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News: Joint Anti – Exercise of SCO

- Recently, the authorities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states, with the support of the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the SCO, conducted a joint anti-terrorism drill to curb terrorist, separatist, and extremist online activities.
- Hosted by India, this exercise focused on curtailing the Internet's exploitation for terrorist, separatist, and extremist purposes.

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 15th June 2001 with its headquarters in Beijing, China.
- Previously it was known as Shanghai-Five. With the inclusion of Uzbekistan on 15th June 2001, the grouping became Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
- India and Pakistan joined as full members in the SCO on 9th June 2017 at Astana summit, Kazakhstan.
- Iran was granted full membership at the 21st summit in 2023.

- Members of the organisation are Iran, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and China.
- Observers of the group are Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia. Belarus recently applied for the membership also.
- Dialogue Partners are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka.
- Culture has become an important element of SCO.
- SCO is the 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.
- Recently, Varanasi has been selected as the SCO region's first "Tourism and Cultural Capital".
- Varanasi "Cultural and Tourism Capital" has been decided under a new rotating initiative to promote people-to-people contacts and tourism among the member states.
- Each year a city of the cultural heritage of a member country that will take over the rotating Presidency of the organisation will get the title to highlight its prominence.

- The new initiative will come into force after the Samarkand summit (2022) following which India will take over the Presidency and host the next Heads of the State summit.

Objectives

- Strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness 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 is 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 organizations 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 & organizational 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 fulfil its aspiration of playing an active role in its extended neighbourhood 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- Damingi 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.