

# India



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## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1947
Population:	1,198,003,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	4.8% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 119
Official languages:	Hindi, English
Time:	GMT plus 5.5hr
Currency:	rupee (Rs)

## Geography

Area:	3,287,263 sq km
Coastline:	7,520km
Capital:	New Delhi

The Republic of India, which lies across the Tropic of Cancer, comprises most of the Indian subcontinent. It also includes the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal and the Lakshadweep Islands in the Arabian Sea. Its neighbours are Pakistan, Afghanistan and China to the north, then Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar (formerly Burma). In the south, the Palk Strait separates it from Sri Lanka. India is a federal republic with 29 states (including the Delhi National Capital Territory), and six union territories.

**Main towns:** New Delhi/Delhi (capital, pop. 12.26m, 2009), Mumbai (formerly Bombay, in Maharashtra State, 13.92m), Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore, in Karnataka, 5.31m), Kolkata (formerly Calcutta, in West Bengal, 5.08m), Chennai (formerly Madras, in Tamil Nadu, 4.59m), Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh, 4.03m), Ahmadabad (Gujarat, 3.91m), Pune (Maharashtra, 3.34m), Surat (Gujarat, 3.23m), Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh, 3.14m), Jaipur (Rajasthan, 3.10m), Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh, 2.69m), Nagpur (Maharashtra, 2.40m), Patna (Bihar, 1.81m), Indore (Madhya Pradesh, 1.81m), Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh, 1.75m), Ludhiana (Punjab, 1.70m), Faridabad (Haryana, 1.46m) and Srinagar (Jammu and Kashmir, 1.06m).

**Topography:** India has great topographical variety, with four distinct regions. The northern region rises into the Himalayas, forming a mountainous wall 160km to 320km deep, the mountains losing height to the east. The second region is the plain of the River Ganges and its tributaries, a huge stretch of flat alluvium flowing into the Bay of Bengal in a broad delta. This is one of the most fertile and densely populated regions of India. The third region is the Thar Desert, which stretches into Pakistan. The fourth region is the Deccan tableland bordered by ranges of hills,

## did you know?

Kamlesh Sharma of India became Commonwealth Secretary-General in 2008.

Twelve Indians have been regional winners in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and three have gone on to take the overall Best Book or Best First Book awards.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative established its HQ in New Delhi in 1993; and the country is also host to the Commonwealth Veterinary Association's secretariat in Bangalore and the Commonwealth Youth Programme's Asia Centre in Chandigarh.

the Western and Eastern Ghats and Nilgiri Hills in the south, and their coastal belts.

The country has many large rivers, the most important of which are the Ganges, Jamuna, Brahmaputra, a stretch of the Indus, Godavari, Krishna, Mahanadi, Narmada and Cauvery. All these rivers are navigable in parts.

**Climate:** The climate is hot with regional variations. Rajasthan and large parts of the north-west are dry (under 750mm annual rainfall) and the Thar Desert (in fact a semi-desert) receives around 300mm. 80% of rain falls between June and September, the season of the monsoon. April to June is generally hot, dry and dusty.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are that finite natural resources support a very large and growing population; deforestation, soil erosion and desertification; air pollution with industrial effluents and vehicle emissions; and water pollution with raw sewage and run-off of agricultural pesticides.

**Vegetation:** Forests in the western Himalayan region range from conifers and broad-leaved trees in the temperate zone to silver fir, silver birch and junipers at the highest level of the alpine zone. The temperate zone of the eastern Himalayan region has forests of oaks, laurels, maples and rhododendrons, among other species. Vegetation of the Assam region in the east is luxuriant with evergreen forests, occasional thick clumps of bamboo and tall grasses. The Gangetic plain is largely under cultivation. The Deccan tableland supports vegetation from scrub to mixed deciduous forests. The Malabar region is rich in forest vegetation. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have evergreen, mangrove, beach and diluvial forests. Much of the country's flora originated 3 million years ago and are unique to the subcontinent. Forest covers 23% of the land area, and there was no significant loss of forest cover during 2000–07. Arable land comprises 53% of the total land area and permanent cropland 4%.

