

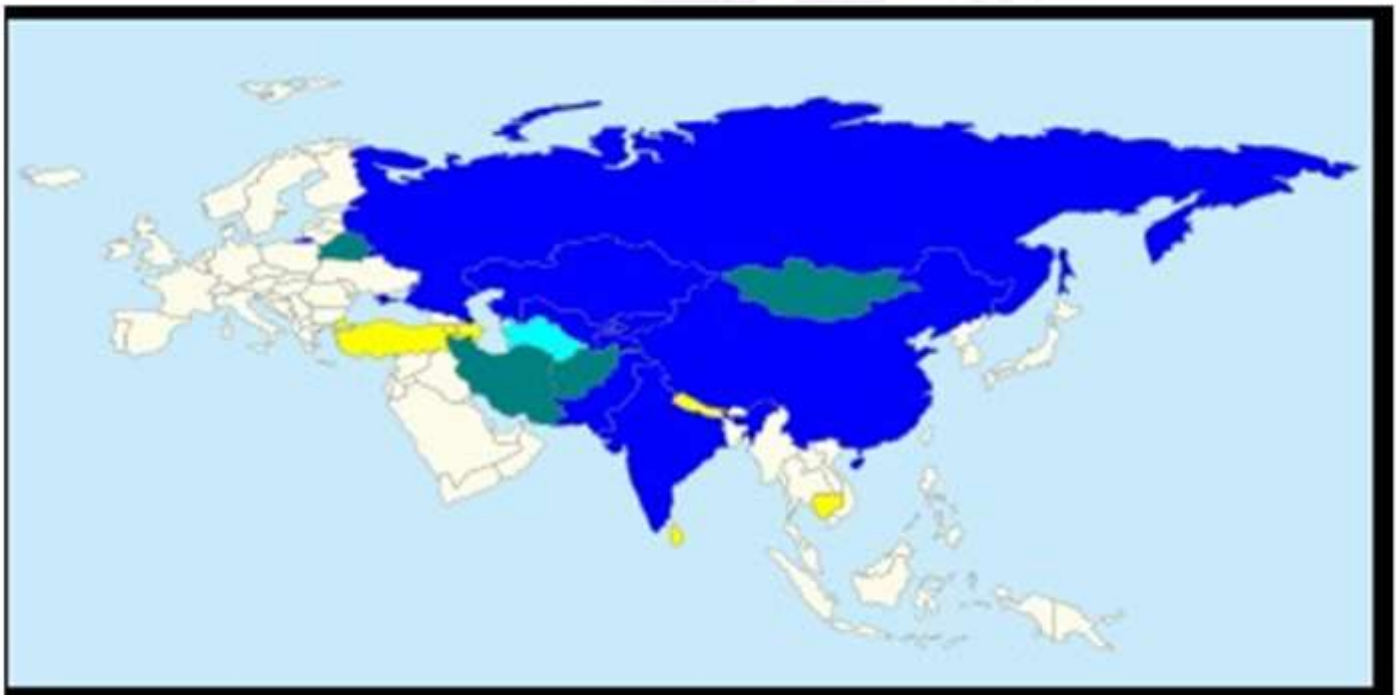
The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent international intergovernmental organization. The creation of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was announced on June 2001 in Shanghai (China) by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Uzbekistan, The Russian Federation, and the Republic of Tajikistan.

- The historical meeting of the Heads of State Council of the SCO held on June 2017 in Astana, the status of a full member of the Organization was granted to the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in this meeting.

Map of Members countries (Highlighted in Blue) of SCO



SCO's main goals are as follows:

1. Strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states;
2. To promote their effective cooperation in trade, politics, research, the economy, technology and culture, as well as in
3. Education, transport, energy, environmental protection, tourism, and other areas;
4. Making joint efforts to maintain and ensure security, stability and peace in the

region;

5. Moving towards the establishment of a democratic, rational and fair new international economic and political order.
6. The organisation pursues its internal policy based on the principles of mutual benefit, mutual trust, mutual consultations, equality, respect for cultural diversity, and a desire for common development, while the external policy is conducted in accordance with the principles of non-targeting, non-alignment any third country, and openness.

