

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XII · CODE 323

# Contemporary South Asia

CUET unit: Contemporary World Politics — Unit on South Asia & Regional Cooperation

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## Snapshot

- Maps South Asia (seven countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and explains its insulation by the Himalayas and the surrounding seas.
- Tracks the uneven democratic trajectory of the region — full democracy (India, Sri Lanka), restored/elective democracy (Pakistan, Bangladesh), abolition of monarchy (Nepal 2008), constitutional monarchy and multi-party reform (Bhutan 2008, Maldives 1968/2005).
- Surveys the major inter-state conflicts: Kashmir, Siachen, nuclear arms race, Indus & Ganga water sharing, Sir Creek, ethnic strife, refugee/migration flows.
- Highlights cooperation frameworks — SAARC (1985), SAFTA (signed 2004, effective 2006), Indus Waters Treaty (1960), Indo-Sri Lanka FTA (1998), Farakka Treaty (1996), confidence-building measures with Pakistan.
- Argues that South Asia's future as a "conflict-prone zone" or a "regional bloc" rests on its own people and governments, not on outside powers like China or the US.

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

The expression "**South Asia**" conventionally includes seven countries: **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**; **Afghanistan and Myanmar** are sometimes added; **China is a key player** but is not part of the region. The Himalayas in the north and the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal to the south, west and east give South Asia a **geographical insulation** that has produced striking linguistic, social and cultural distinctiveness (NCERT §What is South Asia?, p. 30).

The central narrative is the region's **uneven democratic trajectory**. **India and Sri Lanka** have operated democracies continuously since independence. **Pakistan and Bangladesh** have alternated between civilian and military rule, with Bangladesh remaining democratic in the post-Cold War period. **Nepal** was a constitutional monarchy till 2006; the monarchy was **abolished in 2008** and Nepal became a democratic republic; a new constitution was adopted in **2015**. **Bhutan** became a constitutional monarchy and emerged as a **multi-party democracy in 2008** under

royal leadership. **The Maldives** was a Sultanate till **1968**, became a presidential republic, and in **June 2005** the parliament voted unanimously to introduce a multi-party system; the MDP won the 2018 elections (NCERT pp. 30–31).

NCERT then presents a remarkable empirical finding from a **SDSA (State of Democracy in South Asia) survey** of **over 19,000 respondents** across the five large South Asian countries: there is **widespread popular support for democracy** across rich and poor, rural and urban, religious and secular respondents — directly challenging the older Western view that democracy requires economic prosperity (NCERT p. 31).

**Pakistan's political trajectory** (NCERT §The Military and Democracy in Pakistan, pp. 32–33) shows the most volatile pattern. After Pakistan framed its first constitution, General **Ayub Khan**, and then **Yahya Khan**, ruled. The **Bhutto government** ran from 1971 to 1977; he was ousted by **General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977**; an elected government under **Benazir Bhutto** took office in **1988**; political competition between the PPP and Muslim League continued until **General Pervez Musharraf** removed **Nawaz Sharif in 1999**; Musharraf got himself elected President in **2001**; and **democratically elected leaders have ruled since 2008**. NCERT identifies four factors behind Pakistan's failure to build stable democracy: the social dominance of military, clergy and landowning aristocracy; the conflict with India strengthening pro-military groups; the lack of genuine international support for democracy; and US/Western backing of military rule on grounds of "global Islamic terrorism" fears and nuclear arsenal concerns.

**Bangladesh** (NCERT §Democracy in Bangladesh, pp. 33–35) was part of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971. **Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman** led the autonomy movement; the **Awami League** swept the East Pakistan polls in 1970; **Yahya Khan's army crackdown** triggered a massive refugee crisis; the **December 1971 Indo-Pak war** ended with Pakistani surrender and Bangladesh's independence. Bangladesh's constitution declared faith in **secularism, democracy and socialism**; Mujib amended it in 1975 to a presidential system and banned all parties except the Awami League; he was assassinated in **August 1975**; **Ziaur Rahman** formed the BNP and won the 1979 polls but was later assassinated; **Lt Gen H.M. Ershad's** rule ended with mass protests in **1990**; **multi-party representative democracy** has run since the **1991 elections**.

