cushion in case your research takes longer or an interesting opportunity pops up. (*Ahmed et. al.*) Most research visas given during the 07-08 batch were for 2 years, but some only received a one year visa.
- The visa extension and renewal system in Dhaka is difficult to navigate and expensive. Further, a police officer from the Special Branch will need to make a house call, which can be time consuming, and is a situation ripe for attempted corruption. (*Ahmed et. al.*) A Fulbrighter from 07-08 experienced this, and spent almost two months trying to extend a visa in country. It was very stressful for both her and her husband, and she had a difficult time proving to the Bangladesh government what she was doing in Bangladesh and why she deserved an extension.

#### Communication

- Prior communication with your host institution is important. Let them know when you'll be arriving and give them a timeline of when your project will start. If your institution is not great at getting back to you, don't back down with communication from your end.
- If anyone in the US gives you a contact in Bangladesh who they want you to meet when you're there, make sure to take it whether it be a relative or a friend or a business contact. My entire friend network blossomed from the connections that people in the US insisted I get in touch with in Bangladesh.
- Bring your US cell phone with you just in case. You never know when it may end up being handy or useful (at least on the trip there and back.)

#### Bringing and Leaving Stuff

- What to pack:
  - extra change of clothes in carry-on in case luggage is lost
  - lock for luggage
  - labels on all luggage, etc.
  - several passport photos for setting up phone and possible future visas to other countries
  - toiletries you really like and don't think you can buy in Bangladesh
  - guide book

1. Some advice taken directly or adapted from: *Eta ki? Ota ki?, Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the 'Desh*, Compiled by: Nabil Ahmed, Kristin Boekhoff, Tuni Chatterji, Erin Lentz, and Steve Micetic – Fulbright year 2006-2007

- + Bradt travel guides just released their Bangladesh book, I met with the author and used some of his notes while I was there.
- + Lonely Planet just released a new edition this past year)
- headlamp, very useful in frequent power outages
- sturdy pair of sandals, I never wore my shoes at all. These will get very wet.

- What to leave behind:
  - expensive jewelry
  - unnecessary credit cards
  - your social security card
  - copies of travel documents with a family member (passport ID page, airline tickets, driver's license, credit cards, serial numbers on your travelers checks, contact info of the places you will stay), etc.
- Educational materials. You will be allowed to ship a certain amount of materials through the Diplomatic Pouch (check with IIE/American Center). I did not use this at all and just brought a few materials in my luggage. I used none of it, but perhaps others might find it useful. I wish now I hadn't brought it.
- Shipping stuff back from Bangladesh can get expensive. What you send in your Diplomatic Pouch can't be sent back in the pouch. To send stuff back (I sent back two boxes of clothing) FedEx, UPS, and DHL are available. FedEx was the cheapest and cost me \$150 to ship 50lbs of stuff. Bringing back overweight luggage can be expensive too. On my one leg from Dhaka to Bangkok when I left, I paid \$200 to have 48 pounds of extra luggage (they only allowed one bag.)
- How much money to take: I advise bringing several hundred US dollars. I never really used this much in Bangladesh, but used it extensively when traveling around the rest of Asia. You can't easily get US dollars in Bangladesh, so bring some from abroad. You never know when it'll come in handy too.

## **ARRIVING AND STARTING IN COUNTRY**

Allow for about one month of set-up time when doing research concurrently. There is a lot you will need to arrange and gather, more than you can think of. Furniture shopping took me a full month when I moved into my own place, and that was five months into my stay! Other Fulbrighters found the same difficulty in getting everything arranged. Getting simple tasks done in Bangladesh can take a long, frustrating amount of time, and having patience is critical. Be willing to laugh at the crazy stuff that happens along the way, because very few things will go as you expect.

You will get picked up from the airport by the US Embassy and they will bring you to a destination that you have alerted them of through email beforehand. This could be a guest house, a permanent place, or your affiliation's provided housing. Guest houses in Gulshan, Banani, and Dhanmondi

One of the most important things you need to do your first today is get a phone and a SIM card. You will have to start making phone calls from the first day, whether it is to find an apartment, contact your affiliation, a friend in country.

Once in country you will have a security briefing from the US Embassy within your first month. You also will set up a meeting with the American Center to meet those officials who are in charge of you.

Meeting up with your affiliation is all on your accord, from finding it in the city to figuring out how to get there. Try to do this as soon as you can after arriving so you establish that you are around. Plus you get to meet them for the first time.

First bits of culture shock will be from the filth and sheer mass of humanity everywhere. Language barrier at first can be frustrating, and it doesn't help that you aren't sure yet how to get around. Getting used to being careful about food and water also causes stress. Additional, you will likely get sick in your first two weeks, and that just adds to the stress. Be ready for all this to be heaped upon you early on, and take time out to breathe. Get what you have to get done, but don't overextend yourself.

### Maps (from Ahmed et. al.)

- City and country maps can be bought off the street (e.g. in Gulshan-2 Circle) or at almost any book shop (Etc, Words-n-Pages, Omni are a few in the enclave and in Dhanmondi)
- Bring the map with you when you apt hunt or do just about anything until you get a sense of how the city is laid out.
- A few cabbies love to take you on longer routes, so having an idea of how you should get there can mitigate some of the opportunism.
- You are very lucky to be traveling to Bangladesh now! Google Maps has had Bangladesh and Dhaka mapped out for over a year now, with proper street and locale names. Use this heavily in understanding how to get around. ~DK

## **MONEY AND BANKING**

The currency of Bangladesh is the Bangladeshi Taka. Currently around 70 Taka to the dollar. Abbreviated as Tk.

