

Contemporary South Asia

FACTS THAT MATTER

1. South Asia is referred to as a group of seven countries namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka which stand for diversity in every sense and constitutes geopolitical space.

2. Despite the mixed record of democratic experience, the people in these countries share an aspiration for democracy which can be drawn from the examples of Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives.

3. Pakistan began Post Cold War period with successive democratic governments but suffered a military coup in 1999. In Nepal successful uprising led to restoration of democracy in 2006. India and Sri Lanka have also operated a democratic system, despite many limitations and even Maldives have strengthened democracy.

4. In Pakistan, military rule and democracy are two sides of the coin because, during implementation of first constitution, General Ayub Khan took the command by-elections, but thrown away by military due to dissatisfaction of his rule. After 1971, an elected government was formed under the leadership of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, removed by General Zia-Ul-Haq in 1977.

5. Again in 1982, in Pakistan, by a pro-democracy protest, democratic government was established in 1988 under the leadership of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Later on, the history repeated and General Pervez Musharraf took the command in 1999 and got elected in 2005 to be continued till date.

6. Bangladesh was formed by migrants from West Pakistan and refused to form government by East Pakistan despite winning all the seats. India intervened and supported the demand of creation of East Pakistan financially and militarily. Consequently, in December 1971, Pakistan surrendered with the formation of an

independent country named Bangladesh.

7. Bangladesh drafted its own constitution declaring faith in secularism, democracy and socialism. In 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman formed presidential setup, but was assassinated in a military uprising. The new military ruler Ziaur Rahman formed his own Bangladesh National Party and won elections in 1979. He was assassinated and another military take over followed under the leadership of Gen. H.M. Ershad. Since 1991, representative democracy has been working in Bangladesh.

8. Nepal was a Hindu Kingdom and became constitutional monarchy in modern period. The struggle for restoration of democracy began in 1990 and 2007 when king restored house of representatives. Even today Nepal is demanding the formation of constituent assembly.

9. Ceylon, presently known as Sri Lanka experienced an ethnic conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils for power sharing. LTTE demanded a separate state for Tamil 1983 onwards with the support of Indian government who sent Indian Peace Keeping Forces there which was not liked by Sri Lankans.

10. Sri Lanka has maintained a democratic political system with a considerable economic growth i.e. one of the first developing countries to control population growth rate, liberalized economy, and bears highest per capita gross Domestic Product despite the ongoing conflicts.

11. India-Pakistan conflicts in South Asian region is most important to be sorted out. The wars between these countries took place in 1947-48, 1965 and 1971 on the issues of Pak Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Line of Control (LOC). Except, other issues of conflicts are control of Siachin glacier, acquisition of arms and sharing of river water.

12. Both the governments are suspicious to each other on the ground of Pakistani strategy to help Kashmiri militants and ISI to be involved in Anti-India campaign. Pakistan blames India for making trouble in Sindh and Baluchistan.

India and Bangladesh experienced differences over the issues of sharing of Ganga and Brahmaputra river water, illegal immigration to India, support for anti Indian-Islamic fundamentalists, refusal to allow Indian troops and not to export natural gas to India. It is the main link of India's 'Look East' Policy.

14. India and Nepal also bear differences on the issues of Nepal's relations with China and inaction against anti-Indian elements i.e. Maoists. But still both the countries signed the treaty of trade and commerce in 2005 and friendship in 2006 to provide financial and technical assistance and to allow citizens to move without visas and passport.

15. India and Bhutan do not share any major conflict, but attached on the issues to need out the guerrillas and militants from North-eastern India and involvement of India also in big hydroelectric projects in Bhutan is the biggest source of development aid.

16. India is supportive to Maldives in their economy, tourism and fisheries. In November 1988, India reacted quickly against an attack from Tamil Mercenaries on Maldives.

17. In spite of the above-mentioned conflicts and differences, states of South Asia recognise cooperation and friendly relations among themselves. Hence, a major regional initiative has been taken in the form of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1982. SAARC members signed South Asian Free Trade Agreements (SAFTA) to form free trade zone for the whole South Asia.

WORDS THAT MATTER

1. Geo-Politics: Geo-politics refers to the Association of countries who are bound with each other geographically and their interests are also interlinked with each other politically and economically.

2. Bilateral Talks: Talks involving the two countries without any other mediation.

3. Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF): It was sent by India in Sri

Lanka to support the demand of Tamils to be recognised.

4. Seven Party Alliance (SPA): An alliance of seven parties in Nepal which also demanded an end to monarch.

5. SAARC: It stands for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation having seven members and aims at mutual trust and understanding.

6. SAFTA: It is South Asia Free Trade Area Agreement to trade free from custom restrictions and duties by its member states.

7. LTTE: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam in Sri Lanka which demanded a separate state for Tamils.

TIMELINE

1. 1947: India and Pakistan emerge as an independent nation after the end of British rule.

2. 1948: Sri Lanka gains independence. Indo-Pak conflict over Kashmir.

3. 1954-55: Pakistan joins the Cold War military blocs, SEATO and CENTO.

4. September 1960: India and Pakistan sign Indus Waters Treaty.

5. 1962: Border conflicts between India and China.

6. 1965: Indo-Pak War, UN India-Pakistan Observation Mission.

7. 1966: India and Pakistan sign the Tashkent Agreement: Six-Point proposal of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman for greater autonomy to East Pakistan.

8. March 1971: Proclamation of independence by leaders of Bangladesh.

9. August 1971: Indo-Soviet Treaty of friendship signed for 20 years.

10. December 1971: Indo-Pak war, Liberation of Bangladesh.

11. July 1972: India and Pakistan sign the Shimla Agreement.

12. May 1974: India conducts nuclear test.

13. 1976: Pakistan and Bangladesh establish diplomatic relations.

14. December 1985: South Asian leaders sign the SAARC Charter at the first summit in Dhaka.

15. 1987: Indo-Sri Lanka Accord: Indian Peace Keeping Force

(IPKF) operation in Sri Lanka (1987-90).

16. 1988: India sends troops to the Maldives to foil a coup attempt by mercenaries.

India and Pakistan sign the agreement not to attack nuclear installations and facilities of each other.

17. 1988-91: Democracy restoration in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

18. December 1996: India and Bangladesh sign the Farakka Treaty for sharing of the Ganga waters.

19. May 1998: India and Pakistan conduct nuclear tests.

20. December: India and Sri Lanka sign the Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

21. February 1999: Indian PM Vajpayee undertakes bus journey to Lahore to sign a Peace Declaration.

22. June-July 1999: Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan.

23. July 2001: Vajpayee-Musharraf Agra Summit unsuccessful.

24. January 2004: SAFTA signed at the 12th SAARC Summit in Islamabad.