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COOCH BEHAR: HISTORICAL & GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

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ABSTRACT

"Koch Bihar now., more commonly, Coach Behar) district in -eastern frontier of India is included in the Jalpaiguri division of West Bengal. Until the 28th day of August 1949 Koch Bihar as an Indian State ruled by the I-laharaja of Koch Bihar who had been a feudatory, Prince under the British Government". Follow': 'Jing accession to the Dominion Government of India Koch Bihar has been administered as a district of West Bengal since January 1,1950. Historical sources place the territory under the suzerainty of the former kingdom Okamura, earliest mention of which is found in epigraphic records of the Gupta period.³ In later times, bifurcation of Kamrup led to itswestern half acqu lnnng the identity of Kamta.⁴ The name 'Koch Bihari's first used in the Shah Jahan Nama in the mid-17th century. The name derives its etymology as the abode of the Koch tribes who are the Aboriginal residents of the region.

Following a series of kings of the Danaba, Kirata and Asur-a ==> dynasties whose lineal antecedents are obscure, power appears to have passed into the hands of local chiefs. Hiuen Tsarig (Yuan Chwang) visited the kingdom in 1639 while the Asura kings were still in ascendance. In later times kingship passed along through the Pala and Khen dynasties. The Narayana dynasty succeeded to the thrown after the period of Muslim conquest that led to the break-up of Kamrup in the late 15th century, and ruled the kingdom till the time accession.

The district of Cooch Behar is located between the geographical coordinates 26g32'46"N and 2~57'56"N, and 89.,.52'00"E and 88C%45'02"E, forming a trapezoidal land· area of 3,386km.2 "Besides the congregated area included in the boundaries of the district mentioned above, there are



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enclaves or chhits which are outlying and detached tracts of land situated inside the district of Rangpur in Bangladesh".⁶ Similarly, enclaves of Bangladesh territory such as Dahagram, Chhit Kuchlibari and Angar Pota also exists within the district. Mutual access rights to these formed a part of the 'Indira Mujib Pact' between the Governments of Bangladesh and India in 1974; however, the props of implementation has been slow because of numerous impediments.

"With the exception of a few miles at the extreme southern tip of Tufanganj subdivision where the river Raidak forms the boundary and for about -five mile~(8km) to the north of Mekhliganj thana where the river Jaldhaka forms the boundary, there is no natural boundary of the district. The northern boundary and most parts of the western boundary are formed by the district of Jalpaiguri. From west to east the following thanas of the district of Jalpaiguri abut on the border of Koch Bihar, viz. Jalpaiguri, Maynaguri, Dhupguri, Falakata, Alipur Duars and Kumargram. The southern boundary of the district is very much indented and the following tnanas of the district of Rangpur Bangladesh form the southern boundary, viz. from west to east, Boda, Debiganj, Damar, Dimla, Patgram, Hatibandha, Kaliganj, Lalmonir Hat, Phulbari Nageswari and Bhurungamari. The eastern boundary is. formed by the district of Goalpara of Assam".

The entire district "forms a part of the great alluvial plain of the Ganges-Brahmaputra system. · The topography in the district gradually slopes southwards, the maximum elevation in the district being 55m above M.S.L. The northern part of district, which in general has a higher elevation, forms the transitional zone between the northern terai zone· of the Himalayas. and the southern alluvial soil. Apart from the flat, monotonous or gently sloping topography in the district, no other important physiographic features ·are noticed in any part of district".