

Countries

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
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Afghanistan

<div>Islamic Republic of Afghanistan</div> <div>تښتوهم چي مال سانا تسن افاد</div> <div>(Pashto: Da Afgānistān Islāmī Jomhoriyat)</div> <div>ناتسن افای مال ساریوهم چ</div> <div>(Persian: Jomhūrī-ye Eslāmī-ye Afgānistān)</div>	
<div></div>	
<div>Anthem: <i>Afghan National Anthem</i></div>	
<div></div>	
<div>Capital</div> <div>(and largest city)</div>	<div>Kabul</div> <div>34°31′N 69°08′E</div>
<div>Official language(s)</div>	<div>Pashto and Dari (Persian)</div> <div>^[1] ^[2]</div>
<div>Demonym</div>	<div>Afghan</div> <div>^[alternatives]</div>
<div>Government</div>	<div>Islamic republic</div>
<div>- President</div>	<div>Hamid Karzai</div>
<div>- Vice President</div>	<div>Mohammed Fahim</div>
<div>- Vice President</div>	<div>Karim Khalili</div>
<div>- Chief Justice</div>	<div>Abdul Salam Azimi</div>
<div>Establishment</div>	
<div>- First Afghan state</div> <div>^[3] ^[4]</div>	<div>October 1747</div>
<div>- Independence</div>	<div>August 19, 1919</div>
<div>Area</div>	

-	Total	647500 km ² (41st) 251772 sq mi
-	Water (%)	negligible
Population		
-	2010 estimate	28,395,716 ^[5] (42nd)
-	1979 census	15.5 million ^[6]
-	Density	43.5/km ² (150th) 111.8/sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2009 estimate
-	Total	\$26.976 billion ^[7]
-	Per capita	\$1,000 ^[3]
GDP (nominal)		2009 estimate
-	Total	\$14.483 billion ^[7]
-	Per capita	\$501 ^[7]
HDI (2007)		0.352 (low) (181st)
Currency		Afghani (AFN)
Time zone		D† (UTC+4:30)
Drives on the		right
ISO 3166 code		AF
Internet TLD		.af
Calling code		+93

The **Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**, commonly known as **Afghanistan** (اتس‌ن‌ا‌غ‌ف‌ا *afġānistān*, English pronunciation: /æfˈɡænɪstæn/ ( listen)), is a landlocked and mountainous country in south-central Asia.^[8] It is bordered by Pakistan in the south and east,^[note] Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far northeast. The territories now comprising Afghanistan have been an ancient focal point of the Silk Road and human migration. Archaeologists have found evidence of human habitation from as far back as 50,000 BCE.^[9] Urban civilization may have begun in the area as early as 3000 to 2000 BC.^[10]

The country sits at an important geostrategic location which connects the Middle East with Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent,^[11] which has been home to various peoples through the ages.^[12] The land has witnessed military conquests since antiquity, including by Alexander the Great, Mauryan Empire, Genghis Khan, and many others.^[9] ^[10] It has also served as a source from which many local dynasties such as the Greco-Bactrians, Kushans, Hephthalites, Shahis, Saffarids, Samanids, Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Timurids and others have established empires of their own.^[13]

The political history of modern Afghanistan begins in the 18th century with the rise of the Pashtun tribes (known as *Afghans* in Persian language), when in 1709 the Hotaki dynasty rose to power in Kandahar and Ahmad Shah Durrani established the Durrani Empire in 1747.^[4] ^[14] ^[15] The capital of Afghanistan was shifted in 1776 from Kandahar to Kabul and part of its territory was ceded to neighboring empires by 1893. In the late 19th century, Afghanistan became a buffer state in the "Great Game" between the British and Russian empires.^[16] On August 19, 1919, following the third Anglo-Afghan war and the signing of the Treaty of Rawalpindi, the nation regained control over its foreign policy from the British.

Since the late 1970s, Afghanistan has experienced a continuous state of war including major foreign occupations in the forms of the 1979 Soviet invasion, Pakistani military interference in favour of the Taliban in the late 1990s and the October 2001 US-led invasion that overthrew the Taliban government. In December 2001, the United Nations Security Council authorized the creation of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help maintain security and assist the Karzai administration.^[17] The country is being rebuilt slowly with support from the international community while dealing with the Taliban insurgency and widespread political corruption.^{[18] [19]}

Etymology

The name *Afghānistān*, Persian: اتسناغفا Persian pronunciation: [avɣɒnestɒn],^[20] means the "*Land of Afghans*", originating from the word *Afghan*.

Origin of the name

The first part of the name "*Afghan*" designates the Pashtun people since ancient times, the founders and the largest ethnic group of the country.^[21] This name is mentioned in the form of "*Abgan*" in the 3rd century CE^[22] and as "*Avagana*" in the 6th century CE.

The Encyclopædia Iranica states:

From a more limited, ethnological point of view, "Afghān" is the term by which the Persian-speakers of Afghanistan (and the non-Paštō-speaking ethnic groups generally) designate the Paštūn. The equation [of] Afghan [and] Paštūn has been propagated all the more, both in and beyond Afghanistan, because the Paštūn tribal confederation is by far the most important in the country, numerically and politically. The term "Afghān" has probably designated the Paštūn since ancient times. Under the form Avagānā, this ethnic group is first mentioned by the Indian astronomer Varāha Mihira in the beginning of the 6th century CE in his Brihat-samhita.^[21]

A people called "*Afghans*" are mentioned several times in a 10th century geography book, *Hudud al-'alam*. Al-Biruni referred to them in the 11th century as various tribes living on the western frontier mountains of the Indus River, which would be the Sulaiman Mountains.^[15] Ibn Battuta, a famous Moroccan travelling scholar visiting the region in 1333, writes:

We travelled on to Kabul, formerly a vast town, the site of which is now occupied by a village inhabited by a tribe of Persians called Afghans. They hold mountains and defiles and possess considerable strength, and are mostly highwaymen. Their principle mountain is called Kuh Sulayman.^[23]

Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah (Ferishta) explains extensively about Afghans in the 16th century. For example, he writes:

The men of Kábul and Khilj also went home; and whenever they were questioned about the Musulmáns of the Kohistán (the mountains), and how matters stood there, they said, "Don't call it Kohistán, but Afghánistán; for there is nothing there but Afgháns and disturbances." Thus it is clear that for this reason the people of the country call their home in their own language Afghánistán, and themselves Afgháns.^[24]

By the 17th century AD, it seems that some Pashtuns themselves were using the term as an ethnonym - a fact that is supported by traditional Pashto literature, for example, in the writings of the 17th-century Pashto poet Khushal Khan Khattak:

Pull out your sword and slay any one, that says Pashtun and Afghan are not one! Arabs know this and so do Romans: Afghans are Pashtuns, Pashtuns are Afghans!^[25]

The last part of the name, *-stān* is a Persian suffix for "place", prominent in many languages of the region. The name "*Afghanistan*" is described by the 16th century Mughal Emperor Babur in his memoirs as well as by later Mughal scholar Firishta, both referring to the territories south of Kabul that were inhabited by Pashtuns (called "*Afghans*" by both authors).^[26] Until the 19th century the name was used for the traditional lands of the Pashtuns only, while the

kingdom as a whole was known as the *Kingdom of Kabul*, as mentioned by the British statesman and historian Mountstuart Elphinstone.^[27] In 1857, in his review of J.W. Kaye's *The Afghan War*, Friedrich Engels describes "Afghanistan" as:

[...] an extensive country of Asia [...] between Persia and the Indies, and in the other direction between the Hindu Kush and the Indian Ocean. It formerly included the Persian provinces of Khorassan and Kohistan, together with Herat, Beluchistan, Cashmere, and Sinde, and a considerable part of the Punjab [...] Its principle cities are Kabul, the capital, Ghuznee, Peshawer, and Kandahar.^[28]

Other parts of the country were at certain periods recognized as independent kingdoms, such as the *Kingdom of Balkh* in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.^[29] With the expansion and centralization of the country, Afghan authorities adopted and extended the name "Afghanistan" to the entire kingdom, after its English translation had already appeared in various treaties between the British Raj and Qajarid Persia, referring to the lands subject to the Pashtun Barakzai dynasty of Kabul.^[30] It became the official internationally recognized name in 1919 after the Treaty of Rawalpindi was signed to regain full independence over its foreign policy from the British,^[31] and was confirmed as such in the nation's 1923 constitution.^[32]

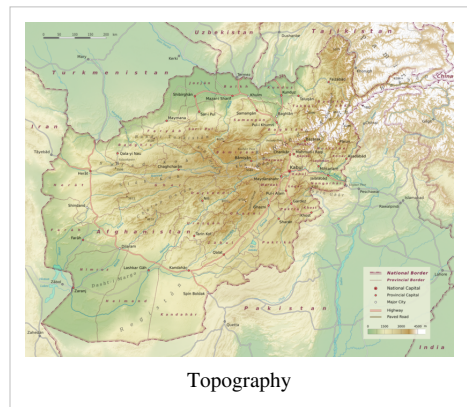
Geography

A landlocked and mountainous country, with plains in the north and southwest, Afghanistan is variously described as being located within South Asia,^[33] ^[34] Central Asia^[35] ^[36] and sometimes Western Asia (or the Middle East).^[37] Its highest point is Nowshak, at 7,485 m (24,557 ft) above sea level. The climate varies by region and tends to change quite rapidly. Large parts of the country are dry, and fresh water supplies are limited. The endorheic Sistan Basin is one of the driest regions in the world.^[38]

The nation has a continental climate with very harsh winters in the central highlands, the glaciated northeast (around Nuristan) and the Wakhan Corridor, where the average temperature in January is below , and hot summers in the low-lying areas of Sistan Basin of the southwest, the Jalalabad basin of the east, and the Turkistan plains along the Amu River of the north, where temperatures average over 35 °C (95 °F) in July. The country is frequently subject to minor earthquakes, mainly in the northeast of Hindu Kush mountain areas. Some 125 villages were damaged and 4,000 people killed by the May 31, 1998, earthquake.

At 249984 sq mi (km²), Afghanistan is the world's 41st-largest country (after Burma). It shares borders with Pakistan in the East, Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far east. The country does not face any water shortage because it receives huge amounts of snow during winter. Once that melts, the water runs into rivers, lakes, and streams, but most of its national water flows to neighboring states. The state needs around \$2 billion to rehabilitate its irrigation systems so that the water is properly used.^[39]

The nation's natural resources include gold, silver, copper, zinc, and iron ore in the Southeast; precious and semi-precious stones (such as lapis, emerald, and azure) in the Northeast; and potentially significant petroleum and natural gas reserves in the North. The country also has uranium, coal, chromite, talc, barites, sulfur, lead, and salt.^[40] ^[41] ^[42] ^[43] It was revealed in 2010 that the country has about \$1–3 trillion in untapped mineral deposits.^[44] ^[45]



Topography

History

Though the modern state of Afghanistan was established in 1747, the land has an ancient history and various timelines of different civilizations. Excavation of prehistoric sites by Louis Dupree, the University of Pennsylvania, the Smithsonian Institution and others suggest that humans were living in what is now Afghanistan at least 50,000 years ago, and that farming communities of the area were among the earliest in the world.^{[9] [46] [47]}

An important site of early historical activity, Afghanistan is a country at a unique nexus point where numerous civilizations have interacted and often fought. The region has been home to various peoples through the ages, among them Ancient Iranian peoples who established the dominant role of Indo-Iranian languages in the region. In certain stages of the history, the land was conquered and incorporated within large empires, among them the Achaemenid Empire; the Macedonian Empire; the Indian Maurya Empire; the Muslim Arab Empire; the Sasanid Empire, and a number of others. Many dynasties and kingdoms have also risen to power in what is now Afghanistan, such as the Greco-Bactrians; Kushans; Indo-Sassanids; Kabul Shahis; Saffarids; Samanids; Ghaznavids; Ghurids; Kartids; Timurids; Mughals, and finally the Hotaki and Durrani dynasties that marked the political beginning of modern Afghanistan.

Pre-Islamic period



Arachosia, Aria and Bactria were the ancient satraps of the Persian Achaemenid Empire that made up most of what is now Afghanistan during 500 B.C. Some of the inhabitants of Arachosia were known as *Pactyans*, whose name possibly survives in today's Pakhtuns / Pashtuns.

Archaeological exploration done in the 20th century suggests that the geographical area of Afghanistan has been closely connected by culture and trade with the neighboring regions to the east, west, and north. Artifacts typical of the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze, and Iron ages have been found in Afghanistan.^[48] Urban civilization may have begun as early as 3000 BC, and the early city of Mundigak (near Kandahar in the south of the country) may have been a colony of the nearby Indus Valley Civilization.^[47] After 2000 BCE, successive waves of semi-nomadic people from Central Asia moved south into the area of modern Afghanistan, among them were Indo-European-speaking (Indo-Iranians).^[46] These tribes later migrated further south to India, west to what is now Iran, and towards Europe via north of the Caspian.^[49] Many of these settlers were Indo-Iranians (speakers of Indo-Iranian languages), the area was called Ariana.^{[46] [50] [51]}

The ancient Zoroastrianism religion is believed by some to have originated in what is now Afghanistan between 1800 to 800 BCE, as its founder Zoroaster is thought to have lived and died in Balkh.^{[52] [53] [54]} Ancient Eastern Iranian languages may have been spoken in the region around the time of the rise of Zoroastrianism. By the middle of the 6th century BCE, the Achaemenid Persian Empire overthrew the Medes and incorporated the region (known as Arachosia, Aria, and Bactria in Ancient Greek) within its boundaries. An inscription on the tombstone of King Darius I of Persia mentions the Kabul Valley in a list of the 29 countries he had conquered.^[55]

In addition, Hinduism in Afghanistan has existed for almost as long as Hinduism itself, as Greater Persia overlapped with Greater India in the Hindu Kush and Pamir mountains.^[56] The religion was widespread in the region until the Islamic conquest of Afghanistan.^[57]

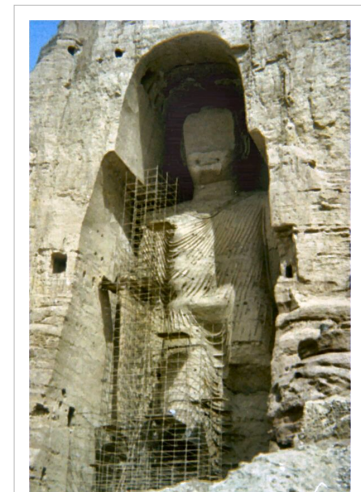
Alexander the Great and his Macedonian army arrived to the area of Afghanistan in 330 BCE after defeating Darius III of Persia a year earlier at the Battle of Gaugamela.^[52] Following Alexander's brief occupation, the successor state of the Seleucid Empire controlled the area until 305 BCE when they gave much of it to the Indian Maurya Empire as part of an alliance treaty.

Alexander took these away from the Aryans and established settlements of his own, but Seleucus Nicator gave them to Sandrocottus (Chandragupta), upon terms of intermarriage and of receiving in exchange 500 elephants.^[58]

—Strabo, 64 BC–24 AD

The Mauryans brought Buddhism from India and controlled southern Afghanistan until about 185 BCE when they were overthrown.^[59] Their decline began 60 years after Ashoka's rule ended, leading to the Hellenistic reconquest of the region by the Greco-Bactrians. Much of it soon broke away from the Greco-Bactrians and became part of the Indo-Greek Kingdom. The Indo-Greeks were defeated and expelled by the Indo-Scythians by the end of the 2nd century BCE.

During the 1st century, the Parthian Empire subjugated the region, but lost it to their Indo-Parthian vassals. In the mid to late 1st century CE the vast Kushan Empire, centered in modern Afghanistan, became great patrons of Buddhist culture. The Kushans were defeated by the Sassanids in the 3rd century. Although various rulers calling themselves Kushanshas (generally known as Indo-Sassanids) continued to rule at least parts of the region, they were probably more or less subject to the Sassanids.^[60] The late Kushans were followed by the Kidarite Huns^[61] who, in turn, were replaced by the short-lived but powerful Hephthalites, as rulers of the region in the first half of the 5th century.^[62] The Hephthalites were defeated by the Sasanian king Khosrau I in CE 557, who re-established Sassanid power in Persia. However, in the 6th century CE, the successors of Kushans and Hephthalites established a small dynasty in Kabulistan called Kabul Shahi.



Buddhas of Bamyan. Buddhism was introduced for the first time during the Maurya Empire (322 BC–185 BC).

Islamic conquests and Mongol invasion



Names of territories during the Islamic conquest of Afghanistan in 750 CE.

From the Middle Ages to the 19th century much of today's Afghanistan was recognized as Khorasan.^[63] ^[64] Two of the four main capitals of Khorasan (i.e. Balkh, Merv, Nishapur and Herat) are now located in modern Afghanistan, while Kandahar, Ghazni and Kabul formed the frontier region between Khorasan and Hindustan.^[65] The land inhabited by the Afghan tribes (i.e. ancestors of modern Pashtuns) was called Afghanistan, which loosely covered the area between the Hindu Kush and the Indus River, but principally around the Sulaiman Mountains.^[23] ^[24]

Arab Muslims brought the religion of Islam to the western area of what is now Afghanistan during the 7th century and began spreading eastward from Khorasan and Sistan, some accepting it while others

revolted.^[66] Prior to the introduction of Islam, Afghanistan was mostly Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Hindu, with unknown population of Jews and others. The Kabul Shahi rulers lost their capital, Kabul, in around 870 AD after it was

conquered by the Saffarids of Zaranj. Later, the Samanids extended their Islamic influence into the Hindu Kush area from Bukhara in the north. Afghanistan at that stage still had non-Muslims who lived side by side with Muslims.

"Kábul has a castle celebrated for its strength, accessible only by one road. In it there are Musulmán's, and it has a town, in which are infidels from Hind."^[67]

—Istahkrí, 921

By the 11th century the Ghaznavids had finally made all of the remaining non-Muslim areas become fully Islamized, with the exception of the Kafiristan region. Afghanistan at that point became the center of many important empires such as the Tahirids, Saffarids, Samanids,^[68] ^[69] Ghaznavids, Ghurids, and Timurids.

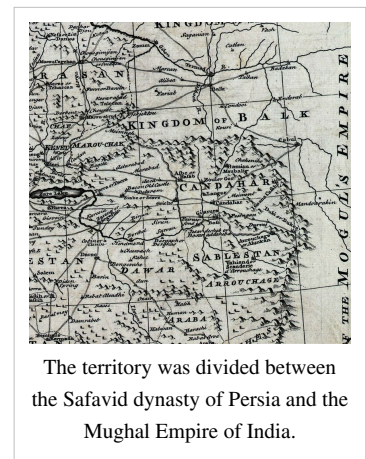
The region was overrun in 1219 by Genghis Khan and his Mongol barbarians, who devastated much of the land. His troops are said to have annihilated the ancient Khorasan cities of Herat and Balkh.^[70] The destruction caused by the Mongols depopulated major cities and caused much of the locals to revert to an agrarian rural society.^[71] Their rule continued with the Ilkhanate, and was extended further following the invasion of Timur who established the Timurid dynasty.^[72] The periods of the Ghaznavids,^[73] Ghurids, and Timurids are considered some of the most brilliant eras of Afghanistan's history as they produced fine Islamic architectural monuments^[46] as well as numerous scientific and literary works.

Babur, a descendant of both Timur and Genghis Khan, arrived from Central Asia and captured Kabul from the Arghun Dynasty, and from there he began to seize control of the eastern Afghan territories. He remained in Kabul until 1526 when he and his army invaded Delhi in India to replace the Lodi dynasty with the Mughal Empire. From the 16th century to the early 18th century, the region of Afghanistan was contended by 3 major powers: The Khanate of Bukhara ruled the north, Safavids the west and the remaining larger area was ruled by Delhi Sultanate of India.

Afghan nation-state

Hotaki dynasty and the Durrani Empire

Mir Wais Hotak, an influential Afghan tribal leader of the Ghilzai tribe, gathered supporters and successfully rebelled against the Persian Safavids in the early 18th century. Mirwais Khan overthrew and killed Gurgin Khan, the Safavid governor of Kandahar, and made the Afghan region independent. By 1713, Mirwais had decisively defeated two larger Persian-Georgian armies, one was led by Khusraw Khán (nephew of Gurgin) and the other by Rustam Khán. The armies were sent by Soltan Hosein, the Safavid King from Isfahan (now Iran), to re-take control of the Kandahar region. Mirwais died of a natural cause in 1715 and his son, Mahmud, took over. In 1722, Mahmud led an Afghan army to the Persian capital of Isfahan, sacked the city during the Battle of Gulnabad and proclaimed himself King of Persia.^[74] The Persians refused to recognize the Afghan ruler, and after the massacre of thousands of Persian religious scholars, nobles, and members of the Safavid family, the Hotaki dynasty was eventually ousted from Persia during the Battle of Damghan.^[75]



The territory was divided between the Safavid dynasty of Persia and the Mughal Empire of India.

In 1738, Nader Shah and his army, which included Ahmad Khan and four thousand of his Abdali Pashtuns,^[76] captured Kandahar from the last Hotak ruler; in the same year he occupied Ghazni, Kabul and Lahore. In June 1747, Nadir Shah was assassinated by one of his officers^[77] ^[78] and his kingdom fell apart. Ahmad Shah Abdali called for a loya jirga ("grand assembly") to select a leader among his people, and in October 1747 the Pashtuns gathered near Kandahar and

chose him as their new head of state. Ahmad Shah Durrani is often regarded as the founder of modern Afghanistan.^{[3] [79] [80]} After the inauguration, Ahmad Shah adopted the title *padshah durr-i dawran* ('King, "pearl of the age") and the Abdali tribe became known as the Durrani tribe there after. By 1751, Ahmad Shah Durrani and his Afghan army conquered the entire present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Khorasan and Kohistan provinces of Iran, along with Delhi in India.^[28] He defeated the Sikhs of the Maratha Empire in the Punjab region nine times; one of the biggest battles was the 1761 Battle of Panipat. In October 1772, Ahmad Shah retired to his home in Kandahar where he died peacefully and was buried at a site now adjacent to the Mosque of the Cloak of the Prophet Mohammed. He was succeeded by his son, Timur Shah Durrani, who transferred the capital of their Afghan Empire from Kandahar to Kabul. Timur died in 1793 and was finally succeeded by his son Zaman Shah Durrani.



Afghan soldiers of the Durrani Empire

Zaman Shah and his brothers had a weak hold on the legacy left to them by their famous ancestor. They sorted out their differences through "round robin of expulsions, blindings and executions", which resulted in the deterioration of the Afghan hold over far-flung territories, such as Attock and Kashmir.^[81] Durrani's other grandson, Shuja Shah Durrani, fled the wrath of his brother and sought refuge with the Sikhs.

After Durrani Vizier Fateh Khan was defeated at the Battle of Attock, he fought off an attempt by Ali Shah, the ruler of Persia, to capture the Durrani province of Herat. He was joined by his brother, Dost Mohammad Khan, and rogue Sikh Sardar Jai Singh Attarwalia. Once they had captured the city, Fateh Khan attempted to remove the ruler Mahmud Shah – a relation of his superior – and rule in his stead. In the attempt to take the city from its Durrani ruler, Dost Mohammad Khan's men forcibly took jewels from a princess and Kamran Durrani, Mahmud Shah's son, used this as a pretext to remove Fateh Khan from power, and had him tortured and executed. While in power, however, Fateh Khan had installed 21 of his brothers in positions of power throughout the Durrani Empire. After his death, they rebelled and divided up the provinces of the empire between themselves. During this turbulent period, Kabul had many temporary rulers until Fateh Khan's brother, Dost Mohammad Khan, captured Kabul in 1826.

The Sikhs, under Ranjit Singh, rebelled in 1809 and eventually wrested from the Afghans a large part of the Kingdom of Kabul (present day Pakistan, but not including Sindh).^[82] Hari Singh Nalwa, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sikh Empire along its Afghan frontier, invaded the Afghan territory as far as the city of Jalalabad.^[83] In 1837, the Afghan Army descended through the Khyber Pass on Sikh forces at Jamrud. Hari Singh Nalwa's forces held off the Afghan offensive for over a week – the time it took reinforcements to reach Jamrud from Lahore.^[84]

Barakzai dynasty and European influence



First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–42). William Brydon was the sole survivor of a group of 3,600 soldiers of the British 44th Regiment of Foot and 12,400 camp followers, who were attacked between Kabul and Jalalabad while heading to what is now Pakistan.



King Amanullah Khan at Berlin in February 1928. His 1927–28 European tour initiated an alliance between Afghanistan and Germany.



King Zahir Shah and wife with US President John F. Kennedy and sister Eunice in the United States

During the 19th century, following the Second Anglo-Afghan War and the ascension of the Barakzai dynasty, Afghanistan saw much of its territory and autonomy ceded to British India. Ethnic Pashtun territories were divided by the 1893 Durand Line, an action which would lead to strained relations between Afghanistan and British India (later the new state of Pakistan). The United Kingdom exercised a great deal of influence, and it was not until the reign of King Amanullah Khan in 1919 that Afghanistan re-gained independence over its foreign affairs after the signing of the Treaty of Rawalpindi.

King Amanullah moved to end his country's traditional isolation in the years following the Third Anglo-Afghan War. He established diplomatic relations with major states and, following a 1927–28 tour of Europe and Turkey, introduced several reforms intended to modernize his nation. A key force behind these reforms was Mahmud Tarzi, an ardent supporter of the education of women. He fought for Article 68 of Afghanistan's first constitution (declared through a Loya Jirga), which made elementary education compulsory.^[85] Some of the reforms that were actually put in place, such as the abolition of the traditional Muslim veil for women and the opening of a number of co-educational schools, quickly alienated many tribal and religious leaders. Faced with overwhelming armed opposition, Amanullah Khan was forced to abdicate in January 1929 after Kabul fell to rebel forces led by Habibullah Kalakani. Prince Mohammed Nadir Shah, Amanullah's cousin, in turn defeated and killed Habibullah Kalakani in October 1929, and was declared King Nadir Shah. He abandoned the reforms of Amanullah Khan in favor of a more gradual approach to modernisation. In 1933, however, he was assassinated in a revenge killing by a Kabul student.

Mohammed Zahir Shah, Nadir Shah's 19-year-old son, succeeded to the throne and reigned from 1933 to 1973. Until 1946 Zahir Shah ruled with the assistance of his uncle, who held the post of Prime Minister and continued the policies of Nadir Shah. Another of Zahir Shah's uncles, Shah Mahmud Khan, became Prime Minister in 1946 and began an experiment allowing greater political freedom, but reversed

the policy when it went further than he expected. In 1953, he was replaced by Mohammed Daoud Khan, the king's cousin and brother-in-law. Daoud sought a closer relationship with the Soviet Union and a more distant one towards Pakistan. Afghanistan remained neutral and was not a participant in World War II, nor aligned with either power bloc in the Cold War. However, it was a beneficiary of the latter rivalry as both the Soviet Union and the United States vied for influence by building Afghanistan's main highways, airports and other vital infrastructure. By the late 1960s many western travelers were using these as part of the hippie trail. In 1973, Zahir Shah's brother-in-law, Daoud Khan, launched a bloodless coup and became the first President of Afghanistan while Zahir Shah was on an official overseas visit. Daoud Khan tried to implement some much needed reforms especially in the economic sector.

Saur revolution and Soviet war

In 1978, a prominent member of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Mir Akbar Khyber, was allegedly killed by the Daoud government. Leaders of the PDPA feared that Daoud was planning to dismantle them because many were being arrested. Hafizullah Amin along with other PDPA members managed to remain at large and organised an uprising. The PDPA, led by Nur Mohammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal and Hafizullah Amin, overthrew the regime of Mohammad Daoud, who was assassinated along with his family during the April 1978 Saur Revolution. Taraki was declared President, Prime Minister and General Secretary of the PDPA. Once in power, the PDPA implemented a socialist agenda. It moved to carry out an ill-conceived land reform, which was misunderstood by virtually all Afghans.^[86] They also imprisoned, tortured or murdered thousands of members of the traditional elite, the religious establishment, and the intelligentsia.^[86] They also prohibited usury^[87] and made a number of statements on women's rights, by declaring equality of the sexes^[87] and introducing women to political life. Anahita Ratebzad was one of several female Marxist leaders and a member of the Revolutionary Council.



Outside the Palace Gate (Arg) in Kabul, the day after Saur Revolution on April 28, 1978.

As part of its Cold War strategy, the White House in the United States began recruiting, financing and arming Mujahideen fighters during Operation Cyclone in 1979, which was aimed to defeat the Soviets. President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, warned at the time that this might prompt a Soviet intervention. In March 1979, Hafizullah Amin took over as prime minister, retaining the position of field marshal and becoming vice-president of the Supreme Defence Council. Taraki remained President and in control of the army until September 14 when he was killed.

To bolster the Parcham faction, the Soviet Union decided to intervene on December 24, 1979, when the Red Army invaded its southern neighbor. Over 100,000 Soviet troops took part in the invasion, which was backed by another one hundred thousand Afghan military men and supporters of the Parcham faction. In the meantime, Hafizullah Amin was killed and replaced by Babrak Karmal. In response to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Reagan administration in the U.S. increased arming and funding of the Mujahideen who began a guerilla war thanks in large part to the efforts of Charlie Wilson and CIA officer Gust Avrakotos. Early reports estimated that \$6–20 billion had been spent by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia^[88] but more recent reports state that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia provided as much as up to \$40 billion^{[89] [90]} in cash and weapons, which included over two thousand FIM-92 Stinger surface-to-air missiles, for building up Islamic groups against the Soviet Union. The U.S. handled most of its support through Pakistan's ISI. Saudi Arabia was also providing financial support. Leaders such as Ahmad Shah Massoud received only minor aid compared to Hekmatyar and some of the other parties, although Massoud was named the "Afghan who won the cold war" by the Wall Street Journal.^[91]



Soviet troops (in right row) withdrawing from Afghanistan in 1988. Afghan government BTR on the left.

The 10-year Soviet occupation resulted in the killings of between 600,000 and two million Afghans, mostly civilians.^[92] About 6 million fled as Afghan refugees to Pakistan and Iran, and from there over 38,000 made it to the United States^[93] and many more to the European Union. Faced with mounting international pressure and great number of casualties on both sides, the Soviets withdrew in 1989. Their withdrawal from Afghanistan was seen as an ideological victory in America, which had backed some Mujahideen factions through three U.S. presidential

administrations to counter Soviet influence in the vicinity of the oil-rich Persian Gulf. The USSR continued to support President Mohammad Najibullah (former head of the Afghan secret service, *KHAD*) until 1992.^[94]

Foreign interference and civil war

1992-1996 After the fall of the communist Najibullah-regime in 1992, several Afghan political parties agreed on a peace and power-sharing agreement (the Peshawar Accords). The Peshawar Accords created the Islamic State of Afghanistan and appointed an interim government for a transitional period. According to Human Rights Watch:

The sovereignty of Afghanistan was vested formally in the Islamic State of Afghanistan, an entity created in April 1992, after the fall of the Soviet-backed Najibullah government. [...] With the exception of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, all of the parties [...] were ostensibly unified under this government in April 1992. [...] Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, for its part, refused to recognize the government for most of the period discussed in this report and launched attacks against government forces and Kabul generally. [...] Shells and rockets fell everywhere.^[95]

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar received operational, financial and military support from Pakistan.^[96] Afghanistan expert Amin Saikal concludes in *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival*:

Pakistan was keen to gear up for a breakthrough in Central Asia. [...] Islamabad could not possibly expect the new Islamic government leaders [...] to subordinate their own nationalist objectives in order to help Pakistan realize its regional ambitions. [...] Had it not been for the ISI's logistic support and supply of a large number of rockets, Hekmatyar's forces would not have been able to target and destroy half of Kabul.^[97]

In addition, Saudi Arabia and Iran - as competitors for regional hegemony - supported Afghan militias hostile towards each other.^[97] According to Human Rights Watch, Iran was assisting the Shia Hazara Hezb-i Wahdat forces of Abdul Ali Mazari, as Iran was attempting to maximize Wahdat's military power and influence.^{[95] [97] [98]} Saudi Arabia supported the Wahhabite Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and his Ittihad-i Islami faction.^{[95] [97]} Conflict between the two militias soon escalated into a full-scale war. A publication by the George Washington University describes:

[O]utside forces saw instability in Afghanistan as an opportunity to press their own security and political agendas.^[99]

Due to the sudden initiation of the war, working government departments, police units or a system of justice and accountability for the newly-created Islamic State of Afghanistan did not have time to form. Atrocities were committed by individuals of the different armed factions while Kabul descended into lawlessness and chaos as described in reports by Human Rights Watch and the Afghanistan Justice Project.^{[95] [100]} Because of the chaos, some leaders increasingly had only nominal control over their (sub-)commanders.^[101] For civilians there was little security from murder, rape and extortion.^[101] An estimated 25,000 people died during the most intense period of bombardment by Hekmatyar's Hezb-i Islami and the Junbish-i Milli forces of Abdul Rashid Dostum, who had created an alliance with Hekmatyar in 1994.^[100] Half a million people fled Afghanistan.^[101] Human Rights Watch writes:

Rare ceasefires, usually negotiated by representatives of Ahmad Shah Massoud, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi or Burhanuddin Rabbani [the interim government], or officials from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), commonly collapsed within days.^[95]

Southern Afghanistan was under the control of neither foreign-backed militias nor the government in Kabul, but was ruled by local leaders such as Gul Agha Sherzai and their militias. In 1994, the Taliban (a movement originating from Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-run religious schools for Afghan refugees in Pakistan) also developed in Afghanistan as a politico-religious force, reportedly in opposition to the tyranny of the local governor.^[102] Mullah Omar started his movement with fewer than 50 armed madrassah students in his hometown of Kandahar.^[102] When the Taliban took control of the city in 1994, they forced the surrender of dozens of local Pashtun leaders who had presided over a situation of complete lawlessness and atrocities.^[101] In 1994, the Taliban took power in several provinces in southern and central Afghanistan.

In late 1994, most of the militia factions (Hezb-i Islami, Junbish-i Milli and Hezb-i Wahdat) which had been fighting in the battle for control of Kabul were defeated militarily by forces of the Islamic State's Secretary of Defense Ahmad Shah Massoud. Bombardment of the capital came to a halt.^{[100] [103] [104]} Massoud tried to initiate a nationwide political process with the goal of national consolidation and democratic elections, also inviting the Taliban to join the process.^[105] The Taliban declined.^[105]

Taliban Emirate and United Front

1996-2001

The Taliban started shelling Kabul in early 1995 but were defeated by forces of the Islamic State government under Ahmad Shah Massoud.^[103] see video ^[106] Amnesty International, referring to the Taliban offensive, wrote in a 1995 report:

"This is the first time in several months that Kabul civilians have become the targets of rocket attacks and shelling aimed at residential areas in the city."^[103]

The Taliban's early victories in 1994 were followed by a series of defeats that resulted in heavy losses.^[101] Pakistan provided strong support to the Taliban.^{[97] [107]} Many analysts like Amin Saikal describe the Taliban as developing into a proxy force for Pakistan's regional interests which the Taliban decline.^[97] On September 26, 1996, as the Taliban with military support by Pakistan and financial support by Saudi Arabia prepared for another major offensive, Massoud ordered a full retreat from Kabul.^[108] The Taliban seized Kabul on September 27, 1996, and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They imposed on the parts of Afghanistan under their control their political and judicial interpretation of Islam issuing edicts forbidding women to work outside the home, attend school, or to leave their homes unless accompanied by a male relative.^[109] The Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) analyze:

"To PHR's knowledge, no other regime in the world has methodically and violently forced half of its population into virtual house arrest, prohibiting them on pain of physical punishment."^[109]

After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban on September 27, 1996,^[110] Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum, two former archenemies, created the United Front (Northern Alliance) against the Taliban that were preparing offensives against the remaining areas under the control of Massoud and those under the control of Dostum. see video ^[111] The United Front included beside the dominantly Tajik forces of Massoud and the Uzbek forces of Dostum, Hazara factions and Pashtun forces under the leadership of commanders such as Abdul Haq, Haji Abdul Qadir, Qari Baba or diplomat Abdul Rahim Ghafoorzai.

According to Human Rights Watch, in late May 1997, some 3,000 captive Taliban soldiers were summarily executed in and around Mazar-i-Sharif by Dostum's Junbish forces and members of the Shia Hazara Hezb-i Wahdat faction.^{[101] [112]} The Taliban defeated Dostum's Junbish forces militarily by seizing Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998. Dostum went into exile.



Afghanistan's National Hero Ahmad Shah Massoud (right) and Pashtun anti-Taliban leader Haji Abdul Qadir (left)



former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf

According to a 55-page report by the United Nations, the Taliban, while trying to consolidate control over northern and western Afghanistan, committed systematic massacres against civilians.^[113]

^[114] U.N. officials stated that there had been "15 massacres" between 1996 and 2001.^[113] ^[114] They also said, that "[t]hese have been highly systematic and they all lead back to the [Taliban] Ministry of Defense or to Mullah Omar himself."^[113] ^[114] The Taliban especially targeted people of Shia religious or Hazara ethnic background.^[113] ^[114] Upon taking Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998, about 4,000 civilians were executed by the Taliban and many more reported tortured.^[115] ^[116] The documents

also reveal the role of Arab and Pakistani support troops in these killings.^[113] ^[114] Bin Laden's so-called 055 Brigade was responsible for mass-killings of Afghan civilians.^[117] The report by the United Nations quotes eyewitnesses in many villages describing Arab fighters carrying long knives used for slitting throats and skinning people.^[113] ^[114]

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf - then as Chief of Army Staff - was responsible for sending thousands of Pakistanis to fight alongside the Taliban and Bin Laden against the forces of Massoud.^[105] ^[107] ^[118] ^[119] In total there were believed to be 28,000 Pakistani nationals fighting inside Afghanistan.^[105] About 20,000 were regular Pakistani soldiers either from the Frontier Corps or army and an estimated 8,000 were militants recruited in madrassas filling regular Taliban ranks.^[117] The estimated 25,000 Taliban regular force thus comprised more than 8,000 Pakistani nationals.^[117] A 1998 document by the U.S. State Department confirms that "20-40 percent of [regular] Taliban soldiers are Pakistani."^[107] The document further states that the parents of those Pakistani nationals "know nothing regarding their child's military involvement with the Taliban until their bodies are brought back to Pakistan."^[107] Further 3,000 fighters of the regular Taliban army were Arab and Central Asian militants.^[117] From 1996 to 2001 the Al Qaeda of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri became a state within the Taliban state.^[120] Bin Laden sent Arab recruits to join the fight against the United Front.^[120] ^[121] Of roughly 45,000 Pakistani, Taliban and Al Qaeda soldiers fighting against the forces of Massoud only 14,000 were Afghan.^[105] ^[117]

Ahmad Shah Massoud remained the only leader of the United Front in Afghanistan. In the areas under his control Massoud set up democratic institutions and signed the Women's Rights Declaration.^[105] Human Rights Watch cites no human rights crimes for the forces under direct control of Massoud for the period from October 1996 until the assassination of Massoud in September 2001.^[112] As a consequence many civilians fled to the area of Ahmad Shah Massoud.^[118] ^[122] In total, estimates range up to one million people fleeing the Taliban.^[123] National Geographic concluded in its documentary *"Inside the Taliban"*:

"The only thing standing in the way of future Taliban massacres is Ahmad Shah Massoud."^[118]

In early 2001 Massoud addressed the European Parliament in Brussels asking the international community to provide humanitarian help to the people of Afghanistan.^[123] He stated that the Taliban and Al Qaeda had introduced "a very wrong perception of Islam" and that without the support of Pakistan and Bin Laden the Taliban would not be able to sustain their military campaign for up to a year.^[123] On this visit to Europe he also warned that his intelligence had gathered information about a large-scale attack on U.S. soil being imminent.^[124]

Recent history (2001–present)



The tomb of Ahmad Shah Massoud is a national visiting site located in the Panjshir Valley, north of the capital Kabul.



U.S. Army Chinook helicopters on their way to Bagram Air Base



Soldiers of the Afghan National Army, including the ANA Commando Battalion standing in the front.

On September 9, 2001, Ahmad Shah Massoud died in a suicide attack by two Arab suicide bombers in the Afghan province of Takhar. Two days later 3,000 people died on U.S. soil in the attacks of September 11, 2001. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks the U.S. government identified Osama Bin Laden alongside Khalid Sheikh Mohammed as the faces behind the attacks. When the Taliban refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden to U.S. authorities and refused to disband Al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan, the U.S. and British air forces began bombing al-Qaeda and Taliban targets inside Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom.^[125] On the ground, American and British special forces along with CIA Special Activities Division units worked with commanders of the United Front (Northern Alliance) to launch a military offensive against the Taliban forces.^[126] These attacks led to the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul in November 2001, as the Taliban and al-Qaida retreated toward the mountainous Durand Line border with Pakistan. In December 2001, after the Taliban government was toppled and the new Afghan government under Hamid Karzai was formed, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established by the UN Security Council to help assist the Karzai administration and provide basic security to the Afghan people.^{[127] [128]}

From 2002 onward, the Taliban began regrouping while more coalition troops entered the escalating US-led war with insurgents. Meanwhile, NATO assumed control of ISAF in 2003^[129] and the rebuilding of Afghanistan began, which is funded by the international community especially by USAID and other U.S. agencies.^{[130] [131]} The European Union, Canada and India also play a major role in reconstruction.^[132] ^[133] The Afghan nation was able to build democratic structures and to make some progress in key areas such as health, economy, educational, transport, agriculture and construction sector. It has also modernized in the field of technology and banking. NATO, mainly the United States armed forces through its Army Corps of Engineers, is rebuilding and modernizing the nation's military as well its police force. Between 2002 and 2010, over five million Afghan expatriates returned with new skills and capital. Still, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries due to the results of 30 years of war, corruption among high level politicians and the ongoing Taliban insurgency backed by Pakistan.^{[134] [135]} U.S. officials have also accused Iran of providing limited support to the Taliban, but stated it was "at a small level" since it is "not in their interests to see the Taliban, a Sunni ultra-conservative, extremist element, return to take control of Afghanistan".^{[136] [137] [138]} Iran has historically been an enemy of the Taliban.^{[139] [140]}

NATO and Afghan troops in recent years led many offensives against the Taliban, but proved unable to completely dislodge their presence. By 2009, a Taliban-led shadow government began to form complete with their own version

of mediation court.^[141] In 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama deployed an additional 30,000 soldiers over a period of six months and proposed that he will begin troop withdrawals by 2012. At the 2010 International Conference on Afghanistan in London, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said he intends to reach out to the Taliban leadership (including Mullah Omar, Sirajuddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar). Supported by senior U.S. officials Karzai called on the group's leadership to take part in a loya jirga meeting to initiate peace talks. According to the Wall Street Journal, these steps have been reciprocated so far with an intensification of bombings, assassinations and ambushes.^[142] Many Afghan groups (including the former intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh and opposition leader Dr. Abdullah Abdullah) believe that Karzai's plan aims to appease the insurgents' senior leadership at the cost of the democratic constitution, the democratic process and progress in the field of human rights especially women's rights.^[143] Dr. Abdullah stated:

"I should say that Taliban are not fighting in order to be accommodated. They are fighting in order to bring the state down. So it's a futile exercise, and it's just misleading. ... There are groups that will fight to the death. Whether we like to talk to them or we don't like to talk to them, they will continue to fight. So, for them, I don't think that we have a way forward with talks or negotiations or contacts or anything as such. Then we have to be prepared to tackle and deal with them militarily. In terms of the Taliban on the ground, there are lots of possibilities and opportunities that with the help of the people in different parts of the country, we can attract them to the peace process; provided, we create a favorable environment on this side of the line. At the moment, the people are leaving support for the government because of corruption. So that expectation is also not realistic at this stage."^[144]

According to a report by the United Nations, the Taliban were responsible for 76 % of civilian casualties in 2009.^[145] Afghanistan is currently struggling to rebuild itself while dealing with the above mentioned problems and challenges.

Government and politics

Politics in Afghanistan has historically consisted of power struggles, bloody coups and unstable transfers of power. With the exception of a military junta, the nation has been governed by nearly every system of government over the past centuries, including a monarchy, republic, and theocracy. The constitution ratified by the 2003 Loya jirga restructured the government as an Islamic republic consisting of three branches, executive, legislative and judicial.

The nation is currently led by the Karzai administration with Hamid Karzai as the President and leader since December 2001. The current parliament was elected in September 2010, and among the elected officials are former mujahideen, Islamic fundamentalists, warlords, communists, reformists, and several Taliban associates.^[146] In 2005, 28% of the delegates elected were women, three points more than the 25% minimum guaranteed under the constitution. This made Afghanistan, long known under the Taliban for its oppression of women, 30th amongst nations in terms of female representation.^[147] Construction for a new parliament building began on August 29, 2005.

The Supreme Court of Afghanistan is currently led by Chief Justice Abdul Salam Azimi, a former university professor who had been legal advisor to the president.^[148] The previous court, appointed during the time of the interim government, had been dominated by fundamentalist religious figures, including Chief Justice Faisal Ahmad Shinwari. The court issued several rulings, such as banning cable television, seeking to ban a candidate in the 2004 presidential election and limiting the rights of women, as well as overstepping its constitutional authority by issuing



Hamid Karzai standing next to Faisal Ahmad Shinwari and others after winning the 2004 presidential election. The last king of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah is sitting at the right.

rulings on subjects not yet brought before the court. The current court is seen as more moderate and led by more technocrats than the previous court.

Elections and parties

The 2004 Afghan presidential election, in which Hamid Karzai won in the first round with 55.4% of the votes, went relatively smoothly. However, the 2009 presidential election was characterized by lack of security, low voter turnout and widespread electoral fraud.^[149] ^[150] The vote, along with elections for 420 provincial council seats, took place in August 2009, but remained unresolved during a lengthy period of vote counting and fraud investigation.^[151]

Two months later, under U.S. and ally pressure, a second round run-off vote between Karzai and remaining challenger Abdullah was announced for November 7, 2009, but on the 1st of November

Abdullah announced that he would no longer be participating in the run-off because his demands for changes in the electoral commission had not been met, and claimed a transparent election would not be possible. A day later, officials of the election commission cancelled the run-off and declared Hamid Karzai as President of Afghanistan for another 5-year term.^[150]

The Afghan government ranks as one of the top corrupted administrations in the world. In November 2009, Afghanistan slipped three places in Transparency International's annual index of corruption perceptions, becoming the world's second most-corrupt country.^[152] A number of government ministries are believed to be rife with corruption, including the Interior, Education and Health. President Karzai vowed to tackle the problem in November 2009, when he stated that "individuals who are involved in corruption will have no place in the government."^[153] A January 2010 report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime revealed that bribery consumes an amount equal to 23 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation. Citizens are forced by corrupt government culture to pay more than a third of their income in bribes.^[154]

Political divisions

Afghanistan is administratively divided into 34 provinces (*wilayats*), with each province having a capital and a governor in office. The provinces are further divided into about 398 smaller provincial districts, each of which normally covers a city or a number of villages. Each provincial district is represented by a sub-governor, usually called a district governor.

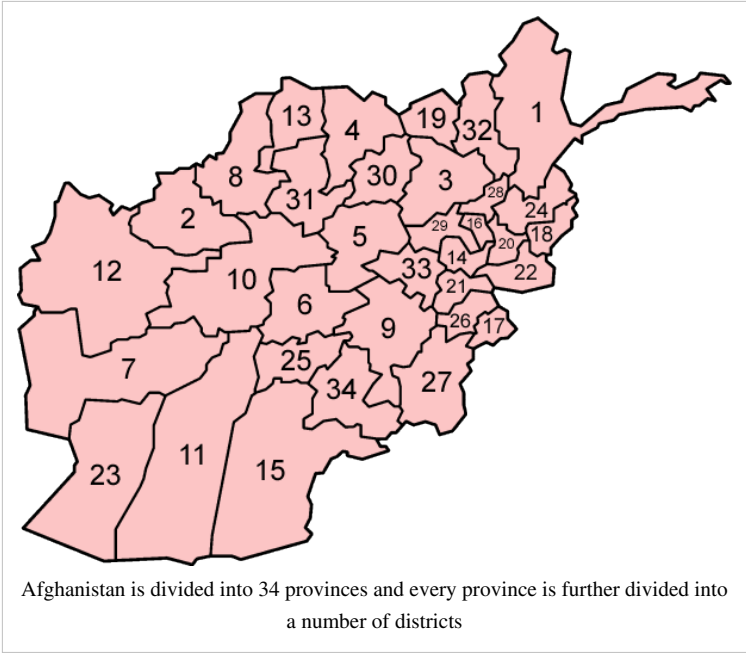
The provincial governors as well as the district governors are voted into office during the nation's presidential election, which takes place every five years. The provincial governors are representatives of the central government in Kabul and are responsible for all administrative and formal issues within their provinces. The provincial Chief of Police is appointed by the Ministry of Interior in Kabul and works together with the provincial governor on law enforcement for all the districts within the province.

There is an exception in the capital city of Kabul where the Mayor is selected directly by the President, and is completely independent from the Governor of Kabul.

The following is a list of all the 34 provinces of Afghanistan in alphabetical order and on the right is a map showing where each province is located:



National Assembly of Afghanistan in 2006



- Badakhshan
- Badghis
- Baghlan
- Balkh
- Bamyan
- Daykundi
- Farah
- Faryab
- Ghazni
- Ghor
- Helmand
- Herat
- Jowzjan
- Kabul
- Kandahar
- Kapisa
- Khost
- Konar
- Kunduz
- Laghman
- Logar
- Nangarhar
- Nimruz
- Nurestan
- Oruzgan
- Paktia
- Paktika
- Panjshir
- Parvan
- Samangan
- Sare Pol
- Takhar
- Wardak
- Zabol

Foreign relations and military

The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for managing the foreign relations of Afghanistan. The nation has maintained good relations with the United States and other members of NATO since at least the 1920s. Afghanistan joined the United Nations on November 19, 1946, and has been a member since. In 2002, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan was established to help rebuild the country. Today, more than 22 NATO nations deploy over 100,000 troops in Afghanistan as a part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Apart from close military links, Afghanistan also enjoys strong economic relations with NATO members and other allies. The United States is the largest donor to Afghanistan, followed by Japan, United Kingdom, Germany, India and others.^[155]

Relations between Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan often fluctuate and tensions between the two countries have existed since 1947.^{[156] [157] [158]} During the Taliban 1996 to 2001 rule, Pakistan was supporting the Taliban leaders^[159] against the Iranian-backed Northern Alliance.^[160] Though Pakistan maintains strong security and economic links with Afghanistan, dispute between the two countries remain due to Pakistani concerns over growing influence of rival India in Afghanistan and the continuing border dispute over the poorly marked Durand Line.^[161] Relations between the two strained further after the 2007 border skirmishes when Afghan officials alleged that Pakistani intelligence agencies were involved in some terrorist attacks on Afghanistan.^[162] Pakistan is a participant in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, pledging \$250 million in various projects across the country.^[163]



The U.S. Embassy in Kabul. Afghanistan-United States relations go back to at least the early 1920s.

Afghanistan has close historical, linguistic and cultural ties with neighboring Iran as both countries were part of Greater Persia before 1747.^[164] Afghanistan-Iran relations formally initiated after 1935 between Zahir Shah and Reza Shah, which soured after the rise of radical Sunni Taliban regime in 1997 but rebounded after the establishment of Karzai government.^[165] Iran has also actively participated in the Afghan reconstruction efforts^[166] but is accused at the same time by American and British politicians of secretly funding the Taliban against NATO-Afghan officials.^[167] Afghanistan also enjoys good relations with neighboring Central Asian nations, especially Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Relations between Afghanistan and India also go a long way back. India is often regarded as one of Afghanistan's most influential allies.^[132] India is the largest regional donor to Afghanistan and has extensively participated in several Afghan reconstruction efforts, including power, agricultural and educational projects.^{[168] [169]} Since 2002, India has extended more than \$1.2 billion in military and other aid to Afghanistan.^[170] There are military ties between the two nations, some Afghan security forces are getting counter-insurgency training in India.^[171] India is also considering the deployment of some troops in Afghanistan.^[172]

The military of Afghanistan is under the Ministry of Defense, which includes the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Army Air Force. It currently has about 134,000 members and is expected to reach 260,000 in the coming years. They are trained and equipped by NATO countries, mainly by the United States armed forces. The ANA is divided into 7 major Corps, with the 201st Selab ("Flood") in Kabul being the main one. The ANA also has a special commando brigade which was started in 2007. The National Military Academy of Afghanistan serves as the main education institute for the militarymen of the country. A new \$200 million Afghan Defense University (ADU) is under construction near the capital.

Economy

Afghanistan is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). It is an impoverished and least developed country, one of the world's poorest. As of 2009, the nation's GDP exchange rate stands at \$14 billion and the GDP per capita is \$1,000.^[3] Its unemployment rate is 35%^[173] and roughly 36% of its citizens live below the poverty line.^[174] About 42 percent of the population live on less than \$1 a day, according to USAID.^[175] The economy has suffered greatly from the 1978 to the present conflict, while severe drought added to the nation's difficulties in 1998–2001. However, due to the infusion of multi-billion dollars in international assistance and investments, as well as remittances from expats, the economy has steadily improved, growing at approximately 12 percent per year during the past six years.^[176] It is also due to improvements in agricultural production, which is the backbone of the nation's economy since over 75% of its citizens are involved in this line of work.^[177]



Inside the fruit processing plant at Badam Bagh in Kabul Province



Afghan rug weavers in Herat Province

Afghanistan is known for producing some of the finest pomegranates, grapes, apricots, melons, and several other fresh and dry fruits, including nuts.^[178] According to the World Bank, "economic growth has been strong and has generated better livelihoods" since late 2001.^[179] As much as one-third of the nation's GDP came from growing illicit drugs during the mid 2000s. Opium production in Afghanistan has soared to a record in 2007 with some 3.3 million Afghans reported to be involved in the business^[180] but then declined significantly in the years following.^[181] The Afghan government began programs to reduce the cultivation of poppy and by 2010 it was reported that 24 out of the 34 provinces are free from poppy cultivation.

One of the main drivers for the current economic recovery is the return of over 5 million Afghan expatriates, who brought with them fresh energy, entrepreneurship and wealth-creating skills as well as much needed funds to start up businesses. The Afghan rugs have become a popular product again and this gives the large number of rug weavers in the country a chance to earn more income. While the country's current account deficit is largely financed with the donor money, only a small portion is provided directly to the government budget. The rest is provided to non-budgetary expenditure and donor-designated projects through the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations.

The Afghan Ministry of Finance is focusing on improved revenue collection and public sector expenditure discipline. Since 2003, over sixteen new banks have opened in the country, including Afghanistan International Bank, Kabul Bank, Azizi Bank, Pashtany Bank, Standard Chartered Bank, First Micro Finance Bank, and others. Da Afghanistan Bank serves as the central bank of the nation and the "Afghani" (AFN) is the national currency, with an exchange rate of 50 Afghanis to 1 US dollar.

Energy and mining

According to recent U.S. Geological Surveys that were funded by the Afghan Ministry of Mines and Industry, Afghanistan may be possessing up to 36 trillion cubic feet (1000 km³) of natural gas, 3.6 billion barrels (m³) of petroleum and up to 1325 million barrels (m³) of natural gas liquids.^[182] Other recent reports show that the country has huge amounts of gold, copper, coal, iron ore and other minerals.^{[40] [41] [42] [43]} In 2010, U.S. Pentagon officials along with American geologists revealed the discovery of nearly \$1 trillion in untapped mineral deposits in Afghanistan.^[44]

Afghan officials assert that "this will become the backbone of the Afghan economy" and a memo from the Pentagon stated that Afghanistan could become the "Saudi Arabia of lithium".^[183] Some have stated, including Afghan President Hamid Karzai, that the untapped minerals could be as high as \$3 trillion.^{[184] [185]} The government of Afghanistan is preparing deals to extract its copper and iron reserves, which will earn billions of dollars in royalties and taxes every year for the next 100 years. These untapped resources could mark the turning point in Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts. Energy and mineral exports could generate the revenue that Afghan officials need to modernize the country's infrastructure, and expand economic opportunities for the beleaguered and fractious. If the Afghan state could generate even \$10 billion per year from its mineral deposits, the country's gross national product would double and provide long-term funding for Afghan security forces and other critical needs.^[186]

Transport and communications

Ariana Afghan Airlines is the national airlines carrier, with domestic flights between Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif. International flights include to Dubai, Frankfurt, Istanbul and a number of other Asian destinations.^[187] There are also limited domestic and international flight services available from the locally owned Kam Air, Pamir Airways and Safi Airways.



Ariana Afghan Airlines

The country has limited rail service with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the north. There are two other railway projects currently in progress with neighboring nations, one is between Herat and Iran while another is to connect with Pakistan Railways.

Most citizens who travel far distances use long traveling bus services. Newer automobiles have recently become more widely available after the rebuilding of roads and highways. Vehicles are imported from the United Arab Emirates through Pakistan and Iran. Postal and package delivery services such as FedEx, DHL and others exist in major cities and towns.

Telecommunication services in the country are provided by Afghan Wireless, Etisalat, Roshan, MTN Group and Afghan Telecom. In 2006, the Afghan Ministry of Communications signed a 64.5 million agreement with ZTE for the establishment of a countrywide optical fiber cable network. As of 2008, the country has 460,000 telephone lines,^[188] 8.45 million mobile phone users^[189] and around 500,000 people (1.5% of the population) have internet access.^[190]

Demographics

As of July 2010, the population of Afghanistan is around 28,395,716,^[5] but it is unknown if the 3 million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and Iran are included or not. A 2009 UN estimate shows that the Afghan population was 28,150,000^[191] and a 2009–2010 nationwide statistical survey conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Afghanistan has put it at 26 million but not counting some parts of the country due to insecurity.^[192]

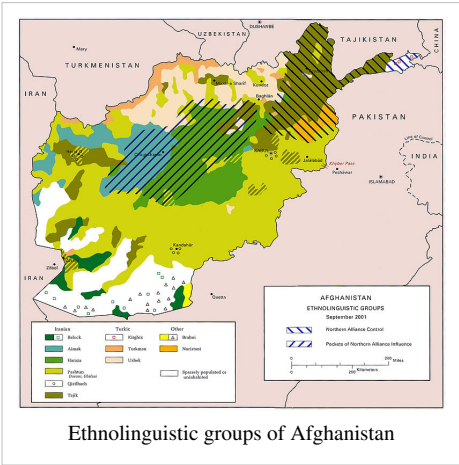
A partial census conducted in 1979 showed roughly 15.5 million people living in the country.^[6] The Statistical Yearbook published in 1983 by the Babrak Karmal government claimed a total population of 15.96 million for 1981-82.^[193] Between 600,000 to 2 million Afghans were killed during the various 1979-2001 wars, majority of them during the Soviet war in the 1980s.^[92] At least 5 million more fled the country to neighboring Pakistan and Iran. According to the Population Reference Bureau, the Afghan population is estimated to increase to 82 million by 2050.^[194]

The only city in Afghanistan with over two million residents is its capital, Kabul. The other major cities in the country are, in order of population size, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Jalalabad, Ghazni, Kunduz, Farah. Urban areas are experiencing rapid population growth following the return of over 5 million Afghan expats from Pakistan and Iran.

Ethnic groups

Afghanistan is a multiethnic society. The population of the country is divided into a wide variety of ethnolinguistic groups. Because a systematic census has not been held in the nation in decades, exact figures about the size and composition of the various ethnic groups are unavailable.^[195] In this regard, the Encyclopædia Britannica states:

No national census has been conducted in Afghanistan since a partial count in 1979, and years of war and population dislocation have made an accurate ethnic count impossible. Current population estimates are therefore rough approximations, which show that Pashtuns comprise somewhat less than two-fifths of the population. The two largest Pashtun tribal groups are the Durrānī and Ghilzay. Tajiks are likely to account for some one-fourth of Afghans and Hazāra nearly one-fifth. Uzbeks and Chahar Aimaks each account for slightly more than 5 percent of the population and Turkmen an even smaller portion.^[196]



An approximate distribution of the nation's total ethnic groups is shown in the line chart below:

Ethnic groups in Afghanistan

Ethnic group	World Factbook / Library of Congress Country Studies estimate (2004-2010) ^{[59] [3]}	World Factbook / Library of Congress Country Studies estimate (1992-2003) ^{[197] [198] [199] [200]}
Pashtun	42%	38-44 percent
Tajik	27%	25-26.3% (of this 1% are Qizilbash)
Hazara	9%	10-19 percent
Uzbek	9%	6-8% percent
Aimak	4%	500,000 to 800,000
Turkmen	3%	2.5 percent
Baloch	2%	100,000
Others (Pashai, Nuristani, Arab, Brahui, Pamiri, Gujjar, etc.)	4%	6.9 percent

The percentage numbers in the chart at the bottom are from recent national opinion polls aimed at knowing how Afghan citizens feel about the 2001–present US-led war, the current political situation, as well as the economic and social issues affecting their daily lives. One was conducted in 2006 by the Asia Foundation (with technical assistance by the Indian *Centre for the Study of Developing Societies* and the *Afghan Center for Socio-economic and Opinion Research*) and the other between 2004 to 2009 by a combined effort of the broadcasting companies NBC News, BBC, and ARD.^{[201] [202]}

The 2006 Asia Foundation survey involved 6,226 randomly selected Afghan citizens from 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. However, Uruzgan Province (representing 1.1 percent) and Zabul Province (representing 1.2 percent) were excluded from the survey because of security concerns. The margin of sampling error in that survey is 2.5 percent.

To questions about their ethnicity at the end of the questionnaires, the results of the total 7,760 Afghan citizens came as:



Boys and girls of Kabul in traditional clothes

Ethnic group	"Afghanistan: Where Things Stand" (2004-2009) ^[202]	"A survey of the Afghan people" (2006) ^[201]
Pashtun	38-46%	41%
Tajik	37-39%	37%
Hazara	6-13%	9%
Uzbek	5-7%	9%
Aimak	0-0%	0%
Turkmen	1-2%	2%
Baloch	1-3%	1%
Others (Nuristani, Arab, etc.)	0-4%	1%
No opinion	0-2%	0%

Languages

The language situation in Afghanistan is strongly affected by its ethnic variety. The most commonly spoken languages in Afghanistan are its two official languages Pashto and Persian (officially called Dari), both Indo-European languages from the Iranian languages sub-family.^[1] Persian has always been the prestige language and as the main means of inter-ethnic communication it has maintained its status of lingua franca. It is the native tongue of the Tajiks, Afghanistan's second largest ethnic group, and the native language of several other ethnolinguistic groups such as the Hazara, Aimak and Kizilbash.^[203] Pashto on the other hand is the native tongue of the Pashtuns, the single largest ethno-linguistic group within Afghanistan. Pashto was historically promoted to the status of national language in 1936. Persian and Pashto were reaffirmed as official languages in 1964. At that time, Persian was renamed to Dari.

