SCO's First Civilisational Dialogue Forum: Delhi, 20-22 November

23 November 2026 update: Indraprastha Communiqué sets out areas for cultural cooperation

The first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum took place at Purana Qila, New Delhi, from 20 to 22 November 2026. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated it on 20 November. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of External Affairs jointly organised the forum, with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) as knowledge partner. It brought together 116 delegates from 22 countries, including four ministers and SCO Secretary-General Nurlan Yermekbayev. The 22 participating countries must not be described as 22 full SCO members. [1]

Outcome: The forum produced the Indraprastha Communiqué. It affirms equal respect for civilisations, their distinct identities and their contributions to humanity. Its account of cultural heritage includes manuscripts, literature, living traditions, cuisine, performing arts and traditional knowledge, as well as monuments. [2]

Areas for cooperation: The document supports identifying shared cultural and documentary heritage for joint nominations under the relevant UNESCO conventions and programmes. It also supports manuscript digitisation and cataloguing, translations, joint studies and exchanges among cultural and academic institutions. A joint nomination is an application, not confirmation of UNESCO inscription. [2]

Technology and protection: Technology, including artificial intelligence, should support access to and understanding of heritage while respecting accuracy, context and the interests of communities and institutions. Cooperation also covers protection against illicit trafficking in cultural property, environmental pressures and natural disasters. [2]

Proposals are not completed projects: A digital repository is proposed, not announced as operational. India proposes holding the dialogue once every two years, with the venue to be decided by member states at the respective SCO summits. This is not an already fixed meeting calendar or a binding treaty. Sharing good practices remains subject to national procedures, priorities and available resources. [2]

Sources

- [1] https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2339975&lang=2&reg=48
- [2] https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2026/nov/doc_10558_20261122_18171201.pdf

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Update: 21 November 2026 - Further proposals for cultural cooperation

At the Purana Qila inauguration on 20 November, the Prime Minister proposed joint museum exhibitions, scholar and researcher exchanges between universities, heritage circuits linking Silk Route and Buddhist sites, and cultural tourism. He also called for participation by young artists, writers, filmmakers and local artisans. These are proposals for cooperation, not announcements of completed programmes or binding agreements. Digitisation and translation of texts are already covered in the earlier update.

Official source: Original release

Update: 20 November 2026 - forum opens today

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum at Purana Qila, New Delhi, today, 20 November 2026, at around 5:30 pm, and will address the gathering.
- The forum runs from 20 to 22 November and brings together scholars, academics, experts and cultural representatives to explore the shared civilisational heritage of SCO countries.
- Aim: celebrate the region's interconnected civilisational heritage, strengthen people-to-people ties and promote cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation.

Sources: - https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pm-to-inaugurate-first-sco-civilisational-dialogue-forum-on-20-november/ - https://ddnews.gov.in/en/pm-modi-to-inaugurate-first-sco-civilisational-dialogue-forum-in-new-delhi-on-november-20/

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> **20 November evening update: SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum inaugurated**
>
> Akashvani's official report published at 8:11 pm on 20 November states that Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum at Purana Qila in New Delhi. The three-day forum is being held from 20 to 22 November.
>
> The Prime Minister stressed the role of digital platforms in cultural cooperation, including possibilities for digitising and translating ancient texts and conducting joint research on shared history. These are proposals and possibilities for cooperation, not a list of completed projects.
>
> The forum aims to promote shared civilisational heritage, people-to-people links and cross-cultural dialogue. Cultural diplomacy can complement security and economic cooperation; it is not by itself evidence that disputes have been resolved.
>
> Official source

What is the SCO?

- **Introduction:** The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a Eurasian political, economic and security grouping formed in **2001**, headquartered in **Beijing**.
- **Members (10):** India, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Iran and Belarus. India became a full member in **2017**; Iran (2023) and Belarus (2024) are the newest.
- **Wider net:** Beyond members, observers and dialogue partners are also invited - hence 25 invitations for this forum.

