

Geography of West Bengal

Location and extent

West Bengal is stretching from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. It lies between 85 degree 50 minutes and 89 degree 50 minutes east longitude, and 21 degrees 38 minutes and 27 degrees 10 minutes north latitude.

The state has a total area of 88,752 square kilometres (34,267 sq mi).

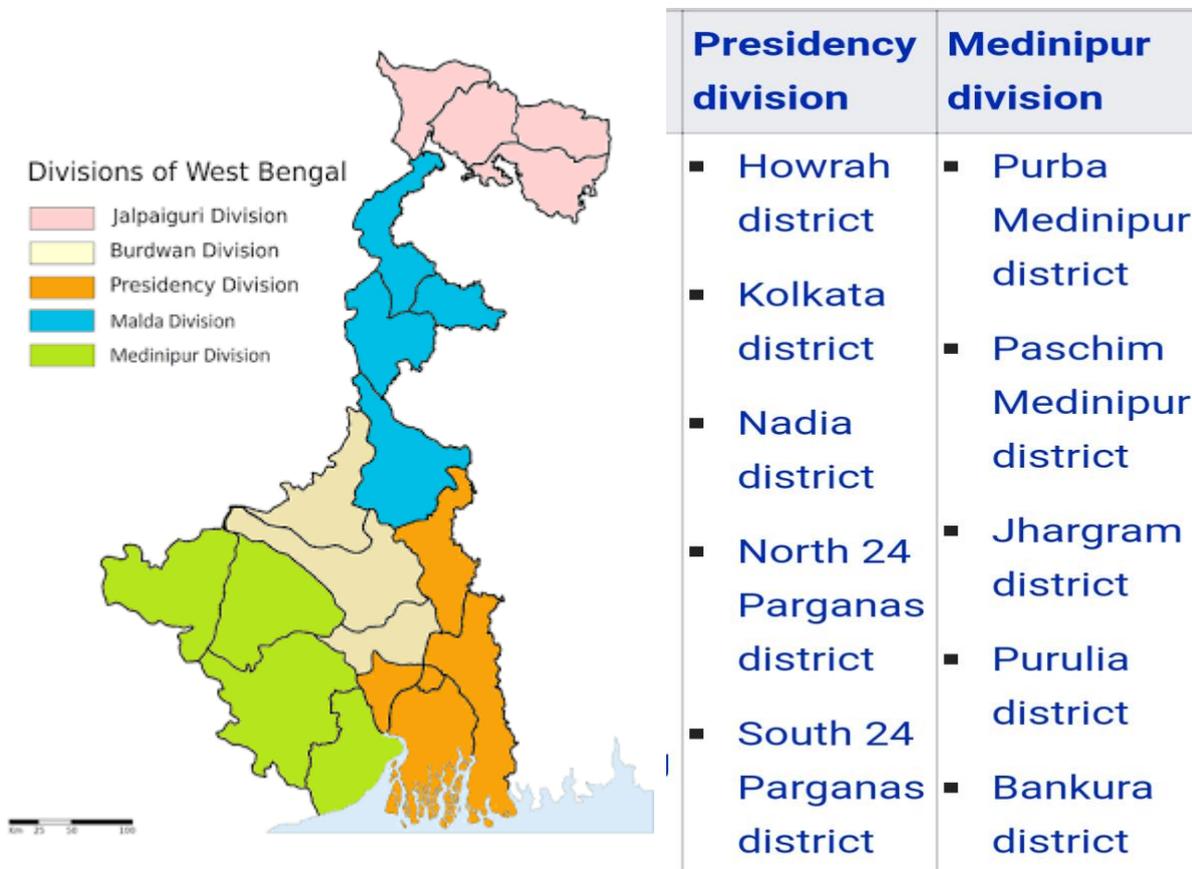
To its northeast lie the states of Assam and Sikkim and the country Bhutan, and to its southwest, the state of Odisha.

To the west it borders the state of Jharkhand and Bihar, and to the northwest, Nepal.

The capital of the state is Kolkata, the third-largest urban agglomeration and the third-largest city in India.

Political geography

There are 23 districts and 5 divisions in West Bengal.



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Burdwan division	Malda division	Jalpaiguri division
▪ Hooghly district	▪ Malda district	▪ Alipurduar district
▪ Purba Bardhaman district	▪ Utta Dinajpur district	▪ Cooch Behar district
▪ Paschim Bardhaman district	▪ Dakhsin Dinajpur district	▪ Darjeeling district
▪ Birbhum district	▪ Murshidabad district	▪ Jalpaiguri district
		▪ Kalimpong district

Each district is governed by a district collector or district magistrate, appointed either by the Indian Administrative Service or the West Bengal Civil Service.

Each district is subdivided into Sub-Divisions, governed by a sub-divisional magistrate, and again into Blocks.

Blocks consists of panchayats (village councils) and town municipalities.

Often the districts north of the Ganges i.e., Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda are together termed as North Bengal.



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The capital and largest city of the state is Kolkata – the third-largest urban agglomeration and the seventh-largest city in India.

Asansol is the second largest city & urban agglomeration in West Bengal after Kolkata.

Other major cities and towns in West Bengal are Howrah, Durgapur, Raniganj, Haldia, Jalpaiguri, Kharagpur, Burdwan, Darjeeling, Midnapore, and Malda.

Landforms



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1. Darjeeling Himalayan hill region

Darjeeling Himalayan hill region is situated on the North-Western side of the state.

This region belongs to the Eastern Himalaya range.

The whole of the Darjeeling district except the Siliguri division and a narrow part in the northern part of Jalpaiguri district constitutes the region.

The Teesta River has divided this mountainous region into two parts: the Singalila and Darjeeling ranges.

The Singalila range is located along the border of Darjeeling and Nepal; it has four important peaks – Sandakfu, Falut, Sabargam and Tonglu.

Among the Himalayan ranges of this region, Singalila range hosts Sandakfu which at 3,636 metres (11,929 ft) is the highest point of West Bengal.

Also to mention Sandakphu & Phalut are the only place in West Bengal from where Mt. Everest is visible.

Two high peaks, Tiger Hill and Ghoom are seen near the town of Darjeeling.

Durpindara is an important mountain in the eastern part of the mountainous region.

Some remnants of the Siwaliks can be seen in the Jalpaiguri district, where they are known as the Buxa-Jayanti Hills.

2. Terai region

The “Terai” (“moist land”) is a belt of marshy grasslands, savannas, and forests at the base of the Himalaya range stretching southwards to about 38 km.

The Terai and Dooars region politically constitute the plains of Darjeeling District, whole of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar district and upper region of Cooch Behar District in West Bengal.

Above the Terai belt lies the Bhabhar, a forested belt of rock, gravel, and soil eroded from the Himalayas.

The *Terai-Duarsavanna and grasslands* is an ecoregion that stretches across the middle of the Terai belt.

The general height of the land is 80 to 100 m.

The entire region is made up of sand, gravel and pebbles laid down by the Himalayan rivers like the Teesta, Torsa, Raidak, Jaldhaka, Sankosh and several other small rivulets.

The Teesta has divided the area into two parts- the western part is known as the Terai whereas the eastern part is known as the Dooars or Duars.

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The Dooars region can be further subdivided into the Siliguri or Western Dooars, the middle or Jalpaiguri Dooars and the eastern or Alipur Dooars.

The **Dooars** or **Duars** (Bengali: দুয়ার্স) are the floodplains and foothills of the eastern Himalayas in North-East India around Bhutan.

Duar means 'door' in Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi and Telugu languages, and the region forms the gateway to Bhutan from India.

The Western Dooars is known as the Bengal Dooars and the Eastern Dooars as the Assam Dooars.

3. North Bengal plains

North Bengal plain start from the south of Terai region and continues up to the left bank of the Ganges.

The southern parts of the district Jalpaiguri, North Dinajpur baring some extreme northern regions, South Dinajpur, Malda and southern part of Cooch Behar districts constitute this geographical region.

The narrow land mass in the North Dinajpur district is known as Mahananda Corridor.

This corridor runs north to south joining Malda with the plains of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

Mahananda River divides the district of Malda into two parts:

The eastern part consists of undulating plains and some tilas and is made up of old alluvium and is a part of the Ganges delta. It is also known as Barind or Barendrabhumi.

In contrast to the eastern part, the western part is made up of new alluvium and in this part River Kalindi joins the Mahananda River.

The part of Malda lying to the north of river Kalindi is known as **tal**. This (Tal) is a lowland and covered with swamps and beels (small water bodies).

Whereas the area south of the Kalindi is a very fertile land and is known as diara.

The plain in the south of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar district is also made of new alluvium deposited by numerous rivers like the Teesta, Torsa, Raidak, Jaldhaka, Sankosh, Balason, Punarbhaba, Atrai and several other small rivulets.

4. Rarh region

Rarh is the region that intervenes between the Vajjabhumi and the Ganges Delta.

Parts of the districts Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Bardhaman and Medinipur constitute this region.

