**20 years of cooperation**

**[Shazia Anwer Cheema](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/shazia-anwer-cheema)**

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June 15, 2021 marks a journey of 20 years of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) because the decision of establishing SCO was announced on June 15, 2001 in Shanghai by China by member states of “the Shanghai Five”—China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan was invited by the Shanghai Five at the inaugural announcement event and Uzbekistan joined the new formation of the Shanghai Five the same day.

The SCO Charter was signed during the St Petersburg SCO Heads of State Summit in June 2002 and the Charter came into force on September 19, 2003. India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members on June 9, 2017 at the Astana Summit, Kazakhstan although both wanted to become full members since early 2000.

The SCO is a great success story for countries of Central Asia as this platform resolved 90 percent of border disputes among them. Can it be useful for Pakistan and India to resolve the Kashmir issue? Only the future can answer this question. Since all Central Asian republics were part of the former Soviet Union, the Russian language had been and is still part of their system; therefore the SCO logo had two languages—Russian and Chinese. Still, the English language (widely spoken and semi-official language of India and Pakistan) is not embedded into the SCO Logo.

[Bangladesh seeks UN intervention to end Rohingya crisis](https://nation.com.pk/18-Jun-2021/bangladesh-seeks-un-intervention-to-end-rohingya-crisis)

Since SCO is the ultimate outcome of the Shanghai Five and its formation and concept is based on the parameters set by the Shanghai Five, one has to review the Shanghai Five to understand the objectives and aims of SCO because objectives and aims are the same, but with new explanation and diction.

The Shanghai Five was established April 26, 1996 in Shanghai after the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions was signed by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. The focus of the treaty was to resolve border disputes among members because states of former USSR Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan had several border issues, resulting in border tensions and these states also had border issues with China.

On April 24, 1997, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan signed the Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions in Moscow, Russia.

The first two meetings of the Shanghai Five focused security confidence-building measures in the border areas between them as China and these countries share borders of over 7,000 kilometres in length and border problems were a potential threat to the relations between China and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

[Israel to send 1M vaccine doses to Palestinian Authority in swap deal](https://nation.com.pk/18-Jun-2021/israel-to-send-1m-vaccine-doses-to-palestinian-authority-in-swap-deal)

The first two meetings also concluded with an understanding that their military forces would not engage in any offensive activities within the border areas and they would not conduct military exercises against each other; that they would limit the scale, level and frequency of military exercises in the border areas; that they would inform each other about their respective major military activities in the areas within one hundred kilometres from the borders; that they would invite each other to observe their planned military exercises; that they would prevent dangerous military activities in the border areas; and that they would enhance friendly exchanges between the military forces and border patrol forces along the border areas. The agreement helped prevent potential conflicts along the borders between the five countries and introduce security and stability in the relationship between China and these countries. Following the summit, China and Kyrgyzstan stepped up efforts to resolve their border problems and signed an important border agreement in July 1996.

[Pakistan army to modernise Artillery corps: COAS](https://nation.com.pk/18-Jun-2021/pakistan-army-to-modernise-artillery-corps-coas)

The second summit of the Shanghai Five was held in Moscow on April 24, 1997. The five heads of state concluded an agreement on mutual reduction of military forces in the border areas. They agreed on non-use of force, not to threaten to use force against each other, and not to seek unilateral military superiority. They also agreed that they would reduce and limit the number of personnel and various principal weapons of the military forces and border patrols in the areas one hundred kilometres from the border and that they would exchange information about military forces deployed along the border areas, etc. The agreement was conducive to disarmament in the areas along the borders between China and the other four countries.

The third summit was held on July 3, 1998 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The five countries affirmed the principle that inter-state differences should be resolved through peaceful consultation. They agreed to fight against various forms of national separatist and religious extremist activities, terrorist operations, weapon smuggling, and drug trafficking. They agreed that they would intensify economic relations between the five countries in the spirit of mutual benefits and pragmatism.

[Sindh, Punjab facing shortage of vaccines](https://nation.com.pk/18-Jun-2021/sindh-punjab-facing-shortage-of-vaccines)

The fourth summit was held in Bishkek of Kirghizia on August 24, 1999 and member states underscored the importance of promoting economic and trade cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual benefits.

The fifth and the last summit was held in Dushanbe of Tajikistan, July 5, 2000. Member states reaffirmed their determination to combat national separatism, international terrorism, religious extremism, weapon smuggling, drug trafficking, and illicit migration, which constitute the major threats to regional security, peace and development.

Hence, the Shanghai Five had a clear agenda of fighting terrorism, enhancing trade among member states, resolving border disputes, regional cooperation, enhancing people-to-people contact and resolving any issue through bilateral or multilateral dialogue within the member states.

People-to-people contacts and high trade among these states had already been positive because all Central Asian States, as former republics of the former Soviet Union, had very soft visa regimes for each other and only entry is needed and no visa is required for cross-country movement within them and within Russian Federation also. The Chinese visa regime is also quite soft for Central Asian countries and Russia. All central Asian states, China and Russia have railway and road linkages and strong airline linkages among them. If we look at the trade design of these countries, they have always been enjoying high trade indicators among them. Minus China, Pakistan and India, the Russian language is enough to travel to the entire SCO bloc.

[Govt aims to preserve historic sites across country: PM Imran](https://nation.com.pk/18-Jun-2021/govt-aims-to-preserve-historic-sites-across-country-pm-imran)

Though Pakistan has been a full member of SCO since the last four years, have we enhanced our capacity of dealing with other members of the SCO? Do our businessmen and traders understand trade and business styles, the rules and design of Central Asian states and Russia? Have we developed a strong cadre of bureaucrats, diplomats and businessmen who can understand and speak the Russian language? Can we develop strong people-to-people contact and durable and doable business relations without knowing a language that is a major tool for business in entire central Asia and Russia?

Moreover, will the SCO platform be useful in resolving border issues between India and Pakistan as other countries resolve them, including China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan?

Will India allow SCO to work calmly and not try to impose its hegemony as it always tries in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), resulting in making SAARC a useless and toothless regional body?

These questions need serious answers if we really wish to take advantage of SCO