1. Issues in the Region as in January 2018

1. All countries were colonies that became independent after 1945. Rivalry and goodwill, hope and despair, mutual suspicion and trust coexist in this turbulent region.

2. Countries have no clearly demarcated international borders as they were under one colonial ruler. Borders assigned before grant of independence, were not based on geographical or ethnic factors. Disputes continue due to arbitrarily defined borders.

3. Countries also have disputes of sharing of river waters.

4. There is a multiplicity of ethnic tribes, and diverse cultures and religions. Ethnic strifes on resource sharing and insurgnency, characterise the region.

5. Domestic politics determines conflicts and cooperation in South Asia. Insurgency and wars have characterised the region.

2. The 7 Countries in South Asia include the following:
3. Afghanistan and Myanmar are often included in South Asian region as these two were also parts of the British colonial extent. China, clearly separated by the Himalayas, is important, but is not a part of South Asia.

4. The main geographical insularity to the South Asian region is provided by the Great Himalayas in the north, the Indian Ocean in the south, the Bay of Bengal in the east and the Arabian Sea in the west. The clearly defined geographical divide has made the region distinctive on basis of linguistic, social and cultural factors. The region stands for diversity in one geopolitical space.

5. Political Systems in South Asia: Different political systems exist in the seven countries in the region.
Questions at the end of the Chapter:

1. Identify the country:
   a. The struggle among pro-monarchy, pro-democracy groups and extremists created an atmosphere of political instability: Nepal.
b. A landlocked country with multi-party competition: **Bangladesh.**

c. The first country to liberalise its economy in the South Asian region: **Sri Lanka.**

d. In the conflict between the military and pro-democracy groups, the military has prevailed over democracy: **Pakistan.**

e. Centrally located and shares borders with most of the South Asian countries: **India.**

f. Earlier the island had the Sultan as the head of state. Now, it’s a republic: **Maldives**

g. Small savings and credit cooperatives in the rural areas have helped in reducing poverty: **Bangladesh.**

h. A landlocked country with a monarchy: **Bhutan.**

2. **Which among the following statements about South Asia is wrong?**

   a) All the countries in South Asia are democratic. **Wrong.**

   b) Bangladesh and India have signed an agreement on river-water sharing.

   c) SAFTA was signed at the 12th SAARC Summit in Islamabad.

   d) The US and China play an influential role in South Asian politics.

3. **What are some of the commonalities and differences between Bangladesh and Pakistan in their democratic experiences?**

   **Answer.** The commonalities are:

   a) That from 1947 to 1971, both was one country. Bangladesh was called East Pakistan and was ruled from Islamabad as a province of Pakistan.
b) Both countries are Islamic States as Islam is recognized as the state religion.

c) Both have been ruled by military dictatorship from time to time, though both started as democracies in 1947.

The differences are that:

a) Pakistan started as a democracy with elected governments till 1999. Thereafter democracy has repeatedly failed to function effectively and military junta ruled from time to time. After 1999 military regime has taken over completely. Pakistan as in 2018 is known as a failed state, where terrorist organisations dominate the state institutions.

b) After gaining independence from Pakistan in March 1971 Bangladesh began as a parliamentary democracy. Then its constitution was amended to make it a presidential form of government. The President was assassinated in a military coup in 1975. Military rule continued till 1990 when elections were held based. A presidential government based on a multi-party democratic system has continued since then.

c) The official language of Pakistan is Urdu, while that of Bangladesh is Bengali.

(148 words)

4. List three challenges to democracy in Nepal.

Answer. Nepal changed its monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1990, by limiting the powers of the king. Therefore, the first challenge to democracy in Nepal is to ensure that the king continues to respect the constitutions limits to his powers.

The second challenge is for the king to control the Maoists movement. The Maoists believe in armed rebellion to overthrow the constitutional monarchy. After a series of clashes, the king in 2002, abolished the Parliament.
In April, 2006 a non-violent pro democratic movement was led jointly by a Seven Party Alliance, the Maoists, and social activists. The king was compelled to restore the dissolved House of Representatives. The third challenge is to create a written Constitution of Nepal and to establish the institutions for a constitutional monarchy more firmly. For this the Maoists have suspended their armed struggle. The people want radical social and economic restructuring to be included in the new constitution.

