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29 August 2026

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Prime Minister Departs for Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan Ahead of the 26th SCO Summit

29 August 2026 · 8 min read ·

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

The Prime Minister departed on August 29, 2026 for a four-day visit to Central Asia, comprising a State Visit to Uzbekistan on August 29 and 30 at the invitation of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, followed by participation in the 26th Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation at Bishkek from August 31 to September 1, at the invitation of Kyrgyz President Sadyr Zhaparov.

As this edition is published, only the Tashkent leg has begun. The Bishkek summit has not taken place. Nothing in this article describes summit outcomes, and any claim you encounter about what the SCO “decided” this week should be checked against the calendar before it is used.

THE ITINERARY

LEG	DATES	HOST	NATURE
Tashkent, Uzbekistan	August 29 to 30, 2026	President Shavkat Mirziyoyev	Bilateral State Visit
Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic	August 31 to September 1, 2026	President Sadyr Zhaparov	26th SCO Summit

This is the Prime Minister’s **fourth visit to Uzbekistan**. India’s stated priorities for the visit have been framed as **Security, Connectivity and Opportunity**.

THE UZBEKISTAN LEG

The bilateral programme covers **delegation-level talks** on trade and investment, defence, digital connectivity, energy and education. The two sides have framed the relationship around a pairing of national visions: India’s **Viksit Bharat 2047** alongside Uzbekistan’s “**Yangi Uzbekistan**” or New Uzbekistan development strategy.

Two symbolic engagements are scheduled and both are examinable.

The Shastri Memorial. Prime Minister **Lal Bahadur Shastri** died in Tashkent on **January 11, 1966**, the day after signing the **Tashkent Declaration** with Pakistan's President Ayub Khan, which formally ended the **India-Pakistan war of 1965**. The declaration was mediated by the Soviet Premier **Alexei Kosygin**. Every Indian prime ministerial visit to Tashkent since has included the memorial, and the association is a standing Prelims fact.

The Mahatma Gandhi Centre at **Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies**, which anchors India's cultural and academic presence in the country.

THE BISHKEK LEG AND THE SCO

The **26th SCO Summit** carries the theme **peace, development and prosperity**, and falls in the organisation's **25th anniversary year**. Official indications are that the Indian intervention will focus on **connectivity and security in the region**, and on the objective of a region **free from terrorism, separatism and extremism**, which is the SCO's own "**three evils**" formulation.

The Prime Minister is also scheduled to attend the **opening of the 6th World Nomad Games**, hosted by the Kyrgyz Republic.

What the SCO is

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Origin	Shanghai Five , 1996 (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan)
Formalised	2001 , on Uzbekistan's accession
India and Pakistan admitted	2017
Iran	2023
Belarus	2024
Secretariat	Beijing
Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)	Tashkent

The original purpose of the Shanghai Five was the settlement of **post-Soviet border disputes** and the building of military confidence along them. That origin is worth holding on to, because it explains why the organisation's institutional habits were formed around a **China-Russia-Central Asia equilibrium** that India joined only in 2017.

WHY CENTRAL ASIA HAS UNDERPERFORMED FOR INDIA

India's institutional architecture in the region is essentially complete. It holds **strategic partnerships with every Central Asian republic except Turkmenistan**, which maintains a policy of permanent neutrality. It announced the **12-point Connect Central Asia policy in 2012**. The Prime Minister visited **all five republics in 2015**. India became a full SCO member in **2017**, holds the **India-Central Asia Dialogue** at foreign-minister level, and convened the first **India-Central Asia Summit** in 2022.

And yet India remains a marginal economic actor there. The reason is not diplomatic and it is not intent. **It is access.**

India shares **no border with Central Asia. Pakistan denies overland transit**. Afghanistan, the only alternative land bridge, has been unstable for the whole of the relevant period. The workaround runs through Iran, via the **Chabahar port** and the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, and both have been constrained less by engineering than by **sanctions exposure**.

This is the single most important analytical point in the topic. **When a policy underperforms despite sustained ambition, funding and continuity across governments, look for a physical constraint rather than a failure of will.**

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The case for investing in the SCO is that no substitute exists. It is the only multilateral platform seating India with all five Central Asian republics, Iran, Russia and China simultaneously. Absence would leave the region's agenda entirely to Beijing and Moscow. Membership also gives India standing on Afghanistan through the **SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group** at a moment when every regional state is recalibrating its approach to Kabul.

The case for scepticism is that India is investing in a forum it cannot shape. The centre of gravity is Chinese, decisions require consensus, and India has consistently declined to endorse the **Belt and Road Initiative** in SCO documents because the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor** traverses Indian territory under illegal occupation. India's visible contribution has therefore been substantially defensive: raising terrorism, invoking the three evils, and objecting to connectivity projects. Those positions are correct and should be held, but they prevent outcomes rather than producing them.

