

**SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION SUMMIT**

# Chinese President accepts India invite as Modi, Xi keep up Wuhan spirit, say armies should talk

Several visits on cards; China to share Brahmaputra data, allow India non-Basmati rice; India clears Bank of China branch

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QINGDAO, JUNE 9

IN THEIR 14th meeting in four years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Saturday carried forward the Wuhan spirit and decided to strengthen communication between the militaries of the two countries. This comes six weeks after they had decided in Wuhan, at an informal summit, to issue "strategic guidance" to the militaries to avoid another Doklam-type situation.

Xi also accepted an invite from Modi at their hour-long

meeting, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Qingdao, to visit India for an informal summit in 2019.

Later this year, the Chinese Defence Minister will visit India, while National Security Advisor Ajit Doval will travel to China for the Special Representative-level border talks. Counter-terrorism cooperation will get a boost with the visit of China's Public Security Minister announced for later this year.

Apart from this, the two sides formally agreed to undertake a joint project in Afghanistan, pertaining to "capacity building".



PM Modi with President Xi in Qingdao, China, Saturday. PTI

This had been hinted at after the Wuhan meeting.

Two bilateral agreements were signed at Qingdao by the Indian and Chinese sides. After a year of strained ties, when Beijing did not share hydrological data on the Brahmaputra river, a pact was reached to share the hydrological data in 2018. The Brahmaputra originates from Tibet and flows into Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. The pact will lead to regular data sharing between May 15 and October 15. India can use the data to prepare for floods in the Northeast.

On the trade front, New Delhi

agreed to the Chinese President's request to allow opening of a Bank of China branch in Mumbai, while China said it will let Indian pharmaceutical companies register for high-quality pharma products in the Chinese market and to allow India to export non-Basmati rice to China. Beijing had earlier denied access to non-Basmati rice saying it failed to meet its norms.

India is the world's largest rice exporter but sends only a

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# Chinese President accepts India invite

minuscule proportion to China, which imports nearly five million tonnes annually for domestic consumption.

Addressing the press, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said, "The Chinese side has accepted the Prime Minister's invitation to President Xi Jinping to have an informal summit in India in 2019. The dates will be worked out."

About Saturday's meeting, he said, "It was a substantive meeting and both leaders began by making a very positive assessment of the Wuhan summit. President Xi said that it was a very successful summit and the discussions with agenda in a relaxed setting had allowed both leaders to discuss a number of issues. He stated that it was a new starting point in our bilateral relationship."

Modi is also said that have acknowledged the Wuhan summit as a "milestone in relationship", one which would help develop mutual understanding and trust and take the relationship forward. In a tweet after the meeting, the PM said, "Met this

year's SCO host, President Xi Jinping this evening. We had detailed discussions on bilateral and global issues. Our talks will add further vigour to the India-China friendship."

The two leaders also spoke about ensuring greater people-to-people contact, with Xi talking about the popularity of Indian films like Dangal, Bahubaali and Hindi Medium in China. "In that context a new people-to-people mechanism will be set up, headed by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on the Indian side and by State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Their first meeting will be held this year," Gokhale said.

In his remarks, Xi recalled the meeting with Modi in Wuhan, how well it had been received, and said a positive atmosphere was taking shape to support China-India relations. China is willing to work with India to see the Wuhan meeting as a "new starting point" and to cooperate so as to push ties in a faster and steadier manner, Xi was quoted as saying by China's state-

run Xinhua news agency.

Modi and Xi are again expected to meet next month during the BRICS Summit in South Africa.

At Qingdao, the PM also met the SCO general secretary, Rashid Alimov, and participated in delegation-level talks with other members of the organisation, on the sidelines of the summit. He held bilateral meetings with the Presidents of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The SCO Summit is scheduled to take place on Sunday, and counter-terrorism and security in the region are expected to dominate the discussions. The SCO member countries are also expected to arrive at a decision on counter-terrorism military exercises, which will mean that Indian and Pakistan's militaries will participate in joint exercises.

This is India's first participation in the summit as a full-time member of the organisation. India, along with Pakistan, became full-time members at the summit in Kazakhstan in June 2017.