About the forum

- **First edition:** The SCO's first international conference dedicated to civilisational dialogue - shared heritage, culture and people-to-people links.
- **Venue signal:** The choice of Purana Qila places India's civilisational heritage at the centre; delegates will also be introduced to India's heritage, including the Indus Valley Civilisation narrative.
- **Pakistan's stance:** According to the news report of 16 November, Pakistan has nominated climate minister Musadik Masud Malik as its representative. This was a pre-event nomination report. The completed forum outcome is recorded in the 23 November update.

Why it matters for India

- **Soft power:** Hosting a civilisation-and-culture forum projects India as a 'civilisational state' beyond security and economic issues.
- **Diplomatic balance:** India maintains its presence on a platform where both China and Pakistan are present; cultural outreach strengthens bilateral ties across Eurasia and the Global South.
- **Exam angle:** SCO's structure, membership and headquarters, and the forum's venue and dates are direct prelims facts; cultural diplomacy is a GS-II mains theme.

Quiz: Test your knowledge

▼ Q1: Where is the first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum being held, and who inaugurated it?

(a) Hyderabad; the Culture Minister
(b) Purana Qila, New Delhi; the Prime Minister
(c) Mumbai; the External Affairs Minister
(d) Varanasi; the President

Answer and explanation: (b) The forum runs 20-22 November 2026 at the Purana Qila complex, New Delhi, inaugurated by PM Narendra Modi.

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▼ **Q2: Which of the following is NOT a full member of the SCO?**

(a) Belarus
(b) Iran
(c) Saudi Arabia
(d) Uzbekistan

Answer and explanation: (c) Saudi Arabia is among the invited countries, not a full member; the 10 members include Belarus (2024) and Iran (2023).

15 November 2026 update: Pakistan nominates federal minister Musadik Masood Malik for the SCO forum in Delhi

Despite the bilateral freeze, Pakistan has confirmed participation in the **SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum** to be held in Delhi on **20-22 November** - it has nominated its federal climate change minister **Dr Musadik Masood Malik** for the event. The forum was proposed by Prime Minister Modi at the **Tianjin summit in September 2025**, and **15 countries** have confirmed participation. Notably, Pakistan will host the SCO heads-of-state summit in **August 2027**.

Source: The Tribune: Pakistan agrees to send federal minister to SCO forum in Delhi amid bilateral freeze

Mains Practice Question

Cultural diplomacy is becoming an important instrument of India's foreign policy in the 21st century. Discuss this statement in the context of India's hosting of the SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum. (Answer in 250 words - 15 marks)

Answer outline:

Introduction: A brief introduction to the first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum (20-22 November, Purana Qila) and the concept of cultural diplomacy.

Main body: Benefits of cultural diplomacy - soft power, bilateral contacts, the image of a civilisational nation, engagement with the Global South. Challenges - regional tensions (Pakistan's nomination versus actual attendance), symbolism versus concrete outcomes, the risk of politicising heritage. Analyse with a balanced assessment.

Conclusion: Such forums create long-term influence; success lies in dialogue turning into concrete cultural and educational cooperation.

Frequently asked questions

When and where was the forum held?

At Purana Qila, New Delhi, from 20 to 22 November 2026.

What is the official participation figure?

The Culture Ministry reports 116 delegates from 22 countries. Older invitation or confirmation counts are not final attendance.

What does the Indraprastha Communiqué mean?

It sets out shared directions for cultural cooperation. It does not automatically turn every proposal into an operational project or binding treaty.

Sources:

- Indian Express - SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum: 15 confirmations (14 November 2026)
- The Hindu - China, Kazakhstan, Iran among confirmations (13 November 2026)
- Hindusthan Samachar - PM Modi to inaugurate first forum at Purana Qila

Related analysis: SCO cultural diplomacy and the distinction from bilateral normalisation

Sources for this update:

- www.thehindu.com
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