

# India



## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1947
Population:	1,236,687,000 (2012)
GDP p.c. growth:	4.7% p.a. 1990–2012
UN HDI 2012:	world ranking 136
Official languages:	Hindi, English
Time:	GMT plus 5.5hr
Currency:	rupee (Rs)

## Geography

Area:	3,287,263 sq km
Coastline:	7,520 km
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.

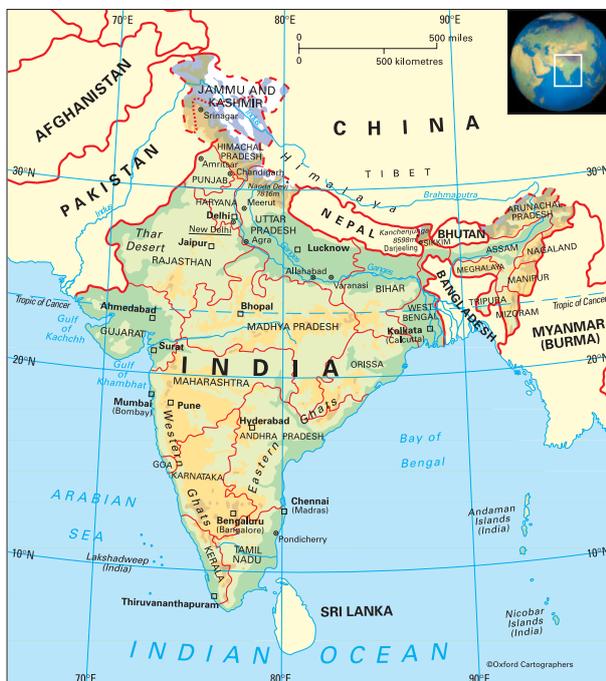
India comprises 29 states and seven union territories (including the National Capital Territory of Delhi). Telangana became the 29th state on 2 June 2014.

**Topography:** India has great topographical variety, with four distinct regions. The northern region rises into the Himalayas, forming a mountainous wall 160 km to 320 km 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, 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 750 mm annual rainfall) and the Thar Desert (in fact a semi-desert) receives around 300 mm. Some 80 per cent 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.



*The designations and the presentation of material on this map, based on UN practice, do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Commonwealth Secretariat or the publishers concerning the legal status of any country, territory or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. There is no intention to define the status of Jammu and/or Kashmir, which has not yet been agreed on by the parties.*

## Did you know?

Kamlesh Sharma of India became Commonwealth Secretary-General in 2008; and Professor Asha Kanwar was appointed President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Learning in 2012.

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 Youth Programme Asia Centre in Chandigarh and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's Project Office, Asia, in Mumbai.

Scholarships for postgraduate study are awarded by India to citizens of other Commonwealth countries under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

**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 three million years ago and are unique to the subcontinent. Forest covers 23 per cent of the land area, having increased at 0.3 per cent p.a. 1990–2010. Arable land comprises 53 per cent of the total land area and permanent cropland four per cent.

**Wildlife:** Among the indigenous mammals are elephants, bison, 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 per cent of the country. Some 94 mammal species and 80 bird species are thought to be endangered (2012).

**Main towns:** New Delhi/Delhi (capital, pop. 12.57m in 2010), Mumbai (formerly Bombay, in Maharashtra State, 13.83m), Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore, in Karnataka, 5.44m), Kolkata (formerly Calcutta, in West Bengal, 5.14m), Chennai (formerly Madras, in Tamil Nadu, 4.62m), Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh, 4.07m), Ahmadabad (Gujarat, 3.96m), Pune (Maharashtra, 3.45m), Surat (Gujarat, 3.34m), Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh, 3.22m), Jaipur (Rajasthan, 3.21m), Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh, 2.75m), Nagpur (Maharashtra, 2.45m), Patna (Bihar, 1.88m), Indore (Madhya Pradesh, 1.85m), Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh, 1.79m), Ludhiana (Punjab, 1.74m), Faridabad (Haryana, 1.52m) and Srinagar (Jammu and Kashmir, 1.08m).

**Transport:** There are 3,316,450 km of roads, 47 per cent 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 63,975 km 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 7,520 km of coastline and coastal shipping of freight within India plays an important role. There are about 19,000 km of navigable inland waterways, though only 4,600 km 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 2012

Population per sq km:	376
Life expectancy:	66 years
Net primary enrolment:	93% (2011)

**Population:** 1,236,687,000 (2012); world's second-largest, after China; 32 per cent of people live in urban areas and 13 per cent in urban agglomerations of more than one million people; some 56 per cent of all Commonwealth people, and 18 per cent of all people live in India; growth 1.6 per cent p.a. 1990–2012; birth rate 21 per 1,000 people (38 in 1970); life expectancy 66 years (29 in 1947 and 49 in 1970). By the late 1990s, 48 per cent 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 per cent of the population and live predominantly in the southern states of India. Indo-Aryans, who account for more than 70 per cent 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 per cent 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 per cent, Muslims 13.4 per cent, Christians 2.3 per cent, Sikhs 1.9 per cent, Buddhists, Jains (2001 census).