It was my understanding that foreigners could not open bank accounts in Bangladesh, so I did not even attempt this, although I have heard of it being done. My recommendation is to open either an HSBC or a Standard Chartered account in the US, and bring your ATM card with you. There are plenty of branches of these in Dhaka and Chittagong, and even in some of the bigger cities: Khulna, Rajshahi, and Sylhet. ATM cards from these two banks will work in all of those banks' ATMs, and about half of the national Bangladeshi banks. Usually security guards are posted at the ATMs for your safety. I usually withdrew Tk15,000 at a time, (maximum is Tk20,000) and then went straight home to put it away for safe keeping.

Personal checks are necessary for paying for deposits at the American Commissary and American Club, and perhaps monthly dues. Otherwise I never had a use for the personal checks I brought.

Being in a cash-based economy requires careful planning when heading out for the day. Small bills and change are hard to come by. You will always find yourself wishing you had Tk2, 5, 10, 20, and 50 bills, and Tk1, 2, and 5 coins. I recommend bringing a two Tk500 bills to a bank and ask them to give you a stack of Tk10 bills in exchange. This should be free.

During the day I usually took out one Tk500 bill, a variety of smaller bills, and about a small handful of coins. I tried to break a Tk500 whenever I could to get change. Rickshaws will only accept bills around Tk50 and below. Taxis will accept Tk100. Very few places will take a Tk500 bill. Do your best to retain change, and horde it.

Some currency exchangers exist in Gulshan, Dhanmondi, and Motijheel. There are also some inside the largest fancy shopping malls, including one inside Bashundara shopping mall and Rifles Square.

In smaller cities, you will likely not find any ATMs, and no currency exchangers. If going there, or living there, be prepared to have as much cash as you'll need. Convert/withdraw in Dhaka and keep safe on your travels.

## **HEALTH CONCERNS**

Getting sick was part of my Fulbright experience. I got stomach sick every week at least once, and was sick enough to have to stay home for a day every third week. I lost 28 lbs over 13 months, with 15 of those pounds lost in the first 3 months. Granted, I had a pretty poor system for filtering water at home, ate food off the street several times daily, and ate almost all my meals at the streetside restaurants that wash their dishes in cold water without soap. However, I felt others got sick almost as much as me, so I don't know how much precaution will keep you safe and perfectly healthy. Overall, I know I got sick once in awhile, but it never interrupted my experience or kept me from getting things done. A sick day just meant a day for me to spend at home and blog.

- Vaccinations and medical tests before leaving the States. The only vaccination I opted out of was Rabies. I was vaccinated for Typhoid (several Bangladeshis I knew got this), Hepatitis (several Bangladeshis I knew got this), and Japanese Encephalitis (no one I knew got this.) I also had a year's supply of malaria pills, and had a refill shipment sent from home after one year. I took the weekly pill mefloquine throughout my entire stay.
- The only way to not get sick at all would be to eat only at home and drink bottled water. You will get sick at some point, and eating at expensive places won't prevent this. My worst case of food poisoning was at a nice Korean restaurant.
- Bring a letter from doctor explaining your medications and why you need them.
- Even ice can be made from unfiltered water, so be careful when having ice in drinks. Bangladesh is really good about serving their bottled drinks very cold anyway, so ice isn't necessary.
- I found buying food from street vendors, including fresh fish, to be completely sanitary. I did it all the time, and never saw that as the source of my getting sick.
- Pollution is not as bad as in Indian cities. The CNGs have apparently made the air better over the years since the banning of two-stroke engines for autorickshaws. I had some days where my mucus would be dirty, and towards the end of my stay I had a cough some days, but generally I never felt pollution was that bad. And I spent all my days on a bus!!
- There are many private hospitals in Dhaka. Dhanmondi has one on every corner. I only went to a hospital once for a bad sore throat, but even then, I went to a friend's mother who was a doctor because I trusted only her.
- My father insisted I have medical protection from Global Rescue, a private company that would even airlift you if necessary. Never had a reason to use it, but it was there. It wouldn't hurt to have a private travel's insurance policy, although the policy Fulbright provides seemed pretty good.

## SAFETY

- I never felt extremely unsafe in Dhaka, but frequently kept an eye over my shoulder at nights. I lived pretty far back amongst some dark thin streets in Dhanmondi, and was mostly worried there. On the main streets, I never felt unsafe, but still was aware.
- Riding in rickshaws and CNGs is unavoidable, but be wary of the dangers, especially at night. The most common tale of thievery is being robbed while on a CNG or rickshaw, regardless of whether the driver is in on it or not. Women have had their handbags snatched from a rickshaw by a passing vehicle, watch for dangling straps. When sitting in a CNG, sit towards the doorway, so that no two thieves can jump in on either side and leave you between them.
- Don't carry too much money on you at any time, and don't flash it around. Separate your money into different pockets and your bag. Don't carry anything unnecessary: I left my US drivers license, passport, and credit card at home unless I knew I would need it that day.
- At home, have a cabinet that locks. Good for keeping your extra cash, credit card, and passport.
- Don't draw attention to yourself.
- Women have a harder time of keeping a low profile as an American woman is less likely to fit in, their slightly more liberal clothing style and the way they carry themselves gives them away. Do your best to follow the custom of wearing an orna, and kameez. Covering up goes a long way to not draw attention to yourself.
- In an emergency, having a phone number from someone at the American Center is important.
- Cyclones have hit Bangladesh every year for the last three years and have caused significant damage in the southern districts. There have been some small earthquakes as well. Additionally, the monsoon rains flood the streets, so being extra careful walking on these days is important. Heat exhaustion can happen in April and May during these hottest months, try to stay indoors or in the shade and drink lots of water during this time (many businesses close their shutters during the midday in this season.)

## HOUSING (from Ahmed et. al.)

See Appendix on Finding Housing for one example of how to search for apartments, after your arrival. Apartments tend to have leases starting at the beginning of the month, so if you are searching for housing mid-month, there will be fewer choices, but also fewer seekers. Try to bargain to reduce rental costs.

