

## **Brief on India-SCO Cooperation**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a ten-member multilateral organization, established on 15 June 2001 by the leaders of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These countries, except Uzbekistan, had been members of the Shanghai-5 group formed in April 1996. In 2001, Uzbekistan was admitted as a member (thus transforming it into the Shanghai-6). At the July 2005 Astana Summit, India, Iran and Pakistan were granted Observer status. In July 2015 in Ufa, Russia, the SCO decided to admit India (and Pakistan) as full Member. In June 2017, at the Summit in Astana, India (and Pakistan) officially joined SCO as a full-member. Iran was granted the status of a Member State at the SCO Summit hosted virtually by India on 4 July 2023. Belarus was admitted as a new member at the SCO Summit in Astana on 4 July 2024. Apart from the 10 Members, the SCO has 2 Observers (Afghanistan and Mongolia) and 14 Dialogue Partners (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Maldives, Bahrain, Myanmar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar). As per the SCO Charter, Russian and Chinese are the only two official languages of the SCO.

### **Structure of SCO and it's mechanisms**

2. SCO's supreme decision-making body is the Council of Heads of State (CHS) which meets annually on a rotational basis (Russian alphabetical order) in the country chairing the SCO. India hosted the 23<sup>rd</sup> Summit of CHS in virtual mode on 4 July 2023. The last (24<sup>th</sup>) Summit of CHS was held in Astana on 3-4 July 2024.
3. The Council of Heads of Government (CHG) is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important SCO mechanism which meets annually to decide upon major issues of trade-economic cooperation as well as the SCO annual budget. India hosted the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of CHG virtually in November 2020. The last (23<sup>rd</sup>) meeting of CHG was held in Pakistan on 15-16 October 2024.
4. The Council of SCO Foreign Ministers (CFM) meets once a year, typically one month before the meeting of CHS to consider the draft outcome documents and other preparations of the CHS meeting. The last meeting of CFM was held on 21-22 May 2024 in Astana.
5. The Council of SCO National Coordinators (CNC) is an important mechanism to coordinate and direct the day-to-day activities of SCO. The CNC is responsible for making necessary preparations for the meetings of CHS, CHG and CFM. JS (SCO) is the National Coordinator of SCO in India.

6. There are also other dialogue mechanisms i.e. annual meetings of Ministers of Defence, Economy & Trade, Transport, Culture, Tourism, Education, Health, Justice, Emergency Situations, Secretaries of National Security Councils, Supreme Court Chief Justices, Prosecutors General, etc.

7. The SCO has two Permanent Bodies: (i) SCO Secretariat in Beijing; and (ii) Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent. The current SCO Secretary General Mr. Nurlan Yermekbaev (Former Minister of Defence of Kazakhstan) assumed charge in January 2025, for a period of three years. India contributes 5.9% to the SCO annual budget. India also has two quota posts (Deputy Secretary General and Referent) each in the SCO Secretariat in Beijing and in the SCO-RATS headquarters in Tashkent.

## **India in SCO**

8. Since its induction as a Member, India has been actively participating in SCO and providing substantial support to various mechanisms in the forum. India has ensured that the meetings and events of SCO are represented at appropriate level. While the CHS meetings are attended by the PM, the CHG meetings are usually represented by EAM.

## **India's Chairship of CHG**

9. Hon'ble Vice President Shri Venkaiah Naidu chaired the 19<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the SCO CHG hosted by India in virtual format on 30 November 2020. This was the first time that a Summit-level Meeting was held under India's chairmanship. A Joint Communique was adopted at the meeting.

10. During the course of its chairmanship of CHG in 2020, India undertook a lot of initiatives in a wide range of areas. India hosted (virtually) a Preparatory Seminar on Startup Forum on 11 August, first-ever meeting of Consortium of Economic Think-Tanks on 21-22 August, Seminar on Role of Traditional Medicine in achieving SDG-3 in SCO Countries on 22 September, SCO Business Conclave on 23 November, Young Scientists Conclave on 24-28 November, and Exhibition on Shared Buddhist Heritage on 30 November. India also translated 10 classics of Indian regional literature into Russian and Chinese languages. These events witnessed enthusiastic participation of SCO Member States. In addition to the two Ministerial meetings – Justice and Foreign Trade & Economy – hosted by India before the CHG meeting, India also launched the first-ever SCO Startup Forum, and initiated proposals on establishing a Special Working Group on Innovation & Startups, and setting up an Expert Working Group on Traditional Medicine.

## **India's presidency of CHS**

11. India assumed the presidency of SCO CHS on 17 September 2022 at the Summit in Samarkand and hosted the SCO-CHS Summit on 4 July 2023 in virtual format. India as the chair of SCO articulated its priorities as moving towards a 'SECURE' SCO – Security, Economic Development, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Environmental protection. In the course of its Presidency of SCO in 2022-2023, India worked on a diverse range of themes to give a new dynamism to the multifaceted cooperation and in many areas opened up new vistas of cooperation to meaningfully enrich SCO's agenda. More than 130 institutional meetings/events were held under India's chairmanship, including 14 Ministerial-level meetings.

12. India also directed the cooperation in SCO towards five new verticals like Startups and Innovation, Traditional Medicine, Science and Technology, Youth Empowerment and Shared Buddhist Heritage. Varanasi as the 1<sup>st</sup> SCO Cultural and Tourism Capital for 2022-23 hosted several events with the active participation from the Member States.

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