

General Studies-2; Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

1) Introduction

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation.
- The SCO's objectives are centred around cooperation between member nations on security-related concerns, military cooperation, intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism.
- SCO assumes greater importance after entry of India and Pakistan, the United Nations has said.
- The expansion of SCO now makes this a powerful and strategic regional grouping.

2) Key Goals of the SCO

- Strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness.
- Promoting effective cooperation in politics, trade, economy, research, technology and culture, as well as education, energy, transport, tourism, and environmental protection.
- Making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region.
- Moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.

3) Recent Developments

- Several joint infrastructure projects have been completed in SCO member states that have improved conditions for cross-border cooperation and boosted development capacity.
- Positive regional dynamics in Central Asia and closer interaction among countries.

4) 2018 SCO Summit

- 18th SCO summit was held in China's Qingdao.
- It is for the first time the Indian prime minister attended the SCO summit after India became full-fledged member of the grouping.
- India floated the concept of SECURE: 'S' for security for citizens, 'E' for economic development, 'C' for connectivity in the region, 'U' for unity, 'R' for respect of sovereignty and integrity, and 'E' for environment protection.
- SCO leaders made joint appeal to youth against terror.
- In the joint Qingdao Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of SCO, India was the only member to refuse to endorse China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project.
- The decision was taken as part of New Delhi's policy of not compromising on territorial issues.

5) Why Multilateralism?

- Multilateralism provides the holistic structure for political and economic relations in the world.
- For example, international problems, especially sustaining rules for trade and investment, involve numerous countries concurrently.
- These international problems cannot be dealt with effectively within the national domain or even bilaterally.
- Domestic goals cannot be accomplished without coordinated multilateral action.
- To create fair, just and lasting solutions to critical matters of peace and political, economic and social security.

- The sustenance of an effective multilateral organization will significantly benefit the expansion of the bilateral relationships.

6) India and SCO

- India has historic ties with the grouping as an observer over the past 12 years.
- The relationship India shares with the members of SCO are historical.
- SCO will strengthen India's relations with Central Asian republics and provide a new opportunity to pursue the "Connect Central Asian Policy".
- The SCO would also be a new channel to enhance bilateral ties with China and Russia.
- Experts say India's inclusion may even bring down Beijing's overarching influence over the SCO.
- India is likely to get greater access to major gas and oil exploration projects in Central Asia.
- India must aim to further enhance connectivity, given the existing strong cooperation bilaterally with existing member countries.
- Sectors such as education, tourism and even medical tourism, can be focused upon to further strengthen the SCO platform.

7) Way Forward

- Joint commitment, respect for human rights and the rule of law, will build and strengthen the cooperation needed to respond to global challenges.
- To ensure fair globalisation, nations must have the necessary domestic resources and capacities to steer their economies and development agendas.
- Openness and partnership between countries can make a critical contribution to strengthening security and bringing about prosperity.
- Connectivity in the SCO region must be given priority.
- Increasing awareness of our shared cultures can help boost tourism.

8) Facts for Prelims

- SCO is a Eurasian political, economic, and security organisation, the creation of which was announced on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- The original six nations, with the exception of Uzbekistan, were previously members of the Shanghai Five group, founded on 26 April 1996 in Shanghai.
- India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members on 9 June 2017 at a summit in Astana, Kazakhstan.
- Currently SCO comprises eight member states, namely India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- Observer states include Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia.
- SCO has six dialogue partners, namely Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.
- SCO has two permanent bodies — the SCO Secretariat based in Beijing and the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent.