

I-Topography

1-Location:

The Kingdom of Cambodia is located in Southeast Asia bordered to the North by Thailand and Lao to the east and the south by Vietnam, and to the South and West by the Gulf of Thailand. Cambodia has a land area of 181,035 square kilometers among of which 20 percent is used for agriculture. It lies totally within the tropics with its southernmost points slightly more than 100 above the Equator.



Cambodia is administratively composed of 21 provinces and four municipalities. Phnom Penh is the capital city of Cambodia with the population approximately 1 million. Most of the country consists of a low-lying alluvial plain that occupies the central part of the country. To the southeast of the plain lies the delta of the Mekong River. To the east of the plain, ranges of undulating hills separate Cambodia from Vietnam. To the southwest mountain range, the Chuor Phnum Krâvanh, fringes the plain and forms a physical barrier along the country's coast. Cambodia's highest peak, Phnom Aural (1,813 m/5,948 ft) rises in the eastern part of this range. To the north, the Chuor Phnum Dangrek Mountains separate Cambodia from Thailand.

2-Demographics

Population

An estimated 85-90 percent of the population lives in rural areas. Ethnically the population consists of about 90 percent Khmer, 5 percent each of Chinese and Vietnamese and small numbers of hill tribes (Chams and Burmese). Khmer is the country's official language. It is spoken by more than 95 percent of the population. French, as a second language is also spoken, mostly by older people. English is more commonly spoken by the younger generation.

The Cambodian population presents several important features. First, due to the baby' boom after 1979, it is a young population with at least half (50% according to some sources, more according to others) under 18 years of age now. Secondly, the proportion of women in the adult population is high, 56% of those who are 18 years old or more being females. Also as a result of the war, there is a rather high proportion of women-headed household; at least 25% according to UNICEF.



Those of Vietnam and Thailand dwarf Cambodia and Laos' populations, and average population densities in the smaller countries are much lower than in Vietnam. Even the very densely populated areas in Cambodia do not have such a concentration of population as can be found in the Red River and Mekong River Deltas in Vietnam .

The population of Cambodia is **12,491,501 (2001 estimate)**. Population growth per year is estimated at 2.3 percent, one of the highest rates in Asia . The rate of infant mortality is also high. The population density is 69 persons per sq km (179 per sq mi), with the densest concentrations on the heavily cultivated central plain. The mountainous regions of the country, where malaria is widespread, are thinly populated, as are the poorly watered northern provinces. During the late 1970s, under the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge, all of Cambodia's towns were depopulated, and residents were forcibly relocated to rural areas. A process of re-urbanization began in the 1980s.

Plant and Animal

Forests cover 53 percent of Cambodia's land. The densest forests thrive in the mountains and along the southwestern coast. Higher plains and plateaus contain savannas covered with high, sharp grass. Plants growing in Cambodia include rubber, kapok (a tree with seeds that yield a cotton-like fiber), palm, coconut, and banana, all of which are exploited commercially.



Wildlife in Cambodia includes elephants, deer, wild ox, panthers, bears, and tigers. Cormorants, cranes, parrots, pheasants, and wild ducks are also found, and poisonous snakes are numerous. Logging and mining activities, along with unregulated hunting, have diminished the country's wildlife rapidly.



Natural Resources

Of Cambodia's total land area, only 21 percent is cultivated. Areas surrounding the Mekong and the Tônlé Sap are the most fertile regions. The country's once-ample timber resources have been poorly managed and are being rapidly depleted by local and foreign entrepreneurs. Although Cambodia is not rich in mineral resources, Batdâmbâng province in northwestern Cambodia contains limited quantities of zircons, sapphires, and rubies. The central part of the country contains commercial deposits of salt, manganese, and phosphate. The Gulf of Thailand is thought to contain petroleum deposits, but the extent and accessibility of the reserves have yet to be determined.



River and Lake



Cambodia 's most important river is the Mekong , the longest river in Southeast Asia and the tenth largest in the world. The Mekong flows from north to south through Cambodia and is navigable for much of its course. Other rivers in the country include the Tonle Srepok and the Tonle Sab.

Cambodia 's principal lake, the Tonle Sap (Great Lake), is the largest in Southeast Asia . From the northwest, the Tonle Sap drains into the Mekong via the Tonle Sab River , entering the Mekong at Phnom Penh . Each year during the monsoon season (approximately May to October), the waters of the Mekong increase and reverse the flow of the Tonle Sab, which begins to drain into the lake. The lake then expands dramatically, flooding the provinces along its banks. When dry weather returns, the river reverses its course again and flows back into the Mekong , draining the northwestern provinces. At the height of the flooding, the Tonle Sap reaches more than 10,000 sq km (4,000 sq mi), or about four times its size in the dry season. The lake is one of the richest sources of freshwater fish in the world.

Environment Issue



Deforestation is the most serious threat to Cambodia 's environment. In the 1960s and 1970s Cambodian forests and wetlands were harmed by bombings and defoliants used in the Vietnam War. In the 1970s and 1980s the damage continued with the disastrous agricultural policies of the Khmer Rouge regime and civil war. In the relatively peaceful 1990s, timber became an important export for Cambodia . More than 800,000 hectares (2 million acres) of Cambodian forest were cut down from 1990 to 1995. In 1995 the government responded by banning log exports, but illegal timber exporting has led to continued deforestation. The annual rate of deforestation in 1990-2000 was 0.58 percent.

Many of the mangrove swamps crucial to the country's fisheries and wildlife have been destroyed. The loss of wildlife habitat and the negative environmental effects of logging and mining industries have caused a decline in biodiversity. In 2000, 86 species were listed as threatened in Cambodia , including 21 species of mammals. In addition, the pollution and contamination of streams and lakes has made much of the country's fresh water unsafe. Only 30 percent (1999) of all Cambodian people have access to safe, drinkable water, and only 18 percent (1999) have access to sanitation.

In addition to banning the export of lumber, the Cambodian government has declared a large portion- 16.2 percent (1997)-of the country's total land area protected. The government has also ratified international environmental agreements pertaining to climate change, desertification, endangered species, marine life conservation, ship pollution, and tropical timber.

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