



# India and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

*The editorial analyses SCO's significance for India.*

## Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

The SCO was formed in 2001, with the intent of reducing the tension at the Eurasian borders strained by the Sino-Soviet rivalry of the Cold War. However, the organization has become more inclusive in its agendas, moving forth from its core security orientation, seeking greater regional prosperity for the collective. Culture has become an important element of the SCO, attuned to the group's search for an inclusive Eurasian identity.

- As a regional grouping, SCO has provided India, China and Russia with an opportunity to reset regional ties.
- The recent, SCO summit was held in June 2018 in Qingdao, China. India (with Pakistan) was admitted as its full member in the Astana summit, 2017.
- The SCO summit gave India fresh leads to engage with Central Asia. Landlocked Uzbekistan will now funnel goods through the Iranian port of Chabahar — a joint undertaking of Iran, India, and Afghanistan.
- Other than this India is re-exploring a transit corridor to Central Asia through Pakistan under the SCO's multilateral connectivity initiative. If the Pakistan-Central Asia two-way route works, it can soften the ground for improved ties between the two countries.

## Members, Goals of the Pan-Eurasian Grouping

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organization formed in 2001. It was preceded by the Shanghai Five mechanism.
- SCO was launched by China, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, reflecting a growing awareness among these countries to come to terms with the unilateralism of the U.S.-led post-Cold War world order.
- The SCO comprises eight member states namely India, Kazakhstan, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- There are four observer states: Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, Mongolia and six dialogue partners including Nepal and Sri Lanka.
- Its **main goals** are: strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, education, energy and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.

## What is India's Stake and Role in the SCO?

- India's entry into SCO provides it with the opportunities in the geoeconomic and the geostrategic sphere in the Central Asian Region (CAR) which supplies around 10 percent of oil and energy to the world. Once energy-rich Iran is in the group, the stakes will be higher.
- India's pending energy projects like the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline, IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) pipeline can get a much-needed push through the SCO.
- India could gain from SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) analyzing key intelligence

inputs on the movements of terror outfits, drug-trafficking, cybersecurity threats, and public information.

- Under its framework, SCO can provide a rare opportunity for Pakistan and India to share several multilateral tables – antiterrorism structure, military exercises etc.
- The SCO provides a platform for India to improve its bilateral relations with the Central Asian countries. It could be also useful for checking the rising influence of China in the Eurasian region.
- The grouping is planning to initiate negotiations on the SCO FTA (free trade agreement) by 2020.

## **Conclusion: SCO Matters**

- From the Indian foreign policy point of view, SCO opens up Central Asia for India while opening up vistas for regional cooperation in the region.
- India needs more engagement in the region in the light of the growing Chinese influence and the need for energy security and regional stability.

## **Fighting Terrorism: SCO-RATS and India**

- SCO-RATS is a permanent body of the SCO and is intended to facilitate coordination and interaction between the SCO member states in the fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism.
- The main functions of SCO-RATS are coordination and information sharing. As a member, India has actively participated in the activities of SCO-RATS.
- India's permanent membership would enable it to generate greater understanding among members for its perspective.

## **Plurilateralism: a term for India's Current Foreign Policy**

- Countries with common interests have traditionally come together in subgroups to formulate, influence and negotiate policies both within and outside multilateral frameworks that characterize international decision-making processes.
- Plurilateralism is not a new phenomenon but has been used by powerful blocs in and outside the multilateral framework.
- Given the current complexities of multilateral negotiations, a shared interest among a limited number of governments brings these together for interconnection. This process of forming blocs is conceptualized as plurilateralism.
  - Examples of Indian plurilateralism (multiple mini-multilateral groupings) include BRICS, IBSA, BIMSTEC, G20, and SCO.