Other languages, such as Uzbek, Turkmen, Balochi, Pashayi and Nuristani languages (Ashkunu, Kamkata-viri, Vasi-viri, Tregami and Kalasha-ala), are used as native tongue by minority groups across the country and have official status in the regions where they are widely spoken. Minor languages also include Pamiri (Shughni, Munji, Ishkashimi and Wakhi), Brahui, Hindko, Kyrgyz, etc. A fair number of Afghans can also speak and understand Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and English.^[1]

Name of language	CIA World Factbook [204]	Encyclopaedia Britannica [205]	Ethnologue [206] (1996)	Encyclopaedia Iranica [207] (1980s)	Others [208] [209] [210]
Dari (Persian)	50 %	50 %	25-50 %	25 %	roughly one-third
Pashto	35 %	40 %	35-50 %	50-55 %	40-60 %
Uzbek and Turkmen	11 %	n. a.	12 %	n. a.	n. a.
Other	4 %	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.

Religions

Religiously, Afghans are over 99% Muslims: approximately 80-85% Sunni, 15-19% Shi'a, and 1% other.^{[59] [211] [212] [213]} Until the 1890s, the region around Nuristan was known as Kafiristan (land of the kafirs) because of its inhabitants: the Nuristani, an ethnically distinctive people who practiced animism, polytheism and shamanism.^[214]

Up until the mid-1980s, there were possibly about 50,000 Hindus and Sikhs living in different cities, mostly in Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Ghazni.^{[215] [216]}

There was also a small Jewish community in Afghanistan who emigrated to Israel and the United States by the end of the last century, and only one individual, Zablun Simintov, remains today.^[217]

Health and education

According to the Human Development Index, Afghanistan is the second least developed country in the world.^[218] Every half hour, an average of one woman dies from pregnancy-related complications, another dies of tuberculosis and 14 children die, largely from preventable causes. Before the start of the wars in 1978, the nation had an improving health system and a semi-modernized health care system in cities like Kabul. Ibn Sina Hospital and Ali Abad Hospital in Kabul were two of the leading health care institutions in Central Asia at the time.^[219] Following the Soviet invasion and the civil war that followed, the health care system was limited only to urban areas and was eventually destroyed. The Taliban government made some improvements in the late 1990s, but health care was not available for women during their six year rule.^[219] There are an estimated one million disabled or handicapped people in the country.^[220] An estimated 80,000 citizens of the country have lost limbs, mainly as a result of landmines.^{[221] [222]}



Inside a regional medical hospital in the Paktia Province

The nation's health care system began to improve dramatically since 2002, which is due to international support on the vaccination of children, training of medical staff. According to USAID, infant mortality rate has dropped by 33 percent and approximately 64 percent of the total population now has access to some form of health care. Most Afghans live within one hour travel to a health facility.^[223] Many hospitals and clinics have been built in the country over the last decade, with the most advanced treatments being available in Kabul. The French Medical Institute for Children and Indira Gandhi Childrens Hospital in Kabul are the leading children's hospitals in Afghanistan. The Jinnah Hospital in Kabul is also under construction at the moment, which is funded by the Government of Pakistan.^[224] There are also a number of well-equipped regional hospitals across the country that were built by the United States Army Corps of Engineers and are run by the Afghan National Army.

Non-governmental charities such as Mahboba's promise assist orphans in association with governmental structures.^[225] According to Reuters, "Afghanistan's healthcare system is widely believed to be one of the country's

success stories since reconstruction began."^[219] However, in November 2009, UNICEF reported that Afghanistan is the most dangerous place in the world for a child to be born.^[226] The nation has the highest infant mortality rate in the world – 257 deaths per 1,000 live births – and 70 percent of the population lacks access to clean water.^[227] [228] The Afghan Ministry of Public Health has ambitious plans to cut the infant mortality rate to 400 from 1,600 for every 100,000 live births by 2020.^[219] Demographic and Health Surveys is working with the Indian Institute of Health Management Research to conduct a survey in Afghanistan focusing on Maternal Mortality, among other things.^[229]

One of the oldest schools in the country is the Habibia High School in Kabul. It was established by King Habibullah Khan in 1903 and helped educate students from the nation's elite class. In the 1920s, the German-funded Amani High School opened in Kabul, and about a decade later two French lycées (secondary schools) began, the AEFÉ and the Lycée Estéqlal. During the same period the Kabul University opened its doors for classes. Education was improving in the country by the late 1950s, during the rule of King Zahir Shah. However, after the Saur Revolution in 1978 until recent years, the education system of Afghanistan fell apart due to the wars. It was revived in the early months of 2002 after the US removed the Taliban and the Karzai administration came to power.

As of 2009 more than five million male and female students were enrolled in schools throughout the country. However, there are still significant obstacles to education in Afghanistan, stemming from lack of funding, unsafe school buildings and cultural norms. Furthermore, there is a great lack of qualified teachers, especially in rural areas. A lack of women teachers is another issue that concerns some Afghan parents, especially in more conservative areas. Some parents will not allow their daughters to be taught by men.^[230]

UNICEF estimates that more than 80 percent of females and around 50 percent of males lack access to education centers. According to the United Nations, 700 schools have been closed in the country because of poor security.^[231] Literacy of the entire population is estimated at 34%. Female literacy is 10%.^[231] The Afghan ministry of education, assisted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is in the process of expanding education in the country by building more new schools and providing modern technologies.

Following the start of the U.S. mission in late 2001, Kabul University was reopened to both male and female students. In 2006, the American University of Afghanistan also opened its doors, with the aim of providing a world-class, English-language, co-educational learning environment in Afghanistan. The university accepts students from Afghanistan and the neighboring countries. Many other universities were inaugurated across the country in recent years, such as Kandahar University in the south, Herat University in the northwest, Balkh University in the north, Nangarhar University and Khost University in the eastern zones, and others. The National Military Academy of Afghanistan has been set up to train and educate Afghan soldiers.



Law enforcement

Afghanistan currently has more than 90,000 national police officers, with plans to recruit more so that the total number can reach 160,000. The Afghan National Police and Afghan Border Police are under the Afghan Interior Ministry, which is today headed by Bismillah Khan Mohammadi. Although they are being trained by NATO countries and through the Afghanistan Police Program, there are still many problems with the force. Large percentage of the police officers are illiterate and are widely accused of demanding bribes.^[232]

Approximately 17 percent of them test positive for illegal drugs. In some areas of the country, crimes have gone uninvestigated because of insufficient police or lack of equipment. In 2009, President Karzai created two anti-corruption units within the nation's Interior Ministry.^[233] Former Interior Minister Hanif Atmar told reporters that security officials from the U.S. (FBI), Britain (Scotland Yard) and the European Union will train prosecutors in the unit.

Helmand, Kandahar, and Oruzgan are the most dangerous provinces in Afghanistan due to its distance from Kabul as well as the drug trade that flourishes there. The Afghan Border Police are responsible for protecting the nation's borders, especially the Durand Line border, which is often used by criminals and terrorists. Every year many Afghan police officers are killed in the line of duty.



Afghan National Police (ANP) honor guards

Culture

Afghans display pride in their religion, country, ancestry, and above all, their independence. Like other highlanders, Afghans are regarded with mingled apprehension and condescension, for their high regard for personal honor, for their clan loyalty and for their readiness to carry and use arms to settle disputes.^[234] As clan warfare and internecine feuding has been one of their chief occupations since time immemorial, this individualistic trait has made it difficult for foreign invaders to hold the region.

Afghanistan has a complex history that has survived either in its current cultures or in the form of various languages and monuments. However, many of the country's historic monuments have been damaged in recent wars.^[235] The two famous statues of Buddha in Bamyán Province were destroyed by the Taliban, who regarded them as idolatrous. Other famous sites include the cities of Kandahar, Herat, Ghazni and Balkh. The Minaret of Jam, in the Hari River valley, is a UNESCO World Heritage site. A cloak reputedly worn by Muhammad is stored inside the famous Mosque of the Cloak of the Prophet Mohammed in Kandahar City.

Buzkashi is a national sport in Afghanistan. It is similar to polo and played by horsemen in two teams, each trying to grab and hold a goat carcass. Afghan hounds (a type of running dog) also originated in Afghanistan.



Girls in Kabul, wearing their traditional clothes, sing at a celebration of International Women's Day in 2002.



Afghan tribal men dressed in their local traditional clothes

Although literacy levels are very low, classic Persian poetry plays a very important role in the Afghan culture. Poetry has always been one of the major educational pillars in Iran and Afghanistan, to the level that it has integrated itself into culture. Persian culture has, and continues to, exert a great influence over Afghan culture. Private poetry competition events known as "musha'era" are quite common even among ordinary people. Almost every homeowner owns one or more poetry collections of some sort, even if they are not read often.

Many of the famous Persian poets of the 10th to 15th centuries stem from what is now known as Afghanistan (then known as Khorasan), such as Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi (also known as *Rumi* or *Mawlānā*), Rābi'a Balkhi (the first poetess in the history of Persian literature), Khwaja Abdullah Ansari (from Herat), Nasir Khusraw (born near Balkh, died in Badakhshan), Jāmī of Herāt, Alī Sher Navāī, Sanāī Ghaznawi, Daqiqi Balkhi, Farrukhi Sistani, Unsuri Balkhi, Anvari, and many others. Moreover, some of the contemporary Persian language poets and writers, who are relatively well-known in Persian-speaking world, include Khalilullah Khalili,^[236] Sufi Ashqari,^[237] Sarwar Joya, Qahar Asey,

Parwin Pazwak and others.

In addition to poets and authors, numerous Persian scientists and philosophers were born or worked in the region of present-day Afghanistan. Most notable was Avicenna (Abu Alī Hussein ibn Sīnā) whose paternal family hailed from Balkh. Ibn Sīnā, who travelled to Isfahan later in life to establish a medical school there, is known by some scholars as "the father of modern medicine". George Sarton called ibn Sīnā "the most famous scientist of Islam and one of the most famous of all races, places, and times." His most famous works are *The Book of Healing* and *The Canon of Medicine*, also known as the *Qanun*. Ibn Sīnā's story even found way to the contemporary English literature through Noah Gordon's *The Physician*, now published in many languages.

Al-Farabi was another well-known philosopher and scientist of the 9th and 10th centuries, who, according to Ibn al-Nadim, was from the Faryab Province in Afghanistan. Other notable scientists and philosophers are Abu Rayhan Biruni (a notable astronomer, anthropologist, geographer, and mathematician of the Ghaznavid period who lived and died in Ghazni), Abu Zayd Balkhi (a polymath and a student of al-Kindi), Abu Ma'shar Balkhi (known as *Albumasar* or *Albuxar* in the west), and Abu Sa'id Sijzi (from Sistan).

Before the Taliban gained power, the city of Kabul was home to many musicians who were masters of both traditional and modern Afghan music, especially during the Nauroz-celebration. Kabul in the middle part of the 20th century has been likened to Vienna during the 18th and 19th centuries.

There are an estimated 60 major Pashtun tribes.^[238] The tribal system, which orders the life of most people outside metropolitan areas, is potent in political terms. Men feel a fierce loyalty to their own tribe, such that, if called upon, they would assemble in arms under the tribal chiefs and local clan leaders. In theory, under Islamic law, every believer has an obligation to bear arms at the ruler's call.

Heathcote considers the tribal system to be the best way of organizing large groups of people in a country that is geographically difficult, and in a society that, from a materialistic point of view, has an uncomplicated lifestyle.^[234]

The population of nomads in Afghanistan is estimated at about 2-3 million.^[239] Nomads contribute importantly to the national economy in terms of meat, skins and wool.

Media

The Afghan media began in the early 20th century, with the first newspaper being published in 1906. By the 1920s, Radio Kabul was broadcasting local radio services. Afghanistan National Television was launched in 1974 but was closed in 1996 when the media was tightly controlled by the Taliban.^[240] Since 2002, press restrictions were gradually relaxed and private media diversified. Freedom of expression and the press is promoted in the 2004 constitution and censorship is banned, though defaming individuals or producing material contrary to the principles of Islam is prohibited. In 2008, Reporters Without Borders listed the media environment as 156 out of 173, with 1st being most free. 400 publications are now registered, at least 15 local Afghan television channels and 60 radio stations.^[241] Foreign radio stations, such as Voice of America and BBC World Service, also broadcast into the country.

Notes

- a. Other terms that can be used as demonyms are **Afghani**^[242] and **Afghanistani**.^[243]
- b. The Government of India also considers Afghanistan to be a bordering country. This is because it considers the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir to be a part of India including the portion bordering Afghanistan. A ceasefire sponsored by the United Nations in 1948 froze the positions of Indian and Pakistani-held territory. As a consequence, the region bordering Afghanistan is in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

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gag:Afganistan

Geographical coordinates: 23°N 90°E

<div><div>The People's Republic of Bangladesh</div><div>গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ</div><div>Gônoprojatontri Bangladesh</div></div>		
<div><div></div><div></div></div>		
<div>Anthem: <i>Amar Shonar Bangla</i> <i>My Golden Bangla</i></div>		
<div></div>		
<div>Capital (and largest city)</div>	<div>Dhaka 23°42'N 90°21'E</div>	
<div>Official language(s)</div>	<div>Bangla</div>	
<div>Demonym</div>	<div>Bangladeshi</div>	
<div>Government</div>	<div>Unitary state and parliamentary democracy^[1]</div>	
<div>-</div>	<div>President</div>	<div>Zillur Rahman</div>
<div>-</div>	<div>Prime Minister</div>	<div>Sheikh Hasina Wazed</div>

-	Speaker	Ad.Abdul Hamid
Independence		from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
-	Declared	March 26, 1971
-	Victory Day	December 16, 1971
Area		
-	Total	147,570 km ² (94th) 56,977 sq mi
-	Water (%)	6.9
Population		
-	2009 estimate	160,000,000 ^[2] (8th)
-	Density	1,099.3/km ² (9th) 2,917.6/sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2010 estimate
-	Total	\$257.545 billion ^[3]
-	Per capita	\$1,566 ^[3]
GDP (nominal)		2010 estimate
-	Total	\$105.402 billion ^[3]
-	Per capita	\$641 ^[3]
Gini (2005)		33.2 ^[4] (medium)
HDI (2007)		 0.543 ^[5] (medium) (146th)
Currency		Taka (BDT)
Time zone		BST (UTC+6)
Drives on the		left
ISO 3166 code		BD
Internet TLD		.bd
Calling code		880
1	Adjusted population, p.4,	

Bangladesh (pronounced /ˈbɑːŋɡlədɛʃ/ (listen) or English pronunciation: /bæŋɡləˈdɛʃ/ (listen); Bengali: বাংলাদেশ), officially the **People's Republic of Bangladesh** (Bangla: গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ *Gônoprojatontri Bangladesh*) is a country in South Asia. It is bordered by India on all sides except for a small border with Burma (Myanmar) to the far southeast and by the Bay of Bengal to the south. Together with the Indian state of West Bengal, it makes up the ethno-linguistic region of Bengal. The name *Bangladesh* means "Country of Bengal" in the official Bengali language.

The borders of present-day Bangladesh were established with the partition of Bengal and India in 1947, when the region became East Pakistan, part of the newly formed nation of Pakistan. However, it was separated from the western wing by 1600 km (994 mi) of Indian territory. Political and linguistic discrimination as well as economic neglect led to popular agitations against West Pakistan, which led to the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and the establishment of Bangladesh. After independence, the new state endured famines, natural disasters and widespread poverty, as well as political turmoil and military coups. The restoration of democracy in 1991 has been followed by

relative calm and economic progress. Today, Bangladesh is a secular, democratic republic.^{[6] [7]}

Bangladesh is the eighth most populous country and is among the most densely populated countries in the world. Bangladesh has a high poverty rate. However, per-capita (inflation-adjusted) GDP has more than doubled since 1975, and the poverty rate has fallen by 20% since the early 1990s. The country is listed among the "Next Eleven" economies. Dhaka, the capital, and other urban centers have been the driving force behind this growth.^[8]

Geographically, the country straddles the fertile Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta and is subject to annual monsoon floods and cyclones. Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy with an elected parliament called the Jatiyo Sangshad. The country is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, the OIC, SAARC, BIMSTEC, and the D-8. As the World Bank notes in its July 2005 Country Brief, the country has made significant progress in human development in the areas of literacy, gender parity in schooling and reduction of population growth.^[9] However, Bangladesh continues to face a number of major challenges, including widespread political and bureaucratic corruption, economic competition relative to the world, serious overpopulation, widespread poverty, and an increasing danger of hydrologic shocks brought on by ecological vulnerability to climate change.

History



Somapura Mahavihara in Paharpur, Bangladesh, is the greatest Buddhist Vihara in the Indian Subcontinent, built by Dharmapala of Bengal.

Remnants of civilization in the greater Bengal region date back four thousand years,^[10] when the region was settled by Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, and Austro-Asiatic peoples. The exact origin of the word "Bangla" or "Bengal" is unknown, though it is believed to be derived from *Bang*, the Dravidian-speaking tribe that settled in the area around the year 1000 BC.^[11]

The kingdom of Gangaridai was formed from at least the 7th century BC, which later united with Bihar under the Magadha, Nanda, Mauryan and Sunga Empires. Bengal was later part of the Gupta Empire and Harsha Empire from the 3rd to the 6th centuries CE. Following its collapse, a dynamic Bengali named Shashanka founded an impressive short-lived kingdom. After a period of anarchy, the

Bengali Buddhist Pala dynasty ruled the region for four hundred years, followed by a shorter reign of the Hindu Sena dynasty.



Sixty Dome Mosque in Mosque city of Bagerhat was built in the 15th century and is the largest historical mosque in Bangladesh, as well as a World Heritage site.

Islam was introduced to Bengal in the 12th century by Arab Muslim merchants; Sufi missionaries and subsequent Muslim conquests helped spread Islam throughout the region.^[12] Bakhtiar Khilji, a Turkic general, defeated Lakshman Sen of the Sena dynasty and conquered large parts of Bengal in the year 1204. The region was ruled by dynasties of Sultans and land lords Bhuiyan for the next few hundred years. By the 16th century, the Mughal Empire controlled Bengal, and Dhaka became an important provincial centre of Mughal administration.

European traders arrived late in the 15th century, and their influence grew until the British East India Company gained control of Bengal following the Battle of Plassey in 1757.^[13] The bloody rebellion of 1857 – known as the Sepoy Mutiny – resulted in transfer of authority to the crown with a British viceroy running the administration.^[14] During colonial rule, famine racked the Indian subcontinent many times, including the Great Bengal famine of 1943 that claimed 3 million lives.^[15]



২১ ফেব্রুয়ারি ১৯৫৩, মহানগর কাসিমাবাদে জাহাজে উঠতে নেমে মুজিব
Sheikh Mujib at 'Probbhat Ferry' with Maulana Bhashani and others — 21 February 1953
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (3rd person from right)
and Maulana Bhashani (4th person from right) in
1953

Between 1905 and 1911, an abortive attempt was made to divide the province of Bengal into two zones, with Dhaka being the capital of the eastern zone.^[16] When India was partitioned in 1947, Bengal was partitioned along religious lines, with the western part going to India and the eastern part (Muslims majority) joining Pakistan as a province called East Bengal (later renamed East Pakistan), with its capital at Dhaka.^[17]

In 1950, land reform was accomplished in East Bengal with the abolishment of the feudal zamindari system.^[18] Despite the economic and demographic weight of the east, however, Pakistan's government and military were largely dominated by the upper classes from the west. The Bengali Language Movement of 1952 was the first sign of friction between the two wings of Pakistan.^[19] Dissatisfaction with the central government over economic and cultural issues continued to rise through the next decade, during which the Awami League emerged as the political voice of the Bengali-speaking population. It agitated for autonomy in the 1960s, and in 1966, its president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib), was jailed; he was released in 1969 after an unprecedented popular uprising. In 1970, a massive cyclone devastated

the coast of East Pakistan, killing up to half a million people,^[20] and the central government responded poorly. The Bengali population's anger was compounded when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose Awami League won a majority in Parliament in the 1970 elections,^[21] was blocked from taking office.

After staging compromise talks with Mujib, President Yahya Khan arrested him in the early hours of 26 March 1971, and launched Operation Searchlight,^[22] a sustained military assault on East Pakistan. Yahya's methods were extremely bloody, and the violence of the war resulted in many civilian deaths.^[23] Chief targets included intellectuals and Hindus, and about ten million refugees fled to neighbouring India.^[24] Estimates of those massacred throughout the war range from three hundred thousand to 3 million.^[23]

Before his arrest by the Pakistan Army, Sk. Mujibur Rahman formally declared the independence of Bangladesh, and directed everyone to fight till the last soldier of the Pakistan army was evicted from East Pakistan. Awami League leaders set up a government-in-exile in Calcutta, India. The exile government formally took oath at Mujib Nagar in Kustia district of East Pakistan on 17 April 1971, with Tajuddin Ahmad as the first Prime Minister.

The Bangladesh Liberation War lasted for nine months. The Bangladesh Forces formed within 11 sectors led by General M.A.G. Osmani consisting of Bengali Regulars, and Mukti Bahini conducted a massive guerilla war against the Pakistan Forces with all out support from the Indian Armed Forces. Jointly, the Mukti Bahini achieved a decisive victory over Pakistan on 16 December 1971, with Indian Armed Forces taking over 90,000 prisoners of war.

After its independence, Bangladesh became a parliamentary democracy, with Mujib as the Prime Minister. In the 1973 parliamentary elections, the Awami League gained an absolute majority. A nationwide famine occurred during 1973 and 1974,^[15] and in early 1975, Mujib initiated a one-party socialist rule with his newly formed BAKSAL. On 15 August 1975, Mujib and most of his family members were assassinated by mid-level military officers.^[25] A series of bloody coups and counter-coups in the following three months culminated in the ascent to power of General Ziaur Rahman, who reinstated multi-party politics, and founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Zia's rule ended when he was assassinated by elements of the military in 1981.^[25]

Bangladesh's next major ruler was General Hossain Mohammad Ershad, who gained power in a bloodless coup in 1982, and ruled until 1990, when he was forced to resign after a massive revolt of all major political parties and the public, along with pressure from western donors (which was a major shift in international policy after the fall of the

Soviet Union). Since then, Bangladesh has reverted to a parliamentary democracy. Zia's widow, Khaleda Zia, led the Bangladesh Nationalist Party to parliamentary victory at the general election in 1991, and became the first female Prime Minister in Bangladeshi history. However, the Awami League, headed by Sheikh Hasina, one of Mujib's surviving daughters, won the next election in 1996. It lost again to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in 2001.

On 11 January 2007, following widespread political unrest, a caretaker government was appointed to administer the next general election. The country had suffered from extensive corruption,^[26] disorder and political violence. The new caretaker government has made it a priority to root out corruption from all levels of government. To this end, many notable politicians and officials, along with large numbers of lesser officials and party members, have been arrested on corruption charges. The caretaker government held what observers described as a largely free and fair election on 29 December 2008.^[27] Awami League's Sheikh Hasina won the elections with a landslide victory and took the oath of Prime Minister on 6 January 2009.^[28]

Government and politics



Jatiyo Sangshad Bhaban houses the Parliament of Bangladesh.

National symbols of Bangladesh

Anthem	Amar Shonar Bangla
Animal	Royal Bengal Tiger
Bird	Oriental Magpie Robin
Fish	Hilsa
Flower	White Water Lily
Fruit	Jackfruit
Tree	Mango Tree
Sport	Hadudu
Calendar	Bengali calendar

Bangladesh is a unitary state and parliamentary democracy.^[29] Direct elections in which all citizens, aged 18 or over, can vote are held every five years for the unicameral parliament known as Jatiya Sangsad. The parliamentary building is known as the *Jatiyo Sangshad Bhaban* and was designed by architect Louis Kahn. Currently the parliament has 345 members including 45 reserved seats for women, elected from single-member constituencies. The Prime Minister, as the head of government, forms the cabinet and runs the day-to-day affairs of state. While the Prime Minister is formally appointed by the President, he or she must be an MP who commands the confidence of

the majority of parliament. The President is the head of state but mainly a ceremonial post elected by the parliament.^[30]

However the President's powers are substantially expanded during the tenure of a caretaker government, which is responsible for the conduct of elections and transfer of power. The officers of the caretaker government must be non-partisan and are given three months to complete their task. This transitional arrangement is an innovation that was pioneered by Bangladesh in its 1991 election and then institutionalized in 1996 through its 13th constitutional amendment.^[31]

The Constitution of Bangladesh was drafted in 1972 and has undergone fourteen amendments.^[31] The highest judicial body is the Supreme Court. Justices are appointed by the President. The judicial and law enforcement institutions are weak.^[32] Separation of powers, judicial from executive was finally implemented on the 1st of November, 2007. It is expected that this separation will make the judiciary stronger and impartial. Laws are loosely based on English common law, but family laws such as marriage and inheritance are based on religious scripts, and therefore differ between religious communities.

The two major parties in Bangladesh are the Bangladesh Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). BNP is led by Khaleda Zia and traditionally been allied with Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh and Islami Oikya Jot,^[33] while Sheikh Hasina's Awami League aligns with leftist and secularist parties. Hasina and Zia are bitter rivals who have dominated politics for over 15 years; each is related to one of the leaders of the independence movement. Another important player is the Jatiya Party, headed by former military dictator Ershad. The Awami League-BNP rivalry has been bitter and punctuated by protests, violence and murder. Student politics is particularly strong in Bangladesh, a legacy from the liberation movement era. Almost all parties have highly active student wings, and student leaders have been elected to the Parliament.

Two radical terrorist organizations, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), were banned in February 2005. Several small-scale bomb attacks taking place since 1999 have been blamed on those groups, and dozens of suspected members have been detained in security operations, including the heads of those two parties in 2006. The masterminds were tried and executed. The Bangladesh government won praise from world leaders, including Western leaders, for its strong anti-terrorist stance.

The January 22, 2007 election was postponed indefinitely and emergency law declared on January 11, 2007 as the Army backed caretaker government of Fakhruddin Ahmed aimed to prepare a new voter list and crack down on corruption. They also assisted the interim Government of Bangladesh in a drive against corruption, which resulted in Bangladesh's position in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index changed from the very bottom, where they had been for 3 years in a row, to 147th in just 1 year.^[34] A large alliance led by the Bangladesh Awami League won the December 29, 2008 poll, in a landslide victory. They got 230 seats among 300 seats in the parliament.^[35]

Foreign policy and military

Bangladesh pursues a moderate foreign policy that places heavy reliance on multinational diplomacy, especially at the United Nations. In 1974 Bangladesh joined both the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations and has since been elected to serve two terms on the Security Council in 1978–1979 and 2000–2001. In the 1980s, Bangladesh played a lead role in founding the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in order to expand relations with other South Asian states. Since the founding of SAARC 1985, a Bangladeshi has held the post of Secretary General on two occasions.

Bangladesh's most important and complex foreign relationships are with India. These relationships are informed by historical and cultural ties and form an important part of the domestic political discourse. Bangladesh's relationship with India began on a positive note because of India's assistance in the independence war and reconstruction. Throughout the years, relations between both countries have fluctuated for a number of reasons.

A major source of tension between Bangladesh and India is the Farakka Dam.^[36] In 1975, India constructed a dam on the Ganges River 11 miles (18 km) from the Bangladeshi border. Bangladesh alleges that the dam diverts much needed water from Bangladesh and adds a man-made disaster to the country already plagued by natural disasters. The dam also has terrible ecological consequences.^[36] On the other hand, India has voiced concerns about anti-Indian separatists and Islamic militants allegedly being harboured across their 2500-mile (4000 km) border, as well as the flow of illegal migrants, and is building a fence along most of it.^[37] But at the 2007 SAARC meeting both nations pledged to work cooperatively on security, economic and border issues.^[38]

The current strength of the army is around 200,000 including reservists,^[39] the air force 22,000,^[39] and navy 14,950.^[40] In addition to traditional defense roles, the military has been called on to provide support to civil authorities for disaster relief and internal security during periods of political unrest. Bangladesh is not currently active in any ongoing war, but it did contribute 2,300 troops to the coalition that fought in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and Bangladesh is consistently a top contributor to UN peacekeeping forces around the world. As of May 2007, Bangladesh had major deployments in Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sudan, Timor-Leste and Côte d'Ivoire.^[41] Presently Bangladesh is the largest troop contributor country to the UN.^[42]

Bangladesh enjoys relatively warm ties with the People's Republic of China which has, particularly in the past decade, increased economic cooperation with the South Asian nation. Between 2006 and 2007, trade between the two nations rose by 28.5% and there have been agreements to grant various Bangladeshi commodities tariff-free access to the Chinese market. Cooperation between the Military of Bangladesh and the People's Liberation Army is also increasing, with joint military agreements signed and Bangladesh procuring Chinese arms which range from small arms to large naval surface combatants such as the Chinese Type 053H1 Missile Frigate.



A Bangladeshi Air Force MiG-29 lands at a BAF Base.



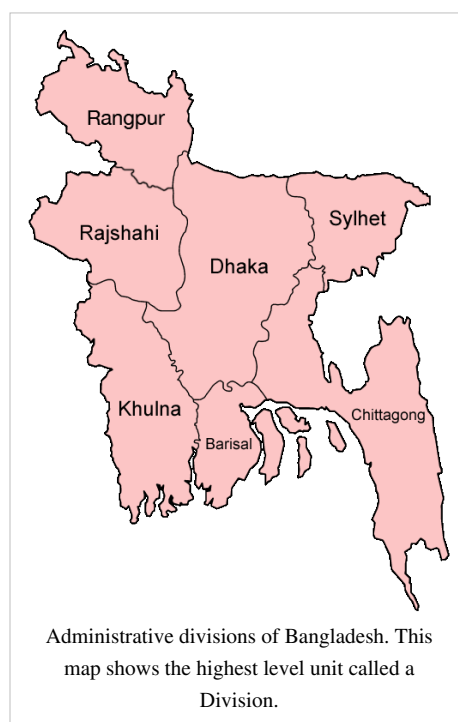
BNS Bangabandhu, a Bangladeshi Navy frigate.

Divisions, districts and upazilas

Bangladesh is divided into seven administrative divisions,^{[43] [44]} each named after their respective divisional headquarters: Barisal (বরিশাল), Chittagong (চট্টগ্রাম), Dhaka (ঢাকা), Khulna (খুলনা), Rajshahi (রাজশাহী), Sylhet (সিলেট), and Rangpur (রংপুর).

Divisions are subdivided into districts (*zila*). There are 64 districts in Bangladesh, each further subdivided into *upazila* (subdistricts) or *thana*. The area within each police station, except for those in metropolitan areas, is divided into several *unions*, with each union consisting of multiple villages. In the metropolitan areas, police stations are divided into wards, which are further divided into *mahallas*. There are no elected officials at the divisional, district or upazila levels, and the administration is composed only of government officials. Direct elections are held for each union (or ward), electing a chairperson and a number of members. In 1997, a parliamentary act was passed to reserve three seats (out of twelve) in every union for female candidates.^[45]

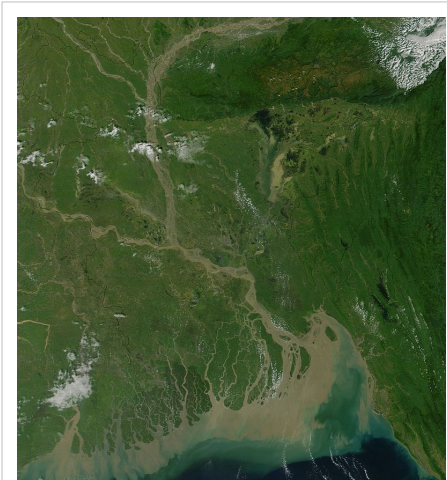
Dhaka is the capital and largest city of Bangladesh. Other major cities include Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Barisal, Bogra, Comilla, Mymensingh and Rangpur. These cities have mayoral elections, while other municipalities elect a chairperson. Mayors and chairpersons are elected for a span of five years.



City	City population (2008 estimate) ^[46]	Metro population (2008 estimate) ^[46]
Dhaka	7,000,940	12,797,394
Chittagong	2,579,107	3,858,093
Khulna	855,650	1,588,425
Narayanganj	800,000	1,500,000
Rajshahi	472,775	775,495
Sylhet	463,198	-
Barisal	210,374	-
Rangpur	251,699	-

Geography and climate

Bangladesh is in the low-lying Ganges–Brahmaputra River Delta or Ganges Delta. This delta is formed by the confluence of the Ganges (local name Padma or *Pôdda*), Brahmaputra (Jamuna or *Jomuna* also known as "Yamuna"), and Meghna rivers and their respective tributaries. The Ganges unites with the Jamuna (main channel of the Brahmaputra) and later joins the Meghna to eventually empty into the Bay of Bengal. The alluvial soil deposited by these rivers has created some of the most fertile plains in the world. Bangladesh has 57 trans-boundary rivers, making water issues politically complicated to resolve – in most cases as the lower riparian state to India.^[47] Most parts of Bangladesh are less than 12 m (39.4 ft) above the sea level, and it is believed that about 10% of the land would be flooded if the sea level were to rise by 1 m (3.28 ft).^[48]



Satellite image presenting physical features of Bangladesh

In south east Bangladesh experiments have been done since the sixties to 'build with nature'. By implementing cross dams, the natural accretion of silt has created new land. With Dutch funding, the Bangladeshi government began to help develop this new land in the late 1970s. The effort has since become a multiagency operation building roads, culverts, embankments, cyclone shelters, toilets and ponds, as well as distributing land to settlers. By fall 2010, the program will have allotted some 27000 acres (10927 ha) to 21,000 families.^[49]

The highest point in Bangladesh is in Mowdok range at 1052 m (3451 ft) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to the southeast of the country.^[50] Cox's Bazar, south of the city of Chittagong, has a beach that stretches uninterrupted over 120 kilometres (75 mi).

Straddling the Tropic of Cancer, Bangladeshi climate is tropical with a mild winter from October to March, a hot, humid summer from March to June. A warm and humid monsoon season lasts from June to October and supplies most of the country's rainfall. Natural calamities, such as floods, tropical cyclones, tornadoes, and tidal bores occur almost every year,^[51] combined with the effects of deforestation, soil degradation and erosion. The cyclones of 1970 and 1991 were particularly devastating. A cyclone that struck Bangladesh in 1991 killed some 140,000 people.^[52]

In September 1998, Bangladesh saw the most severe flooding in modern world history. As the Brahmaputra, the Ganges and Meghna spilt over and swallowed 300,000 houses, 9700 kilometres (6027 mi) of road and 2700 kilometres (1678 mi) of embankment 1,000 people were killed and 30 million more were made homeless with 135,000 cattle killed, 50 square kilometres (19.3 sq mi) of land destroyed and 11000 kilometres (6835 mi) of roads damaged or destroyed. Two-thirds of the country was underwater. There were several reasons for the severity of the flooding. Firstly, there were unusually high monsoon rains. Secondly, the Himalayas shed off an equally unusually high amount of melt water that year. Thirdly, trees that usually would have intercept rain water had been cut down for firewood or to make space for animals.^[53]

Bangladesh is now widely recognized to be one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change. Natural hazards that come from increased rainfall, rising sea levels, and tropical cyclones are expected to increase as climate change, each seriously affecting agriculture, water & food security, human health and shelter.^[54] It is believed that in the coming decades the rising sea level alone will create more than 20 million^[55] climate refugees.^[56] Bangladeshi water is contaminated with arsenic frequently because of the high arsenic contents in the soil. Up to 77 million people are exposed to toxic arsenic from drinking water.^[57] ^[58] Bangladesh is among the countries most prone to natural floods, tornados and cyclones.^[59] ^[60]

Flora and fauna

A major part of the coastline comprises a marshy jungle, the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world and home to diverse flora and fauna, including the Royal Bengal Tiger. In 1997, this region was declared endangered.^[61] The Magpie Robin is the National Bird of Bangladesh and it is common and known as the *Doyel* or *Doel* (Bengali: *দোয়েল*). It is a widely used symbol in Bangladesh, appearing on currency notes and a landmark in the city of Dhaka is named as the *Doyel Chatwar* (meaning: Doyel Square). The national flower of the country is water lily, which is known as *Shapla*. The national fruit is jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), which in Bengali is known as *Kathal*. In late 2010, the Bangladeshi government selected the Mango tree as the national tree.^[62]



Royal Bengal Tiger

Economy

At April 2010, USA - based ratings agency Standard & Poor's (S&P) awarded Bangladesh a BB- for a long term in credit rating which is below India and well over Pakistan and Sri Lanka in South Asia^[63]. And, despite continuous domestic and international efforts to improve economic and demographic prospects, Bangladesh remains a developing nation^[64]. However, Bangladesh gradually decreased its dependency on foreign grant and loan from 85% (On 1988)^[65] to only 2% (On 2010)^[66] for its annual development budget. Its per capita income in 2010 was US\$641 compared to the world average of \$8,985^[67]. But, if purchasing power parity (PPP) is taken into account, Bangladesh's economy is the 48th largest in the world at US\$230 billion.

Jute was once the economic engine of the country. Its share of the world export market peaked in the Second World War and the late 1940s at 80%^[68] and even in the early 1970s accounted for 70% of its export earnings. However, polypropylene products began to substitute for jute products worldwide and the jute industry started to decline. Bangladesh grows very significant quantities of rice, tea, potato, mango, onion and mustard. According to FAOSTAT, Bangladesh is one of world's largest producers of^[69]: Rice (4th), Potato (11th), Mango (9th), Pineapple (16th), Fruit, Tropical (5th), Onion (16th), Banana (17th), Jute (2nd), Tea (11th).

Although two-thirds of Bangladeshis are farmers, more than three quarters of Bangladesh's export earnings come from the garment industry,^[70] which began attracting foreign investors in the 1980s due to cheap labour and low conversion cost. In 2009-10 fiscal year the industry exported US\$ 12.6 billion^[71] worth of products where in 2002 the exported amount was US\$ 5 billion. Recently Bangladesh has been ranked as the 4th^[72] largest clothing exporter by the WTO (The World Trade Organization).^[73] The industry now employs more than 3 million workers, 90% of whom are women.^[74] A large part of foreign currency earnings also comes from the remittances sent by expatriates living in other countries.



Worker in a paddy field – a common scene throughout Bangladesh. Two thirds of the population works in the agricultural sector.

Obstacles to growth include frequent cyclones and floods, inefficient state-owned enterprises, mismanaged port facilities, a growth in the labour force that has outpaced jobs, inefficient use of energy resources (such as natural gas), insufficient power supplies, slow implementation of economic reforms, political infighting and corruption. According to the World Bank, "among Bangladesh's most significant obstacles to growth are poor governance and weak public institutions."^[9] Despite these hurdles, the country has achieved an average annual growth rate of 5% since 1990, according to the World Bank.

Bangladesh has seen expansion of its middle class (world's Fifty Forth largest, just below of Singapore & Vietnam), and its consumer industry has also grown. In December 2005, four years after its report on the emerging "BRIC" economies (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), Goldman Sachs named Bangladesh one of the "Next Eleven",^[75] along with Egypt, Indonesia, Vietnam and seven other countries.

Bangladesh has seen a dramatic increase in foreign direct investment. A number of multinational corporations and local big business houses such as Beximco, Square, Akij Group, Ispahani, Navana Group, Transcom Group, Habib Group, KDS Group, Dragon Group and multinationals such as Unocal Corporation and Chevron, have made major investments, with the natural gas sector being a priority. In December 2005, the Central Bank of Bangladesh projected GDP growth around 6.5%.^[76] In order to enhance economic growth, the government set up several export processing zones to attract foreign investment. These are managed by the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority.

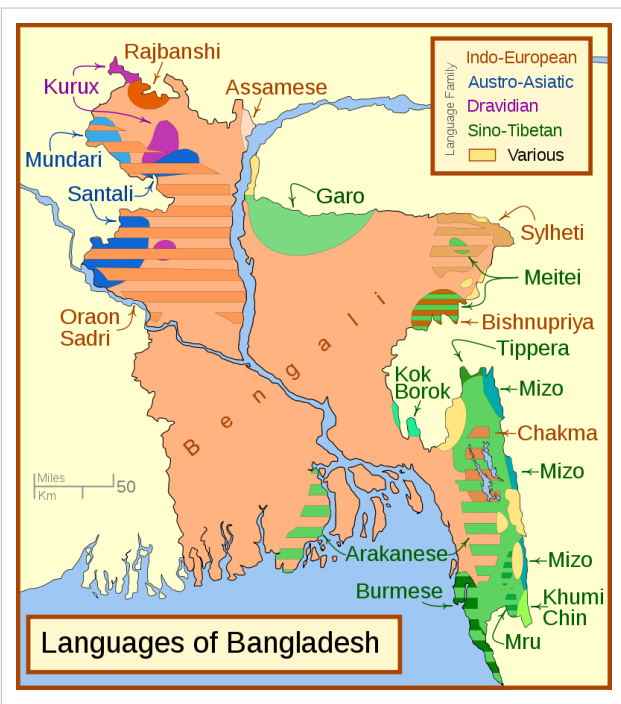
One significant contributor to the development of the economy has been the widespread propagation of microcredit by Muhammad Yunus (awarded the Nobel peace prize in 2006) through the Grameen Bank. By the late 1990s, Grameen Bank had 2.3 million members, along with 2.5 million members of other similar organisations.^[77]

Demographics

Recent (2007–2010) estimates of Bangladesh's population range from 150 to 164 million and it is the 7th most populous nation in the world. In 1951, the population was 44 million.^[78] It is also the most densely populated large country in the world, and it ranks 11th in population density, when very small countries and city-states are included.^[79] A striking contrast is offered by Russia which has a similar population spread over a land area that is 120 times larger than Bangladesh. Bangladesh's population growth was among the highest in the world in the 1960s and 1970s, when the country swelled from 50 to 90 million. With the promotion of birth control in the 1980s, the growth rate has slowed. The population is relatively young, with 60% being 25 or younger and only 3% being 63 or older. Life expectancy is 63 years for both males and females.^[80]



Jamuna Bridge: one of the longest bridges in the world



The overwhelming majority of Bangladeshis are ethnic Bengalis, comprising 98% of the population.^[81] The remainder are mostly Biharis and indigenous tribal groups. There is also a small but growing population of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar around Cox's Bazaar, which Bangladesh seeks to repatriate to Myanmar. The indigenous tribal peoples are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the southeast. There are thirteen tribal groups located in this region, the largest being the Chakma. The Hill Tracts region has been a source of unrest and separatism since and before the inception of Bangladesh.^[82] Outside the Hill Tracts, the largest tribal groups are the Santhals and Garos (Achiks), while smaller groups include the Kaibartta, Meitei, Mundas, Oraons, and Zomi.

Nearly all Bangladeshis speak Bangla as their mother tongue and it is the official language.^[83] It is an Indo-Aryan language of Sanskrit origin with its own script. English is used as a second language among the middle and upper classes.^[84] English is also widely used in higher education and the legal system. Historically, laws were written in English and translated into Bengali until 1987 when the procedure was reversed.^[85] The Bihari population speaks Urdu, which was also the language associated with the government prior to separation from Pakistan.

Health and education levels remain relatively low, although they have improved recently as poverty levels have decreased. Most Bangladeshis continue to live on subsistence farming in rural villages. Health problems abound, springing from poor water quality and prevalence of infectious diseases. The water crisis is acute, with widespread bacterial contamination of surface water and arsenic contamination of groundwater.^[86] Common diseases include malaria, leptospirosis and dengue. The literacy rate in Bangladesh rose to 53.5% in 2007.^[87] There is a gender gap, as literacy rates among women are 81.9% those among men, but this is disappearing in the younger generation.^[87] Among the most successful literacy programs are the *Food for education* (FFE) introduced in 1993,^[88] and a stipend program for women at the primary and secondary levels.^[89]

Religion in Bangladesh	
Religion	Percent
Islam	89.7%
Hinduism	9.2%
Other	1.1%

The main religion practiced in Bangladesh is Islam (89.7%), but a significant percentage of the population adheres to Hinduism (9.2%).^[90] The majority of Muslims are Sunni. There is a small Shia and an even smaller Ahmadiyya community. Ethnic Biharis are predominantly Shia Muslims. Sufi influences in the region go back many centuries.^[91] Other religious groups include Buddhists (0.7%, mostly Theravada), Christians (0.3%, mostly of the Roman Catholic denomination), and Animists (0.1%). Bangladesh has the fourth largest Muslim population after Indonesia, Pakistan, and India, with over 130 million. Bangladesh was founded as a secular state, but Islam was briefly made the state religion, before returning by decree of the High Court to the principles of its 1972 constitution.^[92] The High Court also strengthened its stance against punishments by Islamic edict (fatwa), following complaints of brutal sentences carried out against women by extra-legal village courts.^[93]

Culture

Reflecting the long history of the region, Bangladesh has a culture that encompasses elements both old and new. The Bengali language boasts a rich literary heritage, which Bangladesh shares with the Indian state of West Bengal. The earliest literary text in Bengali is the 8th century Charyapada. Medieval Bengali literature was often either religious (e.g. Chandidas), or adapted from other languages (e.g. Alaol). Bengali literature reached its full expression in the nineteenth century, with its greatest icons being poets Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Bangladesh also has a long tradition in folk literature, for example *Maimansingha Gitika*, *Thakurmar Jhuli* and stories related to *Gopal Bhar*.



Celebrations of the Pohela Baishakh at Dhaka.

The musical tradition of Bangladesh is lyrics-based (*Baniprodhan*), with minimal instrumental accompaniment. The Baul tradition is a distinctive element of Bengali folk music. Numerous other musical traditions exist including Gombhira, Bhatiali and Bhawaiya, varying from one region to the next. Folk music is often accompanied by the *ektara*, an instrument with only one string. Other instruments include the *dotara*, *dhol*, flute and *tabla*. Bangladesh also has an active heritage in North Indian classical music. Similarly, Bangladeshi dance forms draw from folk traditions, especially those of the tribal groups, as well as the broader Indian dance tradition.^[94]

Bangladesh produces about 80 films a year.^[95] Mainstream Hindi films are also quite popular.^[96] Around 200 daily newspapers are published in Bangladesh, along with more than 500 periodicals. However, regular readership is low at just under 15% of the population.^[97] Bangladeshis listen to a variety of local and national radio programs like Bangladesh Betar. Four private FM radio stations named (Radio Foorti, ABC Radio, Radio Today, Radio Amar) are among urban youths. International Bengali language broadcasts include BBC Bangla and Voice of America. The dominant television channel is the state-owned Bangladesh Television, but in the last few years, privately owned channels have developed considerably.

The culinary tradition of Bangladesh has close relations to Indian and Middle Eastern cuisine as well as having its own unique traits. Rice, and curry are traditional favorites. Bangladeshis make distinctive sweetmeats from milk products, some common ones being *Rôshogolla*, *chômchôm* and *kalojam*.

The sari (*shari*) is by far the most widely worn dress by Bangladeshi women. A guild of weavers in Dhaka is renowned for producing saris from exquisite Jamdani muslin. The salwar kameez (*shaloar kamiz*) is also quite popular, and in urban areas some women wear western attire. Among men, western attire is more widely adopted. Men also wear the *kurta-paejama* combination, often on religious occasions, and the *lungi*, a kind of long skirt.

Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha, being the most important holidays in the Islamic calendar, are the subject of major festivals. The day before Eid ul-Fitr is called *Chād Rat* (the night of the moon) and is often celebrated with firecrackers. Major Hindu festivals are Durga Puja, Kali Puja and Saraswati Puja. Buddha Purnima, which marks the birth of Gautama Buddha, and Christmas, called *Bôṛodîn* (Great day), are both national holidays. The most important secular festival is Pohela Baishakh or Bengali New Year, the beginning of the Bengali calendar. Other festivities include Nobanno, *Poush parbon* (festival of Poush) and observance of national days like Shohid Dibosh and Victory Day.

Sports

Cricket enjoys a passionate following in Bangladesh and it is the most popular sport followed by football (soccer). The national cricket team participated in their first World Cup in 1999, and the following year was granted elite Test cricket status. But they have struggled to date, recording only two Test match victories against Zimbabwe in 2005 and the West Indies in 2009.^[98] In July, 2010, they celebrated their first ever win over England in any form of match. Later in 2010, they managed to whitewash New Zealand for the first time in history. In 2011, Bangladesh is going to host the ICC Cricket World Cup 2011 jointly with India and Sri Lanka.

In Asiad 2010 in Guangzhou they defeated Afghanistan to claim Gold Medal in the first ever cricket tournament held in Asian Games.

Hadudu (Kabaddi) is the national sport of Bangladesh. Other popular sports include field hockey, tennis, badminton, handball, volleyball, chess, shooting and carrom. The Bangladesh Sports Control Board regulates twenty-nine different sporting federations.

See also

- List of Bangladesh-related articles

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- Bangladesh (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html>) entry at *The World Factbook*
- Bangladeh Vision GURUMIA (<http://www.gurumia.com>)|
- Bangladesh (<http://www.dmoz.org/Regional/Asia/Bangladesh/>) at the Open Directory Project
- Wikimedia Atlas of Bangladesh
- Bangladesh travel guide from Wikitravel

bjn:Bangladesh

Bhutan

<div>Kingdom of Bhutan</div> <div>འབྲུག་གཡེ་ཁམ་</div> <div>'Brug Gyal-khab (Wylie)</div> <div>Dru Gäkhap</div>		
<div><div></div><div></div></div>		
<div>Anthem: <i>Druk Tsendhen</i></div>		
<div></div>		
Capital		Thimphu
Official language(s)		Dzongkha
Demonym		Bhutanese
Government		Constitutional democratic monarchy
-	King	Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck
-	Prime Minister	Jigme Y. Thinley
Formation		Early 17th century
-	Wangchuk Dynasty	17 December 1907
-	Constitutional Monarchy	2007
Area		
-	Total	38,816 km ² 14987 sq mi
-	Water (%)	<1 (estimate)
Population		
-	July 2009 estimate	691,141 ^[1] (161st)
-	2005 census	634,982 ^[2]

-	Density	18.1/km ² (154th) 47/sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2009 estimate
-	Total	\$3.518 billion ^[3]
-	Per capita	\$5,212 ^[3]
GDP (nominal)		2009 estimate
-	Total	\$1.269 billion ^[3]
-	Per capita	\$1,880 ^[3]
HDI (2007)		▲ 0.619 ^[4] (medium) (132nd)
Currency		Ngultrum ² (BTN)
Time zone		BTT (UTC+6:00)
-	Summer (DST)	not observed (UTC+6:00)
Drives on the		left
ISO 3166 code		BT
Internet TLD		.bt
Calling code		975
1	The population of Bhutan had been estimated based on the reported figure of about 1 million in the 1970s when the country had joined the United Nations and precise statistics were lacking. ^[5] Thus using the annual increase rate of 2–3%, the most population estimates were around 2 million in the year 2000. A national census was carried out in 2005 and it turned out that the population was 672,425. Consequently, United Nations Population Division had down-estimated the country's population in the 2006 revision ^[6] for the whole period from 1950 to 2050.	
2	Indian rupee is also legal tender	

Geographical coordinates: 27°25′01″N 90°26′06″E

Bhutan, officially the **Kingdom of Bhutan** (pronounced English pronunciation: /buːˈtʌːn/ (ⓘ listen); Dzongkha: འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་; Wylie: *'drug yul*; Tibetan pinyin: *Zhugyü*), is a small landlocked country in South Asia, located at the eastern end of the Himalayas and bordered to the south, east and west by the Republic of India and to the north by the People's Republic of China. Bhutan is separated from the nearby country of Nepal to the west by the Indian state of Sikkim, and from Bangladesh to the south by West Bengal.

Bhutan existed as a patchwork of minor warring fiefdoms until the early 17th century, when the area was unified by the Tibetan lama and military leader Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who fled religious persecution in Tibet and cultivated a separate Bhutanese identity. In the early 20th century, Bhutan came under the influence of the British Empire, followed by Indian influence upon Indian independence. In 2006, *Business Week* magazine rated Bhutan the happiest country in Asia and the eighth-happiest in the world based on a global survey.^[7]

Bhutan's landscape ranges from subtropical plains in the south to the Sub-alpine Himalayan heights in the north, with some peaks exceeding 7000 metres (23000 ft). The state religion is Vajrayana Buddhism, and the population of 691,141 is predominantly Buddhist, with Hinduism the second-largest religion. The capital and largest city is Thimphu. After centuries of absolute monarchy, Bhutan held its first democratic elections in March 2008. Bhutan is a member of the United Nations and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); it hosted the sixteenth SAARC summit in April 2010. The total area of the country is currently 38816 square kilometres (14987 sq mi).^[8]

Name

"Bhutan" may be derived from the Sanskrit word *Bhu-Utthan* (भू-उत्थान; highlands). In another theory of Sanskritisation, *Bhoṭa-anta* (भोट-अन्त) means "At the end of Tibet", as Bhutan is immediately to Tibet's south.

Historically Bhutan was known by many names, such as *Lho Mon* (southern land of darkness), *Lho Tsendenjong* (southern land of the *Tsenden* cypress), *Lhomen Khazhi* (southern land of four approaches) and *Lho Men Jong* (southern land of medicinal herbs).^[9]

History

Stone tools, weapons, elephants, and remnants of large stone structures provide evidence that Bhutan was inhabited as early as 2000 BC, although there are no existing records from that time. Historians have theorized that the state of *Lhomon* (literally, "southern darkness", a reference to the indigenous Mon religion), or *Monyul* ("Dark Land", a reference to the Monpa, the aboriginal peoples of Bhutan) may have existed between 500 BC and AD 600. The names *Lhomon Tsendenjong* (Sandalwood Country), and *Lhomon Khashi*, or Southern Mon (country of four approaches), have been found in ancient Bhutanese and Tibetan chronicles.^[10]

The earliest transcribed event in Bhutan was the passage of the Buddhist saint Padma Sambhava (also known as Guru Rinpoche) in 747.^[11] Bhutan's early history is unclear, because most of the records were destroyed after fire ravaged the ancient capital, Punakha, in 1827.^[12] By the 10th century, Bhutan's political development was heavily influenced by its religious history. Various sub-sects of Buddhism emerged which were patronized by the various Mongol warlords. After the decline of the Mongols in the 14th century, these sub-sects vied with each other for supremacy in the political and religious landscape, eventually leading to the ascendancy of the Drukpa sub-sect by the 16th century.

Until the early 17th century, Bhutan existed as a patchwork of minor warring fiefdoms, when the area was unified by the Tibetan lama and military leader Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal who fled religious persecution in Tibet. To defend the country against intermittent Tibetan forays, Namgyal built a network of impregnable *dzong* (fortresses), and promulgated a code of law that helped to bring local lords under centralized control. Many such *dzong* still exist and are active centers of religion and district administration. Portuguese Jesuit Estêvão Cacella and another priest were the first recorded Europeans to visit Bhutan on their way to Tibet. They met with Ngawang Namgyal, presented him with firearms, gunpowder and a telescope, and offered him their services in the war against Tibet, but the Shabdrung declined the offer. After a stay of nearly eight months Cacella wrote a long letter from the Chagri Monastery reporting on his travels. This is a rare extant report of the Shabdrung.^[13]

After Namgyal's death in 1651, Bhutan fell into civil war. Taking advantage of the chaos, the Tibetans attacked Bhutan in 1710, and again in 1730 with the help of the Mongols. Both assaults were successfully thwarted, and an armistice was signed in 1759.

In the 18th century, the Bhutanese invaded and occupied the kingdom of Cooch Behar to the south. In 1772, Cooch Behar appealed to the British East India Company which assisted them in ousting the Bhutanese, and later in attacking Bhutan itself in 1774. A peace treaty was signed in which Bhutan agreed to retreat to its pre-1730 borders. However, the peace was tenuous, and border skirmishes with the British were to continue for the next 100 years. The skirmishes eventually led to the Duar War (1864–1865), a confrontation for control of the Bengal Duars. After Bhutan lost the war, the Treaty of Sinchula was signed between British India and Bhutan. As part of the war reparations, the Duars were ceded to the United Kingdom in exchange for a rent of Rs. 50,000. The treaty ended all hostilities between British India and Bhutan.



Map of Bhutan.

During the 1870s, power struggles between the rival valleys of Paro and Tongsa led to civil war in Bhutan, eventually leading to the ascendancy of Ugyen Wangchuck, the *ponlop* (governor) of Tongsa. From his power base in central Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck defeated his political enemies and united the country following several civil wars and rebellions in the period 1882–1885.

In 1907, an epochal year for the country, Ugyen Wangchuck was unanimously chosen as the hereditary king of the country by an assembly of leading Buddhist monks, government officials, and heads of important families. The British government promptly recognized the new monarchy, and in 1910 Bhutan signed a treaty which "let" Great Britain "guide" Bhutan's foreign affairs. In reality, this did not mean much given Bhutan's historical reticence. It also did not seem to apply to Bhutan's traditional relations with Tibet.

After India gained independence from the United Kingdom on 15 August 1947, Bhutan became one of the first countries to recognize India's independence. A treaty similar to that of 1910 in which Britain gained power with respect to Bhutan's foreign relations was signed 8 August 1949 with the newly independent India.



A *thrikheb* (throne cover) from the 19th century. Throne covers were placed atop the temple cushions used by high lamas. The central circular swirling quadrune is the Gankyil in its mode as the "Four Joys".

In 1953, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck established the country's legislature – a 130-member National Assembly – to promote a more democratic form of governance. In 1965, he set up a Royal Advisory Council, and in 1968 he formed a Cabinet. In 1971, Bhutan was admitted to the United Nations, having held observer status for three years. In July 1972, Jigme Singye Wangchuck ascended to the throne at the age of 16 after the death of his father, Dorji Wangchuck.

In late 2003, the Bhutanese army successfully launched a large-scale operation to flush out anti-India insurgents who were operating training camps in southern Bhutan.

It is called Operation: All Clear and the Royal Bhutan Army drove out the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), and Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) insurgent groups hiding in Bhutan's jungles.



The Trongsa Dzong.

Democratic reform and modernization

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck introduced significant political reforms, transferring most of his administrative powers to the Council of Cabinet Ministers and allowing for impeachment of the King by a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly.^[14]

In 1999, the government lifted a ban on television and the Internet, making Bhutan one of the last countries to introduce television. In his speech, the King said that television was a critical step to the modernisation of Bhutan as well as a major contributor to the country's Gross National Happiness (Bhutan is the only country to measure happiness^[15]), but warned that the "misuse" of television could erode traditional Bhutanese values.^[16]

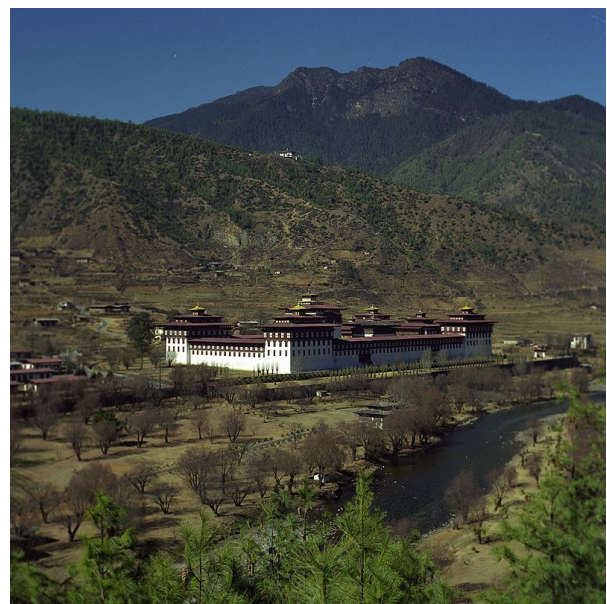
A new constitution was presented in early 2005. In December 2005, Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced that he would abdicate the throne in his son's favor in 2008. On 14 December 2006, he announced that he would be abdicating immediately. This was followed with the first national parliamentary elections in December 2007 and March 2008.

On November 6, 2008, 28-year old Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, eldest son of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, was crowned King.^[17]

Government and politics

Bhutan's political system has developed from an absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy. In 1999, the fourth king of Bhutan created a body called the Lhengye Zhungtshog (Council of Ministers). The *Druk Gyalpo* (King of Druk Yul) is head of state. Executive power is exercised by the Lhengye Zhungtshog, the council of ministers. Legislative power was vested in both the government and the former Grand National Assembly.

On the 17th of December 2005, the 4th King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, announced to a stunned nation that the first general elections would be held in 2008, and that he would abdicate the throne in favor of his eldest son, the crown prince.^[18] King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck took the throne on December 14, 2006 upon his father's abdication. Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck was adorned with Bhutan's Raven Crown at an ornate coronation ceremony in Thimphu on Thursday, November 6, 2008, becoming the world's youngest reigning monarch and head of the newest democracy.^[19]



View of Tashichoedzong, Thimphu, seat of the Bhutanese government since 1952.

The new democratic system comprises an upper and lower house, the latter based on political party affiliations. Elections for the upper house (National Council) were held on December 31, 2007, while elections for the lower house, the 47-seat National Assembly, were held on March 24, 2008. Two political parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) headed by Sangay Ngedup, and the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) headed by Jigmi Thinley, competed in the National Assembly election. The Druk Phuensum Tshogpa won the elections taking 45 out of 47 seats in the parliament.^[20]

Judicial power is vested in the courts of Bhutan. The Chief Justice is the administrative head of the Judiciary.

Military and foreign affairs

The Royal Bhutan Army is Bhutan's military service. It includes the Royal Bodyguard and the Royal Bhutan Police. Membership is voluntary, and the minimum age for recruitment is 18. The standing army numbers about 16,000 and is trained by the Indian Army.^[21] It has an annual budget of about US\$13.7 million — 1.8 percent of the GDP. Being a landlocked country, Bhutan has no navy.

In 2007, Bhutan and India signed a new treaty that clarified that Bhutan was master of its own foreign relations, superseding the treaty signed in 1949. The superseded treaty is still sometimes misinterpreted to mean that India controls Bhutan's foreign affairs, but the government of Bhutan handles all of its own foreign affairs, including the sensitive (to India) border demarcation issue with China. Bhutan has diplomatic relations with 21 countries, and with the European Union, with missions in India, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Kuwait. It has two UN missions, one in New York and one in Geneva. Only India and Bangladesh have residential embassies in Bhutan, while Thailand has a consulate office in Bhutan.