**Nepal** (NCERT §Monarchy and Democracy in Nepal, pp. 35–36) was a Hindu kingdom that became a constitutional monarchy through the **1990 democratic constitution**. A **Maoist insurrection** spread through the 1990s. In **2002**, the king abolished parliament; in **April 2006**, massive protests led by a **Seven Party Alliance (SPA)**, the Maoists and civil society forced the king to restore the House of Representatives; a Constituent Assembly drafted a new constitution; Nepal became a **democratic republic in 2008**; a **new constitution** was adopted in **2015**.

**Sri Lanka** (NCERT §Ethnic Conflict and Democracy in Sri Lanka, pp. 36–37) has retained democracy since 1948 independence; politics was dominated by Sinhala-majority forces hostile to the Tamils who had migrated from India. Militant Tamil

nationalism led by the **LTTE from 1983** fought for a separate "**Tamil Eelam**"; LTTE controlled the north-east at one stage; the **LTTE was vanquished in 2009**. Despite the long conflict, Sri Lanka has registered considerable economic growth, has had the highest per capita GDP in the region for many years, was the **first South Asian country to liberalise its economy**, and has maintained continuous democracy.

**Inter-state relations. India-Pakistan** conflicts (NCERT pp. 37–38) include the **wars of 1947–48 and 1965 over Kashmir** (the 1947–48 war split Kashmir along the **Line of Control**); the **1971 war** which was decisive but did not settle Kashmir; the contested **Siachen Glacier**; the **post-1998 nuclear arms race** following the **Pokhran (India) and Chagai Hills (Pakistan)** tests; the Indian charge of Pakistan-supported low-intensity militancy in Kashmir and earlier in Khalistan; the alleged ISI use of Bangladesh and Nepal as bases for anti-India operations; and Pakistan's reciprocal accusation that India foments trouble in Sindh and Balochistan.

**Water disputes** (NCERT pp. 38–39) are managed through pioneering treaties. India and Pakistan signed the **Indus Waters Treaty in 1960** with World Bank mediation; it has **survived every military conflict**. The **Sir Creek (Rann of Kutch)** demarcation remains unresolved, with implications for sea resources. India–Bangladesh tensions over **Ganga and Brahmaputra** waters have been partly addressed by the **1996 Farakka Treaty** for sharing of Ganga waters, and by the **2015 exchange of enclaves**.

**India-Nepal** has the unusual feature of a treaty allowing citizens of each country to **travel and work in the other without visa or passport** (NCERT §India and its Other Neighbours, p. 40). Tensions over Nepal–China warmth, Indian dissatisfaction with Nepal's response to anti-Indian elements, and the Maoist movement (seen as a security concern given India's Naxalite belt) coexist with strong trade, water and electricity cooperation. **India-Sri Lanka** ties were stress-tested by the **1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord** and the deployment of the **Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) from 1987 to 1990**; the IPKF withdrew in 1989 without achieving its objective; India later adopted a "disengagement" policy on Sri Lanka's internal issues; the **Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement of 1998** and post-tsunami reconstruction help restored warmth. **India-Bhutan** has been remarkably conflict-free; the **Bhutanese monarch's drive to weed out north-east Indian militants** from Bhutanese territory helped India; India runs large hydroelectric projects there and is Bhutan's biggest source of development aid. **India-Maldives** ties have been warm; in **November 1988**, India sent its **air force and navy** to foil a Tamil mercenary attack from Sri Lanka on the Maldives.

The final substantive section concerns **regional cooperation**. The **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** was founded with the **Charter signed in December 1985** at the first summit in **Dhaka**. Persistent political differences have limited its success. The **South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)** was **signed in 2004 at the 12th SAARC Summit in Islamabad** and came into effect on **1 January 2006**. Its aim is the lowering of trade tariffs; smaller neighbours fear it will allow India to dominate their markets, while India argues it will

yield economic gains and improved political cooperation (NCERT §Peace and Cooperation, pp. 42–43).

