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Topic 2

Q. ~~Day:~~ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO): Challenges, opportunities, and its Role in Improving Pakistan-India Relations and Regional prosperity.

Answer-

Introduction-

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has evolved into one of the most influential multilateral organisations of Eurasia, uniting major powers like China, Russia, Pakistan, India, and Iran with Central Asian republics under one cooperative umbrella. Formed in 2001, it now represents over 40% of the world's population and around 30% of global GDP. For Pakistan and India - two nuclear neighbours with a history of conflict - this platform provides a unique opportunity to engage diplomatically, economically and strategically within a structured setting.

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Da : Historical Background and Strategic Evolution Date _____

The SCO emerged from the "Shanghai Five" (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) to resolve border and security issues. Over time, it evolved into a comprehensive organisation addressing counter-terrorism, trade, energy cooperation, and connectivity. The founding principle, the "Shanghai Spirit," promotes mutual trust, respect for sovereignty, and shared prosperity - values crucial for a region long divided by political mistrust.

Recent Developments

The 2025 Tianjin Summit in China marked a turning point for SCO. The Tianjin Declaration outlined ten-year roadmap until 2035, focusing on digital cooperation, energy security, financial integration, and peace.

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Russia proposed joint SCO bonds, a shared payment mechanism, and a regional investment bank to reduce reliance on Western financial system (Reuters, 2025).

Pakistan actively supported these ideas, highlighting its strategic role through CPEC and Cuiabae Port as regional trade corridors. Pakistan's

Shahbaz Sharif reaffirmed the country's vision of peace connectivity and assumed chairmanship of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist structure (RATS) in September 2025.

Moreover, Pakistan is scheduled to host the SCO summit in 2027, signalling its growing diplomatic significance (Dawn, Sept 2025).

India, meanwhile, described the SCO as a forum for "security, connectivity, and opportunity" but refused to endorse certain joint defence statements due to perceived ambiguity on terrorism.

These differences highlight the enduring friction, but the SCO remains the only regional platform where both countries must cooperate institutionally.

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Day: Relationship among Member states.

The SCO's membership brings together a diverse set of economies, regimes, and foreign policy alignments.

- i) Russia and China act as core stabilisers — the former driving economic connectivity, the latter strategic security.
 - ii) Central Asian republics seek economic diversification and protection from extremism.
 - iii) Iran's recent inclusion (2023) adds an energy dimension to SCO's agenda.
 - iv) India and Pakistan — representing South Asia — provide strategic depth but also introduce historical antagonisms.
- Despite these differences, SCO framework continues to offer dialogue, joint exercises, and shared policy development across ideological lines.

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III

Day:

Opportunities for Pakistan

A- Strategic reassurance and Leverage.

The Pact provides Islamabad with Political reassurance from a wealthy and geopolitically influential partner - Potentially a source of strategic leverage during economic crisis and international negotiations. Saudi to security backing can be converted into diplomatic capital and investment inflows if handled prudently.

B- Defence industrial and technological cooperation.

Joint Projects - whether co-production of drones, air-defence systems, or logistics support - can strengthen Pakistan's indigenous defence base and reduce reliance on single-source suppliers. If executed transparently, such cooperation could generate employment, technological spillovers, and export potential.

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IV. Challenges and Costs for Pakistan.

A- Risk of entanglement in Middle Eastern rivalries.

Deep alignment with Riyadh risks drawing Pakistan into Riyadh-Tehran competition. Pakistan's long, porous border with Iran, combined with sectarian fault-lines at home, makes any perception of partiality towards one Gulf power a source of domestic and ~~area~~ regional vulnerability. Analysts warn Islamabad to avoid becoming a proxy or a front-line participant in Gulf disputes.

B- Nuclear and escalation concerns.

Public statements by senior Pakistan officials following the pact led to media reporting about 'extended deterrence' raising fears (domestically and internationally).

about nuclear implications. While Islamabad insists the pact is defensive, any perception that nuclear assets could be made available to a third party would have profound strategic and non proliferation consequences and risk serious diplomatic fallout. Such statements underline need for careful, legally framed assurances and transparency.

C- Domestic Legitimacy and Parliamentary Oversight.

A major foreign-policy shift must be accompanied by clear statutory oversight to prevent future governments from being prematurely committed to costly military operations or entanglements.

D- Balancing India and other regional reactions.

India has deepened relations with

Gulf states in recent years.
The SMDA complications
Islamabad's neighbourhood diplomacy
potentially accelerating security
competition in the Indian ocean
and prompting recalibrations by
New Delhi - including naval
deployments, intelligence ties,
and arms procurement.

