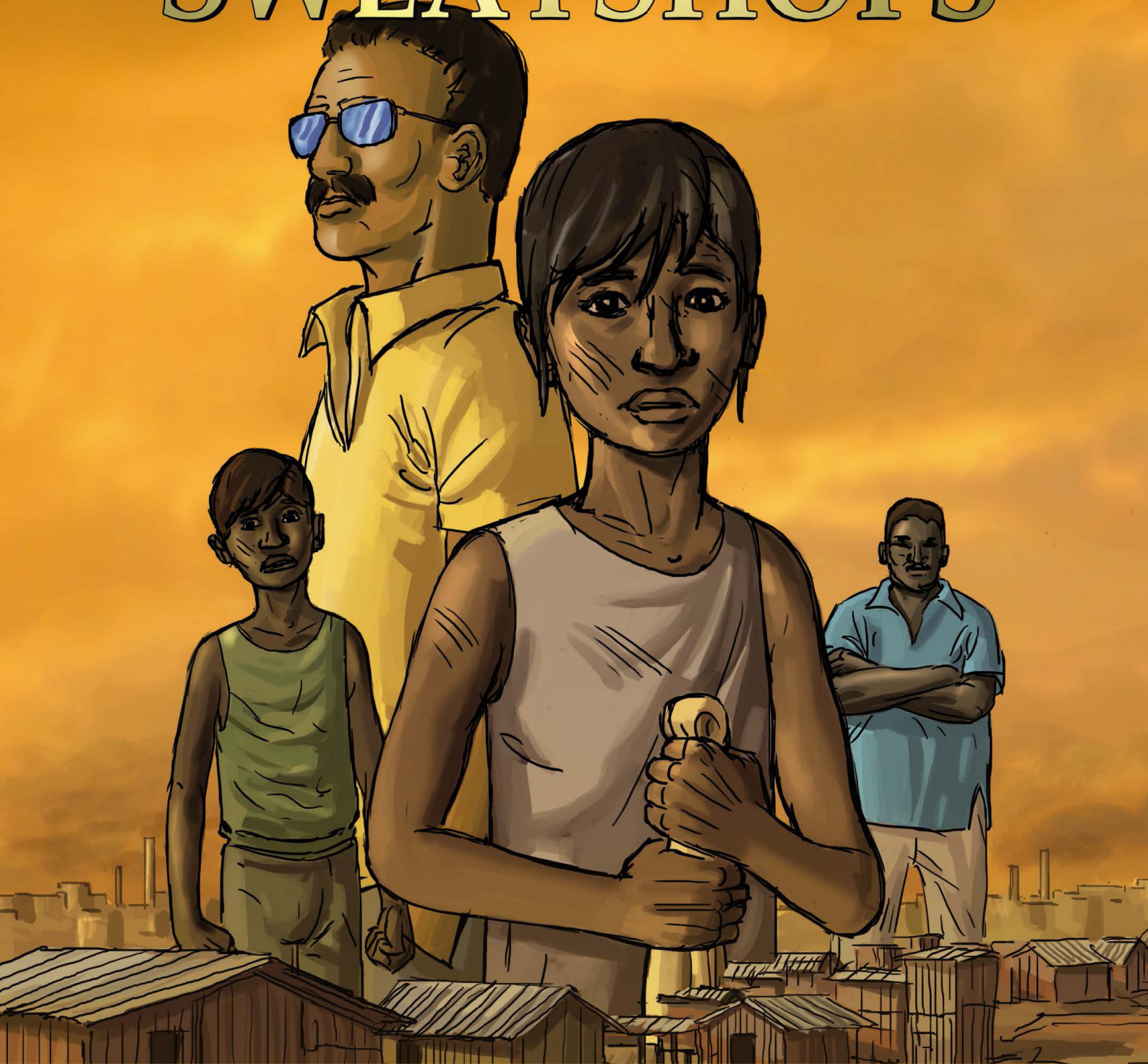


GLOBAL  CONFLICTS

# SWEATSHOPS



## TOPIC OVERVIEW

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# BANGLADESH

## Using the topic overview

This leaflet gives an introduction to the country of Bangladesh as it is presented in Global Conflicts: Sweatshops and to the central problems concerning child labour that the game introduces. The aim of the topics overview is to provide enough background information to support qualified classroom discussions, particularly on the central topics of the game. Simultaneously, the overview aims at providing a multi-perspective look at the many challenges that the people of Bangladesh face today.