**Wildlife:** Among the indigenous mammals are elephants, bisons, pandas, Himalayan wild sheep, deer, antelopes and tapirs. Large cats include lions, tigers, panthers, cheetahs and leopards. The tiger is the Indian national animal, protected since 1973. The tiger population, down to 1,827 in 1972, was in the mid-1990s back to 3,750. Crocodiles and gharials (a crocodile unique to India) are bred in a project begun in 1974 to save them from extinction. Birdlife is abundant and includes pheasants, mynahs, parakeets and hornbills. The spectacular Indian peacock is the national bird. Reptiles include cobras, saltwater snakes and pythons. Endangered wildlife is protected under legislation and there are 83 national parks and 447 wildlife sanctuaries, covering nearly 5.2% of the country.

**Transport:** There are 3,316,450km of roads, 47% paved. The number of vehicles and the demand for roads is growing very rapidly.

India has Asia's biggest, and the world's fourth biggest, railway system, with 63,330km of track. The cities are connected by express trains, and there are local trains between most parts of the country.

The chief western port is Mumbai, and the chief eastern ports are Kolkata–Haldia and Chennai. The country has 7,520km of coastline and coastal shipping of freight within India plays an important role. There are about 19,000km of navigable inland waterways, though only 4,600km is navigable by large vessels.

There are international airports at Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai and Ahmadabad, and a total of about 250 airports with paved runways.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 364

Life expectancy: 64 years

Net primary enrolment: 83%

**Population:** 1,198,003,000 (2009); world's second-largest, after China; 30% lives in urban areas and 11% in urban agglomerations of more than 1 million people; some 60% of all Commonwealth people, and 16% of all people, lives in India; growth 1.7% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 22 per 1,000 people (38 in 1970); life expectancy 64 years (29 in 1947 and 49 in 1970). By 1996, 41% of married women were using contraceptive methods.

The population of India is extremely diverse, comprising almost entirely peoples who have migrated from other parts of the world over previous millennia. Dravidian peoples, who came to India from the Mediterranean region some 5,000 years ago, now constitute about 25% of the population and live predominantly in the southern states of India. Indo-Aryans, who account for more than 70% of the population, came from Northern Europe 3,500–4,000 years ago. Later migrations included peoples from Central Asia and China.

**Language:** The main official languages are Hindi (spoken by 30% of the population), and English (as laid down in the Constitution and Official Languages Act of 1963), but there are also 17 official regional languages, and many other languages. Language has been a major constitutional issue; the states have now been demarcated according to the main language of their populations. Other widely used languages include Urdu (spoken by most Muslims) and (in the north) Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Oriya, Punjabi; (in the south) Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam.

**Religion:** Hindus 80.5%, Muslims 13.4%, Christians 2.3%, Sikhs 1.9%, Buddhists, Jains (2001 census).

**Media:** The leading English-language dailies are *The Asian Age* (New Delhi), *Deccan Herald* (Bengaluru), *The Hindu* (Chennai), *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), *The Pioneer* (New Delhi), *The Statesman* (Kolkata) and *The Times of India* (Mumbai), and *India Today* and *Outlook* are weekly news magazines. There are thousands of daily newspapers published in some 90 languages.

From 1992 private TV channels have been permitted and from 2000, private radio stations. The national, public All India Radio is the only radio network authorised to broadcast news; it also operates an external service, in 17 Indian and 10 foreign languages.

Some 53% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 32 personal computers (2007) and 51 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 3.2% of GDP in 2006. There are nine years of compulsory education starting at age six. The school year starts in April.