The forward-looking question is what India can offer that others cannot. Four things are credible: **critical minerals** cooperation, given Central Asia's uranium, rare earth and lithium potential and India's transition requirements; **digital public infrastructure**, India's most transferable export; **pharmaceuticals, health care and higher education**, all established Indian strengths in the region; and **development finance** through a dedicated line-of-credit window.

Sequencing matters too. Bishkek precedes the **18th BRICS Summit, which India hosts at New Delhi on September 12 and 13, 2026.** What India secures at the first shapes what it can attempt at the second. The **next SCO presidency passes to Pakistan**, which makes credit built with the Central Asian states and Russia during this cycle a practical instrument rather than a courtesy.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India or affecting India's interests; India and its neighbourhood; effect of the policies of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Prelims angle: SCO founding dates and accession years, the location of the Secretariat and of RATS, the Tashkent Declaration and Shastri's death, the composition of the Shanghai Five, and Turkmenistan's neutrality are all directly examinable.

Mains angle: *"India's Central Asia policy has never lacked intent; it has lacked access."* Build the answer around the connectivity constraint and evaluate Chabahar and the INSTC as the operative remedies, rather than listing diplomatic initiatives.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

THE VISIT:

Departure: August 29, 2026. Duration: four days.

Tashkent, Uzbekistan: August 29 to 30, 2026, State Visit at the invitation of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. The Prime Minister's fourth visit to Uzbekistan.

Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic: August 31 to September 1, 2026, 26th SCO Summit, at the invitation of President Sadyr Zhaparov.

India's stated priorities: Security, Connectivity, Opportunity.

Vision pairing: Viksit Bharat 2047 and Uzbekistan's "Yangi Uzbekistan".

Also scheduled: the opening of the 6th World Nomad Games in the Kyrgyz Republic.

THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION:

Predecessor: Shanghai Five, 1996, comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Formalised as the SCO in 2001 when Uzbekistan joined.

India and Pakistan became full members in 2017; Iran in 2023; Belarus in 2024.

Secretariat: Beijing. Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS): Tashkent.

The "three evils": terrorism, separatism and extremism.

SCO Development Strategy 2035 was adopted at the preceding summit.

The next presidency passes to Pakistan.

Afghanistan has held observer status since 2012, though its participation has been in abeyance since 2021 and the seat has not been extended to the Islamic Emirate; the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group is the standing regional format.

THE TASHKENT DECLARATION:

Signed January 10, 1966, ending the India-Pakistan war of 1965, mediated by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin.

Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri died at Tashkent on January 11, 1966, the following day.

INDIA'S CENTRAL ASIA POLICY, IN SEQUENCE:

2012: the 12-point Connect Central Asia policy.

2015: the Prime Minister visits all five Central Asian republics.

2017: India becomes a full SCO member.

2022: first India-Central Asia Summit, held virtually.

India-Central Asia Dialogue operates at foreign-minister level.

Strategic partnerships with all Central Asian states except Turkmenistan, which follows permanent neutrality.

CONNECTIVITY INSTRUMENTS:

Chabahar port, Iran: India's route to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan.

International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC): multimodal route from Mumbai through Iran to Russia and onward.

Ashgabat Agreement: transit corridor between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf; India joined in 2018.

TAPI pipeline (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India): long planned, not operational.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA POSITION:

India does not endorse the Belt and Road Initiative in SCO documents, because the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passes through Indian territory under illegal occupation.

Aksai Chin, the areas of Ladakh under illegal Chinese occupation, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh are integral parts of India.

THE FIVE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS AND THEIR CAPITALS:

Kazakhstan: Astana. Uzbekistan: Tashkent. Kyrgyzstan: Bishkek. Tajikistan: Dushanbe. Turkmenistan: Ashgabat.

Uzbekistan and Liechtenstein are the world's only two doubly landlocked countries, meaning every neighbour is itself landlocked. This is a recurring Prelims question.

WATCH THE TRAP:

The SCO Summit at Bishkek had not taken place when this edition was published. Announcements made before a summit are not outcomes of it.

RATS is at Tashkent, the Secretariat is at Beijing. These two are frequently swapped in options.

The Shanghai Five (1996) and the SCO (2001) are different things with different membership. Uzbekistan was not in the Shanghai Five.

Sources: PIB, Ministry of External Affairs, The Indian Express

Source: Prime Minister Departs for Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan Ahead of the 26th SCO Summit — Ujiyari.com |
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