

CURRENT AFFAIRS

16th July 2022

IRAN, BELARUS TO BE NEWEST SCO MEMBERS

SYLLABUS: GS PAPER-II (IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS)

CONTEXT: Iran and Belarus are likely to be the two newest additions to the China and Russia backed Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

China and Russia are looking to frame the grouping as a counter to the West-particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

ABOUT SANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO)

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a permanent **international intergovernmental organization**.
- The creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was announced in **June 2001 in Shanghai (China) by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation, and the Republic of Tajikistan**.
- In the historical **meeting of the Heads of State Council of the SCO held in June 2017 in Astana**, the status of a full member of the Organization was granted to the **Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in this meeting**.

GENESIS

- Prior to the creation of SCO in 2001, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan were members of the Shanghai Five.
- Shanghai Five (1996) emerged from a series of border demarcation and demilitarization talks which the four former Soviet republics held with China to ensure stability along the borders.
- Following the accession of Uzbekistan to the organization in 2001, the Shanghai Five was renamed the SCO.
- On 17th September, 2021, it was announced that Iran would become a full member of the SCO.

OBJECTIVES

- Strengthening mutual trust and neighborliness among the member states;
- To promote their effective cooperation in trade, politics, research, the economy, technology, and culture.
- Education, transport, energy, environmental protection, tourism, and other areas;
- Making joint efforts to maintain and ensure security, stability, and peace in the region;
- Moving towards the establishment of a democratic, rational, and fair new international economic and political order.
- The organization pursues its internal policy based on the principles of mutual benefit, mutual trust, mutual consultations, equality, respect for cultural diversity, and a desire for common development, while the external policy is conducted under the principles of non-targeting and non-alignment.

MEMBER COUNTRIES

- There are 8 Member States: **China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.**
- There are 3 Observer States interested in acceding to full membership: **Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia.**
- There are 6 Dialogue Partners: **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Turkey.**

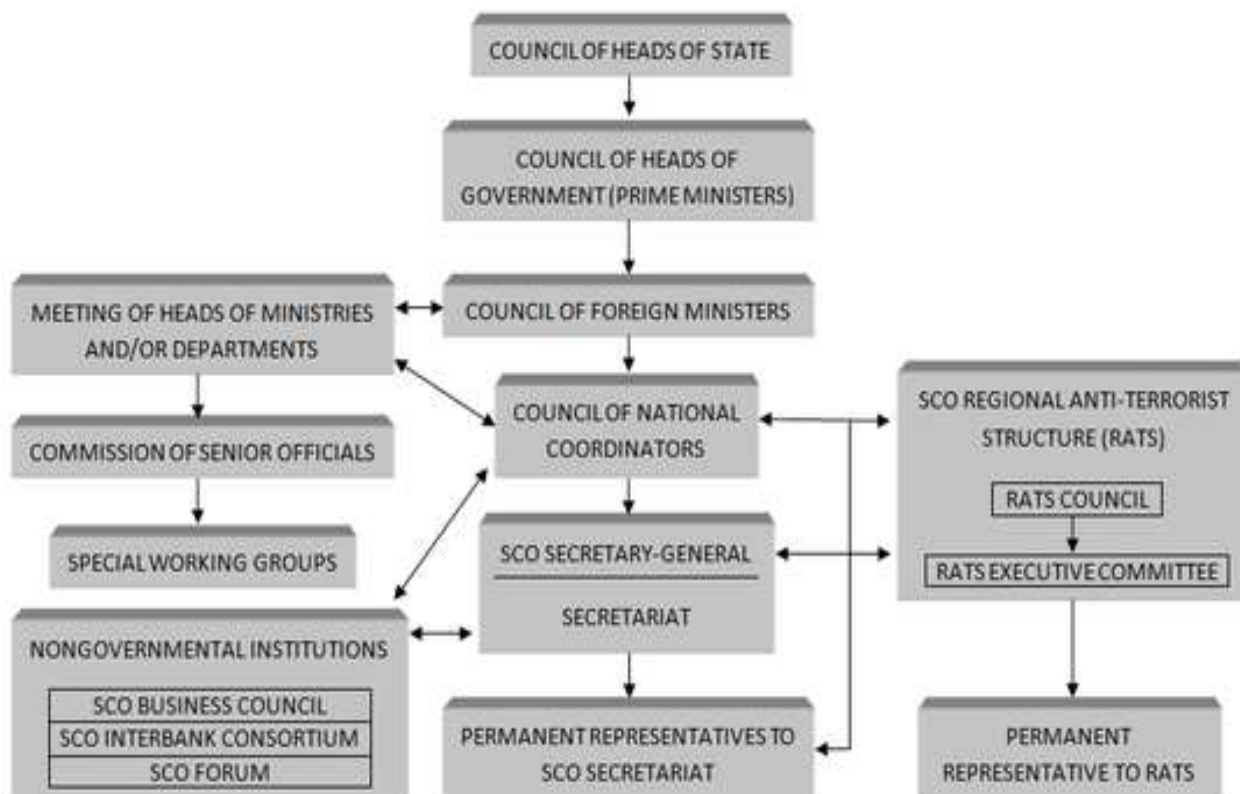
SCO SECRETARIAT – Based in Beijing to provide informational, analytical & organizational support.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE- The official working language of the SCO Secretariat is Russian and Chinese.

