

REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (SAARC,ECO,SCO) AND THE ROLE OF PAKISTAN

- Regional organizations foster economic growth, security, and cultural ties among neighboring/member countries.
- Enhance trade, connectivity, stability amid global challenges like climate change and terrorism.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was founded on December 8, 1985, as a coalition of South Asian countries.
- Its founding members include the governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, who officially ratified its charter.
- SAARC aims to foster economic growth, social advancement, and cultural enrichment across the South Asian region, while also building friendly ties and collaboration with other developing nations.
- The organization focuses on promoting economic, technological, social, and cultural progress, with a strong emphasis on collective self-sufficiency among its member states.
- Summits involving heads of state are typically held once a year, whereas foreign secretaries convene twice annually.
- The organization's main office is located in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Structure:

- Highest body: Summit of Heads of State/Government (Annual).
- Council of Ministers (Foreign Ministers).
- Standing Committee (Foreign Secretaries).
- Technical Committees for sectors like agriculture, health.

Objectives

- Enhance the well-being of South Asia's populations and elevate their living standards;
- Drive rapid economic advancement, foster social progress, and nurture cultural growth across the region, ensuring every individual has the chance to live with dignity and fulfill their potential;
- Encourage and reinforce targeted self-sufficiency among South Asian nations;
- Foster mutual trust, empathy, and a deeper understanding of each other's challenges;
- Promote proactive cooperation and shared support in economic, social, cultural, technical, and scientific arenas;
- Bolster partnerships with other developing nations to strengthen collective progress;

- **Pakistan's Contribution**

- Since the inception of the Association, Pakistan has consistently championed the goals of SAARC and played a dynamic role within its framework.
- The country has made significant contributions toward building the Association's institutions and advancing its initiatives.
- Pakistan advocates for a gradual, stepwise strategy to deepen regional cooperation and emphasizes the importance of improved program coordination and strengthening the achievements attained to date.

- **The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)**

- The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is a regional alliance comprising seven Asian and three Eurasian countries within the South-Central Asian region.
- It serves as a forum for member states to explore strategies for enhancing economic growth, boosting trade, and attracting investment.
- The overarching aim is to create a unified market for goods and services, similar in scope and ambition to the European Union's single market.

- **Historical Background**

- The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) operates with its secretariat and cultural division based in Tehran, its economic office located in Turkey, and its scientific bureau stationed in Pakistan.
- This regional intergovernmental alliance was initiated by Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan.
- Established in 1985, ECO aims to foster collaboration in economic, technical, and cultural fields among its member nations, originally founded by the trio of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey.
- **Member Countries (10):** Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.
- Observers: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, SCO, UN.
- Focus on economic integration in West/Central Asia and beyond.

- **Structure:**

- Summit: Heads of State (biennial).
- Council of Ministers: Foreign Ministers.
- Regional Planning Council: Senior officials.
- Secretariat: Tehran, Iran; specialized bodies like ECO Trade Bank (Istanbul).

- **Objectives:**

- Promote sustainable development, intra-regional trade.
- Remove trade barriers, enhance cooperation in industry, agriculture, tourism, energy, transport.
- Foster investment, banking, and engineering ties.

- **Pakistan's Contribution to ECO**

- ECO is actively addressing the ongoing energy crisis, with key discussions currently taking place in Tehran.
- Successfully tackling this challenge will benefit all member states, particularly Pakistan. Despite its vast potential across various sectors, the country has yet to fully optimize its capabilities to meet the demands of the present situation.
- Pakistan holds significant strengths in telecommunications, agriculture, food production, industry, and trade. These assets position it as a vital contributor, capable of supporting fellow member nations through both financial aid and technical expertise to foster regional development.

SCO - Introduction and Member Countries

- Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), established June 15, 2001, in Shanghai.
- 9 Member States — the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- 3 Observer states - the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, Mongolia.

• **SCO - Structure and Objectives**

• **Structure:**

- Heads of State Council (supreme decision-maker).
- Heads of Government Council.
- Foreign Ministers Council.

• **Objectives:**

- Build mutual trust, friendship; cooperate in politics, economy, culture.
- Combat terrorism, separatism, extremism.
- Promote trade, energy, transport, security stability.

- **Roles, Outcomes, and Achievements**

- **Roles/Activities:** RATS for counter-terrorism; economic forums, cultural festivals; integrate with BRI.

- **Outcomes/Achievements:**

- Expanded membership

- Security: Joint exercises, anti-terror pacts.

- Economy: Connectivity projects; 2025 Tianjin Summit focuses on trade, conflicts resolution.

- **Pakistan's Role in SCO**

- Joined as full member in 2017; hosted 2024 summit in Islamabad (focus: trade, security).
- Multidimensional role in counter-terrorism, economic corridors; attends Tianjin Summit for bilateral talks.
- **Outcomes:** Enhanced security cooperation, regional hub status.

Organization	Key Changes for Pakistan	Economic Impacts	Security/Geopolitical Impacts	Challenges
SAARC	Shift to alternatives amid stagnation	Limited trade growth via SAFTA; potential energy trade	Reduced South Asian isolation; counter-terrorism advocacy	Indo-Pak tensions; no summits since 2016
SCO	Enhanced Eurasian integration	CPEC synergies; FDI attraction	RATS for anti-terror; balanced India ties	Internal conflicts; mediation limits
ECO	West/Central Asian economic focus	Trade diversification; energy corridors	D i p l o m a t i c strengthening with Iran/Turkey	Fragmentation; low integration

Organization	Economic Benefits	Security/Geopolitical Benefits	Strategic/Future Benefits
SAARC	Access to South Asian markets via SAFTA (textiles, agriculture exports); potential energy trade to address deficits.	Advocacy for SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism; dialogue reduces regional isolation.	Pivot to new blocs with China to counter stagnation; fosters alternative South Asian alliances for long-term integration.
SCO	CPEC-BRI integration boosts FDI (\$62B+); trade growth with Central Asia/Russia; Gwadar port as trade hub.	RATS enhances anti-terrorism via intelligence sharing, joint exercises; aligns with “Zarb-e-Istehkam”; balances Western influence, eases India ties (2024 summit).	Hosting 2024 summit, chairing RATS 2025-2026 elevates Eurasian influence; drives 10-15% intra-regional trade growth.
ECO	ECOTA diversifies trade (\$68M+ in medicines, fruits); energy corridors from Iran/Central Asia ensure sustainable supply.	Deepens ties with Iran/Turkey; 2025 summit commitments to climate resilience bolster environmental security.	Lahore as Ecotourism Capital 2027; green corridors enhance connectivity; strengthens Pakistan as regional economic hub.