By a long standing treaty, Indian and Bhutanese citizens may travel to each other's countries without a passport or visa using their national identity cards instead. Bhutanese citizens may also work in India without legal restriction. Bhutan does not have formal diplomatic ties with its northern neighbour, the People's Republic of China, although

exchanges of visits at various levels between the two have significantly increased in recent times. The first bilateral agreement between China (PRC) and Bhutan was signed in 1998, and Bhutan has also set up honorary consulates in Macau and Hong Kong. Bhutan's border with China is largely not demarcated and thus disputed in some places. Approximately 269 square kilometers remain under discussion between China and Bhutan.^[22]

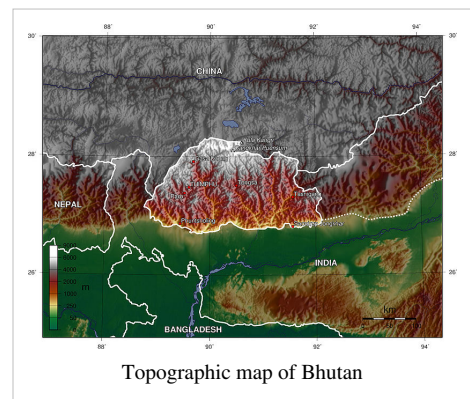
On 13 November 2005, Chinese soldiers crossed into the disputed territories between China and Bhutan, and began building roads and bridges.^[23] Bhutanese Foreign Minister Khandu Wangchuk took up the matter with Chinese authorities after the issue was raised in the Bhutanese parliament. In response, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang of the People's Republic of China has said that the border remains in dispute and that the two sides are continuing to work for a peaceful and cordial resolution of the dispute.^[24] An Indian intelligence officer has said that a Chinese delegation in Bhutan told the Bhutanese that they were "overreacting." The Bhutanese newspaper *Kuensel* has said that China might use the roads to further Chinese claims along the border.^[23]

On 8 February 2007, the Indo-Bhutan Friendship Treaty^[25] PDF (30.6 KB) was substantially revised. In the Treaty of 1949^[26] Article 2 states: "The Government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part the Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations." In the revised treaty it now reads as "In keeping with the abiding ties of close friendship and cooperation between Bhutan and India, the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Government of the Republic of India shall cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests. Neither government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other." The revised treaty also includes this preamble: "Reaffirming their respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity", an element that was absent in the earlier version. The Indo-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 2007 clarifies Bhutan's status as an independent and sovereign nation.

Bhutan has no formal relations with the United States,^[27] Russia, China, the United Kingdom or France. Informal contact with the United States is made through the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi.^[27]

Geography

The Kingdom of Bhutan is nestled in the southern slopes of the eastern Himalayas, and landlocked between the Tibet Autonomous Region to the north and the Indian states of Sikkim, Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to the west and south. The land consists mostly of steep and high mountains crisscrossed by a network of swift rivers, which form deep valleys before draining into the Indian plains. Elevation rises from 200 m (660 ft) in the southern foothills to more than 7000 m (23000 ft). This great geographical diversity combined with equally diverse climate conditions contributes to Bhutan's outstanding range of biodiversity and ecosystems.^[8]



The northern region of the country consists of an arc of Eastern Himalayan alpine shrub and meadows reaching up to glaciated mountain peaks with an extremely cold climate at the highest elevations. Most peaks in the north are over 7000 m (23000 ft) above sea level; the highest point in Bhutan is Gangkhar Puensum at 7570 metres (24840 ft), which has the distinction of being the highest unclimbed mountain in the world.^[1] The lowest point, at 98 m (322 ft), is in the valley of Drangme Chhu, where the river crosses the border

with India.^[1] Watered by snow-fed rivers, alpine valleys in this region provide pasture for livestock, tended by a sparse population of migratory shepherds.

The Black Mountains in the central region of Bhutan form a watershed between two major river systems: the Mo Chhu and the Drangme Chhu. Peaks in the Black Mountains range between 1500 and 2700 m (4900 and 8900 ft) above sea level, and fast-flowing rivers have carved out deep gorges in the lower mountain areas. The forests of the central Bhutan mountains consist of Eastern Himalayan subalpine conifer forests in higher elevations and Eastern Himalayan broadleaf forests in lower elevations. Woodlands of the central region provide most of Bhutan's forest production. The Torsa, Raidak, Sankosh, and Manas are the main rivers of Bhutan, flowing through this region. Most of the population lives in the central highlands.

In the south, the Shivalik Hills are covered with dense Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests, alluvial lowland river valleys, and mountains up to around 1500 m (4900 ft) above sea level. The foothills descend into the subtropical Duars Plain. Most of the Duars is located in India, although a 10 to 15 km (6.2 to 9.3 mi) wide strip extends into Bhutan. The Bhutan Duars is divided into two parts: the northern and the southern Duars. The northern Duars, which abuts the Himalayan foothills, has rugged, sloping terrain and dry, porous soil with dense vegetation and abundant wildlife. The southern Duars has moderately fertile soil, heavy savannah grass, dense, mixed jungle, and freshwater springs. Mountain rivers, fed by either the melting snow or the monsoon rains, empty into the Brahmaputra River in India. Data released by the Ministry of Agriculture showed that the country had a forest cover of 64% as of October 2005.

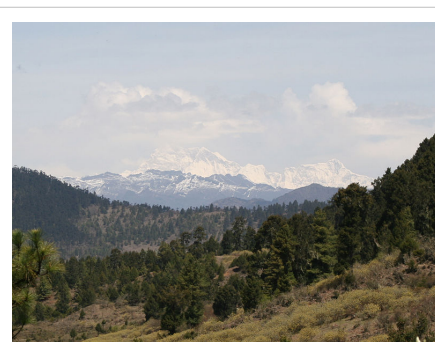
Climate

The climate in Bhutan varies with altitude, from subtropical in the south to temperate in the highlands and polar-type climate, with year-round snow, in the north. Bhutan experiences five distinct seasons: summer, monsoon, autumn, winter and spring. Western Bhutan has the heavier monsoon rains; southern Bhutan has hot humid summers and cool winters; central and eastern Bhutan is temperate and drier than the west with warm summers and cool winters.

Wildlife

More than 770 species of bird and 5,400 species of plants are known to occur throughout the kingdom.

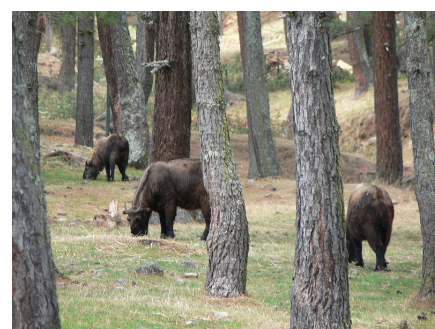
The Bengal tiger, Greater One-horned Rhinoceros, golden langur, clouded leopard, hispid hare and the sloth bear live in the lush tropical lowland and hardwood forests in the south. In the temperate zone, grey langur, tiger, Indian leopard, goral and serow are found in mixed conifer, broadleaf and pine forests. Fruit bearing trees and bamboo provide habitat for the Himalayan black bear, red panda, squirrel, sambar, wild pig and barking deer. The alpine habitats of the great



Gangkhar Puensum from Ura La, Bhutan



Jacaranda trees in Bhutan



The Takin is Bhutan's national animal.

Himalayan range in the north are home to the snow leopard, blue sheep, marmot, Tibetan wolf, antelope and Himalayan musk deer.

Fauna

Mammals *See List of mammals of Bhutan for more information*

- Argali
- Asian Elephant
- Asiatic Black Bear
- Golden Langur
- Binturong
- Tiger
- Dhole
- Snow Leopard
- Takin
- Gray Wolf

Conservation Significance

The Eastern Himalayas have been identified as a global biodiversity hotspot and counted among the 234 globally outstanding ecoregions of the world in a comprehensive analysis of global biodiversity undertaken by WWF between 1995-97. Bhutan is seen as a model for proactive conservation initiatives. The Kingdom has received international acclaim for its commitment to the maintenance of its biodiversity. This is reflected in the decision to maintain at least sixty percent of the land area under forest cover, to designate more than a quarter of its territory as national parks, reserves and other protected areas, and most recently to identify a further nine percent of land area as biodiversity corridors linking the protected areas. Environmental conservation has been placed at the core of the nation's development strategy, the middle path. It is not treated as a sector but rather as a set of concerns that must be mainstreamed in Bhutan's overall approach to development planning and to be buttressed by the force of law

Conservation Issues

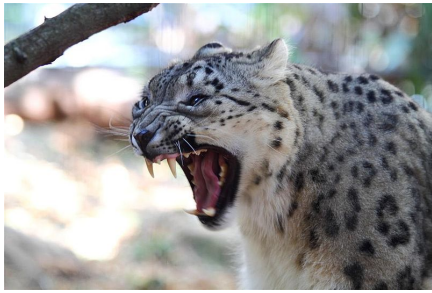
Although Bhutan's natural heritage is still largely intact, the Government has rightly recognised that it cannot be taken for granted and that conservation of the natural environment must be considered one of the challenges that will need to be addressed in the years ahead.

Pressures on the natural environment are already evident and will be fuelled by a complex array of forces. They include population pressures, agricultural modernisation, poaching, hydro-power development, mineral extraction, industrialisation, urbanisation, sewage and waste disposal, tourism, competition for available land road construction and the provision of other physical infrastructure associated with social and economic development.

Policy implementation needs to be continually improved. Sustainable rural livelihoods that do not rely solely upon natural resource use need to be developed and supported. and there needs to be far wider understanding of the environmental threats that come hand in hand with development, to ensure the future of Bhutan's rich and diverse environment.



The most endangered Asia top predator of 2010, the dhole is on edge of extinction. There remain less than 2500 members of species in the world.



Snow leopard showing teeth at Taronga Zoo,
Australia

Economy

The Ngultrum is the currency of Bhutan and its value is pegged to the Indian rupee. The rupee is also accepted as legal tender in the country.

Though Bhutan's economy is one of the world's smallest, it has grown rapidly in recent years, by eight percent in 2005 and 14 percent in 2006. In 2007, Bhutan had the second fastest growing economy in the world, with an annual economic growth rate of 22.4 percent. This was mainly due to the commissioning of the gigantic Tala Hydroelectricity project. As of March 2006, Bhutan's per capita income was US\$1,321.

Bhutan's economy is based on agriculture, forestry, tourism and the sale of hydroelectric power to India. Agriculture provides the main livelihood for more than 80 percent of the population. Agrarian practices consist largely of subsistence farming and animal husbandry. Handicrafts, particularly weaving and the manufacture of religious art for home altars, are a small cottage industry. A landscape that varies from hilly to ruggedly mountainous has made the building of roads and other infrastructure difficult and expensive. This, and a lack of access to the sea, has meant that Bhutan has not been able to benefit from significant trading of its produce. Bhutan does not have any railways, though Indian Railways plans to link southern Bhutan to its vast network under an agreement signed in January 2005.^[28] Bhutan and India signed a 'free trade' accord in 2008, which additionally allowed Bhutanese imports and exports from third markets to transit India without tariffs.^[29] Bhutan had trade relations with the Tibet region until 1960, when it closed its border with China after an influx of refugees.^[30]

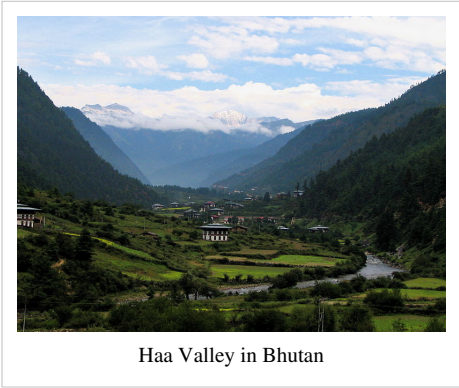
The industrial sector is in a nascent stage, and though most production comes from cottage industry, larger industries are being encouraged and some industries such as cement, steel, and ferroalloy have been set up. Most development projects, such as road construction, rely on Indian contract labour. Agricultural produce includes rice, chilies, dairy (some yak, mostly cow) products, buckwheat, barley, root crops, apples, and citrus and maize at lower elevations. Industries include cement, wood products, processed fruits, alcoholic beverages and calcium carbide.

Incomes of over Nu 100,000 per annum are taxed, but very few wage and salary earners qualify. Bhutan's inflation rate was estimated at about three percent in 2003. Bhutan has a Gross Domestic Product of around USD 2.913 billion (adjusted to Purchasing Power Parity), making it the 162nd largest economy in the world.



The Ngultrum is the currency of Bhutan

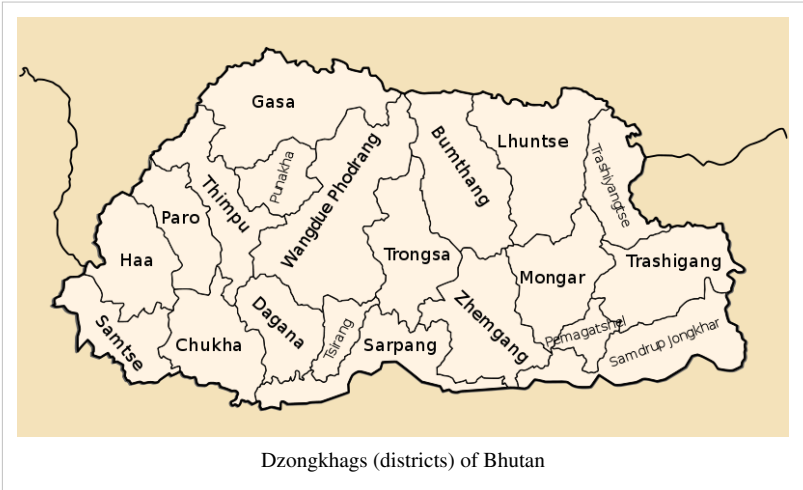
Per capita income is around \$1,400,^[1] ranked 124th. Government revenues total \$272 million, though expenditures amount to \$350 million. 60 percent of the budget expenditure, however, is financed by India's Ministry of External Affairs.^[31] Bhutan's exports, principally electricity, cardamom, gypsum, timber, handicrafts, cement, fruit, precious stones and spices, total €128 million (2000 est.). Imports, however, amount to €164 million, leading to a trade deficit. Main items imported include fuel and lubricants, grain, machinery, vehicles, fabrics and rice. Bhutan's main export partner is India, accounting for 58.6 percent of its export goods. Hong Kong (30.1 percent) and Bangladesh (7.3 percent) are the other two top export partners.^[1] As its border with Tibet is closed, trade between Bhutan and China is now almost non-existent. Bhutan's import partners include India (74.5 percent), Japan (7.4 percent) and Sweden (3.2 percent).



Haa Valley in Bhutan

Districts

Bhutan is divided into four *dzongdey* (administrative zones). Each dzongdey is further divided into *dzongkhag* (districts). There are twenty dzongkhags in Bhutan. Large dzongkhags are further divided into subdistricts known as *dungkhag*. At the basic level, groups of villages form a constituency called *gewog* (blocks) and are administered by a *gup*, who is elected by the people.



Dzongkhags (districts) of Bhutan

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Bumthang | • Samdrup Jongkhar |
| • Chukha (old spelling: <i>Chhukha</i>) | • Samtse (<i>Samchi</i>) |
| • Dagana | • Sarpang (old spelling: <i>Sarbhong</i>) |
| • Gasar | • Thimphu |
| • Haa | • Trashigang (<i>Tashigang</i>) |
| • Lhuntse | • Trashiyangtse |
| • Mongar | • Trongsa (<i>Tongsa</i>) |
| • Paro | • Tsirang (<i>Chirang</i>) |
| • Pemagatshel (<i>Pemagatsetl</i>) | • Wangdue Phodrang (<i>Wangdi Phodrang</i>) |
| • Punakha | • Zhemgang (<i>Shemgang</i>) |

Cities and towns

- Thimphu, the largest city and capital of Bhutan.
- Damphu, the administrative headquarters of Tsirang District
- Jakar, the administrative headquarters of Bumthang District and the place where Buddhism entered Bhutan.
- Mongar, the eastern commercial hub of the country.
- Paro, site of the international airport.
- Phuentsholing, Bhutan's commercial hub.
- Punakha, the old capital.
- Samdrup Jongkhar The aouth eastern town on the border with India
- Trashigang, administrative headquarters of Trashigang District the most populous district in the country.
- Trongsa, in central Bhutan which has the largest and the most magnificent of all the dzongs in Bhutan.

Demographics

Bhutanese people primarily consist of the Ngalops and Sharchops, called the Western Bhutanese and Eastern Bhutanese respectively. The Ngalops primarily consist of Bhutanese living in the western part of the country. Their culture is closely related to that of Tibet. Much the same could be said of the Sharchops, the dominant group, who originate from the eastern part of Bhutan (but who traditionally follow the Nyingmapa rather than the official Drukpa Kagyu form of Tibetan Buddhism). In modern times, with improved transportation infrastructure, there has been much intermarriage between these groups. In the early 1970s, intermarriage between the Lhotshampas and mainstream Bhutanese society was encouraged by the government.

The national language is Dzongkha, one of 53 languages in the Tibetan language family. The script, here called *Chhokey* ("Dharma Language"), is identical to classical Tibetan. In the schools English is the medium of instruction and Dzongkha is taught as the national language. Ethnologue lists 24 languages currently spoken in Bhutan, all of them in the Tibeto-Burman family, except Nepali, an Indo-Aryan language. Until the 1980s, the government sponsored the teaching of Nepali in schools in Southern Bhutan. However, after the armed uprising in the south, Nepali was dropped from the curriculum. The languages of Bhutan are still not well-characterized, and several have yet to be recorded in an in-depth academic grammar. Before 1990s, Lhotshampa (Nepali-speaking community), mainly based on southern

Bhutan constituted of approx. 49% of population. However, during 1990s, after the Bhutanese government followed the policy of one language and one culture, these Lhotshampas were forced to wear the national costume of Bhutan, which is not conducive to the high temperature region in South. Then, protest were started to this cultural discrimination, that led to eviction of more than 100,000 Lhotshampas. These Lhotshampas take refuge in Nepal via India. Those residing in Bhutan are still in threat from government. All the bilateral talks between Nepal and Bhutan to repatriate Bhutanese refugees (Lhotshampas) have been turned futile. Hence, now, UNHCR is helping the refugees to settle in various developed countries such as Norway, USA, Canada and many others.



The Taktshang Monastery, also known as the "Tiger's Nest". Bhutan is a predominantly Buddhist country.

Religions of Bhutan	
religion	percent
Buddhism	76%
Hinduism	23%
Others	1%

The literacy rate is 59.5 percent.^[32] The country has a median age of 22.3 years.^[33] Bhutan has a life expectancy of 62.2 years (61 for males and 64.5 for females) according to the latest data from the World Bank. There are 1,070 males to every 1,000 females in the country.

Religion

It is estimated that between two thirds and three quarters of the Bhutanese population follow Vajrayana Buddhism, which is also the state religion. About one quarter to one third are followers of Hinduism. Muslim and non-religious communities account for less than 1% of the population.^[34] The current legal framework, in principle guarantees freedom of religion; proselytism, however, is forbidden by a royal government decision.^[34]

Buddhism was introduced to Bhutan in the 7th century AD. According to legend, Guru Rinpoche ordered the Tibetan king Trisong Detsen to have 108 temples built all over the Himalayas. Doing so would aid in subduing a demoness and allow for the construction of Samye Temple in Tibet. Two of the 108 temples are in Bhutan, one in Paro and the other in Bumthang and were built around AD 637.

Language

Bhutanese, or Dzongkha, is the language of the Ngalop. It is a Southern Tibetan language that is partially intelligible with Sikkimese and spoken natively by 25% of the population. Tshangla, the language of the Sharchop and the principal pre-Tibetan language of Bhutan, is spoken by a similar number of people. It is not easily classified and may constitute an independent branch of Tibeto-Burman. Nepali constituted some 40% of the population as of 2006. The larger minority languages are Dzala (11%), Limbu (10%, immigrant), and Kheng (8%).^[35]

Culture

Bhutan has a rich and unique cultural heritage that has largely remained intact because of its isolation from the rest of the world until the early 1960s. One of the main attractions for tourists is the country's culture and traditions. Bhutanese tradition is deeply steeped in its Buddhist heritage.^[36] Hinduism is the second dominant religion in Bhutan, being most prevalent in the southern regions.^[37] The government is increasingly making efforts to preserve and sustain the current culture and traditions of the country. Because of its largely unspoiled natural environment and cultural heritage, Bhutan has been referred to as *The Last Shangri-la*.

While Bhutanese citizens are free to travel abroad, Bhutan is viewed as inaccessible by many foreigners. There is a widespread misconception that Bhutan has set limits on tourist visas. Another reason for it being an unpopular destination is the cost, which is high for tourists on tighter budgets. Entry is free for citizens of India and Bangladesh, but all other foreigners are required to sign up with a Bhutanese tour operator and pay around \$200 per day that they stay in the country.

The National Dress for Bhutanese men is the *gho*, a knee-length robe tied at the waist by a cloth belt known as the *ker*a. Women wear an ankle-length dress, the *kira*, which is clipped at one shoulder and tied at the waist. An accompaniment to the kira is a long-sleeved blouse, the *toego*, which is worn underneath the outer layer. Social status and class determine the texture, colours, and decorations that embellish the garments. Differently coloured scarves and shawls are important indicators of social standing, as Bhutan has traditionally been a feudal society. Jewellery is mostly worn by women, especially during religious festivals and public gatherings. To strengthen Bhutan's identity as an independent country, Bhutanese law requires all Bhutanese citizens to wear the national dress in public areas and as formal wear.

Rice, buckwheat, and increasingly maize, are the staple foods of the country. The local diet also includes pork, beef, yak meat, chicken, and mutton. Soups and stews of meat and dried vegetables spiced with chillies and cheese are prepared. *Ema datshi*, made very spicy with cheese and chillies, might be called the national dish for its ubiquity and the pride that Bhutanese have for it. Dairy foods, particularly butter and cheese from yaks and cows, are also popular, and indeed almost all milk is turned to butter and cheese. Popular beverages include butter tea, tea, locally brewed rice wine and beer. Bhutan is the only country in the world to have banned the sale of tobacco.



Bhutanese thanka of Mt. Meru and the Buddhist Universe, 19th century, Tongsa Dzong, Tongsa, Bhutan.

Bhutan's national sport is archery, and competitions are held regularly in most villages. It differs from Olympic standards in technical details such as the placement of the targets and atmosphere. There are two targets placed over 100 meters apart and teams shoot from one end of the field to the other. Each member of the team shoots two arrows per round. Traditional Bhutanese archery is a social event and competitions are organized between villages, towns, and amateur teams. There are usually plenty of food and drink complete with singing and dancing. Attempts to distract an opponent include standing around the target and making fun of the shooter's ability. Darts (*khuru*) is an equally popular outdoor team sport, in which heavy wooden darts pointed with a 10 cm nail are thrown at a paperback-sized target 10 to 20 meters away.

Another traditional sport is the *Digor*, which resembles the shot put and horseshoe throwing. Cricket has gained popularity in Bhutan, particularly since the introduction of television channels from India. The Bhutan national cricket team is one of the more successful affiliate nations in the region. Football is also an increasingly popular sport. In 2002, Bhutan's national football team played Montserrat, in what was billed as The Other Final; the match took place on the same day Brazil played Germany in the World Cup final, but at the time Bhutan and Montserrat were the world's two lowest ranked teams. The match was held in Thimphu's Changlimithang National Stadium, and Bhutan won 4–0. A documentary of the match was made by the Dutch filmmaker Johan Kramer.

Rigsar is an emerging style of popular music in Bhutan, played on a mix of traditional instruments and electronic keyboards, and dates back to the early 1990s; it shows the influence of Indian popular music, a hybrid form of traditional and Western popular influences. Traditional genres include the *zhungdra* and *boedra*.

Characteristic of the region is a type of castle fortress known as the dzong. Since ancient times, the dzongs have served as the religious and secular administration centres for their respective districts.

Bhutan has numerous public holidays, most of which centre around traditional seasonal, secular and religious festivals. They include the winter solstice (around January 1, depending on the lunar calendar), the lunar New Year (February or March), the King's birthday and the anniversary of his coronation, the official start of monsoon season (September 22), National Day (December 17), and various Buddhist and Hindu celebrations.

Masked dances and dance dramas are common traditional features at festivals, usually accompanied by traditional music. Energetic dancers, wearing colourful wooden or composition face masks and stylized costumes, depict heroes, demons, dæmons, death heads, animals, gods, and caricatures of common people. The dancers enjoy royal patronage, and preserve ancient folk and religious customs and perpetuate the ancient lore and art of mask-making.



Changlimithang Stadium, during a parade.



Chaam, sacred masked dances, are annually performed during religious festivals.

Inheritance in Bhutan generally goes in the female rather than the male line. Daughters will inherit their parents' house. A man is expected to make his own way in the world and often moves to his wife's home. Love marriages are common in urban areas, but the tradition of arranged marriages is still common in the villages. Although uncommon, polygamy is accepted, often being a device to keep property in a contained family unit rather than dispersing it. The previous King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who abdicated in 2006, has 4 Queens, all of whom are sisters.

The University of Texas at El Paso in the United States has adopted Bhutanese architecture for its buildings on campus, as have the nearby Hilton Garden Inn and other buildings in the city of El Paso.^[38]

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bjn:Bhutan

Burma

<div>Republic of the Union of Myanmar</div> <div>ပြည်ထောင်စု သမ္မတ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်</div> <div>Pyidaunzu Thanmăda Myăma Nainngandaw</div>		
<div><div></div><div></div></div>		
<div>Anthem: <i>Kaba Ma Kyei</i></div>		
<div></div> <div>Location of Burma (green) in ASEAN dark grey</div>		
<div>Capital</div>		<div>Naypyidaw</div> <div>19°45'N 96°6'E</div>
<div>Largest city</div>		<div>Yangon (Rangoon)</div>
<div>Official language(s)</div>		<div>Burmese</div>
<div>Recognised regional languages</div>		<div>Jingpho, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Mon, Rakhine, Shan</div>
<div>Official scripts</div>		<div>Burmese script</div>
<div>Demonym</div>		<div>Burmese/Myanma</div>
<div>Government</div>		<div>Military Dictatorship</div>
-	<div>Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council</div>	<div>Sr. Gen. Than Shwe</div>
-	<div>Vice Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council</div>	<div>Vice-Sr. Gen. Maung Aye</div>
-	<div>Prime Minister</div>	<div>Thein Sein</div>
-	<div>Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council</div>	<div>Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo</div>
<div>Legislature</div>		<div>Pyidaungsu Hluttaw</div>
-	<div>Upper House</div>	<div>Amyotha Hluttaw</div>
-	<div>Lower House</div>	<div>Pyithu Hluttaw</div>
<div>Formation</div>		

-	Pagan Dynasty	23 December 849
-	Toungoo Dynasty	16 October 1510
-	Konbaung Dynasty	21 March 1752
-	Independence	4 January 1948 (from United Kingdom)
-	coup d'état	2 March 1962
Area		
-	Total	676,578 km ² (40th) 261,227 sq mi
-	Water (%)	3.06
Population		
-	2009 estimate	50,020,000 ^[1] (24th)
-	1983 census	33,234,000 (³)
-	Density	73.9/km ² (119th) 191.5/sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2009 estimate
-	Total	\$71.772 billion ^[2]
-	Per capita	\$1,197 ^[2]
GDP (nominal)		2009 estimate
-	Total	\$34.262 billion ^[2]
-	Per capita	\$571 ^[2]
HDI (2010)		▼ 0.451 ^[3] (low) (132nd)
Currency		kyat (K) (mmK)
Time zone		MST (UTC+6:30)
Drives on the		right ^[4]
Internet TLD		.mm
Calling code		95
1	Some governments recognise Rangoon as the national capital. ^[5]	
2	Estimates for this country take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected.	

Burma (English pronunciation: /ˈbɜrmə/ ([ⓘ] listen)), officially the **Republic of the Union of Myanmar** (US: /mjaːnˈmɑr/ ([ⓘ] listen); Burmese: ပြည်ထောင်စု ဖြစ်သော မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်, *Pyidaunzu Thanmāda Myāma Nainngandaw*, pronounced [pjìdāunzɯ̯ θàn̩məda̯ mjəmà nàiɴŋàndô̯]) is a country in Southeast Asia. The country is bordered by the People's Republic of China on the northeast, Laos on the east, Thailand on the southeast, Bangladesh on the west, India on the northwest, and the Bay of Bengal to the southwest, with the Andaman Sea defining its southern periphery. One-third of Burma's total perimeter of 1930 kilometres (1200 mi) forms an uninterrupted coastline. Burma is the second largest country by geographical area in Southeast Asia.^[6]

The country's culture, heavily influenced by those of its neighbours, is based on Theravada Buddhism intertwined with local elements. Burma's diverse population has played a major role in defining its politics, history, and

demographics in modern times, and the country continues to struggle to overcome its ethnic tensions. The military has dominated government since General Ne Win led a coup in 1962 that toppled the civilian government of U Nu. Burma remains under the tight control of the military-led State Peace and Development Council.

Etymology

The name "Burma" is derived from the Burmese word "Bamar" (ဗမာ), which in turn is the colloquial form of Myanmar (မြန်မာ) (or Mranma in old Burmese), both of which historically referred to the majority Burmans (or the Bamar). Depending on the register used the pronunciation would be "Bama" (pronounced [bəmə]), or "Myanmah" (pronounced [mjəmà]). The name "Burma" has been in use in English since the time of British colonial rule.

In 1989, the military government officially changed the English translations of many colonial-era names, including the name of the country to "Myanmar". This prompted one scholar to coin the term "Myanmarification" to refer to the top-down programme of political and cultural reform in the context of which the renaming was done. The renaming remains a contested issue.^[7]

While most of the name changes are closer to their actual Burmese pronunciations, many opposition groups and countries continue to oppose their use in English because they recognise neither the legitimacy of the ruling military government nor its authority to rename the country or towns in English.^[8] Various non-Burman ethnic groups choose to not recognise the name because the term Myanmar has historically been used as a label for the majority ethnic group, the Bamar, rather than for the country.^{[9] [10] [11]}

Various world entities have chosen to accept or reject the name change. The United Nations, of which Burma (under the name Myanmar) is a member, endorsed the name change five days after its announcement by the junta.^[12] However, governments of many countries including Australia, Canada, France,^[13] the United Kingdom and the United States^[14] still refer to the country as "Burma", with varying levels of recognition of the validity of the name change itself. Others, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the governments of Germany, India, Japan,^[15] Russia^[16] and the People's Republic of China recognise "Myanmar" as the official name.

Media usage is also mixed. In spite of the usage by the US government, some American news outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The International Herald Tribune* and CNN, and international news agencies the *Associated Press*, *Reuters* and *Agence France-Presse* have adopted the name "Myanmar". The name "Burma" is still widely used by other news outlets, including Voice of America, *The Washington Post*, the BBC, ITN and most British newspapers, *The Times of India* and *Time*. Other sources often use combined terms such as "Burma, also known as Myanmar." Some media outlets that use "Myanmar" refer to "Burma" as the nation's "colonial name."^{[17] [18] [19]}

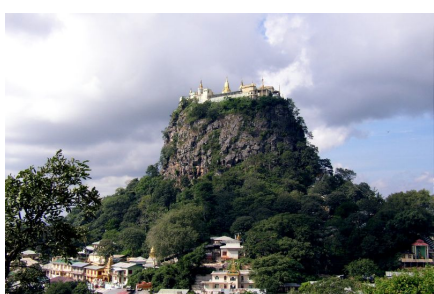
Uncertainty among English speakers on how to pronounce "Myanmar" gives rise to pronunciations such as English pronunciation: /'mjɑːn.mɑr/, /maɪ.ən'mɑr/, /'miː.ən.mɑr/ and /miː'æn.mɑr/. The BBC recommends /mjæn'mɑr/.^[20]
^{[21] [22]} The common pronunciation in Burmese is Burmese pronunciation: [mjəmà].

The official name of the country used by the government is the *Republic of the Union of Myanmar*, which was established as part of the 2008 Constitution and formally adopted in 2010.^[23] Prior to this, the country had been known formally as the *Union of Myanmar* since 1989. This had itself replaced the previous designation of the *Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma* used in the 1974 Constitution, which in turn had replaced the 1947 Constitution adopted following independence, which had referred simply to the *Union of Burma*.

Geography



The Irrawaddy Delta, which is approximately 50400 km² (19460 sq mi) in area, is largely used for rice cultivation.^[24]



Buddhist monastery on Taung Kalat southwest of Mount Popa

Burma, which has a total area of 678500 square kilometres (sq mi), is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, and the 40th-largest in the world.

It is bordered to the northwest by Chittagong Division of Bangladesh and Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh of India to the northwest. Its north and northeast border straddles the Tibet and Yunnan regions of China for a Sino-Burman border total of 2185 kilometres (1358 mi). It is bounded by Laos and Thailand to the southeast. Burma has 1930 kilometres (1200 mi) of contiguous coastline along the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea to the southwest and the south, which forms one quarter of its total perimeter.^[25]

In the north, the Hengduan Shan mountains form the border with China. Hkakabo Razi, located in Kachin State, at an elevation of 5881 metres (19295 ft), is the highest point in Burma.^[26] Three mountain ranges, namely the Rakhine Yoma, the Bago Yoma, and the Shan Plateau exist within Burma, all of which run north-to-south from the Himalayas.^[27] The mountain chains divide Burma's three river systems, which are the Ayeyarwady, Salween (Thanlwin), and the Sittaung rivers.^[24] The Ayeyarwady River, Burma's longest river, nearly 2170 kilometres (1348 mi) long, flows into the Gulf of Martaban. Fertile plains exist in the valleys between the mountain chains.^[27] The majority of Burma's population lives in the Ayeyarwady valley, which is situated between the Rakhine Yoma and

the Shan Plateau.

Climate

Much of the country lies between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator. It lies in the monsoon region of Asia, with its coastal regions receiving over 5000 mm (196.9 in) of rain annually. Annual rainfall in the delta region is approximately 2500 mm (98.4 in), while average annual rainfall in the Dry Zone, which is located in central Burma, is less than 1000 mm (39.4 in). Northern regions of the country are the coolest, with average temperatures of 21 °C (70 °F). Coastal and delta regions have an average temperature of 32 °C (89.6 °F).^[24]



Limestone landscape of Mon State

Wildlife

The country's slow economic growth has contributed to the preservation of much of its environment and ecosystems. Forests, including dense tropical growth and valuable teak in lower Burma, cover over 49% of the country, including areas of acacia, bamboo, ironwood and michelia champaca. Coconut and betel palm and rubber have been introduced. In the highlands of the north, oak, pine and various rhododendrons cover much of the land.^[28] Heavy logging since the new 1995 forestry law went into effect has seriously reduced forest acreage and wildlife habitat.^[29] The lands along the coast support all varieties of tropical fruits and once had large areas of mangroves although

much of the protective mangroves have disappeared. In much of central Burma (the Dry Zone), vegetation is sparse and stunted.

Typical jungle animals, particularly tigers and leopards, occur sparsely in Burma. In upper Burma, there are rhinoceros, wild buffalo, wild boars, deer, antelope, and elephants, which are also tamed or bred in captivity for use as work animals, particularly in the lumber industry. Smaller mammals are also numerous, ranging from gibbons and monkeys to flying foxes and tapirs. The abundance of birds is notable with over 800 species, including parrots, peafowl, pheasants, crows, herons, and paddybirds. Among reptile species there are crocodiles, geckos, cobras, Burmese pythons, and turtles. Hundreds of species of freshwater fish are wide-ranging, plentiful and are very important food sources.^[30] For a list of protected areas, see List of protected areas in Burma.

History

After the First Burmese War, the Ava kingdom ceded the provinces of Manipur, Tenassarim, and Arakan to the British.^[31] Rangoon and southern Burma were incorporated into British India in 1853. All of Burma came directly or indirectly under British India in 1886 after the Third Burmese War and the fall of Mandalay.^[31] Burma was administered as a province of British India until 1937 when it became a separate, self-governing colony. The country became independent from the United Kingdom on 4 January 1948, as the *"Union of Burma"*.

It became the *"Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma"* on 4 January 1974, before reverting to the *"Union of Burma"* on 23 September 1988. On 18 June 1989, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) adopted the name *"Union of Myanmar"* for English transliteration. This controversial name change in English, while accepted in the UN and in many countries, is not recognised by the Burmese democracy movement and by nations such as Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.^[32]

Early history

Archaeological evidence suggests that civilisation in the region which now forms Burma is quite old. The oldest archaeological find was of cave paintings and a Holocene assemblage in a hunter-gatherer cave site in Padah Lin in Shan State.^{[33] [34]}

The Mon people are thought to be the earliest group to migrate into the lower Ayeyarwady valley, and by the mid-10th century BC were dominant in southern Burma.^[35]

The Tibeto-Burman speaking Pyu arrived later in the 1st century BC, and established several city states – of which Sri Ksetra was the most powerful – in central Ayeyarwady valley. The Mon and Pyu kingdoms were an active overland trade route between India and China. The Pyu kingdoms entered a period of rapid decline in early 9th century AD when the powerful kingdom of Nanzhao (in present-day Yunnan) invaded the Ayeyarwady valley several times.

Bagan (1044–1287)

Tibeto-Burman speaking Burmans, or the Bamar, began migrating to the Ayeyarwady valley from present-day Yunnan's Nanzhao kingdom starting in 7th century AD. Filling the power gap left by the Pyu, the Burmans established a small kingdom centred in Bagan in 849. But it was not until the reign of King Anawrahta (1044–1077) that Bagan's influence expanded throughout much of present-day Burma.

After Anawrahta's capture of the Mon capital of Thaton in 1057, the Burmans adopted Theravada Buddhism from the Mons. The Burmese script was created, based on the Mon script, during the reign of King Kyanzittha (1084–1112). Prosperous from trade, Bagan kings built many magnificent temples and pagodas throughout the country – many of which can still be seen today.

Bagan's power slowly waned in 13th century. Kublai Khan's Mongol forces invaded northern Burma starting in 1277, and sacked Bagan city itself in 1287. Bagan's over two century reign of Ayeyarwady valley and its periphery

was over.

Small kingdoms (1287–1531)

The Mongols could not stay for long in the searing Ayeyarwady valley. But the Tai-Shan people from Yunnan who came down with the Mongols fanned out to the Ayeyarwady valley, Shan states, Laos, Siam and Assam, and became powerful players in Southeast Asia.

The Bagan empire was irreparably broken up into several small kingdoms:

- The Burman kingdom of Ava or Innwa (1364–1555), the successor state to three smaller kingdoms founded by Burmanised Shan kings, controlling Upper Burma (without the Shan states)
- The Mon kingdom of Hanthawady Pegu or Bago (1287–1540), founded by a Mon-ised Shan King Wareru (1287–1306), controlling Lower Burma (without Taninthayi).
- The Rakhine kingdom of Mrauk U (1434–1784), in the west.
- Several Shan states in the Shan hills in the east and the Kachin Hills in the north while the north-western frontier of present Chin hills still disconnected yet.

This period was characterised by constant warfare between Ava and Bago, and to a lesser extent, Ava and the Shans. Ava briefly controlled Rakhine (1379–1430) and came close to defeating Bago a few times, but could never quite reassemble the lost empire. Nevertheless, Burmese culture entered a golden age. Hanthawady Bago prospered. Bago's Queen Shin Saw Bu (1453–1472) raised the gilded Shwedagon Pagoda to its present height.

By the late-15th century, constant warfare had left Ava greatly weakened. Its peripheral areas became either independent or autonomous. In 1486, King Minkyinyo (1486–1531) of Taungoo broke away from Ava and established a small independent kingdom. In 1527, *Mohnyin* (Shan: Mong Yang) Shans finally captured Ava, upsetting the delicate power balance that had existed for nearly two centuries. The Shans would rule Upper Burma until 1555.

Taungoo (1531–1752)

Reinforced by fleeing Burmans from Ava, the minor Burman kingdom of Taungoo under its young, ambitious king Tabinshwehti (1531–1551) defeated the more powerful Mon kingdom at Bago, reunifying all of Lower Burma by 1540. Tabinshwehti's successor King Bayinnaung (1551–1581) would go on to conquer Manipur (1556), Shan states (1557), Chiang Mai (1557), Ayutthaya (1564, 1569) and Lan Xang (1574), bringing most of western South East Asia under his rule. Preparing to invade Rakhine, a maritime power controlling the entire coastline west of Rakhine Yoma, up to Chittagong province in Bengal.

Bayinnaung's massive empire unravelled soon after his death in 1581. Ayutthaya Siamese had driven out the Burmese by 1593 and went on to take Tanintharyi. In 1599, Rakhine forces aided by Portuguese mercenaries sacked the kingdom's capital Bago. Chief Portuguese mercenary Filipe de Brito e Nicote (Burmese: *Nga Zinga*) promptly rebelled against his Rakhine masters and established Portuguese rule in Thanlyin (Syriam), then the most important seaport in Burma. The country was in chaos.

The Burmese under King Anaukpetlun (1605–1628) regrouped and defeated the Portuguese in 1611. Anaukpetlun reestablished a smaller reconstituted kingdom based in Ava covering Upper Burma, Lower Burma and Shan states (but without Rakhine or Taninthayi). After the reign of King Thalun (1629–1648), who rebuilt the war-torn country, the kingdom experienced a slow and steady decline for the next 100 years. The Mons successfully rebelled starting in 1740 with French help and Siamese encouragement, broke away Lower Burma by 1747, and finally put an end to the House of Taungoo in 1752 when they took Ava.



Pagodas and temples continue to exist in present-day Bagan, the capital of the Bagan Kingdom.

Konbaung (1752–1885)

King Alaungpaya (1752–1760), established the Konbaung Dynasty in Shwebo in 1752.^[36] He founded Yangon in 1755. By his death in 1760, Alaungpaya had reunified the country. In 1767, King Hsinbyushin (1763–1777) sacked Ayutthya. The Qing Dynasty of China invaded four times from 1765 to 1769 without success. The Chinese invasions allowed the new Siamese kingdom based in Bangkok to repel the Burmese out of Siam by the late 1770s.

King Bodawpaya (1782–1819) failed repeatedly to reconquer Siam in 1780s and 1790s. Bodawpaya did manage to capture the western kingdom of Rakhine, which had been largely independent since the fall of Bagan, in 1784. Bodawpaya also formally annexed Manipur, a rebellion-prone protectorate, in 1813.

King Bagyidaw's (1819–1837) general Maha Bandula put down a rebellion in Manipur in 1819 and captured then independent kingdom of Assam in 1819 (again in 1821). The new conquests brought the Burmese adjacent to the British India. The British defeated the Burmese in the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826). Burma had to cede Assam, Manipur, Rakhine (Arakan) and Tanintharyi (Tenasserim).

In 1852, the British attacked a much weakened Burma during a Burmese palace power struggle. After the Second Anglo-Burmese War, which lasted 3 months, the British had captured the remaining coastal provinces: Ayeyarwady, Yangon and Bago, naming the territories as Lower Burma.

King Mindon (1853–1878) founded Mandalay in 1859 and made it his capital. He skilfully navigated the growing threats posed by the competing interests of Britain and France. In the process, Mindon had to renounce Kayah (Karenni) states in 1875. His successor, King Thibaw (1878–1885), was largely ineffectual. In 1885, the British, alarmed by the French conquest of neighbouring Laos, occupied Upper Burma. The Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885) lasted a mere one month insofar as capturing the capital Mandalay was concerned. The Burmese royal family was exiled to Ratnagiri, India. British forces spent at least another four years pacifying the country – not only in the Burmese heartland but also in the Shan, Chin and Kachin hill areas. By some accounts, minor insurrections did not end until 1896.

Colonial era (1886–1948)

The British conquest of Burma began in 1824 in response to a Burmese attempt to invade India. By 1886, and after two further wars, Britain had incorporated the entire country into the British Raj. Burma was administered as a province of British India until 1937 when it became a separate, self-governing colony. To stimulate trade and facilitate changes, the British brought in Indians and Chinese, who quickly displaced the Burmese in urban areas. To this day Rangoon and Mandalay have large ethnic Indian populations. Railways and schools were built, as well as a large number of prisons, including the infamous Insein Prison, then and now used for political prisoners. Burmese resentment was strong and was vented in violent riots that paralysed Yangon on occasion all the way until the 1930s.^[37]



A British 1825 lithograph of Shwedagon Pagoda reveals early British occupation in Burma during the First Anglo-Burmese War.



The landing of British forces in Mandalay after the last of the Anglo-Burmese Wars, which resulted in the abdication of the last Burmese monarch, King Thibaw Min.

Much of the discontent was caused by a disrespect for Burmese culture and traditions, for example, what the British termed the Shoe Question: the colonisers' refusal to remove their shoes upon entering Buddhist temples or other holy places. In October 1919, Eindawya Pagoda in Mandalay was the scene of violence when tempers flared after scandalised Buddhist monks attempted to physically expel a group of shoe-wearing British visitors. The leader of the monks was later sentenced to life imprisonment for attempted murder. Such incidents inspired the Burmese resistance to use Buddhism as a rallying point for their cause. Buddhist monks became the vanguards of the independence movement, and many died while protesting. One monk-turned-martyr was U Wisara, who died in prison after a 166-day hunger strike to protest a rule that forbade him from wearing his Buddhist robes while imprisoned.^[38]



A view of Fytche Square (now Mahabandula Garden) in downtown Rangoon, which was developed and expanded by the British to serve as Burma Proper's capital.

Eric Blair (George Orwell) served in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma for five years; his experience yielded the novel *Burmese Days* (1934) and the essays "A Hanging" (1931) and "Shooting an Elephant" (1936). An earlier writer with the same expansive career path was Saki. During the colonial period, intermarriage between European male settlers and Burmese women, as well as between Anglo-Indians (who arrived with the British) and Burmese caused the birth of the Anglo-Burmese community. This influential community was to dominate the country during colonial rule and through the mid-1960s.

On 1 April 1937, Burma became a separately administered territory, independent of the Indian administration. The vote for keeping Burma in India, or as a separate colony "khwe-yay-twe-yay" divided the populace, and laid the groundwork for the insurgencies to come after independence. In the 1940s, the Thirty Comrades, commanded by Aung San, founded the Burma Independence Army. The Thirty Comrades received training in Japan.^[39]

During World War II, Burma became a major front-line in the Southeast Asian Theatre. The British administration collapsed ahead of the advancing Japanese troops, jails and asylums were opened and Rangoon was deserted except for the many Anglo-Burmese and Indians who remained at their posts. A stream of some 300,000 refugees fled across the jungles into India; known as 'The Trek', all but 30,000 of those 300,000 arrived in India. Initially the Japanese-led Burma Campaign succeeded and the British were expelled from most of Burma, but the British counter-attacked using primarily troops of the British Indian Army. By July 1945, the British had retaken the country.

Although many Burmese fought initially for the Japanese, some Burmese, mostly from the ethnic minorities, also served in the British Burma Army.^[40] In 1943, the Chin Levies and Kachin Levies were formed in the border districts of Burma still under British administration. The Burma Rifles fought as part of the Chindits under General Orde Wingate from 1943 to 1945. Later in the war, the Americans created American-Kachin Rangers who also fought against the Japanese. Many others fought with the British Special Operations Executive. The Burma Independence Army under the command of Aung San and the Arakan National Army fought with the Japanese from 1942–1944, but switched allegiance to the Allied side in 1945.



British troops firing a mortar on the Mawchi road, July 1944.

British soldiers waged a guerrilla war against Japanese forces in Burma. Chindits were formed into long range penetration groups trained to operate deep behind Japanese lines.^[41] A similar American unit, Merrill's Marauders, followed the Chindits into the jungle in 1943.^[42] Although roughly 150,000 Japanese were to be killed in Burma,

only 1,700 were taken prisoner, of whom only 400 could be described as physically fit.^[43]

In 1947, Aung San became Deputy Chairman of the Executive Council of Burma, a transitional government. But in July 1947, political rivals assassinated Aung San and several cabinet members.^[39]

Democratic republic (1948–1962)

On 4 January 1948, the nation became an independent republic, named the *Union of Burma*, with Sao Shwe Thaik as its first President and U Nu as its first Prime Minister. Unlike most other former British colonies and overseas territories, it did not become a member of the Commonwealth. A bicameral parliament was formed, consisting of a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Nationalities,^[44] and multi-party elections were held in 1951–1952, 1956 and 1960.

The geographical area Burma encompasses today can be traced to the Panglong Agreement, which combined Burma Proper, which consisted of Lower Burma and Upper Burma, and the Frontier Areas, which had been administered separately by the British.^[10]

In 1961, U Thant, then the Union of Burma's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and former Secretary to the Prime Minister, was elected Secretary-General of the United Nations; he was the first non-Westerner to head any international organisation and would serve as UN Secretary-General for ten years.^[45] Among the Burmese to work at the UN when he was Secretary-General was a young Aung San Suu Kyi, who went on to become winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

Rule by military junta (1962–present)

Ne Win years

Democratic rule ended in 1962 when General Ne Win led a military coup d'état. He ruled for nearly 26 years and pursued policies under the rubric of the Burmese Way to Socialism. Between 1962 and 1974, Burma was ruled by a revolutionary council headed by the general, and almost all aspects of society (business, media, production) were nationalized or brought under government control (even the Boy Scouts).^[31] In an effort to consolidate power, Ne Win and many other top generals resigned from the military and took civilian posts and, from 1974, instituted elections in a one-party system.

Between 1974 and 1988, Burma was effectively ruled by Ne Win through the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP),^[46] which from 1964 until 1988 was the sole political party. During this period, Burma became one of the world's most impoverished countries. The Burmese Way to Socialism^[47] combined Soviet-style nationalisation and central planning with the governmental implementation of superstitious beliefs. Criticism was scathing, such as an article published in a February 1974 issue of *Newsweek* magazine describing the Burmese Way to Socialism as 'an amalgam of Buddhist and Marxist illogic'.^[48]

Almost from the beginning, there were sporadic protests against the military rule, many of which were organised by students, and these were almost always violently suppressed by the government. On 7 July 1962, the government broke up demonstrations at Rangoon University, killing 15 students.^[31] In 1974, the military violently suppressed anti-government protests at the funeral of U Thant. Student protests in 1975, 1976 and 1977 were quickly suppressed by overwhelming force.^[46]

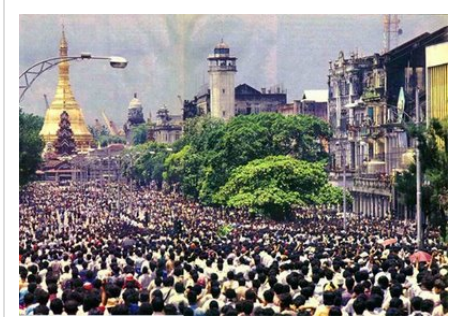
Ne Win's rise to power in 1962 and his relentless persecution of "resident aliens" (immigrant groups not recognised as citizens of the *Union of Burma*) led to an exodus/expulsion of some 300,000 Burmese Indians.^[49] They migrated to escape racial discrimination and wholesale nationalisation of private enterprise a few years later in 1964.^[50] The Anglo-Burmese at this time either fled the country or changed their names and blended in with the broader Burmese society.

A new constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma was adopted in 1974.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled Burma and many refugees inundated neighbouring Bangladesh including 200,000 in 1978 as a result of the King Dragon operation in Arakan.^[51]

Uprising of 1988 and the SPDC

In 1988, unrest over economic mismanagement and political oppression by the government led to widespread pro-democracy demonstrations throughout the country known as the 8888 Uprising. Security forces killed thousands of demonstrators, and General Saw Maung staged a coup d'état and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1989, SLORC declared martial law after widespread protests. The military government finalised plans for People's Assembly elections on 31 May 1989.^[52] SLORC changed the country's official English name from the "Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma" to the "Union of Myanmar" in 1989.



Protesters gathering in central Rangoon, 1988

In May 1990, the government held free elections for the first time in almost 30 years. The National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of Aung San Suu Kyi, won 392 out of a total 489 seats, but the election results were annulled by SLORC, which refused to step down.^[53] Led by Than Shwe since 1992, the military regime has made cease-fire agreements with most ethnic guerilla groups. In 1992, SLORC unveiled plans to create a new constitution through the National Convention, which began 9 January 1993. In 1997, the State Law and Order Restoration Council was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

On 23 June 1997, Burma was admitted into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The National Convention continues to convene and adjourn. Many major political parties, particularly the NLD, have been absent or excluded, and little progress has been made. On 27 March 2006, the military junta, which had moved the national capital from Yangon to a site near Pyinmana in November 2005, officially named the new capital Naypyidaw, meaning "city of the kings".^[54] The *CIA World Factbook*, however, still considers the capital to be Rangoon.^[55]

In November 2006, the International Labour Organization (ILO) announced it will be seeking at the International Criminal Court^[56] "to prosecute members of the ruling Myanmar junta for crimes against humanity" over the continuous forced labour of its citizens by the military. According to the ILO, an estimated 800,000 people are subject to forced labour in Myanmar.^[57]

The 2007 Burmese anti-government protests were a series of anti-government protests that started in Burma on 15 August 2007. The immediate cause of the protests was mainly the unannounced decision of the ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council, to remove fuel subsidies which caused the price of diesel and petrol to suddenly rise as much as double, and the price of compressed natural gas for buses to increase fivefold in less than a week.^[58] The protest demonstrations were at first dealt with quickly and harshly by the junta, with dozens of protesters arrested and detained. Starting 18 September, the protests were led by thousands of Buddhist monks, and those protests were allowed to proceed until a renewed government crackdown on September 26.^[59] During the crack-down, there were rumours of disagreement within the Burmese armed forces, but none were confirmed. Some news reports referred to the protests as the Saffron Revolution.^{[60] [61]}

During the 2007 anti-government protests a significant role was played by Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the opposition to the Burmese military government. Aung San Suu Kyi was under periods of house arrest from 1989-2010. In September 2007, hundreds of monks paid respects to her at the gate of her home, which was the first time in four years that people were able to see her in public. She was then given a second public appearance on 29 September, when she was allowed to leave house arrest briefly and meet with a UN envoy trying to persuade the junta to ease its crackdown against a pro-democracy uprising, to which the Myanmar government reluctantly agreed.

On 7 February 2008, SPDC announced that a referendum for the Constitution would be held and Elections by 2010. The Burmese constitutional referendum, 2008 was held on 10 May and promised a "discipline-flourishing democracy" for the country in the future.

World governments remain divided on how to deal with the military junta. Calls for further sanctions by Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and France are opposed by neighbouring countries; in particular, China has stated its belief that "sanctions or pressure will not help to solve the issue".^[62] There is some disagreement over whether sanctions are the most effective approach to dealing with the junta, such as from a Cato Institute study and from prominent Burmese such as Thant Myint-U (a former senior UN official and Cambridge historian), who have opined that sanctions may have caused more harm than good to the Burmese people.^[63] ^[64]

In 1950, the Karen became the largest of 20 minority groups participating in an insurgency against the government of Burma. The conflict continues as of 2009.^[65] In 2004, the BBC, citing aid agencies, estimates that up to 200,000 Karen have been driven from their homes during decades of war, with 120,000 more refugees from Burma, mostly Karen, living in refugee camps on the Thai side of the border. Many accuse the military government of Burma of ethnic cleansing.^[66] As a result of the ongoing war in minority group areas, more than two million people have fled Burma to Thailand.^[67]

On 3 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis devastated the country when winds of up to 215 km/h (135 mph)^[68] touched land in the densely populated, rice-farming delta of the Irrawaddy Division.^[69] It was the worst natural disaster in Burmese history. Reports estimated that more than 200,000 people were dead or missing, and damage totaled to 10 billion dollars (USD). The World Food Programme reported, "Some villages have been almost totally eradicated and vast rice-growing areas are wiped out."^[70] The United Nations projects that as many as 1 million were left homeless; and the World Health Organization "has received reports of malaria outbreaks in the worst-affected area."^[71] Yet in the critical days following this disaster, Burma's isolationist regime hindered recovery efforts by delaying the entry of United Nations planes delivering medicine, food, and other supplies. The government's action was described by the United Nations as "unprecedented."^[72]

On 4 May 2009, an American, John Yettaw, allegedly swam across the lake uninvited to the house of Aung San Suu Kyi and remained there for two nights, resulting in the arrest of Yettaw and Suu Kyi, who were held in Insein Prison near Yangon.^[73] As a result, Suu Kyi is being charged with violating the terms of her house arrest, and faces a sentence of up to five years.^[74] Suu Kyi's house arrest was due to end on 27 May 2009.^[75] On 11 August 2009, Suu Kyi was sentenced to an additional 18 months of house arrest following conviction on charges of violating the terms of her previous incarceration.^[76] British Prime Minister Gordon Brown stated, "This is a purely political sentence designed to prevent her from taking part in the regime's planned elections next year." On August 12, 2009, U.S. Senator Jim Webb negotiated Yettaw's release on humanitarian grounds because of Yettaw's health. Myanmar authorities commuted Yettaw's sentence in half, suspending the remaining three-and-a-half years upon Yettaw's deportation. On August 14, Senator Webb flew with Yettaw to Thailand.



Protesters in Yangon with a banner that reads *non-violence: national movement* in Burmese, in the background is Shwedagon Pagoda

In early August 2009, a conflict known as the Kokang incident broke out in Shan State in northern Burma. For several weeks, junta troops fought against ethnic minorities including the Han Chinese,^[77] Va, and Kachin.^[78] [79] From 8–12 August, the first days of the conflict, as many as 10,000 Burmese civilians fled to Yunnan province in neighbouring China.^[78] [79] [80]

On 13 August 2010, Junta announces the election date for 2010 is 7 November.

In October, 2010, a new flag was adopted and the official name of the country changed to "Republic of the Union of Myanmar", replacing the old "Union of Myanmar" from 1989.

On November 9, 2010, Myanmar's ruling junta stated that the Union Solidarity and Development Party won 80% of the votes. This claim is widely disputed by pro-democracy opposition groups, asserting that the military regime engaged in rampant fraud to achieve its result.

On November 13, 2010 the military authorities in Burma released the pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

List of historical capitals

- Amarapura
- Ava
- Bagan
- Bago
- Mandalay
- Mrauk U
- Naypyidaw
- Rangoon (Yangon)
- Sagaing
- Shwebo
- Thaton



Government and politics

Burma is governed by a military junta^[81] with the head of state being Senior General Than Shwe, who holds the posts of "Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council" and "Commander in Chief of the Defence Services" as well as the Minister of Defence. General Khin Nyunt was prime minister until 19 October 2004, when he was replaced by General Soe Win, after the purge of Military Intelligence sections within the Myanmar armed forces. The Prime Minister is General Thein Sein, who took over upon the death of General Soe Win on 2 October 2007. The majority of ministry and cabinet posts are held by military officers, with the exceptions being the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, posts which are held by civilians.^[82]

Elected delegates in the 1990 People's Assembly election formed the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), a government-in-exile since December 1990, with the mission of restoring democracy.^[83] Dr. Sein Win, a first cousin of Aung San Suu Kyi, has held the position of prime minister of the NCGUB since its inception. The NCGUB has been outlawed by the military government.

Major political parties in the country are the National League for Democracy and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, although their activities are heavily regulated and suppressed by the military government. Many other parties, often representing ethnic minorities, exist. The military government allows little room for political organisations and has outlawed many political parties and underground student organisations. The military supported the National Unity Party in the 1990 elections and, more recently, an organisation named the Union Solidarity and Development Association.^[84]

In 1988, the army violently repressed protests against economic mismanagement and political oppression. On 8 August 1988, the military opened fire on demonstrators in what is known as 8888 Uprising and imposed martial law. However, the 1988 protests paved way for the 1990 People's Assembly elections. The election results were subsequently annulled by Senior General Saw Maung's government. The National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won over 60% of the vote and over 80% of parliamentary seats in the 1990 election, the first held in 30 years. The military-backed National Unity Party won less than 2% of the seats.



Government propaganda poster states: "Tatmadaw and the people, cooperate and crush all those harming the union."

Aung San Suu Kyi has earned international recognition as an activist for the return of democratic rule, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. The ruling regime has repeatedly placed her under house arrest. Despite a direct appeal by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to Senior General Than Shwe and pressure by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the military junta extended Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest another year on 27 May 2006 under the 1975 State Protection Act, which grants the government the right to detain any persons on the grounds of protecting peace and stability in the country.^{[85] [86]}

The junta faces increasing pressure from the United States and the United Kingdom. Burma's situation was referred to the UN Security Council for the first time in December 2005 for an informal consultation. In September 2006, ten of the United Nations Security Council's 15 members voted to place Myanmar on the council's formal agenda.^[87] On Independence Day, 4 January 2007, the government released 40 political prisoners, under a general amnesty, in which 2,831 prisoners were released.^[88] On 8 January 2007, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the national government to free all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.^[89] Three days later, on 11 January, five additional prisoners were released from prison.^[88]

ASEAN has also stated its frustration with the Union of Myanmar's government. It has formed the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus to address the lack of democratisation in the country.^[90] Dramatic change in the country's political situation remains unlikely, due to support from major regional powers such as India, Russia, and, in particular, China.^{[91] [92]}

In the annual ASEAN Summit in January 2007, held in Cebu, Philippines, member countries failed to find common ground on the issue of Burma's lack of political reform.^[93] During the summit, ASEAN foreign ministers asked Burma to make greater progress on its roadmap toward democracy and national reconciliation.^[94] Some member countries contend that Burma's human rights issues are the country's own domestic affairs, while others contend that its poor human rights record is an international issue.^[94]

Burma's army-drafted constitution was overwhelmingly approved (by 92.4% of the 22 million voters with alleged voter turnout of 99%) on 10 May in the first phase of a two-stage referendum amid Cyclone Nargis. It was the first national vote since the 1990 election. Multi-party elections in 2010 would end 5 decades of military rule, as the new charter gives the military an automatic 25% of seats in parliament. NLD spokesman Nyan Win, inter alia, criticised the referendum: "This referendum was full of cheating and fraud across the country; In some villages, authorities and polling station officials ticked the ballots themselves and did not let the voters do anything."^[95] The constitution would bar Aung San Suu Kyi, from public office. 5 million citizens will vote 24 May in Yangon and the Irrawaddy delta, worst hit by Cyclone Nargis.^[96] Burma has a high level of corruption, and ranks 176th out of 180 countries worldwide on the Corruption Perceptions Index.^[97]

Human rights

Human rights in Burma are a long-standing concern for the international community and human rights organisations. There is consensus that the military regime in Burma is one of the world's most repressive and abusive regimes.^[98]
^[99]

Several human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science have reported on human rights abuses by the military government.^[100]
^[101] They have claimed that there is no independent judiciary in Burma. The military government restricts Internet access through software-based censorship that limits the material citizens can access on-line.^[102] ^[103] Forced labour, human trafficking, and child labour are common.^[104] The military is also notorious for rampant use of sexual violence as an instrument of control, including allegations of systematic rapes and taking of sex slaves as porters for the military. A strong women's pro-democracy movement has formed in exile, largely along the Thai border and in Chiang Mai. There is a growing international movement to defend women's human rights issues.^[105]

The *Freedom in the World 2004* report by Freedom House notes that "The junta rules by decree, controls the judiciary, suppresses all basic rights, and commits human rights abuses with impunity. Military officers hold all cabinet positions, and active or retired officers hold all top posts in all ministries. Official corruption is reportedly rampant both at the higher and local levels."^[106]

Brad Adams, director of Human Rights Watch's Asia division, in a 2004 address described the human rights situation in the country as appalling: "Burma is the textbook example of a police state. Government informants and spies are omnipresent. Average Burmese people are afraid to speak to foreigners except in most superficial of manners for fear of being hauled in later for questioning or worse. There is no freedom of speech, assembly or association."^[107]

Evidence has been gathered suggesting that the Burmese regime has marked certain ethnic minorities such as the Karen for extermination or 'Burmisation'.^[108] This, however, has received little attention from the international community since it has been more subtle and indirect than the mass killings in places like Rwanda.^[109]

In April 2007, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified financial and other restrictions that the military government places on international humanitarian assistance. The GAO report, entitled "Assistance Programs Constrained in Burma", outlined the specific efforts of the government to hinder the humanitarian work of international organisations, including restrictions on the free movement of international staff within the country. The report notes that the regime has tightened its control over assistance work since former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt was purged in October 2004. The military junta passed guidelines in February 2006, which formalised these restrictive policies. According to the report, the guidelines require that programs run by humanitarian groups "enhance and safeguard the national interest" and that international organisations coordinate with state agents and select their Burmese staff from government-prepared lists of individuals. United Nations officials have declared these restrictions unacceptable.