There are more than 200 universities, 9,000 colleges and 1,000 polytechnics, including some 150 medical colleges. There are schemes to reserve places for scheduled (lowest) castes and scheduled tribes in certain colleges and universities, and special boarding schools for talented children with priority given to those from rural areas. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 70:100 (2007). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 81% (2008).

The 2005 Right to Education Bill gave effect to the guarantee in the constitution of the right to education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14. The act requires government schools to provide free education to all admitted children, and private schools to admit at least 25% of children free of charge.

**Health:** Primary health care is provided in rural areas by more than 20,000 centres, backed by sub-centres, community health centres and dispensaries. Western medicine predominates, although Ayurvedic medicine is also practised. The Ayurvedic tradition also gave rise to homeopathy (some 365,000 practitioners). 88% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 31% have adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 50 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (146 in 1960). National health programmes have been established to combat malaria, filaria, sexually transmitted diseases (including AIDS), leprosy and tuberculosis. Family welfare centres give advice and education on family planning. In 2009, 0.3% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

**Communications:** Country code 91; internet domain '.in'. Mobile phone coverage is good in the main towns. Public phone booths are widely available. Internet cafes are located throughout the country, many with wireless facilities.

There are 31 main telephone lines and 438 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

**Public holidays:** The following are universally observed: Republic Day (26 January), Independence Day (15 August) and Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday (2 October).

Religious and other festivals, of which the observance varies between regions and religions, are: Prophet's Birthday, Mahavir Jayanti (March/April), Good Friday, Buddha Purnima (April/May), Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan), Dussehra (October/November), Diwali (October/November), Guru Nanak's Birthday (November), Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice), Muharram (Islamic New Year) and Christmas Day (25 December). Those without specific dates vary from year to year.

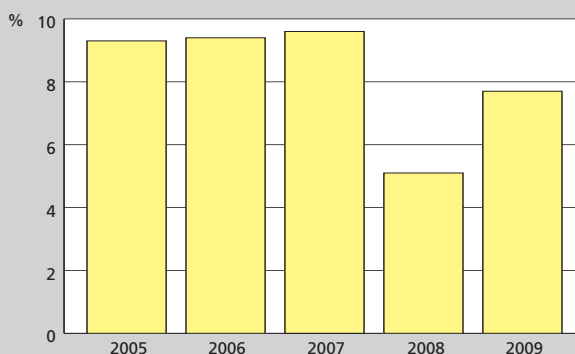
## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2009

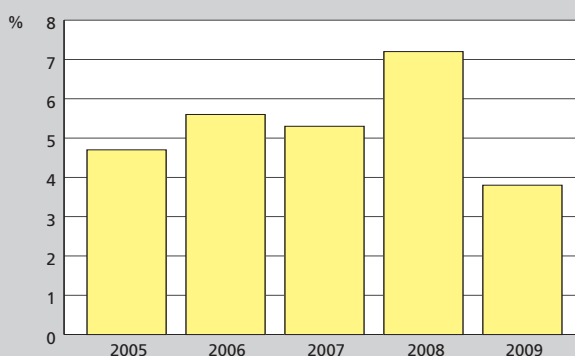
GNI:	US\$1,367.1bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$1,180
GDP growth:	8.2% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	5.3% p.a. 2005–09

**Overview:** India's economic policy has traditionally focused on poverty reduction. From the 1950s to the 1980s, there was a drive towards large-scale industrialisation through government investment in public-sector enterprises, notably in heavy industry, aimed at providing employment and increasing self-reliance, with

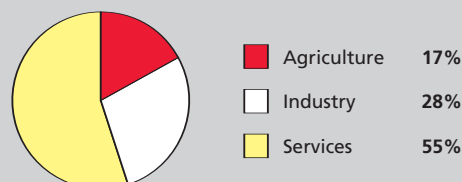
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2009)



an emphasis on import substitution. The outcome was that India is now one of the world's largest industrial economies, with deliberately labour-intensive systems.

