



Physical Geography

MAIN IDEA

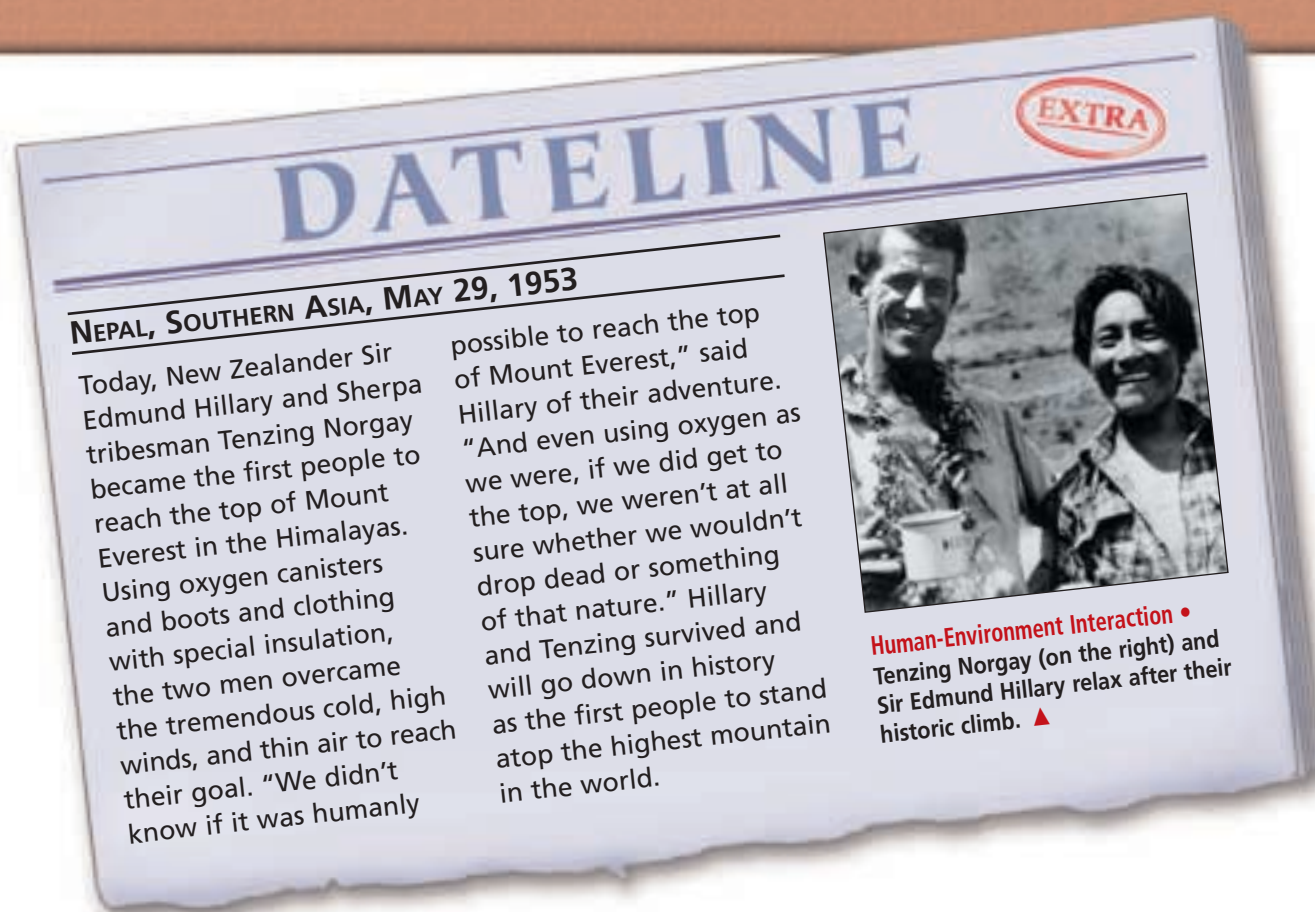
Southern Asia's geography affects how the region's people live.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Studying the geography of Southern Asia will help you understand its history, economy, and customs.

