

**14– 05 – 2022**

**News:** United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

- Recently, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change addressed the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Cote d'Ivoire (Western Africa).

## **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**

- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a **legally binding environment convention that links development and environment to sustainable land management established in 1994.**
- UNCCD has its secretariat in **Bonn, Germany.**
- The UNCCD addresses particularly the arid, semi-arid & dry sub-humid areas, called drylands, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples are found.

- Aim of UNCCD is to **combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought through national action programs** that incorporate long-term strategies supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements.
- Desertification is a type of land degradation in dry lands in which biological productivity is lost due to natural processes or induced by human activities whereby fertile areas become increasingly more arid.
- It is the spread of arid areas caused by a variety of factors, such as through climate change (particularly the current global warming) and through the overexploitation of soil through human activity.)
- To help publicize the Convention, 2006 was declared "**International Year of Deserts and Desertification**".
- CoP to the UNCCD was done once in every years from 1997-2001. Now it's done **once in every 2 years**.
- CoP 14 was held between 02/09/2019 and 13/09/2019 at New Delhi which led to the adoption of New Delhi declaration.
- CoP 15 was held on 2022 at Cote d'Ivoire (Western Africa) with the theme: "**Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity**".
- **Global Land Outlook** (GLO) is published by UNCCD. The **first edition of GLO was published at CoP 14 (New Delhi)**.

- The Global Land Outlook (GLO), the UNCCD flagship publication, underscores land system challenges, showcases transformative policies and practices, and points to cost-effective pathways to scale up sustainable land and water management.

**News:** Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA)

- Recently, India has been unanimously elected as the new Chair of the Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA) for 2022-2024 at the recently held meeting of the Executive board and General Assembly at Manila, Philippines.

## **Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA)**

- Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA) was established in 1998 in pursuance of the resolution passed by participants of the Symposium on Asian Elections in the 21st century held from January 26-29, 1997 in Manila, Philippines.
- Currently, 20 Asian Election Monitoring Bodies are members of AAEA.

- Election Commission of India is a founder member EMB of the AAEA and also served on the Executive Board of the AAEA as the Vice Chair during 2011-13 and Chair during 2014-16.
- AAEA is also an Associate Member of the 118 member Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB).

### **Objectives of AAEA**

- To provide a non-partisan forum in the Asian region for sharing experiences and best practices among election authorities.
- To discuss and act upon ways to promote open and transparent elections with the objective of supporting good governance and democracy.

### **Role of India in AAEA**

- India has regularly organised several international training programmes for the member countries at the International Institute for Democracy and Election Management (IIDEM).
- The IIDEM has been instrumental in training over 250 officials from AAEA member countries since 2019.

- The ECI has also organized the International Election Visitors Programme and International Virtual Election Visitors Programme (IEVP), which was held during Assembly elections in 2022, for the member countries.

**News:** China, Russia, Pak. to attend SCO anti-terror meet in Delhi

- Russia, China, Pakistan and Central Asian countries will gather in Delhi on the weekend ahead of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Regional Anti-Terror Structure (SCORATS) meeting hosted by India from May 16 to 19.

## **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**

- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a permanent Eurasian political, economic and military intergovernmental organization aiming to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.
- SCO was established on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2001 with its headquarters in Beijing, China.
- Previously it was known as Shanghai-Five. With the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 15<sup>th</sup> June 2001, the grouping became Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
- India and Pakistan joined as full members in the SCO on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at Astana summit, Kazakhstan.
- Iran was granted full membership at the 21<sup>st</sup> summit held virtually on 2021.

- Members of the organisation are Iran, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and China.
- Observers of the group are Afghanistan, Belarus and Mongolia.
- Dialogue Partners are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka.
- Culture has become an important element of SCO.
- Largest regional organization in the world in terms of geographical coverage and population, covering three-fifths of the Eurasian continent and nearly half of the human population.
- Officially accepted languages in the group are Russian and Chinese.
- Recent meet of Prosecutors General hosted by India, adopted a protocol to strengthen cooperation in preventing and combating growing menace of human trafficking, especially women and children.

## Objectives

- Strengthening mutual trust and neighborliness among the member states.
- Promoting effective cooperation in -politics, trade & economy, research & technology and culture.
- Enhancing ties in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, etc.