Structure and working

- The supreme decision-making body in the SCO is the Heads of State Council (HSC).
- The HSC meets once in a year and adopts guidelines and decisions on all important matters of the SCO.
- The SCO Heads of Government Council (HGC) meets once a year to discuss the organisation's multilateral cooperation strategy and priority areas, to resolve current important economic and other cooperation issues, and also approves the organisation's annual budget.
- The organisation has two permanent bodies — First is the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent and second is the SCO Secretariat based in Beijing.
- The Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS and SCO Secretary-General are appointed by the Council of Heads of State for a term of 3 years.

Importance of SCO for India:

- SCO is Part of India's stated policy of pursuing "**multi-alignments**".
- The geographical and strategic space which the SCO straddles is important for India. India's security, geopolitical, strategic, and economic interests are closely intertwined with developments in this region.
- The challenges of terrorism, radicalism, and instability pose a grave threat to the sovereignty and integrity not only of India, and also
- India requested access to intelligence and information from SCO's counter-terrorism body, the Tashkent-based Regional Anti-Terror Structure (RATS).
- A stable Afghanistan to is in India's interest, and RATS provides access to non-Pakistan-centred counter-terrorism information there.
- With the landlocked states of central Asia, and Uzbekistan even doubly landlocked, accessing these resources becomes difficult. In this regard, India has prioritized the construction of the International North-South Transport Corridor. Joining SCO will help India to connect with South Asian states.
- The Central Asian region is richly endowed with vital minerals and natural resources.
- The major interest is in energy co-operation. But India will also have to deal with an

assertive China, which will push its Belt and Road Initiative during the summit.

- SCO membership will help India to be a major pan-Asian player, which is currently boxed in the South Asian paradigm.

Central Asia is part of India's extended neighbourhood. India's relations with countries in the region, have enormous potential for enhancing ties in areas such as economy, security, policy, investment, trade, connectivity, energy, and capacity development. One reason is simply that India does not share common land-borders with the region, but another factor has been the infrequent visits at the highest level between India and Central Asian states.

India's membership in the SCO will provide an opportunity for leadership of India, including prime ministers, to meet with their counterparts from Central Asia, Russia, China, Afghanistan, and others regularly and frequently. India's participation in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) will be an added advantage to make this partnership more fruitful.

India has demonstrated its keen interest in strengthening multi-faceted relations with Central Asia through Prime Minister's historic visit to the five Central Asian republics in July 2015. Several agreements were signed and new initiatives were launched. The TAPI gas pipeline is an example of a mutually beneficial project. In the future, India's development experience, particularly in promoting agriculture, small and medium enterprises, pharmaceuticals, and information technology, can be of immense benefit to Central Asian countries.

India at SCO 2019:

- This year (2019), our PM has come up with another innovative acronym called HEALTH which brings together the Indian experience in development, and India's experience in engagement with other countries.
- Indian PM also specifically spoke about radicalization as well. In the acronym that the PM gave, called, "HEALTH", the alphabet "T" stands for countries that stand against terrorism.
- It is important to note that radicalization is an issue that bedevils the Central Asian Region in a very big way. India also called for an international conference on terrorism, the SCO can take a lead in that.
- Also in his 'HEALTH' acronym, the alphabet 'A' refers to alternative energy. It is here that he speaks about India's experience in terms of focusing on renewable energy. Prime Minister also touched upon regional cooperation and spoke about how India is willing to share its expertise in all these areas.
- Focus on Afghanistan (as a matter of fact, this is very significant), even though Afghanistan is not a member of the SCO, but India has a contact group on Afghanistan, and the Prime Minister underlined what India's fundamental position on Afghanistan is.

- Finally, it is important to note that the SCO provides an opportunity for the Indian leadership to connect with the leadership of the Central Asian countries.