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The region is about 50 to 100 m above the sea level.

This region is believed to be created from the soil from the Deccan plateau.

The area is formed by the silt brought by the tributaries of Bhagirathi, Mayurakshi River, Ajay River, Damodar and Rupnarayan River which flow over the western plateau region made up of laterite soil make the soil of the area red in colour.

The land slope is from west to the south-east and formation of natural levees along the river banks is a common phenomenon.

5. Coastal plain

A small coastal region is on the extreme south of the state.

A part of the district of PurbaMedinipur, South 24 parganass along the Bay of Bengal constitutes the coastal plain.

The Digha dune lies nearest to the Bay of Bengal while the Kanthi dune is the farthest from it. In some areas dunes occur at a distance of 15–16 km from the coast and are 11–12 m high.

Sunderbans

The **Sundarbans** delta is the largest mangrove forest in the world situated in the South 24 Parganas district.

It lies at the mouth of the Ganges and is spread across areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India.

The Bangladeshi and Indian portions of the jungle are listed in the UNESCO world heritage list separately as the Sundarbans and Sundarbans National Park respectively, though they are parts of the same forest.

The Sundarbans are intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests, and presents an excellent example of ongoing ecological processes.

The general average height of the area is 10 m.

This area has been created by deposition of silt by its numerous rivers namely, Hoogly, Matla River, Jamira River, Gosaba River, Saptamukhi River, Haribhanga River and their tributaries.

The formation of the delta is an ongoing process and new bars and islands are being created along the rivers and at the river mouth.

The area is known for its wide range of fauna. The most famous among these is the Royal Bengal Tiger, but numerous species of birds, spotted deer, crocodiles and snakes also inhabit it.

It is estimated that there are now 400 Bengal tigers and about 30,000 spotted deer in the area.

6. Western plateau and high lands

The Western plateau and highlands forms the eastern fringes of the Chota Nagpur Plateau and is made up of igneous rocks as well as coal-bearing mudstone and quartzite rocks.

The western part of Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum, Bardhaman and PaschimMedinipur district constitutes this area.

Because of long and continuous erosion, the whole region has been transformed into an undulating peneplain.

This area is interspersed by small monadnocks locally known as tila.

Some of the important hills in the area include Ajodhya Hills (667 m), Panchet and Baghmundi of Purulia, Biharinath (452 m) and Susunia (442 m) of Bankura.

The area has a slope from the west to the east.

The altitude in the area ranges from 500 to 100 m.

Gorgaburu in the Ayodhya Hills (677 m) is the highest point in the region.

7. Ganges delta

The Ganges delta consists of the whole of Murshidabad district, Nadia, Kolkata, Hooghly, and Howrah and the northern part of North and South 24 Parganas.

River Ganges passes through this vast area and divides into three distinct parts – the old delta, the mature delta and the active delta.

The old delta consists of the districts of Murshidabad and Nadia. The formation of delta is complete and the rivers here are heavily silted and many have even dried up in due course of time. Silted rivers, swamps, beels and oxbow lakes forms the area. This area is also known as **Bagri** region.

The districts of Kolkata, Hooghly, and Howrah and part of North 24 Parganas form mature delta region. The rivers are slow and meandering and frequently shift their courses. Swamps, beels and oxbow lakes characterises the scenery.

The northern portion of South 24 Parganas district is known to be the active delta of the Ganges, where the formation of delta is still an ongoing process.

Agro-climatic groups

Depending on soil and climate variations, West Bengal can be divided into six broad divisions:

The hill region in the north

The terai and Teesta alluvial region of North Bengal

The laterectic, red and gravely undulating region in the west

The coastal alluvial region in the south

The gangetic alluvial region in the west

The Vindhya alluvial region in the centre

Rivers



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Ganges enters West Bengal near Rajmahal and then flows in a south-easterly direction.

It divides into two near north of Dhulian in Murshidabad district.

One branch enters Bangladesh as the *Padma* or *Pôdda*, while the other flows through West Bengal as the Bhagirathi River and Hooghly River in a southern direction.

The Bhagirathi is the main river in West Bengal which flows past some of the important cities like Murshidabad, Baharampur, Nabadwip, Chinsura, Chandannagar, Srirampur, Howrah, Kolkata, Diamond Harbour and Haldia. It empties its water into Bay of Bengal near Sagar Island in the South 24 Parganas.

The Mayurakshi, Ajay, Damodar, Kangsabati, Rupnarayan and their tributaries which rise in the Western plateau and high lands flow eastwards through the different districts of West Bengal and joins the Bhagirathi on the right bank.

The Mayurakshi, which is fed by tributaries Brahmani, Dwarka, Bakreshwar and Kopai joins the Bhagirathi near Kalna.

The Ajay, which rises in the hills of Bihar, joined by the Kunur, flows down the plateau fringe, marking the boundary between Bardhaman and Birbhum districts joins it near Katwa.

and Damodar, with its small meandering distributaries, small streams, Khari, Banka and Behula joins the Bhagirathi near Uluberia.

The Damodar is known as the sorrow of Bengal, is now controlled by making the Damodar Valley Project.

The Dwarakeswar and Shilabati rivers join to form Rupnarayan.

and the Kangsabati and Keleghai rivers join to form the Haldi.

The Rupnarayan and Haldi fall into the Bhagirathi in the Murshidabad district.

The Subarnarekha River after flowing for a short distance in West Bengal reenters into Odisha.

This silting is causing great inconvenience for the Kolkata Port and often result flooding in the years of heavy rain.

The distributaries of the Padma River like Bhairab, Jalangi, Mathabhanga River and their tributaries enters West Bengal and joins the Bhagirathi on its left bank.

The Bhairab and the Jalangi meet and their joined waters known as Jalangi falls into Bhagirathi.

The Mathabhanga divides into branches namely; Churni and Ichhamati, while the Churni meets the Bhagirathi while the other flows southwards and joins the Kalindi.

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The Sunderbans region is covered by numerous estuaries and streams, mainly distributaries of main rivers.

The rivers are interconnected and are fed by tidal waters.

The major rivers of the area are Hoogly, Matla, Gosaba, Saptamukhi, Haribhanga, Piyali, Thakuran/ Jamira, Raimangal, Kalindi and Ichhamati.

The Teesta flows cutting deep gorges from north to south in the mountainous Darjeeling district.

It enters the plains at Sevoke and flows in a mighty stream on straight line towards the south east until it pours its waters into the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh.

Torsa, Jaldhaka, Kaljani, Raidak, Sankosh and Mahananda rivers are in the northern hilly region which rise in the Himalayas and flow in a southerly direction through the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and North and South Dinajpur and enters Bangladesh.

As most of the rivers are snow fed, so most of the rivers are perennial in nature and often floods during the rainy season.

The Mahananda rises from the Dow Hills forest, near the town of Darjeeling and are fed by similar small rivers like, Mahanadi, Balason, and Machi and runs in a zig-zag way through the district of Malda and joins the Padma in Bangladesh.

In the central region, the main river is the Mahananda.

The Tangon and Punarbhabha, and Atrai rises in the plains, while the former two joins together and flows into Mahanadi.

Atrai flows into the Padma.

Wetlands

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The area is known for its wide range of fauna. The most famous among these is the Bengal Tiger, but numerous species of birds, spotted deer, crocodiles and snakes also inhabit it. It is estimated that there are now 400 Bengal tigers and about 30,000 spotted deer in the area.

Climate

West Bengal's climate varies from tropical savannah in the southern portions to humid subtropical in the north.

The main seasons are summer, rainy season, a short autumn, and winter.

While the summer in the delta region is noted for excessive humidity, the western highlands experience a dry summer like northern India, with the highest day temperature ranging from 38 °C (100 °F) to 45 °C (113 °F).

In early summer brief squalls and thunderstorms known as "kal-baisakhi" often arrive from the north or northwest.

Monsoons bring rain to the whole state from June to September.

West Bengal receives the Bay of Bengal branch of the Indian ocean monsoon that moves in a northwest direction.

Winter (December–January) is mild over the plains with average minimum temperatures of 15 °C (59 °F).

A cold and dry northern wind blows in the winter, substantially lowering the humidity level.

The Darjeeling Himalayan Hill region experiences a harsh winter, with occasional snowfall at places.

The climate of West Bengal varies from tropical savannah in the southern portions to humid subtropical in the north.

There are five main seasons in West Bengal: spring, summer, rainy season, a short autumn, and winter.

Spring

A short spring is expected in some parts of the state, especially in the northern parts of the state. That is the time when [Holi] takes place.

Summer

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The summer season extends from first week of March to June, While the summer in the delta region is noted for excessive humidity, the western highlands experience a dry summer like **northern India**, with the highest day temperature ranging from 38 °C (100 °F) to 45 °C (113 °F). At nights, a cool southerly breeze carries moisture from the **Bay of Bengal** bringing relief to the people. The rising temperature results in the formation of **low pressure** troughs in the parts of the state during April–May. These troughs attract winds from the north-west and cyclonic storms and rainfall along with thunderstorms often occurs; these are known in West Bengal as *Kalbaisakhi*, or *Nor'westers*, often occur.

