

PYQ Vault

560

questions

50

days

10

years of PYQs

DAY 42

India & South Asia, Part 2 · 7 questions

Every question carries a **Flow Snapshot** — how the answer moves.

A handwritten model answer follows on the channel — no PYQ stays unfamiliar.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 10 marks

“The Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship between India and Bhutan needs to be revised with more pragmatic, realistic obligations and responsibilities.”
Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 1949 Article 2 = guidance clause inherited from Simla → colonial residue → already removed in 2007 **R2** the statement targets a text that no longer exists → live question is practice, not parchment

Body flow

1949 guidance clause → **Raja Mohan**: replaced in 2007 as Bhutan democratised → 2007 text even-handed, mutual bar on use of territory → legal footing at Doklam → what a treaty cannot fix: hydropower = 94% of debt, Punatsangchhu I & II cost overruns, tariffs unsettled → India's answer is delivery: ₹10,000 cr thirteenth Plan, ₹4,033 cr Gelephu–Samtse rail, wholly GoI-funded

Counter-view

pressure has not eased → Bhutan–China boundary talks resume, March 2026 → youth resentment of dependence → **Das & Chakrabarti**: adjust to a changing society, make the partnership people-centric

Conclusion routes

R1 realistic obligations = projects on time + fair tariffs, not a new treaty **R2** 2007 revised the text; 2026 asks India to revise its conduct

India's 1949 treaty with Bhutan carried a colonial inheritance. Article 2 asked Bhutan to be guided by India's advice in external relations. This clause inherited from Simchula (1864).

C. Raja Mohan states that India replaced this treaty in 2007 as Bhutan moved towards democracy. The demand today is for pragmatic practice.

The 2007 treaty talks about both governments cooperate on national interests, and neither may allow its territory to be used against the other. This mutual clause gave India its legal footing at Doklam.

Hydropower explains 94% of Bhutan's debt, Punatsangchu-I & II tripled in cost and tariffs stay unsettled. India delivered ₹ 10,000 crore for Bhutan's 13th plan and two rail links to Gelephu and Samtse worth ₹ 4,033 crore, funded by India.

Bhutan resumed boundary talks with China in March 2026, and its youth resent dependence. *Swarnjan Das & Shantanu Chakrabarti* argue India must adjust to this changing society & make the partnership people-centric.

Therefore, the realistic obligations mean projects on time & fair tariffs and not a new treaty.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 10 marks

Discuss the future prospects of Indo-Nepal relations in the context of the recent publication of new Nepalese map wrongly claiming Indian territory.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 2020 map as reply to Nov 2019 map + Dharchula–Lipulekh road → written into the constitution → claim placed beyond any one government → prospects = management, not early settlement **R2** boundary unsettled since Sugauli 1816 → 2020 map converts an old ambiguity into a fixed national position → question becomes where the claim is argued, not who wins it

Body flow

Sugauli 1816, Kali source undefined → both readings arguable → politics turns ambiguity into quarrel → **Muni**: 2015 coercion builds anti-India nationalism → **Dixit**: map as Oli's reply to the blockade → 2026 verdict, Oli defeated → Shah in Parliament: encroachment both ways, experts to examine → **Dixit**: Limpiyadhura silent in the campaign → dispute moving from platform to table

Counter-view

claim not withdrawn → Lipulekh pilgrimage route still protested → China available as leverage

Conclusion routes

R1 Chellaney: geography leaves no substitute for India → steady, unsentimental ties, negotiation carried by interdependence **R2** settlement unlikely soon → success measured by keeping the map inside expert talks and out of election politics

Nepal's 2020 map claimed Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani. It was against India's November 2019 map and the Dharchula-Lipulekh road. Parliament wrote it into the constitution & shifted the claim beyond any single government.

The Sugauli Treaty of 1816 fixed the Kali as the boundary but left its source undefined. Politics turned that ambiguity into a quarrel. S.D. Muni argues how India's coercive handling of the 2015 constitutional crisis built the anti-Indian nationalism Oli used. Kanak Mani Dixit calls the map as his reply to the blockade.

Oli lost the 2026 election, and PM Balendra Shah told parliament that encroachment runs both ways.