When searching for housing, it is critical to consider where you will be spending the bulk of your work-day. The traffic can be and often is terrible. An hour commute in Dhaka is a lot more draining (pollution/noise/bad driving) than an hour commute in the US.

Housing in Bangladesh tends to be bare-bones. You will most likely need to purchase and install stove, light bulbs, refrigerators, ceiling fans, water heaters (if you want hot showers or hot water for dishes), air-conditioners. If you have a caretaker in your building, for a fee, he may be willing to buy and install light bulbs/fans/water heater etc.

Some apartments are more expensive but come with ACs and other appliances. Amortizing the cost of these appliances over the course of 9 months at a more expensive apartment rather than buying them may make sense. (The following are 2006-2007 prices)

- Dhanmondi:
  - 3 bedroom, 1600 sq feet: 20,000 taka and 3000 maintenance fee, water included
  - 1 bedroom, 800 sq feet, 7,000 taka and 3500 maintenance fee, water included
- Niketan, Gulshan 1
  - 2 bedroom, 12,000 taka and 3000 maintenance fee
- Indira Road, Farm-Gate
  - 3 bedroom, 1400 sq feet: 15,000 taka (plus water, gas, electricity)
- Gulshan 2
  - 3 bedroom, 1850 sq feet; 4 air conditioners, three water heaters, 6 ceiling fans and all light fixtures included: Tk45,000 rent (asking rent was Tk50,000/ month) plus Tk3,000 maintenance, Tk800 for water, gas included

Note: Walk through some of the residential areas and look for "To-Let" signs. Consider renting an apartment with roommates. This can greatly reduce the monthly cost of housing. Shared apartments can be located through adverts at local expat clubs or by word of mouth.

I posted on facebook that I was looking for a roommate/flatmate. I got several responses from Bangladeshis. I checked out two places, and settled on one where I would share with a roommate until he found his own place for his wife and kids. We did share a bed for two months until he moved out, but it wasn't a very big deal. In the end, I got the place to myself for seven months. He helped me keep my boua afterwards too, otherwise it would've been harder to find one. ~DK

### Utilities

- Internet - a wide variety of options are available, mostly localized by neighborhood.
  - Shared 100 kbps line in Dhanmondi: 3,000 taka
  - Shared 70 Kbps line in Farm gate 1500 TK
  - Shared 32 kbps line in Gulshan 2: 1,300 taka
  - Wireless PCI card for laptop: Tk6000 for purchase of card, then Tk1500/mo for 5GB data per month after. 100 kbps, able to take it anywhere in country. CityCell Zoom and Grameen Edge both offer this, but CityCell's at the time was the more preferred because of its reliability and speed. Easy to set up and purchase at any CityCell store. They also have USB internet cards for a lower price, but less reliable service, and are frequently out of stock. ~DK
- Gas is billed by the burner.
  - In Dhanmondi, gas is 200 taka per burner (oven is not extra)

- Electricity
  - 3 bedroom apartment with no AC running, about 500-800 taka per month
  - 1 bedroom with no AC running, about 200 take per month *~DK*
  - With one bedroom's AC running (just at night), expect to pay about another 1000-1500 taka per month.
  - 3 bedroom with 2-3 ACs running part time in the summer is about 3000-4000 taka per month

### Appliances

- You can find **used** items in large markets, such as Gulshan 1 market. However, we caution against purchasing them from folks you don't know; used appliances are all but guaranteed to cost you, in time and money, what a new item would have initially cost.
  - If you do choose to purchase used appliances, it will be best to do so with a street-smart Bangladeshi friend and to demand a warranty. Get a 1-2 year warranty with the terms of the warranty clearly written out because you will likely need to remind the shopkeeper that he did in fact promise to repair the item.
- Check bulletin boards at the Nordic Club and Bagha Club for used appliances. If you can get them directly from an expat they may be more reliable.
- **New** appliances are sold by Toshiba in Gulshan 2 circle, Road 16 in Dhanmondi, etc. Konka in Bashundhara city mall (first floor, on right) and in Gulshan. Navana Tower in Gulshan 1, New Market, MK Electronics in Gulshan 2 Circle on the northeast corner (excellent selection and good prices) as well as many, many other places, so shop around!
  - I found all my appliances on the street in front of my apartment from hole-in-the-wall store and everything was reliable and lasted my full stay. *~DK*
- Air Conditioners
  - New 1 ton window box AC: 26,000 to 31,000 taka upwards
    - Koka is cheaper than Toshiba, but may have a shorter warranty (probably 1 year is plenty for most folks)
  - New split AC (much quieter): 44,000 taka upwards
  - Bargain for free installation. It will be messy, as they will knock out a space in the concrete wall for it.
- Refrigerator: Tk15,000 upwards depending on size
- Hot water heater: approx 7000 Tk.
- Inexpensive (green) ceiling fan: 1,100 taka excluding installation
- Massive industrial floor fan: 3500 taka
- Two gas burners: approx. Tk1000
- 4 burner gas stove with oven Tk29,000 from Etc. (but you could probably get one much cheaper elsewhere, like MK Electronics)
- Television Tk10,000 up
- DVD players: you can get cheap Tk2,500 DVD players from China, but they break much more easily. Higher quality DVD players go for about Tk7,000 and up. Also, most places might give you a service warranty, but they will charge you for parts. If you bring a cheap DVD player from home, make sure it works with "all zones". Otherwise your DVDs won't work!

- In theory, appliances can be re-sold to used dealers or to friends and co-workers. We haven't tried this yet and don't know what kind of prices we will get (e.g., a half or a third etc.).
- For electronic items: DVD players and TVs, etc. Go to Stadium Market in Motijheel. 200+ stores all selling the same stuff and willing to bargain low. ~DK

### Furniture

There is a wide variety of furniture options.

