



3 QUESTIONS- Importance of Shanghai Cooperation Organization foreign ministers summit

What was the importance of the SCO summit?

During the meeting that took place in Gao on May 4-5, foreign ministers of member countries met each other and gave a range of statements about regional and international issues. However, two meetings particularly draw attention and gave clues about whether future cooperation is possible or not. The first important meeting occurred between Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry stated at the summit that the situation in the border areas was “generally stable”. In spite of Chinese claims of stability, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar asserted that an abnormal situation exists along the border. According to him, Sino-Indian relations are not normal and cannot be normal if the border areas are disturbed. The foreign ministers’ assessment of the long-standing border dispute reflects their differences in perceptions of the problem as well as the continued impasse in relations.

The second important point is that Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is the first Pakistani foreign minister to visit India after a 12-year hiatus, albeit under the auspices of the SCO. Despite some speculation about a bilateral meeting between the Pakistani and Indian foreign ministers, Zardari said before landing in India that his visit was “solely focused on the SCO” and that he looked forward to constructive discussions with his counterparts from friendly countries. It is obvious that the main reason for the visit was not to develop relations with India but to develop multilateral relations with member countries, to break Pakistan’s growing isolationism, and to promote the country as part of a trade, connectivity, and energy project in Eurasia.

What was the agenda of the meeting?

3 issues are of particular importance. The first was India's willingness for the long-awaited reform to recognize English as the official language of the SCO, alongside Mandarin and Russian. Since becoming a full member of the SCO in 2017, India has been pushing the bloc to include "English" as the official language of communication. The main reason for this is to disseminate the SCO's decisions worldwide and ensure greater global reach and influence.

The second important topic was the discussion of payments in national currencies for mutual trade. The proposal was made in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, and initial discussions have already begun. India and Russia were already using national currencies in trade relations. Especially since the Russia-Ukraine war began, Moscow is eager to use national currencies in trade to reduce its dependence on the US dollar and Euro. Due to the accelerating de-dollarization process in the international system, China also advocates the use of national currencies in trade. The discussion in the SCO also reflects the intention of the regional powers to increase the use of their national currencies.

The final important topic on the agenda was the expansion of SCO. In particular, foreign ministers discussed the admission of Belarus and Iran as full members of the organization. They also considered applications for observer status for Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Myanmar, and the Maldives to join the grouping. In the era of the Russia-Ukraine war and intensification of Sino-US competition, the expansion of the organization is aimed at increasing SCO's role in regional security mission in Eurasia, as well as strengthening trade relations and promoting the use of national currencies and alternative payment systems.

How is the SCO summit's effect on regional and international issues?

The SCO is one of the unique organizations that exclude Western countries and create

opportunities for the regional power of Eurasia to discuss regional and international issues and promote cooperation. The organization plays a crucial role in maintaining diplomatic channels between countries. In this regard, the meeting between the Chinese and Indian foreign ministers was the best example of the importance of the organization in maintaining dialogue.

Moreover, the agenda of a recent meeting, especially the use of national currencies and the expansion of the organization, reflects the changing dynamics of the international system against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. Discussions on the admission of member and observer states indicate the growing intention of member states to extend the SCO's reach to Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In addition to the expansion of the SCO, the growing discussion of alternative payment systems also shows that member states are eager to enhance the organization's role as both a regional security and economic platform in order to reduce US influence and maximize their economic benefits for the future. However, despite the continuation of areas of cooperation, the success of the organization will largely depend on the development of bilateral relations between member countries. In this context, Sino-Indian and Indian-Pakistani relations can play a decisive role in realizing possible projects and strengthening the organization's position in the international system.