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India-China Ties at the SCO Crossroads

Recalibrating China-India Relations
in a Changing World

Navigating a Shared Future within the SCO



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塞罕坝

牢记使命 艰苦创业 绿色发展

半个多世纪，三代人耕耘。

沙地变林海，荒原成绿洲。

寒来暑往，

塞罕坝机械林场的森林覆盖率

已达80%。

栽种树木按二米株距排开，

可绕地球赤道一圈。

Saihanba is a cold alpine area in northern Hebei Province bordering the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. It was once a barren land but is now home to 75,000 hectares of forest, thanks to the efforts made by generations of forestry workers in the past 55 years. Every year the forest purifies 137 million cubic meters of water and absorbs 747,000 tons of carbon dioxide. The forest produces 12 billion yuan (around US\$1.8 billion) of ecological value annually, according to the Chinese Academy of Forestry.

A Shared Horizon: China-India Relations in the SCO Context

By Pankaj Ramesh Natu

For China and India, guardians of a rich legacy of history, culture, and heritage, a golden opportunity now beckons them toward a positive shift in peaceful cooperation.

In the intricate dance of international diplomacy, few moments are as telling as a handshake between two leaders whose nations share a fraught border and a complicated past. As Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 2025 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Tianjin, the world was watching. His visit, the first to China in seven years, signaled a potential thaw in the frosty relations between Asia's two

giants. However, beneath the diplomatic surface, the summit presented a crucial test for both countries and offered a revealing glimpse into the future of the SCO itself.

For India, participation in the SCO has always been a delicate balancing act. New Delhi's decision to join the bloc in 2017 was an effort to deepen its engagement with Central Asia while maintaining its strategic autonomy. The SCO offers a vital platform for counter-terrorism cooperation

through the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, as well as for promoting regional connectivity and trade. Yet, it is viewed by many in the West as a counterweight to the U.S. and NATO influence.

The recent improvement in India-China relations, however tentative, set the backdrop for Modi's visit to China. In the months leading up to the summit, both countries took steps to de-escalate tensions along the Line of Actual Control. While a full resolution

of all friction points has yet to be achieved, tranquility has returned to the border. This paved the way for renewed dialogue, including the resumption of direct flights and border trade, which had been suspended since the 2020 Galwan Valley clash. Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar recently emphasized that India-China relations should

between India and China is not only essential for regional peace and prosperity but also carries significant global implications. As the world's two most populous nations, with a combined GDP exceeding US\$22 trillion, China and India share a common interest in fostering a multi-polar world order and upholding a rules-based multilateral trading

technology — were all part of a concerted effort to bolster the organization's gravitas.

For India, the SCO can serve its own strategic and economic interests. New Delhi's focus on its "SECURE" vision for the organization — emphasizing Security, Economic cooperation, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Environmental protection — has provided a sound framework. This approach allowed India to champion its core principles while engaging with a diverse group of nations. Moreover, the SCO has offered a useful, albeit imperfect, platform for dialogue with both China and Pakistan.

The SCO Tianjin Summit presented both opportunities and challenges for India. Prime Minister Modi's visit signaled a renewed commitment to diplomatic engagement, acknowledging that a complete breakdown in India-China relations would benefit neither country. However, the path ahead for India requires a clear-eyed and pragmatic approach: one that leverages the SCO platform for mutual benefit while safeguarding India's core interests. In this context, the handshake is a beginning, not a destination, and its true significance will be determined by the concrete actions that follow. ⁶⁶

A stable and constructive relationship between India and China is not only essential for regional peace and prosperity but also carries significant global implications. Their cooperation on worldwide challenges, from climate change to global governance, remains indispensable.

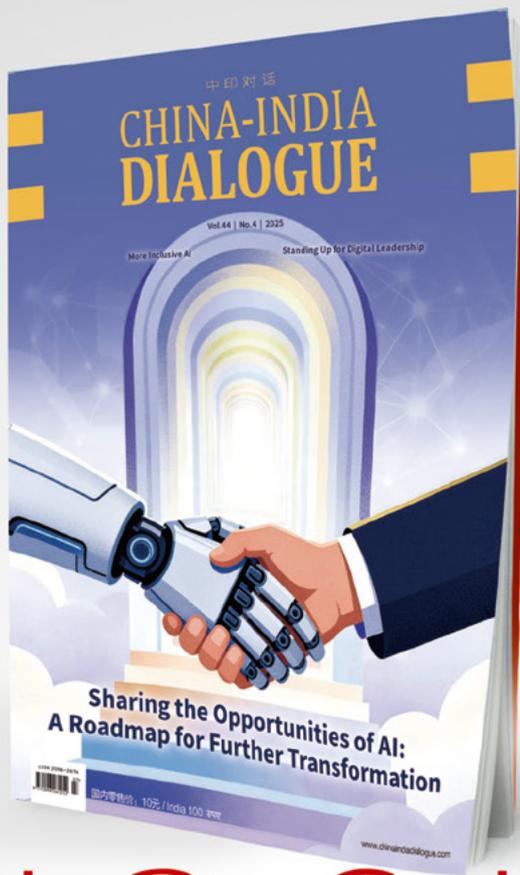
not be viewed through the prism of its ties with the U.S. This comment reflected a pragmatic approach to foreign policy.

Prime Minister Modi's bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the summit was a pivotal moment. It presented an opportunity to build on the momentum from recent talks and reaffirm the "three mutuals" — mutual respect, mutual sensitivity, and mutual interests — for which India has consistently emphasized. A stable and constructive relationship

system. Their cooperation on worldwide challenges, from climate change to global governance, remains indispensable.

From China's perspective, the SCO Tianjin Summit served as a key moment to showcase its growing global influence. By hosting the largest summit in the organization's history, Beijing aimed to consolidate the SCO into a more cohesive, stable, and prosperous bloc. The inclusion of new members and an ambitious agenda — spanning security, economics, culture and

—
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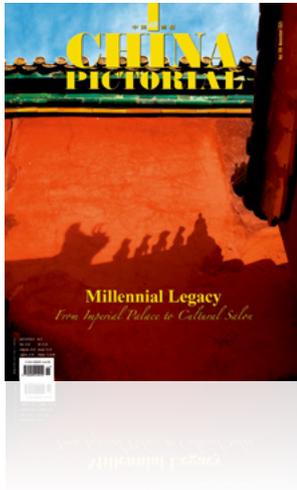
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