Burma's government spends the least percentage of its GDP on health care of any country in the world, and international donor organisations give less to Burma, per capita, than any other country except India.^[110] According to the report named "Preventable Fate", published by Doctors without Borders, 25,000 Burmese AIDS patients died in 2007, deaths that could largely have been prevented by Anti Retroviral Therapy drugs and proper treatment.^[110]

Regions and states

The country is divided into seven states (ပြည်နယ်) and seven regions (တိုင်းဒေသကြီး), formerly called divisions.^[111] The announcement on the renaming of division to regions was made on 20 August 2010.^[112] Regions are predominantly Bamar (that is, mainly inhabited by the dominant ethnic group). States, in essence, are regions which are home to particular ethnic minorities. The administrative divisions are further subdivided into districts, which are further subdivided into townships, wards, and villages.

Below are the number of districts, townships, cities/towns, wards, village Groups and villages in each divisions and states of Burma as of 31 December 2001:^[113]



No.	State/Region	Districts	Townships	Cities/Towns	Wards	Village groups	Villages
1	Kachin State	3	18	20	116	606	2630
2	Kayah State	2	7	7	29	79	624
3	Kayin State	3	7	10	46	376	2092
4	Chin State	2	9	9	29	475	1355
5	Sagaing Region	8	37	37	171	1769	6095
6	Tanintharyi Region	3	10	10	63	265	1255
7	Bago Region	4	28	33	246	1424	6498
8	Magway Region	5	25	26	160	1543	4774
9	Mandalay Region	7	31	29	259	1611	5472
10	Mon State	2	10	11	69	381	1199
11	Rakhine State	4	17	17	120	1041	3871
12	Yangon Region	4	45	20	685	634	2119
13	Shan State	11	54	54	336	1626	15513
14	Ayeyarwady Region	6	26	29	219	1912	11651
	Total	63	324	312	2548	13742	65148

Foreign relations and military

The country's foreign relations, particularly with Western nations, have been strained. The United States has placed a ban on new investments by U.S. firms, an import ban, and an arms embargo on the Union of Myanmar, as well as frozen military assets in the United States because of the military regime's ongoing human rights abuses, the ongoing detention of Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi, and refusal to honour the election results of the 1990 People's Assembly election.^[114] Similarly, the European Union has placed sanctions on Burma, including an arms embargo, cessation of trade preferences, and suspension of all aid with the exception of humanitarian aid.^[115] U.S. and European government sanctions against the military government, coupled with boycotts and other direct pressure on corporations by supporters of the democracy movement, have resulted in the withdrawal from the country of most U.S. and many European companies. However, several Western companies remain due to loopholes in the sanctions.

Despite Western isolation, Asian corporations have generally remained willing to continue investing in the country and to initiate new investments, particularly in natural resource extraction. The country has close relations with neighbouring India and China with several Indian and Chinese companies operating in the country. There remains active debate as to the extent to which the American-led sanctions have had adverse effects on the civilian population or on the military rulers.^{[116] [117]} Burma has also received extensive military aid from India and China in the past.^[118] According to some estimates, Burma has received more than US\$200 million in military aid from India.^[119] Under India's Look East policy, fields of cooperation between India and Burma include remote sensing,^[120] oil and gas exploration,^[121] information technology,^[122] hydro power^[123] and construction of ports and buildings.^[124] In 2008, India suspended military aid to Burma over the issue of human rights abuses by the ruling junta, although it has preserved extensive commercial ties which provide the regime with much needed revenue.^[125]

The country's armed forces are known as the Tatmadaw, which numbers 488,000. The Tatmadaw comprises the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. The country ranked twelfth in the world for its number of active troops in service.^[125] The military is very influential in the country, with top cabinet and ministry posts held by military officers. Official figures for military spending are not available. Estimates vary widely because of uncertain exchange rates, but military spending is very high.^[126] The country imports most of its weapons from Russia, Ukraine, China and India.

The country is building a research nuclear reactor near May Myo (Pyin Oo Lwin) with help from Russia. It is one of the signatories of the nuclear non-proliferation pact since 1992 and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) since 1957. The military junta had informed the IAEA in September 2000 of its intention to construct the reactor. The research reactor outbuilding frame was built by ELE steel industries limited of Yangon and water from Anisakhan/BE water fall will be used for the reactor cavity cooling system.

ASEAN will not defend the country in any international forum following the military regime's refusal to restore democracy. In April 2007, the Malaysian Foreign Ministry parliamentary secretary Ahmad Shabery Cheek said Malaysia and other ASEAN members had decided not to defend Burma if the country's issue was raised for discussion at any international conference. "Now Myanmar has to defend itself if it is bombarded in any international forum", he said when winding up a debate at committee stage for the Foreign Ministry. He was replying to queries from opposition leader Lim Kit Siang on the next course of action to be taken by Malaysia and ASEAN with the military junta. Lim had said Malaysia must play a proactive role in pursuing regional initiatives to bring about a change in Burma and support efforts to bring the situation in Burma to the UN Security Council's attention.^[127] In November 2008, Burma's political situation with neighbouring Bangladesh became tense as they began searching for natural gas in a disputed block of the Bay of Bengal.^[128]

Until 2005, the United Nations General Assembly annually adopted a detailed resolution about the situation in Burma by consensus.^{[129] [129] [130] [131] [132]} But in 2006 a divided United Nations General Assembly voted through a resolution that strongly called upon the government of Burma to end its systematic violations of human rights.^[133] In January 2007, Russia and China vetoed a draft resolution before the United Nations Security Council^[134] calling on the government of Myanmar to respect human rights and begin a democratic transition. South Africa also voted

against the resolution.^[135]

The country is a corner of the Golden Triangle of opium production. In 1996 the United States Embassy in Rangoon released a "Country Commercial Guide", which states "Exports of opiates alone appear to be worth about as much as all legal exports." It goes on to say that investments in infrastructure and hotels are coming from major opiate-growing and opiate-exporting organisations and from those with close ties to these organisations.^[136] A four-year investigation concluded that Burma's national company Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) was "the main channel for laundering the revenues of heroin produced and exported under the control of the Burmese army." The main player in the country's drug market is the United Wa State Army, ethnic fighters who control areas along the country's eastern border with Thailand, part of the infamous Golden Triangle. The Wa army, an ally of Burma's ruling military junta, was once the militant arm of the Beijing-backed Burmese Communist Party. Burma has been a significant cog in the transnational drug trade since World War II.^[137] ^[138] The land area devoted to opium production increased 29% in 2007. A United Nations report cites corruption, poverty and a lack of government control as causes for the jump.^[139]

In 2010 as part of the Wikileaks leaked cables, Burma was suspected of using North Korean construction teams to build a fortified Surface-to-Air Missile facility.^[140]

Economy

The country is one of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia, suffering from decades of stagnation, mismanagement and isolation. Burma's GDP grows at an average rate of 2.9% annually – the lowest rate of economic growth in the Greater Mekong Subregion.^[25]

Under British administration, Burma was the second-wealthiest country in South-East Asia; second only to the Philippines. It had been the world's largest exporter of rice. During British administration, Burma supplied oil through the Burmah Oil Company. Burma also had a wealth of natural and labour resources. It produced 75% of the world's teak and had a highly literate population.^[8] The country was believed to be on the fast track to development.^[8]

After a parliamentary government was formed in 1948, Prime Minister U Nu disastrously attempted to make Burma a welfare state and adopted central planning. Rice exports fell by two thirds and mineral exports by over 96%. Plans were partly financed by printing money, which led to inflation.^[141] The 1962 coup d'état was followed by an economic scheme called the Burmese Way to Socialism, a plan to nationalise all industries, with the exception of agriculture. The catastrophic program turned Burma into one of the world's most impoverished countries.^[47] Burma's admittance to Least Developed Country status by the UN in 1987 highlighted its economic bankruptcy.^[142]

After 1988, the regime retreated from totalitarian rule. It permitted modest expansion of the private sector, allowed some foreign investment, and received needed foreign exchange.^[143] The economy is still rated as the least free in Asia (tied with North Korea).^[144] All fundamental market institutions are suppressed.^[144] ^[145] Private enterprises are often co-owned or indirectly owned by state. The corruption watchdog organisation Transparency International in its 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index released on 26 September 2007 ranked Burma the most corrupt country in the world, tied with Somalia.^[146]

The national currency is Kyat. Burma has a dual exchange rate system similar to Cuba.^[147] The market rate was around two hundred times below the government-set rate in 2006.^[145] Inflation averaged 30.1% between 2005 and 2007.^[144] Inflation is a serious problem for the economy. In April 2007, the National League for Democracy organised a two-day workshop on the economy. The workshop concluded that skyrocketing inflation was impeding



The Sakura Tower in Yangon is not fully occupied due to lack of major foreign investment.

economic growth. "Basic commodity prices have increased from 30 to 60 percent since the military regime promoted a salary increase for government workers in April 2006", said Soe Win, the moderator of the workshop. "Inflation is also correlated with corruption." Myint Thein, an NLD spokesperson, added: "Inflation is the critical source of the current economic crisis."^[148]

In recent years, both China and India have attempted to strengthen ties with the government for economic benefit. Many nations, including the United States and Canada, and the European Union, have imposed investment and trade sanctions on Burma. The United States has banned all imports from Burma.^[145] Foreign investment comes primarily from People's Republic of China, Singapore, South Korea, India, and Thailand.^[149]



Rice cultivation accounts for much of the agriculture in Burma today.

The major agricultural product is rice which covers about 60% of the country's total cultivated land area. Rice accounts for 97% of total food grain production by weight. Through collaboration with the International Rice Research Institute 52 modern rice varieties were released in the country between 1966 and 1997, helping increase national rice production to 14 million tons in 1987 and to 19 million tons in 1996. By 1988, modern varieties were planted on half of the country's ricelands, including 98 percent of the irrigated areas.^[150]

The lack of an educated workforce skilled in modern technology contributes to the growing problems of the economy.^[151]

Today, the country lacks adequate infrastructure. Goods travel primarily across the Thai border, where most illegal drugs are exported and along the Ayeyarwady River. Railways are old and rudimentary, with few repairs since their construction in the late 19th century.^[152] Highways are normally unpaved, except in the major cities.^[152] Energy shortages are common throughout the country including in Yangon. Burma is also the world's second largest producer of opium, accounting for 8% of entire world production and is a major source of illegal drugs, including amphetamines.^[153] Other industries include agricultural goods, textiles, wood products, construction materials, gems, metals, oil and natural gas. The Norwegian company Seadrill owned by John Fredriksen is involved in offshore oil drilling, expected to give the Burmese Military Junta oil and oil export revenues.

The Union of Myanmar's rulers depend on sales of precious stones such as sapphires, pearls and jade to fund their regime. Rubies are the biggest earner; 90% of the world's rubies come from the country, whose red stones are prized for their purity and hue. Thailand buys the majority of the country's gems. Burma's "*Valley of Rubies*", the mountainous Mogoke area, 200 km (120 mi) north of Mandalay, is noted for its rare pigeon's blood rubies and blue sapphires.^[154] Many U.S. and European jewellery companies, including Bulgari, Tiffany, and Cartier, refuse to import these stones based on reports of deplorable working conditions in the mines. Human Rights Watch has encouraged a complete ban on the purchase of Burmese gems based on these reports and because nearly all profits go to the ruling junta, as the majority of mining activity in the country is government-run.^[155]

Since 1992, the government has encouraged tourism in the country. However, fewer than 750,000 tourists enter the country annually.^[156] Aung San Suu Kyi has requested that international tourists not visit Burma. The junta's forced labour programmes were focused around tourist destinations which have been heavily criticised for their human rights records. Burma's Minister of Hotels and Tourism Maj-Gen Saw Lwin has stated that the government receives a significant percentage of the income of private sector tourism services.^[157] Much of the country is completely off-limits to tourists, and the military very tightly controls interactions between foreigners and the people of Burma, particularly the border regions.^[158] They are not to discuss politics with foreigners, under penalty of imprisonment, and in 2001, the Myanmar Tourism Promotion Board issued an order for local officials to protect tourists and limit "unnecessary contact" between foreigners and ordinary Burmese people.^[159]

The M9 gas field in Burma is expected to go online in 2012.^[160]

Demographics

Burma has a population of about 56 million.^[161] Population figures are rough estimates because the last partial census, conducted by the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs under the control of the military junta, was taken in 1983.^[162] No trustworthy nationwide census has been taken in Burma since 1931. There are over 600,000 registered migrant workers from Burma in Thailand, and millions more work illegally. Burmese migrant workers account for 80% of Thailand's migrant workers.^[163] Burma has a population density of 75 per square kilometre (190 /sq mi), one of the lowest in Southeast Asia. Refugee camps exist along Indian, Bangladeshi and Thai borders while several thousand are in Malaysia. Conservative estimates state that there are over 295,800 refugees from Burma, with the majority being Rohingya, Kayin, and Karenni and are principally located along the Thai-Burma border.^[164] There are nine permanent refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, most of which were established in the mid-1980s. The refugee camps are under the care of the Thai-Burma Border Consortium (TBBC) ^[165].

Ethnic groups



Apartment building in Naypyidaw. Naypyidaw is the new capital of Burma which is nearing completion.



A block of flats in down-town Yangon, facing Bogyoke Market. Much of Yangon's urban population resides in densely populated flats.

Ethnic Composition in Burma (rough estimate)

ethnic group or race	percent
Bamar	68%
Shan	9%
Kayin	7%
Other groups	4.5%
Rakhine	3.5%
Chinese	2.5%
Mon	2%
Kachin	1.5%
Chin	1%
Indians	1.25%
Kayah	0.75%

Burma is home to four major linguistic families: Sino-Tibetan, Kradai, Austro-Asiatic, and Indo-European.^[166] Sino-Tibetan languages are most widely spoken. They include Burmese, Karen, Kachin, Chin, and Chinese. The primary Kradai language is Shan. Mon, Palaung, and Wa are the major Austroasiatic languages spoken in Burma. The two major Indo-European languages are Pali, the liturgical language of Theravada Buddhism, and English.^[167]

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Burma's official literacy rate as of 2000 was 89.9%.^[168] Historically, Burma has had high literacy rates. To qualify for least developed country status by the UN in order to receive debt relief, Burma lowered its official literacy rate from 78.6% to 18.7% in 1987.^[169]

Burma is ethnically diverse. The government recognises 135 distinct ethnic groups. While it is extremely difficult to verify this statement, there are at least 108 different ethnolinguistic groups in Burma, consisting mainly of distinct Tibeto-Burman peoples, but with sizeable populations of Daic, Hmong-Mien, and Austroasiatic (Mon-Khmer) peoples.^[170] The Bamar form an estimated 68% of the population.^[171] 10% of the population are Shan.^[171] The Kayin make up 7% of the population.^[171] The Rakhine people constitute 4% of the population. Overseas Chinese form approximately 3% of the population.^[171]^[172] Burma's ethnic minority groups prefer the term "ethnic nationality" over "ethnic minority" as the term "minority" furthers their sense of insecurity in the face of what is often described as "Burmanisation"--the proliferation and domination of the dominant Bamar culture over minority cultures.

Mon, who form 2% of the population, are ethno-linguistically related to the Khmer.^[171] Overseas Indians comprise 2%.^[171] The remainder are Kachin, Chin, Anglo-Indians and other ethnic minorities. Included in this group are the Anglo-Burmese. Once forming a large and influential community, the Anglo-Burmese left the country in steady streams from 1958 onwards, principally to Australia and the U.K.. Today, it is estimated that only 52,000 Anglo-Burmese remain in the country. There are 110,000 Burmese refugees in Thai border camps.^[173]

89% of the country's population are Buddhist, according to a report on ABC World News Tonight in May 2008.



A girl from the Padaung minority, one of the many ethnic groups that make up Burma's population.

Culture



An ear-piercing ceremony at the Mahamuni Pagoda in Mandalay is one of the many coming-of-age ceremonies in Burmese culture.

A diverse range of indigenous cultures exist in Burma, the majority culture is primarily Buddhist and Bamar. Bamar culture has been influenced by the cultures of neighbouring countries. This is manifested in its language, cuisine, music, dance and theatre. The arts, particularly literature, have historically been influenced by the local form of Theravada Buddhism. Considered the national epic of Burma, the *Yama Zatdaw*, an adaptation of India's *Ramayana*, has been influenced greatly by Thai, Mon, and Indian versions of the play.^[174] Buddhism is practised along with nat worship which involves elaborate rituals to propitiate one from a pantheon of 37 nats.^{[175] [176]}

In a traditional village, the monastery is the centre of cultural life. Monks are venerated and supported by the lay people. A novitiation ceremony called shinbyu is the most important coming of age events for a boy when he enters the monastery for a short period of time.^[177] All boys of Buddhist family need to be a novice (beginner for Buddhism) before the age of twenty and to be a monk after the age of twenty. It is compulsory for all boys of Buddhism. The duration can be as little as one week. Girls have ear-piercing ceremonies (နင်းသွင်း) at the same time.^[177] Burmese culture is most evident in villages where local festivals are held throughout the year, the most important being the pagoda festival.^{[178] [179]} Many villages have a guardian nat, and superstition and taboos are commonplace.



Mohinga, rice noodles in fish soup, is widely considered to be Burma's national dish.

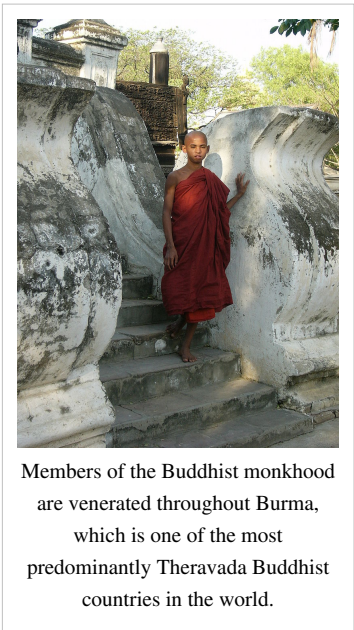
British colonial rule also introduced Western elements of culture to Burma. Burma's educational system is modelled after that of the United Kingdom. Colonial architectural influences are most evident in major cities such as Yangon.^[180] Many ethnic minorities, particularly the Karen in the southeast, and the Kachin and Chin (people) who populate the north and north-east, practice Christianity.^[181] According to CIA World Factbook, the Burman population is 68%, and the Ethnic groups comprise of 32%. However, the exiled leaders and organisations claims that Ethnic population is 40% which is implicitly contrasted with CIA report (official U.S report).

Language

Burmese, the mother tongue of the Bamar and official language of Burma, is related to Tibetan and to the Chinese languages.^[167] It is written in a script consisting of circular and semi-circular letters, which were adapted from the Mon script, which in turn was developed from a southern Indian script in the 8th century. The earliest known inscriptions in the Burmese script date from the 11th century. It is also used to write Pali, the sacred language of Theravada Buddhism, as well as several ethnic minority languages, including Shan, several Karen dialects, and Kayah (Karenni), with the addition of specialised characters and diacritics for each language.^[182] The Burmese language incorporates widespread usage of honorifics and is age-oriented.^[178] Burmese society has traditionally stressed the importance of education. In villages, secular schooling often takes place in monasteries. Secondary and

tertiary education take place at government schools.

Religion



Religion in Burma	
religion	percent
Buddhism	89%
Christianity	4%
Islam	4%
Others including Animism and Chinese folk religion	2%
Hinduism	1%

Many religions are practised in Burma. Religious edifices and orders have been in existence for many years. Festivals can be held on a grand scale. The Christian and Muslim populations do, however, face religious persecution and it is hard, if not impossible, for non-Buddhists to join the army or get government jobs, the main route to success in the country.^[183] Such persecution and targeting of civilians is particularly notable in Eastern Burma, where over 3000 villages have been destroyed in the past ten years.^{[184] [185] [186]} More than 200,000 Rohingya Muslims have settled in Bangladesh, to escape persecution, over the past 20 years.^[187]

89% of the population embraces Buddhism (mostly Theravada). Other religions are practiced largely without obstruction, with the notable exception of some ethnic minorities such as the Muslim Rohingya people, who have continued to have their citizenship status denied and therefore do not have access to education, and Christians in Chin State.^[188] 4 percent of the population practices Christianity; 4 percent, Islam; 1 percent, traditional animistic beliefs; and 2 percent follow other religions, including Mahayana Buddhism, Hinduism, East Asian religions and the Bahá'í Faith.^{[189] [190] [191]} However, according to a U.S. State Department's 2006 international religious freedom report, official statistics underestimate the non-Buddhist population which could be as high as 30%. Muslim leaders estimated that approximately 20 percent of the population was Muslim. A tiny Jewish community in Rangoon had a synagogue but no resident rabbi to conduct services.^[192]

Education

The educational system of Burma is operated by the government Ministry of Education. Universities and professional institutes from upper Burma and lower Burma are run by two separate entities, the Department of Higher Education of Upper Burma and the Department of Higher Education of Lower Burma. Headquarters are based in Yangon and Mandalay respectively. The education system is based on the United Kingdom's system, due to nearly a century of British and Christian presences in Burma. Nearly all schools are government-operated, but there has been a recent increase in privately funded English language schools. Schooling is compulsory until the end of elementary school, probably about 9 years old, while the compulsory schooling age is 15 or 16 at international level.

There are 101 universities, 12 institutes, 9 degree colleges and 24 colleges in Burma, a total of 146 higher education institutions.^[193]

There are 10 Technical Training Schools, 23 nursing training schools, 1 sport academy and 20 midwifery schools.

There are 2047 Basic Education High Schools, 2605 Basic Education Middle Schools, 29944 Basic Education Primary Schools and 5952 Post Primary Schools. 1692 multimedia classrooms exist within this system.

There are four international schools which are acknowledged by WASC and College Board – The International School Yangon (ISY), Crane International School Yangon (CISM), Yangon International School (YIS) and International School of Myanmar (ISM) in Yangon.



Yangon University of Medicine 1

Units of measure

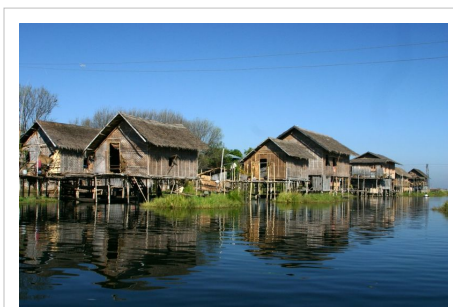
Burma is one of three countries that still predominantly uses a non-metric system of measure, according to the CIA Factbook.^[194] The common units of measure are unique to Burma but the government web pages use both imperial units^[195] and metric units.^[196]

Media

Due to Burma's political climate, there are not many media companies in relation to the country's population, although a certain number exists. Some are privately owned, but all programming must meet with the approval of the censorship board.

Burma has figured in several motion pictures, such as *Beyond Rangoon*, starring Patricia Arquette, *Rambo IV*, starring Sylvester Stallone and *Objective, Burma!*, nominated for an Academy Award and starring Errol Flynn. Burma was also featured in the hit show *Seinfeld*. Burma is the primary subject of a 2007 graphic novel titled *Chroniques Birmanes* by Québécois author and animator, Guy Delisle.

The graphic novel was translated into English under the title *Burma Chronicles* in 2008. In 2009, a documentary about Burmese videojournalists called *Burma VJ* was released.^[197] This film was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the 2010 Academy Awards.^[198]



Stilt houses at Lake Inle, Myanmar

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General information

- Burma Related-News (<http://www.mizzima.com/>)
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- Interactive timeline of turning points in Burmese history (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/eyes-of-the-storm/turning-points-in-burmese-history/5363/>)

Geographical coordinates: 22°N 96°E

China

China





Traditional Chinese:	中國
Simplified Chinese:	中国

China (English pronunciation: /ˈtʃaɪnə/ (🔊 listen)) is seen variously as an ancient civilization extending over a large area in East Asia, a nation and/or a multinational entity.

With nearly 4,000 years of continuous history, China is one of the world's oldest civilizations.^{[1] [2] [3]} Prior to the 19th century, it possessed one of the most advanced societies and economies in the world; but through successive dynasties it then missed the industrial revolution and began to decline.^{[4] [5]} In the 19th and 20th century, imperialism, internal weakness and civil wars damaged the country and its economy, and led to the overthrow of imperial rule.

In 1949, after major combat ended in the Chinese Civil War, two states calling themselves "China" emerged:

-  The **People's Republic of China** (PRC), established in 1949, commonly known as *China*, has control over mainland China and the largely self-governing territories of Hong Kong (since 1997) and Macau (since 1999).
-  The **Republic of China** (ROC) established in 1912 in mainland China, now commonly known as *Taiwan*, has control over the islands of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, Matsu, the Pratas island group, and a few other outlying islands.

In the 1950s, change to economic policies in Taiwan transformed the island into a technology-oriented industrialized developed economy after a period of high growth rates and rapid industrialization. In mainland China, in the 1970s, reforms known as the Four Modernizations improved agriculture, industry, technology and defense, vastly raising living standards and making the PRC one of the great powers.^{[6] [7] [8]}

Historically, China's cultural sphere has extended across East Asia as a whole, with Chinese religion, customs, and writing systems being adopted to varying degrees by neighbors such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Through its history, China was the source of many major inventions.^[9] It has also one of the world's oldest written language systems. The first evidence of human presence in the region was found at the Zhoukoudian cave. It is one of the earliest known specimens of *Homo erectus*, now commonly known as the Peking Man, estimated to have lived from 300,000 to 780,000 years ago.^{[10] [11] [12]}

Etymology

English names

The first recorded use of the word "China" in English is found in *Decades of the New World* (1555) by Richard Eden. The origin of this word is the subject of various scholarly theories.^[13] It may be derived from *Cin* (چین), a Persian name for China popularized in Europe by Marco Polo.^[14] ^[15] In early usage, "china" as a term for Chinese ceramics was spelled differently from the name of the country, the two words being derived from separate Persian words.^[16] Both these words are derived from the Sanskrit word *Cīna* (चीन),^[16] used as a name for China as early as AD 150.^[17]

The traditional theory, proposed in the 17th century by Martin Martini, is that "China" is derived from "Qin" (秦 = *Chin*), the westernmost of the Chinese kingdoms during the Zhou dynasty, or from the succeeding Qin dynasty (221 – 206 BC).^[18] In the Hindu scriptures *Mahābhārata* (5th century BC)^[19] and *Laws of Manu* (2nd century BC), the Sanskrit word *Cīna* (चीन) is used to refer to a country located in the Tibeto-Burman borderlands east of India.^[20] Another theory is that the inhabitants of Yelang, an ancient kingdom in what is now Guizhou, referred to themselves as 'Zina', and may also be the source of the Sanskrit word *Cīna*.^[13]

Traditional Chinese 中國

Simplified Chinese 中国

The traditional (top) and simplified (bottom) characters for "China" in Chinese. The first character means "middle" or "center", and the second character means "country".

Chinese names

The official name of China changed with each dynasty or with each new government, the imperial governments referred to themselves as the Empire of the Great Qing, Empire of the Great Ming, etc. However, the common name remained as *Zhōngguó* (simplified Chinese: 中国; traditional Chinese: 中國, Mandarin pronunciation: [tʃʊŋkwǒ]) through dynastic changes. This translates traditionally as "Middle Kingdom," or as "central country."

The name *Zhōngguó* first appeared in the *Classic of History* (6th century BC), and was used to refer to the late Zhou Dynasty, as they believed that they were the "center of civilization,"^[21] while peoples in the four cardinals were called Eastern Yi, Southern Man, Western Rong and Northern Di respectively. Some texts imply that "Zhōngguó" was originally meant to refer to the capital of the sovereign, to differ from the capital of his vassals.^[22] The use of "Zhōngguó" implied a claim of political legitimacy, and "Zhōngguó" was often used by states who saw themselves as the sole legitimate successor to previous Chinese dynasties; for example, in the era of the Southern Song Dynasty, both the Jin Dynasty and the Southern Song state claimed to be "Zhōngguó."^[23]

Zhōngguó was used as a common name for the Republic of China (*Zhonghua Minguo*) after its establishment in 1912. After the Communists took over control of China in 1949, they established the People's Republic of China (PRC). As a result, the PRC is now commonly known as "China" or "Zhōngguó". The Republic of China nowadays is commonly known as "Taiwan".^[24]

History

			
History of China			
ANCIENT			
3 Sovereigns and 5 Emperors			
Xia Dynasty 2100–1600 BCE			
Shang Dynasty 1600–1046 BCE			
Zhou Dynasty 1045–256 BCE			
Western Zhou			
Eastern Zhou			
Spring and Autumn Period			
Warring States Period			
IMPERIAL			
Qin Dynasty 221 BCE–206 BCE			
Han Dynasty 206 BCE–220 CE			
Western Han			
Xin Dynasty			
Eastern Han			
Three Kingdoms 220–280			
Wei, Shu & Wu			
Jin Dynasty 265–420			
Western Jin	16 Kingdoms 304–439		
Eastern Jin			
Southern & Northern Dynasties 420–589			
Sui Dynasty 581–618			
Tang Dynasty 618–907			
(Second Zhou 690–705)			
5 Dynasties & 10 Kingdoms 907–960	Liao Dynasty 907–1125		
Song Dynasty 960–1279			
Northern Song		W. Xia	
Southern Song	Jin		

Yuan Dynasty 1271–1368	
Ming Dynasty 1368–1644	
Qing Dynasty 1644–1911	
MODERN	
Republic of China 1912–1949	
People's Republic of China 1949–present	Republic of China (Taiwan) 1945–present

Ancient China was one of the earliest centers of human civilization. Chinese civilization was also one of the few to invent writing,^[9] the others being Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley civilization, the Maya and other Mesoamerican civilizations, the Minoan civilization of ancient Greece, and Ancient Egypt.^[25]

Prehistory

Archaeological evidence suggests that the earliest hominids in China date from 250,000 to 2.24 million years ago.^[26]^[27] A cave in Zhoukoudian (near present-day Beijing) has fossils dated at somewhere between 300,000 to 780,000 years.^[10] ^[11] ^[12] The fossils are of Peking Man, an example of *Homo erectus* who used fire.

The earliest evidence of a fully modern human in China comes from Liujiang County, Guangxi, where a cranium has been found and dated at approximately 67,000 years old. Although much controversy persists over the dating of the Liujiang remains,^[28] ^[29] a partial skeleton from Minatogawa in Okinawa, Japan has been dated to 16,600 to 18,250 years old, so modern humans probably reached China before that time.

Dynastic rule



Chinese tradition names the first dynasty Xia, but it was considered mythical until scientific excavations found early bronze-age sites at Erlitou in Henan Province in 1959.^[30] Archaeologists have since uncovered urban sites, bronze implements, and tombs in locations cited as Xia's in ancient historical texts, but it is impossible to verify that these remains are of the Xia without written records from the period.



Some of the thousands of life-size Terracotta Warriors of the Qin Dynasty, ca. 210 BC.

The first Chinese dynasty that left historical records, the loosely feudal Shang (Yin), settled along the Yellow River in eastern China from the 17th to the 11th century BC. The Oracle bone script of the Shang Dynasty represent the oldest forms of Chinese writing found and the direct ancestor of modern Chinese characters used throughout East Asia. The Shang were invaded from the west by the Zhou, who ruled from the 12th to the 5th century BC, until their centralized authority was slowly eroded by feudal warlords. Many independent states eventually emerged out of the weakened Zhou state, and continually waged war with each other in the Spring and Autumn period, only occasionally deferring to the Zhou king. By the time of the Warring States period, there were seven powerful sovereign states, each with its

own king, ministry and army.

The first unified Chinese state was established by Qin Shi Huang of the Qin state in 221 BC, who proclaimed himself as the "First Emperor" and created many reforms in the Empire, notably the forced standardization of the Chinese language and measurements. The Qin Dynasty lasted only fifteen years, as its harsh legalist and authoritarian policies soon led to widespread rebellion.

The subsequent Han Dynasty ruled China between 206 BC and 220 AD, and created a lasting Han cultural identity among its populace that extends to the present day. The Han Dynasty expanded the empire's territory considerably with military campaigns reaching Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia and Central Asia, and also helped establish the Silk Road in Central Asia.

After Han's collapse, another period of disunion followed, including the highly chivalric period of the Three Kingdoms. Independent Chinese states of this period such as Wu opened diplomatic relations with Japan, introducing the Chinese writing system there. In 580 AD, China was reunited under the Sui. However, the Sui Dynasty was short-lived after a failure in the Goguryeo-Sui Wars (598–614) weakened it.

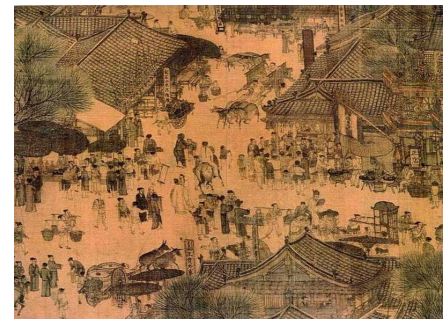


10th–11th century Longquan celadon porcelain pieces from Zhejiang province, during the Song Dynasty.

Under the succeeding Tang and Song dynasties, Chinese technology and culture reached its zenith. The Tang Empire was at its height of power until the middle of the 8th century, when the An Shi Rebellion destroyed the prosperity of the empire. The Song dynasty was the first government in world history to issue paper money and the first Chinese polity to establish a permanent standing navy. Between the 10th and 11th centuries, the population of China doubled in size. This growth came about through expanded rice cultivation in central and southern China, and the production of abundant food surpluses.

Within its borders, the Northern Song Dynasty had a population of some 100 million people. The Song Dynasty was a culturally rich period for philosophy and the arts. Landscape art and portrait painting were brought to new levels of maturity and complexity after the Tang Dynasty, and social elites gathered to view art, share their own, and trade precious artworks. Philosophers such as Cheng Yi and Chu Hsi reinvigorated Confucianism with new commentary, infused Buddhist ideals, and emphasized a new organization of classic texts that brought about the core doctrine of Neo-Confucianism.

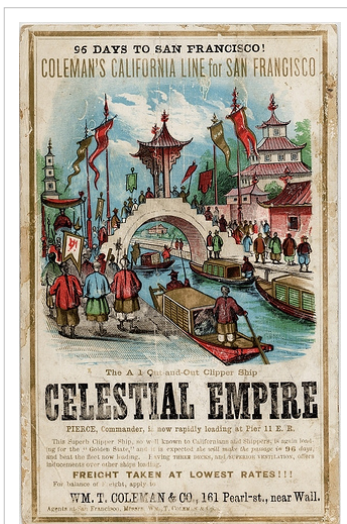
In 1271, the Mongol leader and fifth Khagan of the Mongol Empire Kublai Khan established the Yuan Dynasty, with the last remnant of the Song Dynasty falling to the Yuan in 1279. Before the Mongol invasion, Chinese dynasties reportedly had approximately 120 million inhabitants; after the conquest was completed in 1279, the 1300 census reported roughly 60 million people.^[31] A peasant named Zhu Yuanzhang overthrew the Mongols in 1368 and founded the Ming Dynasty.^[32] Ming Dynasty thinkers such as Wang Yangming would further critique and expand Neo-Confucianism with ideas of individualism and innate morality that would have tremendous impact on later Japanese thought. Chosun Korea also became a nominal vassal state of Ming China and adopted much of its Neo-Confucian bureaucratic structure.



Along the River During the Qingming Festival;
daily life of people from the Song period at the
capital, Bianjing, today's Kaifeng.

Under the Ming Dynasty, China had another golden age, with one of the strongest navies in the world, a rich and prosperous economy and a flourishing of the arts and culture. It was during this period that Zheng He led explorations throughout the world, possibly reaching America. During the early Ming Dynasty China's capital was moved from Nanjing to Beijing. In 1644 Beijing was sacked by a coalition of rebel forces led by Li Zicheng, a minor Ming official turned leader of the peasant revolt. The last Ming Emperor Chongzhen committed suicide when the city fell. The Manchu Qing Dynasty then allied with Ming Dynasty general Wu Sangui and overthrew Li's short-lived Shun Dynasty, and subsequently seized control of Beijing, which became the new capital of the Qing dynasty.

The Qing Dynasty, which lasted until 1912, was the last dynasty in China. In the 19th century the Qing Dynasty adopted a defensive posture towards European imperialism, even though it engaged in imperialistic expansion into Central Asia. At this time China awoke to the significance of the rest of the world, the West in particular. As China opened up to foreign trade and missionary activity, opium produced by British India was forced onto Qing China. Two Opium Wars with Britain weakened the Emperor's control. European imperialism proved to be disastrous for China:



Clipper ship *Celestial Empire*

The Arrow War (1856–1860) [2nd Opium War] saw another disastrous defeat for China. The subsequent passing of the humiliating Treaty of Tianjin in 1856 and the Beijing Conventions of 1860 opened up more of the country to foreign penetrations and more ports for their vessels. Hong Kong was ceded over to the British. Thus, the "unequal treaties system" was established. Heavy indemnities had to be paid by China, and more territory and control were taken over by the foreigners. Busky, Donald F. (2002). *"Communism in History and Theory.* Greenwood Publishing Group, p.2.
http://books.google.com/books?id=Q6b0j1VINWgC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_navlinks

The weakening of the Qing regime, and the apparent humiliation of the unequal treaties in the eyes of the Chinese people had several consequences. One consequence was the Taiping Civil War, which lasted from 1851 to 1862. It was led by Hong Xiuquan, who was partly influenced by an idiosyncratic interpretation of Christianity. Hong believed himself to be the son of God and the younger brother of Jesus. Although the Qing forces were eventually victorious,

the civil war was one of the bloodiest in human history, costing at least 20 million lives (more than the total number of fatalities in the First World War), with some estimates of up to two hundred million. Other costly rebellions

followed the Taiping Rebellion, such as the Punti-Hakka Clan Wars (1855–67), Nien Rebellion (1851–1868), Muslim Rebellion (1862–77), Panthay Rebellion (1856–1873) and the Miao Rebellion (1854–73).^{[34] [35]}

These rebellions resulted in an estimated loss of several million lives each and led to disastrous results for the economy and the countryside.^{[36] [37] [38]} The flow of British opium hastened the empire's decline. In the 19th century, the age of colonialism was at its height and the great Chinese Diaspora began. About 35 million overseas Chinese live in Southeast Asia today.^[39] The famine in 1876–79 claimed between 9 and 13 million lives in northern China.^[40] From 108 BC to 1911 AD, China experienced 1,828 famines,^[41] or one per year, somewhere in the empire.^[42]

While China was wracked by continuous war, Meiji Japan succeeded in rapidly modernizing its military and set its sights on Korea and Manchuria. At the request of the Korean emperor, the Chinese government sent troops to aid in suppressing the Tonghak Rebellion in 1894. However, Japan also sent troops to Korea, leading to the First Sino-Japanese War, which resulted in Qing China's loss of influence in the Korean Peninsula as well as the cession of Taiwan to Japan.

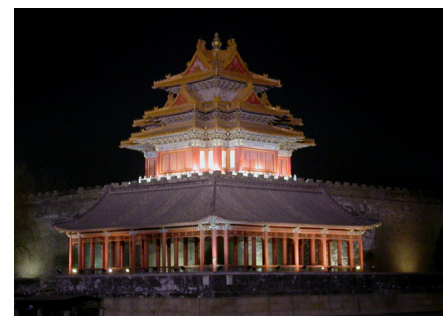
Following this series of defeats, a reform plan for the empire to become a modern Meiji-style constitutional monarchy was drafted by the Emperor Guangxu in 1898, but was opposed and stopped by the Empress Dowager Cixi, who placed Emperor Guangxu under house arrest in a coup d'état. Further destruction followed the ill-fated 1900 Boxer Rebellion against westerners in Beijing.

By the early 20th century, mass civil disorder had begun, and calls for reform and revolution were heard across the country. The 38-year-old Emperor Guangxu died under house arrest on 14 November 1908, suspiciously just a day before Cixi's own death. With the throne empty, he was succeeded by Cixi's handpicked heir, his two year old nephew Puyi, who became the Xuantong Emperor. Guangxu's consort, who became the Empress Dowager Longyu. In another coup d'état, Yuan Shikai overthrew the last Qing emperor, and forced empress Dowager Longyu to sign the abdication decree as regent in 1912, ending two thousand years of imperial rule in China. She died, childless, in 1913.

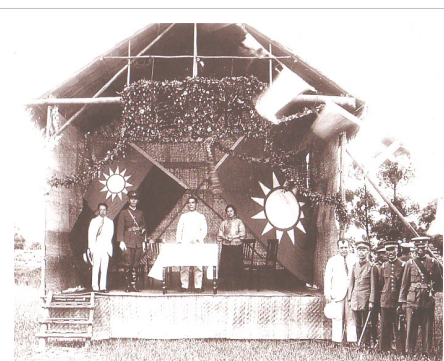
Republic of China (1912–49)

On 1 January 1912, the Republic of China was established, heralding the end of the Qing Dynasty. Sun Yat-sen of the Kuomintang (the KMT or Nationalist Party) was proclaimed provisional president of the republic. However, the presidency was later given to Yuan Shikai, a former Qing general, who had ensured the defection of the entire Beiyang Army from the Qing Empire to the revolution. In 1915, Yuan proclaimed himself Emperor of China but was forced to abdicate and return the state to a republic when he realized it was an unpopular move, not only with the population but also with his own Beiyang Army and its commanders.

After Yuan Shikai's death in 1916, China was politically fragmented, with an internationally recognized but virtually powerless national government seated in Peking (Beijing). Warlords in various regions



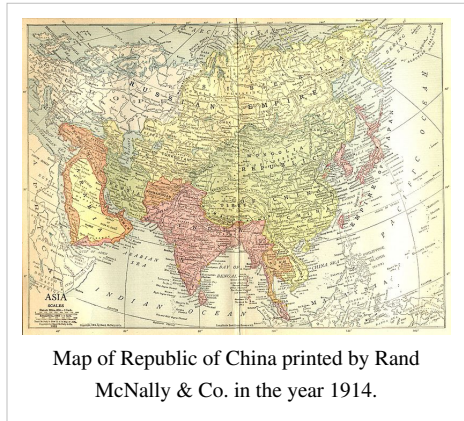
A corner tower of the Forbidden City at night; the palace was the residence for the imperial family from the reign of the Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty in the 15th century until the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912.



Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek at the founding of the Whampoa Military Academy. Flags of the Republic of China and the Nationalist Party shown.

exercised actual control over their respective territories. In the late 1920s, the Kuomintang, under Chiang Kai-shek, was able to reunify the country under its own control, moving the nation's capital to Nanking (Nanjing) and implementing "political tutelage", an intermediate stage of political development outlined in Sun Yat-sen's program for transforming China into a modern, democratic state. Effectively, political tutelage meant one-party rule by the Kuomintang.

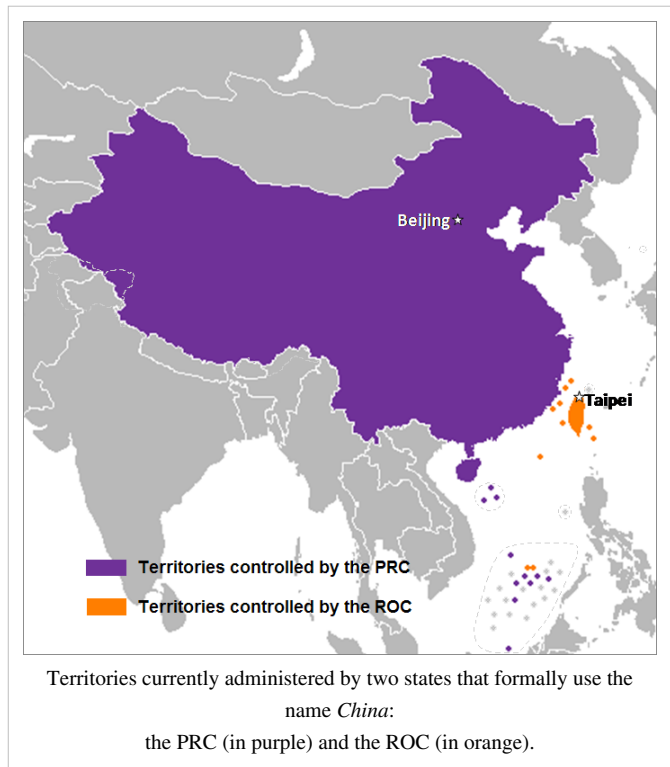
The Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945 (part of World War II) forced an uneasy alliance between the Nationalists and the Communists as well as causing around 20 million Chinese civilian deaths.^[43] With the surrender of Japan in 1945, China emerged victorious but financially drained. The continued distrust between the Nationalists and the Communists led to the resumption of the Chinese Civil War. In 1947, constitutional rule was established, but because of the ongoing Civil War many provisions of the ROC constitution were never implemented in mainland China.



Post Civil War (1949–present)

After its victory in the Chinese Civil War, the Communist Party of China (CCP) led by Mao Zedong gained control of most of Mainland China. On 1 October 1949, they established the People's Republic of China as a Socialist State headed by a "Democratic Dictatorship" with the CCP as the ruling political party, thus, laying claim as the successor state of the ROC. The central government of the Chinese Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek retreated to the island of Taiwan that it had administered at the end of World War II, and moved the ROC government there. Major armed hostilities ceased in 1950 but no peace treaty has been signed. An estimated 30 million died during the Great Chinese Famine of 1958–61.^[44] ^[45]

Beginning in the late 1970s, the Republic of China began the implementation of full, multi-party, representative democracy in the territories still under its control (Taiwan, and a number of smaller islands including Quemoy and Matsu). Today, the ROC has active political participation by all sectors of society. The main cleavage in ROC politics is the issue of eventual political unification with the Chinese mainland vs. formal independence of Taiwan.





Mao Zedong proclaiming the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

After the Chinese Civil War, mainland China underwent a series of disruptive socioeconomic movements starting in the late 1950s with the Great Leap Forward and continuing in the 1960s with the Cultural Revolution. The Great Leap Forward resulted in an estimated 30 to 36 million deaths.^{[44] [46]} With the death of its first generation Communist Party leaders such as Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, the PRC began implementing a series of political and economic reforms advocated by Deng Xiaoping that eventually formed the foundation for mainland China's rapid economic development starting in the 1990s.

Post-1978 reforms in mainland China have led to some relaxation of control over many areas of society. However, the PRC government still has almost absolute control over politics, and it continually seeks to eradicate what it perceives as threats to the social, political and economic stability of the country. Examples include the fight against terrorism, jailing of political opponents and journalists, custody regulation of the press, regulation of religion, and suppression of independence/secessionist movements. In 1989, the student protests at Tiananmen Square were violently put to an end by the Chinese military after 15 days of martial law. In 1997, Hong Kong was ceded to the PRC by the United Kingdom, and in 1999, Macau was handed over by Portugal.

Since 1949, mainland China is administered by the People's Republic of China—a one-party state under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party—while the island of Taiwan and surrounding islands are administered by the Republic of China—a democratic multi-party state. After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, both states claimed to be the sole legitimate ruler of all of China. After the Kuomintang retreat to Taiwan in 1949, the Republic of China had maintained official diplomatic relations with most states around the world, but by the 1970s, a shift had occurred in international diplomatic circles and the People's Republic of China gained the upper hand in international diplomatic relations and recognition count.

In 1971, under UN resolution 2758, the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek to the United Nations were expelled from the intergovernmental organization. With the expulsion of the representatives, and effectively the Republic of China, the representatives of the People's Republic of China were invited to assume China's seat on the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly and other United Nations councils and agencies. Later attempts by the Republic of China to rejoin the UN have either been blocked by the People's Republic of China, which has veto power on the UN Security Council, or rejected by the United Nations Secretariat or a United Nations General Assembly committee responsible for the General Assembly's agenda.^[47]

Since the relocation of its capital to Taiwan, the Republic of China has not formally renounced its claim to authority over all of China, nor has it changed its official maps, which include the mainland and Mongolia. Following the introduction of full democracy, and the electoral victory of the DPP's Chen Shui-bian in the presidential elections, the ROC had adopted a policy of separating the state's identity from "China", while moving towards identifying the state as "Taiwan".

However, the ROC has not made any formal moves to change the name, flag, or national anthem of the state to reflect a Taiwanese identity due to the lack of consensus within Taiwan, pressure from the United States and the fear of invasion or military action from the People's Republic of China against the island. The Republic of China during the DPP years did not actively pursue its claims on mainland China or Mongolia. However, after having been elected as president, KMT's Ma Ying-jeou asserted that, constitutionally, mainland China is



Modern Nanjing skyline. China is the world's fastest-growing major economy.

part of the Republic of China.^[48] The People's Republic of China claims to have succeeded the Republic of China as the sole legitimate governing authority of all of China, which, from the official viewpoint of the People's Republic of China, includes the island of Taiwan.

Over the last 50 years, both the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China have used diplomatic and economic means to compete for recognition in the international arena. Because most international, intergovernmental organizations observe the One-China policy of the People's Republic of China, the PRC has been able to pressure organizations, such as the World Health Organization and the International Olympic Committee, to refuse to officially recognize the Republic of China. Due to the One-China policy, states around the world are pressured to refuse, or to cut off diplomatic relations with the Republic of China. As a result, 23 U.N. member states currently maintain official diplomatic relations with the Republic of China, while the vast majority of U.N. member states maintain official diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

Territory and environment

Historical political divisions

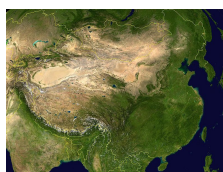
Top-level political divisions of China have altered as administrations changed. Top levels included circuits and provinces. Below that, there have been prefectures, subprefectures, departments, commanderies, districts, and counties. Recent divisions also include prefecture-level cities, county-level cities, towns and townships.

Most Chinese dynasties were based in the historical heartlands of China, known as China proper. Various dynasties also expanded into peripheral territories like Inner Mongolia, Manchuria, Xinjiang, and Tibet. The Manchu-established Qing Dynasty and its successors, the ROC and the PRC, incorporated these territories into the Chinese empire.



Territories occupied by different dynasties as well as modern political states throughout the history of China.

Geography and climate



Composite satellite photo.



Terrace rice fields in Yunnan.



Snowy mountains in Diqing.

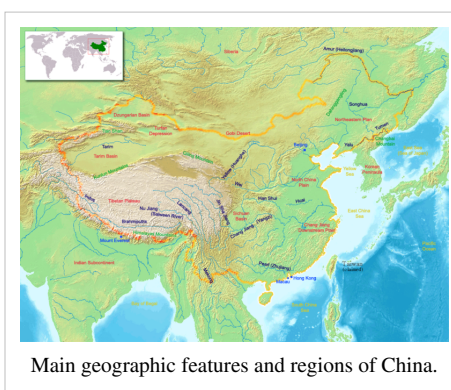
China ranges from mostly plateaus and mountains in the west to lower lands in the east. Principal rivers flow from west to east, including the Yangtze (central), the Huang He (Yellow river, north-central), and the Amur (northeast), and sometimes toward the south (including the Pearl River, Mekong River, and Brahmaputra), with most Chinese rivers emptying into the Pacific Ocean.

In the east, along the shores of the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea there are extensive and densely populated alluvial plains. On the edges of the Inner Mongolian plateau in the north, grasslands can be seen. Southern China is dominated by hills and low mountain ranges. In the central-east are the deltas of China's two major rivers, the Huang He and Yangtze River. Most of China's arable lands lie along these rivers, and they were the centers of China's major ancient civilizations. Other major rivers include the Pearl River, Mekong, Brahmaputra and Amur. Yunnan Province is considered a part of the Greater Mekong Subregion, which also includes Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.^[49]

In the west, the north has a great alluvial plain, and the south has a vast calcareous tableland traversed by hill ranges of moderate elevation, and the Himalayas, containing Earth's highest point, Mount Everest. The northwest also has high plateaus with more arid desert landscapes such as the Takla-Makan and the Gobi Desert, which has been expanding. During many dynasties, the southwestern border of China has been the high mountains and deep valleys of Yunnan, which separate modern China from Burma, Laos and Vietnam.

The Paleozoic formations of China, excepting only the upper part of the Carboniferous system, are marine, while the Mesozoic and Tertiary deposits are estuarine and freshwater, or else of terrestrial origin. Groups of volcanic cones occur in the Great Plain of north China. In the Liaodong and Shandong Peninsulas, there are basaltic plateaus.

The climate of China varies greatly. The northern zone (containing Beijing) has summer daytime temperatures of more than 30 degrees Celsius and winters of Arctic severity. The central zone (containing Shanghai) has a temperate continental climate with very hot summers and cold winters. The southern zone (containing Guangzhou) has a subtropical climate with very hot summers and mild winters.



Main geographic features and regions of China.

Due to a prolonged drought and poor agricultural practices, dust storms have become usual in the spring in China.^[50] Dust has blown to southern Mainland China and Taiwan, and has reached the West Coast of the United States. Water, erosion, and pollution control have become important issues in China's relations with other countries.

Economy

Many analysts assert that China is one of the leading examples of state capitalism in the 21st century.^{[51] [52]}

Culture

Confucianism was the official philosophy throughout most of Imperial China's history, and mastery of Confucian texts was the primary criterion for entry into the imperial bureaucracy. China's traditional values were derived from various versions of Confucianism. A number of more authoritarian strains of thought have also been influential, such as Legalism.

There was often conflict between the philosophies, e.g. the Song Dynasty Neo-Confucians believed Legalism departed from the original spirit of Confucianism. Examinations and a culture of merit remain greatly valued in China today. In recent years, a number of New Confucians (not to be confused with Neo-Confucianism) have advocated that democratic ideals and human rights are quite compatible with traditional Confucian "Asian values".^[53]

With the rise of European economic and military power beginning in the mid-19th century, non-Chinese systems of social and political organization gained adherents in China. Some of these would-be reformers totally rejected China's cultural legacy, while others sought to combine the strengths of Chinese and European cultures. In essence, the history of 20th-century China is one of experimentation with new systems of social, political, and economic organization that would allow for the reintegration of the nation in the wake of dynastic collapse.



Wang Yangming, a highly influential Neo-Confucian



A Chinese Opera (*Beijing Opera*) performance in Beijing of the historical character Yang Guifei.

Arts, scholarship, and literature

Chinese characters have had many variants and styles throughout Chinese history. Tens of thousands of ancient written documents are still extant, from oracle bones to Qing edicts. This literary emphasis affected the general perception of cultural refinement in China, e.g. the view that calligraphy was a higher art form than painting or drama. Manuscripts of the Classics and religious texts (mainly Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist) were handwritten by ink brush.

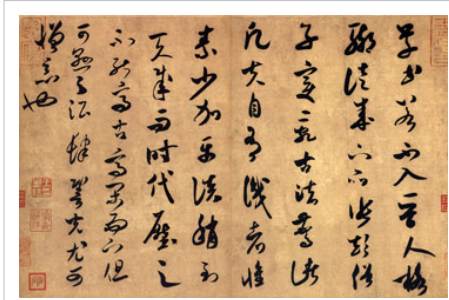
Calligraphy later became commercialized, and works by famous artists became prized possessions. Chinese literature has a long past; the earliest classic work in Chinese, the *I Ching* or "Book of Changes" dates to around 1000 BC. A flourishing of philosophy during the Warring States Period produced such noteworthy works as Confucius's *Analects* and Laozi's *Tao Te Ching*. (See also: the Chinese classics.) Dynastic histories were often written, beginning with Sima Qian's seminal *Records of the Historian*, which was written from 109 BC to 91 BC.

The Tang Dynasty witnessed a poetic flowering, while the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature were written during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Printmaking in the form of movable type was developed during the Song Dynasty. Academies of scholars sponsored by the empire were formed to comment on the classics in both printed and handwritten form. Royalty frequently participated in these discussions as well.

The Song Dynasty was also a period of great scientific literature, and saw the creation of works such as Su Song's *Xin Yixiang Fayao* and Shen Kuo's *Dream Pool Essays*. There were also enormous works of historiography and large encyclopedias, such as Sima Guang's *Zizhi Tongjian* of 1084 AD or the *Four Great Books of Song* fully compiled and edited by the 11th century.

For centuries, religious and social advancement in China could be achieved through high performance on the imperial examinations. This led to the creation of a meritocracy, although success was available only to males who could afford test preparation. Imperial examinations required applicants to write essays and demonstrate mastery of the Confucian classics. Those who passed the highest level of the exam became elite scholar-officials known as *jinshi*, a highly esteemed socio-economic position.

Chinese philosophers, writers and poets were highly respected and played key roles in preserving and promoting the culture of the empire. Some classical scholars, however, were noted for their daring depictions of the lives of the common people, often to the displeasure of authorities. The Chinese invented numerous musical instruments, such as the zheng (zither with movable bridges), qin (bridgeless zither), sheng (free reed mouth organ), and xiao (vertical flute) and adopted and developed others such the erhu (alto fiddle or bowed lute) and pipa (pear-shaped plucked lute), many of which later spread throughout East Asia and Southeast Asia, particularly to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.



Chinese calligraphy by Mi Fu, Song Dynasty, ca. 1100 CE



A bamboo book copy of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, a 20th century reprint of a Qianlong imperial edition.

Demography

Hundreds of ethnic groups have existed in China throughout its history. The largest ethnic group in China by far is the Han. This group, however, is internally diverse and can be further divided into smaller ethnic groups that share similar traits.

Over the last three millennia, many previously distinct ethnic groups in China have been Sinicized into a Han identity, which over time dramatically expanded the size of the Han population. However, these assimilations were usually incomplete, and vestiges of indigenous language and culture still often remain in various regions of China. Because of this, many within the Han identity have maintained distinct linguistic and cultural traditions while still identifying as Han.

Several ethnicities have also dramatically shaped Han culture, e.g. the Manchurian clothing called the qipao became the new "Chinese" fashion after the 17th century, replacing earlier Han styles of clothing such as the Hanfu. The modern term Chinese nation (*Zhonghua Minzu*) is now used to describe a notion of a Chinese nationality that transcends ethnic divisions.

Languages

Most languages in China belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family, spoken by 29 ethnicities. There are also several major linguistic groups within the Chinese language itself. The most spoken varieties are Mandarin (spoken by over 70% of the population), Wu, Yue (Cantonese), Min, Xiang, Gan, and Hakka. Non-Sinitic languages spoken widely by ethnic minorities include Zhuang (Thai), Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur (Turkic), Hmong and Korean.^[54]

Classical Chinese was the written standard in China for thousands of years, and allowed for written communication between speakers of various unintelligible languages and dialects in China. Vernacular Chinese or *baihua* is the written standard based on the Mandarin dialect first popularized in Ming dynasty novels, and was adopted (with significant modifications) during the early 20th century as the national vernacular. Classical Chinese is still part of the high school curriculum and is thus intelligible to some degree to many Chinese.



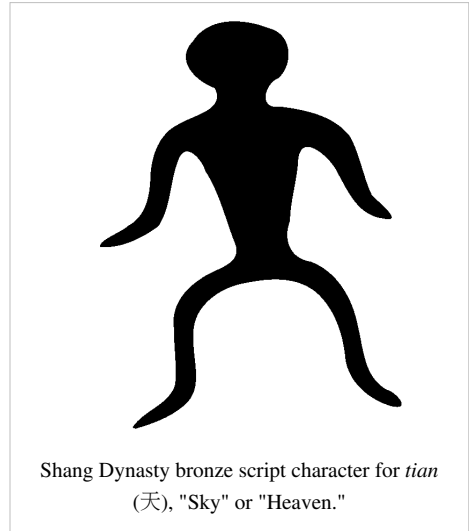
Religion

The "official" orthodox faith system held by most dynasties of China since at least the Shang Dynasty (1766 BC) until the overthrow of the last dynasty (1911 AD) centered on the worship of *Shangdi* ("Supreme God") or "Heaven" as an omnipotent force.^[55] This faith system pre-dated the development of Confucianism and Taoism and the introduction of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

It has features of monotheism in that Heaven is seen as an omnipotent entity, endowed with personality but no corporeal form. From the writings of Confucius, we find that Confucius himself believed that Heaven cannot be deceived, Heaven guides people's lives and maintains a personal relationship with them, and that Heaven gives tasks for people to fulfill to teach them righteousness (*yi*, 義).^[55] However, this faith system was not truly monotheistic since other lesser gods and spirits, which varied with locality, were also worshiped along with *Shangdi*. Still, variants such as Mohism approached high monotheism, teaching that the function of lesser gods and ancestral spirits is merely to carry out the will of *Shangdi*, which included observing "universal love" (*jian'ai*, 兼爱) and shunning fatalism.

Worship of *Shangdi* and Heaven in ancient China includes the erection of shrines, the last and greatest being the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, and the offering of prayers. The ruler of China in every Chinese dynasty would perform annual sacrificial rituals to Heaven, usually by slaughtering a bull as sacrifice. Although its popularity gradually diminished after the advent of Taoism and Buddhism, among other religions, its concepts remained in use throughout the pre-modern period and have been incorporated in later religions in China, including terminology used in Chinese Christianity.

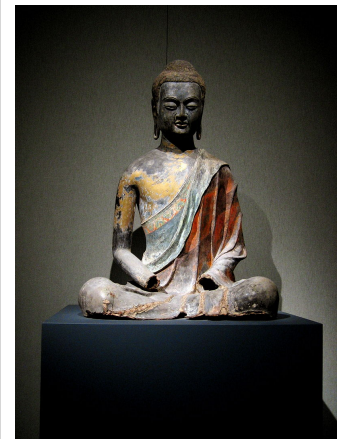
Taoism is an indigenous religion of China and its beginnings are traditionally traced to the composition of Lao Zi's *Tao Te Ching* (*The Book of Tao and Its Virtues*) or to seminal works by Zhang Daoling. The philosophy of Taoism is centered on "the way"; an understanding of which can be likened to recognizing the true nature of the universe. Taoism in its unorganized form is also considered a folk religion of China. More secular derivatives of Taoist ideas include Feng Shui, Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, and acupuncture.