- Panthapath has mostly new wrought iron and cane furniture. There are some used furniture stores tucked away. Elephant Road shops also sell furniture as well as mattresses. This is where I bought all of my furniture from, and transported it home with a rickshaw van. ~DK
- Karwan Bazar and New Market sell cheap Bangladeshi furniture. If you ask for "normal" or "simple" furniture, you can get some serviceable, if not fashionable, furniture. The more you buy at a time, the better your bargaining power.
  - Chokey (queen size bed) Tk600-900
  - Bamboo bookshelves Tk120-180
  - Table/desk (unstained – staining increases the price substantially) 500-1500 taka depending on the size
  - Bring measurements!
  - Not staining the furniture (i.e., leaving it in natural wood form) slightly increases the chance of termites, but dramatically decreases the price.
  - Deliveries tend to happen late at night (past 10 pm), when rickshaw vans can drive on main roads. In Gulshan they will also deliver during the day. These should only cost about Tk200
- Most of the expat clubs also have bulletin boards with postings of used things expats are selling. The Nordic Club, International Club, and German Club have the best bulletin boards, but the American Club also has one as soon as you walk in the front door.

### Water

- Water delivery in 20 liter water cooler containers.
  - Each water delivery driver works a particular area. Once you find housing, keep your eye peeled for delivery trucks or ask your neighbors (or local shops) who delivers their water. Its best to find someone who already works your street, as it means you'll get your water delivered more regularly. Also, choosing a firm that delivers to a reputable store improves the likelihood of getting water that is, in fact, clean.
- Boil and filter
  - It is also possible to boil and filter your own water. Water filters can be purchased from many appliance stores and start around Tk1,500
  - Be sure that you (or your boua!) boil the water for 20 minutes. Then when it is cool put it into the water filter.
- It is not recommended that you drink from the faucet.

### Bouas

Almost all Fulbrighters hired bouas – usually on a part-time basis. Bouas can help make your life much easier by cooking and/or cleaning for you. There is A LOT of dust in Dhaka, so if you don't dust and mop frequently your apartment will get dirty fast!

- To find a boua you can ask people in your building or let security guard/caretaker/daruwan know you are looking (often under-employed bouas periodically stop by apartment building to ask if anyone is

looking for help). You can also find bouas and cooks at the expat clubs. Many folks who are leaving will often post the resumes of their former employees on the bulletin board. The BAGHA Club (The British version of the American Club) has a “help wanted” board that always has adverts for help. See the appendix for Club listings. (*Ahmed et. al.*)

- Prices for bouas can vary greatly depending on the neighborhood and how often you want them to work.
  - In Gulshan-2 for a boua who works 6 days a week from 8am to noon: Tk3,600/month
  - In Dhanmondi for a boua who works 4-6 days a week from 9am-11:30: Tk2200/month
  - In Mohammedpur for a boua who works from 8am to 6:30pm with a two hour lunch break every day: Tk2,000/month
  - In Dhanmondi for a boua who works 7 days a week from 7am-9am: Tk600/ month ~DK
- Some of us have given our bouas keys, others have not. It depends on your level of comfort. One option is to give your boua a key to one of the locks on your doors and keep the key to the second lock for yourself. That way if you go out of town she cannot get in... (*Ahmed et. al.*)
- Theft among bouas is a common problem. Don't leave cash around; get a desk where you can lock the drawers or a safe where you keep your money or other valuables. (*Ahmed et. al.*)

My boua came every morning, and cooked up the groceries I had bought. She made just one large meal which I ate for breakfast and dinner (usually fish curry, rice, and a vegetable.) Three days a week, she swept my floors, and whenever I needed laundry done, she washed and hung it up to dry. She stayed sometime just an hour, sometimes up to three. She took a trip back to her village for about a week, about four times in a nine-month period.

## COMMUNICATION AND ELECTRONICS

- Best way to call the US is through skype or another internet phone service. I never actually tried using a calling card, but have direct dialed from my cell phone.
- A cell phone is the best thing to have, a land line is rarely used. Some Bangladeshis have several cell phones, one from each mobile service provider.
  - A cell phone will run from Tk1000 and up. It is possible to get a used phone from many shops. It is even possible to get a used SIM card, which is what I did, and I never received any phone calls from friends of the previous owner.
  - At the time, Grameen was the largest service provider in Bangladesh. Banglalink and Aktel are a close second and third. CityCell and Warid follow behind that. All provide decent service and similar costs. I used Aktel and liked it the best because it cost only Tk2.5 to text the US, cheaper than other companies. They also seemed to get better service than others outside of Dhaka (Grameen did too.)
  - You should register your SIM card with your provider. This is actually required by law, but I don't know the percentage of those that actually do it. To prevent getting my service disconnected, I went ahead and registered, it took 10 minutes.
- (*from Ahmed et. al.*) **WARNING!!** Be very careful about who you give your number out to! All of us have had experiences where a local has harassed us with repeated calling. Women are especially favored targets for harassment. Some strategies that we have taken to stop the incoming calls:
  - Don't write your real phone number on any non-critical lists (i.e. at drycleaners, tailors, internet cafes, etc.)
  - If you don't want a person who has requested your number to call you, it's ok to say “no”.
  - If you are a woman facing repeatedly calls, one option is to ask a man who speaks Bengali to get on the phone pretending to be your husband.
  - If you don't know the number and aren't expecting a call, don't pick up.