He added that experts from both sides would examine it. Dixit argues that Limpiyadhura barely figured in the campaign.

Kathmandu still objects to the Lipulekh pilgrimage route, and China remains available as leverage. Brahma Chellaney argues that geography offers Nepal no substitute for India.

Therefore, he expects steady but unsentimental ties i.e. quiet negotiation carried by interdependence.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 10 marks

How does cross border terrorism impede the achievements of peace and security in South Asia?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 terrorism as state policy, not law-and-order problem → 1971 turn to asymmetric balancing → Bhutto's strategic depth + Zia's thousand cuts → peace blocked at source **R2** Pahalgam → one attack puts a treaty that outlived three wars in abeyance → the instrument is policy, not crime → peace blocked at source

Body flow

Tellis: plausible deniability + a war Pakistan cannot win + nuclear deterrent as licence → India's dual denial: no decisive victory, no regional pre-eminence → cost turns regional → no SAARC summit since 2014 → Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan abandon Islamabad with India after Uri → counter-terror work moves to BIMSTEC, Pakistan out → Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance since Pahalgam → **Pant:** engagement now conditioned by Pakistan's behaviour

Counter-view

coercion has not changed the incentive → **Cohen:** a stalemate neither side can win nor absorb → each retaliation carries escalation risk

Conclusion routes

R1 Pakistan's own war with the Afghan Taliban since February 2026 → strategy turning on its author → South Asia insecure while terrorism remains policy **R2** SAARC dead, BIMSTEC a workaround, Indus Treaty in abeyance → whole regional order now shaped by one strategy → peace waits on that strategy being given up

Cross-border terrorism in South Asia is not a low-and-order problem but an instrument of state policy. After 1971 Pakistan turned to asymmetric balancing as seen in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's search for strategic depth and Zia-ul-Haq's thousand cuts doctrine.

Regional peace is therefore blocked at its source. Ashley J. Tellis explains its durability. Terrorism gives the deep state plausible deniability & avoids a war Pakistan cannot win. It turns the nuclear deterrent into a licence to provoke India. India is denied both decisive victory and regional pre-eminence.

SAARC has held no summit since 2014 as after Uri, Bangladesh, Bhutan & Afghanistan abandoned the Islamabad summit with India.

Counter-terror work has shifted to BIMSTEC, which excludes Pakistan. Since Pahalgam the Indus Waters Treaty, which outlived three wars, remains in abeyance. Harsh V. Pant argues this as engagement now conditioned by Pakistan's behaviour.

Stephen P. Cohen saw a stalemate neither side can win nor absorb and each retaliation carries escalation risk.

Pakistan's own war with the Afghan Taliban since February 2026 shows its strategy turning against it. South Asia stays insecure while terrorism remains policy.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 20 marks

Explain the defence and foreign policy of India to address the challenges emerging out of the current India-China standoff at the Line of Actual control (LAC).

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 2020 ended the quiet-boundary assumption → two tracks, defence and diplomacy **R2** undefined LAC + the 2020 shock → India answers with capability on the ground and machinery at the table

Body flow

forward formations, logistics → roads, tunnels, airfields, BRO ₹7,394 crore inside the largest 2026-27 outlay → theatre command pending since April 2026 → denial, no new line → **Miller**, two-front → Shaksgam rejection, January 2026 → October 2024 Depsang-Demchok patrolling → August 2025 SR machinery: early-delimitation expert group, border-management working group, de-escalation tabled → Beijing review, May 2026 → **Chaudhuri**, security dilemma, dialogue as restraint → Indo-Pacific partnerships without alliance

Counter-view

buffer zones postpone claims, reserves close behind, calm reversible → **Jabin T. Jacob**, tactical stabilisation not strategic reset, India reactive, patrolling restricted → Doklam and Siliguri Corridor

Conclusion routes

R1 capability and mechanism contain, they do not resolve **R2** boundary moves only when both governments can defend a settlement at home

The 2020 crisis in eastern Ladakh an old assumption i.e. that an undefined boundary could stay quiet while the relationship grew.