Rainy

The rainy season stretches from July to the end of September. During this period, the South-West Monsoons pick up moisture from the **Bay of Bengal** and blow over the state. Most of the annual average rainfall of 175 cm about 125 cm occurs during this period. Heavy rainfall of above 250 cm is observed in the **Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Cooch Behar district**. Later, blowing westwards, the winds cause average rainfall of 125 cm in the **northern plains** and **western plateau** region. During the arrival of the monsoons, low pressure in the Bay of Bengal region often leads to the occurrence of storms in the **coastal areas**.

Autumn

Autumn season is experienced in West Bengal for a very short period, from beginning of October to the middle of November. The skies remain clear in the autumn and temperature begins to gradually decrease. **High pressure** is replaced by low pressure and due to its influence the retreating **monsoon** blow over the state. Troughs of low pressure are often developed near the Bay of Bengal, resulting cyclonic storms. These are known as *Ashwiner Jhar* and often cause huge destruction. This season is a festive season in West Bengal due to the celebration of **Durga puja, Lakshmi Puja and Diwali**.

Winter

Winter season is experienced in the state from mid-November to February, with January being the coldest month. Winter is cold to mild over the plains with average minimum temperatures of 9 to 16°C.^[1] A cold and dry northern wind blows in the winter, substantially lowering the humidity level. However some rainfall may be received from the Western Disturbances. However, the **Darjeeling Himalayan hill region** experiences a harsh winter,

Visit : <http://skabdullah.website2.me> or join telegram group: t.me/prayasacademyforsuccess with occasional snowfall at places. In the northern plain district like Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Alipurduar the minimum temperature can often drop to the 5 to 7 degree C mark.

Temperature

The **Tropic of Cancer** passes 6 km north of **Nabadwip**, so, according to **latitude**, the northern part of the state falls in the **temperate belt** and the southern part fall in the **tropical belt**. But the southern part receives adequate rainfall and because of maritime influence is not severely hot. Barring the mountainous parts of **Darjeeling** and **Jalpaiguri**, the entire state experiences a warm wet tropical **monsoon** climate. Regional differences are visible in the climate. In the western plateau region, rainfall is low and variations in temperature are more common; maritime influence in the coastal region makes the climate here moderate and pleasant. The summer temperatures in the state ranges between 26 °C (79 °F) and 43 °C (109 °F) while the winter temperatures range from 10 °C (50 °F) to 19 °C (66 °F).

Rainfall

The annual **rainfall** varies in the different parts of the state. **North Bengal** receives the highest rainfall, 200 to 400 cm. In the coastal areas rainfall is about 200 cm, in the **Ganga plain** and in the central part of the state rainfall is about 150–200 cm and in the western plateau region the amount of rainfall received is about 100 to 125 cm. **Drought** is a common phenomenon in the **Bankura** and **Purulia** districts.

Mountainous region

Because of high altitude, the mountainous parts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts experience a **cool temperate** kind of climate. The average temperature in summer is about 15 °C (59 °F), and winter temperature is about 2 °C (36 °F). Snowfall occurs in some part of this region. Being obstructed by the **Himalayas**, the region receives heavy rainfall. Due to the scenic beauty and temperate climate of the region, a huge number of tourists visit the areas.

Influence

Adequate rainfall in the plains of West Bengal influences crop production. The hot wet climate is good for the production of **rice** and **jute**. Higher rainfall received in the northern mountainous region is favourable for the production of **tea**, which is popular all over the world. **Pulses** and **oilseeds** are also produced in large quantities.

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The people prefer to wear loose and thin cotton clothes because of the hot humid climate. Rice and fish the staple food of the Bengalis because they are easy to digest in this climate and are easily available. The hot and humid climate hampers the efficiency of the people, as the people tend to get tired easily. For protection against heavy rainfall and snowfall in the north, the people live in houses with sloping roofs.

Natural resources

West Bengal stands third in the country in terms of mineral production.

The state contributes about one-fifth to the total production of minerals in the country.

Coal constitutes 99% of the minerals extracted in West Bengal. Fireclay, china clay, limestone, copper, iron, wolfram, manganese and dolomite are mined in small quantities.

There are good possibilities of obtaining mineral oil and natural gas in the areas near the Bay of Bengal, in Purba Medinipur, Sundarbans, South 24 Parganas and North Bengal plains.

West Bengal is the third largest state for coal production, accounting for about half of India's total.



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Coal is extracted from about 228 mines in the Raniganj and Asansol region of Bardhaman district.

High grade bituminous coal is mined at Raniganj, Dishergarh, Santaldih, Kulti, Barakar, Ghushik, Kajora.

Coalfields stretch over an area of about 1,550 km² (598 sq mi).

The coalfields of Raniganj support the Asansol-Durgapur industrial belt by providing fuel to the industries as well as generation of thermal power.

Lignite mined in Darjeeling is used to make briquettes.

Coal deposits are also found along the Ajoy river in Birbhum district.

West Bengal ranks next to Bihar and Madhya Pradesh in production of fireclay.

Most of this mineral is extracted in the Raniganj region along with few amount is also extracted from Birbhum and Purulia.

China clay used in the pottery, paper, textile, rubber and paint industries are unearthed at Mohammad Bazar in Birbhum and Mejia in Bankura. Rest of the production comes from Purulia, Bardhaman, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri.

Limestone which is used in cement industry is mined in Bankura, Purulia, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri.

There are copper mines in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling.

Small quantities of low quality iron-ore are mined in Bardhaman, Purulia, Birbhum and Darjeeling.

There are manganese in the Jhargram region of PaschimMedinipur, Purulia and Bardhaman.

Wolfram is mined at Jhilimili in Bankura.

The state's production of dolomite comes from the Dooars region of Jalpaiguri.

Flora and fauna

As of 2013, recorded forest area in the state is 16,805 km² (6,488 sq mi) which is **18.93%** of the state's geographical area, compared to the national average of **21.23%**.

World's largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, is located in southern West Bengal.

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State symbols of West Bengal

State
animal

Fishing
cat



State
bird

White-
throated
Kingfisher



State
tree

Devil
Tree



State
flower

Night-
flowering
Jasmine



From a phytogeographic viewpoint, the southern part of West Bengal can be divided into two regions: the Gangetic plain and the littoral mangrove forests of the Sundarbans.

The predominant commercial tree species is *Shorea robusta*, commonly known as the Sal tree.

The coastal region of Purba Medinipur exhibits coastal vegetation; the predominant tree is the *Casuarina*.

A notable tree from the Sundarbans is the *sundari* (*Heritiera fomes*), from which the forest gets its name.

The distribution of vegetation in northern West Bengal is dictated by elevation and precipitation.

For example, the foothills of the Himalayas, the *Dooars*, are densely wooded with Sal and other tropical evergreen trees.

However, above an elevation of 1,000 metres (3,300 ft), the forest becomes predominantly subtropical.

In Darjeeling, which is above 1,500 metres (4,900 ft), temperate-forest trees such as oaks, conifers, and rhododendrons predominate.

West Bengal has 3.26% of its geographical area under protected areas comprising 15 wildlife sanctuaries and 5 national parks^[51] — Sundarbans National Park, Buxa Tiger Reserve, Gorumara National Park, Neora Valley National Park and Singalila National Park.

Extant wildlife include Indian rhinoceros, Indian elephant, deer, leopard, gaur, tiger, and crocodiles, as well as many bird species.

Migratory birds come to the state during the winter.

The high-altitude forests of Singalila National Park shelter barking deer, red panda, chinkara, takin, serow, pangolin, minivet and Kalij pheasants.

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The Sundarbans are noted for a reserve project conserving the endangered Bengal tiger, although the forest hosts many other endangered species, such as the Gangetic dolphin, river terrapin and estuarine crocodile.

The mangrove forest also acts as a natural fish nursery, supporting coastal fishes along the Bay of Bengal.

Recognizing its special conservation value, Sundarban area has been declared as a Biosphere Reserve.

Government and politics

West Bengal is governed through a parliamentary system of representative democracy, a feature the state shares with other Indian states.

The legislature, the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, consists of elected members and special office bearers such as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, that are elected by the members. Assembly meetings are presided over by the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker in the Speaker's absence.

The judiciary is composed of the Calcutta High Court and a system of lower courts.

Executive authority is vested in the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister, although the titular head of government is the Governor. The Governor is the head of state appointed by the President of India.

The leader of the party or coalition with a majority in the Legislative Assembly is appointed as the Chief Minister by the Governor, and the Council of Ministers are appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister.

The Assembly is unicameral with 295 Members of the Legislative Assembly, or MLAs, including one nominated from the Anglo-Indian community.

Terms of office run for 5 years, unless the Assembly is dissolved prior to the completion of the term.

Auxiliary authorities known as *panchayats*, for which local body elections are regularly held, govern local affairs.