However, few improvements reached the rural areas where more than 70% of the population lives and depends on agriculture. A balance of payments crisis in 1991 led to policy reform with the emphasis on liberalisation, decentralisation and private-sector investment, increasing opportunities for small- and medium-scale enterprises to strengthen markets and create employment at the grassroots.

During the 1990s the government made some progress with deregulation of trade and industry and privatisation of both infrastructure (including power generation, ports, roads and airlines) and the many inefficient state enterprises, and generally maintained macroeconomic discipline of containing inflation and current-account deficits. At the same time new industries, and especially software, grew rapidly.

However, the government proceeded more slowly with liberalising the financial sector and reforming labour law. In the 2000s

progress was stalled due to lack of support for the economic reforms in the governing National Democratic Alliance, especially for labour market reform and further privatisation. In May 2004, the new Indian National Congress-led government announced that there would be no more privatisations of profitable state enterprises and others would be decided case by case.

After the first period of adjustment in the early 1990s, the economy began to enjoy strong export-led growth. India was relatively little affected by the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. The economy has expanded rapidly during the 2000s; during 2005–09 growth averaged over 8.2%. In the global economic downturn of 2008–09 the economy remained relatively strong, with growth of 5.1% in 2008 and 7.7% in 2009, rising to about 9% in 2010.

**Trade:** With a large domestic market and a historical policy of self-sufficiency, foreign trade still comprises a comparatively small proportion of economic activity (exports of goods and services accounted for 23% of GDP in 2008). Principal exports are engineering goods, iron and steel, chemicals, clothing and textiles, gems and jewellery, and petroleum.

## Constitution

<b>Status:</b>	<b>Republic</b>
<b>Legislature:</b>	<b>Parliament</b>
<b>Independence:</b>	<b>15 August 1947</b>

India is a federal republic with 29 states (including the Delhi National Capital Territory), and six union territories. It has a parliamentary democracy which operates under the constitution of 1950. There is a bicameral federal parliament: the Rajya Sabha or council of states (upper house) and the Lok Sabha or house of the people (lower house).

The Lok Sabha has 545 members, 543 representing the states and union territories – 79 seats are reserved for scheduled castes and 40 for scheduled tribes – and two additional seats reserved for the Anglo-Indian community. Members are elected, on a first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies, every five years or less, based on universal suffrage.

The Rajya Sabha has a maximum of 250 members of which 12 are presidential appointments. The other members are elected indirectly by the assemblies of the states and union territories for a six-year term, with one-third retiring every two years. Legislation may be introduced in either house, but the Lok Sabha has final say in financial matters.

The prime minister is elected by the members of the Lok Sabha and appoints and heads the Council of Ministers. The president is elected for five years by an electoral college consisting of members of the federal parliament and state assemblies.

Each state has its own legislature (usually unicameral), governor (appointed by the president for five years) and a ministerial council headed by a chief minister. There has been a trend towards devolution of union and state power to local government. The 1950 constitution established the division of power between the national and state legislatures.

Responsibility for enacting laws is set out in three lists: the Union List (for legislation by national parliament), the State List and the

Concurrent List (either national or state legislatures). State legislatures make their own laws on such matters as education, health, taxation, public order, lands and forests. Constitutional amendments must be passed by both houses and ratified by at least half the state legislatures.

On proclamation of a state of emergency by the president, the federal government may assume temporary executive and financial control of a state and the president may rule it in place of the governor. The president appoints an administrator to govern the union territories. The 1950 constitution set out a number of individual freedoms and abolished discrimination on the basis of caste.