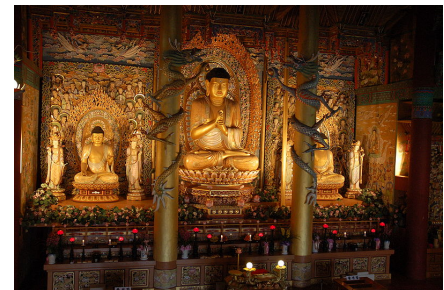
A monk in the Jade Buddha Temple, Shanghai, China

Buddhism in China was first introduced from India and Central Asia during the Han dynasty and became very popular among Chinese of all walks of life, embraced particularly by commoners, and sponsored by emperors in certain dynasties. Mahayana (*Dacheng*, 大乘) is the predominant form of Buddhism practiced in China, where it was largely Sinicized and later exported to Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Some subsets of Mahayana popular in China include Pure Land (Amidism) and Zen. Buddhism is the largest organized faith in China and the country has the most Buddhist adherents in the world. Many Chinese, however, identify themselves as both Taoist and Buddhist at the same time.

Ancestor worship is a major religious theme shared among all Chinese religions. Traditional Chinese culture, Taoism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism all value filial piety, or a love and respect for one's parents and ancestors, as one of the most important virtues. Chinese people generally offer prayers and food for their ancestors, light incense and candles, and burn offerings of Joss paper. These activities are typically conducted at the site of ancestral graves or tombs, at an ancestral temple, or at a household shrine.



A Chinese Tang Dynasty (618–907) sculpture of the Buddha seated in meditation.



Typical interior of a temple.



The Huaisheng Mosque is one of the oldest Mosques in the world, built by Muhammad's uncle, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas

Islam in China dates to a mission in 651, 18 years after Muhammad's death. Muslims came to China for trade, dominating the import/export industry during the Song Dynasty.^{[56] [57]} They became influential in government circles, including Zheng He, Lan Yu and Yeheidie'erdong, who designed the Yuan Dynasty's capital, Khanbaliq. Nanjing became an important center of Islamic study.^[58] The Qing Dynasty waged war and genocide against Muslims in the Dungan revolt and Panthay rebellion.^{[59] [60] [61]}

Judaism in China dates to as early as the 7th or 8th century CE. In the first half of the 20th century, many Jews arrived in Shanghai and Hong Kong during those cities' periods of economic expansion, seeking refuge from the Holocaust. Shanghai was notable for its volume of

Jewish refugees, as it was the only port in the world to accept them without an entry visa.

Christianity in China has developed since at least the 7th century AD with the introduction of the Assyrian Church of the East. Christianity began to make significant inroads in China after the 16th century through Jesuit and later Protestant missionaries. The Taiping Rebellion was influenced to some degree by Christian teachings, and the Boxer Rebellion was in part a reaction against Christianity in China.

Sports and recreation

For sports in the People's Republic of China, see Sport in the People's Republic of China, Sports in Hong Kong, and Sports in Macau.

For sports in the Republic of China, see Sports in Taiwan.

Many historians believe that association football originated in China, where a form of the sport may have appeared around 1000 AD.^[62] Other popular sports include martial arts, table tennis, badminton, and more recently, golf. Basketball is now popular among young people in urban centers.

There are also many traditional sports. Chinese dragon boat racing occurs during the Duan Wu festival. In Inner Mongolia, Mongolian-style wrestling and horse racing are popular. In Tibet, archery and equestrian sports are part of traditional festivals.^[63]

Physical fitness is highly regarded. It is common for the elderly to practice Tai Chi Chuan and qigong in parks. Board games such as International Chess, Go (Weiqi), and Xiangqi (Chinese chess) are also common and have organized formal competitions. The capital city of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, hosted the 2008 Olympic Games, a major international sporting event.



Dragon boat racing, a popular traditional Chinese sport.

Science and technology

Among the technological accomplishments of ancient China were paper (not papyrus) and papermaking, woodblock printing and movable type printing, the early lodestone and needle compass, gunpowder, toilet paper, early seismological detectors, matches, pound locks, the double-action piston pump, blast furnace and cast iron, the iron plough, the multi-tube seed drill, the suspension bridge,^[64] natural gas as fuel, the differential gear for the South Pointing Chariot, the hydraulic-powered armillary sphere, the hydraulic-powered trip hammer, the mechanical chain drive, the mechanical belt drive, the raised-relief map, the propeller, the crossbow, the cannon, the rocket, the multistage rocket, etc.

Chinese astronomers were among the first to record observations of a supernova. The work of the astronomer Shen Kuo (1031–95) alone was most impressive, as he theorized that the sun and moon were spherical, corrected the position of the polestar with his improved sighting tube, discovered the concept of true north, wrote of planetary motions such as retrogradation, and compared the orbital paths of the planets to points on the shape of a rotating willow leaf. With evidence for them, he also postulated geological theories for the processes of land formation in geomorphology and climate change in paleoclimatology.

Other important astronomers included Gan De, Shi Shen, Zhang Heng, Yi Xing, Zhang Sixun, Su Song and Guo Shoujing. Chinese mathematics evolved independently of Greek mathematics and is therefore of great interest in the history of mathematics. The Chinese were also keen on documenting all of their technological achievements, such as in the *Tiangong Kaiwu* encyclopedia written by Song Yingxing (1587–1666).

China's science and technology had fallen behind that of Europe by the 17th century. Political, social and cultural reasons have been given for this, although recent historians focus more on economic causes, such as the high level equilibrium trap. Since the PRC's market reforms, China has become better connected to the global economy and is placing greater emphasis on science and technology.



Remains of an ancient Chinese handheld crossbow, 2nd century BC

Notes

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Geographical coordinates: 35°00′N 105°00′E

India

<p>Republic of India भारत गणराज्य* <i>Bhārat Ganarājya</i></p>	
	 सत्यमेव जयते
<p>Motto: <i>"Satyameva Jayate"</i> (Sanskrit) सत्यमेव जयते (Devanāgarī) "Truth Alone Triumphs"^[3]</p>	
<p>Anthem: <i>Jana Gana Mana</i> Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people^[4]</p>	
<p>National Song^[5] <i>Vande Mataram</i> I bow to thee, Mother^[6]</p>	



Area controlled by India in dark green;
Claimed but uncontrolled territories in light green

Capital		New Delhi 28°36.8'N 77°12.5'E
Largest city		Mumbai
Official language(s)		
Recognised regional languages		
National languages		None defined by the constitution. ^[7]
Demonym		Indian
Government		Federal parliamentary constitutional republic ^[2]
-	President	Pratibha Patil
-	Prime Minister	Manmohan Singh (INC)
-	Speaker of the House	Meira Kumar (INC)
-	Chief Justice	S. H. Kapadia
Legislature		Sansad
-	Upper House	Rajya Sabha
-	Lower House	Lok Sabha
Independence		from the United Kingdom
-	Declared	15 August 1947
-	Republic	26 January 1950
Area		
-		3,287,240 km ² [‡] (7th) 1,269,210 sq mi
-	Water (%)	9.56
Population		
-	2010 estimate	1190251000 ^[8] (2nd)

-	2001 census	1,028,610,328 ^[9]
-	Density	362.1/km ² (31st) 937.8/sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2010 estimate
-	Total	\$3.862 trillion ^[10] (4th)
-	Per capita	\$3,176 ^[10] (127th)
GDP (nominal)		2010 estimate
-	Total	\$1.367 trillion ^[10] (11th)
-	Per capita	\$1,124 ^[10] (142nd)
Gini (2004)		36.8 ^[11] (79th)
HDI (2010)		▲ 0.519 ^[12] (medium) (119th)
Currency		Indian rupee (₹) (INR)
Time zone		IST (UTC+5:30)
-	Summer (DST)	not observed (UTC+5:30)
Date formats		dd/mm/yyyy (AD)
Drives on the		left
ISO 3166 code		IN
Internet TLD		.in
Calling code		91

India (English pronunciation: /ˈɪndiə/ (listen)), officially the **Republic of India** (Hindi: भारत गणराज्य ***Bhārat Gaṇarājya***; see also official names of India), is a country in South Asia. It is the seventh-largest country by geographical area, the second-most populous country with over 1.2 billion people, and the most populous democracy in the world.^[13] Mainland India is bounded by the Indian Ocean on the south, the Arabian Sea on the west, and the Bay of Bengal on the east; and it is bordered by Pakistan to the west;^[note] Bhutan, the People's Republic of China and Nepal to the north; and Bangladesh and Burma to the east. In the Indian Ocean, mainland India and the Lakshadweep Islands are in the vicinity of Sri Lanka and the Maldives, while India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands share maritime border with Thailand and the Indonesian island of Sumatra in the Andaman Sea.^[14] India has a coastline of 7517 kilometres (4700 mi).^[15]



Home to the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation and a region of historic trade routes and vast empires, the Indian subcontinent was identified with its commercial and cultural wealth for much of its long history.^[16] Four of the world's major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism—originated here, while Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam arrived in the first millennium CE and shaped the region's diverse culture. Gradually annexed by the British East India Company from the early 18th century and colonised by the United Kingdom from the mid-19th century, India became an independent nation in 1947 after a struggle for independence which was marked by a non-violent resistance led by Mahatma Gandhi.

India is a federal constitutional republic with a parliamentary democracy consisting of 28 states and seven union territories. A pluralistic, multilingual and multiethnic society, India is also home to a diversity of wildlife in a variety of protected habitats. The Indian economy is the world's eleventh largest economy by nominal GDP and the fourth largest by purchasing power parity. Since the introduction of market-based economic reforms in 1991, India has become one of the fastest growing major economies in the world;^[17] however, the country continues to face several poverty, illiteracy, corruption and public health related challenges. India is classified as a newly industrialised

country and is one of the four BRIC nations.^{[18] [19]} It is the world's sixth *de facto* nuclear weapons state and has the third-largest standing armed force in the world, while its military expenditure ranks tenth in the world.^[20] India is a regional power in South Asia.^[21]

It is a founding member of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the World Trade Organization, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the East Asia Summit, the G20 and the G8+5; a member of the Commonwealth of Nations; and an observer state in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Etymology

The name *India* is derived from *Indus*, which is derived from the Old Persian word *Hindu*, from Sanskrit सन्धि *Sindhu*, the historic local appellation for the Indus River.^[22] The ancient Greeks referred to the Indians as *Indoi* (Ἰνδοί), the people of the Indus.^[23] The Constitution of India and common usage in various Indian languages also recognise *Bharat* (pronounced Hindustani pronunciation: [ˈbʱaːrət̪] ( listen)) as an official name of equal status.^[24] The name *Bharat* is derived from the name of the legendary king Bharata in Hindu scriptures. *Hindustan* (Hindustani pronunciation: [ɦɪnd̪ʊˈstaːn] ( listen)), originally a Persian word for “Land of the Hindus” referring to northern India, is also occasionally used as a synonym for all of India.^[25]

History

Stone Age rock shelters with paintings at the Bhimbetka rock shelters in Madhya Pradesh are the earliest known traces of human life in India. The first known permanent settlements appeared about 8,500 years ago and gradually developed into the Indus Valley Civilisation,^[26] dating back to 3400 BCE in western India. It was followed by the Vedic period, which laid the foundations of Hinduism and other cultural aspects of early Indian society, and ended in the 500s BCE. From around 550 BCE, many independent kingdoms and republics known as the Mahajanapadas were established across the country.^[27]



Paintings at the Ajanta Caves in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, 6th century

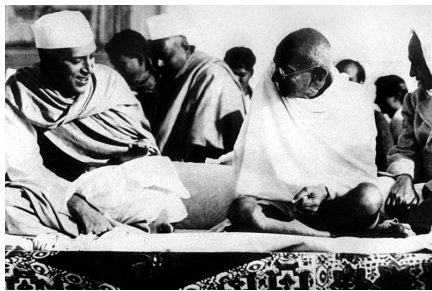
In the 3rd century BCE, most of South Asia was united into the Maurya Empire by Chandragupta Maurya and flourished under Ashoka the Great.^[28] From the 3rd century CE, the Gupta dynasty oversaw the period referred to as ancient "India's Golden Age".^{[29] [30]} Empires in southern India included those of the Chalukyas, the Cholas and the Vijayanagara Empire. Science, technology, engineering, art, logic, language, literature, mathematics, astronomy, religion and philosophy flourished under the patronage of these kings.

Following Islamic invasions from Central Asia between the 10th and 12th centuries, much of northern India came under the rule of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire. Under the rule of Akbar the Great, India enjoyed much cultural and economic progress as well as religious harmony.^{[31] [32]} Mughal emperors gradually expanded their empires to cover large parts of the subcontinent. However, in northeastern India, the dominant power was the Ahom kingdom of Assam, among the few kingdoms to have resisted Mughal subjugation. The first major threat to Mughal imperial power came from a Hindu Rajput king Maha Rana Pratap of Mewar in the 16th century. By early 1700s, the Sikh Empire and the Marathas had emerged as formidable foes of the Mughals.^[33] Following the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Empire entered a period of gradual decline and by mid-18th century, a large portion of the Mughal territory came under the control of the Hindu Maratha Empire.^[34]

From the 16th century, European powers such as Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and Great Britain established trading posts and later took advantage of internal conflicts to establish colonies in the country. By 1856, most of India was under the control of the British East India Company.^[35] A year later, a nationwide insurrection of rebellious military units and kingdoms, known as India's First War of Independence or the *Sepoy Mutiny*, seriously challenged

the Company's control but eventually failed. As a result of the instability, India was brought under the direct rule of the British Crown.

20th century



Mahatma Gandhi (right) with Jawaharlal Nehru, 1937. Nehru would go on to become India's first prime minister in 1947.

In the 20th century, a nationwide struggle for independence was launched by the Indian National Congress (INC) and other political organisations.^[36] Several Indian radical revolutionaries, such as Subhash Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh, led an armed rebellion against the British Raj.^[37] However, the defining aspect of the Indian independence movement was the nonviolent resistance led by Mahatma Gandhi and the INC.^[38] Under the leadership of Gandhi, millions of Indians participated in the *Quit India* civil disobedience movement against the British Raj.^[39]

In September 1939, India declared war on Germany and at the height of the World War II, more than 2.5 million Indian soldiers were fighting against the Axis powers.^[40] The Indian Army was one of the largest Allied forces contingents which took part in the North and East African, Western Desert and the Italian Campaign and played a crucial role in halting the progress of Imperial Japan in the South-East Asian theatre.^{[41] [42]} However, certain Indian nationalists collaborated with the Axis powers to overthrow the British Raj. The Indian National Army (INA), led by Bose, forged an alliance with the Axis powers and fought an unsuccessful military campaign against British India.^[43]

In 1943, a perceived shortage of food leading to large-scale hoarding and soaring food prices coupled with poor food distribution mechanism and inadequate response of the British officials resulted in a catastrophic famine in the Bengal region which killed about 1.5 to 3 million people.^{[44] [45] [46] [47]} After World War II, a number of mutinies broke out in the Air Force and Navy and the INA trials caused considerable public unrest.^{[48] [49]}

Independence and afterwards

On 15 August 1947, the British Indian Empire was dissolved following which the Muslim-majority areas were partitioned to form a separate state of Pakistan.^[50] The partition led to a population transfer of more than 10 million people between India and Pakistan and the death of about one million people.^[51] On 26 January 1950, India became a republic and a new constitution came into effect under which India was established as a secular and a democratic state.^[52]

Since independence, India has faced challenges from religious violence, casteism, naxalism, terrorism and regional separatist insurgencies, especially in Jammu and Kashmir and northeastern India. Since the 1990s, terrorist attacks have affected many Indian cities. India has unresolved territorial disputes with the People's Republic of China, which, in 1962, escalated into the Sino-Indian War, and with Pakistan, which resulted in wars in 1947, 1965, 1971 and 1999.

India is a state armed with nuclear weapons; having conducted its first nuclear test in 1974,^[53] followed by another five tests in 1998.^[53] From the 1950s to the 1980s, India followed socialist-inspired policies. The economy was shackled by extensive regulation, protectionism and public ownership, leading to pervasive corruption and slow economic growth.^[54] Beginning 1991, significant economic reforms^[55] have transformed India into one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, increasing its global clout.^[17]

Government

 National Symbols of India ^{[56] [57]}	
Flag	Tricolour
Emblem	Sarnath Lion Capital
Anthem	Jana Gana Mana
Song	Vande Mataram
Animal	Royal Bengal Tiger
Bird	Indian Peacock
Aquatic animal	Dolphin
Flower	Lotus
Tree	Banyan
Fruit	Mango
Sport	Field hockey
Game	Pachisi
Calendar	Saka
River	Ganges

India is federation with a parliamentary form of government, governed under the Constitution of India.^[58] It is a constitutional republic and representative democracy, "in which majority rule is tempered by minority rights protected by law." Federalism in India defines the power distribution between the centre and the states. The government is regulated by a checks and balances defined by Indian Constitution, which serves as the country's supreme legal document.

Constitution

The Constitution of India, the longest and the most exhaustive among constitutions of independent nations in the world, came into force on 26 January 1950.^[59] The preamble of the constitution defines India as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic.^[60] India has a bicameral parliament operating under a Westminster-style parliamentary system. Its form of government was traditionally described as being 'quasi-federal' with a strong centre and weaker states,^[61] but it has grown increasingly federal since the late 1990s as a result of political, economic and social changes.^[62]

President and Prime Minister

The President of India is the head of state^[63] elected indirectly by an electoral college^[64] for a five-year term.^{[65] [66]} The Prime Minister is the head of government and exercises most executive power.^[63] Appointed by the President,^[67] the Prime Minister is by convention supported by the party or political alliance holding the majority of seats in the lower house of Parliament.^[63] The executive branch consists of the President, Vice-President, and the Council of Ministers (the Cabinet being its executive committee) headed by the Prime Minister. Any minister holding a portfolio must be a member of either house of parliament. In the Indian parliamentary system, the executive is subordinate to the legislature, with the Prime Minister and his Council being directly responsible to the lower house of the Parliament.^[68]

Legislature

The Legislature of India is the bicameral Parliament, which consists of the upper house called the Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and the lower house called the Lok Sabha (House of People).^[69] The Rajya Sabha, a permanent body, has 245 members serving staggered six year terms.^[70] Most are elected indirectly by the state and territorial legislatures in proportion to the state's population.^[70] 543 of the Lok Sabha's 545 members are directly elected by popular vote to represent individual constituencies for five year terms.^[70] The other two members are nominated by the President from the Anglo-Indian community if the President is of the opinion that the community is not adequately represented.^[70]

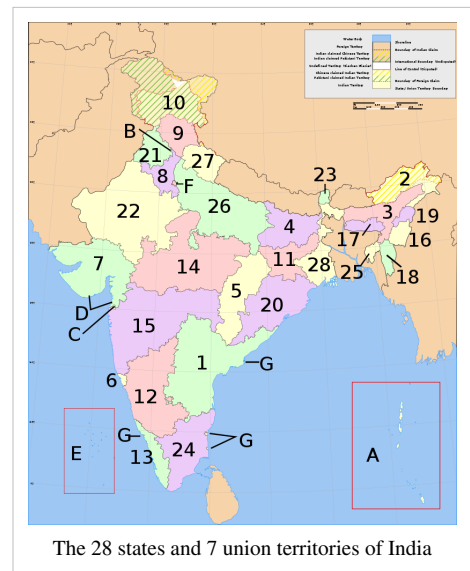
Judiciary

India has a unitary three-tier judiciary, consisting of the Supreme Court, headed by the Chief Justice of India, 21 High Courts, and a large number of trial courts.^[71] The Supreme Court has original jurisdiction over cases involving fundamental rights and over disputes between states and the Centre, and appellate jurisdiction over the High Courts.^[72] It is judicially independent,^[71] and has the power to declare the law and to strike down Union or State laws which contravene the Constitution.^[73] The role as the ultimate interpreter of the Constitution is one of the most important functions of the Supreme Court.^[74]

Administrative divisions

India consists of 28 states and seven Union Territories.^[75] All states, and the two union territories of Puducherry and the National Capital Territory of Delhi, have elected legislatures and governments patterned on the Westminster model. The other five union territories are directly ruled by the Centre through appointed administrators. In 1956, under the States Reorganisation Act, states were formed on a linguistic basis.^[76] Since then, this structure has remained largely unchanged. Each state or union territory is further divided into administrative *districts*.^[77] The districts in turn are further divided into *tehsils* and eventually into villages.

States:



- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| • Andhra Pradesh | • Haryana | • Maharashtra | • Rajasthan |
| • Arunachal Pradesh | • Himachal Pradesh | • Manipur | • Sikkim |
| • Assam | • Jammu and Kashmir | • Meghalaya | • Tamil Nadu |
| • Bihar | • Jharkhand | • Mizoram | • Tripura |
| • Chhattisgarh | • Karnataka | • Nagaland | • Uttar Pradesh |
| • Goa | • Kerala | • Orissa | • Uttarakhand |
| • Gujarat | • Madhya Pradesh | • Punjab | • West Bengal |

Union Territories:

- Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- Chandigarh
- Dadra and Nagar Haveli
- Daman and Diu
- Lakshadweep
- National Capital Territory of Delhi
- Puducherry

Politics

India is the most populous democracy in the world.^[13] ^[78] It has operated under a multi-party system for most of its history. For most of the years since independence, the federal government has been led by the Indian National Congress (INC).^[75] Politics in the states have been dominated by national parties like the INC, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and various regional parties. From 1950 to 1990, barring two brief periods, the INC enjoyed a parliamentary majority.

Within Indian political culture, the Indian National Congress is considered centre-left or "liberal" and the Bharatiya Janata Party is considered centre-right or "conservative". The INC was out of power between 1977 and 1980, when the Janata Party won the election owing to public discontent with the state of emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In 1989, a Janata Dal-led National Front coalition in alliance with the Left Front coalition won the elections but managed to stay in power for only two years.^[79] As the 1991 elections gave no political party a majority, the INC formed a minority government under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and was able to complete its five-year term.^[80]

The years 1996–1998 were a period of turmoil in the federal government with several short-lived alliances holding sway. The BJP formed a government briefly in 1996, followed by the United Front coalition that excluded both the BJP and the INC. In 1998, the BJP formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with several other parties and became the first non-Congress government to complete a full five-year term.^[81]

In the 2004 Indian elections, the INC won the largest number of Lok Sabha seats and formed a government with a coalition called the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), supported by various Left-leaning parties and members opposed to the BJP. The UPA again came into power in the 2009 general election; however, the representation of the Left leaning parties within the coalition has significantly reduced.^[82] Manmohan Singh became the first prime minister since Jawaharlal Nehru in 1962 to be re-elected after completing a full five-year term.^[83]



The Secretariat Building, in New Delhi, houses key government offices.

Foreign relations and military

Since its independence in 1947, India has maintained cordial relationships with most nations. In the 1950s, it strongly advocated for the independence of European colonies in Africa and Asia and played a pioneering role in the Non-Aligned Movement.^[85] ^[86] India was involved in two brief military interventions in neighbouring countries – the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka and Operation Cactus in Maldives. India has a tense relationship with neighbouring Pakistan and the two countries went to war in 1947 and 1965 over the Kashmir dispute. After the Sino-Indian War and the 1965 war, India's relationship with the Soviet Union warmed and continued to remain so until the end of the Cold War. In 1971, a third war broke out between India and Pakistan which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan).^[87] Additional skirmishes have taken place between the two nations over the disputed Siachen Glacier. In 1999, India and Pakistan fought an undeclared war over the Kargil district.



Jointly developed by Sukhoi and Hindustan Aeronautics, the Su-30 MKI "Flanker-H" is the Indian Air Force's prime air superiority fighter.^[84]

In recent years, India has played an influential role in the SAARC and the WTO.^[88] India has provided as many as 55,000 Indian military and police personnel to serve in thirty-five UN peacekeeping operations across four continents.^[89] India is also an active participant in various multilateral forums, particularly the East Asia Summit and the G8+5.^[90] ^[91] Recent overtures by the Indian government have strengthened relations with the United States and the People's Republic of China. In the economic sphere, India has close relationships with other developing nations in South America, Asia and Africa.

India maintains the third-largest military force in the world, which consists of the Indian Army, Navy, Air Force and auxiliary forces such as the Paramilitary Forces, the Coast Guard, and the Strategic Forces Command.^[52] The official Indian defence budget for 2010 stood at US\$31.9 billion (or 2.12% of GDP).^[93] According to a 2008 SIPRI report, India's annual military expenditure in terms of PPP stood at US\$72.7 billion.^[94] The President of India is the supreme commander of the Indian Armed Forces. India maintains close defence cooperation with Russia, Israel and France, who are the chief suppliers of arms. Defence contractors, such as the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL), oversee indigenous development of sophisticated arms and military equipment, including ballistic missiles, fighter aircraft and main battle tanks, to reduce India's dependence on foreign imports.



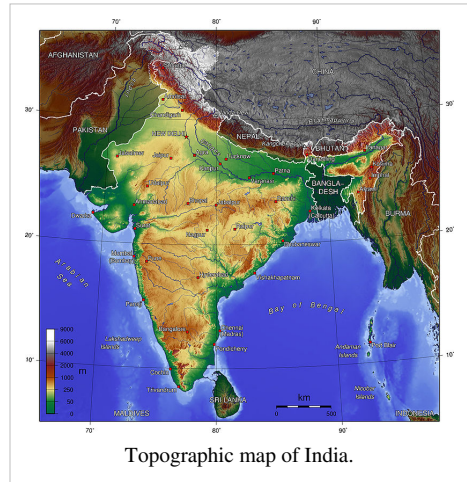
India and Russia share an extensive economic, defence and technological relationship.^[92] Shown here is PM Manmohan Singh with President Dmitry Medvedev at the 34th G8 Summit.

China's repeated threats to intervene in the 1965 war in support of Pakistan convinced India to develop nuclear weapons to counter Chinese nuclear tests.^[95] India conducted its first nuclear weapons test in 1974 and carried out further underground testing in 1998. Despite criticism and military sanctions, India has consistently refused to sign the CTBT and the NPT which it considers to be flawed and discriminatory.^[96] India maintains a "no first use" nuclear policy and is developing nuclear triad capability as a part of its "minimum credible deterrence" doctrine.^[97] ^[98] On 10 October 2008, a civilian nuclear agreement between India and the United States was signed, prior to which India received waivers from the IAEA and the NSG which ended restrictions on nuclear technology commerce and recognised India as the world's sixth *de facto* nuclear weapons state.^[99] Following the NSG waiver, India has also signed civilian nuclear energy cooperation agreements with other nations including Russia,^[100] France,^[101] the United Kingdom,^[102] and Canada.^[103]

Geography

India, the major portion of the Indian subcontinent, sits atop the Indian tectonic plate, a minor plate within the Indo-Australian Plate.^[104]

India's defining geological processes commenced seventy-five million years ago, when the Indian subcontinent, then part of the southern supercontinent Gondwana, began a northeastwards drift—lasting fifty million years—across the then unformed Indian Ocean.^[104] The subcontinent's subsequent collision with the Eurasian Plate and subduction under it, gave rise to the Himalayas, the planet's highest mountains, which now abut India in the north and the north-east.^[104] In the former seabed immediately south of the emerging Himalayas, plate movement created a vast trough, which, having gradually been filled with river-borne sediment,^[105] now forms the Indo-Gangetic Plain.^[106] To the west of this plain, and cut off from it by the Aravalli Range, lies the Thar Desert.^[107]



Topographic map of India.

The original Indian plate now survives as peninsular India, the oldest and most geologically stable part of India, and extends as far north as the Satpura and Vindhya ranges in central India. These parallel ranges run from the Arabian Sea coast in Gujarat in the west to the coal-rich Chota Nagpur Plateau in Jharkhand in the east.^[108] To their south, the remaining peninsular landmass, the Deccan Plateau, is flanked on the left and right by the coastal ranges, Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats respectively;^[109] the plateau contains the oldest rock formations in India, some over one billion years old. Constituted in such fashion, India lies to the north of the equator between 6°44' and 35°30' north latitude^[110] and 68°7' and 97°25' east longitude.^[111]

India's coast is 7517 kilometres (4700 mi) long; of this distance, 5423 kilometres (3400 mi) belong to peninsular India, and 2094 kilometres (1300 mi) to the Andaman, Nicobar, and Lakshadweep Islands.^[15] According to the Indian naval hydrographic charts, the mainland coast consists of the following: 43% sandy beaches, 11% rocky coast including cliffs, and 46% mudflats or marshy coast.^[15]



The Himalayas form the mountainous landscape of Northern India. Seen here is Ladakh in Jammu & Kashmir.

Major Himalayan-origin rivers that substantially flow through India include the Ganges (Ganga) and the Brahmaputra, both of which drain into the Bay of Bengal.^[112] Important tributaries of the Ganges include the Yamuna and the Kosi, whose extremely low gradient causes disastrous floods every year. Major peninsular rivers whose steeper gradients prevent their waters from flooding include the Godavari, the Mahanadi, the Kaveri, and the Krishna, which also drain into the Bay of Bengal,^[113] and the Narmada and the Tapi, which drain into the Arabian Sea.^[114] Among notable coastal features of India are the marshy Rann of Kutch in western India, and the alluvial Sundarbans delta, which India shares with Bangladesh.^[115] India has two

archipelagos: the Lakshadweep, coral atolls off India's south-western coast; and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a volcanic chain in the Andaman Sea.^[116]

India's climate is strongly influenced by the Himalayas and the Thar Desert, both of which drive the monsoons.^[117] The Himalayas prevent cold Central Asian Katabatic wind from blowing in, keeping the bulk of the Indian subcontinent warmer than most locations at similar latitudes.^[118] ^[119] The Thar Desert plays a crucial role in attracting the moisture-laden southwest summer monsoon winds that, between June and October, provide the majority of India's rainfall.^[117] Four major climatic groupings predominate in India: tropical wet, tropical dry, subtropical humid, and montane.^[120]

Flora and fauna

India, which lies within the Indomalaya ecozone, displays significant biodiversity. One of the seventeen megadiverse countries, it is home to 7.6% of all mammalian, 12.6% of all avian, 6.2% of all reptilian, 4.4% of all amphibian, 11.7% of all fish, and 6.0% of all flowering plant species.^[121] Many ecoregions, such as the *shola* forests, exhibit extremely high rates of endemism; overall, 33% of Indian plant species are endemic.^{[122] [123]}

India's forest cover ranges from the tropical rainforest of the Andaman Islands, Western Ghats, and northeastern India to the coniferous forest of the Himalaya. Between these extremes lie the sal-dominated moist deciduous forest of eastern India; the teak-dominated dry deciduous forest of central and southern India; and the babul-dominated thorn forest of the central Deccan and western Gangetic plain.^[124] Important Indian trees include the medicinal neem, widely used in rural Indian herbal remedies. The pipal fig tree, shown on the seals of Mohenjo-daro, shaded Gautama Buddha as he sought enlightenment. According to latest report, less than 12% of India's landmass is covered by dense forests.^[125]

Many Indian species are descendants of taxa originating in Gondwana, from which the Indian plate separated. Peninsular India's subsequent movement towards, and collision with, the Laurasian landmass set off a mass exchange of species. However, volcanism and climatic changes 20 million years ago caused the extinction of many endemic Indian forms.^[126] Soon thereafter, mammals entered India from Asia through two zoogeographical passes on either side of the emerging Himalaya.^[124] Consequently, among Indian species, only 12.6% of mammals and 4.5% of birds are endemic, contrasting with 45.8% of reptiles and 55.8% of amphibians.^[121] Notable endemics are the Nilgiri leaf monkey and the brown and carmine Beddome's toad of the Western Ghats. India contains 172, or 2.9%, of IUCN-designated threatened species.^[127] These include the Asiatic Lion, the Bengal Tiger, and the Indian white-rumped vulture, which suffered a near-extinction from ingesting the carrion of diclofenac-treated cattle.

In recent decades, human encroachment has posed a threat to India's wildlife; in response, the system of national parks and protected areas, first established in 1935, was substantially expanded. In 1972, India enacted the Wildlife Protection Act^[128] and Project Tiger to safeguard crucial habitat; in addition, the Forest Conservation Act^[129] was enacted in 1980. Along with more than five hundred wildlife sanctuaries, India hosts thirteen biosphere reserves,^[130] four of which are part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves; twenty-five wetlands are registered under the Ramsar Convention.^[131]

Economy

According to the International Monetary Fund, India's nominal GDP stood at US\$1.3 trillion, which makes it the eleventh-largest economy in the world,^[132] corresponding to a per capita income of US\$1,000.^[133] If purchasing power parity (PPP) is taken into account, India's economy is the fourth largest in the world at US\$3.6 trillion.^[134] The country ranks 142th in nominal GDP per capita and 127th in GDP per capita at PPP.^[132] With an average annual GDP growth rate of 5.8% for the past two decades, India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world.^[135]

Before 1991, the Indian government followed protectionist and socialist-inspired policies because of which the Indian economy was largely closed to the outside world and suffered from extensive state intervention and regulation.^[136] After an acute balance of payments crisis, the nation liberalised its economy and has since moved towards a free-market economy.^{[137] [138]} Since then, the emphasis has been to use foreign trade and investment as integral parts of India's economy.^[139] Currently, India's economic system is portrayed as a capitalist model with the influx of private enterprise.^[138]



The Bombay Stock Exchange, in Mumbai, is Asia's oldest and India's largest stock exchange by market capitalisation.

India has the world's second largest labour force, with 467 million people.^[140] In terms of output, the agricultural sector accounts for 28% of GDP; the service and industrial sectors make up 54% and 18% respectively. Major agricultural products include rice, wheat, oilseed, cotton, jute, tea, sugarcane, potatoes.^[75] Major industries include textiles, telecommunications, chemicals, food processing, steel, transport equipment, cement, mining, petroleum, machinery and software.^[75] India's external trade has reached a relatively moderate share of 24% of GDP in 2006, up from 6% in 1985.^[137] In 2008, India's share of world trade was about 1.68%;^[141] in 2009, it was the world's fifteenth largest importer and eighteenth largest exporter.^[142] Major exports include petroleum products, textile goods, gems and jewelry, software, engineering goods, chemicals, and leather manufactures.^[75] Major imports include crude oil, machinery, gems, fertiliser, chemicals.^[75]



Tata Nano, the world's cheapest car.^[143] India's annual car exports have surged fivefold in the past five years.^[144]

During the late 2000s, India's economic growth averaged 7.5% a year.^[137] Over the past decade, hourly wage rates in India have more than doubled.^[145] According to a 2007 McKinsey Global Institute report, since 1985, India's robust economic growth has shifted 431 million Indians out of poverty and by 2030, India's middle class population will rise to more than 580 million people.^[146] India ranks 51th in the Global Competitiveness Report and if diversified it ranked 16th in financial market sophistication, 24th in banking sector, 27th in business sophistication and 30th in innovation; ahead of several advanced economies.^[147] Seven of the world's top 15 technology outsourcing companies are based in India and the country is viewed as the second most favourable outsourcing destination after the United States.^[148] India's consumer market is currently the world's thirteenth

largest and is expected to become the fifth largest by 2030.^[146] India has the world's fastest growing telecommunication industry, adding about 10 million subscribers during 2008–09 period.^[149] The country has the world's second fastest growing automobile industry, with domestic sales increasing by 26% during the 2009–10 period^[150] and exports increasing by 36% during the 2008–09 period.^[151]

Despite India's impressive economic growth over recent decades, it still contains the largest concentration of poor people in the world.^[152] The percentage of people living below the World Bank's international poverty line of \$1.25 a day (PPP, in nominal terms ₹ 21.6 a day in urban areas and ₹ 14.3 in rural areas in 2005) decreased from 60% in 1981 to 42% in 2005.^[153] Since 1991, inter-state economic inequality in India has consistently grown; the per capita net state domestic product of India's richest states is about 3.2 times that of the poorest states.^[154] Even though India has avoided famines in recent decades, half of children are underweight^[155] and about 46% of Indian children under the age of three suffer from malnutrition.^{[152] [156] [157]}

A 2007 Goldman Sachs report projected that "from 2007 to 2020, India's GDP per capita will quadruple," and that the Indian GDP will surpass that of the United States before 2050, but India "will remain a low-income country for several decades, with per capita incomes well below its other BRIC peers."^[158] Although the Indian economy has grown steadily over the last two decades; its growth has been uneven when comparing different social groups, economic groups, geographic regions, and rural and urban areas.^[152] The World Bank suggests that India must continue to focus on public sector reform, infrastructure, agricultural and rural development, removal of labour regulations, improvement in transport, energy security, and health and nutrition.^[159]

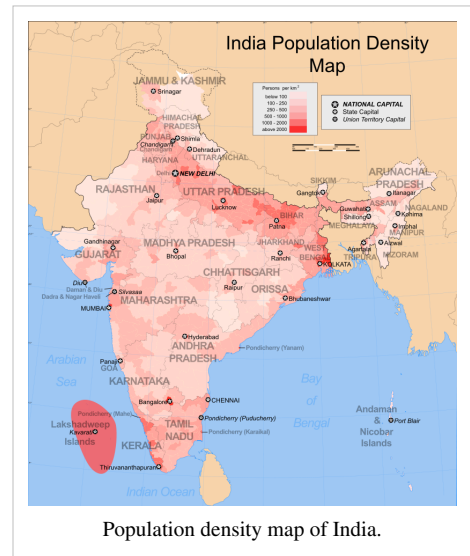
Demographics

With an estimated population of 1.2 billion,^[8] India is the world's second most populous country. The last 50 years have seen a rapid increase in population due to medical advances and massive increase in agricultural productivity due to the "green revolution".^[160] ^[161] The percentage of Indian population living in urban areas has consistently grown; from 1991 to 2001, India's urban population increased by 31.2%.^[162] In 2001, about 285 million Indians lived in urban areas while more than 70% of India's population resided in rural areas.^[163] ^[164] As per the 2001 census, there are twenty seven million-plus cities,^[162] with the largest cities being Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata.

India is home to two major linguistic families: Indo-Aryan (spoken by about 74% of the population) and Dravidian (spoken by about 24%). Other languages spoken in India come from the Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman linguistic families. Neither the Constitution of India, nor any Indian law defines any *national language*.^[7] Hindi, with the largest number of speakers,^[165] is the official language of the union.^[166] English is used extensively in business and administration and has the status of a 'subsidiary official language';^[167] it is also important in education, especially as a medium of higher education. In addition, every state and union territory has its own official languages, and the constitution also recognises in particular 21 "scheduled languages".

As per the 2001 census, over 800 million Indians (80.5%) were Hindu. Other religious groups include Muslims (13.4%), Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.8%), Jains (0.4%), Jews, Zoroastrians and Bahá'ís.^[168] Tribals constitute 8.1% of the population.^[169] India has the third-highest Muslim population in the world and has the highest population of Muslims for a non-Muslim majority country.

India's literacy rate is 64.8% (53.7% for females and 75.3% for males).^[52] The state of Kerala has the highest literacy rate at 91% while Bihar has the lowest at 47%.^[170] ^[171] The national human sex ratio is 944 females per 1,000 males. India's median age is 24.9, and the population growth rate of 1.38% per annum; there are 22.01 births per 1,000 people per year.^[52] Though India has one of the world's most diverse and modern healthcare systems, the country continues to face several public health-related challenges.^[172] ^[173] According to the World Health Organization, 900,000 Indians die each year from drinking contaminated water and breathing in polluted air.^[174] There are about 60 physicians per 100,000 people in India.^[175]



Culture

India's culture is marked by a high degree of syncretism^[177] and cultural pluralism.^[178] India's cultural tradition dates back to 8000 BCE^[179] and has a continuously recorded history for over 2,500 years.^[180] With its roots based in the Indus Valley Tradition, the Indian culture took a distinctive shape during the 11th century BCE Vedic age which laid the foundation of Hindu philosophy, mythology, literary tradition and beliefs and practices, such as dhárma, kárma, yóga and mokṣa.^[181] It has managed to preserve established traditions while absorbing new customs, traditions, and ideas from invaders and immigrants and spreading its cultural influence to other parts of Asia, mainly South East and East Asia.

Indian religions form one of the most defining aspects of Indian culture.^[182] Major dhármic religions which were founded in India include Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Considered to be a successor to the ancient Vedic religion,^[183] Hinduism has been shaped by the various schools of thoughts based on the *Upanishads*,^[184] the *Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhakti* movement.^[182] Buddhism originated in India in 5th century BCE and prominent early Buddhist schools, such as *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna*, gained dominance during the Maurya Empire.^[182] Though Buddhism entered a period of gradual decline in India 5th century CE onwards,^[185] it played an influential role in shaping Indian philosophy and thought.^[182]

Traditional Indian society is defined by relatively strict social hierarchy. The Indian caste system describes the social stratification and social restrictions in the Indian subcontinent, in which social classes are defined by thousands of endogamous hereditary groups, often termed as *jātis* or castes.^[186] Several influential social reform movements, such as the *Bramho Shômaj*, the *Arya Samāja* and the *Ramakrishna* Mission, have played a pivotal role in the emancipation of Dalits (or "untouchables") and other lower-caste communities in India.^[187] However, the majority of Dalits continue to live in segregation and are often persecuted and discriminated against.^[188]

Traditional Indian family values are highly respected, and multi-generational patriarchal joint families have been the norm, although nuclear families are becoming common in urban areas.^[54] An overwhelming majority of Indians have their marriages arranged by their parents and other respected family members, with the consent of the bride and groom.^[189] Marriage is thought to be for life,^[189] and the divorce rate is extremely low.^[190] Child marriage is still a common practice, more so in rural India, with half of women in India marrying before the legal age of 18.^[191] ^[192]

Indian cuisine is characterised by a wide variety of regional styles and sophisticated use of herbs and spices. The staple foods in the region are rice (especially in the south and the east) and wheat (predominantly in the north).^[193] Spices, such as black pepper which are now consumed world wide, are originally native to the Indian subcontinent. Chili pepper, which was introduced by the Portuguese, is also widely used in Indian cuisine.^[194]

Traditional Indian dress varies across the regions in its colours and styles and depends on various factors, including climate. Popular styles of dress include draped garments such as sari for women and dhoti or lungi for men; in addition, stitched clothes such as salwar kameez for women and kurta-pyjama and European-style trousers and shirts for men, are also popular.

Many Indian festivals are religious in origin, although several are celebrated irrespective of caste and creed. Some popular festivals are Diwali, Ganesh Chaturthi, Ugadi, Thai Pongal, Holi, Onam, Vijayadashami, Durga Puja, Eid ul-Fitr, Bakr-Id, Christmas, Buddha Jayanti, Moharram and Vaisakhi.^[195] ^[196] India has three national holidays which are observed in all states and union territories — Republic Day, Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanthi. Other sets of holidays, varying between nine and twelve, are officially observed in individual states. Religious practices are an integral part of everyday life and are a very public affair.



The Taj Mahal in Agra was built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a memorial to his deceased wife Mumtaz Mahal. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site considered to be of "outstanding universal value".^[176]

Indian architecture is one area that represents the diversity of Indian culture. Much of it, including notable monuments such as the Taj Mahal and other examples of Mughal architecture and South Indian architecture, comprises a blend of ancient and varied local traditions from several parts of the country and abroad. Vernacular architecture also displays notable regional variation.

Indian music covers a wide range of traditions and regional styles. Classical music largely encompasses the two genres – North Indian Hindustani, South Indian Carnatic traditions and their various offshoots in the form of regional folk music. Regionalised forms of popular music include filmi and folk music; the syncretic tradition of the *bauls* is a well-known form of the latter.

Indian dance too has diverse *folk* and *classical* forms. Among the well-known folk dances are the *bhangra* of the Punjab, the *bihu* of Assam, the *chhau* of West Bengal, Jharkhand, *sambalpuri* of Orissa, the *ghoomar* of Rajasthan and the *Lavani* of Maharashtra. Eight dance forms, many with narrative forms and mythological elements, have been accorded classical dance status by India's *National Academy of Music, Dance, and Drama*. These are: *bharatanatyam* of the state of Tamil Nadu, *kathak* of Uttar Pradesh, *kathakali* and *mohiniyattam* of Kerala, *kuchipudi* of Andhra Pradesh, *manipuri* of Manipur, *odissi* of Orissa and the *sattriya* of Assam.^[197]

Theatre in India often incorporates music, dance, and improvised or written dialogue.^[198] Often based on Hindu mythology, but also borrowing from medieval romances, and news of social and political events, Indian theatre includes the *bhavai* of state of Gujarat, the *jatra* of West Bengal, the *nautanki* and *ramlila* of North India, the *tamasha* of Maharashtra, the *burrakatha* of Andhra Pradesh, the *terukkuttu* of Tamil Nadu, and the *yakshagana* of Karnataka.^[199]

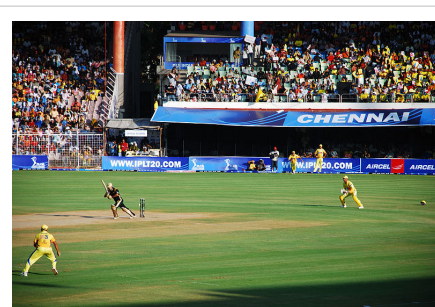
The Indian film industry is the largest in the world.^[200] Bollywood, based in Mumbai, makes commercial Hindi films and is the most prolific film industry in the world.^[201] Established traditions also exist in Assamese, Bengali, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, and Telugu language cinemas.^[202]

The earliest works of Indian literature were transmitted orally and only later written down.^[203] These included works of Sanskrit literature – such as the early Vedas, the epics *Mahābhārata* and *Ramayana*, the drama *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (The Recognition of Śakuntalā), and poetry such as the *Mahākāvya*^[204] – and the Tamil language *Sangam* literature.^[205] Among Indian writers of the modern era active in Indian languages or English, Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize in 1913.

Sport

India's official national sport is field hockey, administered by Hockey India. India's hockey team won the 1975 Hockey World Cup and 8 gold, 1 silver and 2 bronze medals at the Olympic games, making it one of the world's most successful national hockey teams ever. Cricket, however, is by far the most popular sport;^[206] the India cricket team won the 1983 Cricket World Cup and the 2007 ICC World Twenty20, and shared the 2002 ICC Champions Trophy with Sri Lanka. Cricket in India is administered by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI); and domestic competitions include the Ranji Trophy, the Duleep Trophy, the Deodhar Trophy, the Irani Trophy and the NKP Salve Challenger Trophy. In addition, BCCI conducts the Indian Premier League, a Twenty20 competition.

India is home to several traditional sports which originated in the country and continue to remain fairly popular. These include kabaddi, kho kho, pehlwani and gilli-danda. One of the earliest forms of Asian martial arts, such as Kalarippayattu, Yuddha, Silambam and Varma Kalai, originated in India. The Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna and the Arjuna Award are India's highest awards for achievements in sports, while the Dronacharya Award is awarded for



A 2008 Indian Premier League Twenty20 cricket match being played between the Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders

excellence in coaching.

Chess, commonly held to have originated in India, is regaining widespread popularity with the rise in the number of Indian Grandmasters.^[207] Tennis has also become increasingly popular, owing to the victories of the India Davis Cup team and the success of Indian tennis players.^[208] India has a strong presence in shooting sports, winning several medals at the Olympics, the World Shooting Championships and the Commonwealth Games.^[209] ^[210] Other sports in which Indian sports-persons have won numerous awards or medals at international sporting events include badminton,^[211] boxing^[212] and wrestling.^[213] ^[214] Football is a popular sport in northeastern India, West Bengal, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.^[215] I-League is the premier Football competition in the country, it contested by 14 clubs and lasts for about 7 months.

India has hosted or co-hosted several international sporting events, such as the 1951 and the 1982 Asian Games, the 1987 and 1996 Cricket World Cup, the 2003 Afro-Asian Games, the 2010 Hockey World Cup and the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Major international sporting events annually held in India include the Chennai Open, Mumbai Marathon, Delhi Half Marathon and the Indian Masters. The country is scheduled to host the 2011 Cricket World Cup and the first Indian Grand Prix in 2011.

Notes

The Government of India also considers Afghanistan to be a bordering country. This is because it considers the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir to be a part of India including the portion bordering Afghanistan. A ceasefire sponsored by the United Nations in 1948 froze the positions of Indian and Pakistani-held territory. As a consequence, the region bordering Afghanistan is in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

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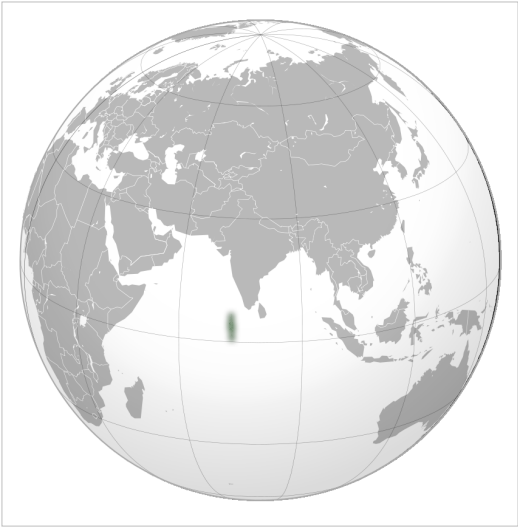
External links

- Government of India (<http://india.gov.in/>) – Official government portal (in English)
- India (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html>) entry at *The World Factbook*
- India (<http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/govpubs/for/india.htm>) at *UCB Libraries GovPubs*
- India (<http://www.dmoz.org/Regional/Asia/India/>) at the Open Directory Project
- Wikimedia Atlas of India
- India travel guide from Wikitravel

Geographical coordinates: 21°N 78°E

bjn:India gag:Īndiya

Maldives

<div>Republic of Maldives</div> <div>ދިވެހިރާއްޖޭގެ ޖުމްހޫރިއްޔާ</div> <div>(<i>Divehi Rājjeḡe Jumhūriyyā</i>)</div>	
<div><div></div><div></div></div>	
<div>Anthem: <i>Qaumii salaam</i>"National Salute"</div>	
<div></div>	
Capital	Malé 4°10'N 73°30'E
Official language(s)	Dhivehi
Ethnic groups	≈100% Dhivehis (Excluding Foreigners)
Demonym	Maldivian
Government	Presidential republic
- President	Mohamed Nasheed
- Vice President	Mohammed Waheed Hassan
- Speaker of the Majlis	Abdulla Shahid
- Chief Justice	Ahmed Faiz ^[1]
Independent	
- from United Kingdom	26 July 1965
Area	
- Total	298 km ² (206th) 115 sq mi
- Water (%)	negligible
Population	

-	2010 estimate	396,334 ^[2] (176th ¹)
-	2006 census	298,968 ^[3]
-	Density	1,036.9/km ² (11th) 2,866.9/sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2009 estimate
-	Total	\$1.688 billion ^[4]
-	Per capita	\$4,894 ^[4]
GDP (nominal)		2009 estimate
-	Total	\$1.357 billion ^[4]
-	Per capita	\$3,932 ^[4]
HDI (2007)		▲ 0.771 ^[5] (medium) (95th)
Currency		Maldivian Rufiyaa (MVR)
Time zone		(UTC+5)
Drives on the		left
ISO 3166 code		MV
Internet TLD		.mv
Calling code		960

The **Maldives** (English pronunciation: /ˈmɒldaɪvz/ (listen) or English pronunciation: /ˈmɒldiːvz/), (Dhivehi: ދިވެހިރާއްޖެ, *Dhivehi Raa'je*), officially **Republic of Maldives**, is an island nation in the Indian Ocean formed by a double chain of twenty-six atolls stretching in a north-south direction off India's Lakshadweep islands, between Minicoy Island and Chagos Archipelago. It stands in the Laccadive Sea, about seven hundred kilometers (435 mi) south-west of Sri Lanka and (250 mi) south-west of India

This chain of islands is the centrally located archipelago among the Lakshadweep-Maldives-Chagos group of islands, which are in reality the tops of a vast undersea submarine mountain range, in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.^[6] The atolls of the Maldives encompass a territory spread over roughly 90,000 square kilometers, making it one of the most dispersed countries in the world in geographic terms. It features 1,192 islets, of which two hundred are inhabited.^[7] The Republic of Maldives's capital and largest city is Malé, with a population of 103,693 (2006). It is located at the southern edge of North Malé Atoll, in the Kaafu Atoll. It is also one of the Administrative divisions of the Maldives. Traditionally it was the King's Island, from where the ancient Maldivian Royal dynasties ruled and where the palace was located.

The Maldives are the smallest Asian country in both population and land area. With an average ground level of 1.5 metres (4 ft 11 in) above sea level, it is the lowest country on the planet.^[8] It is also the country with the lowest highest point in the world, at 2.3 metres (7 ft 7 in).^[8]

Etymology of "Maldives"

The name *Maldives* may derive from *Mahal'deeb*, and the people were called Maldivian 'Dhivehin'. The word *Dheeb/Deeb* (archaic *Dhivehi*, related to Sanskrit *dvīp* (द्वीप)) means "island", and Dhives (Dhivehin) means "islanders" (in other words, the Maldivians). During the colonial era, the Dutch referred to the country as *Maldivische Eilanden* in their documentation, while *Maldivian Island* is the anglicized version of the local name used by the British, which later came to be written as Maldives.

The ancient Sri Lankan chronicle, The *Mahawamsa*, refers to an island called *Mahiladiva* ("Island of Women", 'अहलिदधि) in Pali. The *Mahawamsa* is derived from an even older Sinhala work dating back to the 2nd century BC.

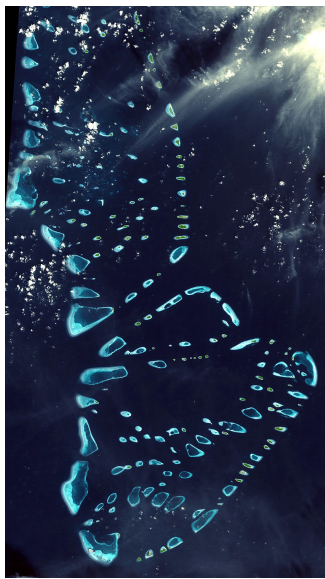
Some scholars theorize that the name *Maldives* derives from the Sanskrit *mālādvīpa* (मालाद्वीप), meaning "garland of islands".^[9] None of the names are mentioned in any literature, but classical Sanskrit texts dating back to the Vedic times mention the "Hundred Thousand Islands" (Lakshadweepa), a generic name which would include not only the Maldives, but also the Laccadives, Amindivi Islands, Minicoy and the Chagos island groups.^[10]

Some medieval Arab travelers such as Ibn Batuta called the islands "Mahal Dibiyat" (تأيبد لحم) from the Arabic word *Mahal* ("palace").^[11] This is the name currently inscribed in the scroll of the Maldivian state emblem. The classical Yemeni name for Maldives is *Dibajat*.^{[12] [13]}

Philostorgius, an Arian Greek historian who relates (circa AD 354) about a *Divoeis* (the Divaeans) hostage after fulfilling his mission to the Homerites, sailed to his island home known as *Divus* (Maldives).^[14] The name *Maldives* also might have come from the Sinhalese word මාලා දිවයින *Maala Divaina* ("Necklace Islands"), perhaps referring to the shape of the archipelago.

The local language of Maldives which is now called 'DHIVEHI' could be coming from the Sanskrit word 'DAIVEHI' meaning 'Godly'. As even after the development of Dhivehi and its Arabic look alike alphabets, most of its words are similar in pronunciation and meaning to words in 'Hindi' language which has its origin in 'Sanskrit' in turn.

Geography



Malhosmadulhu Atoll seen from space. "Fasdutere" and Southern Maalhosmadulhu Atoll can be seen in this picture

The Maldives consists of approximately 1,190 coral islands grouped in a double chain of 26 atolls, along the north-south direction, spread over roughly 90,000 square kilometers, making this one of the most disparate countries in the world. The atolls are composed of live coral reefs and sand bars, situated atop a submarine ridge 960 kilometers long that rises abruptly from the depths of the Indian Ocean and runs from north to south. Only near the southern end of this natural coral barricade do two open passages permit safe ship navigation from one side of the Indian Ocean to the other through the territorial waters of Maldives. For administrative purposes the Maldivian government organized these atolls into twenty one administrative divisions. The largest island of Maldives is Gan, which belongs to Laamu Atoll or Hahdhummathi Maldives. In Addu Atoll the westernmost islands are connected by roads over the reef and the total length of the road is 14 km (9 mi).

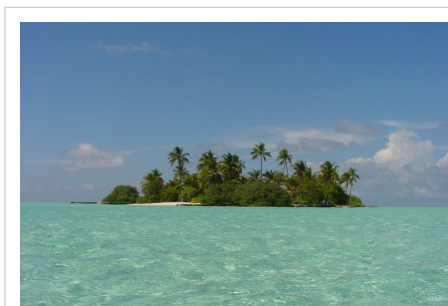
The Maldives is the lowest country in the world, with a maximum natural ground level of only 2.3 metres (7 ft 7 in), with the average being only 1.5 metres (4 ft 11 in) above sea level, although in areas where construction exists, this has been increased to several metres. More than 80 per cent of the country's land, composed of coral islands scattered over an area about 850 km across the equator, is less than one metre above sea level.^[15]

The reef is composed of coral debris and living coral. This acts as a natural barrier against the sea, forming lagoons. Other islands, set at a distance and parallel to the reef, have their own protective fringe of

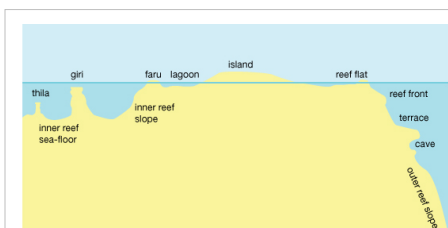
reef. An opening in the surrounding coral barrier allows access to the calmer lagoon waters. The barrier reefs of the islands protect them from the storms and high waves of the Indian Ocean.

A layer of humus 15 centimetres (6 in) thick forms the top layer of soil on the islands. Below the humus layer are 60 centimetres (2 ft) of sandstone, followed by sand and then fresh water. Due to high levels of salt in the soil near the beach, vegetation is limited there to a few plants such as shrubs, flowering plants, and small hedges. In the interior of the island, more vegetation such as mangrove and banyan grow. Coconut palms, the national tree, are able to grow almost everywhere on the islands and are integral to the lifestyle of the population.

The limited vegetation and land wildlife is supplemented by the abundance of marine life. The waters around the Maldives are abundant in rare species of biological and commercial value, with tuna fisheries being traditionally one of the main commercial resources of the country. The Maldives have an amazing diversity of sea life, with corals and over 2,000 species of fish, ranging from reef fish to reef sharks, moray eels, and a wide variety of rays: Manta rays; Stingray; and Eagle ray. The Maldivian waters are also home for the whale shark.



A view of an island in the Maldives.

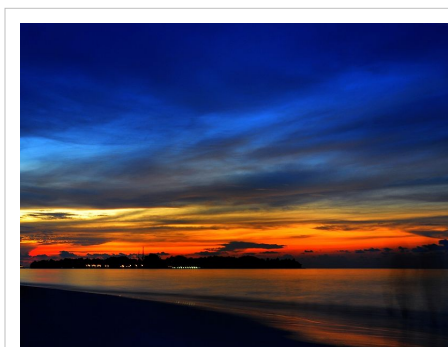


Cross section of a coral reef in the Maldives.

Climate

The Indian Ocean has a great effect on the climate of the country by acting as a heat buffer, absorbing, storing, and slowly releasing the tropical heat. The temperature of Maldives ranges between 24 °C (75 °F) and 33 °C (91 °F) throughout the year. Although the humidity is relatively high, the constant cool sea breezes keep the air moving and the heat mitigated.

The weather in the Maldives is affected by the large landmass of South Asia to the north. The presence of this landmass causes differential heating of land and water. These factors set off a rush of moisture-rich air from the Indian Ocean over the South Asia, resulting in the southwest monsoon. Two seasons dominate Maldives' weather: the dry season associated with the winter northeast monsoon and the rainy season brought the end of April to the end of October and brings strong winds and storms. The shift from the moist southwest monsoon to the dry northeast monsoon occurs during October and November. During this period, the northeast winds contribute to the formation of the northeast monsoon, which reaches Maldives in the beginning of December and lasts until the end of March. However, the weather patterns of Maldives do not always conform to the monsoon patterns of South Asia. The annual rainfall averages 2,540 millimeters in the north and 3,810 millimeters in the south.



Sunset in the Maldives

Environmental issues

Over the last century, sea levels have risen about 20 centimetres (8 in);^[17] ^[18] further rises of the ocean could threaten the existence of Maldives, being the lowest country in the world, with a maximum natural ground level of only 2.3 metres (7 ft 7 in), with the average being only 1.5 metres (4 ft 11 in) above sea level. Current estimates place sea level rise at 59 centimetres (23 in) by the year 2100. However, around 1970, the sea level there dropped 20–30 centimetres (8–12 in).^[19] In November 2008, President Mohamed Nasheed announced plans to look into

purchasing new land in India, Sri Lanka, and Australia because of his concerns about global warming and the possibility of much of the islands being inundated with water from rising sea levels. The purchase of land will be made from a fund generated by tourism.^[20] The President has explained his intentions:

"We do not want to leave the Maldives, but we also do not want to be climate refugees living in tents for decades".^[21]

A tsunami in the Indian Ocean caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake caused serious damage to the socioeconomic infrastructure, which left many people homeless, and irreversible damage to the environment. After the disaster, cartographers are planning to redraw the maps of the islands due to alterations caused by the tsunami.