TERMS & NAMES

subcontinent
Himalayas
Northern Plains
delta
sediment
Deccan Plateau
archipelago
monsoon



The Variety of Southern Asia

The Unit Atlas maps on pages 366–367 show the great variety and contrasts in the geography of Southern Asia. There are the vast snow-capped mountain ranges, such as the Himalayas, and wet low-lying rain forests. Some people live in the mountains, while others live deep in the tropical rain forest or in the desert. Some places are dry, and others get plenty of water—some, in fact, get too much.



Southern Asia is divided into two regions, South Asia and Southeast Asia. South Asia includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (shree LAHNG•kuh). The South Asian subcontinent includes the countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. A **subcontinent** is a large landmass that is part of a continent, but is geographically separate from it. India is the largest country on the subcontinent and in Southern Asia. It is the second most populous country in the world, next to China.

BACKGROUND

Geologists believe that the South Asian subcontinent was once part of the African continent. It broke away 200 million years ago. Forty million years ago, this subcontinent crashed into Asia and created the Himalayas.

Geographic Regions of South Asia

The subcontinent has three main geographic regions—the Northern Mountain Rim, the Northern Plains, and the Deccan (DEK•uhn) Plateau. Just off the coast are two island countries, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Each of these regions has distinctive landforms and climate that affect how people live.

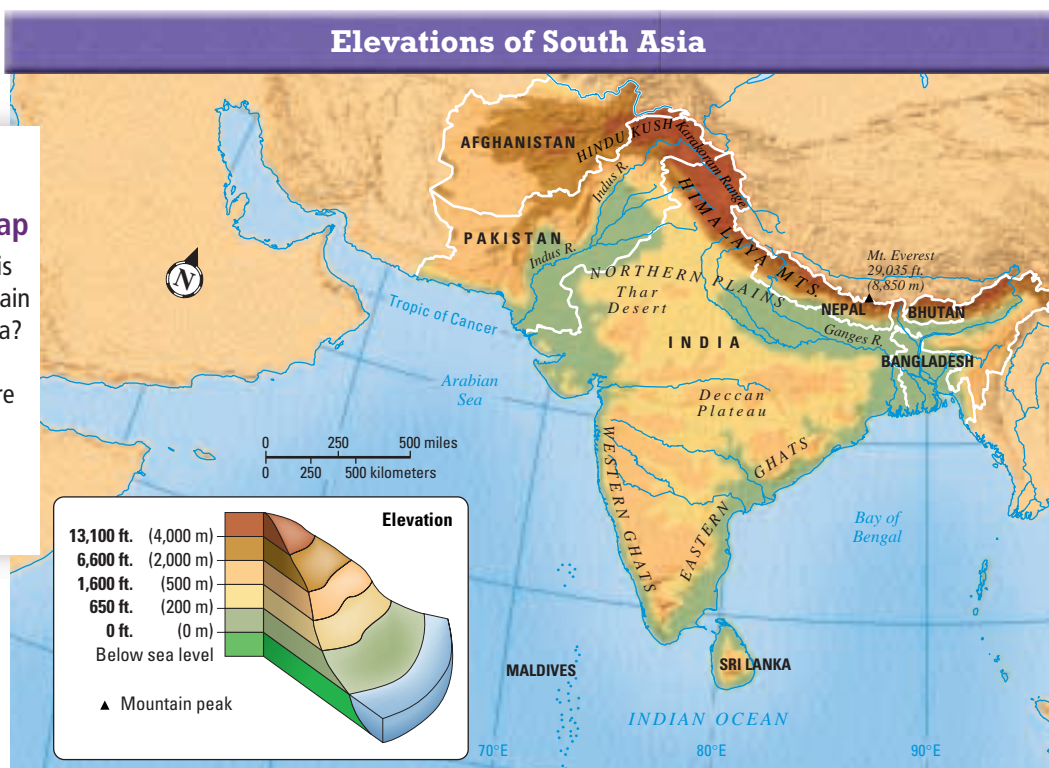
The Northern Mountain Rim The Northern Mountain Rim is made up of several mountain ranges. The Hindu Kush Mountains are located to the west and the **Himalayas** to the east. The Karakoram Mountains lie between the two, extending along the northern border of Pakistan. These mountains form a wall that separates the subcontinent from the rest of Asia.