**Health:** Public spending on health was one per cent of GDP in 2011. 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). Some 92 per cent of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 35 per cent have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2011). Infant mortality was 44 per 1,000 live births in 2012 (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.

**Education:** Public spending on education was three per cent of GDP in 2011. There are nine years of compulsory education starting at the age of six. Primary school comprises five years and secondary seven, with cycles of three and four years. The school year starts in April.

There are some 44 'central' universities, under the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Human Resource Development; 285 state universities, under the state governments, the three oldest of which – the Universities of Calcutta, Madras and Mumbai – date back to 1857; more than 130 higher education institutions recognised and granted autonomous status by the Department of

Higher Education; and 112 private universities (2012). The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 0.70:1 (2010). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 81 per cent (2006).

India hosted the Second Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in 1962. Commonwealth Education Ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.

**Media:** The leading English-language dailies are *The Asian Age* (New Delhi), *Deccan Herald* (Bengaluru), *The Hindu* (Chennai), *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. Doordarshan provides a broad range of public TV services. 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 ten foreign languages.

Some 53 per cent of households have TV sets (2006). There are 32 personal computers per 1,000 people (2007).

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

There are 25 main telephone lines, 699 mobile phone subscriptions and 126 internet users per 1,000 people (2012).

**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, Holi (February/March), Good Friday, Ram Navami (March/April), Mahavir's Birthday (March/April), Buddha Purnima (April/May), Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan), Janamashtami (August/September), Dussehra (October/November), Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice), Diwali (October/November), Muharram (Islamic New Year), Guru Nanak's Birthday (November) and Christmas Day (25 December). Those without specific dates vary from year to year.

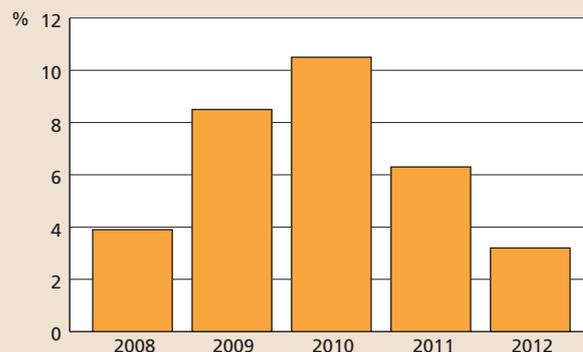
## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2012

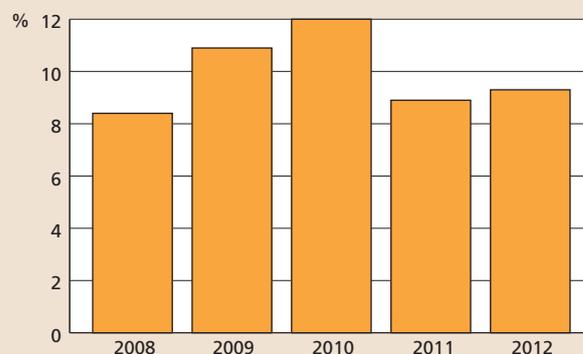
GNI:	US\$1,955.0bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$1,580
GDP growth:	6.5% p.a. 2008–12
Inflation:	9.9% p.a. 2008–12

India is among the largest economies in the world (ranking tenth in 2012, in terms of GDP, and ascending rapidly). 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 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. It also has large reserves of oil and gas; proven

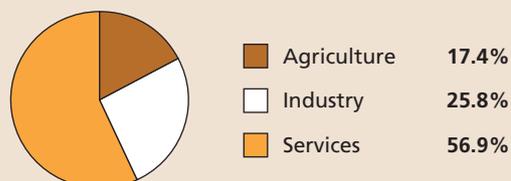
### Real Growth in GDP



### Inflation



### GDP by Sector (2012)



reserves of oil were estimated in January 2013 to be 5.7 billion barrels, and of gas, 1.3 trillion cubic metres.