The state contributes 42 seats to Lok Sabha and 16 seats to Rajya Sabha of the Indian Parliament.

Economy

Agriculture is the leading occupation in West Bengal. Rice is the state's principal food crop. Rice, potato, jute, sugarcane and wheat are the top five crops of the state.

Tea is produced commercially in northern districts; the region is well known for Darjeeling and other high quality teas.

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State industries are localised in the Kolkata region, the mineral-rich western highlands, and Haldia port region.

The Durgapur–Asansol colliery belt is home to a number of major steel plants.

Manufacturing industries playing an important economic role are engineering products, electronics, electrical equipment, cables, steel, leather, textiles, jewellery, frigates, automobiles, railway coaches, and wagons.

The Durgapur centre has established a number of industries in the areas of tea, sugar, chemicals and fertilisers.

Natural resources like tea and jute in and nearby parts has made West Bengal a major centre for the jute and tea industries.

Notably, many corporate companies are now headquartered in Kolkata include ITC Limited, India Government Mint, Kolkata, Haldia Petrochemicals, Exide Industries, Hindustan Motors, Britannia Industries, Bata India, Birla Corporation, CESC Limited, Coal India Limited, Damodar Valley Corporation, PwC India, Peerless Group, United Bank of India, UCO Bank and Allahabad Bank.

In 2010s, events such as adoption of "Look East" policy by the government of India, opening of the Nathu La Pass in Sikkim as a border trade-route with China and immense interest in the South East Asian countries to enter the Indian market and invest have put Kolkata in an advantageous position for development in future, particularly with likes of Myanmar, where India needs oil from military regime.

Transport

Kolkata Suburban Railway caters to the commuters of the populous suburbs of Kolkata

Kolkata MetroRailway, the oldest metro in India, is also the 17th Zone of Indian Railways.

Kolkata is the headquarters of three Zones of the Indian Railways—Eastern Railway and South Eastern Railway and the Kolkata Metro which is the newly formed 17th Zone of the Indian Railways.

The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) plies in the northern parts of the state.

The Kolkata metro is the country's first underground railway.

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, part of NFR, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Airport:

NetajiSubhas Chandra Bose International Airport at Dum Dum, Kolkata, is the state's biggest airport.

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Bagdogra Airport near Siliguri is a customs airport that has international services to Bhutan and Thailand besides regular domestic services.

KaziNazrul Islam International Airport is being developed by Bengal Aerotropolis Projects Ltd. in the city of Durgapur in Bardhaman district.

Port:

Kolkata is a major river-port in eastern India.

The Kolkata Port Trust manages both the Kolkata docks and the Haldia docks.

There is passenger service to Port Blair on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and cargo ship service to ports in India and abroad, operated by the Shipping Corporation of India.

Kolkata is the only city in India to have trams as a mode of transport and these are operated by the Calcutta Tramways Company.

Demographics



Dakshineswar Kali Temple
Tipu Sultan Mosque, Kolkata



St Paul's Cathedral,

According to the provisional results of the 2011 national census, West Bengal is the fourth most populous state in India with a population of 91,347,736 (7.55% of India's population).

Communities of Sherpas and ethnic Tibetans can be found in the Darjeeling Himalayan hill region. The Darjeeling district has a large number of Nepalese immigrants.

West Bengal is home to indigenous tribal *Adivasis* such as Santhal, Kol, and Toto tribe.

There are a small number of ethnic minorities primarily in the state capital, including Chinese, Tamils, Gujaratis, Anglo-Indians, Armenians, Punjabis, and Parsis.

India's sole Chinatown is in eastern Kolkata.

Religions in West Bengal

Religion	Percent
Hindu	72.5%
Muslim	25.2%
Others	2.3%

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The official language is Bengali and English.

Nepali is the official language in three subdivisions of Darjeeling district.

As of 2011, West Bengal has a population density of 1,029 inhabitants per square kilometre (2,670 /sq mi) making it the second-most densely populated state in India, after Bihar.

The literacy rate is 77.08%, higher than the national rate of 74.04%.

About 72% of people live in rural areas.

The proportion of people living below the poverty line in 1999–2000 was 31.9%.

Scheduled Castes and Tribes form 28.6% and 5.8% of the population respectively in rural areas, and 19.9% and 1.5% respectively in urban areas.

In 2011, in reported crimes against women, the state showed a crime rate of 29 compared to the national rate of 18.

West Bengal accounted for about 12.2% of total crime against women (26,125 cases out of India's 213,585 cases).

West Bengal was the first Indian state to constitute a Human Rights Commission of its own.

Music and dance

The Baul tradition is a unique heritage of Bengali folk music, which has also been influenced by regional music traditions.

Other folk music forms include Gombhira (Malda) and Bhawaiya.

Folk music in West Bengal is often accompanied by the ektara, a one-stringed instrument. West Bengal also has a heritage in North Indian classical music.

"Rabindrasangeet", songs composed and set into tune by Rabindranath Tagore and "Nazrulgeeti" (by KaziNazrul Islam) are popular.

Also prominent are other musical forms like Dwijendralal, Atulprasad and Rajanikanta's songs, and "*adhunik*" or modern music from films and other composers.

Chau dance of Purulia is a rare form of mask dance.

Education

The secondary schools are affiliated with the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE), the Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE), the National

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Institute of Open School (NIOS) or the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education and West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education or any central board.

West Bengal has eighteen universities.

The University of Calcutta, the oldest public university in India, has 136 affiliated colleges. Kolkata has played a pioneering role in the development of the modern education system in India.

It is the gateway to the revolution of European education. Sir William Jones (philologist) established the Asiatic Society in 1794 for promoting oriental studies.

People like Ram Mohan Roy, David Hare, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Alexander Duff and William Carey played a leading role in the setting up of modern schools and colleges in the city.

The Fort William College was established in 1810.

The **Hindu College** was established in 1817.

The Scottish Church College, which is the oldest Christian liberal arts college in South Asia, started its journey in 1830.

In 1855 the Hindu College was renamed as the Presidency College.

The Jadavpur University are prestigious technical universities.

Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan is a central university and an institution of national importance.

The state has several higher education institutes of national importance including

Indian Institute of Foreign Trade,

Indian Institute of Management Calcutta (the first IIM),

Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Kolkata,

Indian Statistical Institute, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur (the first IIT),

Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology, Shibpur (the first IEST),

National Institute of Technology, Durgapur

and West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences.

After 2003 the state govt supported the creation of

West Bengal University of Technology,

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West Bengal State University

and GourBanga University.

Besides these, the state also has

Kalyani University,

The University of Burdwan,

Vidyasagar University

and North Bengal University-all well established and nationally renowned, to cover the educational needs at the district levels of the state and also an Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Kolkata.

Also recently Presidency College, Kolkata became a University named Presidency University.

Apart from this there is another private university run by Ramakrishna mission named Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University at Belur Math.

There are a number of research institutes in Kolkata. The Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science is the first research institute in Asia.

C. V. Raman got Nobel Prize for his discovery (Raman Effect) done in IACS.

Also Bose Institute,

Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics,

S.N. Bose National Centre for Basic Sciences,

Indian Institute of Chemical Biology,

Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute,

Variable Energy Cyclotron Center are most prominent.

Notable scholars who were born, worked or studied in the geographic area of the state include physicists Satyendra Nath Bose, Meghnad Saha, and Jagadish Chandra Bose; chemist Prafulla Chandra Roy; statistician Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis; physician Upendranath Brahmachari; educator Ashutosh Mukherjee; and Nobel laureates Rabindranath Tagore, C. V. Raman, and Amartya Sen.

Media

Ananda Bazar Patrika, published from Kolkata with 1,277,801 daily copies, has the largest circulation for a single-edition, regional language newspaper in India.

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Other major Bengali newspapers are *Bartaman*, *Sangbad Pratidin*, *Aajkaal*, *Jago Bangla*, *UttarbangaSambad* and *Ganashakti*.

Major English language newspapers which are published and sold in large numbers are *The Telegraph*, *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, *The Statesman*, *The Indian Express* and *Asian Age*.

Some prominent financial dailies like *The Economic Times*, *Financial Express*, *Business Line* and *Business Standard* are widely circulated.

Sports

Salt Lake Stadium – YuvaBharatiKrirangan, Kolkata

Cricket and soccer are popular sports in the state.

West Bengal, unlike most other states of India, is noted for its passion and patronage of football.

Kolkata is one of the major centres for football in India and houses top national clubs such as East Bengal, MohunBagan and Mohammedan Sporting Club.

Indian sports such as KhoKho and Kabaddi are also played.

Calcutta Polo Club is considered as the oldest polo club of the world, and the Royal Calcutta Golf Club is the oldest of its kind outside Great Britain.

Salt Lake Stadium is the world's second largest stadium, and Eden Gardens stadium is the largest cricket stadium in India.

Notable sports persons from West Bengal include former Indian national cricket captain Sourav Ganguly, Pankaj Roy Olympic tennis bronze medallist Leander Paes, and chess grand master Dibyendu Barua.

