

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION SUMMITS

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a Eurasian group focused on political, economic, and security concerns. It originated from the 'Shanghai Five' in 1996, which included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan joined in 1996, leading to the formation of the SCO. The Council of Heads of State is the organization's top decision-making body, holding annual summits. These meetings result in declarations, strategic documents, and decisions on cooperation. They also serve as platforms for discussing regional security, economic cooperation, connectivity, counter-terrorism, and broader geopolitical issues.

Important/Landmark SCO Summits and Their Highlights –

- Shanghai Summit, 2001, the host country was China, its key highlights were the first formal “heads of state” summit after the creation of the SCO. At the
- Astana Summit in, 2005, the host country was Kazakhstan. The Summit Declaration highlighted a new concept of security based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and interaction.
- Beijing Summit, 2012, the host country was China, which marked a phase of deeper institutional building, enhancing economic and security cooperation.
- The 2018 Qingdao Summit, hosted by China, focused on the Belt and Road Initiative, connectivity, and broadening the SCO's economic reach.
- The 2023 Astana or Central Asia context includes recent summits that have integrated new members, such as Iran, and have emphasized security, pandemic response, and global governance.
- The 2024 Summit in Islamabad, Pakistan, focused on climate change, sustainable development, and enhancing regional cooperation on environmental issues.
- The Tianjin 2025, China, the 25th Heads of State Summit.
- **A few of the Major Outcomes:**
 - Executing the SCO Development Strategy up to 2025
 - Approval has been granted for 24 documents, including the Tianjin Declaration.
 - Establishing and launching new SCO centers, including those dedicated to anti-drug efforts, information security, or counter-terrorism.
 - Laos was awarded dialogue partner status, while CIS gained observer status.

- China promoted the creation of a new SCO development bank and financing mechanism, emphasizing deeper economic integration.
- Over 20 world leaders and heads of 10 international organizations participated, making it one of the largest agendas.
- The chairmanship shifted from China (2024–2025) to Kyrgyzstan for 2025–2026.

These summits demonstrate SCO's evolving character, moving from primarily security concerns to a broader focus on economic integration, connectivity, institutional development, and expanding global influence.

Themes and Trends in SCO Summits Over Time –

From Security to Multi-Dimensional Cooperation –

- The early years of SCO were intensely focused on counterterrorism, border security, and “Three Evils” (terrorism, separatism, extremism). Over time, the summits began to include trade, infrastructure connectivity, energy cooperation, and cultural exchanges.
- Institutional deepening involves introducing new mechanisms, formalizing documentation, and establishing specialized centers (such as anti-drug and cybersecurity centers), which have begun to appear at recent summits, including the 2025 gathering.
- India and Pakistan joined in 2017, expanding membership and reach. Iran became a full member in 2023, followed by Belarus in 2024. Dialogue partners and observers, like Laos in 2025, have also been admitted.
- Recent summits, especially in 2025, have showcased Geopolitical Signaling and an Alternative World Order, with the SCO serving as a key platform.

Larger Participation and Broader Agenda –

- In 2025, the summit featured over 20 foreign leaders and heads of international organizations, beyond just member states. The agenda progressively incorporated topics such as sustainable development, climate change, digital cooperation, and reform of global governance.

Significance and Challenges –

Why these summits are essential –

- Regional Stability and Security – SCO summits serve as key platforms for member states to collaborate on counterterrorism, border security, and intelligence sharing.
- Economic and Connectivity Integration reflects collaboration in infrastructure, trade, facilitation, energy corridors, and financial links.
- Institutional Authority – Summits enhance the SCO's institutional role via declarations, strategic initiatives, and the creation of new centers.
- Geopolitical messages at summits often convey strategic views on global order, sovereignty, and opposition to external influences, especially Western dominance.
- Inclusion and Soft Power – By increasing membership and the number of observers or dialogue partners, the SCO boosts its credibility and influence in the region.

Challenges and Critiques –

- Member states like Russia, China, India, and Pakistan have diverging priorities, leading to less focused results.
- Implementation Gap – Although declarations are common, the actual execution of projects, institutional commitments, and financial mechanisms often lags.
- Some view recent summits as prioritizing optics and geopolitics over genuine cooperation, resulting in an excessive focus on symbolism.
- External pressure from powers such as the US and Europe, as well as competing alliances, affects the SCO's role.
- Economic disparities—differences in development levels among members—create obstacles to equity-based cooperation.

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Date of post: 27.07.2026