

# The Hypnotic Beauty of Bangladesh

The hypnotic beauty of Bangladesh surprised me. As we set out into the countryside at dawn, the reflection of the deep green and golden crops was reflected in the water. This was my first visit to Bangladesh, and it was hard to imagine that this is the country that tops the league for government corruption, can no longer feed its 140 million people, and has such a high birthrate.

Each of our three Baptists groups in Bangladesh practices a holistic ministry, in trying to reach out to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in their society, who are mostly women and children. This was why emphasis is placed on the education of women and children, the creation of marketable goods and the development of savings plans.

Bangladesh is the home of entrepreneurial lending schemes, but the Baptists first insist that people save, so that any loan is then taken from their own savings. Each group of savers has a treasurer, whose role it is to ensure that the funds are saved and banked whenever possible. Loans can then be taken from these funds either by the group as a whole or by an individual. In one center, clothes and other linens were being sewn, and so the group had decided to take a loan to purchase a new sewing machine.

From one of these cooperatives I purchased a beautiful batik of an elephant. They asked for \$2, but I gave \$5, knowing full well that such a large and artistic wall hanging would sell for \$50 in the shopping malls of Northern Virginia.

I visited three medical clinics, all dealing with primary health care but lacking many simple and basic resources. I received a list of much-needed equipment, and Baptist World Aid will send a shipment of these very basic instruments and equipment.

At the headquarters of the Garo Baptists I saw some “historic” operating-theater equipment, used for very basic procedures. Anyone needing more complex surgery was transported by a cycle rickshaw the 2-3 hour journey to a more major facility. I was told that many young women, often in their early teens, suffered problems in pregnancy and died during the journey.

With so much water and so many people, Bangladesh often suffers from severe disasters when the two meet. Cyclones bring heavy flooding, swollen rivers and there is limited space for people to flee. Many of the passenger ferry boats, plying across major rivers, are unsafe and capsize.

Christians are but a small percentage of this mainly Islamic country, and the Baptist population numbers about 40,000 in just over 900 churches. Yet in spite of this and other difficulties, the Baptist family in Bangladesh is growing and extending its ministries.

During my five days in Bangladesh I met many dedicated pastors and people who are striving to share the gospel both by deed and word. They are in need of our continuing support and prayer.

*[Paul Montacute](#) is director of Baptist World Aid.*