## Child labour

The vast majority of the world's countries have banned child labour today, but definitions vary significantly as to what constitutes a child and how much work is acceptable. Throughout history, children have been used as a cheap, unskilled source of labour that was far easier to control than adults. Only in the 1920s and 1930s did the world's attention start to focus on children and children's rights.

In 1923, the international organisation Save the Children put forth five principles on children's rights – principles that were adopted by League of Nations the following year. This was the first attempt at a charter on children's rights.

Urged by the crimes against humanity committed during the Second World War, the UN drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.

In 1959 the UN announced ten principles on children's rights, based on the original five put forth by Save the Children. The ten principles were passed on 20 November, and this date was subsequently proclaimed as Universal Children's Day (not to be confused with International Children's Day, which is celebrated on 1 June).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989. It contains 54 articles. At the Unicef home page, you can read more about the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## THE MAIN TOPICS OF THE GAME

Global Conflicts: Sweatshops is about child labour in Bangladesh and the problems it raises. To complete the game, the player must investigate and reflect on the main topics that all relate to child labour: children's rights, education, globalization and pollution.

When people in the game talk to the main character (controlled by the player) or when, for instance, he discovers chemicals at the factory, the information he gathers all relates to one or more of these topics. The topics are also central to the game's final interview with Raihan, the owner of the factory. They constitute the problem areas that the player must confront him with, and these are the areas in which the players must convince him to make improvements at the factory (globalization is not).

## Human rights – and children's rights

It takes financial and social security as well as understanding and compassion for others to treat one's fellow human beings with respect. And it requires an acceptance that everyone has equal rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN in 1948. It regards all people as born equal and entitled to equal rights. The UN was only established in 1945 and was consequently quite a young organization. It was created to prevent atrocities like the ones committed during the Second World War from ever happening again.

In many countries, a distinction was made between the rights of adults and those of children. Only in 1989, with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, are the rights of children ratified.

In Bangladesh, observing the international human rights has not always been a matter of course. As late as during the caretaker government period (2007-2008), many basic human rights were suspended. The authorities regarded this as a necessary measure to get to the bottom of the widespread corruption problems that the country suffered from.

In the game, two of the most important aspects relating to human rights are how children's rights are regarded in general and what opportunities are available to boys and girls respectively. During the last years, attention to the opportunities of girls has increased, since these opportunities have not been equal to those of boys due to historical and cultural factors.

## Education

All Bangladeshi children between the age of six and ten Bangladesh have the right to free schooling, but there are many factors that may contribute to prevent a child from actually getting an education.

For many of the poorest people, the choice between getting an education and working is not necessarily a real one. Choosing to go to school is often a choice not to work and consequently not to earn money to help one's family survive. Many families are in desperate need of the extra income that the children may earn. Furthermore, the poorest children may have difficulties actually getting to a school if there is not one near their home.

Almost half the pupils in primary school drop out before they complete the fifth grade. There are several reasons for this, among them the poor teaching standards at many schools, the lack of qualified teachers and the costs of school materials. Even if school is officially free for the first six years, the children still need money for transport to and from school, uniforms, pencils, notebooks etc., and such expenses are to be covered by their families. Many children, particularly girls, also have domestic duties and consequently little time for homework. All this causes many of the poorest families to give up on schooling.

Several NGOs have successfully established school projects in the slums and made agreements with the local businesses to ensure that the local children can keep their jobs (and thus help support their families) and go to school for a few hours every day. Consequently, for many children it is not a question of work or school but of work and school. In many places, it is an accepted fact that the children need to work in order for their families to survive. If they can find time for a few hours of schooling, it is probably better than no schooling at all.

Children who are forced not to work, but whose families do not receive any financial compensation for the loss of an income, will often end up doing worse things than working – they may become criminals or prostitutes for instance.

