

# China proposes 3-way summit with India, Pak

**DELHI SAYS NO** India doesn't see third-party role in Pak ties

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**NEWDELHI:** China on Monday proposed a first-of-its-kind trilateral summit with India and Pakistan under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) but New Delhi swiftly dismissed the suggestion, saying there is no role for any third country in its ties with Islamabad.

In a wide-ranging speech at a seminar organised by the Chinese embassy and Indian bodies, Chinese envoy Luo Zhaohui also said that ties between India and China would not be able to take the strain of another Doklam-like standoff. Luo proposed that India and China sign a treaty of friendship and cooperation, negotiate a free trade agreement and work for "early harvest" in their long-standing boundary dispute.

The envoy's speech came against the backdrop of efforts by the two sides – including the informal summit between PM Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping at Wuhan in April and another meeting on the margins of the SCO Summit in Qingdao this month – to reset their relationship following last year's 73-day military standoff at Doklam, or Donglang, at the

### 'CAN'T STAND ANOTHER DOKLAM'

- 1 Chinese envoy proposes trilateral security cooperation between China, India and Pak under framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, or summit of the 3 countries on margins of SCO
- 2 Says India-China relations "cannot stand another Donglang incident", referring to 73-day military stand-off last year at Doklam near Sikkim border
- 3 Proposes India & China treaty of friendship and cooperation, for which Beijing provided a draft 10 years ago, and negotiate a free trade agreement
- 4 Says the 2 nations can enhance regional connectivity through mechanisms such as BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar)
- 5 Proposes enhanced cooperation at SCO, Brics, G20 for global economic integration; more "China India Plus" cooperation in countries such as Afghanistan



Luo Zhaohui

India-Bhutan-Tibet tri-junction.

"China-India ties have gone beyond bilateral scope... We should continue to push forward 'China India Plus' cooperation. Security cooperation is one of three pillars of the SCO. Some Indian friends suggested China, India and Pakistan may have some kind of trilateral cooperation under the framework of

SCO," he said. "At Qingdao, on the sidelines of the SCO Summit, the leaders of China, Russia and Mongolia held a trilateral summit. So why not China, Pakistan and India together have another trilateral summit on the sidelines of SCO?" Luo told an audience that included senior Indian officials and foreign envoys.

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## China

The MEA responded to the trilateral summit proposal through a statement issued hours later, saying that India had “not received any such suggestion from the Chinese government”. It added, “We consider the statement as the personal opinion of the ambassador. Matters related to India-Pakistan relations are purely bilateral in nature and have no scope for involvement of any third country.” During his speech, Luo highlighted the need to maintain peace and tranquillity along the border “to give hope to ourselves and to the outside world”.

“While talking about the CBMs along the border and to prevent Donglang incidents from happening again, we do not imagine what would happen to bilateral relations if the Donglang issue escalates (like) last year. We cannot stand another Donglang incident,” he said.

He added: “India is our immediate neighbour. It’s quite natu-

ral to have differences with neighbours. We need to narrow differences through expanding cooperation. However, it does not mean that differences would be ignored.” The envoy said the two sides should think about signing a treaty of friendship and cooperation, adding Beijing had provided a draft to the Indian side around 10 years ago.

Noting that China is India’s largest trade partner and bilateral trade touched \$84.4 billion last year, Luo said Beijing would like to negotiate a free trade arrangement with New Delhi to expand commercial ties.

More than 800 Chinese firms are investing and doing business in India, creating more than 100,000 jobs, and China will import more sugar, non-basmati rice and high quality medicines from India to reduce trade imbalance. The two sides have also set a bilateral trade target of \$100 billion by 2022, he added, and called for greater coordination on global trade issues against the backdrop of “anti-globalisation and rising

protectionism”.

His address made no mention of China’s Belt and Road Initiative — India has long opposed it on the grounds that it threatens its sovereignty and was the only country not to endorse it at the Qingdao SCO Summit — but he called for enhancing connectivity in the region through mechanisms such as BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar). Referring to a recent agreement by the two sides to work together in Afghanistan, Luo said a start could be made through a joint training programme for Afghan civil servants and diplomats. “Strategic communications, meetings, heart-to-heart dialogues are important. What’s equally important is to implement the consensus, transmit leaders’ personal friendship down to the people, and take more concrete actions,” he said.

A senior Indian official said on condition of anonymity that the Chinese side should provide formal proposals on matters such as a treaty of friendship instead of

raising such matters at public forums. Commodore (retired) C Uday Bhaskar, director of the Delhi-based Society for Policy Studies, advised caution.

“On the face of it, this is a significant articulation coming from the Chinese envoy who is relaying certain signals from Beijing. He has mooted proposals and made unambiguous statements

on sensitive bilateral subjects, such as Doklam,” he said. “It is important to study the proposals carefully for some possibilities that can be reviewed and discussed bilaterally with Beijing. At this stage, I wouldn’t rush into a trilateral with Pakistan. Let the political, diplomatic, military and trade dialogues remain bilateral for now.”