



## Perspective: 24th SCO Summit

**For Prelims:** [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#), [Energy](#), [Trade](#), [Information Security](#), [Combating Terrorism](#), [Separatism](#), [Anti-Drug Strategy](#), [Eco-Tourism](#), [Cross Border Terrorism](#), [Terrorism Financing](#), [India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor \(IMEC\)](#), [Chabahar Project](#), [INSTC](#), [Climate-Resilient Infrastructure](#), [Green Energy](#), [Climate Change Mitigation](#), [E20 National Strategy On Artificial Intelligence](#), [‘Ai For All’](#), [Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure \(Rats\)](#), [Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#), [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor](#), [Illicit Drug Trade](#)

**For Mains:** Significance of the SCO in Terms of India's strategic interests.

### Why in News?

Recently, India attended the **24<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council of Head of States of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** held in **Astana, Kazakhstan**.

- **Bilateral meetings** on the sidelines of **SCO** were also held with the members of SCO.

### What are the Key Highlights of the 24th SCO Summit?

- **New Membership:** **Belarus** has become the **10th member** state of the SCO. The Indian **External Affairs Minister** met with Belarusian counterpart to strengthen bilateral ties.
- **Astana Declaration:** The **24th SCO Summit** in Astana adopted the **Astana Declaration** and approved **25 strategic agreements** on [energy](#), [security](#), [trade](#), [finance](#), and [information security](#).
- **SCO Development Strategy:** Members of the SCO adopted the **SCO Development Strategy untill 2035**, including resolutions on [combating terrorism](#), [separatism](#), and [extremism](#), [anti-drug strategy](#), [energy cooperation](#), [economic development](#), and [cooperation in protected areas and eco-tourism](#).
  - Commitments also included signing a memorandum to **combat illicit drug trafficking** and an interaction plan on international information security issues.

### What are the Key Issues Addressed by India at SCO Summit, 2024?

- **Rising Tensions and Global Concerns:**
  - Ongoing conflicts and rising tensions worldwide **strain international relations**, eg. [Russia-Ukraine conflict](#) and different stands taken by SCO members like **India, China and Russia** in this context make it difficult to deliberate in forums like SCO.
  - India emphasized that the world should aim to mitigate consequences through **finding common ground and cooperation**.
- **Combatting Terrorism**
  - One of the priorities for SCO is combating [cross border terrorism](#) as unchecked terrorism poses major threats to **global and regional peace**.

- India has emphasized that terrorism in any form cannot be justified and nations nurturing terrorists must be isolated.
- India emphasized on **countering cross-border terrorism, terrorism financing, and youth radicalization** in the region. **For Example: Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (RATS-SCO)** mechanism should be used for coordination and information sharing to combat these issues.
- **Addressing Climate Change**
  - India reiterated the commitment to reduce emissions and **adopting climate-resilient infrastructure**. **For Example:** Platforms like **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)** should be used to increase the resilience of infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks, thereby ensuring sustainable development in the region.
  - **Green Development Forum of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** aims to enhance cooperation among SCO countries in **green energy, green industry, climate change mitigation and ecological protection**, and to build a stronger consensus on **green development** can help in boosting initiatives like **Global Biofuel Alliance** and **E20 initiative of India**.
- **Promoting Connectivity and Infrastructure**
  - India emphasized that **robust connectivity** is essential for economic development and trust-building.
    - **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** project which was signed at the **G20 Summit, Chabahar Project** in Iran and **INSTC Multimode Transit Route** linking the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran and to northern Europe, can play pivotal role in this connectivity for **India, Central Asia and Europe**.
  - **Serious deliberations** are needed within SCO on **connectivity and infrastructure projects** as these are essential for mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- **Harnessing Technology for Societal Progress**
  - **21<sup>st</sup> century** is characterized by technological advancements so group should focus on applying technology for **societal welfare and progress**.
    - India is among the countries to formulate a **National Strategy on Artificial Intelligence** and our commitment to **'AI for All'** is also reflected in working within the SCO framework on a **Roadmap on AI cooperation**.
- **Cultural Engagement with SCO**
  - **People-to-people diplomacy** plays a crucial role in the cooperation between the SCO countries and serves as a bridge between nations by providing opportunities to **develop and enrich diverse cultures and civilisations, and preserving folk traditions**.
  - **For instance:**
    - Over a hundred participants from the SCO practiced **yoga** at the event at the Secretariat of the SCO.
    - Also participation of **young people in entrepreneurial activities** through **SCO Young Entrepreneurs Forum** significantly contributes to deepening cooperation among member states.
    - To enhance people to people connection India as SCO host in 2023 organised **SCO Millet Food Festival, SCO Film Festival** and **SCO Surajkund Craft Mela**.

