

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 10 marks

What are the reasons for lack of 'regionness' in South Asia?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 regionness is a degree, not a fact of geography (**Hettne-Söderbaum**) → the level can fall as well as rise → South Asia: a region's material, not its politics **R2** the material is shared, the politics is not → because the founding act of these states was separation

Body flow

separation as the founding act (Partition, 1971, their wars) → national identity becomes a claim against a neighbour → **Muni**: non-Indian identity converting into anti-India sentiment → Pakistan: a working SAARC undoes partition → asymmetry (75% GDP, 70% people) → integration reads as dominance → institutional design (consensus rule + bilateral disputes excluded) → one quarrel halts the rest → no summit since 2014, trade near 5% → the level still falling (IWT in abeyance since April 2025; Dhaka asking for SAARC at a BIMSTEC table, July 2026)

Counter-view

the region does work where politics permits → Nepal's power to Bangladesh across the Indian grid, season after season → the deficit is political, not natural

Conclusion routes

R1 displaced, not absent → these states draw legitimacy from standing apart **R2** the region moves wherever politics allows it to → what is missing is a decision, not a basis

Regionness, according to Bjorn Hettne and Fredrik Soderbaum, is a degree that can fall as well as rise. South Asia has a region's material and not its politics.

Its states were built by separating from one another. Partition, 1971 & wars made national identity a claim against a neighbour. S.D. Muni states how the subcontinent's historical narrative builds a non-Indian identity among neighbours, which converts into anti-India sentiment. Pakistan views a working SAARC as undoing partition.

India holds over 75% of the region's GDP & 70% of its people and integration is viewed as dominance. No summit has met since 2014 & intra-regional trade stays near 5%.

The Indus Waters Treaty, which survived three wars, has stood in abeyance since April 2025. Dhaka focused on SAARC's revival in July this year but it was at a BIMSTEC meeting in Delhi.

Nepal sells power to Bangladesh across the Indian grid each season and the failure is political, not natural.

Regionness is displaced but not absent as these states draw their legitimacy from standing apart.