India's response runs on two domains, a defence perspective that makes the ground hard to change & a diplomacy that ties normalcy to peace at the border.

Roads, tunnels & airfields have cut mobilisation time, and the 2026-27 budget raised BRO's capital to ₹ 7,394 crores. A single theatre command for the northern border has been pending since April 2026.

Manjari Chatterjee Miller argues to the prospect of a two-front war, and India rejected China's renewed Shaksgam Valley claim in January 2026 as illegal.

The October 2024 understanding resorted patrolling at Depsang & Demchok.

In August 2025 the Special representatives added an expert group on early delimitation & a working group on border management.

Rudra Chaudhuri calls this as a security dilemma, where each side treats the other's posture & partnerships as threatening & dialogue acts as restraint. India widens Indo-Pacific partnerships without joining an alliance.

Buffer zones postpone competing claims and both armies keep reserves close behind. Jabin T. Jacob argues this tactical stabilisation rather than a strategic reset. India's reactive & patrolling restricted where it once moved freely. Doklam & the Siliguri corridor leave the eastern flank exposed.

Therefore, capability & mechanism have contained the challenge without resolving it. The boundary will move only when both governments can defend a settlement at home.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 15 marks

Discuss the consequences of illegal cross-border migration in India's north-eastern region.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 consequence is political, not demographic → eight states, some 220 ethnic groups → who belongs stays permanently open → nation-building carries the cost **R2** migrants share language and ethnicity → identification hard → belonging becomes the region's open question → the cost is political, not demographic

Body flow

identification hard → land and jobs → ethnic conflict → **Weiner**, sons-of-the-soil → AASU agitation → Assam Accord 1985 → NRC → Tripura tribes a minority → cut-off keeps moving: 1971 → 2014 CAA → 2024 Exemption Order → AASU reads Accord displaced → forged voter cards → elites mobilise feeling against migrants → security costs: militants among migrants, trafficking, Myanmar frontier → FMR gone, fencing begun → hill communities split by the line oppose it → remedy breeds grievance → detection outruns due process → 1950 Act, DC decides in ten days, Tribunals bypassed → Supreme Court stays, 2026, fair determination → **Murshid**: pushbacks and Dhaka reset as one policy at two levels

Counter-view

Baruah locates it differently → Northeast as a frontier shaped by migration and settlement → detection alone cannot settle belonging

Conclusion routes

R1 four decades on → migrants remain → question open **R2** remedy breeds grievance → detection outruns due process → belonging still unsettled

Illegal migration on India's Northeast is political, not demographic. Across 8 states holding some 220 ethnic groups, it has left the question of who belongs permanently open.

Migrants share language & ethnicity with settled communities. The identification is hard and competition for land & jobs becomes ethnic conflict. Myron Weiner described it in the sons-of-the-soil theory. Assam saw the AASU agitation, the Assam Accord of 1985, the NRC. In Tripura the indigenous tribes became a minority.

The cut-off date keeps changing & AASU calls it as displacing the Accord. 1971 under the accord, 2014 under the CAA, 2024 under the Immigration & Foreigners (Exemption) order, 2025.

Forged voter cards affect elections & elites gain by mobilising against migrants.

Militants said to enter among migrants, trafficking & a Myanmar frontier used by insurgents. The Free Movement Regime is gone and fencing has begun, but hill communities split by that line oppose it and the remedy issues grievance.

In 2026 the Supreme Court orders stayed it and asked for fair determination. Navin Munshid calls the pushbacks & the reset with Dhaka as one policy at two levels.

Sanjib Baruah argues that the Northeast is a frontier shaped by migration & settlement and detection alone cannot settle belonging. Therefore, after four decades on the migrants remain and the issue is open.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 10 marks

Despite deep ties, India's relations with Sri Lanka have seen strains due to China's growing influence in Sri Lanka through investments and economic dominance. Analyse.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 2,500 years + free trade agreement since 2000 → thesis: strain traces to the space Indian delay left open, not to Chinese money **R2** open on China's three doors → ask what opened them → same thesis

