

## **Pakistan does not rule out Sharif-Modi meeting at SCO summit**

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**Islamabad:** Pakistan today did not rule out a possible meeting between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the annual SCO summit in Russia next week, saying such meetings in a multilateral setting are a "normal feature".

"No side has contacted the other for a meeting so far. However, as you would be aware, in any multilateral setting, meetings among Heads of State and Government is a normal feature," Pakistan Foreign Office Spokesperson Qazi Khalilullah said when asked about the possibility of a Sharif-Modi meeting in Russia.

Both Sharif and Modi are expected to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in the Russian city of Ufa next week.

The SCO summit will be held from July 9-10 and both India and Pakistan are likely to be granted full membership of the China-backed grouping.

India had formally applied for membership of SCO in its summit meeting in Dushanbe last year, saying it was ready to step up engagement with the grouping.

SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the Presidents of Russia, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. India, Iran and Pakistan were admitted as observers at the 2005 Astana Summit.

Pakistan and India were involved in a war of words recently with leaders from both sides exchanging sharp comments after Prime Minister Modi's critical remarks about Pakistan during his Dhaka visit last month and in the wake of India's military action in Myanmar.

Prime Minister Modi had called up Sharif last month to greet him on the holy month of Ramzan. Meanwhile, Khalilullah, during his weekly briefing, also said that Pakistan's Permanent Representative in New York Dr Maleeha Lodhi was in Islamabad to take part in the preparation of UN General Assembly (UNGA) annual meeting which coincides with the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations. "The Prime Minister is likely to attend the September Session," he said.

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