

## Seventy facts to mark the 70th anniversary of India's independence

A floating post office, a single timezone and a national microbe are among the more fun facts about the world's biggest democracy, which still feels the reverberations of events in 1947

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The spinning wheel logo was replaced on the Indian flag by a Buddhist wheel of life *Getty*  
India is celebrating its 70th anniversary – an event shot through with both national pride and memories of the trauma of the partition that created it.

In keeping with that major event, which is being celebrated and remembered across the world, here are 70 facts to mark the anniversary – from its horrifying beginnings to its more stunning achievements.

1. Partition is the dividing line struck to divide India and create the Muslim nation of Pakistan which then included what is now Bangladesh.
2. The decision to divide India came against the backdrop of the Second World War and the drive for Indian independence – the Crown was losing control of its jewel. On 20 February 1947 British prime minister Clement Attlee announced British rule would end before June 1948.
3. Nobody really knows why it happened so quickly – Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had arrived just months before to serve as Britain's last viceroy, decided in June 1947 that power would be transferred within a **couple of months** – 10 months earlier than expected. It's thought that the hurry might have been to force the two groups taking part in negotiations to sort themselves out.

4. Both India and Pakistan became new, independent states in August 1947. Pakistan celebrates its independence day on 14 August, a day before India – this timing allowed Lord Mountbatten to attend both ceremonies.
5. On the night of 14 August 1947 – as a nation was being split into two – Lord Mountbatten was reportedly enjoying a screening of the Bob Hope film *My Favourite Brunette*.
6. Mounbatten was far from the first viceroy to keep to eccentric habits as India was headed for chaos. Lord Linlithgow, who served in the job from 1936 to 1943, liked to walk into dinner each evening to a band playing “**The Roast Beef of Old England**”, an especially unusual choice in a country that venerates the cow.
7. It took until two days after Partition – 17 August – for the borders of Pakistan to be drawn up and established.
8. When those borders arrived, they were as divisive as they might appear. Following work by a British-led commission, the Radcliffe Line was drawn on a map – though it was supposed to split the country in such a way as to keep Muslims in Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs in India, it crudely cut communities in two and forced families across borders.
9. In 1941 Karachi was nearly half Hindu – by the end of that decade, almost all of those people had fled. Delhi was designated the capital of India but one one-third Muslim. This soon changed too as Muslims left.
10. That displacement and movement led to horrific outbreaks of violence and death. Governments hadn’t been equipped to cope with them, and in large parts of both countries the entire population of certain religions were wiped out.
11. British soldiers were stationed in the country but were told not to do anything except act to save British lives.
12. The effects are still being felt today. The border is still difficult to cross, and families are left either side of it with no way of reuniting.
13. For all that, the Muslim population of India is still huge, at 160 million people. That makes India the place with the third largest population of Muslims, after Indonesia and Pakistan.
14. And the lines are still unclear. Both countries claim the Himalayan region of Kashmir, for instance.
15. The dispute over Kashmir adds tension to the relationship between the two states. They have fought three wars since 1947.