Other major sporting icons over the years include famous football players such as Chuni Goswami, PK Banerjee and Sailen Manna as well as swimmer Mihir Sen and athlete Jyotirmoyee Sikdar (winner of gold medals at the Asian Games).

With a literacy rate of 77.1%, above the national average of 74.04%, as per provisional figures for the 2011 Census, West Bengal ranks 13th amongst the 35 states and union territories in India in terms of [literacy rate](#).

Rank	District	Literacy Rate (%) 2001 Census (excluding 0-6 age group)	Literacy Rate (%) 2011 Census (excluding 0-6 age group)	% Increase
1	PurbaMedinipur	80.16	87.66	7.50

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2	Kolkata	80.86	87.14	6.28
3	North 24 Parganas	78.07	84.95	6.88
4	Howrah	77.01	83.85	6.84
5	Hooghly	75.11	82.55	7.44
6	Darjeeling	71.79	79.92	8.13
7	PaschimMedinipur	70.41	79.04	8.63
8	South 24 Parganas	69.45	78.57	9.12
9	Bardhaman	70.18	77.15	6.97
10	Nadia	66.14	75.58	9.44
11	Cooch Behar	66.30	75.49	9.19
12	DakshinDinajpur	63.59	73.86	10.27
13	Jalpaiguri	62.85	73.79	10.94
14	Bankura	63.44	70.95	7.51
15	Birbhum	61.48	70.90	9.42
16	Murshidabad	54.35	67.53	13.18
17	Purulia	55.57	65.38	9.81
18	Maldah	50.28	62.71	8.43
19	Uttar Dinajpur	47.89	60.13	12.24

Largest District (km²)

1	South Twenty Four Parganas	9960
2	PaschimMedinipur	9368
3	Barddhaman	7024
4	Bankura	6882
5	Puruliya	6259

Percentage of Child

1	Uttar Dinajpur	16.13 %
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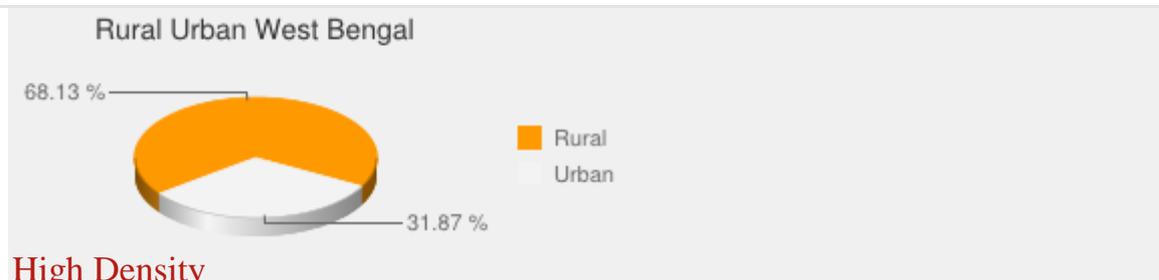
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2	Maldah	15.27 %
3	Murshidabad	14.27 %
4	Puruliya	14.00 %
5	Birbhum	12.81 %



High Density

1	Kolkata	24306
2	Haora	3306
3	North Twenty Four Parganas	2445
4	Hugli	1753
5	Murshidabad	1334

Top Population Growth

1	Uttar Dinajpur	23.15 %
2	Maldah	21.22 %
3	Murshidabad	21.09 %
4	South Twenty Four Parganas	18.17 %
5	Birbhum	16.15 %

High Literacy

1	PurbaMedinipur	87.02 %
2	Kolkata	86.31 %
3	North Twenty Four Parganas	84.06 %
4	Haora	83.31 %
5	Hugli	81.80 %

High Sex Ratio

1	Darjiling	970
2	PaschimMedinipur	966
3	Hugli	961
4	Murshidabad	958
5	Bankura	957

Description	2011	2001
Approximate Population	9.13 Crores	8.02 Crore
Actual Population	91,276,115	80,176,197
Male	46,809,027	41,465,985

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Female	44,467,088	38,710,212
Population Growth	13.84%	17.84%
Percentage of total Population	7.54%	7.79%
Sex Ratio	950	934
Child Sex Ratio	956	957
Density/km2	1,028	903
Density/mi2	2,664	2,340
Area km2	88,752	88,752
Area mi2	34,267	34,267
Total Child Population (0-6 Age)	10,581,466	11,414,222
Male Population (0-6 Age)	5,410,396	5,824,180
Female Population (0-6 Age)	5,171,070	5,590,042
Literacy	76.26 %	68.64 %
Male Literacy	81.69 %	77.02 %
Female Literacy	66.57 %	59.61 %
Total Literate	61,538,281	47,196,401
Male Literate	33,818,810	27,452,426
Female Literate	27,719,471	19,743,975

পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকারের গ্যাজেট অনুসারে নতুন জেলার বিভাজন

পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকার কলকাতা গ্যাজেট এর মাধ্যমে ২৪ মার্চ ২০১৭ তে বর্ধমান জেলা বিভাজনের প্রক্রিয়া ঘোষণা করেন। সেই নির্দেশিকা অনুসারে বর্ধমান জেলাকে ভেঙে দুটি নতুন জেলা করা হয়। বর্ধমান গ্রামীনকে নিয়ে গঠিত হয়েছে পূর্ব-বর্ধমান এবং আসানসোল-দুর্গাপুর শিল্পাঞ্চলকে নিয়ে গঠিত হয়েছে পশ্চিম বর্ধমান।

গ্যাজেট অনুসারে নতুন জেলার বিভাজন

পূর্ব বর্ধমান	
মহকুমা	থানা
বর্ধমান সদর উত্তর	বর্ধমান, ভাতার, আউসগ্রাম, গলাসি, বৃন্দবৃন্দ
বর্ধমান সদর দক্ষিণ	মেমারি, জামালপুর, রাইনা, মাদবডিহি, খণ্ডঘোষ
কাটয়া	কাটয়া, কেতুগ্রাম, মঙ্গলকোট
কালনা	কালনা, পূর্বহুগলী, মন্তেশ্বর, নাদনঘাট

পশ্চিম বর্ধমান	
মহকুমা	থানা
আসানসোল সদর	চিত্তরঞ্জন, সালানপুর, কুগাটি, হিরাপুর, আসানসোল (দঃ), আসানসোল (উঃ), বারাবনি, জামুরিয়া, বানিগঞ্জ
দুর্গাপুর	অডাল, পাণ্ডেশ্বর, ফরিদপুর-দুর্গাপুর, দুর্গাপুর, নিউ টাউনশিপ, কোক ওডেন, কাকসা

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MAJOR FOREST TYPES OF WEST BENGAL

Group 1B : NORTHERN TROPICAL WET EVERGREEN FORESTS

- **Location :** Plains of North Bengal upto 150 m. altitude.
- **Sites :** Bagdogra range of Kurseong division, Khutimari areas of Jalpaiguri division, Damanpur, Cheko, Gadadhar, Rajabhatkhawa, Rydak of Buxa Tiger Reserve.
- **Area :** 167 sq.km.
- **Species :** Sal, Nageshwar, Jam, Kainjal, Lator, Malagiri, Lali & Canes.

Group 2B : NORTHERN SUB-TROPICAL SEMI-EVERGREEN FORESTS

- **Location :** North Bengal
- **Sites :** Sumbong, Peshok, Buxaduar
- **Area :** 25 sq.km.
- **Species :** Champ, Panisaj, Gokul, Angare .

Group 3C : NORTH INDIA MOIST DECIDUOUS FORESTS

- **Location :** North Bengal
- **Sites :** Almost entire duars and terai area
- **Area :** 1757 sq.km.
- **Species :** The most important forests of the State are in this sub-montane belt consisting of Sal w Champ, Chilauni, Chikrassi, Gamar, Lali, Lasune, Panisaj, Paccasaj interspersed with riverian f of Khair, Sissoo, Simul, Toon etc. representing succession from riverian to climax sal.
- The changes of vegetation that occur with increasing altitude in the Himalayas are similar to those take place as one travels from tropics to the poles. The proportion of Sal gradually dwindles, st short of Damuda rocks (2500 ft.) which are remains of Gondwana sand stones and are unsuitab Sal.

Group 4B : LITTORAL & SWAMP FORESTS - THE MANGROVES

- **Sites :** The tidal mangrove forests of Ganga-Brahmaputra delta (Sunderbans):
- **Area :** 4263 sq.km.
- **Species :** Important species are : Goran (*Ceriops roxburghiana*), Gnewa (*Excoecaria agalloch*), Sundari (*Heritiera minor*), Baen (*Avicennia officinalis*), Dhundal (*Carpa obovata*)

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- **Group 4D : LITTORAL & SWAMP FORESTS-TROPICAL SEASONAL**
- **SWAMPS OF Barringtonia.**
- **Location :** Malda & Dinajpur (N & S)
- **Area :** 20 sq.km.
- **Species :** Hijal (*Barringtonia acuteangula*)

- **Group 5B : NORTHERN TROPICAL DRY DECIDUOUS FORESTS**
- **Location :** Bankura, Purulia, Midnapur, Birbhum, Burdwan
- **Area :** 4527 sq.km.
- **Species :** Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Peasal (*Pterocarpus marsupium*), Kend (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), Mahul (*Madhuka latifolia*), Kusum (*Schleichera trijuga*), Karam (*Adina cordifolia*), Asan (*Terminalia tomentosa*), Bahera (*T.belerica*), Rahara (*Soyamida febrifuga*), Dhaw (*Anogeion latifolia*).

