



News / Explained / Everyday Explainers / EAM Jaishankar attends Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit: What the grouping is, why it matters

# EAM Jaishankar attends Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit: What the grouping is, why it matters

With Russia and China as members, SCO has been projected as an alternative to Western-led organisations in international affairs. It has also been expanding in recent years. What is its relevance for India?

Written by [Rishika Singh](#)

New Delhi | Updated: July 4, 2024 22:57 IST

 NewsGuard Follow Us

EXPRESS PREI

In 'integrated  
AI group with  
offs for India

Indian EAM Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Kazakhstan's capital Astana. (Via X.com/DrSJaishankar)

On Thursday (July 4), the final day of the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#) Summit in Kazakhstan's capital Astana, Indian External Affairs Minister [S Jaishankar](#) held talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

Earlier, Jaishankar also held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from SCO members Tajikistan and Russia, and the newest member Belarus, on the sidelines of the two-day summit that began on Wednesday.

"Pleased to meet FM Maksim Ryzhenkov of Belarus today. Welcome Belarus to the SCO as its newest member. Discussed our bilateral relationship and its future growth potential," the Minister posted on X. Belarus and Iran earlier held Observer Status in the grouping. While Iran formally joined it last year, Belarus was formally admitted on Thursday.

What is the significance of the international organisation for India and how has it

evolved? We explain.

## What is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation?

Its origins lie in the “Shanghai Five”, formed in 1996 and consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

EXPRESS PREI



In 'integrated AI group with offers for India

With the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 into 15 independent countries, there were concerns in the region about extremist religious groups and ethnic tensions coming to the fore. To manage these issues, a grouping was created for cooperation on security matters.

---

### Also Read | As Russia, China vie for upper hand, what SCO means for India

---

Building on this, SCO was established on June 15, 2001, in Shanghai as an international organisation, and also included Uzbekistan as a sixth member. Before the inclusion of Belarus, it had nine members: India, Iran, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Afghanistan and Mongolia hold Observer Status.

ADVERTISEMENT

## Why is the SCO significant?

SCO is one of the few international organisations which deal with security issues and primarily has Asian members. Regional heavyweights Russia and China have stressed its position as an alternative to a “Western” international order. Along with

the BRICS grouping, which has India, South Africa and Brazil as well, the two countries are seen positioning against US influence.

But despite declarations of a “limitless friendship” between China and Russia in recent years, there is also a sense of competition between them over who will have greater influence at such forums.

EXPRESS PREI



In 'integrated AI group with offs for India

SCO Summit 2023: India Welcomes SCO Members In Goa | SCO Sum...



While the Central Asian republics have traditionally been viewed as part of Russia's backyard or sphere of influence, China has also sought to leverage the oil and gas-rich nations through investments in massive infrastructure projects in the region. This has happened alongside China's rising economic strength in recent years, with the projects also part of its larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The inclusion of India and Pakistan in SCO in 2017 was also seen as reflecting this jostling. While Russia supported India's entry as a longstanding strategic partner, China backed its ally Pakistan to prevent the balance of powers from tilting in Russia's favour.

SCO's larger expansion of late also has to be seen in the context of the United States' deteriorating ties with Russia and China. Events such as the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War and trade tensions with China that began under US President [Donald Trump](#) have further given them impetus to include more countries in their grouping.

Chinese state media outlet *Global Times* said in 2023, that Iran's inclusion was seen as a step for further enhancing "the international status and influence of the organization, and for Iran, it is an important step in breaking the US diplomatic blockade".

EXPRESS PREI



In 'integrated AI group with offers for India

However, there may not be many tangible outcomes from the SCO. An article in the *Financial Times* noted: "The opaque parameters it uses to launch its initiatives and institutions allows countries to look past the rivalries they have with others in the group. But it does nothing to heal the rifts. Thus the SCO embraces both Pakistan and India, which acknowledge their mutually hostile ties. India's relationship with China itself is also tense on several fronts."

It quotes Yun Sun, director of the China Program at the think-tank Stimson Center, as saying, "The vague language of most of the initiatives made it easy for countries to pay lip service to them. China could then point to this rhetorical support as evidence that a large number of countries backed its world view... However, these countries would only be willing to accommodate China's demands up to a certain point. When push came to shove, they would follow their own interests."

---

## India and the SCO: | Takeaways from the 2023 summit

---

### What relevance does the SCO hold for India?

On one level, SCO membership allows India to participate in a forum which enhances its scope of cooperation with Central Asian countries, which have not had particularly close relations with India since their formation in 1991. It also matters for maintaining communication with major actors in the region on common security issues.

For example, an important permanent structure within the SCO is the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). It assists members in the preparation and staging of counter-terrorism exercises, analyses key intelligence information coming in from the member states, and shares information on terrorist movements and drug trafficking.

However, the relevance of the organisation comes into question given the difficulty in managing ties among the partners. As the FT article notes, India shares tense

relationships with China and Pakistan at present. Last year, when the summit was to be held under India's presidency as part of the rotation, it decided to hold a virtual summit instead.

EXPRESS PREI



In 'integrated AI group with offs for India



Want to go beyond the news and understand the headlines? Subscribe to Explained by The Indian Express

strugglingforexistence@gmail.com

Subscribe

The New Delhi Declaration issued at the end of the leaders' summit saw India refuse to sign off on a paragraph supporting the BRI. India's opposition to the BRI comes from its constituent China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is proposed to pass through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. India sees it as a violation of its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

© The Indian Express Pvt Ltd

First uploaded on: 04-07-2024 at 12:58 IST

**TAGS:** China Everyday Explainers Everyday Global Express Explained Kazakhstan Russia  
S. Jaishankar Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

**EXPRESS** Shorts



What does mud taste like? Modi's unusual question to Rohit Sharma