16. Those wars are especially worrying nowadays, given the fact that both countries have nuclear weapons.
17. And the borders are still being contested in such wars. In 1971 the two countries fought over East Pakistan, which seceded to become Bangladesh.
18. All of that work to decide where the countries would be split was done by Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer who hadn't actually been to India before the Partition process began.
19. He is one of the central controversial figures of Partition but he just drew a line – behind it was the political impetus led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, hailed as a hero in Pakistan, the country he created, but a villain in India.
20. Partition was shocking in its specifics, with individual families being torn apart and separated. But it is shocking in its sheer scale, too: more than 10 million people were displaced during the transition, making it easily one of the biggest movements of people in history.
21. Up to two million people died during the move. Many of them simply went missing – including huge numbers of people who left western India but never knowingly arrived in Pakistan.
22. The movement of communities, especially in Punjab and Bengal, led to numerous other crimes. People were kidnapped, forced to convert and killed, and tens of thousands of women were subjected to sexual violence and murder.
23. Partition didn't happen immediately, at least not in clear ways. For instance, until 1948 Pakistan used Indian bank notes, which had the name of the country stamped over them. The Pakistani rupee arrived in 1948.
24. The Indian tricolour represents courage, truth and peace, and faith and chivalry. Its spinning wheel logo was replaced after Partition by the *ashoka chakra*, a wheel-of-life design connected to the Buddhist *dharma chakra*.
25. India's other major symbol, the Bengal tiger, was once seen throughout the country. But they are gradually dying out, and there are now fewer than 4,000 of them left in the wild.
26. British filmmaker Gurinder Chadha, whose own family was affected by Partition, examined its painful effects this year in her film *Viceroy's House*, which was released in March. Chadha's film leaps into the midst of this conflict when Mountbatten was tasked with ensuring a smooth transfer of imperial power.
27. India makes more than 1,100 films per year – twice as many as Hollywood. And though Bollywood is famous, it's only a small amount of that total: it refers specifically to Mumbai's Hindi film industry, which only makes about 200 films a year. Its immense

output makes it the world's most productive film industry.

28. The first Indian to win an Academy Award was Bhanu Athaiya in 1983, for designing the costumes in Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*. Ravi Shankar was nominated that same year for the film's score, but did not win. Satyajit Ray, director of 1955's *Pather Panchali* is the only Indian to have received an Honorary Academy Award.
29. The "ravanahatha" is a musical instrument believed by some to be the ancestor to the violin. Its sound box is usually either a gourd, a halved coconut shell or a hollowed-out cylinder of wood, with a membrane of stretched goat or other hide. The neck is then produced out wood or bamboo, with the strings created out of gut, hair or steel.
30. India's theatre tradition goes back at least 5,000 years starting out in narrative form comprised of its main elements, singing and dancing. The plots were initially based on history, folk tales and legends with the emphasis placed on visual representation as opposed to vocal. Its representation of the 'epic' is what Bertolt Brecht used to evolve his own creative theories surrounding the art form.
31. The highest-grossing Indian film of all time is the Disney-produced *Dangal*, a 2016 biographical sports drama directed by Nitesh Tiwari. The film stars Aamir Khan as an amateur wrestler who trains his daughters to become Commonwealth Games medallists. It's the fifth highest grossing non-English film of all time with takings of around £240m.
32. Television was first introduced into India in September 1959. There was only one national channel for more than 30 years: DD National. This was part of the All India Radio studio in Delhi – where it stayed until 1965 – and began life as an experimental telecast with just a small transmitter and makeshift studio. It began regular transmission as DD1 Channel in 1982.
33. The people of India are the world's biggest bookworms, reading on average 10.42 hours a week, almost twice as much time as the average Briton. As a result, Indians spend far less time watching TV and listening to radio.
34. Over half the books sold in India are in English, making the country the second-largest marketplace for books in English in the world, second only to the US.
35. Overall, India is the sixth-largest book market in the world – it's worth more than £3bn.
36. During the 1800s Indians used theatre as a means to protest the colonial rule. In 1876 the British Raj implemented the Dramatic Performances Act which dictated that each play would have to meet certain criteria set out by the government, the main one being that they didn't excite feelings of disaffection towards the law. Even after Independence, India partially kept the law, the new government keeping some control over the performing arts. However, come 1993, the act was labelled obsolete.