## Globalisation

Today, the term 'globalisation' covers a number of meanings. In this game, globalisation refers to the increasing exchange of goods (and consequently money) among still more parts of the world. This trade increase has been facilitated by new technology providing still cheaper transport and communication as well as political agreements between national leaders to remove obstacles to trade.

Western businesses in particular choose to move or outsource production to the Far East. One of the main reasons for the attractiveness of the East in this respect is that costs, particularly payroll costs, are much lower there than in the Western countries.

But competition is tough in the East, and many businesses will do anything to reduce their costs and increase their profits. This often happens at the expense of their employees who will often have to work under dangerous and brutal conditions. Many businesses will also hire children to work under such conditions.

Children make few demands and are consequently a very cheap and easily controllable source of labour.

Globalisation, then, is something of a dilemma to countries like Bangladesh: On the one side, it brings capital and creates jobs, but on the other it forces local children and adults alike

to work under slave-like conditions. Furthermore, continued use of child labourers may to a certain extent contribute to keep Bangladesh from escaping its position as a developing country, since the prevalence of skilled labour and technological products is kept low.

## Pollution

As in so many other developing countries, pollution is a big problem in Bangladesh – to the people who live there and have to live with the consequences of their society's lack of understanding for the damage pollution does to people and their environment, but also to the country's animal and plant life, which suffers greatly from the pollution as well.

The country's capital, Dhaka, is particularly hard hit by pollution, as is the river Buriganga that runs through the city. In the Dhaka slums, businesses of all sizes dump waste into the streets of the slums and directly into the river. Many of the poor people living near the river use the polluted water to bathe and wash their clothes in.

Pollution is an important topic to the game since many child labourers carry out what is termed hazardous labour. Jobs such as prostitution, mining, operating of machinery and working with chemicals are all termed as hazardous. Attempts at putting a stop to child labour often focus mainly on such jobs where children are exploited and simultaneously put themselves at risk, often resulting in lasting damages to their bodies and/or minds.

## Global problems

Even though Bangladesh struggles with massive pollution problems, mainly due to the huge amounts of raw sewage and waste from homes and factories dumped straight into rivers like the Buriganga, the country is hardly considered as a great polluter on a global scale. But since Bangladesh is such a low-lying country, the potential disaster threatening it if the water level of the world's oceans rises by only a few centimeters is massive. This disaster can only be avoided if other countries make an effort as well.

## BANGLADESH

Today's Bangladesh is one of the poorest, most densely populated and least developed countries in the world. The greater part of the population (about 85%) lives in the rural areas, and agriculture is still by far its most important economic sector. The soil is extremely fertile due to the monsoon, but every year the rain also causes massive flooding at great human and material cost.

Bangladesh is a relatively young country. The area that is known as Bangladesh today only gained its independence in 1971. Before then, the area had been a part of India and later of Pakistan.

#### FACTS

- Area: 145,000 km<sup>2</sup>
- Population: 162,000,000
- Capital: Dhaka (12,500,000 inhabitants)
- Languages: Bengali, English
- Religion: Islam (90%; state religion), Hinduism (9%)

## HISTORICAL PERIOD

### First Historical Period: 2000 BC – 1757 AD

#### 2000 BC – 600 AD

People have been living in the area for more than 4,000 years, but until the first real King, Shashanka, rose to power and united many of the warring tribes, the area was part of a series of empires and kingdoms.

#### 600-625 Shashanka

In 600 AD Shashanka managed to unite many of the local kingdoms, and for a quarter of a century (until about 625 AD), the area enjoyed relative peace and underwent great cultural and financial development. When Shashanka's Kingdom crumbled, however, the area was again split up and ruled by more or less powerful kings and tribal chiefs faced with numerous attacks from foreigners, primarily nomadic tribes from the north. 200 years would pass before the area was one country again.

#### 750-1200 Pala

In the 8th Century, the Buddhist Pala Dynasty rose to power, and they ruled the Bengal region for the next 400 years. The first Pala Monarch was Gopala, who attained power in

750 through democratic election – the first of its kind in Southern Asia. The Pala Empire reached its peak under Gopala's son Dharmapala, who reigned from 770 to 810. The dynasty collapsed in 1196, and many of the Buddhist monks, who had enjoyed great influence and authority, fled to neighbouring countries.

