



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 **24th 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**
 - **21st 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:**

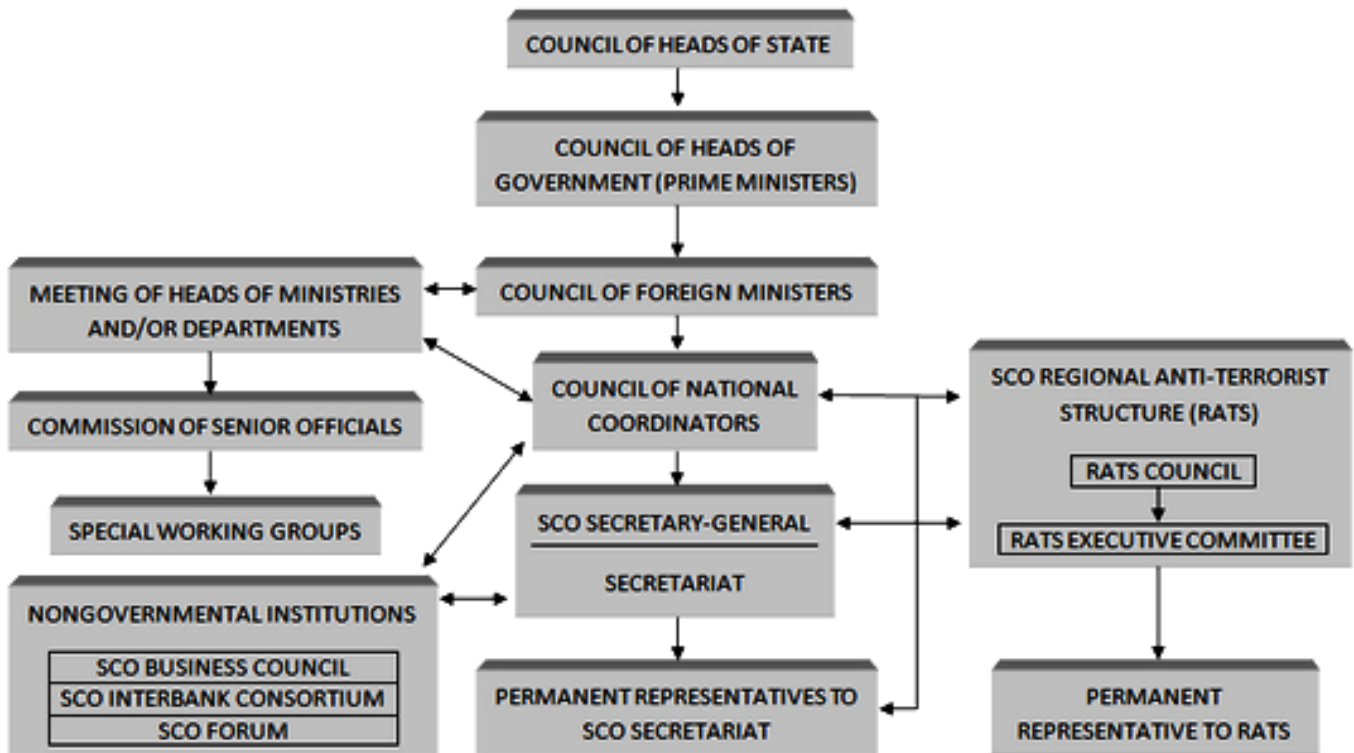
- **Heads of State Council:** The supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States & international organisations, and considers international issues.
- **Heads of Government Council:** Approves the budget, considers and decides upon issues related to economic 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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