**External powers. China-India** ties improved over the last decade; economic ties have multiplied since 1991; but China's strategic partnership with Pakistan remains a major irritant. The **United States** has deepened its engagement post-Cold War, working as a moderator in India-Pakistan ties; the large South Asian diaspora and the region's markets enhance American interest. NCERT's concluding argument is that South Asia's future as a conflict-prone zone or as a coherent regional bloc depends primarily on its own people and governments, not on outside powers.

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
South Asia	Region usually comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, bounded by the Himalayas, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal	30
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, founded with Charter signed in Dhaka in December 1985	32, 42
SAFTA	South Asian Free Trade Agreement signed in 2004, in force from 1 January 2006, aimed at lowering trade tariffs	32, 42
Indus Waters Treaty	1960 agreement between India and Pakistan, signed with World Bank help, for sharing waters of the Indus basin	39
Line of Control (LoC)	Boundary dividing Pakistan-occupied Kashmir from Indian Jammu and Kashmir, drawn after the 1947-48 war	38
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, militant Tamil organisation fighting Sri Lankan army since 1983 for a separate "Tamil Eelam", vanquished in 2009	36-37
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force deployed in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990 under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord	32, 40
Indo-Sri Lanka Accord	1987 accord under which India sent troops to stabilise Sri Lankan government-Tamil relations	32, 37
Farakka Treaty	1996 India-Bangladesh agreement on sharing of the Ganga waters	32
Tashkent Agreement	1966 agreement signed by India and Pakistan after the 1965 war	32
Simla Agreement	1972 India-Pakistan agreement signed after the 1971 war	32
Seven Party Alliance (SPA)	Coalition of Nepali parties that, with Maoists and activists, led the largely non-violent 2006 pro-democracy movement in Nepal	35
ISI	Inter Services Intelligence, Pakistan's spy agency, alleged by India to be involved in anti-India operations	38

Term	Definition	Page
Awami League	Bangladeshi political party led by Sheikh Mujib; won the 1970 East Pakistan polls	33
Tamil Eelam	Separate state demanded by the LTTE in northern and eastern Sri Lanka	36
Sir Creek (Rann of Kutch)	Unresolved India-Pakistan maritime boundary dispute	38
Maoist insurrection (Nepal)	Decade-long armed movement that culminated in 2006 transition	35
1971 Indo-Pak War	Decisive war that produced Bangladesh	34
Pokhran tests (1998)	India's nuclear tests	38
Chagai Hills tests (1998)	Pakistan's nuclear tests	38
Look East / Act East	Indian policy frameworks for engagement with ASEAN and beyond	22
Multi-party democracy (Maldives, 2005)	Year multi-party system introduced by parliament	31
SDSA survey	State of Democracy in South Asia survey, 19,000+ respondents	31
Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman	Bangladesh's founding leader	33
Pervez Musharraf	Pakistani military ruler 1999–2008	33

### 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- HDR 2018 development indicators table comparing Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka with the world and developing-country averages — Sri Lanka tops on life expectancy, literacy, GDP per capita and HDI rank (76); Pakistan is lowest on HDI (150) (NCERT, p. 31).
- "Timeline of South Asia since 1947" — key dates: 1947 Partition; 1948 Sri Lanka independence and first Indo-Pak Kashmir conflict; 1954-55 Pakistan joins SEATO and CENTO; 1960 Indus Waters Treaty; 1962 India-China border war; 1965 Indo-Pak war; 1966 Tashkent; 1971 Bangladesh liberation and Indo-Soviet Treaty; 1972 Simla; 1974 India's first nuclear test; 1985 SAARC Charter in Dhaka; 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and IPKF; 1988 Maldives coup foiled; 1996 Farakka; 1998 nuclear tests and Indo-Sri Lanka FTA; 1999 Lahore bus diplomacy and Kargil; 2001 Agra Summit; 2004 SAFTA; 2007 Afghanistan joins SAARC; 2014 18th SAARC Summit Kathmandu (NCERT pp. 32).