## What is Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)?

- **About:**
  - The SCO originated from the "**Shanghai Five**" formed in 1996, consisting of **China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan**.
  - SCO was established in **2001**, in Shanghai, adding Uzbekistan as a **sixth member**.
  - SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organization for promoting effective cooperation in -politics, trade & economy, research & technology and culture.
  - It's a political, economic and military organization aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
  - The SCO Charter was signed in 2002 and entered into force in 2003.
  - The group was expanded in 2017 when **India and Pakistan** became members.
  - **Iran** joined the group in 2023 and **Belarus is 10th** and the newest member.
  - **SCO Secretariat is based in Beijing**.

▪ **Structure:**

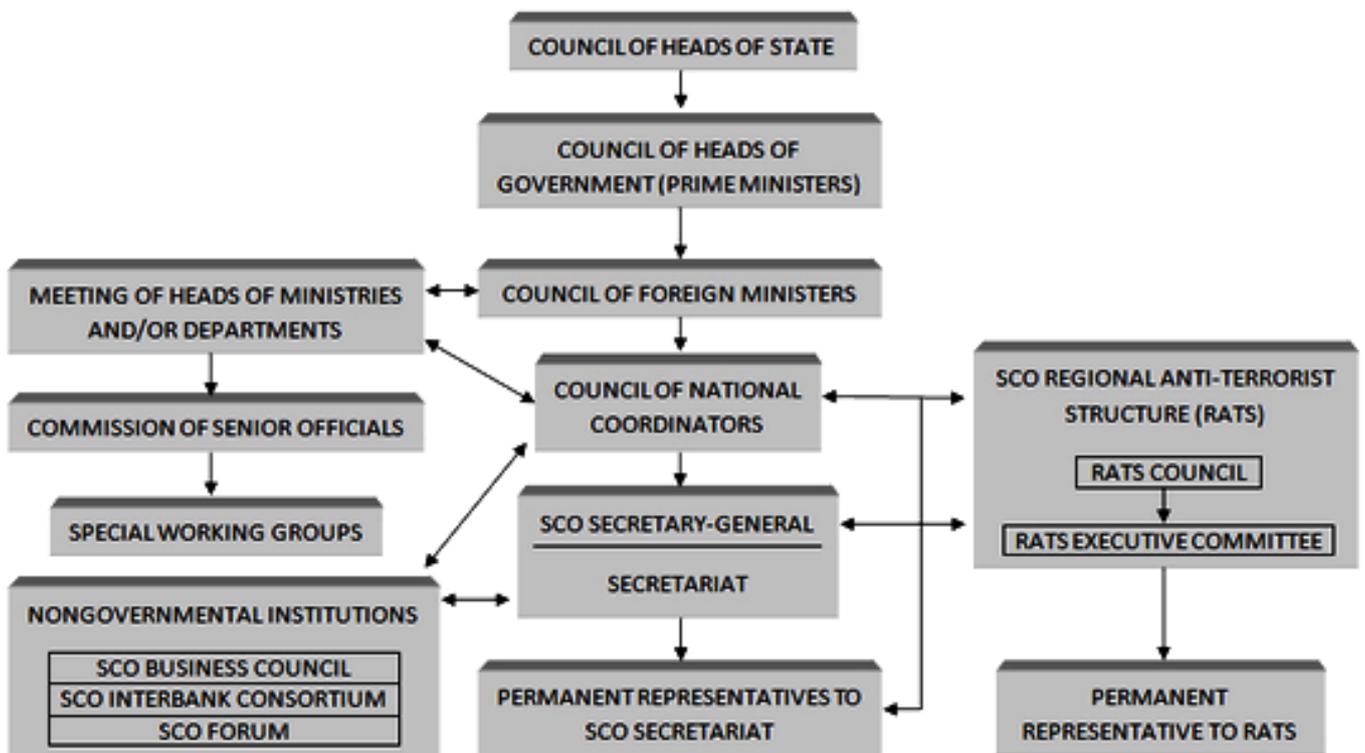
- **Heads of State Council:** The supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States & international organisations, and considers international issues.
- **Heads of Government Council:** Approves the budget, considers and decides upon issues related to economic spheres of interaction within SCO.
- **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs:** Considers issues related to day-to-day activities.
- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS):** Established to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.

