Strengthening the Power in Central Asia

Why in news?

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- Prime minister’s Visit to Kazakhstan will open up a new paradigm of bilateral ties.
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- The visit is important since India is planning to enter into full membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
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What is the importance of the issue?

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- India’s prolonged quest to join the SCO brings into sharp relief an enduring tension between competing geopolitical ideas.
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- There are still decisions going on to whether to choose maritime or continental, India must define itself as a Eurasian or Indo-Pacific power.
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- India has the close civilizational contacts from the Aryans to the Mughals in the central Asian region.
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- With Pakistan blocking India’s access to the region, there is little that India can do to decisively influence the geopolitics of inner Asia.
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- The other source of India’s clamour to join the SCO was the focus on building a multipolar world.
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- India believed that Russia and China would provide an insurance against the presumed unreliability of America as a partner.
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- This calculus saw India join the trilateral forum with Russia and China, the BRICS, the SCO and the AIIB.
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- The scenario has changed due to the rising Power of China’s, which possess

problems for India more than the United States and the West.
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- Becoming a full member of a Chinese-led forum, the SCO will hardly address that problem.
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What are the objectives of India’s move?

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- India’s concerns on terrorism, combating terrorism, extremism and separatism are among the major objectives of the SCO.
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- China is unlikely to put any pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting cross-border terrorism and separatism in Kashmir.
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- China might use the SCO to bring pressure on India to engage and negotiate with Pakistan on Kashmir in the name of “good neighbourliness” that SCO wants to promote regionally.
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- As Russia draws closer to China and Pakistan, Moscow is unlikely to come to India’s rescue on Kashmir, as it used to in the past.
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- The SCO is also focused on promoting connectivity and regional integration in inner Asia.
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- Any hope that this might work to benefit India looks improbable for the moment.
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How can India use the SCO meet?

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- To prevent Pakistan and China ambushing India on the Kashmir question at the current SCO summit in Astana and in the future.
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- India must remind the region that China is a party to India’s territorial disputes in Kashmir and is an ally of Pakistan.
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- India must also take advantage of the few diplomatic opportunities the SCO might present in intensifying engagement with Central Asian states.

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- The SCO could also provide a forum to reduce India’s current frictions with China and Russia.
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- India must prepare itself to seize potential shifts in SCO politics over the longer term.
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What is the way forward?

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- The political turbulence generated by USA and the implicit contradictions between Russian and Chinese interests, are likely to surface at some point.
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- Even as they talk “multipolarity”, China and Russia are eager to cut separate bilateral deals with USA.
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- Russian and Chinese interests may also not be in total alignment in Central Asia. As for now, India must bide its time and adopt a low profile at the SCO.
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- If GOI is realistic about the limits of its role in a continental coalition led by Russia and China, It would double down on building its maritime partnerships.
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- In Eurasia, the strategy must be to limit the damage from the Sino-Russian alliance and probe for potential opportunities for altering the current negative dynamic.
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- As the US becomes an unpredictable actor that is unable or unwilling to balance the heartland powers China and Russia, India must turn to the rim land Japan and Western Europe to secure its strategic interests.
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- India must necessarily play in both the heartland and rim land.
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- What It needs is a clear appreciation of different strengths in the two great geopolitical theatres.
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Source: The Indian Express

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