

SCO Summit: Indo-Pak acrimony takes centre stage at Modi 2.0's first multilateral meet

As PM Modi's attends the SCO Summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, India-Pakistan ties have, to a certain degree, overshadowed the first multilateral visit of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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Geeta Mohan

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For India, development and security would be core of the agenda at the SCO. (Reuters photo)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is one of the two leaders of the SCO member-states (the other being Russia) who is not staying at the state guest house Ala Archa where all others are being hosted by the president of the Kyrgyz Republic.

When asked, India Today TV was told that it was because of logistic reasons since the Indian delegation is huge. But, it hasn't escaped anyone that it would be easier for the Indian side to avoid the Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan by not staying in the same premises.

India-Pakistan ties have, to a certain degree, overshadowed the first multilateral visit of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Pakistan's closed airspace dominates SCO summit

The importance of cooperation in the sphere of connectivity dawned on this regional bloc with Pakistan shutting down its airspace that has affected many lives. But, PM Modi's

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decision to not avail the special concession given by Pakistan by opening its airspace for Modi's aircraft was welcomed by the Indian students in Bishkek.

Wasim, a medical student said, "PM Modi is thinking that when Indian students here are suffering because of this decision by Pakistan then why should he take that route. He is against VIP culture and why should one individual get a concession. There are so many Indian students here who are waiting to go home. It is a good decision by Modi ji."

The impediment in travel is one of the main reasons why PM Modi is going to engage leaders of the SCO as well as those from Afghanistan and Iran, in particular, to find alternative options to Pakistan.

Speaking to India Today TV, former Indian envoy to Uzbekistan Skand Tayal said, "Pakistan is an impediment in connectivity because our goods cannot travel through Pakistan. It is an impediment for our relations with Afghanistan as well as with Central Asia. That is why we are looking at alternate routes. This is a reality and we have to face it. I do not see relations with Pakistan improving in the near future because that country is not going to give up the path of terrorism and trying to needle India. We have to find alternative routes and find technology to cope with this."

Will India-Pakistan meet?

Prime Minister Modi is using this opportunity to engage most of the participating leaders at a bilateral level as well. Bilateral meetings with China, Russia, Afghanistan on day one and then on Friday with Iran and the Kyrgyz Republic show the extent of India's importance in this regional bloc

Briefing the media after the bilateral meeting with China on Thursday, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said, "There was a brief discussion on Pakistan. PM Modi recalled that he has made efforts and these efforts have been derailed, that Pakistan needs to create an atmosphere free of terror and at this stage, we do not see this happening. We expect it to take concrete action."

There has been a lot of speculation on whether leaders of India and Pakistan would meet at all. With yet another attack in Anantnag that claimed the lives of five CRPF jawans and injured three, it is impossible to imagine a thaw between the two nations.

For now, no bilateral talk has been planned but the exchange of pleasantries cannot be ruled out. The question really is who will initiate, if at all?

"When the actual meetings take place, it would be impolite and not civil if our leader and the Pakistani PM do not exchange a few words of courtesies and pleasantries. I don't think it will go beyond that", said Ambassador Tayal.

Development India's focus

For India, development and security would be the core of the agenda at the SCO.

Sachin Chaturvedi, DG RIS said, "China is also cooperating with India in getting this message across. We heard that at the UNSC and we are trying to address this issue in a major way where Pakistan is getting isolated on trade, connectivity and development related issues."

India will focus on counter-terrorism, development agendas, connectivity and climate change at the SCO forum. But, we will have to see if India would name Pakistan or will push for a strongly worded paragraph on terrorism at the summit level meeting.