- SDSA bar-graphs based on interviews with 19,000+ ordinary citizens in the five big South Asian countries showing widespread support for democracy (NCERT p. 31).
- **Process map** — region definition (§What is South Asia?) → democratic trajectories country-by-country (§Military and Democracy in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka) → India-Pakistan bilateral issues (§India-Pakistan Conflicts) → India and other neighbours (§India and its Other Neighbours) → SAARC and SAFTA (§Peace and Cooperation) → external powers (§Peace and Cooperation).

## 2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
1947 Partition	Birth of India and Pakistan	p. 32
1947–48 Kashmir war	Drew the Line of Control	p. 38
1960 Indus Waters Treaty	India-Pakistan water-sharing, World Bank mediated	p. 39
1965 Indo-Pak war	Second war over Kashmir	p. 32
1966 Tashkent Agreement	Post-1965 war settlement	p. 32
1971 Indo-Pak war	Creation of Bangladesh	p. 34
1972 Simla Agreement	Post-1971 settlement	p. 32
1985 SAARC Charter (Dhaka)	Founded SAARC	p. 42
1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and IPKF	India deployed peacekeepers in Sri Lanka	p. 40
1988 Maldives mercenary attack foiled	Indian air force and navy intervention	p. 41
1996 Farakka Treaty	India-Bangladesh Ganga waters	p. 32
1998 Pokhran and Chagai nuclear tests	India and Pakistan become declared nuclear powers	p. 38
1998 Indo-Sri Lanka FTA	Bilateral free trade	p. 40
1999 Kargil	Limited war over Kashmir front	p. 32
2004 SAFTA signed (Islamabad)	At 12th SAARC Summit	p. 42
1 January 2006 SAFTA in force	Implementation date	p. 42
2008 Nepal becomes democratic republic	Monarchy abolished	p. 36
2009 LTTE vanquished	End of Sri Lankan civil war	p. 37
2015 Nepal new constitution	Republican constitution adopted	p. 36

## 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- SAARC Charter year and SAFTA year are different — SAARC Charter signed in **1985** (Dhaka), SAFTA signed in **2004** (12th SAARC Summit, Islamabad), in force **1 January 2006**.
- Nepal events: Monarchy was **abolished in 2008**, not in 2006; the 2006 movement only restored the House of Representatives. The **new constitution** was adopted in **2015**.
- Pakistan timeline: General Zia removed **Bhutto in 1977**; Musharraf removed **Nawaz Sharif in 1999**; Musharraf got himself elected President in **2001**; democratically elected leaders rule **since 2008**.
- Maldives political transition: Sultanate till **1968**, then presidential republic; multi-party system introduced in **June 2005**, not earlier.
- The Indus Waters Treaty (1960) is with **Pakistan**; the Farakka Treaty (1996) is with **Bangladesh** — students often swap them. LTTE was vanquished in **2009**.
- **South Asia = seven countries** — Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. Afghanistan and Myanmar are sometimes added but China is NOT part of the region.
- **India-Nepal visa-free travel** is a treaty arrangement (NOT a free trade agreement or a defence pact).
- **Bangladesh constitutional values**: secularism, democracy, socialism — Mujib amended to presidential in 1975.
- **SDSA survey** covered the FIVE big South Asian countries with 19,000+ respondents; trap items inflate to "all seven."
- **LTTE armed struggle from 1983** — NOT 1971 or 1987 (1987 is IPKF deployment).
- **November 1988 Maldives intervention** — Indian air force and navy responded to a Maldivian request for help.

## Practice MCQs

## PYQ Alignment

Contemporary South Asia is one of the highest-yielding chapters in CUET Political Science papers, typically generating 8-12 MCQs across CUET 2023-25 — focused on the SAARC/SAFTA timeline, Indus Waters/Farakka treaties, the political trajectories of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, the LTTE/IPKF, and India's bilateral relations

with each neighbour. Statement-based and matching-the-following questions on years (1985, 1996, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2015) are particularly common.

### CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.30 (CUET 2023)** Match List I with List II A. Bhutan B. Maldives C. India D. Sri Lanka I. First country in South Asia to liberalise its economy II. Country located across the border with most of South Asian countries III. Island country with a monarchy IV. Landlocked country with monarchy till 1968 Options:

- A) A-I, B-II, C-IV, D-III B) A-II, B-IV, C-III, D-I C) A-III, B-II, C-I, D-IV D) A-IV, B-III, C-I, D-II
- Tests: Contemporary South Asia Answer: Not in extracted key

**Q.31 (CUET 2023)** India and Pakistan have not reached agreement over the demarcation line in Sir Creek. The line in Sir Creek exists in which Indian state?

- A) Maharashtra B) Punjab C) Gujarat D) Rajasthan
- Tests: Contemporary South Asia Answer: Not in extracted key

### CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.27 (CUET 2024)** In 1966, who made the six-point proposal for the greater autonomy of East Pakistan?

- A) Jawaharlal Nehru B) Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman C) General Yahya Khan D) Zulfikar Ali Bhutto
- Tests: Contemporary South Asia Answer: Not in extracted key

**Q.28 (CUET 2024)** Which country joined SAARC in 2007?

- A) Bhutan B) Nepal C) Afghanistan D) Bangladesh
- Tests: Contemporary South Asia Answer: Not in extracted key

**Q.29 (CUET 2024)** Which country is not included in South Asia?

- A) Pakistan B) China C) Bangladesh D) Nepal
- Tests: Contemporary South Asia Answer: Not in extracted key

### CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.30 (CUET 2025)** In which year did India and Bangladesh sign the Farakka Treaty for sharing Ganga water?

- A) 1985 B) 1988 C) 1991 D) 1996
- Tests: Contemporary South Asia Answer: Not in extracted key

**Q.34 (CUET 2025)** The Vajpayee–Musharraf Summit 2001 was held in:

- A) Agra B) Lahore C) Delhi D) Islamabad
- Tests: Contemporary South Asia Answer: Not in extracted key

**Q.41 (CUET 2025)** In which year did Nepal become a democratic republic after abolishing the monarchy?

- A) 2004 B) 2015 C) 2008 D) 2010
- Tests: Contemporary South Asia Answer: Not in extracted key

**Q.42 (CUET 2025)** Which among the following statements is not correct about the nature of state and society in Nepal?

- A) Nepal was a Buddhist Kingdom in the past. B) The monarchy was supported by the army. C) The Maoists in Nepal were successful in spreading their influence in Nepal. D) There was a triangular conflict among the monarchists, democrats and Maoists in Nepal. **Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.43 (CUET 2025)** In which year did the King of Nepal accept the demand for a New Democratic Constitution?

- A) 1999 B) 1990 C) 1992 D) 1993 **Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.44 (CUET 2025)** What is the name of the famous activist shown in the picture?

- A) Nahar Thapa B) Durga Thapa C) Renuka Kaini D) Rita Koirala **Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.45 (CUET 2025)** The non-violent movement to restore democracy in Nepal was led by:

- A) Socialist Democratic Alliance B) Pro-Democracy Initiative C) All Nepal Democratic Party D) Seven Party Alliance **Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.46 (CUET 2025)** In which year was Nepal declared a democratic republic after abolishing monarchy?

- A) 2004 B) 2015 C) 2008 D) 2010 **Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.47 (CUET 2025)** Which among the following statements is not correct regarding the nature of state and society in Nepal?

- A) Nepal was a Hindu kingdom earlier. B) The monarchy was supported by the army. C) The Maoists spread their influence widely. D) There was no conflict among monarchists, democrats and Maoists. **Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.48 (CUET 2025)** In which year did the King of Nepal accept the demand for a New Democratic Constitution?

- A) 1999 B) 1990 C) 1992 D) 1993 **Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.49 (CUET 2025)** Identify the famous activist shown in the picture.

- A) Nahar Thapa B) Durga Thapa C) Renuka Kaini D) Rita Koirala **Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.50 (CUET 2025)** The non-violent movement to restore democracy in Nepal was led by:

- A) Socialist Democratic Alliance B) Pro-Democracy Initiative C) All Nepal Democratic Party D) Seven Party Alliance
- Tests:** Contemporary South Asia **Answer:** Not in extracted key