- Cultural Caveat: In Bangladesh, it is quite normal (since few people have voicemail) to call someone repeatedly if they don't answer. Second, a few Bangladeshis may call you, let the phone barely ring, and then hang up. Since foreigners tend to have more money, a few Bangladeshis expect that you will call them back and therefore pay for the call.
- At home and sometimes out of the home I used the wireless internet of CityCell Zoom. Was fast and connected easily 99% of the time. It seemed most people were provided internet access with an affiliation they had. For example, I had use of the BUET computer lab.
- I did not use the transformer I brought because all of my devices I brought from the US already had one (laptop and camera charger.) Not sure if others used theirs. Converters may come in handy, but most Bangladeshi outlets allow for any foreign plug to be plugged in. The most common foreign plug that needed an adaptor was the South African three pronged round thick plug, but adaptors for these could be found in shops near any home.
- Bringing a laptop should not be an issue, and I used it in and out of the home. When I went away on trips, I locked it up in my cabinet, but left it out during the day when I was out working. It is extremely dusty in Bangladesh, so make sure to clean out your laptop before you leave with compressed air! I never ever found compressed air in Bangladesh to clean my laptop out, and boy did I search.
- There are plenty of printing shops in every city and village, so as long as you have a flash drive, you can print easily and cheaply. Copy machines and fax machines as well. I went to these shops almost weekly and it barely dented my budget.

## LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Some knowledge of Bengali is extremely helpful. There are several good language schools that can offer short courses or semester long studies. The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS) hosted four students from my Fulbright class, and we took one to two semesters (3-6 months) of Bengali. I already had Bengali in college, so they offered an intermediate course. The tuition here is very high though (I think mine was \$3,000) so only if you have a Critical Language Enhancement Award (CLEA) this is a good place for studying Bengali, AIBS is in Baridhara.

If you don't have a CLEA, taking short or long courses at HEED Language Center, located in Banani, is a good option. One Fulbrighter's husband did this, and really enjoyed his beginner's course, and was conversing in basic Bengali very quickly.

Both programs teach you read. This is perhaps just as important as speaking as most signs in Bangladesh are in Bengali, and may not have any English at all. Outside of the big cities, there will rarely be shops with English. The letters are relatively easy to pick up on, and you can learn to sound out words in less than two weeks. This is important because many of the signs are just English words transliterated into Bengali.

Many places may be without an English speaker. Be prepared to have to communicate with gestures if you have no knowledge of Bengali. Learning numbers, at the least, is important, because then you can bargain with store owners and rickshaw drivers.

### Gestures

- Giving a thumbs up sign can be seen as rude, although some Bangladeshis recognize the western usage of it. In Bangladesh, this traditionally is the equivalent of the middle finger when expressed the right away. I only saw it used once in such a manner.
- A handshake with a man may last a lot longer than you are comfortable with. It is not uncommon to have a handshake last up to a minute as the person talking to you asks you questions and tells you about himself. I don't know what happens between a foreign woman and a Bangladeshi woman, but I rarely had to shake a Bangladeshi woman's hand.
- The head nod can mean "yes" or "no" or "I don't know." It is the most frequent non-verbal communication you will run across.

- If you stand out, people may follow you, just to watch what you do. Maybe even snap a few pictures to show their friends.

## CLOTHING

Men: slacks, light shirt (preferably collared), sandals

Women: shalwar kameez or long pants and blouse, orna, sandals

- In an office, Bangladeshi men typically have button up shirts and nice pants with full dress shoes. Women wear shalwar kameez and sandals with an orna.
- Formal wear: Men will wear suits or a sportcoat with dress shoes. Women will wear sharees.
- Party wear: Men will wear panjabi suits with sandals. Women will wear sharees.

## FOOD

- For fresh fruits and vegetables, you can either go to the high-end grocery markets, or buy it off the street for less than half the price. On the street you can bargain the price down even further.
- There are several nice grocery stores in both Dhanmondi and the Gulshan area such as Agora and Nandan.
- The American Commissary is another option for items that you cannot otherwise find in Dhaka. You can get all sorts of things there, from toiletries, salsa, Eggo waffles, ice cream, and alcohol. You have to get commissary membership which costs a \$250 refundable deposit. It is convenient when you want some of the comforts of home. The commissary is located across the American Embassy on Bishwa Road. (*Ahmed et. al.*)
- Cooking at home I found was difficult. I had a boua (maid) who came to clean and cook. I bought all the food, and she made it into whatever she felt like each morning when she came. The cooking equipment that Bangladeshis use will be a tad foreign, and it took me awhile to get used to cooking in my kitchen whenever I did.

### Typical Meal (at a simple Bangladeshi restaurant)

*Breakfast:* egg omelet with onion and chilies, goat curry, thick dal, parata, water, tea

*Lunch:* rice, fish curry, vegetable, fresh cucumber, dal, water, tea

*Dinner:* rice, fish curry or chicken/beef/goat curry, vegetable, fresh cucumber water, tea OR chicken/beef/goat biryani

- Non-South Asian fast food restaurants: millions of fried chicken restaurants, a few pizza places, Bangladeshi version of middle eastern cuisine, Chinese.
- KFC, Pizza Hut, A&W (got closed, may have reopened), Nando's
- Be wary of certain street foods: fresh fruits washed in not-so-clean water, mystery meat on a stick, sugar cane juice

## TRANSPORTATION

Dhaka's traffic could hold the title for "worst on Earth." Average travelling speeds over a full trip can be less than 10 mph on any given day. You may sit in one spot for an hour at a time without moving. Even on a good day, railroad crossings and sheer volume slow you down consistently at many chokepoints across the city. Do your best to live near where you're going to work. Getting from Dhanmondi to Gulshan on any given day could take you 1-2 hours, unless you are traveling before 7:30 AM.

The traffic is bad in Dhaka from 7:30 AM to 9:00 PM at night. It can be bad outside these hours too for no apparent reason beyond volume. It is worst from 8:00 AM to 9:00 PM during morning rush hour, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM when schools let out, and from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM in the evening rush hour.

