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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. SCO has emerged as a key regional organisation in the Eurasian space. In the light of the statement discuss the opportunity for India to fulfil its national interest. (250 Words)

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Approach

- Introduce with explaining in brief about the SCO as an important organization in the Eurasian landscape.
- Discuss how SCO provides opportunity for India to fulfil its national interests.
- Highlight some issues with the group and suggest a way forward the same.

Introduction

In less than two decades, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has emerged as a key regional organisation in the Eurasian space. It accounts for over 60% of Eurasia's territory, more than 40% of the world's population, and almost a quarter of the world's GDP.

Body

India's Opportunities and SCO

- **Regional Security:** SCO will enable India, as an integral part of the Eurasian security grouping, to neutralise threats like religious extremism and terrorism in the region.
It is due to this, India has shown keen interest in deepening its security-related cooperation with the SCO and its Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), which specifically deals with issues relating to security and defence.
- **Connect With Central Asia:** SCO is also a potential platform to advance India's Connect Central Asia policy.
India's ongoing engagement with SCO can be seen through the prism of reconnecting and re-energising ties with a region with which India has shared civilizational linkages, and is considered the country's extended neighbourhood.
- **Dealing With Pakistan & China:** SCO provides India with a forum where it can constructively engage both China and Pakistan in a regional context and project India's security interests.
- **Bringing Stability in Afghanistan:** SCO, also an alternative regional platform to delve into the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan.
So far India completed 500 projects in Afghanistan and is continuing with some more, with a total development aid of \$3 billion.

- **Strategic Importance:** Acknowledging the strategic importance emanating from the region and SCO, the Indian Prime Minister had articulated the foundational dimension of Eurasia being 'SECURE'. The letters in the word SECURE are:
 - S for Security of our citizens,
 - E for Economic development for all,
 - C for Connecting the region,
 - U for Unite our people,
 - R for Respect for Sovereignty and Integrity, and
 - E for Environment protection.

Challenges that India needs to navigate

- **Denial Of Direct Land Connectivity:** A major impediment in India's expanded engagement with Eurasia remains the strategic denial of direct land connectivity between India and Afghanistan and beyond by Pakistan.

The lack of connectivity has also hampered the development of energy ties between the hydrocarbon-rich region and India
- **Difference Over BRI:** While India has made its opposition to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) clear, all other SCO members have embraced the Chinese project.
- **India-Pakistan Rivalry:** SCO members have, in the past, expressed fears of the organisation being held hostage to India's and Pakistan's adversarial relationship, and their fears would likely have worsened in recent times.

Way Forward

- **Improving Relations With China:** It is imperative that India and China set up a modus vivendi (agreement allowing conflicting parties to coexist peacefully) for the 21st century to be viewed through the lens of an Asia century.
- **Improving Relations With Pakistan:** SCO's emphasis on promoting economic cooperation, trade, energy and regional connectivity should be leveraged to improve relations with Pakistan and persuade it to unblock India's access to Eurasia and provide a fillip to projects like TAPI.
- **Strengthening Military Cooperation:** In the context of increasing terrorism in the region, it is imperative for SCO countries to develop a 'cooperative and sustainable security' framework and make the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure more effective.
- The SCO member countries should develop **joint institutional capacities** that respect individual national sensitivities and yet generate a spirit of cooperation to create contact and connectivity between people, societies and nations.
- Member countries should realise that they have collective stakes to create a safe, secure and stable region that can contribute towards progress and improvement of human development indices.