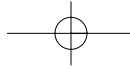
Reading Social Studies

A. Making Inferences How might these mountains have made trade and travel by water important in ancient times?

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Location** • What is the highest mountain range in South Asia?
- Region** • How would you compare land elevations in Bangladesh with land elevations in Pakistan?





However, there are some mountain passes that since ancient times have allowed travelers and invaders from Asia to get through the mountain barrier. The Khyber Pass, for example, connects the two modern-day countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Himalayas stretch for 1,500 miles across northern India and Nepal. They are 200 miles wide at some points, and many peaks are more than four and a half miles high. The tallest mountain in the world, Mount Everest, is almost five and a half miles high. This is taller than 23 Empire State Buildings stacked on top of one another. The terrain is rough in this region with few safe roads. It is also difficult to farm. As a result, fewer people live in this part of South Asia.

The Northern Plains The **Northern Plains** lie between the Himalayas and southern India. This region includes the Ganges (GAN·jeez) and Indus River valleys. The Ganges flows through Bangladesh and empties into the Bay of Bengal. The Indus River flows through Pakistan and empties into the Arabian Sea. The Indus and the Ganges rivers form large deltas where they empty into the sea. A **delta** is a triangular deposit of soil at the mouth of a river. The map on page 378 shows that the Ganges River delta is mostly within Bangladesh.

**Human-
Environment
Interaction •**
People in heavily
populated
Bangladesh
crowd aboard
a Ganges River
ferryboat. ►



The Ganges River carries rich sediment from the Himalayas to the plains. **Sediment** includes minerals and debris that settle at the bottom of a river. During the rainy season, the Northern Plains flood, and the sediment from the Ganges River is deposited there. This makes the plains a fertile farming area.



Reading

Social Studies

B. Clarifying How could fertile soil lead to dense population?

Because of the fertile soil, parts of the Northern Plains are densely populated. In Bangladesh, for example, more than 130 million people live in an area smaller than the state of Wisconsin. In ancient times, the Indus River valley was also fertile and densely populated. Today, however, the valley is mostly desert, and few people live in this hot, dry region.

The Deccan Plateau As you can see from the map on page 378, the **Deccan Plateau** makes up most of southern India. The plateau has mineral deposits, as well as forests where elephants roam. Mountains border the plateau to the east and west—the Eastern and Western Ghats (gahts). The Western Ghats are the higher peaks, reaching 8,000 feet at the southern tip of India. A coastal plain runs between the mountains and the oceans on both coasts. Along these coastal plains the soil is fertile and water is plentiful. In the interior part of the plateau, between the mountain ranges, the soil is not as rich. People do farm there but water supplies are unreliable and it is hot year round. Fewer people live on the Deccan Plateau than in the Northern Plains.



Place • An elephant gets its tusks washed at an elephant training camp in Mudumalai National Park. ▲



Sri Lanka and the Maldives The islands of Sri Lanka and the Maldives lie south and southwest of India. Sri Lanka is a picturesque, mountainous island, 23 miles off the southern tip of India. Parts of it receive a great deal of rain.

The Maldives is a country made up of more than 1,200 low, flat coral islands called atolls. People live on only about 300 of these islands. The Maldives stretch south for 400 miles. The highest elevation in the entire chain is just over six feet above sea level.

BACKGROUND

If scientists' predictions about global warming are accurate, sea levels could rise dramatically. The Maldives would then disappear, or nearly disappear, under the sea.

Place • The central highlands of Sri Lanka have mountains that reach over 7,000 feet and offer some spectacular scenery. ◀



Place • Mount Merapi, called the Fire Mountain, is the most active volcano in Indonesia. ◀

Regions and Nations of Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia contains both a mainland region and many islands. The countries that make up Southeast Asia include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

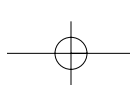
Reading Social Studies

C. Making Inferences How do you think the Mekong River contributes to growing crops in this region?

Mainland Southeast Asia The mainland lies on two peninsulas—the Indochinese Peninsula and the Malay Peninsula. The countries of mainland Southeast Asia are Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and part of Malaysia. The Mekong River drains more than 313,000 square miles of this region. It starts in the highlands of the Plateau of Tibet and ends in the South China Sea. It flows through Laos, central Cambodia, and into Vietnam. This area is a major rice-producing region and is densely populated.