### Public Transportation

- Local and ticket buses are the dominant form of transportation.
  - Buses are the best, least stressful way to get around
  - As a first time rider, try a ticket bus. Go to a bus stand, recognizable by the small little wooden desks in a row which men sitting behind them. Announce to one of them where you are going, and if it's his bus line, he'll sell you the ticket. If not, he'll point you which guy's bus you should board.
  - Local buses: pay on board to a conductor, no defined stops, in a more decrepit state
  - Ticket buses: buy ticket at designated stops from that bus company's ticket counter
  - I never saw any scamming on the buses. The price is printed on the ticket and they won't overcharge you. Even on local buses, it was a rare day when the conductor didn't charge me the fair price.
  - Over 150 private bus companies operating in Dhaka, and none cooperate
  - Each has destinations, usually in Bengali, written on the side of the bus...but sometimes don't
  - Local buses crowded 90% of the time, ticket buses 60% of the time
  - Local buses may require you to run and jump when boarding and alighting, ticket buses rarely
  - Ticket buses have 20% women passengers, local buses only 10% and they sit up front in a segregated women's section
  - Ticket bus fares run from Tk5 to Tk20 (across the full city). Local bus fares run from Tk1 (just a stop or two) to Tk15 (across the full city)
- Tempos
  - Tempos are twelve-passenger vehicles that are basically a passenger cabin attached to the back of a pick-up truck. They run fixed routes and have fares per kilometer about the same as a ticket bus. Work like a local bus and serve routes buses can't maneuver through. Sometimes can be found in small cities.
  - Fares usually are never above Tk7 because the tempo doesn't travel that far.

### Private Transportation

- Walking is the predominant form of transportation in Dhaka. 60% of all trips made are through walking.
- Some foreigners rent or own a car, although only one Fulbrighter did this and she regretted it. They are expensive to purchase. You will undoubtedly need to hire a driver, and this adds to expense. One, it is difficult to drive in Dhaka. Two, you don't want to have to personally wait in one hour long lines to fill up on gasoline or CNG.
- Rickshaws are the primary way to get around short distances in Dhaka. There are over 500,000 in Dhaka. In small cities and towns, this may be the ONLY way to get around. Trips usually start around Tk5, and are about Tk1 more per half kilometer.
  - You can either bargain out a price beforehand, or simply pay what you know it was worth afterwards (after you've learned what the price for a frequent trip typically is.) You may get into an argument with the rickshaw driver once in awhile on the price. No trip in Dhaka, unless you are crossing the entire city, should cost you more than Tk30. If they say anything higher, they are overcharging you. Most trips you wouldn't just take a bus or CNG for will be Tk10 to Tk20. In small cities and villages, fares will be lower. Typically fits two people in a rickshaw, but a third and fourth can fit if necessary.
  - Some streets are rickshaw prohibited. Rickshaws may not be able to cross them either. If a rickshaw driver insists he can't travel somewhere, you should probably believe him.
- CNG or autorickshaw. In Dhaka these are called CNG because that is the fuel they run on. Similar transport, but running on diesel or gasoline, exists outside Dhaka. Fit three people comfortably, and in Dhaka they are metered. If you find a CNG driver who will use the meter you have found the needle in the haystack. These drivers consistently refuse to drive places they don't feel like driving, and will charge high prices for even the shortest route. They are in such high demand, they know they can control the market. Just take a bus instead, it is much less stressful and 10 times as cheap.

- Taxis are a bit more expensive than CNGs. There are three levels of taxis. Black taxis are considered to be dangerous, but I rode them a few times. Blue taxis are the next step up, with nicer interiors and safer drivers. Yellow taxis are the nicest, and are air conditioned with wide back seats. These drivers are the safest. Fares can get up to Tk300 in a yellow taxi while crossing the city.

During the holidays, traffic in the city reduces to nothing. Especially during the two Eid holidays and) the streets are mostly empty. On Ekushe February (February 21) and Pohela Boishakh (April 14) offices are closed, but certain parts of the city are impassable as city-folk take to the streets to observe the holidays.

### Travel Inside/Outside the Country

- Best way to get around Bangladesh is by long-distance bus. There are several very good companies that serve many large and small cities including: Green Line, Shohagh, Shyamoli, and Hanif. Depending on the route and time of day, there may be an AC bus available for a bit higher price. Typically you will get a non-AC bus, a “Chair Coach” but with airplane style seats. Usually clean and efficient. One-way fares range from Tk200 to nearby cities to Dhaka, to Tk800 for an AC bus to Cox’s Bazaar. Can book sometimes the day before.
- If traveling over the Eid holidays or other major holidays, book tickets 2-3 weeks in advance. Booking the week of will leave you with limited options.
- There are also local type buses that travel the routes within the country, but are much dirtier and take longer. But are about half the price as a Chair Coach.
- Buses outside of Dhaka drive all over the road, and it can be a hair-raising experience. Try to sit in the third row and behind so you don’t have to watch the road. Don’t get the back row though, as it bounces a lot and the chairs won’t recline.
- Taking the train to Rajshahi, Sylhet, or Chittagong is another option. The Chittagong train is the nicest of them all with the newest train cars. Trips take a bit longer than by bus, but are safer.
- To Khulna and Barisal it is possible to travel by boat. These launches leave from the river port on the Buriganga River in the south of Dhaka. Usually are overnight trips, and one should book a first-class cabin, and its real cheap.
- Before traveling outside of your city, whether it be Dhaka or any other, you must notify the American Center.
- When travelling outside of Bangladesh, you have some options. To get to Kolkata or Nepal, you can travel by long-distance bus, just make sure you have the proper visas. You can also travel to Kolkata via the new Moitri Express, a just reopened train line that travels twice a week between Dhaka and Kolkata.
- Besides those places mentioned above, your best bet is to fly. Biman and GMG are the two best airlines Bangladesh has to offer, and GMG should be your preferred choice. Best Airways is a step below only because it doesn’t serve many destinations. You can get to Bangkok, all over India, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore, as well as some others on Biman. Fares can be fairly expensive, \$300 for a roundtrip flight to Bangkok for example. Foreign carries charge even more.
- When booking an airline ticket, it is easiest to just go to the airline’s office and speak to a representative. Online booking doesn’t exist, and a phone call won’t get you far. Airline offices are in Motijheel with some branches in Gulshan as well.
- Visas besides Bangladesh: the most difficult visa to get is the Indian visa. Everyone seems to leave the Indian embassy with a story of annoyance and grief. The Indian consular officials are very tough on tourists, and will demand a lot of proof of why you are traveling. The Nepali embassy officials, for example, are the exact opposite.