## Politics

<b>Last elections:</b>	<b>April/May 2009</b>
<b>Next elections:</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Head of state:</b>	<b>President Pratibha Patil (2007–)</b>
<b>Head of government:</b>	<b>Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh</b>
<b>Ruling party:</b>	<b>United Progressive Alliance coalition led by Indian National Congress</b>

In 1991, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) withdrew its support, Janata Dal split and the Lok Sabha was dissolved in March 1991, to prepare for a general election. While campaigning, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a member of an extremist faction supporting the Tamil guerrillas in Sri Lanka. In the elections Congress (I) party took 227 seats and its new leader Narasimha Rao formed a minority government, the BJP winning 119 seats and Janata Dal only 55.

The Rao administration introduced economic reforms and turned the economy around, but failed to win an overall majority in the 1996 elections. The BJP and its allies won 194 seats, Congress (I) 136 and a loose alliance of left-wing parties 179 seats, with the remainder won by minor parties and independents. The BJP formed a minority government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, but this proved too fragile to last and the country was then governed by a coalition of 13, and later 15 parties, with Deve Gowda and then I K Gujral as prime minister, with the support of Congress (I) which was wracked by defections and splits following its election defeat. By late 1997 the coalition had lost its majority and an early general election was called.

But in the February/March 1998 general election again no party emerged with a clear majority. Of the total of 545 seats, BJP took 181, Congress (I) 141 and Communist Party of India (Marxist) 32. But after the negotiations that followed the election the BJP-led coalition had the support of some 265 members, and Vajpayee of the BJP was able to form a coalition government comprising some 40 parties and independent members and finally commanding a majority in an early vote of confidence of 274:261 votes.

There followed a year in which the government was faced with continuing difficulty in keeping its coalition together, despite continuing strong economic growth and the popularity of nuclear tests in 1998, and after the BJP's largest coalition partner, the Tamil Nadu-based All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), withdrew from the government, in April 1999 the government lost

its majority. Following an unsuccessful attempt by Congress (I) – now led by Rajiv's widow, Sonia Gandhi – to form a coalition, President K R Narayanan dissolved the Lok Sabha and asked Vajpayee to head a caretaker government until a complete round of new elections could be held in September and October 1999.

Victory for the Indian armed forces in Kashmir in July 1999 formed the backdrop for the BJP's formation of a national political alliance, the 24-party National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which issued its manifesto in August 1999. Thus the BJP's alliance with AIADMK was replaced by a series of agreements with strong regional parties, including a breakaway from Congress in West Bengal and a strong rival to Congress in Andhra Pradesh. Such alliances diluted the Hindu militancy with which the BJP was formerly associated. The final results of the 1999 elections gave the NDA a solid majority with 298 seats, though BJP's own total of 182 seats had

hardly increased. However, Congress (I) and its allies took only 136 seats. The 1999 elections were the first since 1984 when a pre-election alliance managed to secure a clear majority in parliament.

The year 2002 saw higher levels of tension between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, especially in May 2002 when India mobilised a vast army along the Line of Control and the two countries were on the brink of war. Tension eased considerably in October 2002 when India reduced its number of troops along the Line of Control; diplomatic relations were restored in August 2003 and a ceasefire along the Line of Control was agreed and took effect from 26 November 2003.

In an early election, the first using electronic voting machines, held over four days in April/May 2004, the coalition – the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) – led by Indian National Congress (INC) emerged, with 217 seats, ahead of the ruling NDA (185 seats).



## History

The Indian subcontinent is one of the cradles of civilisation. An Indus Valley culture of pre-Aryan people flourished from about 3000 BC. This population comprised Dravidian tribes who appear to have migrated from the west, ousting and assimilating aboriginal inhabitants. The Indus Valley civilisation developed writing, art, temples, cities, irrigation and commerce. It was wiped out around 2500 BC by invaders who entered the subcontinent through the mountain passes of the north-west frontier.

Indo-European conquerors (with iron weapons, war chariots and armour) had control of much of the subcontinent by 1500 BC. They settled and established the tightly stratified Vedic civilisation. Much information about this civilisation, which was advanced in various arts and sciences, is derived from the Vedas, a collection of sacred writings. Sixteen autonomous states were established, with the kingdom of Magadha in the Ganges river valley (territory of present-day Bihar) rising to prominence in the 6th century BC. During the reign of King Bimbisara (c. 543–491 BC) Prince Siddhartha and Vardhamana Jnatiputra or Nataputta Mahavira (founders of Buddhism and Jainism) preached in Magadha.

