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External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as he arrives to attend Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting, in Islamabad, Pakistan. (AP)

IN A thinly-veiled reference to Pakistan and China, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday that “if trust is lacking or cooperation inadequate, if friendship has fallen short and good neighbourliness is missing somewhere, there are surely reasons to introspect and causes to address”.

Speaking at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) heads of government meeting in Islamabad, Jaishankar listed the key challenges that the organisation was committed to combating — terrorism, separatism and extremism.

Addressing the gathering that included Pakistan Prime Minister [Shehbaz Sharif](#) and visiting Chinese Premier Li Qiang, he said: “If we fast-forward from the inception of the Charter to the situation today, these goals and these tasks are even more crucial. It is, therefore, essential that we have an honest conversation. If trust is lacking or cooperation inadequate, if friendship has fallen short and good neighbourliness is missing somewhere, there are surely reasons to introspect and causes to address. Equally, it is only when we reaffirm our commitment most sincerely to the Charter that we can fully realise the benefits of cooperation and integration that it envisages.”

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“Our endeavours will progress only when our commitment to the Charter remains firm. It is axiomatic that development and growth requires peace and stability. And as the Charter spelt out, this means being firm and uncompromising in countering the ‘three evils’. If activities across borders are characterised by terrorism, extremism and separatism, they are hardly likely to encourage trade, energy flows, connectivity and people-to-people exchanges in parallel,” Jaishankar said, again hinting at Pakistan’s intransigence on cross-border terrorism.”

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In a cautionary remark, again aimed at China and Pakistan, he said: “Cooperation must be based on mutual respect and sovereign equality. It should recognise territorial integrity and sovereignty. It must be built on genuine partnership, not unilateral agendas. It cannot progress if we cherry-pick global practices, especially of trade and transit.”

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This is in the context of the China-Pakistan economic corridor, which, India says, violates its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Also, Pakistan doesn't allow overland transit of Indian goods for trade with Central Asia.

Congratulating Pakistan for its presidency of the SCO Council of Heads of Government this year, Jaishankar said India has extended its full support.

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“We meet at a difficult time in world affairs. Two major conflicts are underway, each with its own global repercussions. The Covid pandemic has left many in the developing world deeply devastated. Disruptions of various kinds — ranging from extreme climate events to supply chain uncertainties and financial volatility — are impacting growth and development. Debt is a serious concern, even as the world falls behind in achieving SDG targets. Technology holds great promise, as well as raises a new host of concerns. How should the members of the SCO respond to these challenges,” he said.

“The answers lie in the Charter of our organisation... I urge you to reflect on Article 1 that spells out the goals and tasks of the SCO... The objective is to strengthen

mutual trust, friendship and good neighbourliness. It is to develop multifaceted cooperation, especially of a regional nature. It is to be a positive force in terms of balanced growth, integration and conflict prevention. The Charter was equal clear what the key challenges were. And these were primarily three, that the was committed to combating: one, terrorism; two, separatism; and three, extremism,” he said.

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Calling for reaffirming commitment to the Charter, Jaishankar said: “This is not just an endeavor for our own benefit. We all realise that the world is moving towards multi-polarity. Globalisation and rebalancing are realities that cannot be denied. Cumulatively, they have created many new opportunities in terms of trade, investment, connectivity, energy flows and other forms of collaboration. There is no question that our region would benefit immensely if we take this forward. Not just that, others too would draw their own inspiration and lessons from such efforts.”

This is a major affirmation of regional connectivity and groupings by Delhi, at a time when groupings like SAARC have not met for a decade now.

“Let us contemplate how much we all stand to gain if it was to be otherwise... Industrial cooperation can enhance competitiveness and expand labour markets. MSME collaboration has positive implications for employment. Our collective endeavours can expand resources and encourage investment flows. Business communities will profit through larger networks. Collaborative connectivity can create new efficiencies. The world of logistics, as indeed of energy, could undergo a sea change. Environmental protection and climate action are ready domains for mutually beneficial exchanges. The treatment of infectious and non-infectious diseases will benefit from accessible and affordable pharmaceutical capabilities. Whether it is health, food or energy security, we are all clearly better off working together. Indeed, even culture, education and sports are promising areas. In effect, there is so much that we can do once we are truly determined to promote that synergy,” Jaishankar said.

He also listed the Indian initiatives and examples that can be emulated. “From an Indian perspective, our own global initiatives and national endeavours are also strongly relevant for the SCO. The International Solar Alliance promotes renewable energy. The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure prepares us for climate events. Mission LiFE advocates a sustainable lifestyle. Practicing yoga and promoting millets make a difference to wellness and to environment. The Global Biofuel Alliance recognises the task of energy transition. The International Big Cat Alliance protects our bio-diversity. At home, we have demonstrated the value of digital public infrastructure, just as we have shown the impact of women-led development,” he said.

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Calling for reformed multilateralism and reform of the UN, Jaishankar said: “While we each make our contribution, the world order is more than the sum of its parts. As it changes, global institutions do need to keep pace. That is why the case for ‘reformed multilateralism’ gets stronger by the day. Comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council, both in the permanent and non-permanent categories, is essential.”

This is important since China and Pakistan have been resisting India’s permanent membership at the UN.

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“I remind you that we recognised in July 2024 at Astana that the credibility and effectiveness of the UN is dependent on ensuring the representation of developing countries through comprehensive reform. Similarly, in the ‘Pact for the Future’ which was adopted at the recent UN General Assembly, our leaders have agreed to reform the Security Council, to make it more representative, inclusive, transparent,

efficient, effective, democratic and accountable. The SCO must be in the lead of advocating such change, not hold back on a matter of such importance,” he said

“It is imperative that we now renew our resolve to attain the objectives of the Charter. That means recognising the current constraints on our cooperation and focusing on the pathway forward. It can surely happen when we develop and implement a common agenda that is firmly based on an agreed mutuality of interests. To do that, it is equally essential that we abide by the dos and don’ts so clearly articulated by the Charter. After all, the SCO represents the forces of change on whom much of the world puts such great store. Let us live up to that responsibility,” Jaishankar said.

Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif, who opened the SCO session, said, “Let us prioritise collaboration over political divisions, build on our achievements, address the shared challenges and work hand-in-hand to ensure that the SCO remains a beacon of stability, development and mutual benefit for our peoples.”

Jaishankar, who reached Islamabad on Tuesday, is the first Indian foreign minister to visit Pakistan in about nine years. The last such visit was by [Sushma Swaraj](#), who travelled to Islamabad to attend the ‘Heart of Asia’ conference on Afghanistan, in December 2015.

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