V- Regional Implications-

A. South Asia- recalibrated alignments.

The Pact may nudge regional
alignment by linking Gulf
security directly with South
Asian dynamics. This could drive
the Gulf states to be more
assertive in regional security
diplomacy and may influence
naval posture and basing considerations
in the Arabian Sea.

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B- Middle East - a turn toward regional burden-sharing.

For Riyadh, the pact represents a bid to diversify security partners as doubts about the unconditionality of US guarantees persist. The agreement may thus be read as part of Saudi Arabia's broader strategy to build regional hedges and deter perceived threats. Catham House and other commentators interpret the SMDA as signalling an appetite in Riyadh to shift some burden-sharing to regional partners.

C- Great-Power competition.

China's growing engagement across the Gulf and Pakistan (economic and strategic) means Beijing will be an influential observer and potential facilitator of deep Riyadh-Islamabad projects.

The US reaction will be shaped by Washington's regional priorities; Caution US diplomacy might seek to ensure the Pact does not destabilise nuclear or conventional balances.

VI- Implementation Pathways and Policy recommendations for Islamabad.

1- Institutionalise transparency.
Create Parliamentary committees and Publish a non-classified implementation roadmap describing decision - rules for invoking the Pact.

2- Define operational limits.
Negotiate side-agreements that delimit the Pact's scope specially regarding nuclear assets - To reassure neighbours and the international community.

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3- Economic security integration.

Couple defence cooperation with clear investment, energy, and labour-roadmap commitments to convert strategic goodwill into tangible development outcomes.

4- Balance ~~an~~ regional diplomacy.

Pursue confidence-building measures with Iran and India to defuse misperceptions and prevent escalation.

5- Incremental implementation.

Start with benign, cooperative fields (training, maritime security, humanitarian logistics) and avoid immediate operational deployments that could trigger crisis dynamics.

Conclusion-

The Pakistan-Saudi SMDA is both an opportunity and a test. It can yield political

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reassurance, economic dividends,
and defence modernization if
Islamabad ensures transparency,
Parliamentary oversight, and balanced
regional diplomacy. Conversely,
strategic ambiguity - especially on
nuclear matters - and rushed
operationalization risk entangling
Pakistan in external disputes
and magnifying regional anxieties.

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2 - Economic Integration and Regional Prosperity.

The SCO's geography offers immense potential for intra-regional trade and energy cooperation. According to Pakistan Today, the organisation's new strategy aims to make the Eurasian region a hub of digital trade and sustainable energy exchange.

- ii) Pakistan's CPEC corridor can link Central Asia to the Arabian Sea, while India's Chabahar Port and North-South corridor can connect Eurasia to the Indian Ocean.
- iii) If both initiatives are harmonised under the SCO framework, they can transform South and Central Asia into a connectivity hub rivaling East Asia.
- (iii) The proposed SCO Bank and joint bond system advocated by Russia, can create new financial mechanisms that shield member economies from sanctions and

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and currency fluctuations.

iv. Collective energy grids, cross-border electricity projects, and oil pipelines could drive down costs and create economic interdependence as a long-term stabilising factor for India-Pakistan ties.

3- Shift Towards Multipolarity and Strategic Autonomy-

SCO's economic initiatives signal a broader shift from Western-dominated system towards Eurasian multipolarity. For both Pakistan and India, this diversification ~~of~~ reduce dependence on western alliances. It allows Pakistan to strengthen its partnership with China and Russia, while enabling India to balance its relations with both western and Eastern blocs.

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Challenges and Constraints:

1. Historical Distrust and Bilateral Disputes:

The Kashmir issue and cross-border terrorism allegations remain primary hurdle. India often resists language seen as lenient on terrorism, while Pakistan seeks recognition of disputed issues.

2. Internal Power Politics:

China's economic dominance and Russia's strategic influence sometimes overshadow smaller states. India's growing western ties through the Quad also complicate intra-SCO alignment.

3. Institutional weakness =

Unlike the EU, SCO lacks a robust enforcement or dispute-resolution mechanism. Implementation of trade or infrastructure projects often lags behind declarations.

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~~The~~ Role of SCO in ~~shaping~~ Pakistan - India Relations.

Despite historical rivalry, both countries recognise the pragmatic value of dialogue under SCO.

The joint condemnation of terrorism in the 2005 Tianjin Declaration, including attacks in Pahalgam (India) and Khuzdar (Pakistan), shows readiness for cooperative security discourse.

Economic projects under the SCO umbrella can gradually

Regional and Global Implication..

Conclusion.

SCO stand at a crucial juncture in redefining the political and economic architecture of Eurasia. For Pakistan and India, it is more than a diplomatic forum - it is a strategic opportunity converging in partnership . . .