▪ **Significance:**

- The SCO covers **40% of the global population, nearly 30% of the global GDP and 60% of the area of Eurasia.**
- The SCO has a strategically important role in Asia due to its **geographical significance** - this enables it to control **Central Asia** and limit the American influence in the region.
- **Significance for India:**
  - SCO provides a platform to India to participate in a forum which enhances its scope of cooperation with **Central Asian countries.**
  - It also helps in maintaining communication with major actors in the region on **common security issues** through **RATS** which is a permanent structure within the SCO.
  - Central Asia being reservoir of **Uranium and green energy sources**, SCO provides opportunity for India to foster cooperation for **energy security.**

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**THE STRUCTURE OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION**



**What are the Challenges Associated with SCO?**

- **Geopolitical Challenges:** In the given global scenario when **geopolitics are dysfunctional**, given the coalition of countries in SCO where members have differences, its relevance is being

called into question.

- **China -Pakistan-Russia Angle:** Presence of **China and Pakistan's** inclusion in SCO poses **potential difficulties** for India.
  - India has always opposed the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, as it says the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor** violates **India's territorial integrity and sovereignty**.
  - India's ability to assert itself would be limited and it may have to play second fiddle since **China and Russia** are co-founders of SCO and its dominant powers.
- **Expansion:** If any platform expands the original mandate of the grouping tends to dilute as new members come up with their own priorities.
- **Counter Terrorism:** Despite counter terrorism as one of the mandates of SCO it has attained little success in countering **cross border terrorism and illicit drug trade**.
  - **The Golden Crescent** which comprises the mountainous peripheries of **Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan** and recent enhanced illicit drug trade by **Taliban** poses challenge in the region.
- **Anti-West Image of SCO:** India may also have to either dilute its growing partnership with the West or engage in a delicate balancing act as SCO has traditionally adopted an **anti-Western posture**.
  - Furthermore, some SCO member states used **Afghanistan and the Taliban** for their own **geo-economic and geo-strategic interests** against the West and also against each other.

## Way Forward

- **Addressing Geopolitical Challenges:** Underlining the principle of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**, India has been emphasising on translating these sentiments for global as well as regional cooperation.
- **Mutual Cooperation:** Members of SCO need to cooperate on issues of terrorism, illicit drug trade, people to people connect and securing economic interest by sidelining their bilateral issues.
- **Expansion:** Given the expansion of SCO there is a need to ensure that the original mandate of the grouping does not dilute and members should **cooperate on the goals and priorities** of the grouping.
- **Strengthening Counter Terrorism Mechanism:** From its inception as a full member, India not only supported **strengthening the core agenda of SCO on terrorism and radicalism** but also has urged the members not to hesitate in condemning such nations and emphasized the importance of consistency in addressing these critical issues.
- **Evolution of Organisation:** Evolution of any organisation is necessary as per need and time to **avoid redundancy**. Given this fact SCO should evolve to accommodate the needs of the region and its members.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q. The term 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' often appears in the news in the context of the affairs of a group of countries known as? (2016)**

- (a) G20
- (b) ASEAN
- (c) SCO
- (d) SAARC

**Ans: (b)**

### Mains:

**Q. Critically examine the aims and objectives of SCO. What importance does it hold for India? (2021)**

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