### **LIFE AS A FULBRIGHT RESEARCHER**

- Affiliations will have a variety of expectations for you. Some may be very lackadaisical and let you be as you do your work. Others may have a range of tasks they expect you to complete, whether they directly relate to your project or not.

- If under pressure from your affiliation to do exorbitant amounts of work that is not for your project, don't be afraid to say "no"
- Best way to manage expectations is meet with your affiliation early on and explain your expected role. Listen carefully to what they want, and express to what extent you think you can involve yourself with activities beyond your project.
- If your project happens to change, make sure you notify the American Center.
- Try to attain any documentation from your affiliation as soon as possible. At BUET, I needed to get permission to use the library and computer labs, and getting this permission took over a month.

#### Relations with colleagues and students

- Let your advisor at your affiliation initially influence the amount of contact you have. Academic and business environments in Bangladesh differ greatly from the US, and can extremely reserve. They may be working a foreigner for the first time, and may be cautious of what to expect from you, or on the other hand, may be assertive on what they want you to do. You can set their expectations straight with direct communication early on.
- If you end up working with other students, or hiring assistants to help you, be careful in your interactions. They may see you as a friend and not as a fellow worker. Manage this relationship so that you they understand you need work from them, and if you are going to pay them, you expect results. Some Fulbrighters expressed dissatisfaction with their assistants because they took a long time to complete tasks. Sometimes a pay raise can help, sometimes a stern talk.
- The pace of workflow is oftentimes very slow. Be patient, but also explain how deadlines need to be met. Manage a deadline carefully, and don't set something unrealistic for an assistant. Understand that time has a different meaning, influenced heavily by the traffic which makes getting things done very slow. Additionally, the work culture can be very relaxed.

#### **OTHER (from Ahmed et. al.)**

##### Tailors:

- Ferdous Tailors in Gulshan 2 (next to MK Electronics on the northeast side) is a great to copy just about any western clothes such as pants, shirts, jackets, etc. They also make great dress shirts here.
- Finding a good quality tailor can be difficult and prices will vary greatly. At a cheap (and not so good tailor) a sari blouse will cost Tk50, drawstring pants Tk100, petticoats Tk30, shalwar kameez Tk200.
- Most Fulbrighters found a tailor who they returned to frequently for clothing, whether it before Bangladesh or for bringing back to the US. I personally got over ten dress shirts, several dress pants, four suits, one sportcoat, and one tuxedo. ~DK

##### **Insect Control:**

Pest control can be a big problem.

- Mosquitoes. We have had varying levels of issues with mosquitoes. In the most extreme case, one of us went to bed one night without any mosquito protection and woke up looking like she had chicken pox the next day. A three pronged approach:
  - First, a mosquito net may be a necessity, depending on where you live. You can buy ready-made square nets in most bazaars or you can have one made at a tailor that specializes in bedspreads and mosquito nets (in Gulshan 2 Circle, on the northeast corner behind the inner row of stores there is a market – go east past the vegetables and you will find it...) Having a custom made net in "American style" (Bangladeshi term) or "princess style" (American term) will cost about 1,500 0
    - I bought a mosquito net and never used it. Instead I bought a mosquito repellent incense device called Good Night that kept them away for 30 days at a time. Easy to find at any store. They are odorless and non-toxic, and easy to find refills. ~DK

Cockroaches. Another nasty pest and very common.

- We recommend covering your kitchen with the powder for the first day or two after you move in to kill all of the bugs. You can buy insect powder and chalk at the main grocery stores and small hardware stores.
- You can also hire (or have your landlord hire) a professional exterminator.
- Keep food covered and counters clean.
- Periodically wipe out cabinets where food is stored.
- Never leave a sink full of dirty dishes overnight. Ever.
- Buy a covered trashcan.
- Mothballs (available at grocery stores) placed in drains/sinks can keep cockroaches from coming out of the drains. Mothballs aren't recommended for kitchen sink – since they are poisonous.

## ADDITIONAL INFO

### Popular place names and the American facilities

**Gulshan** – Northeast Dhaka, very high end housing and restaurants. Where most ex-pats live and work. Lots of entertainment, food, shopping. Most international businesses have an office here. A few embassies located here.

**Banani** – Northeast Dhaka, West of Gulshan. High end housing and restaurants. Older than Gulshan and with many private universities. Has a row of skyscrapers that can be seen from a distance.

**Baridhara** – Northeast Dhaka. East of Gulshan. Extremely high end housing. Where the embassies are mostly located, included US embassies. Embassy officials usually live here. Housing only, no commercial areas.

**Dhanmondi** – Southwest Dhaka. Medium to high end housing. Lots of primary and secondary schools and lower end private universities. Close to New Market and Dhaka University. Where the older wealth of Dhaka lives.

