

# India to host Annual Meeting of the SCO Heads of Government Officials

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For the first time, India will host the annual meeting of council of heads of government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Earlier, SCO's Secretary General Vladimir Norov held talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on a range of issues after which made the announcement for the meeting. Usually, the heads of government meeting of the SCO is represented by foreign ministers while a number of countries send their prime ministers also.

The event will bring together leaders from eight SCO member-states—India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan joined the SCO as full members in 2017. Analysts held back from commenting on whether Pakistan would accept an invitation from India and send a representative, as also on whether the SCO meet could set the stage for a thaw between the two countries.

A person familiar with the developments on the Indian side confirmed that India would need to send an invite to Khan. However, given that tensions have been running high between the two countries for almost a year, the possibility of a high-level visit from Pakistan is far from certain.

India became a full member of the China-dominated grouping in 2017 and New Delhi's entry into it increased the bloc's heft in regional geo-politics, besides giving it a pan-Asian hue. India is also keen on deepening its security-related cooperation with the SCO and its Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) which specifically deals with issues relating to security and defence.

India was an observer at the SCO since 2005 and has generally participated in the ministerial-level meetings of the grouping which focus mainly on security and economic cooperation in the Eurasian region.

## **About SCO**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the presidents of Russia, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan became its members in 2017. The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body in the SCO, it meets once a year and adopts decisions and guidelines on all important matters of the organisation. Military exercises are also regularly conducted among members to promote cooperation and coordination against terrorism and other external threats, and to maintain regional peace and stability

The SCO is widely regarded as the "alliance of the

East", due to its growing centrality in Asia-Pacific, and has been the primary security pillar of the region. It is the largest regional organisation in the world in terms of geographical coverage and population, covering three-fifths of the Eurasian continent and nearly half of the human population.

**SOURCE:** *Livemint, Business Standard*