- **Maintain and ensure peace**, security and stability in the region.
- Establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political & economic order.
- Guiding Principle – Based on Shanghai Spirit.
- Internal policy based on the **principles of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for cultural diversity**, and a desire for common development.
- External policy in accordance with the **principles of non-alignment**, non-targeting any third country, and openness.

### **Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

- **Heads of State Council** – **The supreme SCO body which decides its internal functioning and its interaction with other States** & international organisations, and considers international issues.
- **Heads of Government Council** – **Approves the budget, considers and decides upon issues related economic spheres** of interaction within SCO.
- **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs** – Considers issues related to day-to-day activities.
- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** – Established to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism.

- **SCO Secretariat** – Based in Beijing to provide informational, analytical & organisational support.

### **Importance for India**

- India's membership of SCO can help in **achieving regional integration**, promote connectivity and stability across borders.

### **Security**

- India through RATS can **improve its counterterrorism** abilities by working toward intelligence sharing, law enforcement and developing best practices and technologies.
- Through the SCO, India can also work on **anti-drug trafficking** and small arms proliferation.
- Cooperation on common challenges of **terrorism and radicalization**.

### **Energy**

- **India being an energy deficient country** with increasing demands for energy, **SCO provides it with an opportunity to meet its energy** requirements through regional diplomacy.



- Talks on the construction of stalled pipelines like the **TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline**; **IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) pipeline** can get a much needed push through the SCO.

## **Trade**

- SCO provides **direct access to Central Asia** – overcoming the main hindrance in flourishing of trade between India and Central Asia.
- SCO acts as an **alternative route to Central Asia**.
- Economic Ties - **Central Asian countries provides India with a market for its IT, telecommunications, banking, finance and pharmaceutical industries.**

## **Geopolitical**

- Central Asia is a part of India's **Extended Neighborhood** – SCO provides India an opportunity to pursue the “**Connect Central Asian Policy**”.
- Helps India fulfill its aspiration of playing an active role in its extended neighborhood as well as **checking the ever growing influence of China** in Eurasia.
- Platform for India to **simultaneously engage with its traditional friend Russia as well as its rivals, China and Pakistan.**

## Challenges of SCO Membership for India

- Pakistan's inclusion in SCO poses potential difficulties for India.
- India's ability to assert itself would be limited and it may have to play second fiddle since China and Russia are co-founders of SCO and its dominant powers.
- India may also have to either dilute its growing partnership with the West or engage in a delicate balancing act - as SCO has traditionally adopted an anti-Western posture.

## Wonders of SCO

- India- Statue of Unity
- Kazakhstan- Archaeological Landscape of Tamgaly
- China- Daming imperial palace complex
- Kyrgyzstan- Lake Issyk-Kul
- Pakistan- The Great Mughal's heritage, Lahore
- Russia- The Golden Ring cities
- Tajikistan- Palace of Nowruz
- Uzbekistan- The Poi Kalon complex

## **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)**

- The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), **headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ** of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which serves to **promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.**
- The **Head of RATS is elected for a three-year term.** Each member state also sends a permanent representative to RATS.
- The RATS was formed in the June 2004 summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. **RATS are engaged in furthering cooperation and ties between member countries on concerns of terrorism, security, and drug trafficking, crime and cyber warfare.**

**News:** Erdogan opposes Finland, Sweden joining NATO bloc

- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that his country is “not favourable” toward Finland and Sweden joining NATO, indicating that Turkey could use its status as a member of the Western military alliance to veto moves to admit the two countries.

## **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**

- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is an **intergovernmental military alliance between 30 North American and European Countries.**
- North Macedonia became the 30<sup>th</sup> member in February 2019.
- NATO is established by **Washington Treaty that was signed in 4<sup>th</sup> April 1949.**
- NATO constitutes a **system of collective defence** whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defence in response to an attack by an external party.
- Its headquarters is in **Brussels, Belgium.**
- There are two **official languages of NATO, English and French.**
- Recently US Senate passed the National Defense Authorisation Act that brings India at par with NATO allies for increasing defence cooperation.
- Major non-NATO allies of US are Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Brazil, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Morocco, New Zealand,

Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Tunisia. NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes.

- If **diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations.** These are carried out under the collective defence clause of NATO's founding treaty – Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organisations.
- A NATO-led mission, called **Resolute Support, was launched in 2015 to provide further training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces and institutions.**