Mali

Location

The Republic of Mali is located in West Africa bordering Algeria to the north, Niger to the east, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire to the south, Guinea to the south-west, and Senegal and Mauritania to the west. It is the seventh largest country in Africa. The country consists of 8 regions (Gao, Kayes, Kidal, Koulikoro, Mopti, Segou, Sikasso, Tombouctou which is more widely known as Timbuktu, and 1 district, Bamako. Bamako is the capital of the country. The name comes from the Bambara word which means crocodile’s back. The city is located at 12° 39' North, 8° 0' West.

Geography

Mali is almost twice the size of Texas, measuring at 478,700 square miles or 1,240,000 square kilometers. It is the 24th largest country in the world. Most of the land is flat. The northern part of the country is covered by sand and the southern part is around the Niger River where most people live. However, most of the country lies in the Sahara desert. The percentage of water in their land is only 1.6%.

Climate

Mali has subtropical, arid climate. The Sahara desert produces a hot and dusty harmattan haze during dry seasons which often leads to droughts.

History

Sahelian kingdoms including the Ghana Empire, the Mali Empire, and the Songhai Empire settled in the Sahel which includes today’s Mali. The city, Timbuktu, played a very important role as an outpost for trans-Saharan trade and a center for scholarships. Mali was
invaded by France in 1880 and became one of its territories. The colony was known as French Sudan or the Sudanese Republic and sometimes it included the neighboring countries also. Mali Federation, the union of Mali and Senegal, gained independence from France on June 20, 1960 but Senegal withdrew from the federation only after a few months. Mali, or the Republic of Mali withdrew from the French Community on September 22, 1960 under Modibo Keita. He was imprisoned for 8 years and the country was ruled by Moussa Traore until 1991. The motto of the country is “One people, one goal, one faith”.

**Government**

an anti-government protest broke out in 1991 and a transitional government and a new constitution were forced. The following year, Mali’s first democratic, multi-party presidential election was held and Alpha Oumar Konare became the first president. He was re-elected in 1997 and imposed political and economic reforms. In 2002, Amadou Toumani Toure, a retired General and the leader of the military aspect of 1991 democratic uprising, won the election. As a semi-presidential political country, Modibo Sidibe is the current prime minister of Mali. Today, the country is among the most politically and socially stable countries in Africa.

**Important date (Public Holidays)**

1 Jan—New Year’s Day

20 Jan Armed Forces’ Day

20 Mar Mawloud (Prophet’s Birthday)

24 Mar Easter Monday

26 Mar Day of Democracy

1 May Labour Day.
25 May Africa Day

22 Sep Independence Day

2 Oct Korité (End of Ramadan)

9 Dec Tabaski (Feast of the Sacrifice)

25 Dec Christmas Day

Language

Due to the French invasion in the history of Mali, the official language of Mali is French. However, it is low and concentrated in The urban areas. Approximately 60% of the population is literate, many of them speak in Bamanakan which is the largest spoken language and has its own alphabet known as N'Ko. Others also speak Arabic and attend Koranic school. Mali has one of the oldest universities in the world in Sankore, Timbuktu which dates back to the 1400’s.

Demographic

The ethnic groups of Mali consist of Mande 50% (Bambara, Malinke, Soninke), Peul 17% (Fula/Fulani), Boltaic 12%, Tuareg and Moor 10%, Songhai 6%, and other 5%. People in Mali are called Malian. The population is estimated at 11,995,402 for 2007 which is the 73rd most populated country in the world. The population density of Mali is 28 per square miles or 11 per square kilometers. Mali is dominated by Muslim 90% but, includes indigenous beliefs 9%, and Christianity 1% although missionaries encouraged it under French colonial rule.

Culture

Since 90% of Malians are Muslims, they have their own educational systems, leading to baccalaureate and doctoral degrees. However, there are exceptions of traditional religious
beliefs and practices. The number of Muslims who make the pilgrimage to Mecca and study in Arab countries is increasing.

Kora virtuoso Toumani Diabate is the music of Mali. The blues guitarist Ali Farka Toure was one of the roots of the music. Several Afro-pop artists such as Salif Keita, the duo Amadou et Mariam, and Oumou Sangare are popular.

Resources

The three primary sectors of Mali’s exports are gold 56%, cotton 27%, and livestock 5%. Mali also has abundant natural resources such as gold, phosphate, kaolinite, uranium, salt, and limestone. The mining industry attracted interest and investment from overseas companies. Mali is now fourth in the world to export gold. They also mine phosphate but sometimes they find copper and diamonds. The gold industry helped alleviate some of the negative impact of the cotton and Cote d’Ivoire crises since 1999.

They produce cotton, cereals and rice. Cotton is the primary exports in Mali. The livestock industry is also experiencing growth. Although the country is mostly desert or semi-desert land, the Niger River is considered a potential irrigation source.

Economy

Mali has applied an economic adjustment program between 1987 and 1995 that helped with their economic growth and financial imbalance. This increased GDP growth rate was 9.6% in 2002 and decreased inflation. GDP in 2002 totaled $3.2 billion in US dollars which is made up of agriculture 37.8%, industry 26.4%, and services 35.9%. The estimated GDP for 2005 was $14.4 billion in US dollars and GDP per capita is $1,154.

The implementation of macroeconomic stabilization and economic liberalization policies and the stable political situation resulted in good economic performance. It made it possible for
the country to strengthen the foundations for a market-oriented economy and encourage private sector development, backed up by significant improvement in executing Mali’s privatization program. To diversify and expand agricultural production and reduce its costs, they also put agricultural reform into operation. However, the country’s economy is weak because of the climate, fluctuation in terms of trade, and dependence on neighboring country’s ports.

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