

## India rebalancing ties with Pakistan

“The SCO has been working on connectivity among its member countries. Now that India and Pakistan are both members, it provides New Delhi with a fresh opportunity to reach out to Central Asia across the Pakistani corridor,” the source said.

An Indian official had earlier told *The Hindu* that as its full participation neared, the Indian side “seriously began to explore opportunities presented by New Delhi’s participation in the SCO.”

“The result is an evolving policy towards Eurasia, with a Central Asia core.”

### Opposes BRI

Asserting India’s continued opposition to China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, Mr. Modi said mega connectivity projects must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries.

However, New Delhi, he said, would support initiatives which ensure inclusivity. Referring to the “unfortunate” example of the effects of terrorism in Afghanistan, he hoped that the steps taken by its President Ashraf Ghani would be respected by all the players in the region.

Without referring to Pakistan, Prime Minister Modi said, during his address on Sunday to the SCO’s restricted plenary, that connectivity with the neighbouring countries and SCO was India’s top priority. “We have again reached a stage where physical and digital connectivity is changing the definition of geography. Therefore connectivity with our neighbourhood and the SCO region is our priority.”

The Prime Minister also spelt out his new mantra applicable to the SCO, which he termed as SECURE: ‘S’ for security of citizens, ‘E’ for economic development, ‘C’ for connectivity in the region, ‘U’ for unity, ‘R’ for respect of sovereignty and integrity, and ‘E’ for environmental protection.

### Distinct identity

In a search for a distinct identity for the grouping, eight SCO leaders on Sunday dug into the region’s eastern roots to find ideological answers to the divisive wave of anti-globalisation rising from the West.

Prime Minister Modi cited Buddha, Rumi, and Confucius among the region’s icons that have defined an inclusive identity for today’s SCO.

In an obvious reference to the America-first doctrine of the Trump administration, Chinese President Xi Jinping extolled Confucian values of harmony and mutual respect to counter the headwinds of protectionism and inward-looking geopolitics.

At the press conference on Sunday, Mr. Xi stressed that SCO members would uphold the authority and efficacy of WTO rules, strengthen an open, inclusive, transparent, non-discriminatory and rules-based multilateral trading regime, and oppose trade protectionism of any form.

“We point out that economic globalisation and regional integration are the compelling trend of our times,” Mr. Xi said.

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