

## BANGLADESH MISSION

### 1. Social setting

Formerly East Pakistan, Bangladesh came into being only in 1971, when the two parts of Pakistan split after a bitter war which drew in neighboring India. Bangladesh spent 15 years under military rule and, although democracy was restored in 1990, the political frictions remain among the two major political parties. This is usually a tolerant country. Some consider it as a model of coexistence with minority religions. The national language is Bangla or Bengali.

Bangladesh has population of 162 million people and it is one of the world's most densely populated countries, with its people crammed into a delta of rivers that empties into the Bay of Bengal. 31.5% live below poverty line. The majority profess Islam – 90%, the other religions are Hindus – 8.5%, Buddhists – 0.6% and Christians – 0.4%.

Frequent flooding in the country because of the geographical nature and various river beds, especially in the low lying areas, is a concern. Corruption is another problem in the country. Islamic groups with various ideologies are also a concern.

### 2. Ecclesial Setting

The Portuguese arrived in 1518 at Diang, nearby Chittagong, and this marks the arrival of Chris-



tianity. There are six dioceses and two archdioceses (Dhaka and Chittagong). Now, there are approximately 350,000 Catholics, approximately 0.2 percent of the population. About 60% of Catholics come from "tribals", members of minority tribes.

In 1845, Chittagong became the seat of first East Bengal Vicariate and the territory was entrusted to Dhaka diocese in 1886. Chittagong diocese was created in 1927 and was elevated to an archdiocese on Feb. 2, 2017 with Most Rev. Moses Costa CSC, as its first archbishop. The

Chittagong archdiocese celebrates 500 years of Christian presence in 2018. The archdiocese has 11 Parishes and has 23 priests and 6 women religious congregations. The Catholic population is 32,000, among these 22,000 live in hill tracts. The schools which are run by the Church are very much appreciated by the people and it has good influence in the social fabric of the society. Although the Church has a long history, due to various reasons, the Church has not grown in numbers. The Catholics receive faith formation through various programs.

### 3. Our Arrival at the Archdiocese

Abp. Moses Costa invited our Society to help his archdiocese in pastoral and social ministries. Considering “What God wants us to do now”, \_\_\_\_\_ discussions and discernment were done elaborately with the confreres and the archbishop regarding our entry into Bangladesh. Knowing the socio-religious situation of this country and the local Church concerns, the generalate decided that the mission in Bangladesh would be under its

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administration. Thus, it started the process of finding suitable confreres for establishing this mission.

Fr. Mariusz Pacula and Fr. Cyprian Pinto were identified as the first batch for this mission. After a short preparation in Guwahati (ING), Mariusz Pacula and Cyprian Pinto together with Fr. Stanislaus Thanuzraj Lazar, the generalate mission secretary, landed in Bangladesh on 4th January, 2018. They reached the Jamal Khan Parish house on 6<sup>th</sup> January, the feast of Epiphany. The official opening of the Bangladesh Mission was on 15<sup>th</sup> January, the feast day of St. Arnold Janssen, with the installation of Cyprian Pinto as parish priest of Jamal Khan parish by Abp. Moses Costa. Fr. Maxim Rodrigues, ING regional, was the official representative of the Society for this event. After a few months, we will serve at Noakhali parish which is 120 km from Chittagong.

Fr. Deoswarup Kujur and Fr. Falentinus Tnesi are also assigned to this mission and they will reach Chittagong after six months. Keeping up with our tradition and charism, this is an intercultural community and our challenge is to spread the Word of God and to do effective intercultural mission.