CONTEXT:

India called upon the member countries of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to strengthen and implement all existing international laws and mechanisms, without exceptions or double standards, to combat terrorism and its enablers.

Terrorism continues to disrupt our societies and undermine our developmental endeavors. It is important for SCO countries to come together to deal with this menace.

The process of globalisation has opened up immense opportunities for the growth of SCO members, but also brought to the fore multidimensional, complex and transnational threats affecting developing countries. All members need to work together in defeating challenges like terrorism, climate change, endemic poverty, under development, pandemics and inequality.

India voiced the Government’s resolve of providing an enabling economic ecosystem for partner countries to invest and do business in India. He listed out various initiatives taken by the Government in this regard including relaxing FDI reforms, allowing 100 per cent foreign investment in coal mining and contract manufacturing, easing sourcing norms for single-brand retailers and approving 26 per cent overseas investment in digital media.

We strongly support the initiative to facilitate cooperation among small and medium-sized enterprises within the SCO. Food industry is another potential area of collaboration. SCO members can work together for technology and investment support to food processing and put in a supporting logistics chain.

India is ready to share its experience and expertise in skill development and capacity building in areas such as telemedicine, medical tourism, resource mapping, launching of satellites, agricultural education and effective and affordable pharmaceuticals. Finance, hospitality and tourism services also present significant opportunities.

Reiterated the Government’s commitment to a transparent, rules-based, open, inclusive and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organisation at its centre.

Invited SCO Member states to join the ‘Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure’. India has taken the initiative of launching the coalition to assist countries in upgrading their capacities for developing resilient infrastructure. It will address the loss reduction targets under the Sendai Framework, besides contributing to climate change adaptation. India would be holding Joint Urban Earthquake Search and Rescue exercise of SCO member States along with SCO Expert level meeting on disaster prevention.

About SCO:

SCO: Formerly the Shanghai Five and formed in 1996, the SCO has eight members today including India and Pakistan, which became part of it in 2017.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the then security and economic architecture in the Eurasian region dissolved and new structures had to come up.

The original Shanghai Five were China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

The SCO was formed in 2001, with Uzbekistan included. It expanded in 2017 to include India and Pakistan.

Since its formation, the SCO has focused on regional non-traditional security, with counter-terrorism as a priority: The fight against the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism and extremism has become its mantra. Today, areas of cooperation include themes such as economics and culture.

How does membership of the SCO help India?

In a world riven by geopolitical contestations, SCO membership provides India a vital counter to some of the other groupings it is a part of, balancing out its stated policy of pursuing “multi-alignments”. It is a platform also for alignments on issues such as energy security, connectivity and trade. With India indicating that it sees little use for SAARC, the SCO provides the only multilateral platform for it to deal in close proximity with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

For India, two important objectives are counter-terrorism and connectivity. These sit well with the SCO’s main objective of working cooperatively against the “three evils”.

India wants access to intelligence and information from SCO’s counter-terrorism body, the Tashkent-based Regional Anti-
Terror Structure (RATS).

A stable Afghanistan too is in India’s interest, and RATS provides access to non-Pakistan-centred counter-terrorism information there.

Connectivity is important for India’s Connect Central Asia policy.

Energy cooperation dominates its interest – and it’s in China’s neighbourhood. But India will also have to deal with an assertive China, which will push its Belt and Road Initiative during the summit.

SCO membership also bolsters India’s status as a major pan-Asian player, which is boxed in the South Asian paradigm.