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EDITION 2026

PYQ Vault

560

QUESTIONS

50

DAYS

10

YEARS OF PYQS

DAY 41

India & South Asia, Part I • 6 questions

Every question carries a **Flow Snapshot** — and a handwritten model answer on the channel. By the end of this series, **no PYQ will be unfamiliar.**

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

“Despite the differences between India and Pakistan on various issues, Indus Water Treaty has stood the test of times.” In the light of this statement, discuss the recent developments over this issue.

FLOW SNAPSHOT *how the answer moves*

Intro routes

R1 1960, World Bank → basin divided, not shared → design built to keep water out of politics

R2 three wars, standoffs 1987–2019, treaty intact → durability came from institutional insulation, not goodwill

Body flow

eastern rivers India / western rivers Pakistan, ~20% non-consumptive → Permanent Indus Commission + neutral expert + arbitration → insulation from politics → **Drabu**: among the world’s most successful → survived 1965, 1971, 1999 → strain both ways: Tulbul objections / 80% grievance / Article XII lock → **Ranjan**: water nationalism, militant pick-up → Uri 2016 “blood and water” → 2019 threat → 23 April 2025 suspension, Article 62 Vienna Convention

Counter-view

leverage limited → **Drabu**’s arithmetic: diversion or storage, thirty to fifty years, severe environmental cost → **Yaqoob**: treaty a “non-exit” partnership

Conclusion routes

R1 treaty lasted because water stayed out of politics → recent turn breaks that insulation

R2 suspension short of termination → **Chellaney**: renegotiate for changed realities as the steadier route

The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, brokered by the World Bank, divided the basin instead of sharing it. The eastern rivers went to India, the western rivers to Pakistan and allowed India about 20% of western-river water for non-consumptive use.

Its machinery of a Permanent Indus Commission, neutral expert determination and arbitration kept water insulated from politics. Iftikhar A. Droba calls it one of the world's most successful water-sharing arrangements. It survived the wars of 1965, 1971 and 1999 & the standoffs from 1987 to 2019.

Pakistan objected to Indian projects on the western rivers for example Tubul was among them. India resented conceding nearly 80% of the flow. Article XII allows modification only if both ratify. Amit Ranjan argues how a widening supply-demand gap turned this into water nationalism that militant groups took up.

After Uri in 2016, Narendra Modi said "blood & water can't flow together", and in 2019 India threatened to stop every drop. On 23 April 2025, after Pahalgam, India suspended the treaty, invoking Article 62 of the Vienna Convention & a fundamental change of circumstances.

Drabu's arithmetic shows diversion or storage on the western rivers would take 30 to 50 years to affect Pakistan, at severe environmental cost. Asma Yaqoob calls the treaty as a "non-exit" partnership.

The treaty lasted because water stayed out of politics. Suspension stops short of termination, & Brahma Chellaney argues for renegotiating it on the basis of reality.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 10 marks

Analyze the impact of Hydro politics on Indo Bangladesh relations.

FLOW SNAPSHOT *how the answer moves*

Intro routes

R1 54 shared rivers, formal agreement on only two → JRC dormant since 2011 → hydro politics sets a ceiling, does not break the tie
R2 lower riparian, lean-season flow falling → Farakka and Teesta still open after five decades → the one file that stays stuck while the rest of the relationship advances

Body flow

Teesta as the test case → 1983 ad hoc: India 39%, Bangladesh 36% → 2011 collapse → coalition politics + West Bengal's objections → river sustains state's poorest districts → **Ghosh** on Farakka: transboundary → inter-state → block is federal, not diplomatic → Sikkim dams cut lean-season flow → delay read as indifference → **Rahman**: frustration, trust weakened → **Majumdar**: spillover to India's Brahmaputra position vs China

Counter-view

land boundary and maritime disputes settled → connectivity and energy ties grew alongside → impact is a ceiling, not a rupture

Conclusion routes

R1 water marks the limit of that progress → **Muni**: strategic interests not to be blocked by narrow domestic concerns
R2 constraint is internal, so the remedy is internal → settling Teesta protects India's wider riparian position

India and Bangladesh shares 54 rivers, but only the Ganga & the Teesta carry formal agreements. The Joint Rivers Commission has been dormant since 2011.

Hydro politics has not broken the relationship and has set a ceiling on it. The 1983 ad hoc arrangement gave India 39% & Bangladesh 36%. The framework agreement collapsed in 2011 over coalition politics & West Bengal's objections as the river sustains its poorest districts.

Nilanjan Ghosh argues the same shift at Farakka, where a transboundary dispute is becoming an inter-state. The block is now federal and not diplomatic.

For a lower riparian whose lean-season flow has fallen with dams in Sikkim, delay is called as indifference. Mirza Zulfiqar Rahman states that the impasse has bred frustration and weakened trust in Bangladesh. Jaideep Majumdar argues that failure could weaken India's position on the Brahmaputra with China.

The land boundary and maritime disputes were settled and connectivity & energy ties grew. Water marks the limit of that progress.

