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Title : Statement regarding Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit held in Astana.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH): Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, was set up in 2001. The basic objectives of the organisation are strengthening mutual trust, good neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation amongst the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation member-states, maintenance of regional peace, security and stability, assistance for economic and social development in the region. The various Summit and other meetings have issued declarations and taken forward cooperation amongst member countries not only by adopting confidence building measures but also undertake activities like joint military exercises, training programmes, and establishment of a Regional Anti Terrorist Structure headquartered in Tashkent. SCO has a Secretariat in Beijing and the Council of Heads of State is the supreme decision-making body.

As the SCO has emerged to be an important regional organisation involving countries of the Central Asian region and those around it, India applied for observer status in the SCO in March this year. In the SCO Summit held in Astana on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 2005, India, Pakistan and Iran were admitted as Observers (Mongolia was admitted as an Observer last year). I represented India at the Astana Summit in July. The Astana Summit focussed on terrorism, drug trafficking and promoting economic cooperation. I also had very useful bilateral meetings with the leaders assembled there. In view of our own interest in strengthening relations with countries in our extended neighbourhood including Central Asia, it is in our interest to be closely associated with the SCO.

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On the sidelines of the Summit, I had bilateral meetings with leaders of SCO countries. President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan received me warmly and welcomed economic cooperation with India. The Chinese President Mr. Hu Jintao emphasised the need for cooperative partnership and coordination in international affairs. In my meeting with the Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and Foreign Minister Kasuri, we reviewed the status of our bilateral relations. We discussed possibilities of enhancing air, rail and road communications between India and Pakistan. We also noted the potential for cooperation between India and Pakistan in areas such as climate change and ozone depletion. Other bilateral meetings were with the President of Tajikistan, and the Foreign Ministers of Uzbekistan and Mongolia. I also had a pleasant exchange of views with President Putin of Russia. In the discussions with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, we reviewed our bilateral relations as well as the trilateral cooperation with China.

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