

India-Pak SCO entry may have negative effect on grouping: Chinese media

17/06/2016 18:16 by admin

Beijing: With Shanghai Cooperation Organisation set to admit India and Pakistan amid growing rancour over their NSG membership bid, a Chinese state-run daily today expressed concern that the hostility between them may have a "negative effect" on the security grouping.

"Observers are concerned about SCO expansion, especially the admission of India and Pakistan," an article in the state-run Global Times said ahead of the six-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in the Uzbek capital Tashkent on June 23-24.

"The two nations, which are hostile over the issues of Kashmir and anti-terrorism, have long been locked into a state of military confrontation, and share conflicting views over the Afghanistan issue and other regional affairs," the article said, for the first time airing concern as the long drawn out process of India-Pakistan SCO admission is nearing completion.

The SCO summit is taking place just around the same time as the 48-member NSG plenary which is set to meet in Seoul to discuss the entry of India and Pakistan.

China has been vocal in opposing India's Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership on the grounds that it has not signed nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and wants consensus for admission of new members.

The article said that the Indo-Pak differences are not going to die down soon.

"The hostility between the two states is unlikely to be dispelled in the short time. Together with their complicated relations with China and Russia, analysts believe their admission may have negative effects on the SCO, bringing more internal conflicts and lowering the level of mutual political trust and the efficiency of multilateral cooperation," it said.

But at the same time there is also optimism that the entry of India and Pakistan into the grouping will have sobering effect on the two. "Besides adding 1.5 billion people under the SCO umbrella, the India-Pakistan admission may also help improve strained ties between India and Pakistan by opening another communication channel," Xia Yishan, a research fellow of Central Asian studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said.

"Under the SCO framework, heads of states and their security and law enforcement departments will regularly meet. This will to some extent help the two countries engage in conciliatory dialogue," Fu Xiaoqiang, an expert on South Asian studies at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, told the daily.

Chinese Foreign Affairs Assistant Minister Li Huilai, during a special media briefing earlier this week on President Xi Jinping's three-nation tour had said the inclusion of India and Pakistan into SCO is a sign that the organisation has matured.

Regarded as a Central Asian security group dominated by China, the SCO which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai comprises of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as full members. Afghanistan, Belarus, India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan have observer status.

(Reopens FGN 11)

While Russia backed India's regular membership to add clout to the fledgling security group focussing mainly on containing terrorism, China supported Pakistan's entry also to expand SCO's influence to South Asia.

Their admission was finalised at Ufa summit in Russia last year but the procedures including the adoption of all SCO documents since 2001 by both India and Pakistan are under way and both may have to wait until the 2017 summit for formal seat among its members.

SCO officials say there is no firm timeline set yet about the entry of the two countries.

Besides highlighting concerns, the Global Times article said India and Pakistan have both attached great importance to joining the SCO.

"They pledged to sign all the SCO legal documents and perform in accordance with the law and are willing to contribute to the SCO on both economic and security matters," the article said.

"Noticeably, expansion could also bring many benefits to the SCO. The scope of the group will be expanded from China, Russia and Central Asian countries to South Asia, covering over 60 per cent of Eurasia. In addition, more opportunities will be brought to the SCO," it said.

"As India and Pakistan are both major powers in South Asia, their accession to the SCO will make the group a more important player and more appealing in regional and global affairs. With more geopolitical and geo-economic influence, the SCO will play a vital role in the process of multi-polarisation. In the Tashkent summit, the SCO will demonstrate its special global influence again to the world," it said.

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