(154 words)

5. Name the principal players in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. How do you assess the prospects of the resolution of this conflict?

Answer. The principal players in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka are the Sinhalese, who are the natives and in majority and migrants of Tamil origin from India.

The Tamil migrant settlements are mostly in Northeastern parts of Sri Lanka. This area was neglected and not developed by the government of Sri Lanka. The government is predominantly of the majority Sinhalese. They want the Tamils to leave their country. The Tamil militant organisation called Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is fighting 1983 onwards, demanding a separate country for Tamils.

No country will allow a minority population divides the country. The ethnic conflict can only be resolved through talks and building of trust between the two groups. The Tamils have to give up their armed struggle and become a part of the mainstream development of Sri Lanka. The high rate of growth and GDP of Sri Lanka can facilitate in creation of acceptable development plans for Tamils.

(155 words)
6. Mention some of the recent agreements between India and Pakistan. Can we be sure that the two countries are well on their way to a friendly relationship?

**Answer.** As in January 2018, there have been no recent agreements with Pakistan. The last two agreements signed were in 1988, and 2004. In 1988, the two countries had signed an agreement not to attack each other’s nuclear facilities. In January 2004 SAFTA was signed at the 12th SAARC Summit, in Islamabad.

SAARC is South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation with 8 members. Senior level talks that had been going on were stopped by India after the terrorist attack in Uri and Pathankot in 2016. Thereafter, India refused to respond to any overtures for talks by Pakistan.

In view of the Uri attack, India refused to attend the 19th SAARC Summit in 2016 in Islamabad. Thereafter, other members also refused and the summit was postponed.

(125 words)

7. Mention two areas each of cooperation and disagreement between India and Bangladesh.

**Answer.** India and Bangladesh have differences over sharing of waters of Rivers Ganga and River Brahmaputra. There are several border issues that have not been settled. Bangladesh denies permitting illegal immigrants to India, and its support for anti-Indian Islamic fundamentalist groups.

India and Bangladesh cooperate on disaster management and environmental issues.

7. How are the external powers influencing bilateral relations in South Asia? Take any one example to illustrate your point.

**Answer.** USA and China are two major external powers who have been influencing bilateral relations in South Asia. The USA has been supplying arms and military technology to Pakistan to strengthen its army. It treated
Pakistan as its base for invasion of Afghanistan. The US aid has been used by Pakistan to create units for terror attacks against India as well as against US troops in Afghanistan. The country’s Northern zones have become safe havens for guerillas from Afghanistan and the Taliban. It is only in December 2017 and January 2018 that the US for the first time has warned Pakistan to remove all terrorist training camps and has withheld military assistance and aid.

8. Write a short note on the role and the limitations of SAARC as a forum for facilitating economic cooperation among the South Asian countries.

**Answer.** SAARC stands for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. It has 8 member countries of the sub-continent and was established in 1985. The members signed the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) in 2004 for formation of a free trade zone in South Asia. It came into effect from January 2006 but has not made much progress.

The larger size of India’s geography, and its bigger economy, makes the smaller members of SAARC apprehensive about reducing their trade tariffs. India’s inability to change this mindset of distrust, is a major limitation.

The difference in the political systems adopted by SAARC members is another limitation.

10. India’s neighbours often think that the Indian government tries to dominate and interfere in the domestic affairs of the smaller countries of the region. Is this a correct impression?

**Answer.** No, this is not the correct impression but a misgiving in the minds of India’s neighbours. India is feared due to its large size and for its huge economy. Misgivings against India have also been due to:

b) Indian army’s assistance in the creation of Bangladesh, in 1971.

c) Sending Indian troops in 1988, to fight the Tamil guerillas, after Sri Lankan forces failed. These were withdrawn soon after action was completed.

d) Sending of Indian troops in 1988 to Mauritius at the request of the then President to quell a coup.

To dispel the misimpression, India continues to provide humanitarian and financial assistance and cooperation during any disaster or calamity. In 2017, India’s launching of a ‘SAARC satellite’ for use by all members is one such step. A direct road linkage for trade has also been started with Bangladesh.

(155 words)