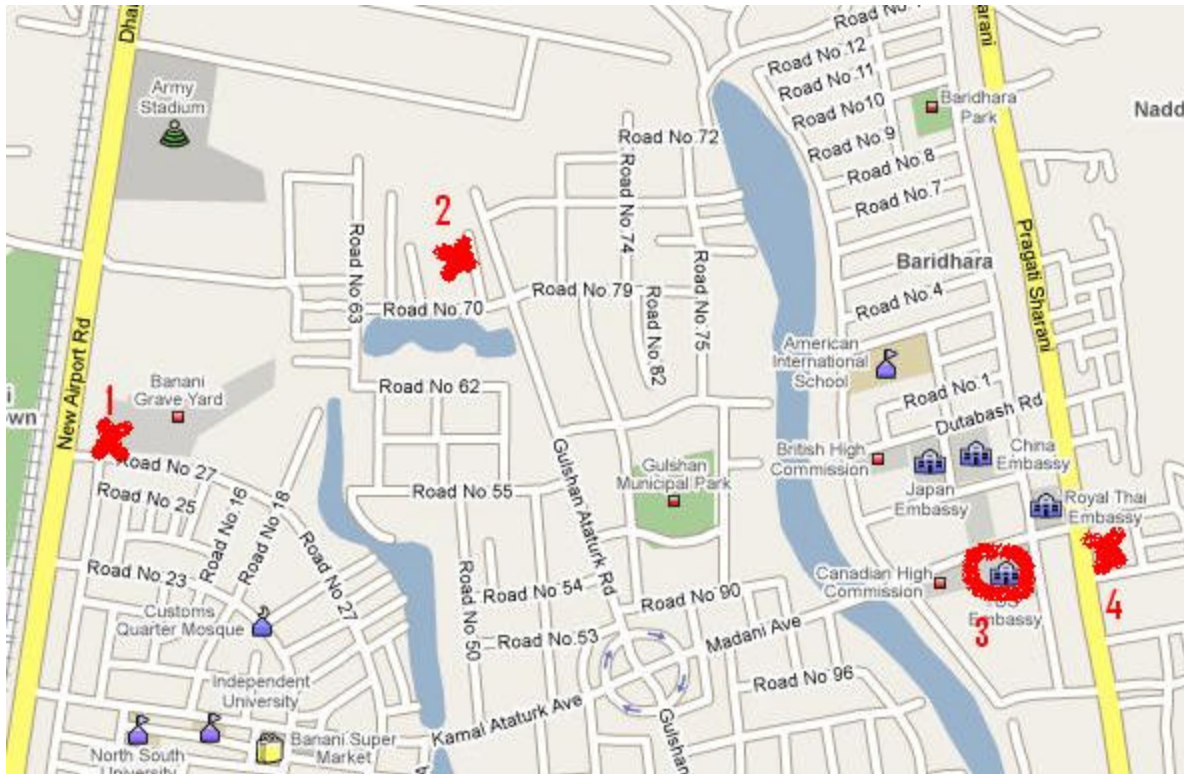
**Motijheel** – Southeast Dhaka. Financial center of Dhaka and most recognizable Central Business District. Soccer and field hockey stadiums. Train station to the east.

**Mirpur** – Northwest Dhaka. Suburbs for middle class Bangladeshis. Separated into numbered zones. Many NGO offices here. Also the headquarters of Grameen Bank and has the country's main cricket stadium.

**Old Dhaka** – Southern Dhaka. South of Motijheel and Dhanmondi is the oldest part of Dhaka. Streets are very narrow and dirty. Very densely populated. Many well-off Dhaka residents have never even traveled here. Foreigners can't resist going in and taking in the sites.

- 1: American Cultural Center (American Center): Employees who deal with Fulbrighters, pick up mail, send mail, library.
- 2: American Recreation Association (American Club): pool, tennis courts, American food, alcohol, requires deposit to get membership
- 3: United States Embassy (US Embassy): initial security briefing, any official events you are invited to, Consular services
- 4: American Commissary: American groceries, requires deposit to get membership

As a Fulbrighter, you will be able to get an American Club membership, but will first need a letter from the American Center. You also can get access to the American Commissary, and will need a letter for this as well. Joining is not required, and I never bought a membership or put a deposit down for either. If you live in Dhanmondi as opposed to Gulshan, Banani, or Baridhara, you will most likely never be near these facilities to warrant the membership costs.



### Appendix: How to Find Housing (from Ahmed et. al.)

The way we found our apartment was by walking around (or taking a rickshaw around) Dhanmondi, looking at the To-Let signs, and asking the security guard basic questions e.g.:

- How many bedrooms?
- What is the price?
- What is the maintenance fee?
- Is there a security guard always on duty?
- Is there a generator?

Then, if we liked those answers, we called the landlord, and spoke to her/him and if everything was mutually agreeable, we met. Of the three apartments we initially liked, one landlord wouldn't rent to an American, one was very nosy and asking the person helping us with the calls all sorts of weird questions, and one spoke excellent English and had rented to foreigners before. The third one was our clear choice and the only apartment we actually saw.

When you look at an apt:

- Check out the water pressure/
- Check cupboards for bugs (sadly, we didn't look very closely at the kitchen) and make sure that if there are locking closets, that the locks work or that a caretaker will come and fix them
- Check the main door locks and see if there is a peephole.

- Location and noise level – if it is on a main road or near a school, it could be very noisy but if it is too remote, it could be hard to find transport from there and/or not be safe late at night (quiet streets off of main roads are ideal...)
- If there is a generator in the building, ask how many lights and fans are on the generator (the electricity goes out quite often here)
- Be sure to negotiate the price you can get a 5% - 20% reduction just by asking
- Ask for a lease
- See if there is a 24 hour security guard. If there is not, you may have a curfew!!
- Check to make sure that you can get out of your apartment in an emergency (i.e. the front gate is not padlocked at night)
- Ask if the apartment has hot water (many places in Gulshan and Dhanmondi will have at least one bedroom with hot water)

We didn't see any furnished apartments available in Dhanmondi. They are available in Gulshan. My understanding of prices in Gulshan is that unfurnished apartments are a bit more (absolute minimum Tk35,000 without service charge, but many are Tk70,000 a month and up!) and furnished apartments are quite expensive (I didn't see any for less than Tk70,000/ month). If you are only going to be in Dhaka for six or even nine months, you might save money (and headache) by renting a furnished place rather than purchasing all the necessities.

Also note that single women may have trouble finding apartments in some areas of Dhaka. The diplomatic enclave is more receptive to singles, but one of us was unable to get an apartment in Dhanmondi because of her single status!