Therefore, SD Muni argues that strategic interests should not be blocked by narrow domestic concerns.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 15 marks

Write a brief analysis of the ethnic conflicts and cross-border migrations along India-Myanmar and India-Bangladesh borders.

FLOW SNAPSHOT *how the answer moves*

Intro routes

R1 neither border follows ethnic geography → both cut across it → 3,700 km Bangladesh line + Myanmar frontier along four NE states → belonging before numbers

R2 two porous frontiers splitting kin communities → movement read as an identity question first, a numbers question second

Body flow

Bangladesh side = settlement → poverty / floods / 1971 → 30–40 million → Tripura's demography → shared language hides the migrant → contest over land, jobs, cultural dominance → AASU → Assam Accord 1985 → NRC → Myanmar side = insurgency + refuge → NSCN-K through the same porousness → Feb 2021 coup → refugees into Mizoram → Rohingyas as the joint between the two borders → statelessness 1974 / 1982 → treated as Bangladeshi immigrants → UN "ethnic cleansing"

Counter-view

hardening the line has a real case → fencing + scrapped FMR → trafficking, forged voter cards, ISI support → but the ethnic conflict predates the migration → **Ross Mallick**, colonial state with new rulers → 220 ethnic groups in one administrative frame → separatism mobilised

Conclusion routes

R1 Ghoshal → dormancy or militancy turns on state capacity to accommodate → fencing buys time, accommodation buys settlement

R2 flow follows growth asymmetry → control alone cannot hold the line → work permits + development + Gujral Doctrine on root causes

The 3700 Km Bangladesh line, the world's longest land border & the Myanmar frontier along Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh split Kin communities.

Movement across them raises a question of belonging before one of numbers. The Bangladesh border focuses on settlement. Poverty, floods & 1971 push people across a porous frontier; 30 to 40 million by estimate, with Tripura's demography visibly changed.

Shared language makes migrants hard to identify & the contest turns on land, jobs & cultural dominance. It led to the AASU agitation, the Assam Accord of 1985, the National Register of Citizens.

The Myanmar border produces insurgency & refuge. NSCN-IM work through the porousness and the coup of February 2021 pushed refugees into Mizoram.

The Rohingyas join the two borders i.e. stateless under Myanmar's law of 1974 & 1982 and treated there as immigrants from Bangladesh. They were also called the victims of what the UN calls "ethnic cleansing".

Fencing & the scrapped Free Movement Regime viewed as a solution to trafficking, forged voter cards, ISI support to militancy. But the ethnic conflict predates the migration. Ross Mallick argues that "the post-colonial state is actually the colonial state with new rulers", pressing the region's 220 ethnic groups into one administrative frame & mobilising separatism.

Migration inflames the wound and follows growth. The living standards rise faster & control gets harder. Ghoshal states the assertions move between dormancy & militancy with the state's capacity to accommodate grievance.

Therefore, Fencing gives time but work permits, development & the Gujral Doctrine's attention to root causes focuses on settlement.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 10 marks

Discuss the steps required to realise 'hydro-co-operation' between India and Bangladesh

FLOW SNAPSHOT *how the answer moves*

Intro routes

R1 54 rivers, only two under agreement → JRC idle since 2011 → water shared river by river, as volume → steps must move it to basin management

R2 what has failed is the frame, not the goodwill → each river negotiated separately, each deal a division of quantity → co-operation begins when the unit shifts from river to basin

Body flow

institutional first: JRC revived, stronger mandate, mediation capacity (**Raja Mohan**) → procedural content: hydrological data exchange, joint feasibility studies for hydro sites, framework agreements on sharing / operation / disputes (**Karim**) → engineering reform: Farakka's design ignored sediment → ecologically informed engineering + basin commissions with powers above the states (**Nilanjan Ghosh**)

Counter-view

commissions above the states collide with federal politics → Teesta framework fell in 2011 to West Bengal's objections → five of its poorest districts live off the river → consent has to be carried, not overridden

Conclusion routes

R1 Muni: strategic interest not to be blocked by narrow domestic concerns → water linked to transit and trade → dividing volume becomes sharing benefit

R2 sequence the steps: data and institutions first, allocation last → a wider benefit is what makes the state's consent affordable

India and Bangladesh share 54 rivers, but only the Ganga and the Teesta are under formal agreement, and the Joint Rivers Commission has been inactive since 2011.

Water has been negotiated river by river, as a division of volume. Hydro-co-operation needs a wider frame i.e. management of the basin.

C. Raja Mohan wants the commission revived, with a stronger mandate and mediation capacity. Tariq A. Karim argues that routine exchange of hydrological data and joint feasibility studies for hydroelectric sites. The framework agreements fixing principles for sharing, operation and dispute resolution.

Nilanjan Ghosh traces the Farakka dispute to a design that ignored sediment, and states ecologically informed engineering and river basin commissions with powers above the states.

The Teesta framework collapsed in 2011 over West Bengal's objections as the river sustains five of its poorest districts. Any agreement must carry the state with it.

