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Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

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What is SCO?

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organisation.
- It's a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- It was created in 2001.
- The SCO Charter was signed in 2002, and entered into force in 2003.
- It is a statutory document which outlines the organisation's goals and principles, as well as its structure and core activities.
- The SCO's official languages are Russian and Chinese.

Genesis

- Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan were members of the Shanghai Five.
- Shanghai Five (1996) emerged from a series of border demarcation and demilitarization talks which the four former Soviet republics held with China to ensure stability along the borders.
- Following the accession of Uzbekistan to the organisation in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO.
- India and Pakistan became members in 2017.

Membership

1. Kazakhstan
2. China
3. Kyrgyzstan
4. Russia
5. Tajikistan
6. Uzbekistan

7. India
8. Pakistan

Observer states

- Afghanistan
- Belarus
- Iran
- Mongolia

Dialogue Partner

- Azerbaijan
- Armenia
- Cambodia
- Nepal
- Turkey
- Sri Lanka

Objectives

- Strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states.
- Promoting effective cooperation in -politics, trade & economy, research & technology and culture.
- Enhancing ties in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, etc.
- Maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region.
- Establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political & economic order.

Guiding Principle – Based on Shanghai Spirit

- Internal policy based on the principles of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for cultural diversity, and a desire for common development.
- External policy in accordance with the principles of non-alignment, non-targeting any third country, and openness.

Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

- **Heads of State Council** – The supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States & international organisations, and considers international issues.

- **Heads of Government Council** – Approves the budget, considers and decides upon issues related economic spheres of interaction within SCO.
- **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs** – Considers issues related to day-to-day activities.
- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** – Established to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- **SCO Secretariat** – Based in Beijing to provide informational, analytical & organisational support.

Operations

- Initially, the SCO focused on mutual intraregional efforts to curb terrorism, separatism and extremism in Central Asia.
- In 2006, SCO's agenda widened to include combatting international drug trafficking as a source of financing global.
- In 2008, SCO actively participated in bringing back stability in Afghanistan.
- At the same time, the SCO took up a variety of economic activities:
 - In 2003, SCO member states signed a 20-year Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation for the establishment of a free trade zone within the territory under the SCO member states.

Strengths of SCO

- The SCO covers 40% of the global population, nearly 20% of the global GDP and 22% of the world's land mass.
- The SCO has a strategically important role in Asia due to its geographical significance - this enables it to control the Central Asia and limit the American influence in region.
- SCO is seen as counterweight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Challenges for SCO

- The SCO security challenges includes combating terrorism, extremism and separatism;; drug and weapons trafficking, illegal immigration, etc.
- Despite being geographically close, the rich diversity in member's history, backgrounds, language, national interests and form of government, wealth and culture makes the SCO decision making challenging.

Importance for India

India's membership of SCO can help in achieving regional integration, promote connectivity and stability across borders.

Security

- India through RATS can improve its counterterrorism abilities by working toward intelligence sharing, law enforcement and developing best practices and technologies.
- Through the SCO, India can also work on anti-drug trafficking and small arms proliferation.
- Cooperation on common challenges of terrorism and radicalisation.

Energy

India being an energy deficient country with increasing demands for energy, SCO provides it with an opportunity to meet its energy requirements through regional diplomacy.

Talks on the construction of stalled pipelines like the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline; IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) pipeline can get a much needed push through the SCO.

Trade

- SCO provides direct access to Central Asia – overcoming the main hindrance in flourishing of trade between India and Central Asia.
- SCO acts as an alternative route to Central Asia.
- Economic Ties - Central Asian countries provides India with a market for its IT, telecommunications, banking, finance and pharmaceutical industries.

Geopolitical

- Central Asia is a part of India's Extended Neighbourhood – SCO provides India an opportunity to pursue the “Connect Central Asian Policy”.
- Helps India fulfil its aspiration of playing an active role in its extended neighbourhood as well as checking the ever growing influence of China in Eurasia.
- Platform for India to simultaneously engage with its traditional friend Russia as well as its rivals, China and Pakistan.

Challenges of SCO Membership for India

- Pakistan’s inclusion in SCO poses potential difficulties for India.
- India’s ability to assert itself would be limited and it may have to play second fiddle since China and Russia are co-founders of SCO and its dominant powers.
- India may also have to either dilute its growing partnership with the West or engage in a delicate balancing act - as SCO has traditionally adopted an anti-Western posture.