Body flow

debt → Hambantota port → investment → Colombo Port City → trade → top import partner without any trade agreement → **Pant:** regional dominance that also pushes out other powers → **Bajpai:** "disinterested neighbour" against "big brother India" → India's own delivery deficit → Hambantota and Trincomalee offered to Delhi first → recovery since 2022 → nearly \$4 billion crisis support → 2025 defence agreement + Trincomalee energy hub → Cyclone Ditwah relief → Mazagon Dock in Colombo Dockyard → gap narrowed

Counter-view

Colombo reads it as balance, not choice → Hambantota's ninety-nine-year lease stays with China

Conclusion routes

R1 Raja Mohan: crisis support built goodwill and an opening to reframe ties **R2** strain real but not terminal → contest now turns on delivery, not sentiment

India & Sri Lanka share 2500 years of ties and a free trade agreement since 2000. The issue owes less to Chinese money than to the space Indian delay left open.

China entered through debt, investment & trade. It gave loan to build Hambantota port, invested the Colombo Port City, and it passed India as the top import partner without any trade agreement. Harsh V. Pant calls this as a bid for regional dominance that also pushes out other powers.

Kanti Bajpai argues why China projected itself as "a disinterested neighbour and a remarkably attractive alternative to big brother India." Delhi's own delays was a reason because Hambantota and Trincomalee were offered to India first.

The delivery has improved since 2022. India gave \$4 billion in crisis support, the 2025 defence agreement & Trincomalee energy hub. Relief after cyclone Ditwah & Mazagon Dock's majority stake in Colombo Dockyard have narrowed the gap.

Colombo saw this as balance, not choice, and Hambantota's 99 year lease stays with China. C. Raja Mohan argues that such support build goodwill and an opening to reframe ties.

The strain is real but not terminal. Therefore, it now turns on delivery.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 15 marks

Discuss the potential role India can play in initiating a possible phase of trilateral economic engagement among India, China and Nepal.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Nepal land-locked between two rising economies → foreign policy narrowed to both, not widened to the world → trilateral converts zero-sum contest over Kathmandu into positive-sum **R2** India already holds trade, power and transit instruments → constraint is not capacity but sequencing → begin project by project, not by grand framework

Body flow

functional advantage: largest trading partner + main power market + route to sea → ~45,000 MW viable potential vs 10,000 MW committed over ten years → Nepal already sells power to Bangladesh across Indian grid = trilateral working in practice → **Raja Mohan**: manage complex interdependence, not compete → functionalist case for shared needs → Lipulekh border trade reopened June 2026, Nepal protests the pass is its own → Himalayan economy still in two separate bilateral tracks

Counter-view

India distrusts BRI and any third presence in Nepal → suspicion dating to Sugauli → China rarely joins what it has not begun → **Muni**: Kathmandu plays the China card for better terms from Delhi; new government caught between regional and global rivalries

Conclusion routes

R1 India's own delivery is the first ceiling — 20 MW withheld, transmission limits → begin where politics is thinnest: power, transit, shared water data **R2 Chellaney**: geography leaves Nepal no substitute for India → Delhi can move first, trilateralism built project by project

Nepal is land-locked between two rising Asian economies, and its foreign policy has narrowed to them rather than widened to the world. A trilateral frame would turn the zero-sum contest over Kathmandu into a positive-sum one.

India is Nepal's largest trading partner, main power market & route to the sea. Against a viable potential near 45000 MW, India has committed to import 10,000 MW over 10 years. Nepal already sells power to Bangladesh across the Indian grid. C. Raja Mohan argues that India's task is not to compete with China here but to manage complex interdependence & the functionalist case for shared needs.

India & China reopened border trade at Lipulekh in June 2026 after 6 years & Nepal protested that the pass is its own.

The Himalayan economy runs in two separate bilateral tracks.

India disrupts the Belt & Road and any 3rd presence in Nepal, a suspicion dating to Sugauli. SD Muni states that Kathmandu plays the china card for better terms from Delhi. Its new government is one caught between regional and global rivalries.

In June 2026 India withheld clearance for 20 MW to Bangladesh due to transmission limits.

India should begin where politics is weak i.e. power, transit & shared water data. Brahma Chellaney argues that geography leaves Nepal no substitute for India and Delhi can move first.

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