

## **India may join Shanghai Cooperation Organisation within a year: Secretary-General**

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**Beijing:** India is likely to attain full membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) within a year, Secretary-General of the six-member political, economic and military alliance led by China and Russia has said.

### ***Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)***

"For almost a year, we held consultations with top representatives from India. To become a full member of the SCO, the applicant states should adopt all the documents in accordance with the procedures in this country," Rashid Alimov, the Secretary-General, said yesterday at the SCO headquarters here.

At the Tashkent summit on June 23-24, India will inch a step closer to obtaining full SCO membership, with the signing of a memorandum on the commitments of applicant states.

"We have around 30 documents of this kind. The main document is about long term partnership, cooperation and good neighbourhood. In Tashkent, we are expected to sign the document that will take India to the next stage in the process," he said.

He added that India will first have to accept all the documents that have been adopted by the SCO member states in the past 15 years which may take some time.

"Keeping all the required documentation in mind, a concrete date cannot be set in this regard. It may take six months or a year," Alimov said.

While China may be blocking India's bid to join the coveted NSG club, the prospect of its neighbour joining the six-member SCO, often touted as a counterweight to Western alliances, seems promising to the Secretary-General.

"I think India is a great country, it has great culture and economy. When it joins the SCO as a full member, the organisation will grow more powerful," Alimov said.

India, which has observer status, applied in 2014 for SCO membership, that is expected to allow the country greater access to energy resources in Central Asia and more say in key security initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region.

The SCO summit held in Ufa in Russia last year approved inclusion of India and Pakistan to the list. During the summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made

a strong pitch to secure India's entry to SCO with visits to other SCO members Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Calling both India and Pakistan countries with "deep history", Alimov said that the decision to include both nations was a well-thought-out one.

"These are both friendly states to all the founding states of the SCO. Both sides have had observer states for 11 years. The decision to grant them full membership is a well- thought conscious decision," he said.

"I believe it's natural that the organisation is going to get only stronger with the addition of these two countries," added Alimov.

The SCO currently has six member states - China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, with Afghanistan, India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan as observers, and Belarus, Turkey and Sri Lanka as dialogue partners.

India and Pakistan are expected to be elevated as regular members.

- PTI