STRUCTURE AND WORKING

- The **supreme decision-making body** in the SCO is the **Heads of State Council (HSC).**
- The HSC meets once a year and adopts guidelines and decisions on all important matters of the SCO.
- The SCO Heads of Government Council (HGC) meet once a year to discuss the organization’s multilateral cooperation strategy and priority areas, to resolve current important economic and other cooperation issues
- The organization has two **permanent bodies** — **First is the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent and second is the SCO Secretariat based in Beijing.**
- The Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS and SCO Secretary-General are appointed by the Council of Heads of State for a term of 3years.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION



ZERO BUDGET NATURAL FARMING (ZBNF)

SYLLABUS: GS PAPER-III (AGRICULTURE)

CONTEXT: Recently, PM Narendra Modi addressed a conclave on natural farming in Surat wherein he opined that if there is a people's movement in natural farming, it will be a tremendous success.

He also spoke about the measures taken by the Union government to promote natural farming through schemes like **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana**.

ABOUT ZBNF

- Zero budget natural farming is a method of **chemical-free agriculture** drawing from traditional Indian practices.
- It was **originally promoted by agriculturist Subhash Palekar**, who developed it in the mid-1990s as an alternative to the Green Revolution's methods that are driven by chemical fertilizers and pesticides and intensive irrigation.
- It is a unique model that relies on Agro-ecology.
- It aims to bring down the cost of production to nearly zero and return to a pre-green revolution style of farming.
- It claims that there is **no need for expensive inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, and intensive irrigation**.

FOUR PILLARS OF ZBNF

- **Jiwamrita/Jeevamrutha:** It is a mixture of fresh cow dung and aged cow urine (both from India's indigenous cow breed), jaggery, pulse flour, water, and soil; to be applied on farmland.
Benefits: By promoting soil microbial activity, this culture improves the availability of nutrients to plants, shields crops from soil diseases, and raises the carbon content of the soil.
- **Bijamrita:** It is a concoction of neem leaves & pulp, tobacco and green chilies prepared for insect and pest management, that can be used to treat seeds.
Benefits: Fungal and other seed- and soil-borne infections may impact the seeds sowed in the field. The seeds are shielded against illnesses by the "Bijamrita" seed treatment.
- **Acchadana/Mulching:** The process of mulching involves adding cover crops, organic debris, or agricultural residue to the topsoil.
Benefits: Decomposing the materials used for mulching results in humus, which not only improves soil nutritional status but also conserves topsoil, boosts soil water retention, reduces evaporation loss, and promotes soil fauna. It also inhibits weed growth.
- **Waaphasa/Moisture (Soil Aeration):** For plants to grow and thrive, the soil must have adequate aeration.
Benefits: Applying Jiwamrita and mulching promotes soil aeration, humus content, availability of water, water retention capacity, and soil structure, all of which are essential for crop growth, particularly during dry spells.

POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES

- For all crops, ZBNF methods use between 50 and 60 per cent less water and electricity compared to non-ZBNF methods.

- Through multiple aerations, ZBNF lowers methane emissions.
- By using mulching, it is also possible to prevent the burning of residue.
- In ZBNF, cultivation costs are lower.
- The primary reason for debt and suicide amongst farmers is the rising expense of external inputs (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides). Over half of all farmers are in indebtedness, and nearly 70% of households in the agricultural sector spend more than they make, according to data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- The cost of production could be decreased and agriculture could be turned into a “zero budget” endeavor since under ZBNF there is no requirement of spending money or taking out loans for external inputs.
- This will enable many small farmers to escape the debt cycle and pave the way for the income of farmers to double.
- As ZBNF is a completely chemical-free technique, it is environmentally friendly and produces organic yields which fetch the farmers higher profits than from normal agricultural yields.

PARAMPARAGAT KRISHI VIKAS SCHEME

- A traditional farming improvement programme, PMKY was launched in 2015.
- It is an **extended component of Soil Health Management (SHM)** under the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).
- With the help of PKVY, the government aims to support and promote: Organic farming; Reduction in dependence on fertilizers and agricultural chemicals; Improvement of the soil health while increasing the yields; Organic food, thus produced will be linked with modern marketing tools and local markets.

PRELIMS FACTS

THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

- The population of Great Indian Bustard is dwindling due to the **lack of action to convert the overhead cable to underground power transmission in Gujarat and Rajasthan.**
- The Great Indian Bustard (GIB), **the State bird of Rajasthan, is considered India’s most critically endangered bird.**
- It is considered the **flagship grassland species**, representing the health of the grassland ecology.
- Its population is **confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat.** Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.
- The bird is under constant threats due to collision/electrocution with power transmission lines, hunting (still prevalent in Pakistan), habitat loss and alteration as a result of widespread agricultural expansion, etc.
- International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List: **Critically Endangered**
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): **Appendix 1**
- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS): **Appendix I**

- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: **Schedule 1**

ASIATIC BLACK BEARS

- The Asian black bear (**Ursus thibetanus**), also known as the Asiatic black bear, **moon bear and white-chested bear**, is a medium-sized bear species native to Asia that is adapted to an arboreal lifestyle.
- It lives in the **Himalayas, southeastern Iran, the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent, the Korean Peninsula, China, the Russian Far East, the islands of Honshu and Shikoku in Japan, and Taiwan.**
- It is listed as **vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.**
- It is threatened by deforestation and poaching for its body parts, which are used in traditional medicine.

COMMISSION FOR AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT (CAQM)

- It released a policy to curb air pollution in Delhi-NCR region.
- The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) was established as a **statutory body** by the government in August 2021 as an overarching body to carry out air quality management in Delhi NCR.
- The Commission aims at better coordination, research, identification, and resolution of problems related to air quality in NCR and adjoining areas.
- Adjoining areas refer to areas in the neighboring states of NCR namely, **Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.**
- Its authority supersedes the central and state pollution control boards of Delhi, Haryana, UP, Punjab and Rajasthan.