Invasions subsequently came from Persia and Greece, including that of Alexander the Great of Macedon in 326 BC. Through this turmoil, Magadha strengthened its position as the centre of an expanding empire. The Maurya dynasty was founded in 321 BC. At the zenith of the Maurya period under Ashoka (272–232 BC), the empire took in the entire subcontinent, and stretched from Afghanistan to Bengal. Ashoka gave India many of its enduring cultural characteristics, including his emblem, and philosophy. Ashoka spread the teachings of Prince Siddhartha (Buddhism) across India.

This empire in turn fragmented under waves of invasion between about AD 100–300, though, when the Guptas seized power and reunified Magadha in AD 319–606, Indian art, culture and philosophy had another renaissance and Hinduism gained strength again. This power centre was, in its turn, broken up in the Hun invasion, bringing confusion to northern India.

Muslim conquerors began entering the north from around the seventh century; this phase of history had its apogee in the Moghul dynasty of 1526 to 1738. One of the great legacies of

Moghul India is aesthetic: it gave to Indian culture new arts in poetry, architecture, garden design and notably some of the world's greatest palace and funerary buildings, of which the Taj Mahal is only one masterpiece. However, the Moghul dynasty also had negative effects, especially for the south, where the trading empires, established for centuries and historically involved in sea trade with such partners as Egypt and the Roman Empire, were destroyed.

With the decline of the Moghul Empire into separate feudal and often feuding states, new invaders, Portuguese, Dutch, French and British, entered the Indian Ocean. In 1690 the British East India Company set itself up at Calcutta to trade in clothes, tea and spices. The company had its own private army, with which it ousted the French from Madras in 1748. French plans for control of the subcontinent were finally ended by decisive British victories in 1756–63. One by one, the company then conquered the Indian states until it had control of virtually the whole subcontinent by 1820. Those states which remained unconquered entered into alliance with Britain.

Sporadic resistance to the rule of the East India Company culminated in a major uprising in 1857, known to the British as the Indian Mutiny. After its suppression, the British Crown took direct control. The high colonial period followed, when the Indian railway system was constructed, a nationwide education system established, and the world's then largest administrative system developed. There was also, however, substantial disruption: India's handloom textile industry was destroyed by competition from British mills and peasant farming hit by reorganisation in favour of cash crops. India's importance to Britain was as more than a source of raw materials and a market for British manufactured goods. India underpinned Britain's imperial influence and strength, the 'Jewel in the Crown' of the British Empire.

However, the independence movement not only brought an end to British rule, but also set the pattern for resistance to colonialism everywhere. The Indian National Congress was set up in 1885; Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi became its leader after 1918 and set it on its course of non-violent non-co-operation with the foreign rulers. Gandhi's methods of mass mobilisation greatly

However, INC leader, Sonia Gandhi, decided not to accept the prime ministership and Dr Manmohan Singh, a former finance minister who had overseen the economic reform programme in the early 1990s, was chosen by INC to form the new government. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), with 43 seats, joined INC to provide the necessary majority in taking the new agenda forward.

Peace talks between India and Pakistan began in 2004, marking a historic advance in relations between the two countries. The talks led to the restoration of communication links and a range of confidence-building measures, including co-ordinated relief efforts in the aftermath of the October 2005 earthquake. However, at the start of 2007, the two sides were yet to commence substantive discussions on political issues.

The July 2007 presidential election was won by Pratibha Patil of the INC, who was the nominee of UPA and first woman to become

president. She defeated the BJP's candidate, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, in the electoral college vote to choose a successor to Dr Abdul Kalam.

