

SOMALIA

A new member of the Arab league *

by

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Independent since 1960, Somalia was formed through the amalgamation of the British Somaliland in the north, and of the Italian trust territory in the south. This is a large country, over 246,000 Sq. miles in size, extending so far into the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden. With a population nearly 2,5 millions. The great part of Somalia is arid and semi-arid. Because of its tropical location, temperatures range between 60° F. and 110° F. The highest temperatures and lowest precipitation occur along the northern coast, where less than 3 inches of rain, are typical ; rainfall increases generally with distance south, averaging in the moistest areas from 16 to 24 inches.

Somalia has four seasons, based on moisture and related to the northeast and southwest monsoons. Two seasons are wet (May - June and from October to December) and two seasons are dry (January - March and July - September).

There are many point of views concerning the name Somali.

According to one version, it is a combination of (So) means go and (mal) means milk, referring to the words the wandering stranger would hear upon arrival in a Somali encampment, when his host sends one of his children to fetch some milk. The Somalis own view is that it is derived from their ancestor, a rich trader, was nicknamed "Zumal", an arabic word meaning rich.

(*) Resumé of the original text in Arabic in this Bulletin.

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Although there is much variation amongst the Somali, the physical features which strike the eye and seem most generally characteristic of the Somali people as a whole, are their tall stature, thin bones, long heads. Skin colours show a wide range from coppery brown to black. The Somalis claim their descent from noble Arabian lineage, and from the family of the prophet. The Somali language contains a considerable number of Arabic words, and Arabic itself is sufficiently known all over Somalia.

Somalia is one of the few countries in the world with a nomad majority. There are, however, major differences in ways of life between the north and south of the country.

In the generally arid north, the proportion of nomads rises to 85% and agriculture has been adopted by a small minority. Southwards as the climate becomes wetter, nomadism shades into transhumance and cultivation becomes more common. Here, too, river water becomes available from Juba and Shibeli.

The main factors influencing nomadic movements are the supply of water, and of grazing lands, but minor considerations include the animal's need for salt pasture, and the avoidance of areas infected with diseases. Camels are used in the driest parts, since they require infrequent waterings. Sheep and goats are most widespread, cattle are confined to wetter regions, especially the south.

Agriculture is increasing in Somalia, but only about 10% of the area with dry farming potential is as yet cultivated. Even in the south, where cultivation is most widespread, only 19% of the population rely solely upon agriculture. Rain cultivation occurs in areas of high rainfall between the Juba and Shibeli rivers, and in places along the dune lined coast. In non-irrigated areas, drought-resistant sorghums occupy most of the land, while along the rivers maize may replace them as the chief cereal, and minor crops such as cotton, beans, sesame, gourds and manioc can be grown more widely. Although plantation cash crops occupy about 35,000 acres, they are of paramount importance in the economy of Somalia. Banana is the chief crop which had provided the main item in the export list before the Suez Canal was closed.

There is also sugar cane which makes Somalia self-supporting in Sugar.

The Somali boundaries are artificial and superimposed by Britain, France, Italy, the former powers in the region. Since the Somali nation extends in nearly 400,000 Sq. miles, or in all the horn of Africa, there are boundary disputes with Ethiopia, Kenya and France, and these boundaries have become the source of almost continuous friction since independence.



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