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Q5(d)

Why do ethnic conflicts and insurgencies continue to remain major impediments to regional co-operation in South Asia?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 marks · India and South Asia

India and South Asia: Regional Co-operation; South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation; South Asian Economic cooperation; Impediments to regional co-operation; India and the Look East / Act East policy.

Core demand of the question

- Show how ethnic conflict and insurgency in South Asia have hampered regional cooperation
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Insurgency and ethnic war in South Asia routinely cross borders.

Sanctuary charges, refugees, and military alerts replace trade talks.

SAARC and road-and-port plans stall on insecure stretches, including Afghanistan 2021 and Myanmar 2021.

Domestic ethnic politics also block a regional "we."

Cooperation needs a security floor that these conflicts remove.

Introduction

Ethnic conflict and insurgency in South Asia cross borders. They produce refugees, accusations of sanctuary, and military alerts. Regional cooperation needs trust and open borders. Those conflicts work against both.

Body

Cross-border chains

- Insurgents use neighbouring territory as sanctuary. States then treat neighbours as security problems rather than as market partners.
- Refugee flows, as with Rohingya in Bangladesh and populations after the Myanmar 2021 coup, strain host politics and bilateral agendas.
- Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka, Maoist and hill conflicts, and Afghanistan's wars after decades of intervention all feed suspicion among capitals.

Direct hits on cooperation

- SAARC cannot run a normal summit politics when terrorism and Kashmir dominate India-Pakistan exchanges.
- **Connectivity projects stop at insecure stretches:** Afghanistan after August 2021, Myanmar after February 2021, and parts of the North-East-Myanmar frontier.
- Intelligence and army staffs crowd out trade ministries in bilateral time.

Identity politics inside cooperation

- Ethnic parties and diaspora lobbies in one State mobilise against another State's government, which makes "regional identity" harder than a brochure.
- Majority nationalism in several States reads minority kin across the border as a threat.
- BIMSTEC and SCO then become partial clubs that manage some issues while the full South Asian table stays empty.

Flow diagram

Ethnic conflict insurgency -> Sanctuary refugees
Sanctuary refugees -> Trust failure
Trust failure -> SAARC connectivity stall

Conclusion

Ethnic war and insurgency hamper South Asian cooperation by closing borders, blocking summits, and turning neighbours into security files. Functional trade cannot spill over, in Mitrany's sense, while sanctuary and refugee crises remain first.

Facts & figures

SAARC summit freeze

Repeated postponement linked to India-Pakistan security crises and terrorism disputes.

Rohingya displacement

Refugee load on Bangladesh that crowded out other regional business with Myanmar.

Taliban August 2021

Return of an insurgent movement to Kabul, ending many India-built civilian projects' operating conditions.

Myanmar coup 2021

Civil war and border flux that hit India's east-bound connectivity.

Sri Lanka civil war legacy

Tamil question as a long India-Sri Lanka political constraint on easy regionalism.

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