However, few improvements reached the rural areas where more than 70 per cent of people live and depend 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, especially software development, 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

## History

The Indian subcontinent is one of the cradles of civilisation. An Indus Valley culture of pre-Aryan people flourished from about 3000 BCE. 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 BCE 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 BCE. 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 BCE. During the reign of King Bimbisara (c. 543–491 BCE) 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 BCE. Through this turmoil, Magadha strengthened its position as the centre of an expanding empire. The Maurya dynasty was founded in 321 BCE. At the zenith of the Maurya period under Ashoka (272–232 BCE), 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 CE 100–300, though, when the Guptas seized power and reunified Magadha in CE 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 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-co-operation' 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 World War II, 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 four 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. 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 per cent 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 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 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.

### Relations with Pakistan

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.

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.

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.

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 2007–11 growth averaged 7.6 per cent p.a. The country was relatively unaffected by the global economic downturn of 2008–09; growth dipped in 2008 to 3.9 per cent, but grew strongly again in 2009 (8.5 per cent), 2010 (10.5 per cent) and 2011 (6.3 per cent), moderating in 2012–14 to about four per cent p.a.

## Constitution

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

India is a federal republic with 29 states and seven union territories. It has a parliamentary democracy that 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 245 members, 12 of which are presidential appointments and 233 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.

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>7 April–12 May 2014</b>
<b>Next elections:</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>Head of state:</b>	<b>President Pranab Mukherjee (2012–)</b>
<b>Head of government:</b>	<b>Prime Minister Narendra Modi</b>
<b>Ruling party:</b>	<b>Bharatiya Janata Party</b>
<b>Women MPs:</b>	<b>11% (previous Lok Sabha)</b>

After a year in which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition government faced continuing difficulty in keeping the coalition together, the final results of the early September/October 1999 elections gave the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) – a new 24-party national alliance led by the BJP – 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.

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 214 seats, ahead of the ruling NDA (187 seats). The INC won 146 seats and the BJP 137. 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.

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.

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.

The July 2012 presidential election was won by Pranab Mukherjee of the INC, who was the nominee of UPA. He defeated BJP's Purno Agitok Sangma in the electoral college vote to choose a successor to Pratibha Patil.

The general election – held on a number of days during the period 7 April to 12 May 2014 – was won decisively by the BJP-led NDA. The BJP secured 282 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats (with 31.0 per cent of the votes cast), INC 44 seats (19.3 per cent), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam 37 and All India Trinamool Congress 34. On 26 May 2014 BJP leader Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat State, 2001–14, was sworn in as Prime Minister.

## International relations

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

## Traveller information

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for at least 180 days from the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include some fresh food, live plants and products comprising the skins or horns or tusks of animals.

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

Domestic air services connect the main towns. The Indian railway system is extensive and fast trains link the main towns. Taxis and auto-rickshaws are available in urban areas, and fares are charged by the kilometre. Chauffeur-driven tourist cars can be found in major centres and cost slightly more than taxis.

**Travel health:** Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include cholera, dengue fever, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis, malaria, polio, rabies and typhoid.

There were 6,649,000 tourist arrivals in 2012.

## Further information

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

Election Commission of India: [eci.nic.in](http://eci.nic.in)

Lok Sabha (House of the People): [loksabha.nic.in](http://loksabha.nic.in)

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation: [www.mospi.gov.in](http://www.mospi.gov.in)

Reserve Bank of India: [www.rbi.org.in](http://www.rbi.org.in)

Ministry of Tourism: [tourism.gov.in](http://tourism.gov.in)

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative: [www.humanrightsinitiative.org](http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org)

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

Commonwealth of Nations: [www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/India](http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/India)

## Media

*Deccan Herald:* [www.deccanherald.com](http://www.deccanherald.com)

*The Asian Age:* [www.asianage.com](http://www.asianage.com)

*The Hindu:* [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)

*The Hindustan Times:* [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com)

*The Indian Express:* [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

*The Pioneer:* [www.dailypioneer.com](http://www.dailypioneer.com)

*The Statesman:* [www.thestatesman.net](http://www.thestatesman.net)

*The Times of India:* [timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com)

*India Today:* [indiatoday.intoday.in](http://indiatoday.intoday.in)

*Outlook:* [www.outlookindia.com](http://www.outlookindia.com)

All India Radio: [allindiaradio.org](http://allindiaradio.org)

Doordarshan Television: [www.ddindia.gov.in](http://www.ddindia.gov.in)

New Delhi TV: [www.ndtv.com/news](http://www.ndtv.com/news)

Asian News International: <http://www.aniin.com/>

Indo-Asian News Service: [www.ians.in](http://www.ians.in)

Press Trust of India: [www.ptinews.com](http://www.ptinews.com)

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