S.D. Muni views that the strategic interest should not be blocked by narrow domestic concerns. The linking of water to transit and trade turns the bargaining from dividing volume into sharing benefit.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 15 marks

What steps has India taken to regain its foothold in Afghanistan since the Taliban has taken over the country in August 2021?

FLOW SNAPSHOT *how the answer moves*

Intro routes

R1 Aug 2021 removes the government India backed → Pakistan gains the depth it sought → **Narayanan** “patron saint” → India returns by treating the new rulers as a fact to be used

R2 India’s Afghan stake outlived the Republic → delivery record survives the regime change → engagement resumes on interest, not approval

Body flow

move 1: deal with the regime itself → mend ties realistically → counter “strategic depth” through security cooperation → JeM / LeT under a regime that looks the other way → distance costlier than contact → move 2: fall back on the delivery advantage → **Sanjeev Kumar** / Peking 2018 study → more than UN and NATO gave → \$2 bn in energy and highways → China limited to relief and vaccines → move 3: hold the line on recognition → contacts with the ousted Republic’s leaders → Russia engaged without unsettling the West → seat inside the settlement

Counter-view

Sareen: engage, isolate, oppose together, engagement alone is not policy → **Katju**: still no permanent presence in Kabul → what has been regained is access, not standing

Conclusion routes

R1 Chaudhuri: facts used, not changed; recognition kept back as discretion → India is back in, on access not presence

R2 the return rests on delivery record and calculation → firm only when presence in Kabul follows

August 2021 removed the government India had backed, handing Pakistan the depth it sought. M.K. Narayanan calls Pakistan the "patron saint" of the new regime.

India has since worked its way back by treating the new rulers as a fact to be used. The first move was to deal with the regime itself & mending ties realistically. Countering Pakistan's search for "strategic depth" through security cooperation, JcM & LeT face a regime willing to look the other way, which made distance costlier than contact.

Dr. Sanjeev Kumar states a 2018 Peking university study that praised India's delivery of major projects. Afghans credited India with giving more than the UN and NATO.

\$2 billion in energy & highways still carries that record, while Chinese help since 2021 has rarely gone past relief and vaccines.

India has also held to the international consensus on recognition & kept contact with leaders of the ousted Republic. It engaged Russia without unsettling the West so that it stays inside any settlement.

Sushant Sareen argues that engagement must run alongside isolation & opposition and not replace them. Vivek Katju favours a permanent presence in Kabul without delay as dealing with Taliban is "supping with the devil, with a long spoon."

Rudra Chaudhuri argues that facts cannot be changed, only used and recognition stays a matter of discretion decided by political gain. India has used the facts to get back in built on access and not presence.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 10 marks

China's growing footprint and a tangible shift in power dynamics in Bangladesh has weakened India's leverage in Dhaka. Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT *how the answer moves*

Intro routes

R1 Doval: most important neighbour → showcase of Neighbourhood First → China has not displaced the record, only ended India's monopoly as Dhaka's option

R2 statement locates the cause outside → leverage has thinned, but the opening was made at home

Body flow

China's advantage is procedural → firms indifferent to profit / no conditions on transparency or reform / faster decisions than India manages → **Bajpai:** disinterested neighbour vs big brother India → dependency theory: reliance as structural inequality, Chinese finance loosens it → India's own unfinished business → 54 rivers, only two agreements → Teesta framework falls 2011 to West Bengal → **Rahman:** impasse undermines trust → credit lines and project delivery lagging

Counter-view

erosion is partial → transit dependence runs both ways → land boundary settled, maritime award accepted in Dhaka's favour

Conclusion routes

R1 what thinned is goodwill, not primacy → **Sabharwal:** fulfil commitments, expedite projects

R2 leverage in Dhaka was never coercive → it returns through delivery, not pressure

Bangladesh has been the showcase of Neighbourhood first. Ajit Doval called it India's most important neighbour.

China has not displaced that record. It has ended India's standing as Dhaka's only option, and that is what has thinned the leverage. China's advantage is procedural i.e. state-backed firms indifferent to profit, no conditions on transparency or reform and decisions faster than India managers.

Kanti Bajpai argues Beijing projecting itself as "a disinterested neighbour and a remarkably attractive alternative to big brother India". Dependency theory views Dhaka's reliance on India as structural inequality, which Chinese finance offers to loosen.

Out of 54 shared rivers only two carry an agreement, and the Teesta framework fell in 2011 to West Bengal's objections. Mirza Zulfikar Rahman argues that the impasse has undermined trust, while credit lines & project delivery have lagged.

Transit dependence runs both ways, the land boundary was settled, and India accepted the maritime award in Dhaka's favour. What India lost is goodwill, not primacy.

Sharat Sabharwal argues for fulfilling commitments and expediting projects fits the loss better than pressure.

— PYQ VAULT · DAY 41 · INDIA & SOUTH ASIA, PART 1 —

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Tomorrow — **Day 42**. Don't break the chain.



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