

23. Southern Asia

South, or **Southern Asia** is the southern region of Asian continent that comprises the Indian subcontinent and Ceylon island. Southern Asia is home to over one fifth of the world's population making it both the most populous and the most densely populated region in the world.



Colour and fill in the map the countries of Southern Asia:

1. India (New Delhi)
2. Pakistan (Islamabad)
3. Afghanistan (Kabul)
4. Bangladesh (Dhaka)
5. Nepal (Kathmandu)
6. Bhutan (Thimphu)
7. Sri Lanka (Colombo / Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte)
8. Maldives (Male)

+ locate in the map:

- the capital cities
- most important rivers

Natural conditions

- climate: most of the region is in tropical climate (changes between rainy and dry season – significant influence of monsoon winds), northern part has high mountains, therefore climate there changes from tropical in the bottom of the mountains to polar climate in the highest parts.
- mountain ranges: the Himalayas, Karakoram, Hindukush, Western and Eastern Ghats
- rivers: Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Godavari
- deserts: Thar desert

Population

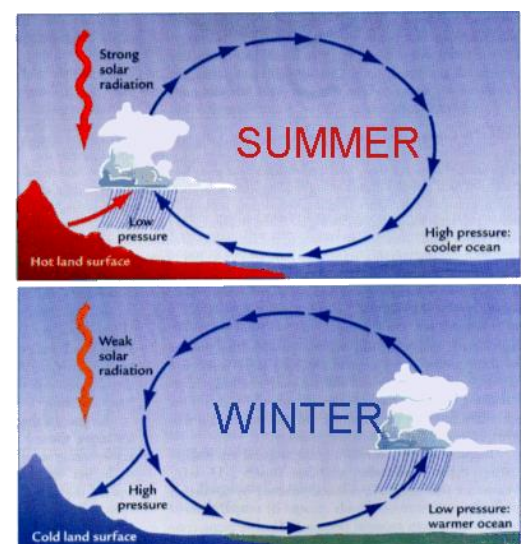
The most populous part of the region is the Indo-Gangetic Plain, the lowland that was home to the first civilizations about 4000 years ago. Distinctive cultures and religions developed in this region, among them Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddhism originated in India about 2500 years ago and later spread to neighbouring countries (but now it is not the prevailing religion in India). About 1200 years ago Islam started to spread into the region and nowadays there are several purely Muslim countries (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh). In the 19th century almost the whole Southern Asia got under British rule, except of Afghanistan. The British influence can be seen even today – English is one of the official languages in India and Pakistan.

Southern Asia is influenced by various traditions, especially the strict division of people into social classes (e.g. Caste system in India) or by religious prejudices. The gap between the rich and the poor is huge, mostly in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. The whole region is experiencing very high natural increase of population. One of the problems of increasing population is a lack of good education – low literacy rate (bad, but significantly increases).

Religious and ethnic differences in the region were often the reason of many conflicts and wars. Until recently, there was a civil war in Sri Lanka between buddhists and hinduists. India and Pakistan are in a long-standing dispute over the Kashmir region. And Afghanistan became a symbol of long wars (Soviet-Afghan war, Afghan civil war, Taliban Insurgency and the U.S. war in Afghanistan). Life in many countries is influenced by natural disasters. Floods are often in lowlands in Bangladesh, Pakistan and northern India, mountain areas are often hit by earthquakes (Pakistan, Nepal).

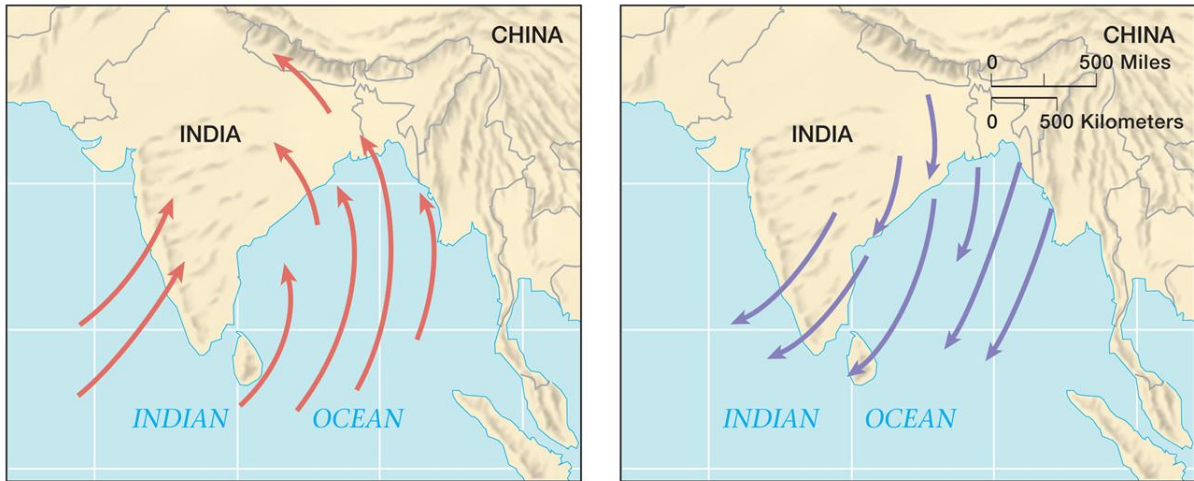
Monsoon winds

Southern Asia has very significant monsoon winds, that play huge role in climate of this region. Monsoons are seasonal winds accompanied by corresponding changes in precipitation. The term monsoon is now also used to describe seasonal changes in atmospheric circulation and precipitation associated with the asymmetric heating of the land and sea. The summer monsoon and the winter monsoon determine the climate for large part of Southern and Southeast Asia.



- *Summer monsoon* = wind blowing from ocean towards land mass => brings heavy rainfall
- *Wintern monsoon* = wind blowing from land mass towards ocean => brings drought

Exercise: Identify on the illustration below summer and winter monsoon.



Influence of monsoon extends from the southernmost part of the subcontinent to the Karakoram and the Himalayas in the north. Most of monsoons are not able to cross higher parts of these mountain ranges. As a result, the foothill area of the Himalayas is green with dense vegetation, in higher altitude there are cold, dry mountain deserts and behind the main ridges are deserts created in the rain shadow - e.g. in Ladakh in India.

Similar big differences can be seen in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Lower, southern parts of the countries are often influenced by monsoons – sometimes experiencing severe floods. Higher and northern parts are more arid. For example only about 1/8 of Afghanistan total area is arable, the rest are steppes, mountains and deserts.

Key words: Southern Asia, Ceylon, Indo-Gangetic Plain, Ladakh, Kashmir, monsoons



Dense forest in Western Ghats (left) and barren, cold mountain deserts of Ladakh (right)