- **Group 8B : NORTHERN SUB-TROPICAL BROAD-LEAVED WET HILL FORESTS**
- **Location :** North Bengal hills 300m-1650m altitude.
- **Sites :** Sim, Upper Sumbong , Upper Reyong , Forests blocks of Majua, Lower Babukhola, Phuguri, Bunklong, Khairbani, Mana, Sittong Numbong, Setikhola, Shivakhola, Mirik, Paglajhora, Kuhi and Latpanchar
- **Area :** 800 sq.km.
- **Species :** Chilouni, Panisaj, Gokul, Sour, Utis, Mauwa, Tarsing.
- The species commonly found are Mowa, Chilaune, Katus, Panisaj, Lampate, Phaleado, Saur, Tai Angare, Melo Kapasi, Utis, Toon and Malagiri along with Kutmero, Jhingni, Lek Chilaune, Ma Thali, Kawla etc. Climbers and epiphytes are common here. Choyabans and tree Ferns occur lo

- **Group 11B : NORTHERN MONTANE WET TEMPERATE FORESTS**
- **Location :** North Bengal hills 1650m-3000m.altitude.
- **Sites :** Selimbong, Kankibong, Little Rangit, Lopchu, Mahaldiram, Chattakpur, Dhobijhora, Upper Babukhola , Phuguri, Paglajhora and Lower Babukhola forest blocks
- **Area :** 150 sq.km.
- **Species :** Kawla, Lkhar, Pipli, Oaks (buk & phalat), Rani champ, Abies densa, *Tsugabrunoniana* , *Acer* spp. The principal species found here are Pipli(*Bucklandia pop*

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Utis, Saur, Katus, Kapasi, Arkula, Mowa, Khankpa, Sinkoli, Buk, Phalant, Champ, Kawla, Mal Magnolia, Latasaea and *Machilus* spp. along with Jhigni, Chiwri, Araliaceous, spp. Ilex spp., T Kharane, The ground flora includes Kimbu, Kagate, Asare, Thotne, Chuletro, Maling, Lycopod Basak and Chirata.

• **Group 12C : EAST HIMALAYAN MOIST TEMPERATE FORESTS**

- **Location :** North Bengal hills 1500m-1800m.
- **Sites :** Rimbik
- **Area :** 150 sq.km.
- **Species :** The species commonly found are Mowa, Chilaune, Katus, Panisaj, Lampate, Phaleado, Tarsing, Angare, Melo Kapasi, Utis, Toon, and Malagiri along with Kutmero Jhigni, Lek Chila Malata, Thali, Kawla etc. Climbers and epiphytes are common here. Choyabans and tree Ferns locally. This type of forests are met within the forest blocks of Majua, Lower Babukhola , Phug Bunklong, Khairbani, Mana, Sittong Numbong, Setikhola. Shivakhola, Mirik, Paglajhora, Kuhi Latpanchar.

• **Group 14C : SUB-ALPINE FORESTS**

- **Location :** North Bengal hills 3000m-3700m
- **Sites :** Sandakpu, Sabarkum, Phalut
- **Area :** 20sq.km.
- **Species :** Important spp. are Putli, Lekh Kapasi, Lekh Pipli, Kapasi, Arupate, Sindure Katus(*Castanopsis sp.*) , Yew (*Taxus bacata*) , *Tsuga brunoniana* , *Abies densa* , Junipers, Birch (*Betula utilis*) , Rhododendrons, Salix, Berberis, Maling bamboo.

Bio-Diversity Conservation: In Situ-Conservation

The state has 4031 sq.km. of forests, under protected area network which is 34% of the State's total forest area and 4.54% of the total geographical area. There are five National Parks, fifteen sanctuaries, two tiger reserves and one biosphere reserve. The PA network includes 1055 sq. km. of sanctuaries, 1693 sq. km. of National Parks, the balance are being represented by buffer areas of the two tiger reserves, viz. Sunderbans Tiger Reserve and Buxa Tiger Reserve.

Ex Situ Conservation

Alipore Zoological Gardens, Kolkata.

Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, Darjeeling.

Both these centers are engaged in protection of wildlife and also in captive breeding of endangered wild animals.

The Bengal Natural History Museum, Darjeeling is now under the management of the State Forest Department. Ex-Situ conservation is conservation outside the natural habitats and in genetic resource centers, zoos, botanical gardens culture collections, seed banks, sperm banks etc. or in the form of germplasm bank in vitro. Ex Situ Conservation in West Bengal is carried out at Calcutta Zoological Park and Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological park. Both these centers are engaged in protection of wild life and also in captive breeding of endangered wild animals. The Bengal Natural History Museum, Darjeeling is now under the management of the State Forest Department.

Ex-Situ Centres are also located at the:

1. Rajabhatkhawa (Buxa Tiger Reserve)- Captive Vulture Breeding Centre.
2. South Khairbari (Wildlife III Division)- Rehabilitation Centre for rescued Circus Tigers.
3. Madarihat (Jaldapara Sanctuary)
4. Moorti(Gorumara National park)
5. Shukna(Mahananda Sanctuary)
6. Kalimpong

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7. Sajnekhali(Sunderban Tiger Reserve)

Maintenance of Ex-situ Conservation and Propagation Centres – In this component, existing production capacity of forest nurseries is enhanced in order to use such nurseries as ex-situ conservation centres and production centers of quality planting materials.

The target of species here includes not only those occurring in the wild but also those important ones which are cultivated.

Propagation centres have been established in various locations, namely, Sukna, Garubathan, Sonada in Darjeeling district; Rajabhatkhawa, Lataguri in Jalpaiguri district, Beliapore in Bankura district, and Amlachoti near Jhargram in West Midnapore district.

Special mention may be made of the centre at Amlachoti near Jhargram. It contains plants of more than 600 species. One does not frequently come across with a gene pool reserve of such dimension.

Biosphere Reserve

The Sundarban Region in India is located between 21°32' and 22°40'N latitude and 88°30'N and 89°00' longitude. It is bounded by the river Hooghly on the west, Ichamati-Kalindi-Raimangal on the east, Dampier-Hodges line on the north and the bay of Bengal on the south. The total area of Indian Sundarban region is about 9630 sq. km., out of which the Reserve Forest occupies nearly 4260 sq. km. At present, out of 108 islands of the Sundarban region, 54 are inhabited with a population of about 3.2 million (1991 census), spread over 1093 mouzas.

Constitution of Sunderban Biosphere Reserve:

As part of the Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB), accepted in the general conference of the UNESCO in 1970, the Ministry of Environment of Forests, Govt. of India adopted the National MAB programme and declared the entire 9630 sq. km. of Sundarban as the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve in 1989. Sundarban Biosphere Reserve has also been included in the World Network of Biospheres by UNESCO in November, 2001. The extent of mangrove Reserved Forest in Indian Sundarban is around 4260 sq. km., which is administratively divided into Sunderban Tiger Reserve (area = 2600 sq. km.) and 24 Pgs. (S) Forest Divn. (area = 1660 sq.

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km.). Out of this total recorded forest area, 55% is under vegetation cover and balance 45% is under water body/ char land.

Park/ Sanctuary Area:

- Sunderban National Park 1330 sq. km.
 - Saznekhali Wildlife Sanctuary 362 sq. km.
 - Lothian Wildlife Sanctuary 38 sq. km.
 - Haliday Wildlife Sanctuary 6 sq. km.
-
- Sunderbans of Bangladesh and India is the single largest mangrove forest of the world.
 - The only mangrove forest of the world having largest floral and faunal diversity.
 - The only mangrove forest having a Tiger population.
 - Home of several endangered, threatened and endemic floral and faunal species.
 - Sunderban mangrove acts as a fish nursery and supports coastal fisheries along Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean.
 - Sunderban forest acts as a sink for the mega-metropolitan pollutants.
 - The mangrove forest provides protection to inland habitations against the fury of cyclones

Eco-Tourism

The natural beauty of the State, its snow-clad mountains, lush green forest, the rolling Tea gardens, ripe agricultural fields in North Bengal, the red lateritic tracts and the pure sal forests in the South West Bengal, and the world's largest mangrove delta in Sundarban make the State potential paradise for Eco-tourism.

Eco-tourism is "tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specified objectives of studying, admiring and enjoying the sceneries and its wild plants and animals, as well as in existing cultural aspects found in these areas" (WTO). Thus eco-tourism differs from Resort tourism or mass tourism by requiring lesser infrastructure development and lower impact on the environment.