On 22 April 2008, then Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom pleaded for a cut in global greenhouse gas emissions, warning that rising sea levels could submerge the island nation of Maldives.^[22] ^[23]

Marine ecosystem

Maldives waters are home to wide variety of ecosystems, but it is most noted for their variety of colorful coral reefs, home to 300 species of fish. Seven species have been described as new to science, several more await description. Over 400 have been identified and catalogued and many are now held in the reference collection, including 5 species of turtles, 51 species of echinoderms, 5 species of sea grasses and 285 species of alga & sponges, crustaceans, and tunicates.^[24]

The total number of coral species recorded from the Maldives to date is about 200, representing over 60 genera, 5 species of turtles, 51 species of echinoderms, 5 species of sea grasses and 285 species of alga & sponges, crustaceans, and tunicates.^[24] In the Uthuru Province, Baa Atoll, Maldives you can find Moray Eels, Puffer Fish, Fusiliers, Jackfish, Lionfish. In the Kaafu Atoll, Maldives you can find Sweetlips, Sharks, Groupers, Eels, and Snappers. In the North Ari Atoll, Medhu-Uthuru Province, Maldives you can find Groupers, Rays, Moray Eels, Banner Fish, Bat Fish, Hump head Wrasse, Stingrays. In the Medhu-Uthuru Province, Ari Atoll you can find Eagle Rays, Spotted Rays, Scorpion Fish, Puffer Fish, Reef Fish, Lobsters, Groupers. In the West of the Hinnavaru Island you can find Moray Eels, Nudibranches, Groupers, Turtles, Rays, Angelfish, Butterfly Fish, Scorpion Fish. In the South of Filitheyo, North Nilandhe Atoll you can find Squirrel fish, soldier fish, banner fish, glass fish, fusiliers and unicorn fish. In the Outer West of the North Male Atoll you can find Napoleon wrasses, tuna, barracudas, surgeonfish, snappers, gray reef sharks, white and silver tip reef sharks and eagle rays.^[25]

These coral reefs are home to a variety of marine ecosystems that vary from planktonic organisms to sharks, crustaceans and sponges. Sponges have gained a special interest as five species have already being identified as having anti-tumor and anti-cancer properties.^[24] In 1998, warming due to El Nino phenomenon killed 2/3 of the Maldives coral reefs due to bleaching.^[26] Coral reef bleaching is a "term suggested in place of "coral bleaching" because this condition is seldom limited to corals and most affected photo symbiotic hosts reside on coral reefs". Bleaching is the loss of photo symbiotic microorganisms (dinoflagellates, red and green algae, or cyanobacteria), or the pigments of these photosymbionts, or some of both, from tissues of host cnidarians, sponges, molluscs or other photosymbiotic host animals. The name comes from the whitening of many hosts which possess few pigments of their own.^[27]



Oriental Sweetlips (*Plectorhinchus vittatus*) at Meeru Island, North Male Atoll



A whale shark in the Maldives, one of many animals that inhabit the reefs that make up the whole country

Due to the bleaching that occurred in 1998 from the El-Nino effect, much of the coral life was reduced. The marine water had been raised as much as 5 degrees, but several scientists came together to create electrified cones. Each cone was placed anywhere from 20–60 feet below the water. The electrified cone create an attraction for the larva to attach itself. In 2004 scientists witnessed corals regenerating. Corals began to eject pink-orange eggs and sperm. The growth of these corals are surprisingly five times faster than ordinary corals.^[26] One of the scientists named Azeez Hakim witnessed this extraordinary event. “Before 1998, we never thought that this reef would die. We had always taken for granted that these animals would be there, that this reef would be there forever. El Nino gave us a wake-up call that these

things are not going to be there forever.” Hakim said.^[25] This is great news because without their recovery it would be difficult to maintain the balance of the environment. “They help by removing and recycling the carbon-dioxide which in excess amounts can lead to global warming. Not only this, they also act as a natural barrier against the tropical storms, floods and tsunamis. Seaweeds grow on the skeletons of dead coral”. The corals reefs are like the rainforest for marine life.^[28]

History

Comparative studies of Maldivian oral, linguistic and cultural traditions and customs confirm that the first settlers were Dravidian people^[29] from Kerala in the Sangam period (300 BCE – 300 CE), most probably fishermen from the southwest coasts of what is now the south of the Indian Subcontinent and the western shores of Sri Lanka. One such community is the Giraavaru people descended from ancient Tamils. They are mentioned in ancient legends and local folklore about the establishment of the capital and kingly rule in Malé. They are considered to be the earliest community of settlers on the islands. A strong underlying layer of Tamil population and culture is present in Maldivian society, with a clear Tamil-Malayalam substratum in the language, which also appears in place names, kin terms, poetry, dance, and religious beliefs. Keralan sea faring led to Tamil settling of the Laccadives, and the Maldives were evidently viewed as an extension of the archipelago. Some argue that Sindhi's also were an early layer of migration. Seafaring from Debal began during the Indus valley civilization. The Jatakas and Puranas show abundant evidence of this maritime trade. Another early settlers might have been from Southeast Asia.^[30] The arrival of Sinhalese, who were descended from the exiled Kalinga (India) Prince Vijaya (Vijaya was a Banga or a Prince of Bengal whose maternal ancestor was Kalinga) and his party of several hundred, in the Maldives occurred between 543 to 483 BCE. They were made to leave their native regions of Orissa and the Sinhapura kingdom in north west India. According to the Mahavansa, one of the ships that sailed with Prince Vijaya who went to Sri Lanka around 500 BC, went adrift and arrived at an island called Mahiladvipika, which is the Maldives. It is also said that at that time the people from Mahiladvipika used to travel to Sri Lanka. Their settlement in Sri Lanka and some of the Maldives marks a significant change in demographics and the development of the Indo-Aryan language Dhivehi. There are some signs of Arab inhabitants mostly in southernmost atolls.



Illustration that appeared in an article in *The Graphic* depicts veranda swing (Fendaamathi Undholi) of royal palace, by the Englishman CW Rosett. He visited Maldives on 25 October, 1885 and stayed in Malé; his purpose was to exhibit his findings at the Colonial and Indian exhibition.

Buddhism came to the Maldives at the time of Emperor Ashoka's expansion and became the dominant religion of the people of the Maldives until the 12th century AD. The ancient Maldivian Kings promoted Buddhism and the first Maldivian writings and artistic achievements in the form of highly developed sculpture and architecture are from that period. Isdhoo Lōmāfānu is the oldest copper-plate book to have been discovered in the Maldives to date. The book was written in AD 1194 (590 AH) in Evēla form of the Divehi akuru with the exception of the first plate, during the reign of Siri Fennaadheettha Mahaa Radun (Dhinei Kalaminja). Tusites Maakri, the god of war in Maldivian mythology was said to overtake any leader that may have done wrongful deeds while wearing the crown.

First archaeological study of the remains of early cultures on the Maldives began with the work of H.C.P. Bell, a British commissioner of the Ceylon Civil Service. Bell was shipwrecked on the islands in 1879, and returned several times to investigate ancient Buddhist ruins. He studied the ancient mounds, called *havitta* or *ustubu* (these names are derived from chaitiya or stupa) (Dhivehi: ޖަތިގަނޑު) by the Maldivians, which are found on many of the atolls.

Although Bell asserted that the ancient Maldivians followed Theravada Buddhism, many local Buddhist archaeological remains now in the Malé Museum display in fact Mahayana and Vajrayana iconography.

In the early 11th century the Minicoy and Thiladhunmathi also possibly other northern Atolls was conquered by the medieval Chola Tamil emperor Raja Raja Chola I, becoming a part of the Chola empire.

According to a legend from the Maldivian Folklore, in the early 12th century AD a medieval prince named Koimala nobleman of the Lion Race from Ceylon, sailed to Rasgetheemu island (literally King's Town) in North Maalhosmadulu Atoll and from there to Malé and established a kingdom there. By then, the *Aadeetta* (Sun) Dynasty had for sometime ceased to rule in Malé, possibly due to invasions by the Cholas of Southern India in the Tenth Century. The indigenous people in Malé Atoll, the Giraavaru invited Koimala to Malé and permitted him to be proclaimed king. Koimala Kalou (Lord Koimala) reigned as King Maanaabarana, was a king of the *Homa* (Lunar) Dynasty, which some historians call House of Theemuge. Since Koimala's reign, the Maldivian throne was also known as the *Singaasana* (Lion Throne).^[31] Before then, and in some situations since, it was also known as the *Saridhaaleys* (Ivory Throne).^[32] Some Historians accredit Koimala of freeing the Maldives from Tamil Chola rule.

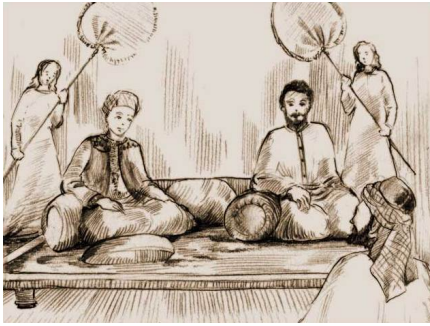
The Maldives were the first landfall for traders of Basrah, sailing to Sri Lanka or Southeast Asia. In the Maldives, ships could take on fresh water, fruit and the delicious, basket-smoked red flesh of the black bonito, a delicacy exported to Sindh and China and Yemen. The people of the archipelago were gentle, civilized and hospitable. They produced brass utensils as well as fine cotton textiles, exported in the form of sarongs and turban lengths. These local industries must have depended on imported raw materials.

The other essential product of the Maldives was coir, the fiber of the dried coconut husk. Cured in pits, beaten, spun and then twisted into cordage and ropes, coir's salient quality is that it is resistant to saltwater. It stitched and rigged the Dhows that plied the Indian Ocean. Maldivian coir was exported to Sindh, China, Yemen and the Persian Gulf.

"It is stronger than hemp," wrote Ibn Battuta, "and is used to sew together the planks of Sindhi and Yemeni Dhows, for this sea abounds in reefs, and if the planks were fastened with iron nails, they would break into pieces when the vessel hit a rock. The coir gives the boat greater elasticity, so that it doesn't break up."



Various plants were submerged into the sea in order to attract large sea snails, nautilus, gastropods and mollusks. Their valuable cowrie shells were sold throughout the Medieval world.



Queen Siri Raadha Abaarana Mahaa Rehendhi (Sultana Khadija), a 14th century queen and her husband Mohamed El-Jameel giving an audience. The drawing is allegedly based on the writings of the fourteenth century Moorish traveller Ibn Batuta, who on visiting Maldives was invited to stay as the Qadi (Chief Justice) from the year 1347 to 1349.

Several foreign travelers, mainly Arabs, had written about a kingdom over the Maldives ruled by a queen. This kingdom pre-dated Koimala's reign. al-Idrisi referring to the writings of earlier writers mentions the name of one of the queens. Her name was Damahaar. She was a member of the *Aadeetta* (Sun) dynasty. The *Homa* (Lunar) dynasty sovereigns inter-married with the Aaditta (Sun) Dynasty. This was why the formal titles of Maldivian kings until 1968 contained references to "*kula sudha ira*" which meant "descended from the Moon and the Sun". No official records exist of the Aadeetta dynasty's reign.^[32]

The conversion to Islam is mentioned in the ancient edicts written in copper plates from the end of the 12th century AD. There is also a locally well-known legend about a foreign saint (an Azeri from the city of Tabriz) who subdued a demon known as Rannamaari. Dhovemi Kalaminja who succeeded Koimala converted to Islam in the year AD 1153.

The main export of medieval Maldivians was cowries shell, which they cultivated by floating branches of coconut palms in the sea, to which the shells attached themselves. Ibn Battuta described the next step: *They gather these cowries in the sea and then put them in holes in the ground until the flesh rots, leaving the white shell...they exchange the shells for rice with the people of neighboring countries, who use them as a major currency. They also sell them to the people of Yemen, who ballast their ships with them. These cowries are also used in the Swahili Coast (Zanj). I saw them being sold in Mali and Gao at a rate of 1150 per dinar, it was used to make necklaces and lucky charms. In the Maldives, the exchange rate at that time was 400,000 cowries to the gold dinar. This was 1/350 of the Malian rate, a proportion that gives an idea of the profits possible in the cowry trade if the shells could be transported far enough from their place of origin.*

Over the centuries, the islands have been visited and their development influenced by sailors and traders from countries on the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

In 1953, there was a brief, abortive attempt to form a republic, but the sultanate was re-imposed. In 1959, objecting to Nasir's centralism, the inhabitants of the three southernmost atolls protested against the government. They formed the United Suvadive Republic and elected Abdullah Afeef as president and Hithadhoo as capital of this republic.

Although governed as an independent Islamic sultanate from 1153 to 1968, the Maldives was a British protectorate from 1887 until 25 July 1965.

Independence

The agreement giving the Maldives full political independence was signed on behalf of His Majesty the Sultan by Ibrahim Nasir Rannabandeyri Kilegefan, Prime Minister; and on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen by Sir Michael Walker, British Ambassador designate to the Maldivian Islands. The Ceremony took place at the British High Commissioner's Residence in Colombo on 26 July 1965. After independence from Britain in 1965, the sultanate continued to operate for another three years under King Muhammad Fareed Didi. On 11 November 1968, the monarchy was abolished and replaced by a republic under the presidency of Ibrahim Nasir, although this was a cosmetic change without any significant alteration in the structures of government. The official name of the country was changed from **Maldivian Islands** to the **Maldives**. Tourism began to be developed on the archipelago by the beginning of the 1970s.

However, political infighting during the '70s between President Nasir's faction and other popular political figures led to the 1975 arrest and exile of elected prime minister Ahmed Zaki to a remote atoll. Economic decline followed the closure of the British airfield at Gan and the collapse of the market for dried fish, an important export. With support

for his administration faltering, Nasir fled to Singapore in 1978, allegedly with millions of dollars from the treasury.

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom began a 30-year role as President in 1978, winning six consecutive elections without opposition. His election was seen as ushering in a period of political stability and economic development in view of Gayoom's priority to develop the poorer islands. Tourism flourished and increased foreign contact spurred development in the islands. However, his rule is controversial, with some critics saying Gayoom was an autocrat who quelled dissent by limiting freedoms and political favoritism.^[33]

A series of coup attempts (in 1980, 1983, and 1988) by Nasir supporters and business interests tried to topple the government without success. While the first two attempts met with little success, the 1988 coup attempt involved a roughly 200-person force of the PLOTE Tamil militant group who seized the airport and caused Gayoom to flee from house to house until the intervention of 1600 Indian troops airlifted into Malé restored order.

In November 1988, a group of Maldivians headed by Muhammadu Ibrahim Lutfee, a small time businessman, used Tamil mercenaries from Sri Lanka to stage a coup against President Gayoom. After an appeal by the Maldivian government for help, the Indian military intervened against the mercenaries in order to reinstate Gayoom in power. On the night of 3 November 1988, the Indian Air Force airlifted a parachute battalion group from Agra and flew them non-stop over 2000 kilometres (1200 mi) to the Maldives. The Indian paratroopers landed at Hulule and secured the airfield and restored the government rule at Malé within hours. The brief, bloodless operation, labelled *Operation Cactus*, also involved the Indian Navy.

2004 Tsunami

On 26 December 2004, following the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, the Maldives were devastated by a tsunami. Only nine islands were reported to have escaped any flooding, while fifty-seven islands faced serious damage to critical infrastructure, fourteen islands had to be totally evacuated, and six islands were destroyed. A further twenty-one resort islands were forced to close because of serious damage. The total damage was estimated at more than 400 million US dollars,

or some 62 percent of the GDP. A total of 108 people, including six foreigners, reportedly died in the tsunami.^[33]

The destructive impact of the waves on the low-lying islands was mitigated by the fact there was no continental shelf or land mass upon which the waves could gain height. The tallest waves were reported to be 14 feet (4.3 m) high.



People in Malé removing sand bags from a nearby construction site, to be used as a barrier to protect their homes from the flood, shortly after being hit by the tsunami generated by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake

Multi-party democracy

Violent protests in 2004 and 2005 organized by the Current president Mohamed Nasheed [former political Prisoner] and his party led to a series of reforms to the Country. Internal and International pressure forces President Gayoom to legalize political parties and improve the democratic process. Multi-party, multi-candidate elections were held on 9 October 2008, with 5 candidates running against incumbent Gayoom. A 28 October runoff election between Gayoom and Mohamed Nasheed as the Presidential Candidate, a former journalist and political prisoner who is a staunch critic of the Gayoom regime, resulted in a 54-percent majority for Nasheed and his vice-president candidate Dr. Waheed. In a speech prior to handing over power to his successor on 11 November 2008, Gayoom said: "I deeply regret any actions on my part ... (that) led to unfair treatment, difficulty or injustice for any Maldivian." At the time. Nasheed was detained and imprisoned for several times since the age of 20, for heavy criticisms against Gayoom's Administration and its officials in relating to Election Frauds and high profile Corruption. Nasheed was tortured and treated inhumanly in detention. Gayoom was the longest serving leader of any Asian nation.^[33]

Mohamed Nasheed became the first President to be elected by a multi-party democracy in the Maldives, and Dr. Waheed was the first elected Vice President in the Maldives. Their election victory ended the 30 year Dictatorship of President Gayoom.

The new government of President Nasheed faces restoring the islands and economy after the 2004 tsunami, addressing concerns for the effect of global warming on the future of the islands, unemployment, government corruption, and increasing drug use, especially among youth. On 10 November 2008, Nasheed announced an intent to create a sovereign wealth fund with money earned from tourism that could be used to purchase land elsewhere for the Maldives people to relocate should rising sea levels due to climate change inundate the country. The government is reportedly considering locations in Sri Lanka and India due to cultural and climate similarities, and as far away as Australia.^[33]

Politics

Maldives is a presidential republic, with the President as head of government and head of state. The President heads the executive branch and appoints the cabinet which is approved by the People's Majlis (Parliament). Following the introduction of a new constitution in 2008, direct elections for the President take place every five years, with a limit of two terms in office for any individual. The current President is Mohamed Nasheed. Members of the unicameral Majlis serve five-year terms, with the total number of members determined by atoll populations. At the 2009 election, 77 members were elected.



Mulaa'ge- the Presidential Palace of Malé, Maldives.



Mosque in Hulhumalé

Prior to 2008, Maldives did not have a constitution which guaranteed fundamental human rights. For 30 years, from 1978 until 2008, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was president of the country. During the later part of his rule, independent political movements emerged in Maldives, which challenged the then-ruling Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (Maldivian People's Party) and demanded democratic reform. These movements brought about significant change in the political structure of the Maldives. In 2008 a new constitution was approved and the first direct presidential elections occurred, which were won by Mohamed Nasheed and Dr. Mohammed Waheed Hassan (as Vice-President) in

the second round. The 2009 parliamentary election saw the Maldivian Democratic Party of President Nasheed receive the most votes with 30.81%, gaining 26 seats, however the Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party with 24.62% of the vote received the most seats (28).

Despite the passage from monarchy to republic, the contemporary political structure shows a continuity with the feudal past in which power was shared among a few families at the top of the social structure. In some islands, the offices have remained within the same family for generations. In the modern day, the village is ruled by an administrative officer called Katību, who serves as the executive headman of the island. Above the Katībus of every atoll is the AtoĴuveriya (Atoll Chief). The power of these local chiefs is very limited and they take few responsibilities. They are trained to report to the government about the situation in their islands and to merely wait for instructions from the central power and to follow them thoroughly. Although islands are of considerably long distances from the governing capital, administrative rights over the lawmaking body of a particular island is withheld to a minimum, hence centralizing representatives from islands to a general parliament; the People's Majlis located in Male' which houses members from all over the country.^[34]

Administrative divisions

The Maldives has 7 provinces each consisting of the following administrative divisions (the capital Malé is its own administrative division):

1. Mathi-Uthuru Province; consists of Haa Alif Atoll, Haa Dhaalu Atoll and Shaviyani Atoll.
2. Uthuru Province; consists of Noonu Atoll, Raa Atoll, Baa Atoll and Lhaviyani Atoll.
3. Medhu-Uthuru Province; consists of Kaafu Atoll, Alifu Alifu Atoll, Alifu Dhaalu Atoll and Vaavu Atoll.
4. Medu Province; consists of Meemu Atoll, Faafu Atoll and Dhaalu Atoll.
5. Medhu-Dhekunu Province; consists of Thaa Atoll and Laamu Atoll.
6. Mathi-Dhekunu Province; consists of Gaafu Alifu Atoll and Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll.
7. Dhekunu Province; consists of Gnaviyani Atoll and Seenu Atoll.

These provinces correspond to the historic divisions of *Uthuru Boduthiladhunmathi*. *Dhekunu Boduthiladhunmathi*, *Uthuru Medhu-Raajje*, *Medhu-Raajje*, *Dhekunu Medhu-Raajje*, *Huvadhu* (or *Uthuru Suvadhinmathi*) and *Addumulah* (or *Dhekunu Suvadhinmathi*).

The Maldives has twenty-six natural atolls and few island groups on isolated reefs, all of which have been divided into twenty-one administrative divisions (twenty administrative atolls and Malé city).^[35]

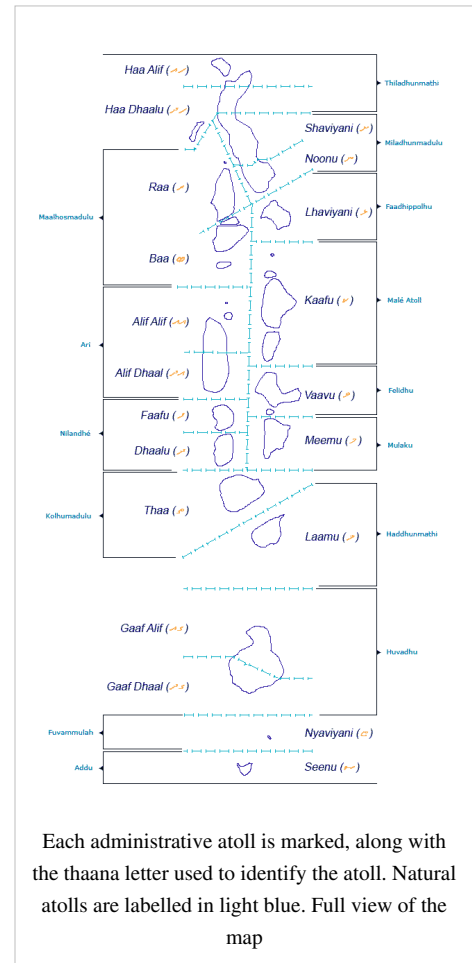
In addition to a name, every administrative division is identified by the Maldivian code letters, such as "Haa Alif" for Thiladhunmati Uthuruburi (Thiladhunmathi North); and by a Latin code letter.

The first corresponds to the geographical Maldivian name of the atoll. The second is a code adopted for convenience. It began in order to facilitate radio communication between the atolls and the central administration. As there are certain islands in different atolls that have the same name, for administrative purposes this code is quoted before the name of the island, for example: Baa Funadhoo, Kaafu Funadhoo, Gaafu-Alifu Funadhoo. Since most Atolls have very long geographical names it is also used whenever the name of the atoll has to be quoted short, for example in the atoll website names.^[36]

This code denomination has been very much abused by foreigners who didn't understand the proper use of these names and have ignored the Maldivian true names in publications for tourists.^[37] Maldivians may use the letter code name in colloquial conversation, but in serious geographic, historical or cultural writings, the true geographical name always takes precedence. The Latin code letter is normally used in boat registration plates. The letter stands for the atoll and the number for the island.

Each atoll is administered by an Atoll Chief (*Atholhu Veriyaa*) appointed by the President. The Ministry of Atoll Administration and its Northern and Southern Regional Offices, Atoll Offices and Island Offices are collectively responsible to the President for Atolls Administration. The administrative head of each island is the Island Chief (Katheeb), appointed by the President. The Island Chief's immediate superior is the Atoll Chief.

The introduction of code-letter names has been a source of much puzzlement and misunderstandings, especially among foreigners. Many people have come to think that the code-letter of the administrative atoll is its new name



and that it has replaced its geographical name. Under such circumstances it is hard to know which is the correct name to use.^[36]

Demographics



Malé, the capital of the Maldives

As a multi-ethnic nation, The Maldivian ethnic identity is a blend of the cultures reflecting the peoples who settled on the islands, reinforced by religion and language. The earliest settlers were probably from southern India and Sri Lanka. They are linguistically and ethnically related to the people in the Indian subcontinent. They are ethnically known as Dhivehis.

Some social stratification exists on the islands. It is not rigid, since rank is based on varied factors, including occupation, wealth, Islamic virtue, and family ties. Traditionally, instead of a complex caste system, there was merely a distinction between noble (*bēfulhu*) and

common people in the Maldives. Members of the social elite are concentrated in Malé. Outside the service industry, this is the only location where the foreign and domestic populations are likely to interact. The tourist resorts are not on islands where the natives live, and casual contacts between the two groups are discouraged.

A census has been recorded since 1905, which shows that the population of the country remained around 100,000 for the next sixty years. Following independence in 1965, the health status of the population improved so much that the population doubled (200,000) by 1978, and the population growth rate peaked at 3.4% in 1985. By 2007, the population had reached 300,000, although the census in 2000 showed that the population growth rate had declined to 1.9%. Life expectancy at birth stood at 46 years in 1978, while it has now risen to 72 years. Infant mortality has declined from 127 per thousand in 1977 to 12 today, and adult literacy stands at 99%. Combined school enrollment stands in the high 90s.

As of April 2008, more than 70,000 foreign employees live in the country and another 33,000 legalized immigrants sums up more than one third of Maldivian population. They consist mainly of people from the neighbouring South Asian countries of India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Economy

In ancient times the Maldives were renowned for cowry shells, coir rope, dried tuna fish (Maldivian Fish), ambergris (Maavaharu) and coco de mer (Tavakkaashi). Local and foreign trading ships used to load these products in Sri Lanka and transport them to other harbors in the Indian Ocean. From the 2nd century AD the islands were known as the 'Money Isles' by the Arabs who dominated the Indian Ocean trade routes — The Maldives provided enormous quantities of cowry shells, an international currency of the early ages. The cowry is now the symbol of the Maldives Monetary Authority.

The Maldivian government began an economic reform program in 1989, initially by lifting import quotas and opening some exports to the private sector. Subsequently, it has liberalized regulations to allow more foreign investment. Real GDP growth averaged over 7.5% per year for more than a decade. Today, the Maldives' largest industry is tourism, accounting for 28% of GDP and more than 60% of



Maldives market

the Maldives' foreign exchange receipts. Fishing is the second leading sector.

The Maldivian economy is to a large degree based on tourism. In late December 2004, the major tsunami left more than 100 dead, 12,000 displaced, and property damage exceeding \$400 million. As a result of the tsunami, the GDP contracted by about 3.6% in 2005. A rebound in tourism, post-tsunami reconstruction, and development of new resorts helped the economy recover quickly and showed an 18% increase on 2006. 2007 estimates show the Maldives enjoy the highest GDP per capita \$4,600 (2007 est) amongst south Asian countries.

Tourism

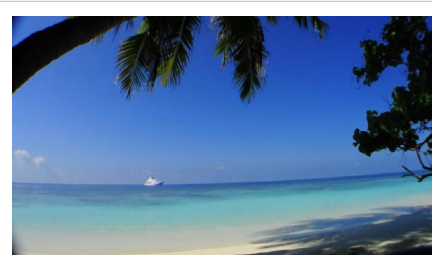


Filithayo island beach with tall palm trees and blue lagoons

The Maldives was largely terra incognita for tourists until the early 1970s. Strewn across the equator in the Indian Ocean, the Maldives archipelago possesses a truly unique geography as a small island country. Nature has fragmented the archipelago into 1,190 tiny islands that occupy a mere one per cent of its 90,000 km² territory. Only 185 islands are home to its 300,000 population, while the other islands are used entirely for economic purposes of which tourism and agriculture are the most dominant. Tourism accounts for 28% of GDP and more than 60% of the Maldives' foreign exchange receipts. Over 90% of government tax revenue comes from import duties and tourism-related taxes. The development of tourism has fostered the overall growth of the country's economy. It has created direct and indirect employment

and income generation opportunities in other related industries. The first tourist resorts were opened in 1972 with Bandos island resort and Kurumba Village.

According to the Ministry of Tourism website ^[38], the emergence of tourism in 1972 transformed the economy of the Maldives, moving rapidly from the dependence on the fisheries sector to the tourism sector. In just three and a half decades, the industry has become the main source of income and livelihood of the people of the Maldives. Tourism is also the country's biggest foreign currency earner and the single largest contributor to the GDP. Today, there are 89 resorts in the Maldives with a bed capacity of over 17,000, providing facilities for tourists whose annual arrival figure exceeds 600,000. ^[39]



Maldivian beach video

The number of resorts has increased from 2 to 92 between 1972 and 2007. As of 2007, over 8,380,000 tourists had visited Maldives. ^[40]

Practically all visitors arrive at Malé International Airport, located on Hulhulé Island, which is next to the capital Malé. The airport is served by a wide array of flights to India, Sri Lanka, Doha, Dubai and major airports in South-East Asia, as well as an increasing number of charters from Europe. Many flights stop in Colombo (Sri Lanka) on the way.

Gan Airport, on the southern atoll of Addu, also serves an international flight to Milan several times a week.

Fishing industry

For many centuries the Maldivian economy was entirely dependent on fishing and other marine products. Fishing remains the main occupation of the people and the government gives special priority to the development of the fisheries sector.

The mechanization of the traditional fishing boat called *dhoni* in 1974 was a major milestone in the development of the fisheries industry and the country's economy in general. A fish canning plant was installed in the island of Felivaru in 1977, as a joint venture with a Japanese firm. In 1979, a Fisheries Advisory Board was set up with the mandate of advising the government on policy guidelines for the overall development of the fisheries sector. Manpower development programs were begun in the early 1980s, and fisheries education was incorporated into the school curriculum. Fish aggregating devices and navigational aids were located at various strategic points. Moreover, the opening up of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Maldives for fisheries has further enhanced the growth of the fisheries sector. Today, fisheries contribute over fifteen percent of the country's GDP and engage about thirty percent of the country's work force. It is also the second-largest foreign exchange earner after tourism.



A dhoni without lateen sails.



Maldives rudder fish (*Kyphosus cinerascens*)

Agriculture and Cottage industries

Agriculture and manufacturing continue to play a lesser role in the economy, constrained by the limited availability of cultivable land and the shortage of domestic labor. Most staple foods must be imported. Industry, which consists mainly of garment production, boat building, and handicrafts, accounts for about 7% of GDP. The development of the tourism sector gave a major boost to the country's fledgling traditional cottage industries such as mat weaving, lacquer work, handicraft, and coir rope making. New industries that have since emerged include printing, production of PVC pipes, brick making, marine engine repairs, bottling of aerated water, and garment production.

Judiciary

As a Republic the Constitution came into force in 1968 by a (and amended in 1970, 1972, and 1975) has been repealed and replaced by another Constitution assented to by the President Gayoom on 27 November 1997. This Constitution came into force on 1 January 1998. All stated that the president was the Head of State, Head of Government and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and the Police of the Maldives. Under Intense pressure from the opposition a new Constitution was Ratified, dated 7 August 2008, whereby the power of judiciary was separated from the head of state.

According to the constitution of Maldives, "The judges are independent, and subject only to the constitution and the law. When deciding matters on which the Constitution or the law is silent, judges must consider Islamic Shari'ah."

The independent Judicial Services Commission is the core of the judiciary, who oversee the appointment and dismissal of judges, and act as a 'watchdog' to ensure that Judges uphold their own codes of conduct. Currently in an interim stage, one is appointed by the president other member from the Civil Service Commission, parliament, the public, high court judge, lower court judge and a supreme court member. Contradiction in the commission's makeup, which requires a Supreme Court member to be present on the commission, even though the Supreme Court must be composed with the advice of the commission.

There has been raised concerns over the independence of the commission, given that of eight interim members, the President appoints one and all current judges were appointed by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom under the previous constitution, of them two were appointed to the commission.

The Supreme Court of Maldives is headed by a Chief Justice, who is the head of judiciary. Right now at an interim stage the President appointed 5 judges, who was approved by the Parliament. The interim court will sit until a new permanent Supreme Court is nominated under the constitution. Underneath the Supreme Court a High Court and a Trial court. The constitution requires an uneven number rulings in the High Court of Maldives, therefore three justice is appointed. Any verdict there must be reached by a majority, but must also include a 'minority report'.

As part of the newly independent judiciary a Prosecutor General is appointed, who is responsible for initiating court proceedings on behalf of the government, will oversee how investigations are being conducted and have a say in criminal prosecutions, duties previously held by the Attorney General. Also has the power to order investigations, monitor detentions, lodge appeals and review existing cases. The Prosecutor General of Maldives is appointed by the President and has to be approved by the Parliament.

The Maldives have, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), undertaken to write the world's first Muslim criminal code. This project would formalize the proceedings of criminal justice in this tiny nation to one of the most comprehensive modern criminal codes in the world. The code has been written and awaits action by the parliament.

Recently the opposition leaders had been taken to police custody of suspect ion for corruption. and call up for a demonstration against corruption. the events was organized by the present government of maldives and the parliamentary leader of the ruling party mr.moosa Manik announced that the orders will be from public court and the chief judge of the public court is himself. its a step the government takes backward in this time of democracy.

Religion

Islam is the only official religion of The Maldives. The open practice of all other religions is forbidden and such actions are liable to prosecution under the law of the country. A small but growing number of Maldivians do question their faith, using the internet as a means of communication but rarely in a public way.^[41] According to the revised constitution, in article two, it says that the republic "is based on the principles of Islam." Article nine says that "a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives"; number ten says that "no law contrary to any principle of Islam can be applied in the Maldives." Article nineteen states that "citizens are free to participate in or carry out any activity that is not expressly prohibited by sharia or by the law."

The requirement to adhere to a particular religion and prohibition on public worship in other religions is contrary to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which the Maldives has recently become party^[42] and was thus addressed in the Maldives' reservation in adhering to the Covenant claiming that "The application of the principles set out in Article 18 of the Covenant shall be without prejudice to the Constitution of the Republic of the Maldives."^[43]

The Maldives is one of the countries which tops the government restrictions index on religious freedom.

Military of Maldives

The Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF) is a combined security force responsible for defending the security and sovereignty of the Maldives, having the primary task of being responsible for attending to all internal and external security needs of the Maldives, including the protection of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The MNDF component branches are the Coast Guard, the Fire & Rescue Service, Infantry Services, Defence Institute for Training & Education (Training Command), and Support Services.

Coast Guard

As a water-bound nation much of the security concerns lie at sea. Almost 90% of the country is covered by sea and the remaining 10% land is scattered over an area of 415 km (258 mi) x 120 km (75 mi), with the largest island being not more than 8 km² (3 sq mi). Therefore the duties assigned to the MNDF of maintaining surveillance over Maldives' waters and providing protection against foreign intruders poaching in the EEZ and territorial waters, are immense tasks from both logistical and economic view points. Hence, for carrying out these functions, it is the Coast Guard that plays a vital role. To provide timely security its patrol boats are stationed at various MNDF Regional Headquarters.

Coast Guard is also assigned to respond to the maritime distress calls and to conduct search and rescue operations in a timely manner. Maritime pollution control exercises are conducted regularly on an annual basis for familiarization and handling of such hazardous situations.

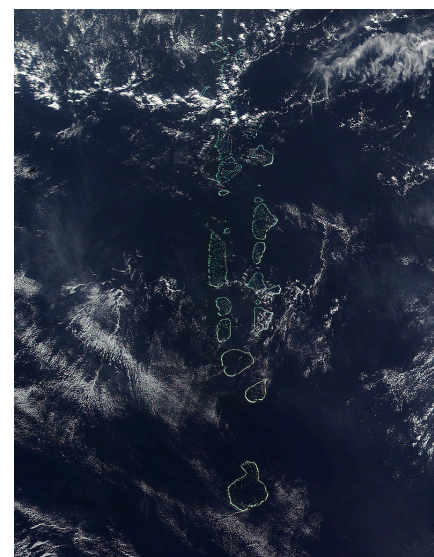
Coast Guards also undertake armed sea transport of troops and military equipment around the country.



Fire & Rescue Service boats.

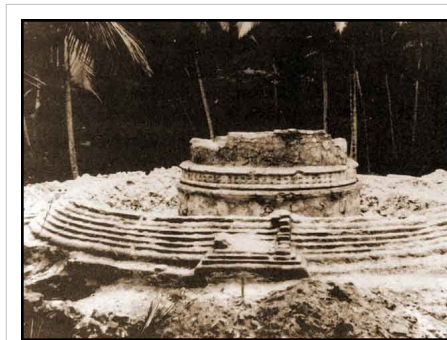
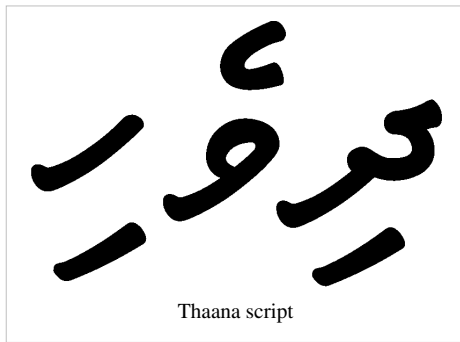
The Indian Ocean Commission

Since 1996, the Maldives has been the official progress monitor of the Indian Ocean Commission. Since 2002, the Maldives has expressed interest in the work of the Indian Ocean Commission but has not applied for membership. The interest of the Maldives relates to its identity as a small island state, especially in relation to matters of economic development and environmental preservation, and its desire to forge close relations with France, a main actor in the IOC region. The Maldives is a founding member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, SAARC, and as former protectorate of Great Britain, joined the Commonwealth in 1982, some 17 years after gaining independence from Great Britain. The Maldives enjoys close ties with Seychelles and Mauritius, who like the Maldives are members of the Commonwealth. The Maldives and Comoros are also both members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference. The Maldives has refused to enter into any negotiations with Mauritius over the demarcation of the maritime border between the Maldives and the British Indian Ocean Territory, pointing out that under international law, the sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago rests with the UK, with whom negotiations were started in 1991.



Satellite image of the Maldives by NASA. The southernmost atoll of the Maldives, Addu Atoll, is not visible on the image.

Language and culture



Pre-Islamic Buddhist Stupa of Maldives,
excavated in Thoddoo in the 1950s

Maldivian culture is heavily influenced by geographical proximity to Sri Lanka and southern India.

The official and common language is Dhivehi, an Indo-European language having some similarities with Elu, the ancient Sinhalese language. The first known script use to write Dhivehi is Eveyla akuru script which is found in historical recording of kings (raadhavalhi). Later a script called Dhives akuru was introduced and used for a long period. The present-day written script is called Thaana and is written from right to left. Thaana is said to be introduced by the reign of Mohamed Thakurufaanu. English is used widely in commerce and increasingly as the medium of instruction in government schools.

The language is of Indic Sanskritic origin, which points at a later influence from the north of the subcontinent. According to the legends, the kingly dynasty that ruled the country in the past has its origin there.

Possibly these ancient kings brought Buddhism from the subcontinent, but the Maldivian legends don't make it clear. In Sri Lanka there are similar legends; however, it is improbable that the ancient Maldivian royals and Buddhism both came from that island because none of the Sri Lankan chronicles mention the Maldives. It is unlikely that the ancient chronicles of Sri Lanka would have failed to mention the

Maldives if a branch of its kingdom had extended itself to the Maldivian Islands.^[44]

After the long Buddhist^[45] period of Maldivian history, Muslim traders introduced Sunni Islam. Maldivians converted to Islam by the mid-12th century. The island has a long history of Sufic orders, as can be seen in the history of the country such as the building of tombs. They were used until as recent as the 1980s for seeking the help of buried Saints. They can be seen today next to some old mosques of the Maldives and are considered today as Cultural heritages. Other aspects of tassawuf, such as ritualized dhikr ceremonies called Maulūdu (Mawlid) -- the liturgy of which included recitations and certain supplications in a melodical tone—existed until very recent times. These Maulūdu festivals were held in ornate tents specially built for the occasion. At present Sunni Islam is the official religion of the entire population, as adherence to it is required for citizenship.



The Abu al Barakat Tomb, housed in the Old
Friday Mosque, *Hukuru Miskiyy*



The Islamic Centre, housing the mosque
Masjid-al-Sultan Mohammed
Thakurufaanu-al-A'zam

Since the 12th century AD there are also influences from Arabia in the language and culture of the Maldives because of the general conversion to Islam in the 12th century, and its location as a crossroads in the central Indian Ocean. This was due to the long trading history between the far east and the middle east. Somali pirates then later discovered the island for gold in the 13th Century before the Portuguese. Their brief stay later ended in a bloody conflict known by the Somalis as "Dagaal Diig Badaaney" in 1424.

According to Moroccan traveller Ibn Batuta, the person responsible for this conversion was a Sunni Muslim visitor named Abu al Barakat sailing from Morocco. However, more reliable Maldivian tradition

says that he was a Persian saint from Tabriz called Yusuf Shamsuddin. He is also referred to as Tabrizugefaanu. His venerated tomb now stands on the grounds of the Friday Mosque, or Hukuru miski, in the capital of Malé. Built in 1656, this is the oldest mosque in Maldives.

Maldives' Firsts

- Maldives made a scuba diving record in 2006 for the largest number of scuba divers participating in one dive, with a grand total of 958 divers descending into the water at the same time. This record has since been overtaken by Indonesia in 2009.
- Maldives was the first country to open a virtual embassy, in the online world Second Life, on 22 May 2007.^[46]
[47]
- Maldives was the first country to hold a cabinet meeting underwater.

The cabinet meeting was chaired by President Mohamed Nasheed. In the meeting, the President, Vice President, and the cabinet signed a declaration calling for concerted global action on climate change, ahead of the UN climate conference in Copenhagen. The underwater meeting was part of a wider campaign by international environmental NGO 350.org.^[48]

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External links

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- Maldives (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mv.html>) entry at *The World Factbook*
- Maldives (<http://www.dmoz.org/Regional/Asia/Maldives/>) at the Open Directory Project
- Wikimedia Atlas of Maldives
- Maldives travel guide from Wikitravel

Geographical coordinates: 3°12'N 73°13'E

bjn:Maladewa gag:Maldiv adaları

Nepal

सङ्घीय लोकतान्त्रिक गणतन्त्र नेपाल
Sanghiya Loktāntrik Ganatantra Nepāl
Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal



Motto: जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी (Devanāgarī)
 "Mother and Motherland are Greater than Heaven"

Anthem: "Sayaun Thunga Phool Ka"



Capital (and largest city)	Kathmandu (Nepali: काठमाडौं) 27°42'N 85°19'E	
Official language(s)	Nepali ^[1]	
Recognised regional languages	Nepal Bhasa, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Gurung, Tamang, Magar, Awadhi, Sherpa, Kiranti, Limbu and other 100 different indigenous languages.	
Demonym	Nepali	
Government	Republic	
-	President	Ram Baran Yadav
-	Vice President	Parmanand Jha
-	Prime Minister	Madhav Kumar Nepal (acting until next P.M. is elected)
Unification		
-	Kingdom declared	21 December 1768
-	State declared	15 January 2007

-	Republic declared	28 May 2008
Area		
-	Total	147,181 km ² (93rd) 56,827 sq mi
-	Water (%)	2.8
Population		
-	2009 estimate	29,331,000 ^[2] (40th)
-	2007 census	28,875,140
-	Density	199.3/km ² (62nd) 518.1/sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2010 estimate
-	Total	\$34.880 billion ^[3]
-	Per capita	\$1,237 ^[3]
GDP (nominal)		2010 estimate
-	Total	\$14.721 billion ^[3]
-	Per capita	\$522 ^[3]
Gini (2003–04)		47.2 (high)
HDI (2007)		▲ 0.553 ^[4] (medium) (144th)
Currency		Nepalese Rupee (NPR)
Time zone		NPT (UTC+5:45)
-	Summer (DST)	not observed (UTC+5:45)
Drives on the		left
ISO 3166 code		NP
Internet TLD		.np
Calling code		+977

Nepal (English pronunciation: /nɛˈpɔːl/ (ⓘ listen) *ne-PAWL*^[5] Nepali: नेपाल [neˈpal](ⓘ listen)), officially the **Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal**, is a landlocked country in South Asia. It is located in the Himalayas and bordered to the north by the People's Republic of China, and to the south, east, and west by the Republic of India. With an area of 147181 square kilometres (56827 sq mi) and a population of approximately 30 million, Nepal is the world's 93rd largest country by land mass^[6] and the 41st most populous country. Kathmandu is the nation's capital and the country's largest metropolis.

Nepal has a rich geography. The mountainous north has eight of the world's ten tallest mountains, including the highest point on Earth, Mount Everest, called *Sagarmatha* in Nepali. It contains more than 240 peaks over 20000 ft (6096 m) above sea level.^[7] The fertile and humid south is heavily urbanized.

By some measures, Hinduism is practised by a larger majority of people in Nepal than in any other nation.^[8] Buddhism, though a minority faith in the country, is linked historically with Nepal as the birthplace of the Buddha. Many Nepali do not distinguish between Hinduism and Buddhism and follow both religious traditions. There are 3 different buddhist traditions: Himalayan Buddhism, Buddhism of Kathmandu Valley (mostly Mahayana and Vajrayana), and also the Theravada Buddhism.

A monarchy throughout most of its history, Nepal was ruled by the Shah dynasty of kings from 1768, when Prithvi Narayan Shah unified its many small kingdoms. In 2006, however, a decade-long People's Revolution by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) along with several weeks of mass protests by all major political parties of Nepal culminated in a peace accord, and the ensuing elections for the constituent assembly voted overwhelmingly in favor of the abdication of the last Nepali monarch Gyanendra Shah and the establishment of a federal democratic republic in 28 May 2008.^[9] The first President of Nepal, Ram Baran Yadav, was sworn in on 23 July 2008.

Etymology

Nepal Bhasa origin

The word "Nepal" is believed by scholars to be derived from the word "Nepa:" which refers to the Newar Kingdom, the present day Kathmandu Valley. With Sanskritization, the Newar word Nepa became Nepal.^[10] The Newars of present day Nepal, refer to all the inhabitants of Kathmandu valley and its peripheries (called "Nepa:") before the advent of Shah dynasty.

Ne Muni

History and local traditions say that a Hindu sage named "Ne" established himself at the valley of Kathmandu during prehistoric times and that the word "Nepal" came into existence as the place protected ("pala" in Sanskrit) by the sage "Ne". The etymology of the name Nepal means, "the country looked after by Ne".^[11]

He used to perform religious ceremonies at Teku, the confluence of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers.^[12] He is said by legend to have selected a pious cowherd to be the first of the many kings of the Gopala Dynasty.^[11] These rulers are said to have ruled Nepal for over 500 years.^[13] He selected Bhuktaman to be the first king in the line of the Gopal (*Cowherd*) Dynasty.^[12] The Gopal dynasty ruled for 621 years. Yakshya Gupta was the last king of this dynasty.

According to *Skanda Purana*, a rishi called "Ne" or "Nemuni" used to live in Himalaya.^[14] In the *Pashupati Purana*, he is mentioned as a saint and a protector.^[15] He is said to have practised meditation at the Bagmati and Kesavati rivers^[16] and to have taught his doctrines there too.^[11]

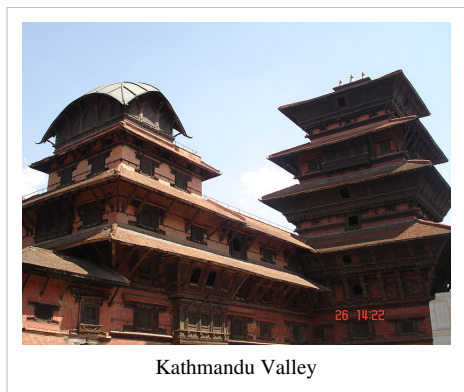
History

Prehistory

Neolithic tools found in the Kathmandu Valley indicate that people have been living in the Himalayan region for at least 9,000 years. It appears that Kirat ethnicity people were the first people to settle in Nepal and ruled Nepal for about 2,500 years.^[17]

Ancient

Terai News writes, "*Nepal has been highlighted for the last several centuries in Sanskrit literature like 'Skand Purana'. 'Skanda Purana' has a separate volume known as 'Nepal Mahatmya', which explains in more details about the beauty and power of Nepal.*"^[18] Nepal is also mentioned in Hindu scriptures such as the *Narayana Puja*^[19] and the *Atharva Siras* (800–600 BC).^[19] Around 1000 BC, small kingdoms and confederations of clans arose in the region. From one of these, the Shakyas confederation, arose a prince named Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BC), who later renounced his royalty to lead an ascetic life and came to be known as the *Buddha* ("the enlightened one"). The 7th Kirata king, Jitedasti, was on the throne in the



Kathmandu Valley

Nepal valley at the time. By 250 BC, the region came under the influence of the Mauryan Empire of northern India, and later became a vassal state under the Gupta Empire in the fourth century AD. In the fifth century, rulers called *the Licchavis* governed the majority of its area. There is a good and quite detailed description of the kingdom of Nepal in the account of the renowned Chinese Buddhist pilgrim monk Xuanzang, dating from c. 645 AD.^{[20] [21]} The Licchavi dynasty went into decline in the late eighth century and was followed by a Newari era, from 879, although the extent of their control over the entire country is uncertain. By the late 11th century, southern Nepal came under the influence of the Chalukaya Empire of southern India. Under the Chalukayas, Nepal's religious establishment changed as the kings patronised Hinduism instead of the prevailing Buddhism.

Medieval

By the early 12th century, leaders were emerging whose names ended with the Sanskrit suffix *mallā* ("wrestler"). Initially their reign was marked by upheaval, but the kings consolidated their power and ruled over the next 200 years; by the late 14th century, much of the country began to come under a unified rule. This unity was short-lived; in 1482 the region was carved into three kingdoms: Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur.

Kingdom of Nepal

After centuries of petty rivalry between the three kingdoms, in the mid-18th century, Prithvi Narayan Shah, a Gorkha King, set out to unify the kingdoms. Seeking arms and aid from India, and buying the neutrality of bordering Indian kingdoms, he embarked on his mission in 1765. After several bloody battles and sieges, he managed to unify the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding territory three years later in 1768. However, an actual battle never took place to conquer the Kathmandu valley; it was taken over by Prithvi Narayan and his troops without any effort, during Indra Jatra, a festival of Newars, when all the valley's citizens were celebrating the festival. This event marked the birth of the modern nation of Nepal.



Hindu temples in Patan, capital of one of the three medieval Newar kingdoms

In 1788 the Nepalese overran Sikkim and sent a punitive raid into Tibet. Kangra in northern India was also occupied by the Nepalese. In 1809, Ranjit Singh the ruler of the Sikh state in the Punjab, had intervened and drove the Nepalese army east of the Satluj river.^[22]



Statue of a Gurkha soldier

At its maximum extent, Greater Nepal extended from the Tista River in the east, to Kangara, across the Sutlej River in the west as well as further south into the Terai plains and north of the Himalayas than at present. A dispute and subsequent war with Tibet over the control of mountain passes forced the Nepalese to retreat and pay heavy reparations to China.

Rivalry between Nepal and the British East India Company over the annexation of minor states bordering Nepal eventually led to the Anglo-Nepalese War (1815–16). At first the British underestimated the Nepalese and were badly defeated until committing more military resources than they had anticipated needing. They were greatly impressed by the valor and competence of their adversaries. Thus began the reputation of "Gurkhas" as fierce and ruthless soldiers. The war ended in the Treaty of Sugauli, under which Nepal ceded recently captured portions of Sikkim and lands in Terai as well as the right to recruit soldiers.

Factionalism inside the royal family had led to a period of instability. In 1846 a plot was discovered revealing that the reigning queen had planned to overthrow Jung Bahadur Rana, a fast-rising military leader. This led to the Kot Massacre; armed clashes between military personnel and administrators loyal to the queen led to the execution of several hundred princes and chieftains around the country. Jung Bahadur Rana emerged victorious and founded the Rana lineage.

The king was made a titular figure, and the post of Prime Minister was made powerful and hereditary. The Ranas were staunchly pro-British and assisted them during the Indian Sepoy Rebellion in 1857 (and later in both World Wars). Some parts of the Terai Region were given back to Nepal by the British as a friendly gesture, because of her military help to sustain British control in India during the Sepoy Rebellion. In 1923, the United Kingdom and Nepal formally signed an agreement of friendship, in which Nepal's independence was recognized by the UK.

Slavery was abolished in Nepal in 1924.^[23] Nevertheless debt bondage even involving debtors' children has been a persistent social problem in the Terai.

In the late 1940s, newly emerging pro-democracy movements and political parties in Nepal were critical of the Rana autocracy. Meanwhile, with the assertion of Chinese control in Tibet in the 1950s, India sought to counterbalance the perceived military threat from its northern neighbour by taking pre-emptive steps to assert more influence in Nepal. India sponsored both King Tribhuvan (ruled 1911–55) as Nepal's new ruler in 1951 and a new government, mostly comprising the Nepali Congress Party, thus terminating Rana hegemony in the kingdom.



Nepalese royalty in the 1920s

After years of power wrangling between the king and the government, King Mahendra (ruled 1955–72) scrapped the democratic experiment in 1959, and a "partyless" panchayat system was made to govern Nepal until 1989, when the "Jan Andolan" (People's Movement) forced King Birendra (ruled 1972–2001) to accept constitutional reforms and to establish a multiparty parliament that took seat in May 1991.^[24] In 1991–92, Bhutan expelled roughly 100,000 ethnic Nepalis, most of whom have been living in seven refugee camps in eastern Nepal ever since.^[25]

In 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) started a bid to replace the royal parliamentary system with a people's socialist republic by violent means. This led to the long Nepal Civil War and more than 12,000 deaths. On 1 June 2001, there was a massacre in the royal palace. King Birendra, Queen Aiswarya, Crown Prince Dipendra and seven other members of the royal family were killed. Dipendra was accused of patricide and of committing suicide

thereafter. This outburst was alleged to have been Dipendra's response to his parents' refusal to accept his choice of wife. Nevertheless there are speculation and doubts among Nepalese citizens about who was responsible.

Following the carnage, Birendra's brother Gyanendra inherited the throne. On 1 February 2005, Gyanendra dismissed the entire government and assumed full executive powers to quash the violent Maoist movement,^[24] but this initiative was unsuccessful because a stalemate had developed where the Maoists were firmly entrenched in large expanses of countryside yet could not dislodge the military from numerous towns and the largest cities. In September 2005, the Maoists declared a three-month unilateral ceasefire to negotiate.

In response to the 2006 democracy movement King Gyanendra agreed to relinquish sovereign power to the people. On 24 April 2006 the dissolved House of Representatives was reinstated. Using its newly acquired sovereign authority, on 18 May 2006 the House of Representatives unanimously voted to curtail the power of the king and declared Nepal a secular state, ending its time-honoured official status as a Hindu Kingdom. On 28 December 2007, a bill was passed in parliament to amend Article 159 of the constitution — replacing "Provisions regarding the King" by "Provisions of the Head of the State" — declaring Nepal a federal republic, and thereby abolishing the monarchy.^[26] The bill came into force on 28 May 2008, as the constituent assembly overwhelmingly voted to abolish royal rule.^[27]

Republic

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) won the largest number of seats in the Constituent Assembly election held on 10 April 2008, and formed a coalition government which included most of the parties in the CA. Although acts of violence occurred during the pre-electoral period, election observers noted that the elections themselves were markedly peaceful and "well-carried out."^[28]

The newly elected Assembly met in Kathmandu on 28 May 2008, and, after a polling of 564 constituent Assembly members, 560 voted to form a new government,^[27] ^[29] with the monarchist Rastriya Prajatantra Party, which had four members in the assembly, registering a dissenting note. At that point, it was declared that Nepal had become a secular and inclusive democratic republic,^[30] with the government announcing a three-day public holiday from 28 to 30 May. The King was thereafter given 15 days to vacate the Narayanhiti Royal Palace, to re-open it as a public museum.

Nonetheless, political tensions and consequent power-sharing battles have continued in Nepal. In May 2009, the Maoist-led government was toppled and another coalition government with all major political parties barring the Maoists was formed. Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) was made the Prime Minister of the coalition government.

Geography

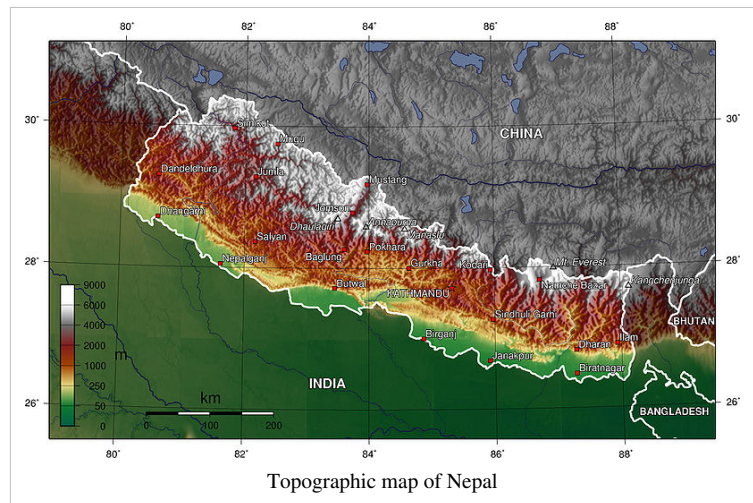
Nepal is of roughly trapezoidal shape, 800 kilometres (497 mi) long and 200 kilometres (124 mi) wide, with an area of 147181 km² (56827 sq mi). See List of territories by size for the comparative size of Nepal.

Nepal is commonly divided into three physiographic areas: the Mountain, Hill, Siwalik region and Terai Regions. These ecological belts run east-west and are vertically intersected by Nepal's major, north to south flowing river systems.

The southern lowland plains or **Terai** bordering India are part of the northern rim of the Indo-Gangetic plains. They were formed and are fed by three major Himalayan rivers: the Kosi, the Narayani, and the Karnali as well as smaller rivers rising below the permanent snowline. This region has a subtropical to tropical climate. The outermost range of foothills called Shiwalik or Churia Range cresting at 700 to 1000 metres (2297 to 3281 ft) marks the limit of the Gangetic Plain, however broad, low valleys called Inner Tarai (Bhitri Tarai Uptyaka) lie north of these foothills in several places.



Map of Nepal



Topographic map of Nepal



Mount Everest

The **Hill Region** (*Pahad*) abuts the mountains and varies from 800 to 4000 metres (2625 to 13123 ft) in altitude with progression from subtropical climates below 1200 metres (3937 ft) to alpine climates above 3600 metres (11811 ft). The Mahabharat Lekh reaching 1500 to 3000 metres (4921 to 9843 ft) is the southern limit of this region, with subtropical river valleys and "hills" alternating to the north of this range. Population density is high in valleys but notably less above 2000 metres (6562 ft) and very low above 2500 metres (8202 ft) where snow occasionally falls in winter.

The **Mountain Region** (*Parbat*), situated in the Great Himalayan Range, makes up the northern part of Nepal. It contains the highest elevations in the world including 8848 metres (29029 ft) height Mount Everest (*Sagarmatha* in Nepali) on the border with China. Seven other

of the world's eight thousand metre peaks are in Nepal or on its border with China: Lhotse, Makalu, Cho Oyu, Kanchenjunga, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and Manaslu.



Barun Valley – There are many such valleys in the Himalaya created by glacier flows.



Gosainkunda Lake in Langtang.



The arid and barren Himalayan landscape

Nepal has five climatic zones, broadly corresponding to the altitudes. The tropical and subtropical zones lie below 1200 metres (3937 ft), the temperate zone 1200 to 2400 metres (3937 to 7874 ft), the cold zone 2400 to 3600 metres (7874 to 11811 ft), the subarctic zone 3600 to 4400 metres (11811 to 14436 ft), and the Arctic zone above 4400 metres (14436 ft).

Nepal experiences five seasons: summer, monsoon, autumn, winter and spring. The Himalaya blocks cold winds from Central Asia in the winter and forms the northern limit of the monsoon wind patterns. In a

land once thickly forested, deforestation is a major problem in all regions, with resulting erosion and degradation of ecosystems.

Nepal is popular for mountaineering, containing some of the highest and most challenging mountains in the world, including Mount Everest. Technically, the south-east ridge on the Nepali side of the mountain is easier to climb; so, most climbers prefer to trek to Everest through Nepal. Moreover Nepal has 8 of the top 10 highest mountains of the world with postcard beauty.

Neotectonics

The collision between the Indian subcontinent and the Eurasian continent, which started in Paleogene time and continues today, produced the Himalaya and the Tibetan Plateau, a spectacular modern example of the effects of plate tectonics. Nepal lies completely within this collision zone, occupying the central sector of the Himalayan arc, nearly one third of the 2400 km (1500 mi)-long Himalayas.^{[31] [32] [33] [34] [35] [36]}

The Indian plate continues to move north relative to Asia at the rate of approximately 50 mm (2.0 in) per year.^[37] Given the great magnitudes of the blocks of the Earth's crust involved, this is remarkably fast, about twice the speed at which human fingernails grow. As the strong Indian continental crust subducts beneath the relatively weak Tibetan crust, it pushes up the Himalayan mountains. This collision zone has accommodated huge amounts of crustal shortening as the rock sequences slide one over another.

Erosion of the Himalayas is a very important source of sediment, which flows via several great rivers (the Indus to the Indian Ocean, and the Ganges and Brahmaputra river system) to the Bay of Bengal.^[38]

Environment

The dramatic differences in elevation found in Nepal result in a variety of biomes, from tropical savannas along the Indian border, to subtropical broadleaf and coniferous forests in the Hill Region, to temperate broadleaf and coniferous forests on the slopes of the Himalaya, to montane grasslands and shrublands and rock and ice at the highest elevations.

At the lowest elevations is the Terai-Duar savanna and grasslands ecoregion. These form a mosaic with the Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests, which occur from 500 to 1000 metres (1600 to 3300 ft) and include the Inner Terai Valleys. Himalayan subtropical pine forests occur between 1000 and 2000 metres (3300 and 6600 ft).

Above these elevations, the biogeography of Nepal is generally divided from east to west by the Gandaki River. Ecoregions to the east tend to receive more precipitation and to be more species-rich. Those to the west are drier with fewer species.

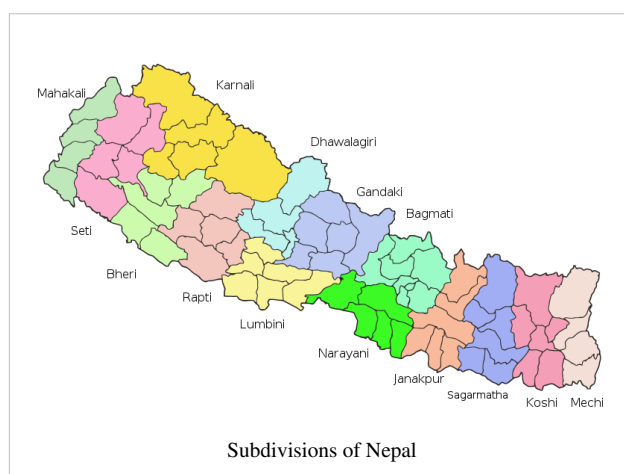
From 1500 to 3000 metres (4900 to 9800 ft), are temperate broadleaf forests: the eastern and western Himalayan broadleaf forests. From 3000 to 4000 metres (9800 to 13000 ft) are the eastern and western Himalayan subalpine conifer forests. To 5500 metres (18000 ft) are the eastern and western Himalayan alpine shrub and meadows.

