



PM to carry Wuhan warmth to Qingdao; terror on SCO list

But India Faces Diplomatic Challenges



New Delhi: As PM Narendra Modi heads out to Qingdao to participate in the SCO summit as a full-fledged member for the first time, India's challenge is to make itself relevant in a grouping where India's values don't match with any of the other member states.

India has participated in all meetings and events since joining up. Modi will hold bilateral meetings with leaders of almost all the member states. He will have a separate meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines, as



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well as with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The warmth of the virtually back-to-back informal summits in Wuhan and Sochi will continue into these meetings. Modi will also meet all the leaders of the central Asian states, though it's unclear whether he will have a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart, Khaqan Abbasi.

India's ambassador to China, Gautam Bambawale, told Chinese media, "The focus of

SCO members is on security cooperation, countering terrorism, economic development as well as cultural exchange..."

Nevertheless, SCO is run along China's interests with Russia playing a supporting role, and the growing closeness of the two powers run on a trajectory where India would not like to go. That brings into question India's own strategy in the SCO. India has identified counter-terror-

ism, non-proliferation and disarmament and connectivity as being its focus issues in the SCO. In July, Indian forces will conduct military exercises with other SCO forces in Russia, probably the first time Indian and Pakistani forces will exercise together under a multilateral format.

India also recently participated in the quadrilateral meeting with US, Japan and Australia, a grouping that is anathema to both China and Russia. India would also have to object to open endorsement of OBOR by SCO countries.

However, there is no getting away from the fact that India considers China to be a strategic challenge, while its struggling to keep its relationship with Russia from declining further. SCO is not likely to be a cakewalk for India, in fact it could be fraught with diplomatic challenges.