

## PAKISTAN - INFORMATION SHEET

### BACKGROUND

Pakistan, as it is today, was created in 1947 when the British, who had colonised present day Pakistan and India for over 100 years, divided it from India. It is known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Islam-i Jamhuriya-e Pakistan). In the Urdu language the name Pakistan means 'Land of the Pure.' It is bordered by China, the Arabian Sea, Iran, Afghanistan and India. The population is estimated to be 135 million with 40 million living in urban areas and the remainder in rural areas.



### LANGUAGE

Urdu is the official national language though there are over 20 languages spoken in Pakistan. Most public officials also speak English. Punjabi is spoken by almost 60% of the population. Other languages include Sindhi, Pushto and/or Baluchi.

### RELIGION

The majority of the population are Muslim (95%). Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Baha'i and Parsi ( Zoroastrianism) are practised by the remaining 5%.

### CULTURAL IDENTITY

With the establishment of Pakistan arising from a political decision, the peoples of Pakistan tend to identify more with their own communities than a national identity. Pakistanis, therefore, tend to see themselves as either Punjabi, Baluchi, Sindhi or Pashtun.

### MAJOR HOLIDAYS

**Eid-al Fitr** is celebrated by Muslims to mark the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. For Pakistanis who can afford it, an animal is sacrificed and divided into three parts. The first part is donated to the poor, the second is given to relatives and/or friends and the third is cooked in the household of the person who made the sacrifice.

The **Urs** festivals, commemorates the death of Sufi saints.

Other national holidays include Independence Day (August 14th), Pakistan Day (March 23), Defence of Pakistan Day (September 6) and the birth-date and death date of M A Jinnah, the Qaid-e-Azam (December 25 and September 11, respectively).

### **CULTURAL PRACTICES**

**NEWBORNS:** Muslim newborns are blessed by prayer at a naming ceremony. A newborn boy's head is shaven to ensure that future hair will grow healthily. The shaven hair is weighed and the equivalent weight, in silver, is then given to the poor. All males are ritually circumcised. Upon the birth of a baby an animal is sacrificed: one for girls and two for boys. The meat is distributed amongst the poor or friends and relatives.

**EDUCATION:** Muslims mark the beginning of a child's religious education in a ceremony known as Bismillah.

**NAMING PRACTICES:** The privilege of naming the baby is traditionally given to the grandfather. The naming occurs within the first 40 days of its life.

**Greetings:** Traditionally Pakistanis greet each other with the Muslim greeting Salaam alaikum (peace be with you). The correct response is Wa alaikum as Salaam (and also unto you). Men shake hands and friends embrace one another. Men are addressed as sahib, meaning Mr or sir. The word sahib however comes after the name ie Jones Sahib. The female equivalent is begum.

**CLOTHING:** Male attire is usually the salwar; loose baggy trousers and a long shirt like tunic over the top. Head covering varies from turbans to caps. Women wear loose fitting pants and a long loose top with a scarf, or a sari. However orthodox Muslim women cover themselves from head to foot in a burqa (pronounced burka).

### **GENDER ROLES**

Most Pakistani women work in the home and the men earn money. Most of the Pakistani women who do work are nurses and teachers.

### **CUISINE**

Muslims do not eat pork, hence beef, chicken, lamb and fish are the favoured dishes. During the month of Ramadan fasting occurs during the day. Wheat and flour products are the staple with foods like chappatis or roti accompanied by lentils and seasonal vegetables.

### **REFERENCES**

1. <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Norway-to-Russia/pakistans.html>
2. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>