

"The regional aspirations of Central Asian countries contradict India's goals."

At the 19th Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, India will have to navigate between two contradictory imperatives. While on the one hand it must act as a willing partner of regional cooperation led by China and Russia, on the other it must avoid being seen as a part of the 'anti-American gang'. It could also be seen as a paradox that India wants to fight against terrorism through a body that includes states that pose the biggest threats to Indian security.

Trade and terrorism

In Bishkek, Russia and Central Asian countries are likely to express "broad support" for China in its escalating tariff fight against the U.S. India is equally concerned about this trade war, but it is unclear whether it will join the others in slamming U.S. protectionism. New Delhi is seemingly confident of dealing with the U.S. without necessarily supporting China. For Chinese President Xi Jinping, whipping up anti-Americanism serves to stave off mounting opposition against his anti-corruption campaign and concentration of power. It is also notable that all SCO members barring India are enthusiastic supporters of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The summit is likely to have a muted agenda. SCO Secretary General Vladimir Norov has hinted at adopting documents to deepen multilateral cooperation and discussing non-conventional issues such as the fight against drug trafficking, cooperation in IT, environmental protection and healthcare. Terrorism is likely to be approached from the angle of improving the situation in Afghanistan and not necessarily of curbing the terrorist elements emanating from Pakistan. China is sure to offer its experiences of dealing with counterterrorism, and the deradicalisation measures it has taken in Xinjiang. China's achievement in expanding its high-speed rail network to restive Xinjiang comes with enormous economic and security implications for Eurasia. China has also enhanced its military projection capabilities to meet any potential crises beyond its western frontiers.

Kyrgyzstan is the latest to create an international near-border trade centre in Alai district bordering China. If the regional countries switch to adopting the Chinese railway track gauge of 1,435 mm, then China will be successful in uniting Eurasia to challenge a united Europe. As the situation unfolds, China and Russia are adopting a new era of global strategic partnership. Where India fits in is the question.

On the sidelines

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with President Xi on the sidelines of the summit will be critical, especially as Mr. Modi is now being guided by his new External Affairs Minister. This meeting also comes after

China's decision to withdraw its technical hold on listing Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The key concern for the two leaders is the impact of the U.S.-China trade war, but judging from the trends, both sides seem to be gearing up for a big settlement of pending bilateral issues.

Mr. Modi's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin is important to save the S-400 contract deal against Washington's mounting threat to act under CAATSA. India and Russia have an ambitious economic agenda drawn up for 2019, and Mr. Putin might reiterate his invitation to Mr. Modi to be the chief guest at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September. It would be a good opportunity for India to explore Russia's Far East region not just for developing economic cooperation but also for exploring the prospects of transferring skilled labourers to offset Chinese demographic threats in the region. Russia is also keen that India joins the Arctic: Territory of Dialogue Forum.

India seems committed to work within the SCO to develop a 'cooperative and sustainable security' framework, to make the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure more effective, and participate in efforts to bring about stability in Afghanistan. Even though the regional aspirations of Central Asian countries contradict India's goals, these countries back India's proposal for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Mr. Modi is certain to bring up India's resolve to fight terrorism by drawing the SCO's attention to the attacks in Pulwama and Sri Lanka. But China would not like India to use the SCO to name and shame Pakistan.

India may stick to its position on BRI, but accelerating progress on the International North-South Transport Corridor, the Chabahar Port, the Ashgabat Agreement and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway should be very much on the cards.

The Pakistan policy

The India-Pakistan stalemate endures but the environment has changed a little since India's air strikes in Balakot. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has been less belligerent, but whether the Pakistani military is taking tougher measures to curb anti-India terror groups is not known. Mr. Khan will have to demonstrate clearly if he wants Mr. Modi to give diplomacy a chance should they meet on the margins of the SCO meet. Mr. Modi might chart a new policy course in favour of normalising ties, especially since India has scored a point with Masood Azhar being designated as a global terrorist at the UNSC.

Pakistan places high hopes on the SCO to regulate key regional security issues (Afghanistan and Kashmir) even though the SCO discourages bilateral disputes to be raised. Its other agenda would be to sell the Gwadar Port as a potential passage to landlocked Central Asian states, besides promoting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor for regional economic integration and security cooperation.

To be sure, none of the institutional-level measures including the joint SCO military exercises have so far entailed any satisfactory results in jointly fighting against terrorism. Nevertheless, the SCO is relevant for India to garner support for reforms of the UNSC to make the latter more representative and effective. India has been lending support to the member countries' candidatures for non-permanent membership of the UNSC for a long time.

GS World Team...

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

Why in the discussion?

- A two-day Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) conference is being organized in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan today. This is the 19th Conference of SCO.
- During this summit, PM Modi will also hold bilateral meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin.
- This conference is very important in view to geo-strategic balance.
- SCO is an eight-member economic and security block led by China. In this group, India and Pakistan were included in the year 2017.

What is it?

- SCO is a permanent intergovernmental international organization.
- It is an Eurasian political, economic and security organization, whose purpose is to maintain peace, security and stability in the respective area.
- It was founded on June 15, 2001 in Shanghai.
- The SCO charter was signed in the year 2002 and it was implemented in the year 2003.
- This charter is a constitutional document that outlines its structure and key activities along with the goals and principles of the organization.
- Russian and Chinese are the official languages of SCO.

Formation

- Prior to the establishment of SCO in 2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan were members of the organization 'Shanghai-5'.
- In the year 1996, 'Shanghai-5' was formed from the series of demilitarization negotiations, which was done with China by four former Soviet republics for stability on the borders.
- 'Shanghai-5' was named SCO after Uzbekistan joined the organization in 2001.

- In 2017, India and Pakistan got its membership status.

Member Country

- Currently its member countries include Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan.
- Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia are included as observer in SCO countries.
- Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka are the dialogue partners of this organization.

Aim

- Strengthening mutual trust and goodwill among member countries.
- Promote effective cooperation in political, business and economy, research and technology and culture.
- Enhancing relationships in areas such as education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, etc.
- To maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the respective area.
- Establishing a democratic, impartial and rational new-global political and economic system.

Structure

- **Council of Heads of State:** It is the highest body of SCO which interacts with other nations and international organizations through their internal activities and talks on international issues.
- **The Council of Heads:** Under the SCO, it decides the issues related to economic sectors through talks and approves budget of the organization.
- **Council of Foreign Ministers:** It considers issues related to day-to-day activities.
- **Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS):** looks into the matters dealing with terrorism, separatism and extremism.
- **SCO Secretariat:** It is located in Beijing to provide informative, analytical and organizational support.

Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

Q. Consider the following statements related to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation-

1. It was established in Shanghai in 2011.
2. In 2017, India and Pakistan were jointly given the membership.
3. Its 19th Summit is organised in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) 2 and 3
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

Q.1 What is Shanghai Cooperation Organisation? In recent years India has been given its membership. How will it influence the economic and strategic interests of India in Middle East? Discuss.

(250Words)

Note: Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 12 June is 1 (c)

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