

## The Modi-Xi informal summit is a first step in rebooting India-China ties

The end of the military standoff at Doklam last year did not immediately lead to better ties between India and China. Suspicions remained about Beijing's plans along disputed sections of the border and its ability to stymie New Delhi on a range of key issues, including membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the sanctioning of top terrorists based in Pakistan. However, a series of developments on the global stage have led to the two countries eyeing the possibility of greater cooperation and the announcement of the informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The meeting had been widely anticipated even before the formal announcement, an indication of the behind-the-scenes contacts that helped set it up.

The tariffs threatened by the US on Chinese imports have given rise to fears of a full-fledged trade war, something that China would be keen to avoid as it strains to keep its economic growth on a sound footing. India too is keen to avoid any bumps on the road to further economic growth, something that is crucial for Mr Modi ahead of next year's general election. The leaders of India and China have perhaps also realised their countries can take on a greater role on the world stage as the United States under President Donald Trump cedes its long-standing leadership. The two countries are already collaborating on issues such as climate change, while bilateral trade was worth \$84.4 billion last year. Clearly, the two countries realise they have a lot more to gain by aligning their positions more closely on global issues.

However, the growing contacts and the upcoming summit do not mean the differences between the two sides will magically disappear. More than anything, such contacts could help India and China to prepare the ground to address the more contentious issues and irritants, such as the dispute over 3,488 kilometres of the border, Beijing's position on terrorism, the Tibet issue and exploitation of river waters. This summit must not be seen as the end game, but the first step on a long road to completely reboot this crucial relationship.

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