

THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION HOLDS OUT BENEFIT FOR INDIA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: SCO and India

The first multilateral summit Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend in his second term will be the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) get-together in Kyrgystan. The SCO is among a set of strategic bodies that India has signed up to as a geopolitical hedge rather than because it is clear how membership will further long-term strategic interests. That the media interest is more about the possibility of Mr Modi's meeting Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and his face-to-face with China's Xi Jinping is not without reason.

Nonetheless, it is important that India continues to invest in SCO. The body has shown slow but steady development as a counterterrorism body and could potentially become the basis of a trading arrangement in the region. But India's struggle to engage Central Asia and the Eurasian heartland is severely hampered by geography. The lack of a common border with Central Asia, the cordon created by Pakistan and China, the complexity of setting up a land-sea connection via Iran and Afghanistan severely constrains India's economic footprint. Central Asia's trade with Indian is about a fiftieth of the region's trade with China. The possibility of a United States withdrawal from Afghanistan will only increase the difficulties India already faces.

India's original entry was promoted by Russia to counter the influence of China in the region. Since then, Moscow has aligned itself with Beijing. The primary supporters of an active Indian role are the Central Asian countries themselves, desirous of geopolitical options beyond the two giants to their north and east. China's overweening position is so evident that India had to agree not to directly criticise Pakistan in Bishkek. But many SCO members are pleased to join in poking Pakistan through more general statements about terrorism. Yet SCO is no one's puppet: even China's hopes for an SCO development bank and free trade agreement were shot down by others. These and similar pointers indicate there are enough chinks and gaps for India to exert leverage, so long as it is realistic about how far its writ will run.

First Published: Jun 12, 2019 20:00 IST

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com