Islands of Southeast Asia The islands of Southeast Asia include Borneo, part of which belongs to the country of Malaysia, the island of Singapore, and the archipelagoes of Indonesia and the Philippines. An **archipelago** (AHR•kuh•PEHL•uh•GOH) is a group of islands.

Indonesia is the largest nation in Southeast Asia. It extends over an area about three times the size of Texas, and it has the fourth largest population in the world. Indonesia is made up of 17,000 islands that were formed by volcanoes.



More than 6,000 of these islands are inhabited. The islands have a tropical climate with a lot of rain, but the soil is not very fertile. Still, more than half the people of Indonesia are farmers.

The 7,100 islands of the Philippines cover an area about the size of the state of Arizona. Only 800 of these islands are inhabited. Nearly half of the Philippine people are farmers.

Climate and Monsoons

Most of South Asia has three seasons—cool, hot, and rainy. The higher elevations are usually cooler. Much of India's weather is

milder in the cool season. Sometimes frost forms on the Northern Plains. However, most of southern India is hot all year round.

Southeast Asia's climate has less variety. It is hot and rainy. Heavy seasonal winds and rains are common both to South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The Monsoon Cycle The period from June through September marks the coming of the monsoon winds and the rainy season. A **monsoon** is a seasonal wind that blows over the northern part of the Indian Ocean. From April through October, the monsoon blows from the southwest, building up moisture over the ocean and bringing heavy rains to South Asia and Southeast Asia. From November through March, the monsoon blows from the northeast.

South Asia and Southeast Asia have different monsoon cycles. In South Asia, heavy monsoon rains fall from June through October. November through February is mostly cool and dry. Because March through late May is hot and humid, the monsoon rains in June bring great relief. In India, school starts in June, after the rains begin. Children take their main vacation during the spring, when it is too hot to study. The monsoon rains reach as far north as the Himalayas. However, there is very little rain in most of western Pakistan.

Strange but TRUE

The World's Most Destructive Volcano Krakatau (krak•uh•TOW), a volcanic island between Java and Sumatra in Indonesia, is pretty quiet these days (see below). In 1883, however, it erupted with explosions so loud they were heard in Australia and Japan, thousands of miles away. Krakatau's volcanic eruption caused tidal waves that killed 36,000 people. The eruption blew nearly 5 cubic miles of rock into the air and spewed out volcanic ash at least 17 miles high, throwing the region into darkness for days. This ash, blown around Earth for two years, caused amazing sunsets worldwide.





In Southeast Asia, there are two seasons. The summer monsoon lasts from April to September. During this time, there are heavy rains. The winter season from October through March is cool and dry.

Depending on Rain Agriculture depends on the timing of the monsoons. If the monsoons come too early, the farmers do not have time to plant their seeds. If the rains do not arrive or if they arrive too late, the crops fail. Sometimes the monsoons bring too much rain, resulting in severe flooding that ruins crops, damages property, and is dangerous to people.

Reading Social Studies

D. Compare and Contrast How does this cycle of hot, cool, and rainy seasons compare with the cycle of seasons where you live?

Culture • These women in India are celebrating Teej, a festival for welcoming the coming of the monsoons. ►



SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

- 1. Identify:** (a) subcontinent (b) Himalayas (c) Northern Plains (d) delta
(e) sediment (f) Deccan Plateau (g) archipelago (h) monsoon

Taking Notes

- 2.** Use a chart like this one to record important information about South Asia and Southeast Asia.

	South Asia	Southeast Asia
Countries		
Major Regions		
Major Rivers		
Monsoon Cycle		

Main Ideas

- 3. (a)** Describe three distinctive regions of South Asia.
(b) Where is the Mekong River? Which countries does it flow through?
(c) Name two nations in Southeast Asia that are archipelagoes.

Critical Thinking

4. Compare and Contrast

Compare the Northern Plains with the Deccan Plateau. How are they similar? How are they different?

Think About

- ♦ location
- ♦ fertility of the soil and population density

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Photocopy a **map** of Southeast Asia. Using highlighter markers, spotlight the places you have learned about in Section 1. Share your map with the class.