

## **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation decides to include India as full member**

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**Ufa:** Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) today decided to include India as a full member, prompting Prime Minister Narendra Modi to offer to work with the six-member grouping to enhance connectivity, combat terror and create an environment for boosting trade by easing barriers.

India, which has an Observer status for the past 10 years, will technically become the member by next year after completion of certain procedures.

Beijing-based SCO currently has China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as members.

Along with India, the process to include Pakistan as a member was also initiated here today. "I convey our deep sense of gratitude to the members of SCO for accepting India as a full member," Modi said after the announcement was made at the Summit, attended by leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

"Our membership of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a natural extension of the relationships that India has with member countries and mirrors the region's place in India's future," he said.

Noting that India's membership "reflects the natural links of history," he said, "it will also promote peace and prosperity in this vast region that has often been called the pivot of human history."

Modi said the membership also advances the shared vision to reconnect and integrate Eurasia's different region. India was made an Observer in the SCO in 2005 and it made an application last year for full membership of the grouping whose focus is on connectivity, counter-terrorism cooperation, bolstering cooperation in energy sector, enhancing trade and dealing with drug trafficking.

"We will work with SCO to combat terrorism and extremism that is a rising threat to the entire region. A stable and peaceful Afghanistan is a future that the Afghan people richly deserve, but it will also advance peace, stability and prosperity in the region," the Prime Minister said.

"As we look forward, we would lend our support to improving transportation and communication networks in the region.

We can create a vast network of physical and digital connectivity that extends from Eurasia's northern corner to Asia's southern shores.

The International North South Transportation Corridor is a step in that direction," he said. Modi, who attended the SCO Summit soon after his bilateral meeting with Sharif, congratulated Pakistan for joining the SCO.

"I also take this opportunity to congratulate Pakistan on joining the SCO," he said.

Emphasising that the future of prosperity rests on the foundation of peace, the Prime Minister said "India will contribute to advancing peace and friendship in the region" and further its partnership with all partner countries.

"My current visit to all five Central Asian countries is a testimony to the importance that India attaches to the

region," the Prime Minister said, adding India also has strong and deepening strategic partnership with China and Russia.

He said together with other countries present, SCO could be a springboard for an integrated and connected Eurasia to become one of the most dynamic regions in the world.

"We have everything we need to succeed. We are nearly two-fifths of the humanity. We are blessed with abundant natural resources, skills, markets and technology," he underlined.

Modi said India has been actively participating in SCO activities that are open to Observers and it has deeply valued its association with the grouping.

He said India will be pleased to contribute to the development of infrastructure in the region and will support efforts to create an environment that eases barriers and facilitates trade and investments in the region. Modi said India's requirement for energy and resources and its vast and dynamic market will boost prosperity in the SCO region.

India will deepen its engagement in human resource development, information and communication technology, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, banking and capital markets, small and medium enterprises and microfinance, and food security and agriculture, he said.

"The SCO region is characterised by rich diversity of cultures. Promoting deeper understanding and exchanges, especially among our youth, will promote greater unity in the region and beyond," Modi said. He said the ecology of the region is "fragile"; and, our natural heritage is truly beautiful. We will work together with SCO for sustainable development and combating climate change.

"India's own dreams can be fulfilled through partnership with neighbours. SCO is an important part of our vision. I assure you of India's full cooperation to SCO," he said.

- PTI