

# 24th SCO Summit in Astana

## Why In News

- **24th Meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of State (SCO Summit)** will be held on July 4, 2024, in Astana, Kazakhstan, under Kazakhstan's presidency. **Dr S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister**, will lead the Indian delegation, MEA officials said.



- During the Summit, leaders will review the organisation's activities over the past twenty years and discuss future multilateral cooperation. Key regional and international issues are also on the agenda. **Last year, India hosted** the SCO Summit virtually, where PM Modi expressed full support for the event's success in a recent call with Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.



## Why Isn't PM Modi Attending

- **Indian prime minister usually attends** the SCO – which provides an opportunity for heads of the state of the eight-member bloc to meet on the sidelines of the summit.
- Indeed, India had earlier said Modi would attend the SCO meet. the official reason India has given for Modi dropping out is that the dates of the SCO **conflicted with that of the first session of India's Parliament**. "Participation in SCO summits has also helped India maintain the facade of multi-alignment, amid the rapidly growing ties with the US," the piece noted.
- But a look at recent history shows that Modi and Xi haven't had much interaction at summits.



## Shanghai Cooperation Organization

- **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** is a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance that was **founded in 2001**. It began as the Shanghai Five in 1996, consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, focusing on border demarcation and building mutual trust.



- The group expanded and evolved into the SCO with the **inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001**. Founded by China and Russia in 2001, the SCO is the world's largest regional organisation in geographic scope and population, **covering 80% of Eurasia and 40% of the global population**.
- The organization has two main permanent bodies:
- The **SCO Secretariat in Beijing, which** handles administrative functions.
- The **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, focusing on security cooperation and counter-terrorism.
- The decision-making process within the SCO is consensus-based, reflecting the principle of equal partnership among member states.



## Membership and Observers

- The **SCO's membership has grown over time**. Initially comprising six countries, it expanded to include India and Pakistan as full members in 2017. The current full members are: China; Russia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan; Uzbekistan; India, Iran and Pakistan.
- Additionally, the SCO has several observer states and dialogue partners, including countries like Afghanistan, Belarus, Mongolia, and others, which participate in various capacities in the organization's activities.

## Key Areas of Cooperation

- **Security Cooperation:** The SCO places significant emphasis on combating the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordinated actions against threats are central to this effort.



- **Economic Collaboration:** The organization promotes trade and economic cooperation among member states. Initiatives such as the SCO Development Bank and the SCO Free Trade Area have been proposed to enhance economic integration.



- **Cultural Exchange:** The SCO fosters cultural ties through events, educational exchanges, and joint cultural projects, aiming to strengthen people-to-people connections among member countries.

## India's Entry and Strategic Interests

- **India's accession to the SCO in 2017** marked a significant step in its foreign policy, reflecting its interest in engaging with Eurasia. India's involvement in the SCO is driven by several strategic objectives:
- India's priorities in SCO are shaped by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a '**SECURE**' SCO. SECURE stands for Security, Economic cooperation, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Environmental protection, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.



- **Regional Security:** Participation in the SCO enhances India's ability to collaborate on security issues, particularly in combating terrorism and extremism. The SCO provides a platform for intelligence sharing and joint counter-terrorism efforts.
- **Economic Opportunities:** The SCO offers India access to the resource-rich Central Asian region, which is crucial for energy security and trade. India's engagement aims to boost connectivity and trade routes, such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).



- **Geopolitical Influence:** Membership in the SCO allows India to play a more prominent role in regional geopolitics. It provides a counterbalance to China's influence in the region and strengthens India's ties with Russia and Central Asian countries.
- **Cultural and People-to-People Ties:** India leverages the SCO to promote cultural exchanges and enhance its soft power in the region. Initiatives such as the SCO Film Festival and academic scholarships help build cultural bridges.

