

## Rajshahi, Bangladesh



According to popular legend, a Sufi Muslim saint named Shah Makhdum rode a crocodile up the river and brought Islam to Rajshahi. His shrine in the city is visited by many Muslims in the area seeking a cure for infertility, sickness and other problems.

Situated on the banks of the Ganges a few miles from India, Rajshahi city is home to about half a million Bengali Muslims. The region has been successively dominated by waves of Aryan, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, British, and Pakistani control before the region finally gained independence as Bangladesh in 1971. Rajshahi city itself became prominent during the British Raj, and although once predominantly Hindu, the city is now 90% Muslim. Rajshahi Muslims are generally quite liberal and open-minded, but the main university campus is controlled by the Islamist Jamaati-Islam student party, and the city has been a hub for some minor terrorist activity.

Rajshahi is an educational hub for the country, with over ten large universities, colleges and medical schools. Rajshahi University alone has over 25,000 students. Rajshahi is also a medical hub for the country, with a Christian Mission Hospital.

Almost a hundred years ago the Gospel first began to bear fruit among Muslims in the region, when Scriptures were distributed in the Muslim dialect of Bengali. Hundreds came to faith, but unfortunately these believers were encouraged to abandon their traditions and dialect, and merge into the Hindu-background church culture; this resulted in the death of the movement.

In the early 1980s, a brave young Muslim-background Christian businessman moved to Rajshahi and began witnessing to Muslims, encouraging believers to remain within their families and culture. As a result, there are now three house fellowships in the city, with additional ones in the surrounding villages. These fellowships are growing, vibrant and bold in outreach, but much depth in discipleship and knowledge of God's Word is needed to sustain the movement.

In the past, the ministry has been forced to focus on the men, with the women and children being much less accessible. That is beginning to change. However, women are still less literate and more limited in travel opportunities and free time.

### ▶ Prayer REQUESTS

- ▶ *Pray for the small house fellowships of believers to grow in maturity, obedience and knowledge of God's Word. Pray for godly elders to be appointed who are committed to holy living and service (1 Tim 3:1-13).*
- ▶ *Pray that believing husbands would teach their wives, maintain family devotions and take responsibility for their children's faith. Pray that more women would find opportunities to grow in maturity.*
- ▶ *Some people in the city have begun to sell Bibles in the Muslim dialect of Bengali. Pray that seekers would buy, read and understand God's Word.*
- ▶ *In the larger Rajshahi district, there are many seekers and young believers who meet together sporadically. Pray that believers would see the need for regular weekly worship.*
- ▶ *Pray for a significant witness on Rajshahi campuses among the thousands of students. There has been some witness in recent years.*