



## Strengthening India-Pakistan Relations and SCO

**For Prelims:** [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#), [TAPI \(Turkmenistan-Pakistan-Afghanistan-India\)](#), [SAARC](#), [Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure \(RATS\)](#), [UN General Assembly](#), [Iran-Pakistan-India \(IPI\) Pipeline](#), Shanghai Spirit, [SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group](#), [Commonwealth of Independent States \(CIS\)](#), [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#), [Collective Security Treaty Organization \(CSTO\)](#).

**For Mains:** Role of multilateral forums in strengthening India and Pakistan relations and importance of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in it.

[Source: TH](#)

### Why in News?

Recently, India's External Affairs Minister had an **informal interaction** with Pakistan's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister during the [SCO Council of Heads of Government](#) meeting in **Islamabad, Pakistan**.

- The atmosphere of exchanges has been said to be **more positive** than in previous encounters.
- **The Shanghai cooperation organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of Governments** is the **second-highest council** after the SCO Council of Heads of States.

### What were the Positive Developments Between India and Pakistan at the SCO Summit?

- **Avoidance of Contentious Language:** Both India and Pakistan avoided using contentious language in their national statements.
  - There were **no direct references** to sensitive issues like **Kashmir** from Pakistan while India **avoided** specific references to **Pakistan while addressing [cross-border terrorism](#)**.
- **Productive Meeting:** India commended the Pakistani leadership for organising a **productive SCO meeting**, signalling a positive tone in his **departure remarks**.
- **Collaboration on Regional Issues:** Topics like **trade, connectivity, energy flows**, and cooperation against **terrorism, separatism, and extremism** were discussed, with an emphasis on **collaboration** rather than confrontation.
  - [TAPI \(Turkmenistan-Pakistan-Afghanistan-India\)](#) energy pipeline and other issues were discussed with some SCO members.
- **Initiatives for Economic Cooperation:** The summit resulted in proposals for an **Economic Dialogue Programme** and strategies to enhance **economic cooperation**.
  - The joint statement emphasised cooperation in areas like **green development, digital economy, trade, poverty alleviation, and renewable energy**.

### Why are Positive Developments Significant?

- **Revocation of Article 370 (2019):** India's decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir ([Article 370](#)) in August 2019 **strained already fragile relations**.
  - Pakistan views this as an **illegal annexation**, while India considers it an **internal matter**.
- **Downgrade in Bilateral Relations:** On 7th August 2019, Pakistan **unilaterally downgraded** diplomatic relations with India to the **chargé d'affaires level** and **expelled the Indian High Commissioner**, in response to India's revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Indus Waters Treaty:** Disputes over the [Kishanganga](#) and [Ratle hydroelectric projects](#), in particular, have raised tensions, with Pakistan alleging that India is violating the treaty.
  - India has formally requested a **review and modification** of the [Indus Waters Treaty \(IWT\)](#) with Pakistan which has not gone well with Pakistan.
- **Limited Trade:** After the [Pulwama attack](#) in 2019, India revoked Pakistan's **Most Favoured Nation (MFN)** status, and Pakistan suspended bilateral trade.
  - Revocation of **Article 370** led to a halt in **bilateral trade**. In 2018-19, trade amounted to **USD 2.06 billion of exports and USD 0.495 billion of imports**.
- **Internal Interference:** Pakistan has accused India of fomenting unrest in its **Balochistan** province and supporting separatist movements there.
  - India accuses Pakistan of **radicalising** Kashmiri youth and **internationalising** Kashmir issue.

## How can Multilateral Forums Improve India-Pakistan Relations?

- **Neutral Platforms for Dialogue:** Multilateral settings like the [SCO](#) provide **neutral environments** for India and Pakistan to engage without the bilateral tensions that usually impede dialogue.
  - These forums allow **informal conversations** and [track-two diplomacy](#) (unofficial, non-governmental discussions) which can **ease tensions** and keep lines of **communication open**.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Through [SAARC](#), both nations have **previously collaborated** on regional trade agreements.
  - The potential for cooperation in areas like [climate change](#), [disaster management](#), and public health remains high.
- **Security Concerns:** Both India and Pakistan are part of the **SCO's [Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure \(RATS\)](#)**, which aims to promote cooperation on **combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism**.
  - This offers a framework where both countries can work together on **common security threats**, even if their bilateral relations are strained.
- **Reducing Mistrust:** [UN General Assembly](#) and other international forums involve the participation of several countries, which can act as mediators for **constructive dialogue**.
  - Multilateral diplomacy can ease tensions, as witnessed in the [Kargil conflict](#) in 1999, where international pressure played a role in **de-escalating the situation**.
- **Economic Exchanges:** Projects like the **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline** and [Iran-Pakistan-India \(IPI\) pipeline](#) of mutual benefit can foster cooperation even between adversaries.

## What are the Key Facts About SCO?

- **About SCO:** It is a **permanent intergovernmental international organisation** founded on **15th June 2001**, in Shanghai, China.
- **Establishment:** It was established by **six founding countries** namely Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, evolving from the **Shanghai Five mechanism**.
- **Objectives of the SCO:** It aims to strengthen **mutual trust** among member states, enhance cooperation in various fields, ensure **regional peace and stability**, and promote a fair international **political and economic order**.
- **Principles of SCO:** The SCO adheres to the **Shanghai spirit**, characterised by **mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation**, respect for cultural diversity, and the pursuit of common development.
- **Decision-Making Bodies:** The **SCO's supreme** decision-making body is the **Council of Heads**

of States (CHS), which meets annually to address key organisational issues.

- The **Council of Heads of Government (CHG)** convenes yearly to discuss cooperation strategies, prioritise areas, and approve the budget.

▪ **Standing Bodies:** The SCO has **two permanent bodies**.

- The **Secretariat** is located in **Beijing**, responsible for the organisation's day-to-day operations.
- The **Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** in **Tashkent**, which focuses on regional security and **counter-terrorism efforts**.

▪ **Current Membership:** SCO has **10 full members** namely China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, **Iran (2023)** and **Belarus (2024)**.



- **SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group:** In **2005**, the SCO formed the **SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group** to address **security and stability** concerns in Afghanistan, demonstrating its commitment to regional security issues.
- **Official Languages:** The official languages of the SCO are **Russian and Chinese**, facilitating communication among member states.
- **Partnerships and Collaborations:** The SCO has developed **partnerships** with various organisations, including the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)**, **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)**, and multiple United Nations agencies.

## Conclusion

The recent **informal interactions** between India and Pakistan at the SCO meeting, characterised by positive developments and constructive dialogue, highlight the **potential of multilateral forums** to

foster cooperation. By prioritising regional collaboration and addressing common challenges, these platforms can pave the way for improved bilateral relations and stability.

**Drishti Mains Question:**

Analyse how multilateral forums can reduce mistrust between India and Pakistan. How can the spirit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) contribute to this?

**UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)**

**Mains**

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

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