PM opens first SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum at Purana Qila, Delhi

Topics: International Affairs · UPSC Prelims · TNPSC · SSC · Current Affairs



News

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the first Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Civilisational Dialogue Forum at Purana Qila (Old Fort), New Delhi, on 20 November 2026. The three-day forum holds four thematic sessions on 21 and 22 November: (1) cultural expressions – music and performing arts, textiles, cuisine and traditional games; (2) art and architecture; (3) language and literature, including scripts and manuscripts; (4) monastic trails and philosophical traditions (PIB). An exhibition, 'ASTITVA', traces Delhi's history through archaeological evidence from 1200 BCE to 1200 CE. The PM said, 'Empires have changed the maps of the world, but civilisational dialogues have changed the ideas of the world.' He recalled Indus–Mesopotamia trade, the Silk Road, Buddhist monks such as Faxian and Xuanzang, Nalanda, and the Panchatantra becoming 'Kalila wa Dimna' in Arabic; he also cited Kucha-born Kumarajiva, the Ramayana as 'Reamker' in Cambodia and the Charbagh garden style of Samarkand and Herat (PIB). He proposed cooperation in digitising and translating ancient texts, joint museum exhibitions and cultural tourism. Modi had proposed the forum at the 2025 SCO Summit in Tianjin, China; the 2026 Bishkek Declaration welcomed it (PIB).

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Event	First SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum

Point	Details
Inaugurated	20 November 2026 – PM Modi
Venue	Purana Qila, New Delhi
Sessions	21–22 Nov: cultural expressions; art & architecture; language & literature; monastic trails & philosophy
Exhibition	'ASTITVA' – Delhi, 1200 BCE – 1200 CE
Proposed at	2025 SCO Summit, Tianjin (China)
Welcomed by	Bishkek Declaration, 2026
PM's theme	'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' – the world is one family

Background

- History: Purana Qila is traditionally linked with Indraprastha of the Mahabharata. ASI excavations have found nine cultural levels, from pre-Mauryan to Mughal times (PIB, 2023). Humayun began its citadel as his city 'Dinpanah' in 1533; Sher Shah Suri, who defeated him in 1540, renamed it Shergarh and added to it (Delhi Govt).
- Inside the fort, the octagonal 'Sher Mandal', built by Sher Shah, later served as Humayun's library; he died in January 1556 after falling down its stairs. The Qila-i-Kuhna mosque (1541) inside the fort was built by Sher Shah (Delhi Govt).
- Cultural exchange: the Panchatantra, ascribed to Vishnu Sharma, went into Persian (Pahlavi) in the 6th century and later into Arabic as 'Kalila wa Dimna' through Ibn al-Muqaffa. Faxian came to India under Chandragupta II and Xuanzang under Harsha. Brahmagupta's mathematics reached Baghdad and fed into Al-Khwarizmi's work.
- SCO: the Eurasian grouping founded in 2001 marks its 25th year in 2026 (PMIndia). The 2026 summit was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. India has been a full member since 2017.

Tamil Nadu link: Tradition holds that Bodhidharma, who took Chan (Zen) Buddhism to China, was born in Kanchipuram in the 5th or 6th century CE (TN Tourism); he is also said to have been a Pallava king's son (ANI). At Nagapattinam, a Srivijaya king built the Chudamani Vihara in 1006 with Rajaraja Chola I's help; about 350 Buddhist bronzes were found there.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the first Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Civilisational Dialogue Forum at Purana Qila (Old Fort), New Delhi, on 20 November 2026.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Event: First SCO Civilisational Dialogue Forum; Inaugurated: 20 November 2026 – PM Modi; Venue: Purana Qila, New Delhi; Sessions: 21–22 Nov: cultural expressions; art & architecture; language & literature; monastic trails & philosophy.

What is the background to this news?

History: Purana Qila is traditionally linked with Indraprastha of the Mahabharata. ASI excavations have found nine cultural levels, from pre-Mauryan to Mughal times (PIB, 2023).

Practice questions (with answers)

1. Purana Qila, the forum's venue, is traditionally identified with which city of the Mahabharata?

A) Hastinapura

B) Indraprastha

C) Kurukshetra

D) Mathura

Answer: B – Explanation: Indraprastha – the Pandavas' capital. ASI digs found 9 cultural levels, pre-Mauryan to Mughal. Hastinapura was the Kauravas' capital (UP).

2. Who is regarded as the author of the Panchatantra, which the PM said became 'Kalila wa Dimna' in Arabic?

A) Kalidasa

B) Banabhatta

C) Vishnu Sharma

D) Somadeva

Answer: C – Explanation: Vishnu Sharma – animal fables to teach statecraft to princes. Somadeva wrote Kathasaritsagara; Bana the Harshacharita; Kalidasa Shakuntala.

3. The Chinese monk Faxian, whom the PM named among Silk Road travellers, visited India during whose reign?

A) Chandragupta II

B) Samudragupta

C) Harshavardhana

D) Kanishka

Answer: A – Explanation: Chandragupta II (Vikramaditya) – Faxian was in India c. 405–411 CE but never visited the court. Xuanzang came in Harsha's reign.

4. Which Mughal emperor died in 1556 after falling from the stairs of the Sher Mandal library inside Purana Qila?

A) Babur

B) Akbar

C) Jahangir

D) Humayun

Answer: D – Explanation: Humayun – he died months after regaining Delhi in 1555, lost to Sher Shah in 1540. Sher Shah built the Sher Mandal. Humayun's Tomb is a UNESCO site.

5. According to tradition, Bodhidharma, who took Chan (Zen) Buddhism to China, came from which Tamil Nadu city?

A) Madurai

B) Nagapattinam

C) Uraiyur

D) Kanchipuram

Answer: D – Explanation: Kanchipuram – 5th–6th century CE; said to be a Pallava king's son. He is linked with China's Shaolin monastery.

Sources: PIB/PMO, 19 & 20 Nov 2026; PMIndia, 20 Nov 2026; News On AIR, 19 Nov 2026; ASI – asi.nic.in / PIB (Purana Qila excavation, 2023); Delhi Govt SRDC; Deccan Herald (Sher Mandal); NCERT Class 6/7 History and TN State Board (Faxian, Panchatantra, Humayun); TN Tourism; ThePrint (ANI). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.