



Strengthening India-Pakistan Relations and SCO

For Prelims: [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#), [TAPI \(Turkmenistan-Pakistan-Afghanistan-India\)](#), [SAARC](#), [Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure \(RATS\)](#), [UN General Assembly](#), [Iran-Pakistan-India \(IPI\) Pipeline](#), Shanghai Spirit, [SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group](#), [Commonwealth of Independent States \(CIS\)](#), [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#), [Collective Security Treaty Organization \(CSTO\)](#).

For Mains: Role of multilateral forums in strengthening India and Pakistan relations and importance of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in it.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Recently, India's External Affairs Minister had an **informal interaction** with Pakistan's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister during the [SCO Council of Heads of Government](#) meeting in **Islamabad, Pakistan**.

- The atmosphere of exchanges has been said to be **more positive** than in previous encounters.
- **The Shanghai cooperation organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of Governments** is the **second-highest council** after the SCO Council of Heads of States.

What were the Positive Developments Between India and Pakistan at the SCO Summit?

- **Avoidance of Contentious Language:** Both India and Pakistan avoided using contentious language in their national statements.
 - There were **no direct references** to sensitive issues like **Kashmir** from Pakistan while India **avoided** specific references to **Pakistan while addressing [cross-border terrorism](#)**.
- **Productive Meeting:** India commended the Pakistani leadership for organising a **productive SCO meeting**, signalling a positive tone in his **departure remarks**.
- **Collaboration on Regional Issues:** Topics like **trade, connectivity, energy flows**, and cooperation against **terrorism, separatism, and extremism** were discussed, with an emphasis on **collaboration** rather than confrontation.
 - [TAPI \(Turkmenistan-Pakistan-Afghanistan-India\)](#) energy pipeline and other issues were discussed with some SCO members.
- **Initiatives for Economic Cooperation:** The summit resulted in proposals for an **Economic Dialogue Programme** and strategies to enhance **economic cooperation**.
 - The joint statement emphasised cooperation in areas like **green development, digital economy, trade, poverty alleviation, and renewable energy**.

Why are Positive Developments Significant?

- **Revocation of Article 370 (2019):** India's decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir ([Article 370](#)) in August 2019 **strained already fragile relations**.
 - Pakistan views this as an **illegal annexation**, while India considers it an **internal matter**.
- **Downgrade in Bilateral Relations:** On 7th August 2019, Pakistan **unilaterally downgraded** diplomatic relations with India to the **chargé d'affaires level** and **expelled the Indian High Commissioner**, in response to India's revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Indus Waters Treaty:** Disputes over the [Kishanganga](#) and [Ratle hydroelectric projects](#), in particular, have raised tensions, with Pakistan alleging that India is violating the treaty.
 - India has formally requested a **review and modification** of the [Indus Waters Treaty \(IWT\)](#) with Pakistan which has not gone well with Pakistan.
- **Limited Trade:** After the [Pulwama attack](#) in 2019, India revoked Pakistan's **Most Favoured Nation (MFN)** status, and Pakistan suspended bilateral trade.
 - Revocation of **Article 370** led to a halt in **bilateral trade**. In 2018-19, trade amounted to **USD 2.06 billion of exports and USD 0.495 billion of imports**.
- **Internal Interference:** Pakistan has accused India of fomenting unrest in its **Balochistan** province and supporting separatist movements there.
 - India accuses Pakistan of **radicalising** Kashmiri youth and **internationalising** Kashmir issue.

How can Multilateral Forums Improve India-Pakistan Relations?

- **Neutral Platforms for Dialogue:** Multilateral settings like the [SCO](#) provide **neutral environments** for India and Pakistan to engage without the bilateral tensions that usually impede dialogue.
 - These forums allow **informal conversations** and [track-two diplomacy](#) (unofficial, non-governmental discussions) which can **ease tensions** and keep lines of **communication open**.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Through [SAARC](#), both nations have **previously collaborated** on regional trade agreements.
 - The potential for cooperation in areas like [climate change](#), [disaster management](#), and public health remains high.
- **Security Concerns:** Both India and Pakistan are part of the **SCO's [Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure \(RATS\)](#)**, which aims to promote cooperation on **combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism**.
 - This offers a framework where both countries can work together on **common security threats**, even if their bilateral relations are strained.
- **Reducing Mistrust:** [UN General Assembly](#) and other international forums involve the participation of several countries, which can act as mediators for **constructive dialogue**.
 - Multilateral diplomacy can **ease tensions**, as witnessed in the [Kargil conflict](#) in 1999, where international pressure played a role in **de-escalating the situation**.
- **Economic Exchanges:** Projects like the **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline** and [Iran-Pakistan-India \(IPI\) pipeline](#) of mutual benefit can foster cooperation even between adversaries.

What are the Key Facts About SCO?

- **About SCO:** It is a **permanent intergovernmental international organisation** founded on **15th June 2001**, in Shanghai, China.
- **Establishment:** It was established by **six founding countries** namely Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, evolving from the **Shanghai Five mechanism**.
- **Objectives of the SCO:** It aims to strengthen **mutual trust** among member states, enhance cooperation in various fields, ensure **regional peace and stability**, and promote a fair international **political and economic order**.
- **Principles of SCO:** The SCO adheres to the **Shanghai spirit**, characterised by **mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation**, respect for cultural diversity, and the pursuit of common development.
- **Decision-Making Bodies:** The **SCO's supreme** decision-making body is the **Council of Heads**

of States (CHS), which meets annually to address key organisational issues.

- The **Council of Heads of Government (CHG)** convenes yearly to discuss cooperation strategies, prioritise areas, and approve the budget.

▪ **Standing Bodies:** The SCO has **two permanent bodies**.

- The **Secretariat** is located in **Beijing**, responsible for the organisation's day-to-day operations.
- The **Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** in **Tashkent**, which focuses on regional security and **counter-terrorism efforts**.

▪ **Current Membership:** SCO has **10 full members** namely China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, **Iran (2023) and Belarus (2024)**.

▪ **SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group:** In **2005**, the SCO formed the [SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group](#) to address **security and stability** concerns in Afghanistan, demonstrating its commitment to regional security issues.

▪ **Official Languages:** The official languages of the SCO are **Russian and Chinese**, facilitating communication among member states.

▪ **Partnerships and Collaborations:** The SCO has developed **partnerships** with various organisations, including the [Commonwealth of Independent States \(CIS\)](#), [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#), [Collective Security Treaty Organization \(CSTO\)](#), and multiple United Nations agencies.

Conclusion

The recent **informal interactions** between India and Pakistan at the SCO meeting, characterised by positive developments and constructive dialogue, highlight the **potential of multilateral forums** to foster cooperation. By prioritising regional collaboration and addressing common challenges, these platforms can pave the way for improved bilateral relations and stability.

Drishti Mains Question:

Analyse how multilateral forums can reduce mistrust between India and Pakistan. How can the spirit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) contribute to this?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Mains

Q. Critically examine the aims and objectives of SCO. What importance does it hold for India? **(2021)**