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Bishkek to Islamabad: **A New Chapter for the SCO**



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The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a Eurasian political, economic, and international security organization, established in 2001 with 6 member states, has now become one of the strongest and most important regional platforms for cooperation. With every passing year SCO is expanding. New



members are becoming part of it which reflects the growing geopolitical and the economic importance of the SCO. Currently, SCO consists of 10 full members, 2 observer states, and 15 dialogue partners. These numbers show that the SCO has evolved beyond its original security-oriented purpose and has expanded its role over time. It now promotes cooperation among member states in diverse areas including connectivity, trade, education, culture, technology, energy and human connectivity.

The year 2026 is particularly meaningful for SCO as this year marked the 25th anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. From 31st August to 1st September, 2026, the 26th SCO Summit was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. It was held at the Yrys-Ordo Congress Hall (Bishkek) under the chairmanship of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, His Excellency Sadyr Japarov. The theme of the 26th meeting of the Council of Heads of State (CHS) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was “25 Years of the SCO: Together for Sustainable Peace, Development and Prosperity”. The theme reflects the organization’s 25 years journey and its focus on regional stability, economic development, connectivity, environmental cooperation and practical multilateral engagement. The summit brought together leaders and representatives of its member states. **Bishkek Declaration** and 27 other documents were adopted during the summit.

The 25th anniversary is not just a number. It is a reminder of how far the organization has come. It also shows that the SCO charter and the founding members have done a great job in binding the member states together. At the same time, the expansion is the reflection of both the credibility organization has built successfully and the growing interest of countries in regional organizations. The SCO, today, brings together countries from South Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, the Middle East and Europe. It means that the organization is not only connecting countries, it is connecting some of the most important regions of the world. These regions are important because they contain major populations, economies, energy resources, trade routes, and strategic locations.

China: A Major Force Behind SCO's growth

China is the founding member of SCO and has played a central role in its growth. Among all the members of SCO, China is the most influential one. China's position as the world's 2nd largest economy, a major world power, and the growing influence on the world stage has helped China shape the ideas, policies, and direction of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). China was the leading force in the creation of SCO. It promoted the



Shanghai Spirit. It introduced the New Security Concept, introduced Five Outlooks, the concept of A Community with Shared Future, and the Four Global Initiatives. All the aforementioned ideas helped SCO grow from merely a security focused platform into a world's largest regional organization. Therefore, China has played an exceptional role from the creation of SCO to its expansion.

Being an economic giant, China has always pushed SCO countries for greater economic cooperation. In fact, China presented its experience in physical infrastructure, digital infrastructure, trade and investment to SCO member states as a model to follow. This

provides an important opportunity to all the member countries to learn from China's experience. At the same time, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can help the SCO by connecting its member countries through infrastructure and trade, which can increase economic cooperation.

In addition to the security concerns and combating terrorism, some major emerging areas like AI, digitalization, climate policy, e-commerce and technological cooperation, were also discussed in the 26th SCO Summit. China's role and experience helped expand SCO's agenda while China's investment can further encourage other SCO countries to develop these sectors. Simply put, as the SCO moves towards a more modern and economically focused future. China's contributions become especially valuable.

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: The Key Pillars of SCO

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are among the founding members of the Shanghai Cooperation organization (SCO). Both are the key members of SCO because of their strategic location, economic potential, and role in connecting Central Asia with China, Russia, and other regions. Uzbekistan's location at the heart of Central



Asia, its growing economy and diplomatic influence make it a crucial SCO member. Similarly, Uzbekistan is an ardent supporter of regional connectivity. It is transforming itself into a trade and logistics hub connecting regional markets with South Asia and Eurasia. To further reinforce its commitment to regional cooperation, Uzbekistan hosted the Termez Dialogue on Connectivity in 2026.

Kazakhstan is another key SCO partner, with its vast territory, natural resources and strategic position between China, Russia and other Eurasian markets. Its role in transport,

trade, energy and investment strengthens regional connectivity and supports the SCO's wider economic goals.

Pakistan: A Proud and Active Member

Pakistan joined the SCO in 2017 and since then the SCO has become an important platform for Pakistan helping it strengthen diplomatic relations with Central Asia, China, Russia and other regional partners. Security issues have always been a matter of great concern for Pakistan. Therefore, after becoming full member of SCO, Pakistan has



actively participated in SCO activities in areas ranging from security and counter-terrorism to trade, transport, poverty alleviation and people-to-people contacts.

Pakistan's contribution to the organization is also reflected in its leadership roles. It has chaired the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure and has served as the permanent chair of the SCO Special Working Group on Poverty Alleviation. Pakistan has also hosted important SCO meetings, including the meeting of the Council of Heads of Government in Islamabad in 2024.

Now, Pakistan has taken another important responsibility.

Pakistan is honored and proud to assume the chairmanship of the SCO Council of Heads of State for 2026–2027. The chairmanship was handed over to Pakistan at the end of the 26th SCO Summit. The theme of the 27th SCO Summit is “Turning Vision into Action: Connectivity, Innovation and Shared Prosperity”. It is set to be hosted by Islamabad. In addition, the Lahore city, Pakistan, received the status of the SCO Tourism and Cultural Capital for 2026–2027.



The chairmanship is the reflection of Pakistan's growing importance in the international affairs. It shows that the fellow SCO members are confident of Pakistan's ability to contribute to the organization's future. Pakistan, now, can this valuable platform to promote regional connectivity, people-to-people connectivity, economic cooperation, trade and opportunities for youth.

A Future of Greater Cooperation

The Bishkek Summit not only celebrated the 25 years of SCO but also gave a clear message to the world that SCO is ready to enter the next 25 years with more confidence and a broader vision. It is expanding its agenda and moving beyond the traditional areas of cooperation. In addition to regional security, combating terrorism, economic and political cooperation, education, cultural diplomacy, people-to-people exchanges, AI, digitalization, energy and transport corridors have also become key focus areas of SCO's work.

The 26th SCO Summit provided an opportunity to all the member states to look back at the progress organization has made in the past 25 years, feel proud of themselves, while looking forward to even greater possibilities.

For Pakistan, the moment is especially significant. SCO chairmanship for 2026-2027 is an honor and a responsibility as well. It is an opportunity for Pakistan to contribute positively to regional cooperation and to welcome the SCO family to Islamabad in 2027.

The next chapter of the SCO can therefore be one of greater connectivity, stronger economic links, technological cooperation, cultural understanding and shared prosperity. Its journey over 25 years shows that when countries work together, a regional platform can grow into something much larger.