In July 2008, when a key UPA coalition partner, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – CPI(M), would not support the government's proposed nuclear deal with the USA, the government narrowly survived a vote of confidence (275:256 votes, 11 abstentions), largely due to the support of a non-coalition member, the Samajwadi Party.

A series of co-ordinated terrorist attacks in Mumbai during three days in November 2008 resulted in at least 170 dead and several hundred injured. The principal targets were two luxury hotels. The Indian authorities released a dossier of evidence asserting that the ten gunmen were Pakistan-based. This dossier was subsequently presented to the Government of Pakistan for it to take appropriate action.

► impressed the Congress radical wing and a young activist, Jawaharlal Nehru. There was, however, bloodshed at Amritsar, Punjab, in 1919 when British troops killed more than 400 protesters.

The memory of the Amritsar massacre became a rallying cry for the independence movement. Congress launched its 'non-cooperation' campaign: colonial institutions, elections, administrative bodies, schools and British products were boycotted. Campaign participants were instructed to accept passively the legal consequences. With Gandhi's campaign against the state monopoly on salt, the movement spread nationwide. Around 27,000 Indian nationalists were imprisoned and the British administrative system was partially paralysed. The colonial authorities were politely, but insistently, invited to 'go home'. As a result of its much weakened position at the end of the Second World War, the UK accepted the inevitable and began the process of transferring power. India became independent in August 1947.

At independence the subcontinent was divided, at the insistence of Muslim leaders, into the independent Islamic state of Pakistan and the independent secular state of India. Some 12 million refugees were transferred across the borders, as Sikhs and Hindus moved from Pakistan into India and Muslims migrated to Pakistan. An estimated 4 million people migrated in September 1947 alone, amid much violence, including military action in disputed areas and the murder of the Mahatma himself, in 1948, by a Hindu extremist. Nehru's Congress won the general election (India's first general election with universal adult suffrage) of 1952; he remained prime minister until his death in 1964 when he was succeeded by Lal Bahadur Shastri.

During this period the modern nation of India was founded. Nehru had to address four main areas: the constitution, reorganisation of states, development of India as an industrial nation, and settling disputes with neighbours. The main problems with the constitution were the remnants of the princely states, all eventually brought into the Union (although the dispute between Pakistan and India over Kashmir continued into the 2000s), and the redrawing of state boundaries in accordance with linguistic criteria.

Nehru's distrust of world powers and exploitation led his pursuit of a self-sufficient industrial socialist state. He also aimed to resolve religious conflict through a secular state, and to abolish the caste system. Internationally, Nehru set India on its course of non-alignment and was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. Foreign policy, however, was dogged with problems, chief among these being the ongoing crises with Pakistan (and to some extent Bangladesh) over boundaries, which led to three wars in 1947, 1965 and 1971, and dispute with China over Tibet in 1962, culminating in armed conflict. In time, India developed a large and well-equipped army, and was the first Third World country to develop a nuclear-weapons capability (1974) and equip its army through indigenous production as well as through imports.

Following Lal Bahadur Shastri's death in 1966, Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, became prime minister; she won the 1967 general election, but lost in 1977. Her early popularity was undermined by recession after the 1970s oil crisis, food riots, popular resistance to the mass sterilisation campaign and her declaration of a state of emergency in 1975. Between 1977 and 1980 a Janata coalition – led by Morarji Desai, a former member of the Congress party – and then a Lok Dal coalition ruled the country. Heading her new Congress (I) party, Indira Gandhi returned to power in the 1980 elections.

In 1984, when there was unrest in several states, Sikh nationalists demanding autonomy occupied several places of worship; federal troops stormed the Golden Temple at Amritsar. On 31 October 1984 Indira Gandhi was assassinated in New Delhi by two Sikh members of her personal bodyguard. Rajiv Gandhi, her son, was at once sworn in as prime minister. He called elections in December at which Congress (I) won 49% of the votes and 403 seats.