Subdivisions

Nepal is divided into 14 zones and 75 districts, grouped into five development regions. Each district is headed by a permanent chief district officer responsible for maintaining law and order and coordinating the work of field agencies of the various government ministries. The five regions and 14 zones are:

- Eastern Region (Purwanchal)
 - Koshi
 - Mechi
 - Sagarmatha
- Central Region (Madhyamanchal)

- Bagmati
- Janakpur



- Narayani
- Western Region (Pashchimanchal)
 - Dhawalagiri
 - Gandaki
 - Lumbini
- Mid-Western Region (Madhya Pashchimanchal)
 - Bheri
 - Karnali
 - Rapti
- Far-Western Region (Sudur Pashchimanchal)
 - Mahakali
 - Seti

Largest cities

The 10 largest cities (by population)^[39]

1. **Kathmandu** (Pop.: 1,442,271)
2. **Pokhara** (Pop.: 200,000)
3. **Patan** (Pop.: 183,310)
4. Biratnagar (Pop.: 182,324)
5. Birgunj (Pop.: 133,238)
6. Dharan Bazar (Pop.: 108,600)
7. Bharatpur (Pop.: 107,157)
8. Janakpur (Pop.: 93,767)
9. Dhangarhi (Pop.: 92,294)
10. Butwal (Pop.: 91,733)

Government and politics

Nepal has seen rapid political changes during the last two decades. Until 1990, Nepal was a monarchy running under the executive control of the king. Faced with a Communist movement against the absolute monarchy, King Birendra, in 1990, agreed to large-scale political reforms by creating a parliamentary monarchy with the king as the head of state and a prime minister as the head of the government. Nepal has also been noted for its recent speed of development, such as being one of the few countries in Asia to abolish the death penalty^[40] and the first country in Asia to rule in favor of same-sex marriage, which the government has a seven-person committee studying after a November 2008 ruling by the nation's Supreme Court, which ordered full rights for LGBT individuals, including the right to marry.^[41]

Nepal's legislature was bicameral, consisting of a House of Representatives called the Pratinidhi Sabha and a National Council called the Rastriya Sabha. The House of Representatives consisted of 205 members directly elected by the people. The National Council had



Flag of Nepal

60 members: ten nominated by the king, 35 elected by the House of Representatives, and the remaining 15 elected by an electoral college made up of chairs of villages and towns. The legislature had a five-year term but was dissolvable by the king before its term could end. All Nepali citizens 18 years and older became eligible to vote.

The executive comprised the King and the Council of Ministers (the cabinet). The leader of the coalition or party securing the maximum seats in an election was appointed as the Prime Minister. The Cabinet was appointed by the king on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Governments in Nepal tended to be highly unstable, falling either through internal collapse or parliamentary dissolution by the monarch, on the recommendation of the prime minister, according to the constitution; no government has survived for more than two years since 1991.

The movement in April 2006 brought about a change in the nation's governance: an interim constitution was promulgated, with the King giving up power, and an interim House of Representatives was formed with Maoist members after the new government held peace talks with the Maoist rebels. The number of parliamentary seats was also increased to 330. In April 2007, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) joined the interim government of Nepal.

On 10 April 2008, the first election in Nepal for the constitution assembly took place. The Maoist party led the poll results but failed to gain a simple majority in the parliament.^[42]

On 10 December 2007, the interim parliament passed a bill that would make Nepal a federal republic, with the Prime Minister becoming head of state. On 28 May 2008, lawmakers in Nepal legally abolished the monarchy and declared the country a republic, ending 239 years of royal rule in the Himalayan nation. The newly elected assembly, led by the former communist rebels, adopted the resolution at its first meeting by an overwhelming majority. King Gyanendra was given 15 days to leave the former Royal Palace in central Kathmandu by the Nepalese Constituent Assembly. He left the former Royal Palace on 11 June.^[43]

On 26 June 2008, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala tendered his resignation to the Nepalese Constituent Assembly, which is also functioning as the Nepalese Parliament; however, a new Prime Minister has yet to be elected by the Nepalese Constituent Assembly.

On 19 July 2008, the first round of voting for the election of the country's president and vice president took place in the Constituent Assembly. Parmanand Jha became the first vice president of Nepal. However, the two presidential frontrunners, Dr. Ram Baran Yadav of Nepali Congress and the Maoist-backed candidate Ram Raja Prasad Singh, both failed to gain the minimum 298 votes needed to be elected, with Yadav receiving 283 votes and Singh receiving 270. Of 594 CA members, 578 registered in the voter list had cast their votes, of which 24 were invalid.

On 21 July 2008, the second round of voting was held. Yadav received 308 of the 590 votes cast, securing his election as president.^[44]

On 15 August 2008, Maoist leader Prachanda (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) was elected Prime Minister of Nepal, the first since the country's transition from a monarchy to a republic. On 4 May 2009, Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal resigned over on-going conflicts over sacking of the Army chief.

Since Dahal's resignation, the country has been in a serious political deadlock – one of the big issues being the proposed integration of the former Maoist combatants, also known as the People's Liberation Army, into the national security forces.^[45]

Military and foreign affairs

Nepal's military consists of the Nepalese Army, which includes the Nepalese Army Air Service (the air force unit under it.) Nepalese Police Force is the civilian police and the Armed Police Force Nepal^[46] is the paramilitary force. Service is voluntary and the minimum age for enlistment is 18 years. Nepal spends \$99.2 million (2004) on its military—1.5% of its GDP. Much of the equipment and arms are imported from India. Consequently, the US provided M16s M4s and other Colt weapons to combat communist (Maoist) insurgents. As of now, the standard-issue battle rifle of the Nepalese army is the Colt M16.^[47]

Nepal has close ties with both of its neighbours, India and China. In accordance with a long-standing treaty, Indian and Nepalese citizens may travel to each others' countries without a passport or visa. Nepalese citizens may work in India without legal restriction.



A member of the Nepalese Quick Reactionary Force (QRF)

Although Nepal and India typically have close ties, from time to time Nepal becomes caught up in the problematic Sino-Indian relationship. Recently, China has been asking Nepal to curb protests in Nepal against China's Policy on Tibet,^[48] and on 17 April 2008, police arrested over 500 Tibetan protestors^[49] citing a need to maintain positive relations with China.

Economy

Nepal's gross domestic product (GDP) for 2008 was estimated at over \$12 billion (adjusted to Nominal GDP), making it the 115th-largest economy in the world. Agriculture accounts for about 40% of Nepal's GDP, services comprise 41% and industry 22%. Agriculture employs 76% of the workforce, services 18% and manufacturing/craft-based industry 6%. Agricultural produce — mostly grown in the Terai region bordering India — includes tea, rice, corn, wheat, sugarcane, root crops, milk, and water buffalo meat. Industry mainly involves the processing of agricultural produce, including jute, sugarcane, tobacco, and grain.

Its workforce of about 10 million suffers from a severe shortage of skilled labour. About half of the population live below the international poverty line of \$1.25 a day.^[51] The spectacular landscape and diverse, exotic cultures of Nepal represent considerable potential for tourism, but growth in this hospitality industry has been stifled by recent political events. The rate of unemployment and underemployment approaches half of the working-age population. Thus many Nepali citizens move to India in search of work; the Gulf countries and Malaysia being new sources of work. Nepal receives \$50 million a year through the Gurkha soldiers who serve in the Indian and British armies and are highly esteemed for their skill and bravery. The total remittance value is worth around \$1 billion, including money sent from the Persian Gulf and Malaysia, who combined employ around 700,000 Nepali citizens.



Terraced farming on the foothills of the Himalayas.



A Rs.500 banknote of The Republic of Nepal. For economical reasons, the watermark on the right still contains a picture of King Gyanendra, obscured by printing a rhododendron, the national flower of Nepal.^[50]

A long-standing economic agreement underpins a close relationship with India. The country receives foreign aid from India, Japan, the UK, the US, the EU, China, Switzerland, and Scandinavian countries. Poverty is acute; per-capita income is around \$1,000.^[52] The distribution of wealth among the Nepalis is consistent with that in many developed and developing countries: the highest 10% of households control 39.1% of the national wealth and the lowest 10% control only 2.6%.

The government's budget is about \$1.153 billion, with expenditure of \$1.789 billion (FY05/06). The Nepalese rupee has been tied to the Indian Rupee at an exchange rate of 1.6 for many years. Since the loosening of exchange rate controls in the early 1990s, the black market for foreign exchange has all but disappeared. The inflation rate has dropped to 2.9% after a period of higher inflation during the 1990s.

Nepal's exports of mainly carpets, clothing, leather goods, jute goods and grain total \$822 million. Import commodities of mainly gold, machinery and equipment, petroleum products and fertilizer total US\$2 bn. India (53.7%), the US (17.4%), and Germany (7.1%) are its main export partners. Nepal's import partners include India (47.5%), the United Arab Emirates (11.2%), China (10.7%), Saudi Arabia (4.9%), and Singapore (4%).^[53]

Infrastructure

Nepal remains isolated from the world's major land, air and sea transport routes although, within the country, aviation is in a better state, with 48 airports, ten of them with paved runways; flights are frequent and support a sizable traffic. The hilly and mountainous terrain in the northern two-thirds of the country has made the building of roads and other infrastructure difficult and expensive. There were just over 8500 km (5282 mi) of paved roads, and one 59-km railway line in the south in 2003. There is only one reliable road route from India to the Kathmandu Valley.

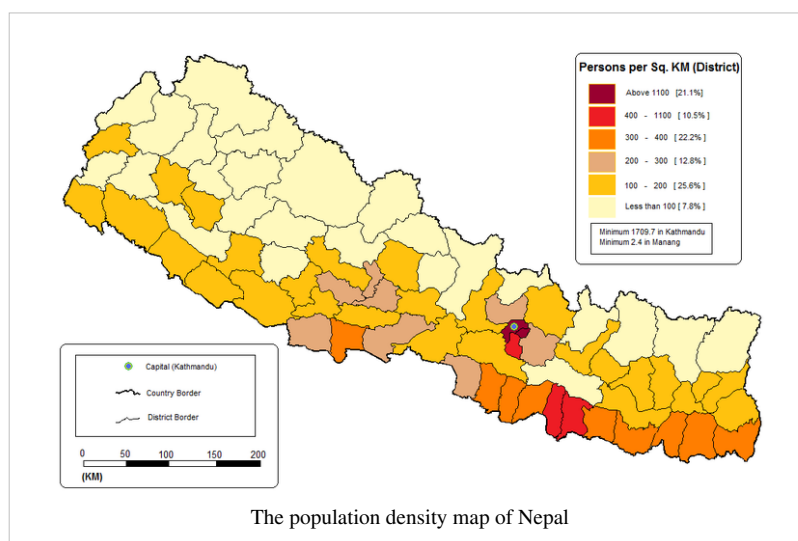
The only practical seaport of entry for goods bound for Kathmandu is Calcutta in India. Internally, the poor state of development of the road system (22 of 75 administrative districts lack road links) makes volume distribution unrealistic. Besides having landlocked, rugged geography, few tangible natural resources and poor infrastructure, the long-running civil war is also a factor in stunting the economic growth.^[54]

There is less than one telephone per 19 people. Landline telephone services are not adequate nationwide but are concentrated in cities and district headquarters. Mobile telephony is in a reasonable state in most parts of the country with increased accessibility and affordability; there were around 175,000 Internet connections in 2005. After the imposition of the "state of emergency", intermittent losses of service-signals were reported, but uninterrupted Internet connections have resumed after Nepal's second major people's revolution to overthrow the King's absolute power.^[53]

Demographics

Nepal's population has grown from 9 million people in 1950 to 29 million in 2010.^[55] At the time of the 1981 census, the total population of Nepal was 15 million, the average family was made up of 5.8 persons.^[56]

The Nepalese are descendants of three major migrations from India, Tibet, and North Burma and Yunnan via Assam. Even though Indo-Nepalese migrants were latecomers to Nepal relative to the migrants from the north, they have come to dominate the country not only numerically, but also socially, politically, and economically.^[57]

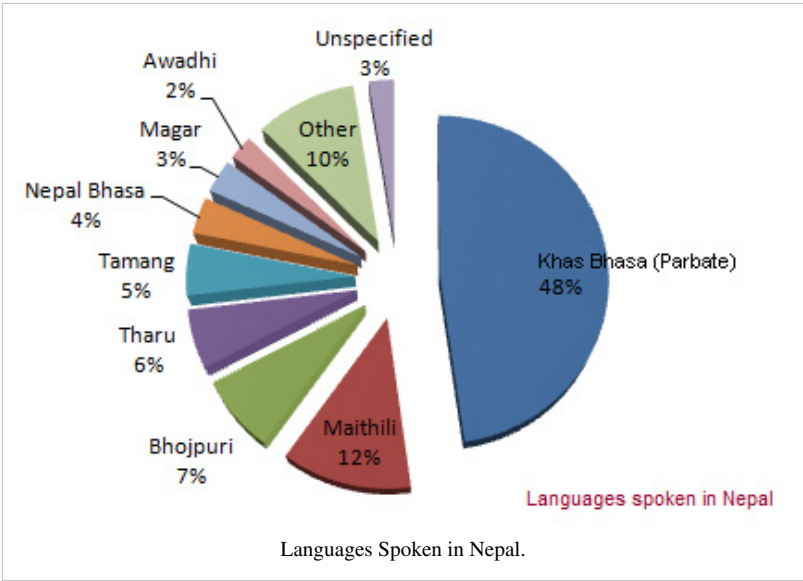


Among the earliest inhabitants were the Kirat of east mid-region, Newar of the Kathmandu Valley and aboriginal Tharu in the southern Terai region. The ancestors of the Brahmin and Chetri caste groups came from India's present Kumaon, Garhwal and Kashmir regions, while other ethnic groups trace their origins to North Burma and Yunnan and Tibet, e.g. the Gurung and Magar in the west, Rai and Limbu in the east (from Yunnan and north Burma via Assam), and Sherpa and Bhutia in the north (from Tibet).

In the Terai, a part of the Ganges Basin with 20% of the land, much of the population is physically and culturally similar to the Indo-Aryans of northern India. Indo-Aryan and East-Asian-looking mixed people live in the hill region. Indo-Aryan ancestry has been a source of prestige in Nepal for centuries, and the ruling families have been of Indo-Aryan and Hindu background.^[58] The mountainous highlands are sparsely populated. Kathmandu Valley, in the middle hill region, constitutes a small fraction of the nation's area but is the most densely populated, with almost 5% of the population.

Nepal is a multilingual society. These data are largely derived from Nepal's 2001 census results published in the *Nepal Population Report 2002*.

According to the *World Refugee Survey 2008*, published by the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Nepal hosted a population of refugees and asylum seekers in 2007 numbering approximately 130,000. Of this population, approximately 109,200 persons were from Bhutan and 20,500 from People's Republic of China.^[59] ^[60] The government of Nepal restricted Bhutanese refugees to seven camps in the Jhapa and Morang districts, and refugees were not permitted to work in most professions.^[59] At present, the United States is working towards resettling more than 60,000 of these refugees in the US.^[25]



Population Structure

Data	Size
Population	28,676,547 (2005)
Growth Rate	2.2%
Population below 14 Years old	39%
Population of age 15 to 64	57.3%
Population above 65	3.7%
The median age (Average)	20.07
The median age (Male)	19.91
The median age (Females)	20.24
Ratio (Male:Female)	1, 000:1,060
Life expectancy (Average)	59.8 Years
Life expectancy (Male)	60.9
Life expectancy (Female)	59.5
Literacy Rate (Average)	53.74%
Literacy Rate (Male)	68.51%
Literacy Rate (Female)	42.49%

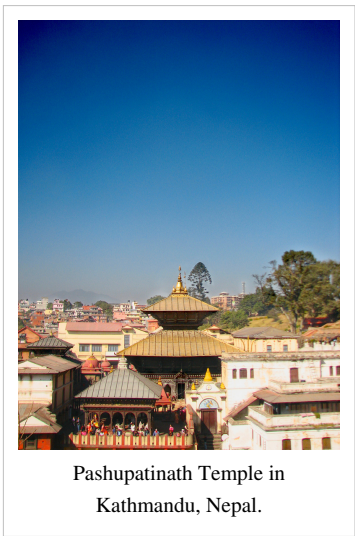
Despite the migration of a significant section of the population to the southern plains or terai in recent years, the majority of the population still lives in the central highlands. The northern mountains are sparsely populated. Kathmandu, with a population of around 800,000 (metropolitan area: 1.5 million), is the largest city in the country.

Languages

Nepal's diverse linguistic heritage evolved from four major language groups: Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Mongolian and various indigenous language isolates. The major languages of Nepal (percent spoken as mother tongue) are Nepali (48.61%), Maithili (12.30%), Bhojpuri (7.53%), Tharu (5.86%), Tamang (5.19%), Newari/Nepal Bhasa (3.63%), Magar (3.39%), Awadhi (2.47%), Rai (2.79%), Limbu (1.47%), and Bajjika (1.05%).

Derived from Sanskrit, Nepali has roots in Sanskrit and is written in Devanagari script. Nepali is the official national language and serves as *lingua franca* among Nepalis of different ethnolinguistic groups. Regional dialects Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and rarely Hindi are spoken in the southern Terai Region. Many Nepalis in government and business speak English as well. Dialects of Tibetan are spoken in and north of the higher Himalaya where standard literary Tibetan is widely understood by those with religious education. Local dialects in the Terai and hills are mostly unwritten with efforts underway to develop systems for writing many in Devanagari or the Roman alphabet.

Religion



Nepal religiosity	
religion	percent
Hinduism	80.6%
Buddhism	10.7%
Islam	4.2%
Mundhum	3.6%
Christianity	0.5%
Other	0.4%

The overwhelming majority in Nepal follow Hinduism. Shiva is regarded as the guardian deity of the country.^[61] Nepal is home to the largest Shiva temple in the world, the famous Pashupatinath Temple, where Hindus from all over the world come for pilgrimage. According to mythology, Sita Devi of the epic Ramayana was born in the Mithila Kingdom of King Janaka Raja.

Near the Indian border, Lumbini, is a Buddhist pilgrimage site and UNESCO World Heritage Site site in the Kapilavastu district. It is held to be the birthplace in about 563 B.C. of Siddhartha Gautama, a Kshatriya caste prince of the Sakya clan, who, as the Buddha Gautama, gave birth to the Buddhist tradition. The holy site of Lumbini is bordered by a large monastic zone, in which only monasteries can be built. All three main branches of Buddhism exist in Nepal and the Newar people have their own branch of the faith. Buddhism is the dominant religion of the

thinly populated northern areas, which are inhabited by Tibetan-related peoples, such as the Sherpa.

The Buddha, born as a Hindu, is also said to be a descendant of Vedic Sage Angirasa in many Buddhist texts.^[62] The Buddha's family surname is associated with Gautama Maharishi.^[63] Differences between Hindus and Buddhists have been minimal in Nepal due to the cultural and historical intermingling of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. Moreover traditionally Buddhism and Hinduism were never two distinct religions in the western sense of the word. In Nepal, the faiths share common temples and worship common deities. Among other natives of Nepal, those more influenced by Hinduism were the Magar, Sunwar, Limbu and Rai and the Gurkhas.^[17] Hindu influence is less prominent among the Gurung, Bhutia, and Thakali groups who employ Buddhist monks for their religious ceremonies.^[17] ^[53] Most of the festivals in Nepal are Hindu.^[64] The Machendrajatra festival, dedicated to Hindu Shaiva Siddha, is celebrated by many Buddhists in Nepal as a main festival.^[65] As it is believed that Ne Muni established Nepal,^[66] some important priests in Nepal are called "Tirthaguru Nemuni".

Islam is a minority religion in Nepal, with 4.2 % of the population being Muslim according to a 2006 Nepalese census.^[67] However, a more recent estimate indicates that Muslims constitute approximately 5-10% of the population.^[68]

Health

The fertility rate in Nepal was at 3.7 births per woman in the early 2000s.^[69] Public expenditure on health was at 1.5 % of the GDP in 2004.^[69] Private expenditure on health was 4.1 % in 2004.^[69] In the early 2000s, there were 21 physicians per 100,000 people.^[69] Infant mortality was 56 per 1000 life births in 2005.^[69]

Culture

A typical Nepalese meal is *dal-bhat-tarkari*. *Dal* is a spicy lentil soup, served over *bhat* (boiled rice), served with *tarkari* (curried vegetables) together with *achar* (pickles) or *chutni* (spicy condiment made from fresh ingredients).. The Newar community, however, has its own unique cuisine. It consists of non-vegetarian as well as vegetarian items served with alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. Mustard oil is the cooking medium and a host of spices, such as cumin, coriander, black peppers, sesame seeds, turmeric, garlic, ginger, methi (fenugreek), bay leaves, cloves, cinnamon, pepper, chillies, mustard seeds, etc., are used in the cooking. The cuisine served on festivals is generally the best.

The Newari Music orchestra consists mainly of percussion instruments, though wind instruments, such as flutes and other similar instruments, are also used. String instruments are very rare. There are songs pertaining to particular seasons and festivals. Paahan chare music is probably the fastest played music whereas the Dapa the slowest. There are certain musical instruments such as Dhimay and Bhusya which are played as instrumental only and are not accompanied with songs. The dhimay music is the loudest one. In the hills, people enjoy their own kind of music, playing saarangi (a string instrument), madal and flute. They also have many popular folk songs known as *lok geet* and *lok dohari*.

The Newar dances can be broadly classified into masked dances and non-masked dances. The most representative of Newari dances is Lakhey dance. Almost all the settlements of Newaris organise Lakhey dance at least once a year, mostly in the Goonlaa month. So, they are called Goonlaa Lakhey. However, the most famous Lakhey dance is the Majipa Lakhey dance; it is performed by the Ranjitkars of Kathmandu and the celebration continues for the entire week that contains the full moon of Yenlaa month. The Lakhey are considered to be the saviors of children.

Folklore is an integral part of Nepalese society. Traditional stories are rooted in the reality of day-to-day life, tales of love, affection and battles as well as demons and ghosts and thus reflect local lifestyles, cultures and beliefs. Many Nepalese folktales are enacted through the medium of dance and music.

The Nepali year begins in mid-April and is divided into 12 months. Saturday is the official weekly holiday. Main annual holidays include the National Day, celebrated on the birthday of the king (28 December), Prithvi Jayanti (11 January), Martyr's Day (18 February), and a mix of Hindu and Buddhist festivals such as dashain in autumn, and *tihar* in late autumn. During tihar, the Newar community also celebrates its New Year as per their local calendar Nepal Sambat.

Most houses in rural lowland of Nepal are made up of a tight bamboo framework and walls of a mud and cow-dung mix. These dwellings remain cool in summer and retain warmth in winter. Houses in the hills are usually made of unbaked bricks with thatch or tile roofing. At high elevations construction changes to stone masonry and slate may be used on roofs.

Nepal's flag is the only national flag in the world that is not rectangular in shape.^[70] According to its official description, the red in the flag stands for victory in war or courage, and is also color of the rhododendron, the national flower of Nepal. Red also stands for aggression. The flag's blue border signifies peace. The curved moon on the flag is a symbol of the peaceful and calm nature of Nepalese, while the sun represents the aggressiveness of Nepalese warriors.



Costumed Hindu-girls in Nepal. The two small children represent the god Krishna and his consort Radha. Sitting behind are the god Vishnu and his consort Laxmi.

Education

About two thirds of female adults and one third of male adults are illiterate.^[69] Net primary enrollment rate was 74% in 2005.^[69] It now is at about 90%.^[71] In 2009 the World Bank has decided to contribute a further \$130 million towards meeting Nepal's Education for All goals.^[71] Nepal has several universities.

Footnotes

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External links


- Official website (<http://http://www.nepal.gov.gov.np>)
- Nepal (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>) entry at *The World Factbook*
- Nepal (<http://www.dmoz.org/Regional/Asia/Nepal/>) at the Open Directory Project
- Wikimedia Atlas of Nepal
- Nepal travel guide from Wikitravel

Geographical coordinates: 26°32'N 86°44'E

bjn:Nepal

Pakistan

<p>Islamic Republic of Pakistan ناتس کاپ یروم چ ی م ل س ا <i>Islāmī Jumhūrī-ye Pākistān</i></p>	
 	
<p>Motto: Unity, Discipline, Faith (م ک ح م نی ق ی م ی ظ ن ت ، د ا ح ت ا) <i>Ittehad, Tanzeem, Yaqeen-e-Muhkam</i></p>	
<p>Anthem: <i>Qaumī Tarāna</i></p>	
	
Capital	Islamabad 33°40'N 73°10'E
Largest city	Karachi
Official language(s)	Urdu (National) English

Recognised regional languages		Balochi, Pashto, Punjabi, Saraiki, Sindhi ^[1]
Demonym		Pakistani
Government		Federal Parliamentary republic
-	Founder	Muhammad Ali Jinnah
-	President	Asif Zardari (PPP)
-	Prime Minister	Yousaf Gillani (PPP)
-	Chief Justice	Iftikhar Chaudhry
-	Chair of Senate	Farooq Naek (PPP)
Legislature		Majlis-e-Shoora
-	Upper House	Senate
-	Lower House	National Assembly
Formation		
-	Pakistan Declaration	January 1933
-	Pakistan Resolution	23 March 1940
-	Independence	from the United Kingdom
-	Declared	14 August 1947
-	Islamic Republic	23 March 1956
Area		
-	Total	796,095 km ² (36th) 307,374 sq mi
-	Water (%)	3.1
Population		
-	2010 estimate	170.6 million ^[2] (6th)
-	1998 census	132,352,279 ^[3]
-	Density	214.3/km ² (55th) 555/sq mi
GDP (PPP)		2010 estimate
-	Total	\$451.972 billion ^[4]
-	Per capita	\$2,713 ^[4]
GDP (nominal)		2010 estimate
-	Total	\$177.901 billion ^[4]
-	Per capita	\$1,067 ^[4]
Gini (2005)		31.2 (medium)
HDI (2007)		 0.572 ^[5] (medium) (141st)
Currency		Pakistani Rupee (Rs.) (PKR)
Time zone		PST (UTC+5)
-	Summer (DST)	PDT (UTC+6)
Drives on the		left ^[6]

ISO 3166 code	PK
Internet TLD	.pk
Calling code	92

Pakistan (English pronunciation: /ˈpækɪstæn/ (listen) or English pronunciation: /pɑːkiˈstɑːn/ (listen); Urdu: پاکستان (Urdu pronunciation: [paːkiˈstɑːn] (listen)), officially the **Islamic Republic of Pakistan** (Urdu: اسلامی جمہوریہ پاکستان) is a country in South Asia. It has a 1046-kilometre (650 mi) coastline along the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman in the south and is bordered by Afghanistan and Iran in the west, India in the east and China in the far northeast.^[7] Tajikistan also lies very close to Pakistan but is separated by the narrow Wakhan Corridor. Strategically it is located in a position between the important regions of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East.^[8]

The region forming modern Pakistan was the site of several ancient cultures including the neolithic Mehrgarh and the bronze era Indus Valley Civilisation. Subsequently it was the recipient of Vedic, Persian, Indo-Greek, Islamic, Turco-Mongol, and Sikh cultures through several invasions and/or settlements. As a result the area has remained a part of numerous empires and dynasties including the Persian empires, Islamic caliphates and the Mauryan, Mongol, Mughal, Sikh and British Empires. Pakistan gained independence from the British Empire in 1947 after a struggle for independence, led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, that sought independent states for the Muslim majority populations of the eastern and western regions of British India.^[9] With the adoption of its constitution in 1956, Pakistan became an Islamic republic.^[10] In 1971, an armed conflict in East Pakistan resulted in the creation of Bangladesh.^[11]

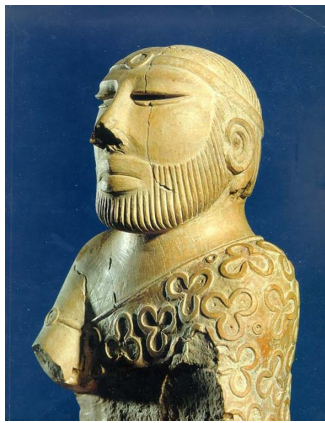
Pakistan is a federal parliamentary republic consisting of four provinces and four federal territories. With over 170 million people, it is the sixth most populous country in the world^[2] and has the second largest Muslim population after Indonesia.^[12] It is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country with a similar variation in its geography and wildlife. With a semi-industrialized economy, it is the 27th largest in the world in terms of purchasing power. Since gaining independence, Pakistan's history has been characterised by periods of military rule, political instability and conflicts with neighbouring India. The country faces challenging problems including poverty, illiteracy, corruption and terrorism.

Pakistan has the seventh largest standing armed force and is the only Muslim-majority nation to possess nuclear weapons. It is designated as a major non-NATO ally of the United States.^[13] It is a founding member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference^[14] and a member of the United Nations,^[15] Commonwealth of Nations,^[16] Next Eleven economies and the G20 developing nations.

Etymology

The name *Pakistan* means *Land of (the) Pure* in Urdu and Persian. It was coined in 1934 as *Pakstan* by Choudhary Rahmat Ali, a Pakistan movement activist, who published it in his pamphlet *Now or Never*.^[17] The name is a portmanteau representing the "thirty million Muslim brethren who live in PAKSTAN—by which we mean the five Northern units of India viz: Punjab, North-West Frontier Province (Afghan Province), Kashmir, Sind, and BaluchisTAN".^[18] The letter 'i' was later added to ease pronunciation.

History



The Indus Priest/King wearing a Sindhi Ajruk, ca. 2500 BC.

The Indus region, which covers a considerable amount of Pakistan, was the site of several ancient cultures including the Neolithic era's Mehrgarh and the bronze era Indus Valley Civilisation (2500–1500 BCE) at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.^[19]

Waves of conquerors and migrants from the west—including Harappan, Indo-Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Sakas, Parthians, Kushans, Hephthalites, Afghans, Arabs, Turks and Mughals—settled in the region throughout the centuries, influencing the locals and being absorbed among them.^[20] Ancient empires of the east—such as the Nandas, Mauryas, Sungas, Guptas and the Palas—ruled these territories at different times from Patliputra.^[21]

However, in the medieval period, while the eastern provinces of Punjab and Sindh grew aligned with Indo-Islamic civilisation, the western areas became culturally allied with the Iranian civilisation of Afghanistan and Iran.^[22] The region served as a crossroads of historic trade routes, including the Silk Road, and as a maritime entreport for the coastal trade between Mesopotamia and beyond up to Rome in the west and Malabar and beyond up to China in the east.^[23]

Modern day Pakistan was at the heart of the Indus Valley Civilisation; that collapsed in the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE and was followed by the Vedic Civilisation, which also extended over much of the Indo-Gangetic plains. Successive ancient empires and kingdoms ruled the region: the Achaemenid Persian empire around 543 BCE,^[24] the Greek empire founded by Alexander the Great in 326 BCE and the Mauryan empire founded by Chandragupta Maurya and extended by Ashoka the Great, until 185 BCE.^[25]

The Indo-Greek Kingdom founded by Demetrius of Bactria included Gandhara and Punjab from 184 BCE, and reached its greatest extent under Menander, establishing the Greco-Buddhist period with advances in trade and culture. The city of Taxila (Takshashila) became a major centre of learning in ancient times—the remains of the city, located to the west of Islamabad, are one of the country's major archaeological sites.^[26] The Rai Dynasty (c.489–632) of Sindh, at its zenith, ruled this region and the surrounding territories.^[27]



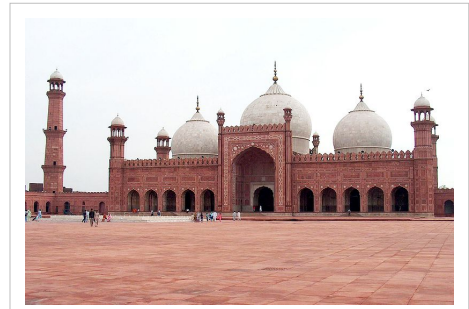
Menander I was a Bactrian ruler, who established one of the Indo-Greek Kingdom which existed in the territory of modern day Pakistan

In 712 CE, the Arab general Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh and Multan in southern Punjab.^[28] The Pakistan government's official chronology states that "its foundation was laid" as a result of this conquest.^[29] This Arab and Islamic victory would set the stage for several successive Muslim empires in South Asia, including the Ghaznavid Empire, the Ghorid Kingdom, the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. During this period, Sufi missionaries played a pivotal role in converting a majority of the regional Buddhist and Hindu population to Islam.

The gradual decline of the Mughal Empire in the early eighteenth century provided opportunities for the Afghans, Balochis and Sikhs to exercise control over large areas until the British East India Company gained ascendancy over South Asia.^[30] The Indian Rebellion of 1857, also known as the *Sepoy Mutiny*, was the region's last major armed struggle against the British Raj, and it laid the foundations for the generally unarmed freedom struggle led by the Indian

National Congress in the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, a movement led by the Hindu politician Mahatma Gandhi, and displaying commitment to long enshrined Hindu tenet of *ahimsa*, or non-violence, engaged millions of protesters in mass campaigns of civil disobedience.^[31]

The All India Muslim League rose to popularity in the late 1930s amid fears of under-representation and neglect of Muslims in politics. On 29 December 1930, Allama Iqbal's presidential address called for an autonomous "state in northwestern India for Indian Muslims, within the body politic of India."^[32] Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah espoused the *Two Nation Theory* and led the Muslim League to adopt the *Lahore Resolution* of 1940, popularly known as the Pakistan Resolution. In early 1947, Britain announced the decision to end its rule in India. In June 1947, the nationalist leaders of British India—including Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad on behalf of the Congress, Jinnah representing the Muslim League, and Master Tara Singh representing the Sikhs—agreed to the proposed terms of transfer of power and independence.



17th Century Badshahi Masjid built during Mughal rule

The modern state of Pakistan was established on 14 August 1947 (27 Ramadan 1366 in the Islamic Calendar), carved out of the two Muslim-majority wings in the eastern and northwestern regions of British India and comprising the provinces of Balochistan, East Bengal, the North-West Frontier Province, West Punjab and Sindh.^[33] The controversial, and ill-timed, division of the provinces of Punjab and Bengal caused communal riots across India and Pakistan—millions of Muslims moved to Pakistan and millions of Hindus and Sikhs moved to India.^[34]

Disputes arose over several princely states including in the Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir, whose Hindu ruler had acceded to India following an invasion by Pashtun tribal militias, leading to the First Kashmir War in 1948.^[35]



The Working Committee of the Muslim League in Lahore (1940)

From 1947 to 1956, Pakistan was a Dominion of Pakistan in the Commonwealth of Nations. It became a Republic in 1956, but the civilian rule was stalled by a coup d'état by General Ayub Khan, who was president during 1958–69, a period of internal instability and a second war with India in 1965. His successor, Yahya Khan (1969–71) had to deal with a devastating cyclone—which caused 500,000 deaths in East Pakistan—and also face a civil war in 1971. Economic grievances and political dissent in East Pakistan led to violent political tension and military repression that escalated into a civil war.^[36] After nine months of guerrilla warfare between the Pakistan Army and the

Indian backed Bengali Mukti Bahini militia, Indian intervention escalated into the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, and ultimately to the secession of East Pakistan as the independent state of Bangladesh.^[37]

Civilian rule resumed in Pakistan from 1972 to 1977 under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, until he was deposed and later sentenced to death in 1979 by General Zia-ul-Haq, who became the country's third military president. Zia introduced the Islamic Sharia legal code, which increased religious influences on the civil service and the military. With the death of President Zia in a plane crash in 1988, Benazir Bhutto, daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was elected as the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan. Over the next decade, she fought for power with Nawaz Sharif as the country's political and economic situation worsened. Pakistan got involved in the 1991 Gulf War and sent 5,000 troops as part of a U.S.-led coalition, specifically for the defence of Saudi Arabia.^[38]



The first Governor General Muhammad Ali Jinnah delivering the opening address on 11 August 1947 to the new state of Pakistan.

Military tensions in the Kargil conflict with India were followed by a Pakistani military coup d'état in 1999 in which General Pervez Musharraf assumed vast executive powers.^[39] ^[40] In 2001, Musharraf became President after the controversial resignation of Rafiq Tarar. After the 2002 parliamentary elections, Musharraf transferred executive powers to the newly elected Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali, who was succeeded in the 2004 prime-ministerial election by Shaukat Aziz. On 15 November 2007, the National Assembly, for the first time in Pakistan's history, completed its tenure and new elections were called. The exiled political leaders Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif were permitted to return to Pakistan. However, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto during the election campaign in December led to postponement of elections and nationwide riots. Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) won the largest number of seats in the elections held in February 2008 and its member Yousaf Raza Gillani was sworn in as Prime Minister.^[41] On 18 August 2008, Pervez Musharraf resigned from the presidency when threatened with impeachment,^[42] and was succeeded by current president Asif Ali Zardari. By the end of 2009, more than 3 million Pakistani civilians have been displaced by the on going conflict in North-West Pakistan between the government and Taliban militants.^[43]

Government and politics

Pakistan is a democratic parliamentary federal republic with Islam as the state religion.^[44] The first Constitution of Pakistan was adopted in 1956, but was suspended in 1958 by General Ayub Khan. The Constitution of 1973—suspended in 1977, by Zia-ul-Haq, but re-instated in 1985—is the country's most important document, laying the foundations of the current government.^[20]

The bicameral legislature comprises a 100-member Senate and a 342-member National Assembly. The President is the Head of state and the Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces and is elected by an electoral college. The prime minister is usually the leader of the largest party in the National Assembly. Each province has a similar system of government with a directly elected Provincial Assembly in which the leader of the largest party or alliance becomes Chief Minister. Provincial Governors are appointed by the President.^[44]



Prime Minister's Secretariat

The Pakistani military has played an influential role in mainstream politics throughout Pakistan's history, with military presidents ruling

from 1958–71, 1977–88 and from 1999–2008.^[45] The leftist Pakistan Peoples Party, led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, won support after the loss of East Pakistan but was overthrown amidst riots in 1977.^[46] Under the military rule of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, A politically nationalist insurgency in Balochistan was also bloodlessly quelled by military governor Rahimuddin.^[47] The 1990s were characterised by coalition politics dominated by the Pakistan Peoples Party and a rejuvenated Muslim League.^[44] Pakistan is an active member of the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the latter of which Pakistan has used as a forum for *Enlightened Moderation*, a plan to promote a renaissance and enlightenment in the Muslim world.^[44] Pakistan is also a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO).^[44] In the past, Pakistan has had mixed relations with the United States; in the early 1950s, Pakistan was the United States' "most allied ally in Asia"^[48] and a member of both the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO).



Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yousaf Raza Gillani.

National Symbols of Pakistan ^[49]	
Flag	Flag of Pakistan
Emblem	Faith, Unity, Discipline
Anthem	Qaumi Tarana
Animal	Markhor
Bird	Chukar
Flower	Jasmine
Tree	Cedrus deodara
Juice	Sugarcane juice
Sport	Field hockey
Dress	Shalwar Kameez

During the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s, Pakistan was a major U.S. ally.^[50] But relations soured in the 1990s, when sanctions were imposed by the U.S. over Pakistan's refusal to abandon its nuclear activities.^[51] However, the American War on Terrorism, as an aftermath of 11 September 2001 attacks in New York, led to an improvement in US–Pakistan ties, especially after Pakistan ended its support of the Taliban regime in Kabul. Its positive side was evidenced by a major increase in American military aid, providing Pakistan \$4 billion more in three years after the 9/11 attacks than before.^[52] On the other hand, Pakistan is presently burdened with nearly 3 million displaced civilians due to the ongoing Afghan war. As of 2004, in contexts of the War on Terror, Pakistan was being referred to as part of the Greater Middle East by the US under the Bush administration.^[53]

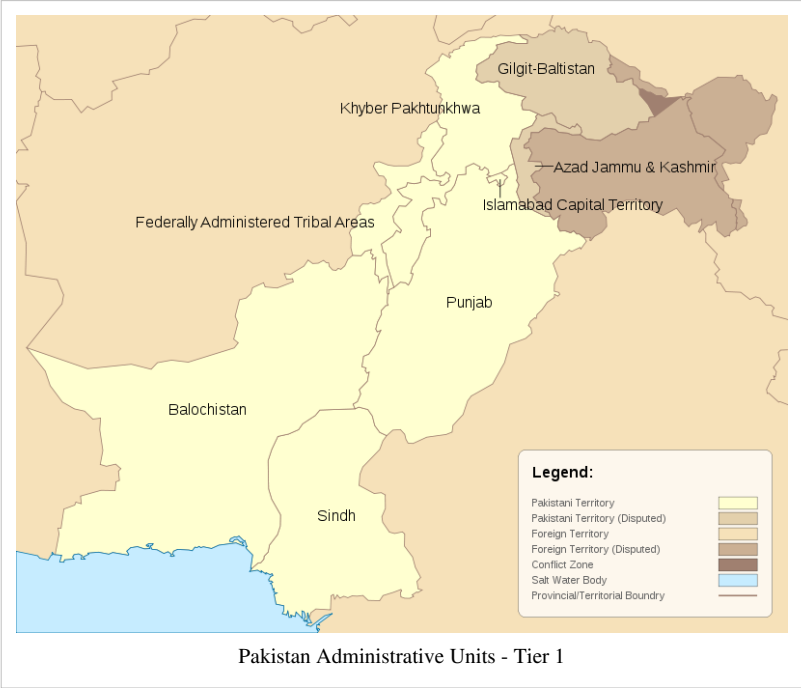
On 18 February 2008, Pakistan held its general elections after Benazir Bhutto's assassination postponed the original date of 8 January 2008.^[54] The Pakistan Peoples Party won the majority of the votes and formed an alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League (N). They nominated and elected Yousaf Raza Gilani as Prime Minister.^[55] On 18 August 2008, Pervez Musharraf resigned as President of Pakistan amidst increasing calls for his impeachment.^[56] In the presidential election that followed, Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan People's Party won a landslide majority and became President of Pakistan.^[57]

Administrative units

Pakistan is a federation of four provinces, a capital territory and a group of federally administered tribal areas. The government of Pakistan exercises *de facto* jurisdiction over the western parts of the disputed Kashmir region, organized as two separate political entities; Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Prior to 2001, the sub-provincial tier of government was composed of 26 divisions with two further tiers (districts and tehsils) administered directly from the provincial level. The divisions were abolished in 2001^[58] and a new three-tiered system of local government came into effect comprising districts, tehsils and union councils with an elected body at each tier.

There are currently 113 districts in Pakistan-proper, each with several tehsils and union councils. The tribal areas comprise seven tribal agencies and six small frontier regions^[59] detached from neighboring districts whilst Azad Kashmir comprises ten^[60] and Gilgit-Baltistan seven^[61] districts respectively.



Provinces	Territories
Balochistan	Islamabad Capital Territory
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Federally Administered Tribal Areas including the Frontier Regions
Punjab	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
Sindh	Gilgit-Baltistan

Military



Pakistan Air Force Special Services Wing on training at Fort Lewis, WA.



Pakistan's nuclear-capable Babur cruise missile.



A PAF Dassault Mirage 5 ROSE strike fighter, with FLIR sensor under the nose, taxiing past a PAF JF-17.

The armed forces of Pakistan are the seventh-largest in the world. The three main services are the Army, Navy and the Air Force, supported by a number of paramilitary forces which carry out internal security roles and border patrols. The National Command Authority is responsible for exercising employment and development control of all strategic nuclear forces and organisations, and for Pakistan's nuclear doctrine.

The Pakistan Army came into existence after independence in 1947 and is currently headed by General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani. The Pakistan Army is a professional fighting force.^[62] It has an active force of 612,000 personnel and 513,000 men in reserve.^[63] Conscription may be introduced in times of emergency, but it has never been imposed.^[64]

Since independence, the Army has been involved in four wars with neighbouring India and several border skirmishes with Afghanistan. It maintained division and brigade strength presences in some of the Arab countries during the past Arab–Israeli Wars, and aided the Coalition in the first Gulf War. Other major operations undertaken by the Army include Operation Black Thunderstorm and Operation Rah-e-Nijat. Apart from conflicts, the Army has been an active participant in United Nations peacekeeping missions and played a major role in rescuing trapped American soldiers from Mogadishu, Somalia in 1993 in Operation Gothic Serpent.

The Pakistan military first saw combat in the First Kashmir War, gaining control of what is now Azad Kashmir. In 1961, the army repelled a major Afghan incursion on Pakistan's western border.^[65] Pakistan and India were at war again in 1965 and in 1971. In 1973, the military quelled a Baloch nationalist uprising.

In the past, Pakistani personnel have volunteered to serve alongside Arab forces in conflicts with Israel. During the Six-Day War in 1967 and Yom Kippur War in October 1973 PAF pilots volunteered to go to the Middle East to support Egypt and Syria in a state of war against Israel, Air Force pilots shot down ten Israeli planes in the Six-Day War. During the Yom Kippur War 16 PAF pilots volunteered to leave for the Middle East in order to support Egypt and Syria but by the time they arrived Egypt had already agreed on a cease-fire.^[66]

During the Soviet–Afghan war, Pakistan shot down several intruding pro-Soviet Afghan aircraft and provided covert support to the Afghan mujahideen through the Inter-Services Intelligence agency. In 1999, Pakistan was involved in the Kargil conflict with India. Currently, the military is engaged in an armed conflict with extremist Islamic militants in the north-west of the country.^[67]

Since 2004, Pakistani armed forces are engaged in fighting against Pakistani Taliban groups. Militant groups have engaged in suicide bombings in Pakistani cities, killing more than 3,000 civilians and armed personnel in 2009 alone.^[68]

Internationally the Pakistani armed forces contributed to United Nations peacekeeping efforts, with more than 10,700 personnel deployed in 2009,^[69] and are presently the largest contributor. Pakistan provided a military contingent to the UN-backed coalition in the first Gulf War.^[70] The Pakistani troops were rushed to Makkah on

Saudi Government's request and Pakistani SSG commandos lead the operation of the Grand Mosque Seizure.

Geography and climate

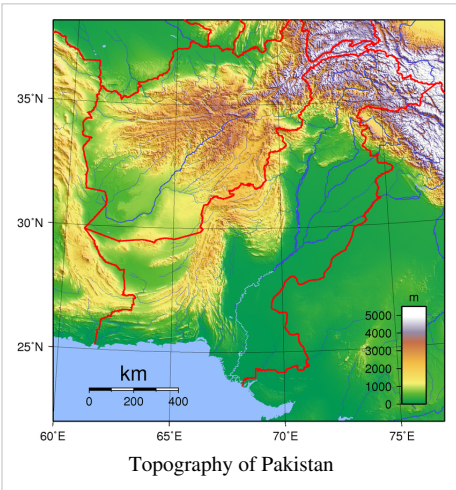
Pakistan covers an area of 796095 km² (sq mi), approximately equaling the combined land areas of France and the United Kingdom. It is the 36th largest nation by total area although this ranking varies depending on how the disputed territory of Kashmir is counted. Apart from the 1046 km (650 mi) coastline along the Arabian Sea, Pakistan's land borders a total of 6774 km (4209 mi)—2430 km (1510 mi) with Afghanistan, 523 km (325 mi) with China, 2912 km (1809 mi) with India and 909 km (565 mi) with Iran.^[20]

Geologically, Pakistan overlaps with the Indian tectonic plate in its Sindh and Punjab provinces, while Balochistan and most of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa lie within the Eurasian plate which mainly comprises the Iranian plateau. Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir lie mainly in Central Asia along the edge of the Indian plate and are hence prone to violent earthquakes.

The geography of Pakistan is a blend of landscapes varying from plains to deserts, forests, hills, and plateaus ranging from the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea in the south to the mountains of the Karakoram range in the north. Pakistan is divided into three major geographic areas: the northern highlands; the Indus River plain; and the Balochistan Plateau.^[71] The northern highlands of Pakistan contain the Karakoram, Hindu Kush and Pamir mountain ranges, which incorporate some of the world's highest peaks, including K2 (8611 m/28251 ft) and Nanga Parbat (8126 m/26660 ft). The Balochistan Plateau lies to the West, and the Thar Desert in the East. An expanse of alluvial plains lies in Punjab and Sindh along the Indus river. The 1609 km (1000 mi) Indus River and its tributaries flow through the country from the Kashmir region to the Arabian Sea.^[72]



The 62-kilometre-long Baltoro Glacier, in northern Pakistan, is one of the longest glaciers outside the polar regions



Pakistan's climate varies from tropical to temperate with arid conditions existing in the coastal south, characterized by a monsoon season with adequate rainfall and a dry season with lesser rainfall. There are four distinct seasons; a cool, dry winter from December through February; a hot, dry spring from March through May; the summer rainy season or southwest monsoon period, from June through September; and the retreating monsoon period of October and November.^[73] Rainfall can vary radically from year to year, and successive patterns of flooding and drought are common.^[74]

Flora and fauna

The diversity of landscapes and climates in Pakistan allows for a wide variety of trees and plants to flourish in this region. The forests range from coniferous alpine and subalpine trees such as spruce, pine, and deodar cedar in the extreme northern mountains, to deciduous trees such as the mulberry-type Shisham in the Sulaiman range in the majority of the country, to palms such coconut and date in South Punjab and all of Sindh. The western hills are home to juniper and tamarisk as well as coarse grasses and scrub plants. Mangrove forests form much of the coastal wetlands along the coast in the south.^[75]

Coniferous forests in most of the northern and north-western highlands are found at altitudes ranging from 1,000m to 4,000m. In the xeric regions of Balochistan, date palms and ephedra are common floral varieties. In most of Punjab and Sindh, the Indus plains support tropical and subtropical dry and moist broadleaf forestry as well as tropical and xeric shrublands. These forests are mostly mulberry, acacia, and Eucalyptus.

According to statistics, 2.5% or about 1,902,000 hectares (**unknown operator: u'strong'** km²) of Pakistan was forested in 2000.^[76]

Similar to the vegetation, the animal life in Pakistan reflects the varied climatic regions of the land. The southern plains are home to crocodiles in the Indus while boars, deers, porcupines, and small rodents are found more commonly in the surrounding areas. The sandy scrublands of central Pakistan are home to a jackals, hyenas, wild cats, panthers, and leopards.



Markhor, Pakistan's national animal

In the north, a wide variety of animals have found home in the mountainous regions including the Marco Polo sheep, Urial sheep, Markhor and Ibex goats, black and brown Himalayan bears, and the rare Snow Leopard. Another rare species is the blind Indus River Dolphin of which there are believed to be about 1,100 remaining, protected at the Indus River Dolphin Reserve in Sindh.^[77] There have been sightings of the rare Asiatic cheetahs in the southwestern deserts of Sindh and Balochistan.

Apart from crows, sparrows and myna, hawks, falcons, and eagles are the more commonly found birds in Pakistan. A lot of birds sighted within Pakistan are migratory as they make their way from Europe, Central Asia and India.^[78]

In recent years, the number of wild animals being killed for fur and leather trading led to a new law banning the hunting of wild animals and birds as well as the establishment of several wildlife sanctuaries and game reserves. The number of hunters have greatly dwindled since then.^[79]

Vast sections of the Indus flood plains have been cleared of natural vegetation to grow crops. Only animals like the jackal, mongoose, jungle cat, civet cat, scaly anteater, desert cat and the wild hare occur in these areas. Hog deer are found in riverine tracts. The crop residues and wild growth support reasonable populations of black and grey partridges.^[80]

The lack of vegetative cover, severity of climatic conditions, and the impact of grazing animals on the deserts have left wild animals in a precarious position. Chinkara is the only animal that can still be found in significant numbers in Cholistan.^[81] The blackbuck, once plentiful in Cholistan, has now been eliminated; efforts are being made to reintroduce them into the country. A small number of blue bulls are found along the Pakistan-Indian border, and in some parts of Cholistan. Grey partridge, species of sand grouse and the Indian courser are the main birds of the area.



Cedrus deodara, Pakistan's national tree.

Peafowl occur in some areas in Cholistan.^[82]

Economy

Pakistan has a semi-industrialized economy.^{[83] [84]} The growth poles of the Pakistani economy are situated along the Indus River.^{[84] [85]} Diversified economies of Karachi and Punjab's urban centres, coexist with lesser developed areas in other parts of the country.^[84] Despite being a very poor country in 1947, Pakistan's economic growth rate has been better than the global average during the subsequent four decades, but imprudent policies led to a slowdown in the late 1990s.^[86]

Recently, wide-ranging economic reforms have resulted in a stronger economic outlook and accelerated growth especially in the manufacturing and financial services sectors.^[86] Since the 1990s, there has been great improvement in the foreign exchange position and rapid growth in hard currency reserves.^[86]

The 2005 estimate of foreign debt was close to US\$40 billion. However, this has decreased in recent years with assistance from the International Monetary Fund and significant debt-relief from the United States. Pakistan's gross domestic product, as measured by purchasing power parity, is estimated to be \$475.4 billion^[87] while its per capita income stands at \$2,942.^[87] The poverty rate in Pakistan is estimated to be between 23%^[88] and 28%.^[89]

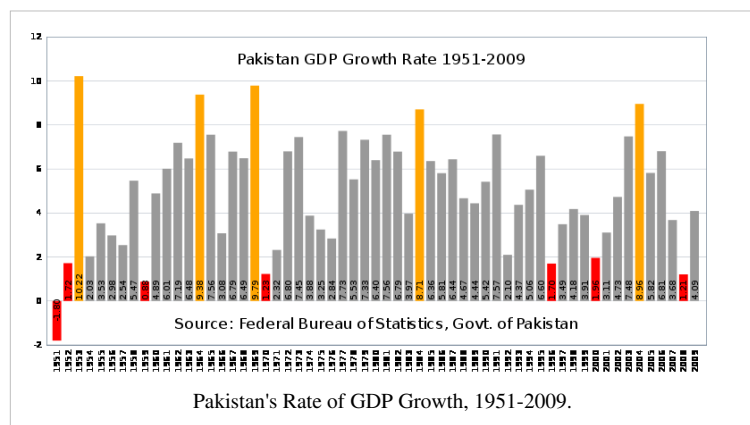
GDP growth was steady during the mid-2000s at a rate of 7%;^{[90] [91]} however, slowed down during the Economic crisis of 2008 to 4.7%.^[20] A large inflation rate of 24.4% and a low savings rate, and other economic factors, continue to make it difficult to sustain a high growth rate.^{[92] [93]} Pakistan's GDP is US\$167 billions, which makes it the 48th-largest economy in the world or 27th largest by purchasing power adjusted exchange rates. Today, Pakistan is regarded as to having the second largest economy in South Asia.^[94]

The structure of the Pakistani economy has changed from a mainly agricultural base to a strong service base. Agriculture now only accounts for roughly 20% of the GDP, while the service sector accounts for 53% of the GDP.^[95] Significant foreign investments have been made in several areas including telecommunications, real estate and energy.^{[96] [97]} Other important industries include apparel and textiles (accounting for nearly 60% of exports), food processing, chemicals manufacture, and the iron and steel industries.^[98] Pakistan's exports in 2008 amounted to \$20.62 billion (USD).^[20] Pakistan is a rapidly developing country.^{[99] [100] [101]}

However, the economic crisis of 2008 led Pakistan to seek more than \$100 billion in aid in order to avoid possible bankruptcy.^{[102] [103]} This was never given to Pakistan and it had to depend on a more aggressive fiscal policy,



Islamabad Stock Exchange Tower located in the Blue Area.



backed by the IMF. A year later, Asian Development Bank reported that the Pakistan economic crisis was easing.^[104] Furthermore it is projected that in 2010 Pakistan economy would grow at least 4% and could grow more with strong international economic recovery.^[105]

Demographics

The estimated population of Pakistan in 2010 was over 170 million^[2] making it the world's sixth most-populous country, behind Brazil and ahead of Russia. In 1951 Pakistan had a population of 34 million.^[106] The population growth rate now stands at 1.6%.^[107] The majority of southern Pakistan's population live along the Indus River. By population size, Karachi is the largest city of Pakistan.^[108] In the northern half, most of the population live in an arc formed by the cities of Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Gujrat, Jhelum, Sargodha and Sheikhupura. About 20% of the population live below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 a day.^[109]

Life expectancy at birth is 63 years for females and 62 years for males as of 2006^[110] compared to the healthy life expectancy at birth which was 54 years for males and 52 years for females in 2003.^[110] Expenditure on health was at 2% of the GDP in 2006.^[110] The mortality below 5 was at 97 per 1,000 live births in 2006.^[110] During 1990–2003, Pakistan sustained its historical lead as the most urbanised nation in South Asia, with city dwellers making up 36% of its population.^[111] Furthermore, 50% of Pakistanis now reside in towns of 5,000 people or more.^[112]

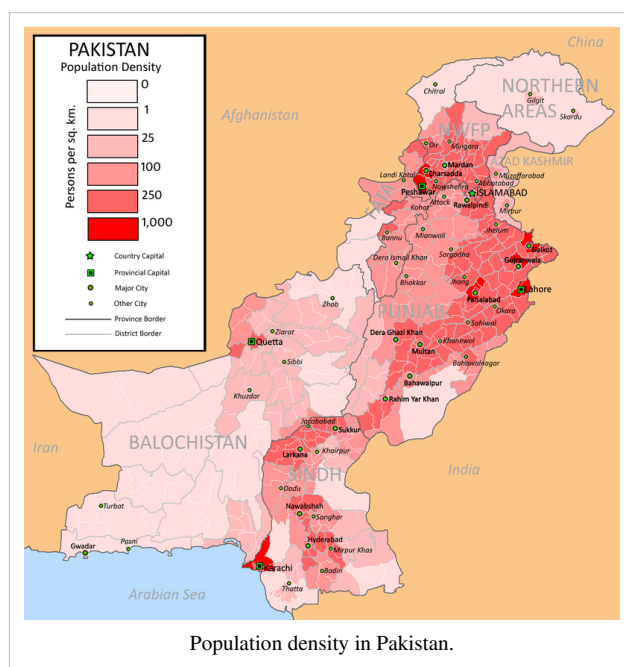
Pakistan is a multilingual country with more than sixty languages being spoken. English is the official language of Pakistan and used in official business, government, and legal contracts,^[20] and Punjabi has a plurality of native speakers, Urdu is the lingua franca and national language in Pakistan. Punjabi is the provincial language of Punjab. Saraiki is also spoken in the larger area of Punjab province. Pashto is the provincial language of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Sindhi is the provincial language of Sindh and Balochi is the provincial language of Balochistan.^[113]

Pakistan is the second-most populous Muslim-majority country^[12] ^[114] and also has the second-largest Shi'a population in the world.^[115] About 97% of the Pakistanis are Muslim. The majority are Sunni, with an estimated 5-20% Shi'a.^[116] ^[117] ^[118] ^[119] ^[120] 2.3% are Ahmadis,^[121] who are officially considered non-Muslims since a 1974 "anti-Ahmadi" constitutional amendment.^[122] There are also several Sufi and Quraniyoon communities.^[123] ^[124] ^[125] ^[126] Although the groups of Muslims usually coexist peacefully, sectarian violence occurs sporadically.^[127] The religious breakdown of the country is as follows:^[116] ^[117] ^[118] ^[119] ^[120]

- Islam 173,000,000 (97%) (the majority are Sunni Muslims, 5-20% are Shi'a and 2.3% are Ahmadis).
- Hinduism 2,800,000 (1.6%)^[116]
- Christianity 2,800,000 (1.6%)^[116]
- Sikhs Around 20,000 (0.001%)
- The remaining are Parsis, Buddhists, Jews, Bahá'ís, and Animists (mainly the Kalasha of Chitral).^[128]

The population comprises several main ethnic groups (2009)^[129]:

1. Punjabis (44.15%) 78.7 million
2. Pashtuns (15.42%) 27.2 million





3. Sindhis (14.1%) 24.8 million
4. Seraikis (10.53%) 14.8 million
5. Muhajirs (7.57%) 13.3 million
6. Balochs is (3.57%) 6.3 million
7. Others (4.66%) 11.1 million

Smaller ethnic groups, such as Kashmiris, Hindkowans, Kalash, Burusho, Brahui, Khowar, Shina, and Turwalis are mainly found in the northern parts of the country.

Pakistan's census does not include the registered 1.7 million Afghan refugees from neighbouring Afghanistan, who are mainly found in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) areas, with small numbers in the cities of Karachi and Quetta.^[130] Around 2 million refugees from Bangladesh, Iran, Africa, and other places are also found in Pakistan.

Cities by population (2010 estimate)^[131]

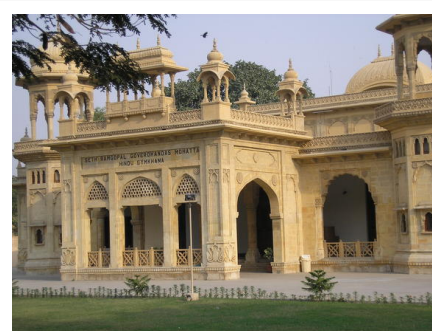
Rank	City	Location	Population	Rank	City	Location	Population	
1	Karachi	Sindh	13,205,339	11	Sargodha	Punjab	600,501	 Karachi, Sindh
2	Lahore	Punjab	7,129,609	12	Bahawalpur	Punjab	543,929	
3	Faisalabad	Punjab	2,880,675	13	Sialkot	Punjab	510,863	 Lahore, Punjab
4	Rawalpindi	Punjab	1,991,656	14	Sukkur	Sindh	493,438	
5	Multan	Punjab	1,606,481	15	Larkana	Sindh	456,544	
6	Hyderabad	Sindh	1,578,367	16	Sheikhupura	Punjab	426,980	
7	Gujranwala	Punjab	1,569,090	17	Jhang	Punjab	372,645	
8	Peshawar	KP	1,439,205	18	Rahim Yar Khan	Punjab	353,112	
9	Quetta	Balochistan	896,090	19	Mardan	KP	352,135	
10	Islamabad	Capital Territory	689,249	20	Gujrat	Punjab	336,727	

Education

According to the constitution of Pakistan, it is the state's responsibility to provide free primary education.^[132] At the time of independence Pakistan had only one university, the University of the Punjab, founded in 1882 in Lahore. Pakistan now has more than 130 Universities of which 71 are public universities and 59 are private universities.^[133]

Education in Pakistan is divided into five levels: primary (grades one through five); middle (grades six through eight); high (grades nine and ten, leading to the Secondary School Certificate); intermediate (grades eleven and twelve, leading to a Higher Secondary School Certificate); and university programmes leading to graduate and advanced degrees.^[134]

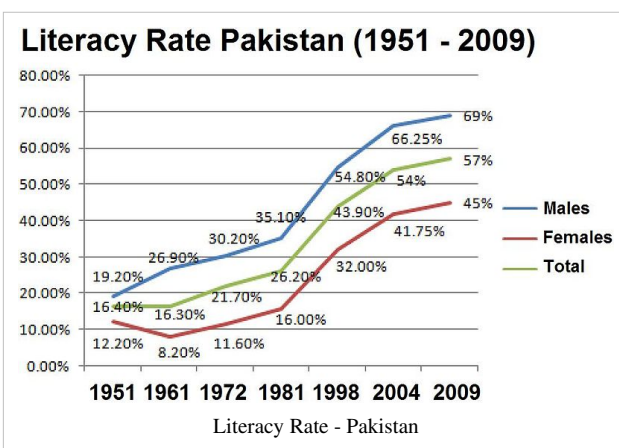
Pakistan also has a parallel secondary school education system in private schools, which is based upon the curriculum set and administered by the Cambridge International Examinations, in place of government exams. Some students choose to take the O level and A level^[135] exams through the British Council.



National Academy of Performing Arts, Karachi.