#### 1100-

In the 12th Century, the first Arabic traders arrived in the area, and they brought Islam with them. Slowly the new religion spread and eventually supplanted Buddhism and Hinduism in many places.

#### 1400-

From the 15th Century onwards, European traders arrived as well, and their growing influence eventually resulted in the British East India Company gaining control of the region.

## Second Historical Period: 1757 - 1947

In 1757, the British East India Company gained a decisive victory over Siraj Ud Daulah and his French allies at the Battle of Plassey. Mir Jafar, a Bengali commander-in-chief, had been persuaded to betray his countrymen and join the British forces along with his men. This handed the British an easy victory, and they were subsequently able to drive out the French and seize control of Bengal and India, which later became a part of the British Empire.

The East India Company and the British Empire controlled Bengal until the partition of the British India in 1947.

## Third Historical Period: 1947 - 1971

In 1947, British India was split in two, and Bengal was divided between the nations of India and Pakistan. The western part of Bengal became part of India while the Eastern part passed to Pakistan.

From the very beginning, relations between East and West Pakistan were strained. One significant problem was that the two regions were separated by about 1600 kilometres of Indian territory, which made it difficult to rule and treat the regions equally. The government and other ruling powers were mostly situated in West Pakistan, which led to a feeling among the East Pakistanis of being discriminated against. An increasing wish for autonomy in East Pakistan eventually resulted in the Pakistani Government deploying troops to quell the resistance. In spite of such attempts, the Awami League and its allies, who fought for national autonomy, managed to force a parliamentary election in 1970. The Awami League gained an overwhelming victory. Its leader, Mujibur Rahman was subsequently captured

by the army who also persecuted league members and others who wanted autonomy. Many Awami Leaders fled to India where they established a government in exile, and, helped by the Indian army and the East Pakistani liberation forces, they managed to beat the Pakistani army nine months later. Mujibur was released and returned to newly formed country of Bangladesh.

## Fourth Historical Period: 1971-2010

Following two years of famine in 1973 and 1974 and Mujibur's changing of the country's form of government to a one-party system, he and many of his family members are murdered by the military.

### 1977-1981

General Ziaur Rahman and BNP (the Bangladesh National Party) rule the country. He is murdered by the military in 1981.

### 1982-1990

General Hossain Ershad is in power for eight years, but is forced to resign in 1990 following huge demonstrations and massive public protests.

Parliamentarism is reinstated, and during the next many years the country is ruled by one or other of the country's two big parties: the secular Awami League and the Islamic BNP.

### **1991-1996**

BNP wins the first parliamentary election. The party leader is the widow of murdered president Ziaur Rahman, Begum Khaleda Zia. The party stays in power from 1991 to 1996 when the Awami League takes over.

### **1996-2001**

The Awami League wins the 1996 election. The leader is now Hasina Wajed, daughter of the country's founder, Mujibur Rahman.

### **2001-2006**

The power reverts to the BNP, still lead by Begum Zia. Her term is characterized by increasing corruption and politically motivated acts of violence.

### **2006-2007**

In January 2007, emergency law is declared, and an army backed caretaker government is appointed in an attempt to deal with the increasing corruption problem.

### **2008-**

On 29 December 2008, a new election is held and democracy reinstated. The election is won by the Awami League and Hasina Wajed. Even though many politicians have been prosecuted for corruption, the Bangladeshi public administration and legal system still suffer from widespread corruption problems.

#### **FACTS**

- Age: One third of the population is less than 15 years old.
- Literacy: Less than 50% literacy (i.e. 50% of the population are illiterate to some extent)
- Poverty: 45% of the population lives below the poverty line
- Internet: About 3% internet users (500.000 regular users)

## TEACHING - LINKS

**The Free Dictionary on Bangladesh:**

<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Bangladesh>

**Wikipedia on Bangladesh: (Remember that information found on Wikipedia may not be completely accurate - always double-check your facts)**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh>

**CIA Factbook on Bangladesh:**

[www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)

**Unicef on Bangladesh:**

[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bangladesh\\_bangladesh\\_background.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bangladesh_bangladesh_background.html)



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