37. India's first election took place in 1952 under the auspices of an Electoral Commission that was established just two years after independence.
38. It was a progressive election, encouraged by its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. He made sure that the election happened as early as possible – and that it didn't use systems like the electoral college or exclude women or poor voters.
39. That was a tough ask: the size of the electorate was 176 million. To allow all of those people to vote, the country had to build 224,000 polling booths, fitted out with a total of two million steel boxes.
40. Now the electorate is four and a half times as big, with 814 million people getting a chance to vote. And there are 1.2 billion people in the country in total, who live in 29 states and seven union territories.
41. More of those people have access to a phone than they do a toilet.
42. Between them, they speak 22 official languages – though the national languages are Hindi and English – and hundreds of dialects.
43. India marks six seasons: summer, autumn, winter and spring, but also the summer monsoon and winter monsoon.
44. Cricket is the country's most popular sport, after it was introduced during British rule. But it's not officially the national sport – which is actually hockey.
45. The national fruit of India is the mango. (And it's also the national fruit of Pakistan, as well as being the national tree of Bangladesh.)
46. The national bird of India is the Indian peacock. It was chosen in 1963.
47. The country even has its own national microbe. It's the *lactobacillus delbrueckii*, and was picked in 2012 during a biodiversity conference that was held in Hyderabad. It was picked out by schoolchildren.
48. India uses the Rupee as its national currency, issued by the Reserve Bank of India. The symbol, which looks like the letter "R" is derived from the Devanagari consonant "र", but Latin letter was adopted in 2010.
49. The Indian economy is 27 times larger than it was at the time of Partition in 1947.
50. India's average annual GDP growth rate since 2006 has been 7 per cent.
51. There were 420 million people in India prior to 1947. That fell to 350 million at Partition. Today there are 1.3 billion.

52. A sixth of Indians – 218 million people – are estimated to live in extreme poverty today.
53. India has more individual people in extreme poverty than in China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia combined.
54. Indian GDP per capita (at Purchasing Power Parity) in 2016 was \$4,900 – 12 per cent of the UK's GDP per capita.
55. The dollar-value of the Indian economy this year is \$2.25 trillion. It is expected by the IMF to overtake the dollar value of the UK economy in 2018.
56. India is the world's biggest tea producer. (Tea is also by a long way its most popular drink.)
57. It may be no surprise that the country produces 70 per cent of the world's spices.
58. London has more Indian restaurants than even the biggest Indian cities.
59. India is the most vegetarian place in the world, with the **fewest meat-eaters**.
60. Despite being so large, all of India uses a single timezone.
61. India's rail network is the fourth largest in the world with more than a million employees.
62. The country has the world's second-biggest road network – only the US's is larger.
63. Exhaust fumes make New Delhi's air the **most polluted in the world**. Just breathing it for one day during Diwali is **reportedly** like smoking 113 cigarettes.
64. India has the most post offices in the world: nearly 155,000, including a **floating post office** on Dal Lake in Srinagar.
65. The country is known for the heights it has climbed in international cricket. India's Himachal Pradesh region is home to Chail, a hill station that was once the summer retreat of the Maharaja of Patiala. There sits the highest cricket ground in the world, at 2,250 metres. Howzat!
66. And that's not the only claim that India has to being very, very tall. Khardung La – a pass that can be found in the state of Jammu and Kashmir – is also said to be the tallest motorable road in the world. But unfortunately that doesn't appear to be true: satellite observations show the pass to be slightly less high than previously thought, and that another Indian road might in fact be the tallest one.

67. India is home to the man with the world's biggest family, **Ziona Chana**, with around 180 people, including 39 wives and 94 children.
68. The game today known as snakes and ladders began in India, and was originally called *moksha patam*. Inside its rules can be seen some of the philosophies that are part of Indian thought to this day, particularly in its emphasis on destiny and karma. (When it was imported into England, the Victorians changed some of the virtues and vices to suit what they suggested were more western values.)
69. Played around the 7th century AD, the Indian game *chaturanga* is regarded as the precursor to chess.
70. The "Kumbh Mela" is a huge Hindu religious festival that's held every 12 years in India. It is regularly referred to as the biggest gathering of people in the world, though it can be very difficult to actually work out the size of such a huge gathering. As such, it's not clear how many people attend – but it's in the tens of millions.