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■ The key elements of the Eco-tourism are :

- Existence of NP/Sanctuary/Nature as prime attraction.
- Should be ecologically, socially, culturally, and economically sustainable.
- Should have participation of the local stakeholders.
- Should be a low profile venture.
- Should be capable of forging partnership with the existing tourism industry.

National eco-tourism policy and guidelines (1998) has identified, the following cardinal principles for development of eco-tourism :

- It should involve local community and lead to economic development of the area.
- It should identify the likely conflicts between resource use for tourism and livelihood of local inhabitants and attempt to minimise such conflicts.
- The type and scale of tourism development should be compatible with the environment and socio-cultural characteristics of the local community
- It should be planned as part of the overall area development strategy, ensuring sectoral integrations.

Ecotourism spots are available at:

■ Key players in eco-tourism (implementing agency) :

During initial years, Forest Department of the State should be the main implementing agency. However, attempts should be made to gradually entrust the activities to the Eco-Development Committees / Forest Protection Committees, with Forest / Tourism Department playing controlling and supervisory roles.

■ The eco-tourism package should include:

- Simple, adequate board and lodging facilities, ethnic in nature.

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- Road network within the identified tourism zone.
- Self guided nature trails.
- Nature Interpretation Centres.
- Way-side exhibits and signages.
- Observation towers.
- Public conveniences and garbage disposal facility.

■ Periodic training programmes on eco-tourism to the host community

will include :

- Lodge management.
- Basic education and awareness.
- Health and sanitations.
- Skill development for preparation of local souvenirs.
- Code of conducts.
- Forests and Wildlife Conservation.
- Garbage and pollution control.
- Forging partnership with tourists and tourism industry.

■ Possible inputs for community based eco-tourism :

- Creation and management of ethnic cottage.
- Guide service to the visitors.
- Sale outlet for local products / souvenirs.
- Facilities like boating, angling, folk dance, picnic spots, nature trail, visit to a host village and guided bird watching

■ Is eco-tourism against conservation :

- Access of outsiders to the P.As may endanger the Biodiversity of the P.A.s
- There may be a tendency to use Forest Land for building up infrastructure for tourism
- Ecotourism is not F.D's business - the field staff get diverted from normal forestry works

■ Benefits of Eco-tourism ::

- Brings the conservation efforts to public view

- Increased awareness about P.A.s creates peer pressure for their conservation
- Helps in mobilization of resources for P.A. management
- Strengthens interface between eco-tourists and local people

INDUSTRIES

Industrial development in West Bengal dates back to the latter part of 19th century when jute mills were set up along two sides of river Hooghly. These were followed by engineering, iron and steel, cotton textile, chemicals and other industries. At present, important large scale industries in West Bengal include (i) jute textile, (ii) iron and steel, (iii) engineering, (iv) petroleum refining, (v) chemicals, (vi) paper, (vii) cotton textile, (viii) leather and (ix) tea industry.

2.5.1. FAVOURABLE FACTOR FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRIES IN WEST BENGAL

1. Availability of raw materials. Two kinds of primary raw material are important in West Bengal for the development of industries.

(i) West Bengal is noted for its rich agricultural base. Some of the agricultural crops produced in West Bengal act as raw materials for industries. Of these, jute is most important which is the basis for the development of jute textile industry in the state. Other crops include tea (for tea industry), sugarcane (for sugar industry) and mulberry cultivation (for sericulture promoting silk industry).

(ii) Mineral resources form the secondary category of raw material for the development of industries. Production of mineral resources in the state is not considered to be very significant but some of these have promoted the localization of industries. Most of these industries are in the small scale. For example, availability of china clay has promoted the development of potteries in Bankura and Purulia districts. Fire clay is found in the coalfield areas of Raniganj and it has promoted the manufacturing of refractory bricks which are highly heat resistant.

Among the large scale industries, iron and steel industry in Burnpur initially started by using iron-stone deposits of Raniganj, but the deposit was soon exhausted.

2. Availability of power. Coal is the most important power resource in West Bengal. The state is presently the 6th largest producer of coal in India and in 2000-01, it accounted for 6% of

the country's total production. Raniganj is the main coal mining area of the state. Early development of the iron and steel industry in West Bengal took place due to the availability of high quality coal in Raniganj which is used both as a source of power as well as raw material. Total generation of power in the state at the end of 1998 was 6,441 mega-watt and 98% of it came from coal-based thermal power stations. Major thermal power stations are Bandel, Santaldih, Kolaghat, Farakka and recently commissioned Bakreswar. Recent developments of hydropower in north Bengal would encourage the development of industrial activities in the region.

West Bengal is presently designated as a power-surplus state and this condition is likely to promote further industrial growth.

3. **Transport development.** Landform in West Bengal does not create any obstacle for the development of surface transport except in the hills of Darjeeling district. West Bengal is linked with other states both by *roadways* and *railways*. Total length of all types of roads in West Bengal (as on 31-03-2000) is 80,433 km. Of these, 17,472 km. of roads, are maintained by the Public Works Department (P.W.D.) of Government of West Bengal. Road density in the state is 0.91 km. of road per sq. km. of area, which is much higher than the national average of 0.59 km. Total route km. of railways in West Bengal (as on 31-03-2001) is 3,102 km. with 1,073 railway stations. All the districts of West Bengal are connected by a dense network of roads and also by railways. These ensure easy movement of raw materials to the industrial centers and finished products from the industrial centers to the market areas.

Waterways also play an important role in the development of industries in southern parts of West Bengal. Navigability of river Hooghly was one of the most important factors for the early development of industries on the two sides of river Hooghly.

4. **Port facilities.** Kolkata port is regarded as a gateway to eastern India and it is one of the most important ports in the country. The port facilitates, the import of raw materials and machinery and the export of finished products. Haldia port in Midnapore district is also a major and it has been developed to reduce the pressure on Kolkata port. Port facility at Haldia has promoted the development of Haldia industrial region.

5. **Supply of labour.** West Bengal is the most densely populated state in India. As a result, there is no dearth in the availability of labour force for the development of industries. Besides, this, number of educated manpower is significantly high which is another advantage for the development of industries.
6. **Growing market in the rural areas.** Presence of a rich agricultural base, increase in foodgrains production and land reform measures have increased the purchasing power in the rural areas. As a result, there is a growth of market in the rural areas for the consumer goods industries. This is a motivating factor for the development of industries in the state.
7. **Climatic conditions.** Climate of West Bengal is dominated by tropical humid or sub-humid type of climate. This type of climate is suitable for the development of industries and urban settlements.
8. **Government policies.** State Government has set up West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation (WBIDC) to promote industrial development in the state. The state Government also established West Bengal Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation (WBIDFC) in May, 1997, for providing financial assistance for implementation of infrastructure projects in the state. These infrastructures development would facilitate the development of industries.

2.5.2. JUTE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

1. **Growth and present position.** West Bengal is the pioneer and till now most important state in the country for the manufacturing of jute textiles. First jute mill was set up in 1859 at Rishra near Kolkata. Since then a number of mills were established in and around Kolkata and the production was increased rapidly. India became world leader in the production of jute textiles due to the development of the industry in West Bengal. But during the post-independence period, the performance has not been found to be encouraging. Total number of mills have been declined and production has remained more or less stagnant during last 20 years.

At present there are 81 jute mills in West Bengal (including non-operating jute mills). In

2000-01, total production of jute textiles in West Bengal was 1.39 million tones. The products comprised Hessian, sacking and others. Of these, sacking material accounted for 58% of the total production.

2. **Location pattern.** Jute textile industry in West Bengal is predominantly concentrated on the top banks of river Hooghly near Kolkata. Major centers of production are Naihati, Bhatpara, Titagarh and Kamarhati in North 24 Parganas district; Bansberia, Baidyabati, Rishra and Sreerampore in Hooghly district; Salkia, Howrah and Uluberia in Howrah district and Budge Budge in South 24 Parganas district. Major factors for the development of jute textile industry in these centers are (i) navigability of river Hooghly offering the cheapest mode of transport, (ii) presence of Kolkata port facilitating the export of jute goods, (iii) cultivation of jute in the adjoining areas and (iv) availability of power and other infrastructure facilities.

2.5.3. ENGINEERING INDUSTRY

West Bengal is one of the leading states in the production of engineering goods and export of engineering goods from West Bengal is highly significant. Major engineering industries include machine tools, textile machinery, transport equipment, railway engine, wagon manufacturing, precision engineering goods, ship building, etc.

Favorable factors for the development of engineering industries in West Bengal may be mentioned as follows:

1. Development of engineering industries mainly depends on the skill varieties. Skilled labours are adequately available in different urban areas.
2. Presence of Kolkata port and later the development of Haldia port have facilitated the import of raw materials (as and when necessary) and export of finished engineering goods.
3. Availability of power resource is an advantage for the growth of engineering industries in this state. West Bengal is now regarded as a power surplus state.
4. Iron and steel plants in Durgapur and Burnpur, mini steel plants (mainly rolling mills) and aluminum plants supply the necessary raw materials for the engineering industries.
5. Presence of market for different engineering goods is another favorable factor for the development of these industries.