After the November 1989 general election, although Congress (I) remained the single biggest party in the Lok Sabha, it was unable to command an overall majority and V P Singh, leader of the new Janata Dal party and head of the National Front Coalition, became prime minister. The Janata Dal party (a merger of the old Janata and Lok Dal parties) aimed to be the party of the poor and lower castes.

In the general election of April/May 2009 the Congress Party-led UPA prevailed, extending its share to 261 of the 545 seats (INC with 206), obviating the need for the complex coalition negotiations that had followed recent elections. Its main rival, the NDA, took 159 seats (BJP with 116); the Third Front coalition – now including the CPI(M) – 78. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh returned to head the government for a second term.

## International relations

India is a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, Non-Aligned Movement, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

## Traveller information

**Local laws and conventions:** Traditions and rituals in India have become an integral part of everyday life and should be respected by all visitors. Visitors are advised to observe and respect local dress sense. All visitors should remove footwear before entering places of religious worship.

Penalties for drug offences are severe: there is a minimum sentence of six months for possession of small amounts for personal consumption only, and a ten-year sentence for larger amounts.

There are strict religious and social customs, and visitors must show great respect when visiting a person's home. Indian women prefer not to shake hands. Most people remove footwear before entering houses.

English is widely used in business. Businessmen and women should dress formally for meetings or social functions. The best months for business visits are October to March. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0930–1700, Sat 0930–1300.

**Immigration and customs:** Business and tourist visas are usually required and are valid for six months. Passports need to be valid for at least six months on arrival into the country. Visitors are advised to make a copy of the photopage of their passport, Indian visa and any entry stamps, and keep their passport safe at all times. A yellow fever certificate is required from anyone travelling from an infected country.

Lone parents travelling with a child/children should carry documentation showing that they have the right to do so.

Prohibited imports include livestock and pig meat products, live plants, dangerous drugs, gold coins and silver bullion.

**Travel within the country:** Driving is on the left. An international driving permit is required to hire a car.

Buses connect all parts of the country and are often the only means of travelling to mountainous areas. Urban buses are usually crowded.

Taxis and auto rickshaws are available in larger towns and cities, and fares are charged by the kilometre. Chauffeur-driven tourist cars can be found in major centres and cost slightly more than taxis.

The Indian railway system is extensive, and there are six classes of travel. Super-fast trains connect the major cities and luxury tourist trains are available for sightseeing trips.

India Airlines is the state domestic airline and connects more than 70 cities. Outward flights should be reconfirmed, especially between December and April when all flights become very full.

Ferries operate from Kolkata and Chennai, and there is a catamaran service from Mumbai to Goa.

**Travel health:** Visitors should take out comprehensive medical insurance. Private medical care is available in the major cities but is expensive. Many endemic diseases require that adequate care be taken with water and food hygiene. Water used for brushing teeth or making ice should be boiled.

Dengue fever outbreaks occur and visitors will need to take repellent and appropriate clothing to protect themselves against insect bites. Vaccination for Hepatitis B is sometimes advised, together with Japanese encephalitis and tuberculosis.

All visitors over the age of 18 wishing to stay for longer than one year must take an AIDS test.

Valid certificates of inoculation and vaccination will be required for all those travelling on to countries that impose health restrictions on arrivals from India.

Prescription drugs should be in their original containers, clearly marked to avoid confusion.

**Money:** Currency can be exchanged at banks and airports and at authorised changers. It is illegal to use unauthorised moneychangers. US dollars and pounds sterling are the easiest currencies to change. American Express, Diners Card, Mastercard and Visa are accepted throughout India. Travellers cheques in dollars or sterling are the most easily changed, although some banks refuse certain brands. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 1000–1400, Sat 1000–1200.

There were 5,109,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

## Further information

National Portal of India: [www.india.gov.in](http://www.india.gov.in)

Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

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