

Pakistan (Islamic Republic of)

Last updated: 31-01-2004

Location and area

Pakistan is a republic in south Asia, bordered on the north and northwest by Afghanistan, on the northeast by Jammu and Kashmir, on the east and southeast by India, on the south by the Arabian Sea, and on the west by Iran. The status of Jammu and Kashmir is a matter of dispute between India and Pakistan. The area of Pakistan is 796,095 km², excluding the section of Jammu and Kashmir under its control. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

Pakistan is divided by the River Indus, which enters the country in the northeast and flows south into the Arabian Sea. The Indus forms the demarcation line between two of Pakistan's main topographic areas:

1. The Indus Plain extends principally along the eastern side of the river and varies in width from about 80 to 320 km. From north to south it includes portions of the Punjab Plain and the Sind Plain. The Punjab region is drained by the Sutlej, Ravi, Chenab, and Jhelum rivers, which are tributaries of the Indus.
2. The upland Baluchistan Plateau lies to the southwest of the Indus and is bordered by the Tobakakar Range, the Siahan Range, the Sulaiman Range, and the Kirthar Range.

Four other topographic areas are:

3. The coastal plain, a narrow strip of land bordering the Arabian Sea,
4. The Kharan Basin to the west of the Baluchistan Plateau,
5. The Thar Desert (or Great Indian Desert), which straddles the border with India in the south-east, and
6. The mountains of the north and north-west, including the Hindu Kush with as highest peak Tirich Mir (7,690 m. The Safed Koh Range is pierced by the Khyber Pass on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The highest peak in Pakistan is K2 (the second-highest mountain in the world, 8,611 m a.s.l.) in the Karakorum Range. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

The climate of Pakistan varies widely with topography, but is generally continental. In the mountain regions of the north and west, temperatures fall below freezing during the winter. In the Indus Plain area, temperatures range between about 32° and 49° C in summer; the winter average is about 13° C. Throughout most of Pakistan rainfall is scarce. The Punjab region receives the most precipitation - more than 500 mm per year. The arid regions of the southeast and southwest receive less than 125 mm annually. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

In much of the country the natural vegetation is limited to drought-resistant grasses and stunted trees. Alpine vegetation grows on the higher mountain slopes. The wetter slopes are wooded. About 28 % of Pakistan's land area, predominantly in the Indus Valley, is arable; most cultivated land is irrigated (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

Pakistan possesses a great variety of wetlands. Inland waters cover 78,000 km², over half of which comprise waterlogged areas, seasonally flooded plains and saline marshes. Coastal mangrove swamps cover at least 2,600 km². Freshwater swamp originally (i.e. before the influence of humans) covered 18,227 km² against currently 1,601 km²; mangroves originally covered 3,800 km² against currently 727 km², whereas seasonal salt marshes originally and currently cover 8,736 km² (www.geoanalytics.com/bims/pk.htm).

Other sources give for the Indus River Delta Arabian Sea mangroves an area of 5,800 km² (www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/im/im1403_full.html).

Peatlands

Markov et al. (1988) estimate the area of „peat resources“ (peat thickness not mentioned) in Pakistan of 20 km², that is quoted by Lappalainen & Žurek (1996b) for the estimated “recent peatland area”. Possibly this estimate goes back to the volume of 2000 Mtonnes of peat that Tibbets (1969) mentions for “East Pakistan”, the current Bangladesh. Bangladesh was up to 1971 a province of Pakistan (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols exist in Pakistan and 410 km² of gley soils.

Pictures of peatlands in Pakistan can be found under
http://www.ramsar.org/archives_banners.htm