Locational patterns of engineering industries show the agglomeration of these industries primarily

in two places – Hooghly industrial region in an around Kolkata and Durgapur-Asansol industrial region. Some of the important centers are Hind Motor (automobile industry), Garden Reach (ship building and repairing), Belghoria (textile machinery), Chittaranjan (railway engine), Kolkata (precision engineering), Durgapur (heavy machinery), etc. Haldia is expected to grow as an important centre for engineering industries in near future.

2.5.4. IRON AND STEEL INDUSTRY

West Bengal possesses two out of seven integrated iron and steel plants in India. These are Indian Iron and Steel Co. (IISCO) in Burnpur near Asansol and Durgapur Steel Plant (DSP) in Durgapur, both of which are located in Burdwan district. IISCO in Burnpur is the second oldest steel plant in India after TISCO in Jamshedpur. It was set up under private sector and started production in 1918. The steel plant was nationalized at a much later date in 1972. It is located at the heart of the Raniganj-Asansol coalfield area and hence, it may be described as a coal-based location. Initially the steel plant obtained iron ore from the iron ore deposit in Raniganj, but it was soon exhausted. At present, iron ore comes from Gua in Jharkhand. Types of production include steel rods and structural bars. The steel plant has not yet undergone modernization and as a result capacity utilization is the lowest in the country.

Durgapur steel plant was developed during 2nd Five-year Plan under public sector. The location of the plant is on the bank of river Damodar at a distance of 160 km. from Kolkata. The most important locational advantage is its nearness to Raniganj coalfield. Iron ore is brought from Noamundi in Jharkhand. This steel plant has specialized in the production of railway items like wheels, axles, sleepers, etc. Capacity utilization is being increased with the modernization of the steel plant.

Total production of finished steel in West Bengal increased from 1.03 million tones in 1991-92 to 1.40 million tones in 1999-2000.

2.5.5. CHEMICAL INDUSTRY

Chemical industry in West Bengal may be divided into different categories. Major categories

include (i) heavy chemicals, (ii) petrochemicals, (iii) medicines, (iv) pesticides, (v) soaps and detergents, (vi) cosmetics and (vii) chemical fertilizer.

- (i) Heavy chemical industry in West Bengal primarily includes sulphuric acid. Production of Sulphuric acid in West Bengal is mostly concentrated in the Hooghly industrial region of West Bengal. At present there are more than 30 sulphuric acid producing units in West Bengal, many of which are small scale units. Chlorine is another important heavy chemical produced in West Bengal.
- (ii) Development of petrochemical industry in West Bengal is a recent phenomenon. Biggest project which has been implemented in the state is Haldia Petrochemicals in West Bengal. It has started production from 02-04-2000. Products of this petrochemical complex mainly include *ethylene* and *propylene* which are used as raw materials for other petrochemicals. These two are obtained by cracking naphtha, which is imported. Industries which use the products of Haldia Petrochemicals are known as downstream industries. The end products of these industries include plastics, polythene, benzene etc.
- (iii) There are several drugs and pharmaceutical manufacturing units in the state most of which are located in and around Kolkata.
- (iv) Manufacturing of pesticides is important in the state due to the growing demand from the agricultural sector.
- (v) Soaps and detergents have high demand in the urban areas and as a result several manufacturing units have been developed in the urban and metropolitan areas of south Bengal. A big project has been taken up in Haldia by Hindustan Lever Ltd., for the manufacturing of detergent that is under implementation.
- (vi) Cosmetics industry is primarily developed in Kolkata metropolitan region. But some of the old cosmetic manufacturing companies have become sick due to several reasons. Recently cosmetic manufacturing has been developed in Durgapur by using the by-products of coal.
- (vii) Hindustan Fertilizer Corporation Ltd. has two nitrogenous fertilizer producing units in West Bengal. These are located in Durgapur and Haldia. At present, Haldia unit is closed. Two

major centers of the production of phosphoric fertilizer are Khardah and Rishra both of which are located near Kolkata. Hindustan Lever Ltd. (HLL) has set up a phosphoric fertilizer plant at Haldia.

Besides, there are other categories, which include paints and varnishes, bleaching powder, hydrochloric acid, etc.

Some of the favorable factors for the development of chemical industry in West Bengal are (i) presence of a large market, (ii) availability of skilled workers, (iii) presence of Kolkata and Haldia ports facilitating import of raw materials, (iv) availability of raw materials from the by-products of coke ovens of the steel plants and (v) infrastructure facilities.

Public sector has an important role to play in the development of chemical industry in the state. Activities of some of the public sector enterprises for chemical industry may be mentioned as follows:

1. The Eastern Distilleries and Chemicals Ltd. manufacture rectified spirit and industrial alcohol.
2. Durgapur Chemicals Ltd. produces soda lye, liquid chlorine, synthetic phenol, etc.
3. Gluconate Health manufacture drugs, particularly life-saving drugs like pethidine and sibanate.
4. West Bengal Chemical Industries manufacture chemicals for pharmaceuticals and other industries.
5. Hindustan Fertilizer Corporation manufacture nitrogenous fertilizer at Durgapur.

2.5.6. PAPER INDUSTRY

Manufacturing of paper in India started in West Bengal. So, it is the pioneer in paper production in India. Following Maharashtra, it is now the 2nd largest state in India on the basis of production capacity (about 1/5th of the country's total).

Favourable factors for the development of paper industry may be mentioned as follows:

1. Initially the raw material was sabai grass which was brought from Uttar Pradesh and Nepal. Later bamboo was introduced as raw material which is in abundance in West Bengal and also in north-eastern India.
2. Huge amount of waste paper is collected regularly in Kolkata and from surrounding urban areas. These waste papers are also recycled in the paper industry as raw material.
3. Adequate supply of water is needed for paper industry. Paper mills located on the banks of river Hooghly have the advantage of the availability of water from the river.
4. River Hooghly provides the cheap water transport facility.
5. Kolkata is a big market for different varieties of paper and this is a favorable condition for the development of paper industry.
6. Consumption of power in paper industry is significantly high. Requirement of power is equivalent to four tones of coal per tonne of paper. Initially coal from Raniganj was used as fuel. Later, the industry began to use electricity generated by thermal power stations.

Present *location pattern* shows that there are five large paper mills in West Bengal. These are located at (i) Titagarh (Titagarh Paper Mills Ltd.), (ii) Naihati (Indian Paper Pulp Co. Ltd.), (iii) Dakshineswar (WIMCO Paper Mills Ltd.), (iv) Triveni (Triveni tissues Ltd.) and (v) Raniganj (Bengal Paper Mills Ltd.). West Bengal accounts for 1/5th of the total production capacity of paper in India.

Paper industry in West Bengal has a good prospect for future growth due to the following reasons:

1. Kolkata is the focal point of all commercial activities in eastern India. It ensures the presence of a stable market for paper.
2. There is a steady growth in the literacy rate of West Bengal that causes the increasing

demand for paper (mainly writing paper).

3. Growing printing and publishing industry is an advantageous factor for the development of paper industry.
4. Adequate availability of power is another advantage for the development of paper industry.

2.5.7. LEATHER INDUSTRY

Leather industry occupies an important position in the industrial economy of the state. West Bengal is the highest foreign exchange earner from the export of finished leather goods among all the states in India. The state accounts for 15% of the total production of leather and leather products of India.

Bata Shoe Company in Batanagar near Kolkata is the most famous shoe manufacturing company in India. But leather industry in West Bengal primarily consists of small scale industrial units. Total number of small scale units engaged in the manufacture of leather and leather products is more than 20,000 providing employment to more than 2 lakh persons. Most of these units are located in and around Kolkata.

The 'Charmaja' outlets under West Bengal State Leather Industrial Development Corporation provide marketing facilities for the products of small scale leather units in the state.

The construction of leather complex with modern effluent treatment plant and other modern facilities near Kolkata is going to boost the leather industry of the state in future. Most of the existing tanneries in Kolkata will be relocated very soon in this complex.

2.5.8. TEA INDUSTRY

2.5.8.1. IMPORTANCE

Tea industry plays an important role in the economy of West Bengal in the following ways:

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1. Tea industry generates employment in different ways that include production, processing and distribution. Average daily employment in the tea plantations of north Bengal is around 260 thousands.
2. Tea is one of the most important commodities for export from West Bengal. Total value of tea export from West Bengal increased from Rs. 626.27 crore in 1985-86 to Rs. 2,302 crore in 1998-99.
3. Kolkata port is the biggest tea-handling port in India. Export of tea from Kolkata has generated export-related economic functions like storage facility, commercial services, etc.
4. Kolkata is also the biggest tea auction market in India. It has promoted tea trading activities.
5. Tea industry has promoted other economic activities like manufacturing of tea chests (Wooden box for tea packing), development of transport, setting up of tea trading companies, etc.