There are currently 730 technical & vocational institutions in Pakistan.^[136] The minimum qualifications to enter male vocational institutions, is the completion of grade 8, and for female is grade 5.

English medium education is to be extended, on a phased basis, to all schools across the country.^[137] Through various educational reforms, by the year 2015, the ministry of education expects to attain 100% enrolment levels amongst primary school aged children, and a literacy rate of 86% amongst people aged over 10.^[138]



Pakistan also has madrassahs that provide free Islamic education and also offer free boarding and lodging to students who come mainly from the poorer strata of society.^[139] After criticism over terrorists using them for recruiting purposes, efforts have been made to regulate them.^[140]

In 2004 only 46.6 percent of adult Pakistanis were literate. Male literacy was 60.6 percent, while female literacy was 31.5 percent. Literacy rates also vary regionally, and particularly by sex, for instance in tribal areas female literacy is 3%.^[141] The government launched a nationwide initiative in 1998 with the aim of eradicating illiteracy and providing a basic education to all children.^[142]

Culture

Pakistani society is largely hierarchical, with high regard for traditional Islamic values, although urban families have grown into a nuclear family system because of the socio-economic constraints imposed by the traditional joint family system.^[143] Recent decades have seen the emergence of a middle class in cities like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Hyderabad, Faisalabad, Multan and Peshawar (now numbering at 30 million, with an average annual income of US\$10,000, with another 17 million belonging to the upper and upper-middle classes^[144] that wish to move in a more centrist direction, as opposed to the northwestern regions bordering Afghanistan that remain highly conservative and dominated by centuries-old regional tribal customs. Increasing globalisation has resulted in ranking 46th on the A.T. Kearney/FP Globalization Index.^[145]

The variety of Pakistani music ranges from diverse provincial folk music and traditional styles such as Qawwali and Ghazal Gayaki to modern forms fusing traditional and western music, such as the synchronisation of Qawwali and western music by the world renowned Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. In addition Pakistan is home to many famous folk singers such as the late Alam Lohar, who is also well known in Indian Punjab. However, majority of Pakistanis listen to Indian music produced by Bollywood and other Indian film industries. The arrival of Afghan refugees in the western provinces has rekindled Pashto and Persian music and established Peshawar as a hub for Afghan musicians and a distribution center for Afghan music abroad.^[146]



A sitar workshop in Islamabad



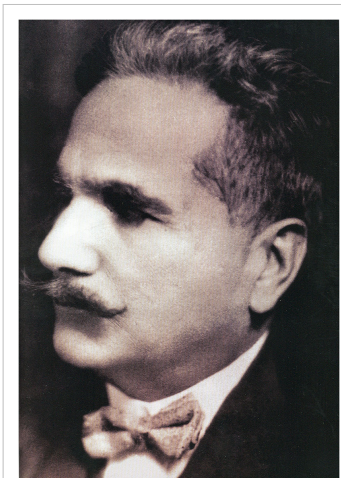
View of Food Street in Lahore

State-owned Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) and Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation were the dominant media outlets, but there are now numerous private television channels. Various American, European, and Asian television channels and films are available to the majority of the Pakistani population via private television networks, cable, and satellite television (43 million Pakistanis have satellite television).^[147] There are also small indigenous film industries based in Lahore and Peshawar (often referred to as Lollywood). And while Bollywood films have been banned from being played in public cinemas since 1965 they have remained popular in popular culture.^[148]

The architecture of the areas now constituting Pakistan can be designated to four distinct periods—pre-Islamic, Islamic, colonial and post-colonial. With the beginning of the Indus civilisation around the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C.,^[149] an advanced urban culture developed for the first time in the region, with large structural facilities, some of which survive to this day.^[150] Mohenjo Daro, Harappa and Kot Diji belong to the pre-Islamic era settlements. The rise of Buddhism and the Persian and Greek influence led to the development of the Greco-Buddhist style, starting from the 1st century CE. The high point of this era was reached with the culmination of the Gandhara style.

An example of Buddhist architecture is the ruins of the Buddhist monastery Takht-i-Bahi in the northwest province.^[151]

The arrival of Islam in today's Pakistan meant a sudden end of Buddhist architecture.^[152] However, a smooth transition to predominantly pictureless Islamic architecture occurred. The most important of the few completely discovered buildings of Persian style is the tomb of the Shah Rukn-i-Alam in Multan. During the Mughal era design elements of Islamic-Persian architecture were fused with and often produced playful forms of the Hindustani art. Lahore, occasional residence of Mughal rulers, exhibits a multiplicity of important buildings from the empire, among them the Badshahi mosque, the fortress of Lahore with the famous Alamgiri Gate, the colourful, still strongly Persian seeming Wazir Khan Mosque as well as numerous other mosques and mausoleums. Also the Shahjahan Mosque of Thatta in Sindh originates from the epoch of the Mughals.^[153] In the British colonial period, predominantly functional buildings of the Indo-European representative style developed from a mixture of European and Indian-Islamic components. Post-colonial national identity is expressed in modern structures like the Faisal Mosque, the Minar-e-Pakistan and the Mazar-e-Quaid.^[154]



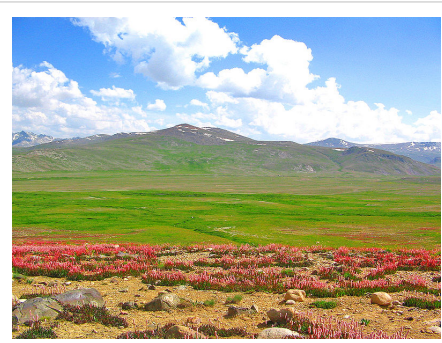
Sir Muhammad Iqbal was a key leader in the Pakistan Movement. He is also a national poet of Pakistan.

The literature of Pakistan covers the literatures of languages spread throughout the country, namely Urdu, Sindhi, Punjabi, Pushto, Baluchi as well as English^[155] and Persian as well. Prior to the 19th century, the literature mainly consisted of lyric poetry and religious, mystical and popular materials. During the colonial age the native literary figures, under the influence of the western literature of realism, took up increasingly different topics and telling forms. Today, short stories enjoy a special popularity.^[156]

The national poet of Pakistan, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, suggested the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. However, Iqbal had also wrote the Tarana-e-Hind which stated the belief of a strong united India. His book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* is a major work of modern Islamic philosophy. The most well-known representative of the contemporary Urdu literature of Pakistan is Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Sufi poets Shah Abdul Latif, Bulleh Shah, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh and Khawaja Farid are also very popular in Pakistan.^[157] Mirza Kalich Beg has been termed the father of modern Sindhi prose.^[158]

Tourism

Despite having an image problem, and once listed as one of the most dangerous countries in the world by *The Economist*,^[159] tourism is still a growing industry in Pakistan because of its diverse cultures, peoples and landscapes.^[160] The variety of attractions ranges from the ruins of ancient civilisations such as Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and Taxila, to the Himalayan hill-stations, that attract those interested in field and winter sports. Pakistan also has five out of fourteen mountain peaks of height over 8000 metres (26250 ft), that attract adventurers and mountaineers from around the world, especially to K2.^[161] From April to September, domestic and international visitors to these areas bring tourist income to the local people.



The Deosai National Park is located in Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.



K2 is the second-highest mountain on Earth after Mount Everest. With a peak elevation of 8611 metres (28251 ft), K2 is part of the Karakoram range, Pakistan.

In Balochistan there are many caves for cavers and tourists to visit especially the Juniper Shaft Cave, the Murghagull Gharra cave, Mughall saa cave, and Pakistan's naturally decorated cave, the Mangocher Cave. Pakistan is a member country of the Union International de Spéléologie (UIS).^[162]

The northern parts of Pakistan are home to several historical fortresses, towers and other architecture including the Hunza and Chitral valleys, the latter being home to the Kalash, a small pre-Islamic Animist community.^[163] Punjab is also the site of Alexander's battle on the Jhelum River. The historic city of Lahore is considered Pakistan's cultural centre and has many examples of Mughal architecture such as the Badshahi Masjid, Shalimar Gardens, Tomb of Jahangir and the Lahore Fort.^[164] The Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) also helps promote tourism in the country.^[165] However, tourism is still limited because of the lack of proper infrastructure and the worsening security situation in the country. The recent militancy in Pakistan's scenic sites, including Swat in Khyber Pakhtoon Kawa province, have dealt a massive blow to the tourism industry. Many of the troubles in these tourist destinations are also blamed on the frail travel network, tourism regulatory framework, low prioritisation of the tourism industry by the government, low effectiveness of marketing and a constricted tourism perception.^[166] ^[167] After these areas were being cleared off the militant groups in late 2009, the government, with financial support



Utror Swat valley May-2010

from the USAID, started a campaign to reintroduce tourism in Swat valley. Pakistan receives 500,000 tourists annually, with almost half of them heading to northern Pakistan.^[168]

Sports

The national sport of Pakistan is field hockey, although cricket is the most popular game across the country.^[169] The national cricket team has won the Cricket World Cup once (in 1992), were runners-up once (in 1999), and co-hosted the games twice (in 1987 and 1996). Pakistan were runners-up in the inaugural 2007 ICC World Twenty20 held in South Africa and were the champions at the 2009 ICC World Twenty20 held in England. Lately however, Pakistani cricket has suffered heavily due to teams refusing to tour Pakistan because of terrorism fears. No teams have toured Pakistan since March 2009, when militants attacked the touring Sri Lankan cricket players.^[170]



Cricket is the most popular sport in Pakistan

Squash is another sport that Pakistanis have excelled in. Successful world-class squash players such as Jahangir Khan and Jansher Khan have won the World Open several times during their careers.

At international level, Pakistan has competed many times at the Olympics in field hockey, boxing, athletics, swimming, and shooting. Pakistan's Olympic medal tally stands at 10 (3 gold, 3 silver and 4 bronze) while the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games medal tally stands at 61 and 182 respectively. Hockey is the sport in which Pakistan has been most successful at the Olympics, with three gold medals in (1960, 1968, and 1984). Pakistan has also won the Hockey World Cup a record four times (1971, 1978, 1982, 1994).

Among others, Association football and Polo are the more prominent sports with regular national events held in different parts of the country. Boxing, Billiards, Snooker, Rowing, Kayaking, Tennis, Contract Bridge, Golf and Volley Ball are also actively participated and Pakistan has produced notable champions in these sports at regional and international levels.

Transport



The Makran Coastal Highway starts from Karachi and goes all the way to Gwadar

Rail services in Pakistan are provided by the state-run Pakistan Railways, under the supervision of the Ministry of Railways. Pakistan Railways provides an important mode of transportation in Pakistan, catering to the large-scale movement of people and freight. The railway network comprises 8,163 km^[171] of which 1,676 mm (5 ft 6 in) (broad gauge) forms 7,718 km including 293 km of electrified track. Pakistan Railways carry 65 million passengers annually and daily operates 228 mail, express and passenger trains. Pakistan Railways also operate special trains for various occasions. The Freight Business Unit with 12000 personnel operates over 200 freight stations on the railway network. Pakistan has also planned or had many Mass Transit Systems. The Karachi Circular Railway, which opened in the

early 1940s, is the only functioning Mass Transit System in Pakistan as of date. In 1976, Karachi was slated to begin work on an underground metro system, but plans have been put on hold since. The Lahore Metro is another proposal still in planning and is scheduled to be completed by 2020. Pakistan has been successful in foreign trade by rail. Pakistan has successfully traded with countries such as Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, India, Turkmenistan and China.^[172]

During the 1990s, Pakistan began an ongoing project to rebuild all national highways throughout the country specifically to important financial, cargo and textile centres. The National Highway Authority or NHA is responsible for the maintenance of all national highways in Pakistan. The construction of motorways began in the early 1990s with the idea building a world class road network and to reduce the load off the heavily used national highways throughout the country. The first motorway to be completed was M1 in 1997 from Peshawar to Islamabad. Later on, Highways such as M2 from Islamabad to Lahore, M3 from Pindi Bhattian to Faisalabad, M9 from Hyderabad to Karachi, Karachi Northern Bypass from Hyderabad to Karachi, Lahore ring road project^[173] were completed.

The waterway network in Pakistan is in its infancy with Karachi being the only major city situated next to the Arabian Sea. Plans are being proposed for the development of the waterways in the country along the Indus River and through the Punjab as it would boost employment opportunities and the economic and social development in Pakistan.^[174] Pakistan has an estimated 139 airports, 10 of them international.^[175]

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- Pakistan (<http://www.dmoz.org/Regional/Asia/Pakistan/>) at the Open Directory Project
- Wikimedia Atlas of Pakistan
- Pakistan travel guide from Wikitravel

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Sri Lanka

<p>Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka ධනාත්මක සමාජවාදී ජනරජය இலங்கை ஜனநாயக சமத்துவ கூடியரசு</p> <p>Sri Lanka ශ්‍රී ලංකා இலங்கை</p>
<div>   </div>
<p>Anthem: "Sri Lanka Matha" Music , Singing</p>



Capital	Sri Jayawardenapura-Kotte ^{[1] [2]} 6°54'N 79°54'E
Largest city	Colombo
Official language(s)	Sinhala, Tamil
Ethnic groups (2001)	≈73.9% Sinhalese, ^[3] ≈12.6% Tamil, ^[3] ≈7.4% Moors, ^[3] ≈5.2% Indian Tamil, ^[3] ≈0.5% Others. ^[3]
Demonym	Sri Lankan
Government	Democratic Socialist Republic
- President	Mahinda Rajapaksa
- Prime Minister	D. M. Jayaratne
Independence	from the United Kingdom
- Dominion (Self rule)	February 4, 1948
- Republic	May 22, 1972
Area	
- Total	65,610 km ² (122nd) 25,332 sq mi
- Water (%)	4.4
Population	
- 2009 estimate	20,238,000 ^[4] (53rd)
- July 2008 census	21,324,791 ^[5]
- Density	308.4/km ² (35th) 798.9/sq mi
GDP (PPP)	2010 estimate
- Total	\$102.537 billion ^[6] (65th)
- Per capita	\$5,026 ^[6]

GDP (nominal)	2010 estimate
- Total	\$41.979 billion ^[7] (76th)
- Per capita	\$2,029 ^[8]
Gini (1999–00)	33.2 (medium)
HDI (2010)	▲ 0.658 ^[9] (medium) (91st)
Currency	Sri Lankan Rupee (LKR)
Time zone	Sri Lanka Standard Time Zone (UTC+5:30)
Drives on the	left
ISO 3166 code	LK
Internet TLD	.lk
Calling code	94

The **Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka** (commonly known as ***Sri Lanka*** (🇱🇰 /sriːˈlɑːŋkə/, /sriːˈlæŋkə/, or English pronunciation: /ˈsriːˈlɑːŋkə/ (🇱🇰 listen));^[10] ^[11] Sinhala: ශ්‍රී ලංකා, Tamil: இலங்கை) is a country off the southern coast of the Indian subcontinent. An island nation in South Asia, it was until 1972 known as **Ceylon** (🇱🇰 /siːˈlɒn/, /seɪˈlɒn/, or /siːˈlɒn/). Sri Lanka is surrounded by the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Mannar, the Palk Strait and lies in the vicinity of India and Maldives.

Sri Lanka is a republic and a unitary state which is governed by a semi-presidential system with its official seat of government in Sri Jayawardenapura-Kotte, the capital.

As a result of its location in the path of major sea routes, Sri Lanka is a strategic naval link between West Asia and South East Asia.^[12] It has also been a center of the Buddhist religion and culture from ancient times and is one of the few remaining abodes of Buddhism in South Asia along with Ladakh, Bhutan and the Chittagong hill tracts^[13] The Sinhalese community forms the majority of the population; Tamils, who are concentrated in the north and east of the island, form the largest ethnic minority. Other communities include Moors, Burghers, Kaffirs, Malays and the aboriginal Vedda people.

The country is famous for the production and export of tea, coffee, coconuts, rubber and cinnamon, the latter which is native to the country.^[14] The natural beauty Sri Lanka has led to the title *The Pearl of the Indian Ocean*, it is full of lush tropical forests, white beaches and diverse landscape throughout along with a rich biodiversity. The country lays claim to a long and colorful history of over three thousand years, having one of the longest documented histories in the world. Sri Lanka's rich culture can be attributed to the many different communities in the island. Sri Lanka is a founding member state of SAARC and a member United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations, G77 and Non-Aligned Movement.

Name

In ancient times, Sri Lanka was known by a variety of names: ancient Greek geographers called it *Taprobane*^[15] (🇱🇰 /təˈprɒbəniː/) and Arabs referred to it as *Serendib* (the origin of the word "serendipity").^[16] *Ceilão* was the name given to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese when they arrived in 1505,^[17] which was transliterated into English as *Ceylon*.^[18] As a British crown colony, the island was known as Ceylon, and achieved independence under the name Dominion of Ceylon in 1948.

In Sinhala the country is known as ශ්‍රී ලංකා *śrī laṃkā*, IPA: [ʃriːˈlɑ̃kɑː], and the island itself as ලංකාව *laṃkāva*, IPA: [lɑ̃ˈkɑːvə]. In Tamil they are both இலங்கை *ilaṅkai*, IPA: [iˈlɑ̃ŋɡaɪ]. The name derives from the Sanskrit श्री लंका *śrī* (venerable) and *lankā* (island),^[19] the name of the island in the ancient Indian epics Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

In 1972, the official name of the country was changed to "Free, Sovereign and Independent Republic of Sri Lanka". In 1978 it was changed to the "Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka".^[20]

Geography and climate

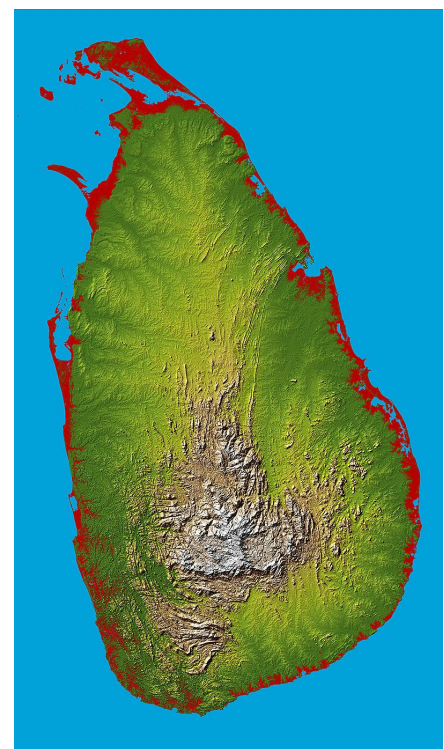
The island of Sri Lanka lies in the Indian Ocean, to the southwest of the Bay of Bengal. It is separated from the Indian subcontinent by the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait. According to Hindu mythology, a land bridge to the Indian mainland, known as Rama's Bridge, was constructed during the time of Rama by the vanara architect Nala. Often referred to as Adam's Bridge, it now amounts to only a chain of limestone shoals remaining above sea level.^[21]

According to colonial British reports, this is a natural causeway which was formerly complete, but was breached by a violent storm in 1480.^[22] The island consists mostly of flat-to-rolling coastal plains, with mountains rising only in the south-central part. Amongst these is the highest point Pidurutalagala, reaching 2524 metres (8281 ft) above sea level.

The climate of Sri Lanka can be described as tropical and warm. Its position between 5 and 10 north latitude endows the country with a warm climate moderated by ocean winds and considerable moisture. The mean temperature ranges from about 16 °C (60.8 °F) in the Central Highlands, where frost may occur for several days in the winter, to a maximum of approximately 33 °C (91.4 °F) in other low-altitude areas. The average yearly temperature ranges from 28 °C (82.4 °F) to nearly 31 °C (87.8 °F). Day and night temperatures may vary by 4 °C (7.20 °F) to 7 °C (12.60 °F). During the coldest days of January, many people wear coats and sweaters in the highlands and elsewhere.

May, the hottest period, precedes the summer monsoon rains. The rainfall pattern is influenced by monsoon winds from the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal: as the winds encounter the mountain slopes of the Central Highlands, they unload heavy rains on the slopes and the southwestern areas of the island. Some of the windward slopes receive up to 2500 millimetres (98.4 in) of rain each month, but the leeward slopes in the east and northeast receive little rain. Periodic squalls occur and sometimes tropical cyclones bring overcast skies and rains to the southwest, northeast, and eastern parts of the island.

Between December and March, monsoon winds come from the northeast, bringing moisture from the Bay of Bengal. Humidity is typically higher in the southwest and mountainous areas and depends on the seasonal patterns of rainfall, and places like Colombo experience daytime humidity above 70% all year round, rising to almost 90% during the monsoon season in June. Anuradhapura experiences a daytime low of 60% during the monsoon month of March, but a high of 79% during the November and December rains. In the highlands, Kandy's daytime humidity usually ranges between 70% and 79%.



Topographic map of Sri Lanka.

Flora and fauna

The mountains and the southwestern part of the country, known as the "wet zone", receive ample rainfall at an average of 2500 mm (98 in). Most of the east, southeast, and northern parts of the country comprise the "dry zone", which receives between 1200 mm (47 in) and 1900 mm (75 in) of rain annually. Much of the rain in these areas falls from October to January; during the rest of the year there is very little precipitation. The arid northwest and southeast coasts receive the least amount of rain at 600 mm (24 in) to 1200 mm (47 in) per year.

Varieties of flowering acacias are well adapted to the arid conditions and flourish on the Jaffna Peninsula. Among the trees of the dry-land forests, are some valuable species such as satinwood, ebony, ironwood, mahogany and teak. In the wet zone, the dominant vegetation of the lowlands is a tropical evergreen forest, with tall trees, broad foliage, and a dense undergrowth of vines and creepers. Subtropical evergreen forests resembling those of temperate climates flourish in the higher altitudes. Forests at one time covered nearly the entire island, but by the late 20th century lands classified as forests and forest reserves covered around $\frac{1}{3}$ of the land.^[23]

The Yala National Park in the southeast protects herds of elephant, deer, and peacocks, and the Wilpattu National Park in the northwest preserves the habitats of many water birds, such as storks, pelicans, ibis, and spoonbills. During the Mahaweli Ganga Program of the 1970s and 1980s in northern Sri Lanka, the government set aside four areas of land totalling 1900 km² (730 sq mi) as national parks. The island has four biosphere reserves, Bundala, Hurulu Forest Reserve, the Kanneliya-Dediyagala-Nakiyadeniya, and Sinharaja.^[24]

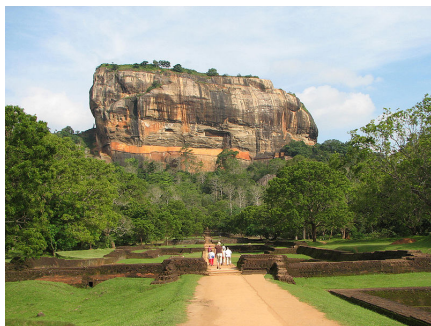
The national flower of Sri Lanka is the *Nymphaea stellata* (Sinhalese *Nil Mahanel*),^[25] the national tree is the *Ironwood* (Sinhalese *Na*),^[26] and the national bird is the Sri Lanka Junglefowl, which is endemic to the country.^[27]



Horton Plains National Park represents Sri Lanka montane rain forests

History

Early periods



Sigiriya Rock Fortress.

Paleolithic human settlements have been discovered at excavations in several cave sites in the Western Plains region and the South-western face of the Central Hills region. Anthropologists believe that some discovered burial rites and certain decorative artefacts exhibit similarities between the first inhabitants of the island and the early inhabitants of Southern India. Recent bioanthropological studies have however dismissed these links, and have placed the origin of the people to the northern parts of India.

One of the first written references to the island is found in the Indian epic Ramayana, which described the emperor Ravana as monarch of

the powerful kingdom of *Lanka*, which was created by the divine sculptor Vishwakarma for Kubera, the treasurer of the Gods.^[28] English historian James Emerson Tennent also theorised Galle, a southern city in Sri Lanka, was the ancient seaport of Tarshish from which King Solomon is said to have drawn ivory, peacocks and other valuables. The main written accounts of the country's history are the Buddhist chronicles of Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa.

The earliest-known inhabitants of the island now known as Sri Lanka were probably the ancestors of the Wanniyala-Aetto people, also known as *Veddahs* and numbering roughly 3,000. Linguistic analysis has found a correlation of the Sinhalese language with the languages of the Sindh and Gujarat, although most historians believe that the Sinhala community emerged well after the assimilation of various ethnic groups.

From the ancient period date some remarkable archaeological sites including the ruins of Sigiriya, the so-called "Fortress in the Sky", and huge public works. Among the latter are large "tanks" or reservoirs, important for conserving water in a climate that alternates rainy seasons with dry times, and elaborate aqueducts, some with a slope as finely calibrated as one inch to the mile. Ancient Sri Lanka was also the first in the world to have established a dedicated hospital in Mihintale in the 4th century BCE. Ancient Sri Lanka was also the world's leading exporter of cinnamon, which was exported to Egypt as early as 1400 BCE. Sri Lanka was also the first Asian nation to have a female ruler in Queen Anula (47–42 BC).



Sri Lankan coin, 1st century CE.

Ancient Sri Lanka

Since ancient times Sri Lanka was ruled by monarchs, most notably of the Sinha royal dynasty that lasted over 2000 years. The island was also infrequently invaded by South Indian kingdoms and parts of the island were ruled intermittently by the Chola dynasty, the Pandya dynasty, the Chera dynasty and the Pallava dynasty. The island was also invaded by the kingdoms of Kalinga (modern Orissa) and those from the Malay Peninsula.

Buddhism arrived from India in the 3rd century BCE, brought by Bhikkhu Mahinda, who is believed to have been the son of Mauryan emperor Ashoka. Mahinda's mission won over the Sinhalese monarch Devanampiyatissa of Mihintale, who embraced the faith and propagated it throughout the Sinhalese population. The Buddhist kingdoms of Sri Lanka would maintain a large number of Buddhist schools and monasteries, and support the propagation of Buddhism into Southeast Asia.



Bronze imitation of a Roman coin, an example of Indo-Roman trade and relations. Sri Lanka, 4-8th century CE.

Colonial era

Sri Lanka had always been an important port and trading post in the ancient world, and was increasingly frequented by merchant ships from the Middle East, Persia, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia. The islands were known to the first European explorers of South Asia and settled by many groups of Arab and Malay merchants.

A Portuguese colonial mission arrived on the island in 1505 headed by Lourenço de Almeida, the son of Francisco de Almeida. At that point the island consisted of three kingdoms, namely Kandy in the central hills, Kotte at the Western coast, and Yarlpanam (Anglicised Jaffna) in the north. The Dutch arrived in the 17th century. Although much of the coastal regions of the island came under the domain of European powers, the interior, hilly region of the island remained independent, with its capital in Kandy.



British colonial Coat of arms of
Ceylon

The British East India Company took over the coastal regions island controlled by the Dutch in 1796, in 1802 these provinces were declaring a crown colony under direct rule of the British government, therefore the island was not part of the British Raj. The annexation of the Kingdom of Kandy in 1815 by the Kandyan convention, unified the island under British rule.

20th Century and the World Wars

European colonists established a series of cinnamon, sugar, coffee, indigo cultivation followed by tea and rubber plantations and graphite mining. The British also brought a large number of indentured workers from Tamil Nadu to work in the plantation economy. The city of Colombo was developed as the administrative centre and commercial heart with its harbor, and the British established modern schools, colleges, roads and churches that brought Western-style education and culture to the native people.

Increasing grievances over the denial of civil rights, mistreatment and abuse of natives by colonial authorities gave rise to a struggle for independence in the 1930s, when the youth leagues opposed the "Ministers' Memorandum," which asked the colonial authority to increase the powers of the board of ministers without granting popular representation or civil freedoms. Buddhist scholars and the Teetotalist Movement also played a vital role in this time.

During World War II, the island served as an important Allied military base. A large segment of the British and American fleet were deployed on the island, as were tens of thousands of soldiers committed to the war against Japan in Southeast Asia. Majority of Ceylonese forget the war as part of British Commonwealth Forces, and some Ceylonese expatriates in the Far east joined to form a *Lanka Regiment* in the Indian National Army. There was a plan to transport them to Ceylon by submarine, to lead a liberation struggle there^[29], but this was aborted.

Independence

Following the war, popular pressure for independence intensified. The office of Prime Minister of Ceylon was created in advance of independence on 14 October 1947, Don Stephen Senanayake being the first prime minister. On 4 February 1948 the country gained its independence as the Dominion of Ceylon. The island enjoyed good relations with the United Kingdom and had the British Royal Navy stationed at Trincomalee until 1956. With Solomon Bandaranaike elected as prime minister, Ceylon began moving towards links with the communist bloc.

On 21 July 1960 Sirimavo Bandaranaike took office as prime minister, and became the world's first female prime minister^[30] and the first female head of government in post-colonial Asia. During her second term as prime minister, her government instituted socialist economic policies and strengthened ties with the USSR and later China, while promoting a policy of non-alignment. However in 1971, Ceylon experienced a Marxist insurrection, which was quickly suppressed with international support. In 1972, with the adaptation of a new constitution, the country became a republic changing its name to Sri Lanka and remained a member of the Commonwealth of Nations.



The formal ceremony marking the start of self rule, with the opening of the first parliament at Independence Square.

Civil war

One of the aspects of the independence movement was that it was very much a Sinhalese movement. As a result, the Sinhalese majority attempted to remodel Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese nation-state. The lion in the national flag is derived from the banner of the last Sinhalese Kingdom, which, to the Sinhalese majority, is a symbol of their fight against British colonialism. One single strip of orange on the left part of the flag represents the Tamil population, and it is seen by many Tamil as a symbol of their marginalisation.^[31]

In 1956, the Official Language Act (commonly referred to as The Sinhala Only Act) was enacted. The law mandated Sinhala, the language of Sri Lanka's majority Sinhalese community, which is spoken by over 70% of Sri Lanka's population, as the sole official language of Sri Lanka. Supporters of the law saw it as an attempt by a community that had just gained independence to distance themselves from their colonial masters.

The immediate (and intended) consequence of this act was to force large numbers of Tamil who worked in the civil service, and who could not meet this language requirement, to resign. An attempt to make Buddhism the national religion, to the exclusion of Hindu and Islam, was also made. Affirmative action in favour of Sinhalese was also instituted, ostensibly to reverse colonial discrimination against Sinhalese in favour of Tamil. Many Tamil, in response to this deliberate marginalisation, came to believe that they deserved a separate nation-state for themselves.

From 1983 to 2009, there was an on-and-off civil war against the government by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist militant organisation who fought to create an independent state named Tamil Eelam in the North and East of the island. Both the Sri Lankan government and LTTE have been accused of various human rights violations.

On 19 May 2009, the President of Sri Lanka officially claimed an end to the insurgency and the defeat of the LTTE, following the death of Velupillai Prabhakaran and much of the LTTE's other senior leadership.^[32]

Post War

With the end of the war, the government of Sri Lanka called for redevelopment of the nation. The final stages of the war left some 300,000 people displaced.^[33] By 2 May 2010, 214,227 IDPs (74%) had been released or returned to their places of origin.^[34]

Government and politics

The Constitution of Sri Lanka establishes a democratic, socialist republic in Sri Lanka, which is also a unitary state. The government is a mixture of the presidential system and the parliamentary system. The President of Sri Lanka is the head of state, the commander in chief of the armed forces, as well as head of government, and is popularly elected for a six-year term.

In the exercise of duties, the President is responsible to the Parliament of Sri Lanka, which is a unicameral 225-member legislature. The President appoints and heads a cabinet of ministers composed of elected members of parliament. The President's deputy is the Prime Minister, who leads the ruling party in parliament and shares many executive responsibilities, mainly in domestic affairs.^[35]

Members of parliament are elected by universal (adult) suffrage based on a modified proportional representation system by district to a six-year term. The primary modification is that, the party that receives the largest number of valid votes in each constituency gains a unique "bonus seat." The president may summon, suspend, or end a legislative session and dissolve Parliament any time after it has served for one year. The parliament reserves the power to make all laws.

On 1 July 1960 the people of Sri Lanka appointed the first-ever female head of government in Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga served for a short period as the prime minister between August and December 1994 before being elected as the first female president of the country from 1994 to 2005 for 2 consecutive terms. The current president, who took office on 21 November 2005, and has been elected for two consecutive terms, is Mahinda Rajapaksa. The current prime minister, D. M. Jayaratne, took office on 21 April 2010.

Sri Lanka has enjoyed democracy with universal suffrage since 1931. Current politics in Sri Lanka are controlled by rival coalitions led by the left-wing Sri Lanka Freedom Party, headed by President Rajapaksa, the comparatively right-wing United National Party led by former prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. There are also many smaller Buddhist, socialist and Tamil nationalist political parties that oppose the separatism of the LTTE but demand regional autonomy and increased civil rights. Since 1948, Sri Lanka has been a member of the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations.

It is also a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Colombo Plan, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Through the Cold War-era, Sri Lanka followed a foreign policy of non-alignment but has remained closer to the United States and Western Europe.

The military of Sri Lanka comprises the Sri Lankan Army, the Sri Lankan Navy and the Sri Lankan Air Force. These are administered by the Ministry of Defence. During 1971 and 1989 the army assisted the police in government response against the Marxist militants of the JVP and fought the LTTE from 1983 to 2009. Sri Lanka receives considerable military assistance from Pakistan and China.^[36]



The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

Foreign relations and military

Foreign relations

Sri Lanka traditionally follows a nonaligned foreign policy but has been seeking closer relations with the United States since December 1977. It participates in multilateral diplomacy, particularly at the United Nations, where it seeks to promote sovereignty, independence, and development in the developing world. Sri Lanka was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). It also is a member of the Commonwealth, the SAARC, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, and the Colombo Plan. Sri Lanka continues its active participation in the NAM, while also stressing the importance it places on regionalism by playing a strong role in SAARC.

Military



Sri Lanka Air Force IAI Kfir fighter aircraft

The Sri Lanka Armed Forces, comprising the Sri Lanka Army, the Sri Lanka Navy and the Sri Lanka Air Force, comes under the purview of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The total strength of the three services is around 230,000 active personnel. Sri Lanka does not use a military draft.

In support of the armed forces there are three paramilitary units functioning under purview of the Ministry of Defence, which are the Special Task Force, the Civil Defence Force and the Sri Lanka Coast Guard^[37] ^[38]

Since independence from Britain in 1948, the primary focus of the armed forces has been on internal security, due to three major insurgencies, including a 30 year long conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam which was proscribed as a terrorist organisation by 32 countries. Due to this conflict the armed forces had expanded to its current size and where in a continuous mobilized state for the last 30 years. Unique in modern military history, this was a low intensity conflict which progressed into a bloody conflict which included elements of conventional warfare as well as classic guerrilla and asymmetric warfare, with pitched battles taking place in land and at sea, later briefly moving to the air and unprecedented use of suicide attacks by a violent non-state actor. Although it drew in other regional countries into the conflict directly (India) or indirectly (Pakistan, China); the conflict itself did not result in any territorial or constitutional changes, it resulted in the deaths of 80,000-100,000 people.^[39]

In a rare occurrence in modern history the conflict that had 30 years of constant fighting, halted several times briefly by failed peace overtures, ended by a military outcome with a comprehensively defeat of the LTTE May 2009.^[40] Since 2002 the Sri Lankan armed forces have also taken part in several peace keeping missions with the UN.

Peace keeping

Even though its armed forces were then engaged in an internal conflict, Sri Lanka contributed with forces in international missions organised by the United Nations, notably the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and continue to contribute their forces to the United Nations. On 21 October 2009 another group of two hundred Sri Lankan troops including nine officers from all three branches of the armed forces were added to the current deployment in a passing-out parade. The two hundred troops are scheduled to leave for Haiti on 8 November 2009.^[41]

Economy

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Sri Lanka became a plantation economy, famous for its production and export of cinnamon, rubber and Ceylon tea, which remains a trademark national export. The development of modern ports under British rule raised the strategic importance of the island as a centre of trade. During World War II, the island hosted important military installations and Allied forces. However, the plantation economy aggravated poverty and economic inequality.

From 1948 to 1977 socialism strongly influenced the government's economic policies. Colonial plantations were dismantled, industries were nationalised and a welfare state established. While the standard of living and literacy improved significantly, the nation's economy suffered from inefficiency, slow growth and lack of foreign investment.

From 1977 the UNP government began incorporating privatisation, deregulation and the promotion of private enterprise. While the production and export of tea, rubber, coffee, sugar and other agricultural commodities remains important, the nation has moved steadily towards an industrialised economy with the development of food processing, textiles, telecommunications and finance. By 1996 plantation crops made up only 20% of export, and further declined to 16.8% in 2005 (compared with 93% in 1970), while textiles and garments have reached 63%.

The GDP grew at an average annual rate of 5.5% during the early 1990s, until a drought and a deteriorating security situation lowered growth to 3.8% in 1996. The economy rebounded in 1997–2000, with average growth of 5.3%. The year of 2001 saw the first recession in the country's history, as a result of power shortages, budgetary problems, the global slowdown, and continuing civil strife. Signs of recovery appeared after the 2002 ceasefire which died away following the beginning of war. Since the separatist war ended in May 2009 the Sri Lankan stock market has shown marked gains to be among the 3 best performing markets in the world.^[42] The Colombo Stock Exchange reported the highest growth in the world for 2003, and today Sri Lanka has the highest per capita income in South Asia. About 14% of the population live on less than US\$ 1.25 per day.^[43]

In April 2004, there was a sharp reversal in economic policy after the government headed by Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party was defeated by a coalition made up of Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the leftist-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna called the United People's Freedom Alliance. The new government stopped the privatisation of state enterprises and reforms of state utilities such as power and petroleum, and embarked on a subsidy program called the Rata Perata economic program. Its main theme to support the rural and suburban SMEs and protect the domestic economy from external influences, such as oil prices, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Sri Lanka, with an income per head of US\$1,972, still lags behind some of its neighbours including Maldives but is ahead of its giant neighbour India. Its economy grew by an average of 5% during the 1990s during the 'War for Peace' era. According to the Sri Lankan central bank statistics, the economy was estimated to have grown by 7% last year, while inflation reached 20%.

Parts of Sri Lanka, particularly the South and East coast, were devastated by the 2004 Asian Tsunami. The economy was briefly buoyed by an influx of foreign aid and tourists, but this was disrupted with the reemergence of the civil war resulting in increased lawlessness in the country^[44] and a sharp decline in tourism.^[45] ^[46] But following the end of the 3 decade long separatist war in May 2009 tourism has seen a steep uptick. Also the end of war has ensured the



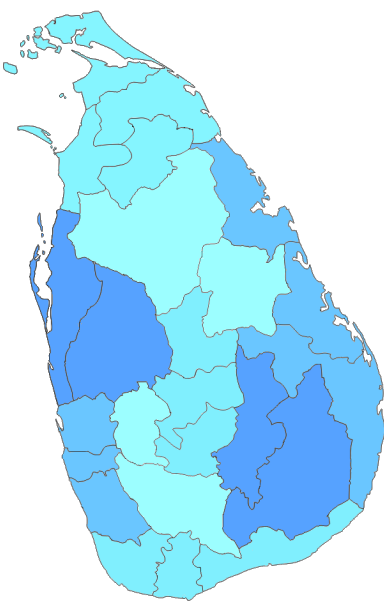
The Colombo World Trade Center in Colombo.



Sri Lanka's most widely known export, Ceylon tea.

rule of law in the whole of the island.
Recently, New York Times has placed Sri Lanka Number 1 in 31 places to go in 2010.^[47]

Administrative divisions



Bay of Bengal

Palk Strait

Northern Province

Gulf of

Mannar

North Central Province

North Western
Province

Eastern
Province

Central
Province

Uva Province

Western
Province

Sabaragamuwa
Province

Southern Province

Indian Ocean





Provinces

The **Provinces of Sri Lanka** (Sinhala: පළාත Tamil: மாகாணம்) have existed since the 19th century but they didn't have any legal status until 1987 when the 13th Amendment to the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka established provincial councils following several decades of increasing demand for a decentralisation of the Government of Sri Lanka.^[48] Between 1988 and 2006 the Northern and Eastern provinces were temporarily merged to form the North-East Province. Prior to 1987, all administration was handled by a district-based civil service which had been in place since colonial times.

Sri Lanka is divided into 9 provinces^[49] and 25 districts.^[50] Each province is administered by a directly elected provincial council:

Administrative Divisions of Sri Lanka			
province	Capital	Area (km ²)	Population
Central	Kandy	5,674	2,423,966
Eastern	Trincomalee	9,996	1,460,939
North Central	Anuradhapura	10,714	1,104,664
Northern	Jaffna	8,884	1,311,776
North Western	Kurunegala	7,812	2,169,892
Sabaragamuwa	Ratnapura	4,902	1,801,331
Southern	Galle	5,559	2,278,271
Uva	Badulla	8,488	1,177,358
Western	Colombo	3,709	5,361,200

Districts



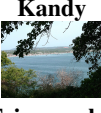



The provinces of Sri Lanka are divided into 25 districts (Sinhala: දිස්ත්‍රික්ක *sing.* දිස්ත්‍රික්කය Tamil: மாவட்டம்). Each district is administered under a District Secretariat. The districts are further subdivided into divisional secretariats, and these in turn to Grama Niladharis.

The Districts are known in Sinhala as *Disa* and in Tamil as *Maawaddam*. Originally a Disa (usually rendered into English as Dissavony) was a duchy, notably Matale and Uva. The Government Agent, who is known as **District Secretary**, administers a district.

These were originally based on the feudal counties, the *korales* and *ratas*. They were formerly known as 'D.R.O. Divisions' after the 'Divisional Revenue Officer'. Later the D.R.O.s became 'Assistant Government Agents' and the Divisions were known as 'A.G.A. Divisions'. Currently, the Divisions are administered by a 'Divisional Secretary', and are known as a 'D.S. Divisions'. Rural D.S. Divisions are also administered by a 'Pradeshiya Sabha' and 'Pradesha Sabhai' (Sinhala and Tamil for 'Regional Council'), which is elected.

Cities

Cities by population

<div></div> <div>Colombo</div> <div></div> <div>Kandy</div> <div></div> <div>Trincomalee</div>	Rank	City	Province	Population	Rank	City	Province	Population	<div></div> <div>Kotte</div> <div></div> <div>Jaffna</div> <div></div> <div>Galle</div>
	1	Colombo	Western	682 046	11	Galle	Southern	97 209	
	2	Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia	Western	232 220	12	Batticaloa	Eastern	95 489	
	3	Moratuwa	Western	202 021	13	Katunayake	Western	90 231	
	4	Negombo	Western	142 451	14	Battaramulla	Western	84 200	
	5	Trincomalee	Eastern	131 954	15	Dambulla	Central	75 290	
	6	Kotte	Western	125 914	16	Dalugama	Western	74 129	
	7	Kandy	Central	119 186	17	Maharagama	Western	74 117	
	8	Kalmunai	Eastern	103 879	18	Kotikawatta	Western	71 879	
	9	Vavuniya	Northern	101 143	19	Chavakachcheri	Northern	70 273	
	10	Jaffna	Northern	98 193	20	Anuradhapura	North Central	66 951	
2009 estimation ^[51]									

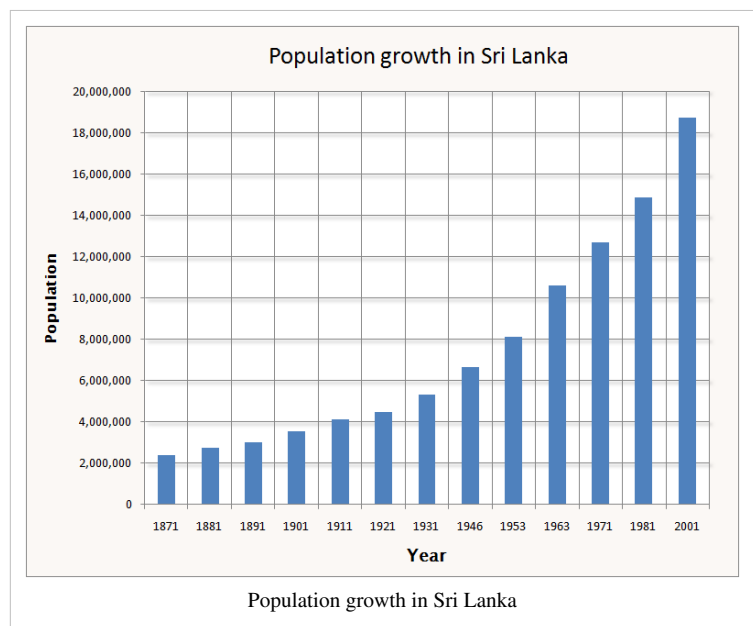
Demographics

Sri Lanka is the 53rd most populated nation in the world, with an annual population growth rate of 0.79%. Sri Lanka has a birth rate of 15.63 births per 1,000 people and a death rate of 6.49 deaths per 1,000 people. Population density is highest in western Sri Lanka, especially in and around the capital. There is a small population on the island of the Vedda people. They are believed to be the original indigenous group to inhabit the island. The Sinhalese people form the largest ethnic group in the nation, composing approximately 81.9% of the total population.

Tamils are concentrated in the North, East, Central and Western provinces of the

country. Sri Lankan Tamils are the second major ethnic group on the island and have called it home for generations. Indian Tamils who were brought as indentured labourers from India by British colonists to work on estate plantations, nearly 50% of whom were repatriated following independence in 1948,^[52] are called "Indian Origin" Tamils. They are distinguished from the native Tamil population that has resided in Sri Lanka since ancient times.

According to 2001 census data Indian Tamils makeup 5.1% of the Sri Lankan population and, Sri Lankan Tamils 4.3% but this figure only accounted for Sri Lankan Tamils in government-controlled areas, not accounting for those in rebel-held territories. The World Factbook states that Sri Lankan Tamils make up 14% of the population. There is



a significant population (8.0%) of Moors, who trace their lineage to Arab traders and immigrants from the Middle East. Their presence is concentrated in the cities and the central and eastern provinces. There are also small ethnic groups such as the Burghers (of mixed European descent) and Malays from Southeast Asia.

Language

Sinhalese and Tamil are the two official languages of Sri Lanka. English is fluently spoken by approximately 10% of the population, and is widely used for education, scientific and commercial purposes. Members of the Burgher community speak variant forms of Portuguese Creole and Dutch with varying proficiency, while members of the Malay community speak a form of creole Malay that is unique to the island.

Religions

Sri Lanka has a multi ethnic and multi religious population. Buddhism constitutes the religious faith of about 70% of the population of the island,^[53] ^[54] most of whom follow the Theravada school of Buddhism.^[55] According to traditional Sri Lankan chronicles, Buddhism was introduced into Sri Lanka in the 2nd century BCE by Venerable Mahinda, the son of the Emperor Ashoka, during the reign of Sri Lanka's King Devanampiyatissa.^[55]

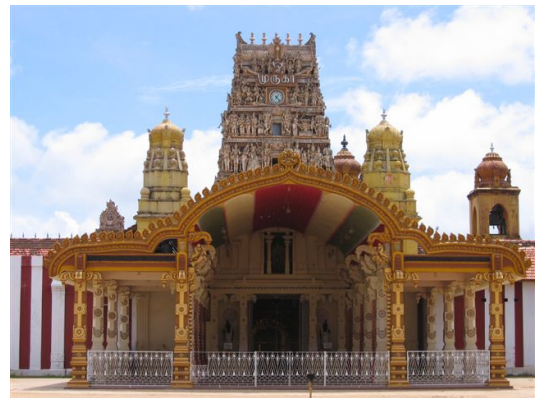
During this time, a sapling of the Bodhi Tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment was brought to Sri Lanka and the first monasteries were established under the sponsorship of the Sri Lankan king. The Pali Canon (*Thripitakaya*), having previously been preserved as an oral tradition, was first committed to writing in Sri Lanka around 30 BCE.^[56]

Sri Lanka has the longest continuous history of Buddhism of any predominately Buddhist nation,^[55] with the Sangha having existed in a largely unbroken lineage since its introduction in the 2nd century BCE. During periods of decline, the Sri Lankan monastic lineage was revived through contact with Thailand and Burma.^[56]

Periods of Mahayana influence, as well as official neglect under colonial rule, created great challenges for Theravada Buddhist institutions in Sri Lanka, but repeated revivals and resurgences—most recently in the 19th century—have kept the Theravada tradition alive for over 2000 years. Hinduism the second most prevalent religion in Sri Lanka and it also arrived from India. Today, most Hindus are Tamil and they constitute a majority in Northern Sri Lanka.



Temple of the Tooth is the focal point of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.



The Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil, Jaffna is an important place for Hinduism in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka religiosity	
religion	percent
Buddhism	69%
Hinduism	15%
Islam	8%
Christianity	8%

Source: David, 1993^[57]

Religions which today exist in Sri Lanka, in addition to Buddhism and Hinduism include Islam as well as different churches of Christianity. Followers of Islam comprise nearly eight percent of the population,^[54] having been brought to the island by Arab traders over the course of many centuries, most are Sunni who follow the Shafi'i school.^[58]

Hinduism was primarily established in Sri Lanka by migrants and often invaders from southern India,^[59] Hindus constitute just over 7 percent of the population,^[54] ^[60] mostly of the Shaivite school. European colonists introduced Christianity to the country in the 16th century,^[61] and the religion has been adopted by around six percent of the population.^[54]

There also was a small population of Zoroastrian immigrants from India (Parsis) who settled in Ceylon during the period of British rule. As a result of emigration, few remain, yet they have played a significant role in the growth of the country. The former finance minister of Sri Lanka, Nariman Choksy, was a Parsi. Other famous Parsi families in Sri Lanka include the Captain family and the Pestongee family.

Religion plays an important part in the life and culture of Sri Lankans. The Buddhist majority observe Poya Days, once per month according to the Lunar calendar. The Hindus and Muslims also observe their own holidays. There are many Buddhist temples spread throughout the island in addition to numerous mosques, Hindu temples and churches, especially in areas where respective communities are concentrated.

Buddhists are distributed across most parts of the island except in the north. Hindus are concentrated in north, east, and central high lands, though high populations also exists in the capital city of Colombo and in the surrounding suburbs. Christians, particularly Roman Catholics are mainly concentrated along the western coastal belt.

Muslims are concentrated in several pockets along the coast and in the interior. All religious communities are represented in the western province and in other urban centres in sizeable numbers. Sri Lanka was ranked the 3rd most religious country in the world by a 2008 Gallup poll, with 99% of Sri Lankans saying religion is an important part of their daily life.^[62]

Health

Life expectancy was 69 for males and 76 for females in 2006.^[63] Government expenditure on health care was approx. US\$ 105 (PPP) in 2006.^[64] Sri Lanka has about 48.9 physicians per 100,000 people.^[65] The Médecins Sans Frontières are active in Sri Lanka.^[65]

Education

With a literacy rate of 92%, and 83% of the total population having had Secondary Education,^[66] Sri Lanka has one of the most literate populations amongst developing nations.^[67] An education system which dictates 9 years of Compulsory Schooling for every child is in place, with 99% of the children entering the first grade.^[66] A free education system initiated in 1945^[68] by Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara, a former minister of education, has greatly contributed to this.

Dr. Kannangara led the establishment of the Madhya Maha Vidyalayas (Central Schools) in different parts of the country in order to provide education to Sri Lanka's rural population. In 1942 a special education committee proposed extensive reforms to establish an efficient and quality education system for the people. However in the 1980s changes to this system saw the separation the of administration of schools between the central government and the provincial government. Thus the elite National Schools are controlled directly by the Ministry of Education and the provincial schools by the provincial government.

Most schools in Sri Lanka provide education from grades 1 to 13 in the same institution. Students sit for the GCE Ordinary Level Examination (O/Levels) in grade 11 and the GCE Advanced Level Examination (A/levels) in grade 13, conducted by the Department of Examinations. These schools are modelled on British colleges. A majority of them are public, but a number of private schools do exist. While most reputed National and Private Schools centred around large cities are usually single-sex institutions, rural provincial schools tend to be coeducational.

In recent decades, a large number of international schools have been established across the nation. In these schools General Certificate of Secondary Education, International Baccalaureate and Cambridge International Examinations are popular education programs. Many of the schools offer subjects in Sinhala and Tamil languages with regionally leading schools offering subjects in English medium also.

Sri Lanka has around 16 public universities. They include the University of Colombo, the University of Peradeniya, the University of Kelaniya, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, the University of Moratuwa, the University of Jaffna, the University of Ruhuna, the Eastern University of Sri Lanka, the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka and the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka.

However the lack of space in these institutions and the unwillingness to establish private universities has led to a large number of students been denied entry into formal universities as well as high undergraduate unemployment. As a result, a number of public and private institutions have emerged, which provide specialised education in a variety of fields, such as computer science, business administration and law. These include the government owned Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology and the Institute of Technological Studies. The free education system ensures that primary to tertiary education is provided free of charge to its citizens.



University of Colombo



Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology

Transport

Most Sri Lankan cities and towns are connected by the Sri Lanka Railways, the state-run national railway operator. The first railway line was inaugurated on 26 April 1867, linking Colombo with Kandy. The total length of Sri Lankan roads exceeds 11000 kilometres (6840 mi), with a vast majority of them being paved.

The government has launched several highway projects to bolster the economy and national transport system, including the Colombo-Katunayake Expressway, the Colombo-Kandy (Kadugannawa) Expressway, the Colombo-Padeniya Expressway and the Outer Circular Highway to ease Colombo's traffic congestion.

There are also plans to build a major bridge connecting Jaffna to the Indian city of Chennai.

The Ceylon Transport Board is the state-run agency responsible for operating public bus services across the island. Sri Lanka also maintains 430 kilometres (270 mi) of inland waterways. It has three deep-water ports at Colombo, Trincomalee and Galle. There is also a smaller, shallower harbour at Kankasanturai, north of Jaffna.

There are twelve paved airports and two unpaved airstrips in the country. SriLankan Airlines is the official national carrier, partly owned and operated by Emirates Airline. It was voted the best airline in South Asia by Skytrax. SriLankan Air Taxi is the smaller, domestic arm of the national carrier, while Expo Aviation and Lankair are private airline companies. The Bandaranaike International Airport, currently the country's only international airport, is located in Katunayaka, 22 kilometres (14 mi) north of Colombo. A second international airport is under construction in Mattala, in the south of the island.

The Port of Colombo is the largest port in Sri Lanka, handling over 4.1 million TEUs annually. The new Port of Hambantota is currently under construction, and due to begin operations in November 2010.



GM EMD G12 - ALBERTA diesel locomotive
used for transportation

Human rights

Human rights as ratified by the United Nations are guaranteed by the constitution of Sri Lanka. The human rights situation in Sri Lanka has come under criticism by human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch,^[69] as well as the United States Department of State^[70] and the European Union,^[71] have expressed concern about the state of human rights in Sri Lanka. Both the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government of Sri Lanka are accused of violating human rights.

In its 2007 report, however, Amnesty International stated that "escalating political killings, child recruitment, abductions and armed clashes created a climate of fear in the east, spreading to the north by the end of the year", whilst also outlining concerns with violence against women, the death penalty and "numerous reports of torture in police custody". However, the report also stated that the ceasefire between government and LTTE remained in place despite numerous violations.^[72]

However, the Sri Lankan minister for HR said "We regret one or two statements made here, that fly in the face of all concrete evidence, that the situation in Sri Lanka is deteriorating, when we have dealt more firmly with terrorism, with far-less damage to civilians, than in any comparative situation."^[73] Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama said, the report presents a distorted view of the actual situation in Sri Lanka during the year 2007 and is a litany of unsubstantiated allegations, innuendo and vituperative exaggerations.^[74]

Culture and arts

The island is the home of two main traditional cultures: the Sinhalese (centred in the ancient cities of Kandy and Anuradhapura) and the Tamil (centred in the city of Jaffna). In more recent times a British colonial culture was added, and lately Sri Lanka, particularly in the urban areas, has experienced a dramatic makeover in the western mould.

Until recently, for example, most Sri Lankans, certainly those in the villages, have eaten traditional food, engaged in traditional crafts and expressed themselves through traditional arts. But economic growth and intense economic competition in developed countries has spilled over to most of Sri Lanka, producing changes that might variously be identified as progress, westernisation or a loss of identity and assimilation.



The Buddha statue at Mihintale.



Hindu Devotess engaging in 'Kavadi' at a Vavuniya temple.

Traditional food

Sri Lankans have added western influences to the customary diet such as rice and curry, pittu (mixture of fresh rice meal, very lightly roasted and mixed with fresh grated coconut, then steamed in a bamboo mould). Kiribath (cooked in thick coconut cream for this unsweetened rice-pudding which is accompanied by a sharp chili relish called "lunumiris"), watalapam (rich pudding of Malay origin made of coconut milk, jaggery, cashew nuts, eggs, and various spices including cinnamon cloves and nutmeg), kottu, and hoppers ("appa"), batter cooked rapidly in a hot curved pan, accompanied by eggs, milk or savouries.



Traditional dish of Kiribath with lunumiris

Middle Eastern influences and practices are found in traditional Moor dishes. While Dutch and Portuguese influences are found with the island's Burgher community preserving their culture through traditional favourites such as Lamprais (rice cooked in stock and baked in a banana leaf), Breudher (Dutch Christmas cake) and Bolo Fiado (Portuguese-style layer cake).

Festivals

Every year on or about 13 April Sinhala and Tamil people celebrate **Sinhalese and Tamil New Year Festival**, and Muslims celebrate **Ramadan**. Esala Perahera (A-suh-luh peh-ruh-ha-ruh) is the grand festival of Esala held in Sri Lanka. It is very grand with elegant costumes. Happening in July or August in Kandy, it has become a unique symbol of Sri Lanka. It is a Buddhist festival consisting of dances and richly decorated elephants.

There are fire-dances, whip-dances, Kandian dances and various other cultural dances. The elephants are usually adorned with lavish garments. The festival ends with the traditional 'diya-kepeema'. The elephant is paraded around the city bearing the tooth of Buddha. However the new year for tamils have been established as being on 14 January from this year.



Elephants at the Esala Perahera

Cinema

Sri Lankan cinema in past years has featured subjects such as family relationships, love stories and the years of conflict between the military and Tamil Tiger rebels. Many films are in the Sinhalese language and the Sri Lankan cinematic style is similar to Bollywood, Kollywood of Indian cinema.

The first film to be produced and shown in Sri Lanka was Kadawunu Porondurwa (The Broken Promise) which was released in 1947. The first colour film of Sri Lanka was Ranmuthu Duwa.

Afterwards there were many Sinhalese movies produced in Sri Lanka and some of them, such as Nidhanaya, received several international film awards. The most influential filmmaker in the history of Sri Lankan cinema is Lester James Peiris who has directed many movies of excellent quality which led to global acclaim. His latest film, *Wekande Walauwa* ("Mansion by the Lake") became the first movie to be submitted from Sri Lanka for the Best Foreign Language film award at the Academy Awards.

In 2005 the director Vimukthi Jayasundara became the first Sri Lankan to win the prestigious Camera d'Or award for Best First Film, or any award for that matter, at the Cannes Film Festival for his Sinhalese language film *Sulanga Enu Pinisa* (The Forsaken Land). Controversial filmmaker Asoka Handagama's films are considered by many in the Sri Lankan film world to be the best films of honest response to the ethnic conflict raged in the country for many years.

Prasanna Vithanage is one of Sri Lanka's most notable filmmakers. His films have won many awards, both local and international. Recent releases like 'Sooriya Arana', 'Samanala thatu', and 'Hiripoda wessa' have attracted Sri Lankans to cinemas. Sri Lankan films are usually in the Sinhalese language. Tamil language movies are also filmed in Sri Lanka but they are part of Kollywood which is Indian Tamil cinema. It is also known as Sri Lankan Tamil cinema in Sri Lanka. However some Kollywood films are based in Sri Lanka as well.

Music

The earliest music came from the theatre at a time when the traditional open-air drama (referred to in Sinhala as *Kolam*, *Sokari* and *Nadagam*). In 1903 the first music album, **Nurthi**, was released through Radio Ceylon. Also Vernon Corea introduced Sri Lankan music in the English Service of Radio Ceylon.

In the early 1960s, Indian music in films greatly influenced Sri Lankan music and later Sri Lankan stars like Sunil Shantha found greater popularity among Indian people. By 1963, Radio Ceylon had more Indian listeners than Sri Lankan ones. The notable songwriters Mahagama Sekara and Ananda Samarakoon made a Sri Lankan music revolution. At the peak of this revolution, musicians such as W. D. Amaradeva, H.R. Jothipala, Milton Mallawarachchi, M.S. Fernando, Annesley Malewana and Clarence Wijewardene did great work.

A very popular type of music is the so-called Baila, a kind of dance music that originated from Portuguese music introduced to the island in colonial times.

Media

The national radio station radio, Radio Ceylon is the oldest-running radio station in Asia.^[75] ^[76] It was established in 1923 by Edward Harper just three years after broadcasting was launched in Europe.^[77] It remains one of the most popular stations in Asia, with its programming reaching neighbouring Asian nations. The station is managed by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and broadcasts services in Sinhalese, Tamil, English and Hindi.

Since the 1980s, a large number of private radio stations have also being introduced, and they have gained commercial popularity and success. Broadcast television was introduced to the country in 1979 when the Independent Television Network was launched. Initially all Television stations were state controlled, but private television networks began broadcasts in 1992.^[78]

Global television networks from India, Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States are also widely popular, and cable and satellite television is gaining in popularity with Sri Lanka's middle-class. Popular publications include the English language *Daily Mirror* and *The Sunday Observer* and *The Sunday Times*, *Divayina*, *Lankadeepa* and *Lakbima* in Sinhalese and the Tamil publications *Dinakaran* and *Uthayan*.

Sports

While the national sport in Sri Lanka is volleyball,^[79] by far the most popular sport in the country is cricket.^[79] Rugby union also enjoys extensive popularity, as do as do aquatic sports, athletics, football (soccer) and tennis. Sri Lanka's schools and colleges regularly organise sports and athletics teams, competing on provincial and national levels.

The Sri Lanka national cricket team achieved considerable success beginning in the 1990s, rising from underdog status to winning the 1996 Cricket World Cup.^[80] Sri Lankan cricket team reached the finals of the 2007 Cricket World Cup, where they lost to Australia.^[81] The national cricket team of Sri Lanka won the Asia Cup in 1986, 1997, 2004 and 2008.

Sri Lanka has a large number of sports stadiums, including the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground, the Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu Stadium, the R. Premadasa Stadium and the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium in Dambulla as well as the Galle International Stadium. The country co-hosted the 1996 Cricket World Cup with India and Pakistan, and has hosted the Asia Cup tournament on numerous occasions. It will also co-host the 2011 Cricket World Cup. Aquatic sports such as boating, surfing, swimming and scuba diving on the coast, the beaches and backwaters attract a large number of Sri Lankans and foreign tourists. There are two styles of martial arts native to Sri Lanka, Cheena di and Angampora.



A Test match between Sri Lanka and England at the SCC Ground, Colombo, March 2001.

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