



EVENT REPORT

SCO SUMMIT 2025

Resetting India–China Ties

21 August 2025

India International Centre, New Delhi



ABOUT CRF

Chintan Research Foundation is an independent think tank dedicated to shaping policy through rigorous research and thought leadership. With a strong focus on fostering collaboration between policymakers and industry, CRF integrates practical insights into its research and advocacy efforts. It conducts comprehensive research to support informed decision-making and engages with stakeholders through discussions, events, and publications. CRF's research is focused on three core domains – Climate Change & Energy Transition, Economy & Trade, and Geopolitics & Strategic Studies. For more details, refer to the website: www.crfindia.org

ABOUT CGII

Centre for Global India Insights (CGII) is a think tank set up by TGII, which focuses on geopolitics, international relations and public policy. CGII seeks to advance a multi-layered policy- oriented conversation among diplomats, experts, academics, and business/industry on India's expanding global engagements and the country's emergence as a global player.

SCO SUMMIT 2025

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21st August 2025 | India International Centre, New Delhi



Chintan
Research
Foundation



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FOREWORD

Connectivity and dialogue have emerged as key currencies of diplomacy in the 21st century, particularly in Asia, where the destinies of nations are increasingly interlinked. Against this backdrop, the panel discussion on “Resetting India-China Ties: Challenges and Opportunities”, jointly organized by Chintan Research Foundation (CRF) and the Centre for Global India Insights (CGII), on August 21, 2025, at the India International Centre, New Delhi, assumed great significance. The timing of the event—just days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to China for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit—was especially relevant, as India and China appear poised at an important juncture in their complex relationship.

The discussion aimed to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on how to recalibrate India-China relations in a rapidly changing regional and global environment. With relations showing tentative signs of stabilisation after years of strain, the event provided an opportunity to reflect on the pathways toward normalisation and cooperation. The choice of speakers—China’s Ambassador to India, distinguished diplomats, and strategic thinkers—was deliberate to ensure that all major dimensions of the relationship, from border management and trade to multilateral engagement and people-to-people ties, were comprehensively covered.

The deliberations underscored that while challenges remain—particularly concerning border issues, strategic mistrust, and trade imbalances—there is also a growing recognition in both countries of the enormous potential that lies in collaboration. The recent steps towards confidence-building, including the resumption of e-visas, the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, and high-level ministerial visits, reflect a mutual willingness to move forward. The discussions reaffirmed that sustainable peace and stability along the border are foundational to unlocking the broader potential of economic and cultural cooperation.

Equally, the event emphasized that India-China relations extend far beyond bilateral concerns. As two major Asian powers and key members of the SCO, their cooperation has direct implications for regional and global governance. Participants agreed that redefining the relationship from that of competition to constructive coexistence is essential for realizing the vision of an “Asian Century.” The enthusiastic participation and the depth of discussions reaffirmed the importance of sustained academic and policy dialogues in shaping pragmatic approaches to complex international relationships.

We hope that the insights and recommendations from speakers of this event will contribute meaningfully to India’s evolving engagement with China and to the broader pursuit of peace, prosperity, and stability in Asia.

Warm regards,

Mr. Shishir Priyadarshi

President, Chintan Research Foundation

Panel Discussion

SCO Summit 2025: Resetting India–China Ties



In the run-up to the 25th SCO Heads of State Council meeting in Tianjin from August 31 to September 1, 2025, Chintan Research Foundation, in collaboration with the Centre for Global India Insights (CGII), convened a panel discussion on “SCO Summit 2025: Resetting India–China Ties.” The event brought together diplomats, scholars, and senior policymakers to reflect on India-China relations within the SCO framework and to consider possibilities for a reset in Indo-China relations. Held just days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s first visit to China in seven years, the dialogue sought to provide timely perspectives on the evolving trajectory of bilateral relations and their implications for the broader SCO agenda. Against the backdrop of renewed tensions and cautious recalibration in New Delhi’s foreign policy, the discussion offered a platform to debate opportunities, risks, and pathways for stabilising one of Asia’s most consequential relationships.

Welcome Remarks



MR SHISHIR PRIYADARSHI
President, Chintan Research
Foundation

In his welcome address, Mr Priyadarshi underlined the timeliness of the discussion, noting that the SCO has emerged as a platform of considerable importance in Eurasia. He framed the session as a space for open and constructive dialogue, stressing the role of Track II platforms in shaping informed policy choices. He also set the stage for the discussion by pointing to the dual imperatives facing India, that is, safeguarding its sovereignty and security while exploring opportunities for cooperation with China in multilateral frameworks such as the SCO.

Welcome Remarks



AMBASSADOR XU FEIHONG

Ambassador of
China to India

In his keynote address, Ambassador Xu Feihong provided a comprehensive overview of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), highlighting its achievements in security, counterterrorism, and regional development, and positioning it as a pillar of multipolarity and negotiated stability. He noted that the SCO, now marking over two decades since its inception, was founded on the recognition that multipolarity is essential for global stability. Initially focused on regional security and cooperation, the organisation has successfully addressed challenges such as terrorism while fostering trust and collaboration among member states. By 2017, the SCO had demonstrated its effectiveness as a stabilising force in Eurasia, with India joining the framework based on its positive experiences working with China and Russia, and reflecting India's history of pragmatic engagement. Ambassador Xu emphasised that India's membership added weight and balance to the organisation, enabling it to support stable and peaceful development across the region.

Turning to bilateral ties, Ambassador Xu underscored India and China's shared civilisational heritage and transformative economic rise. He highlighted that both nations have lifted millions out of poverty in recent decades and could play a leading role in stabilising the evolving world order. He urged both sides to focus on complementarities, including trade, green development, and digital innovation, while managing disputes with "dialogue and patience." Referring to the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties, he framed India-China cooperation not as an anti-Western project but as a constructive partnership contributing to global peace and development.

Ambassador Xu further stressed that the SCO represents more than a geopolitical forum; it embodies a vision for cooperative, negotiated solutions in a complex international system. He highlighted the organisation's civilisational dimension, arguing that collaboration among member states- including Russia, Iran, and Central Asian partners-can foster a more equitable, multipolar world. He noted that the SCO complements rather than challenges other global powers, aiming to create shared prosperity and stability.

Concluding his address, Ambassador Xu reaffirmed China's commitment to working with India and other member states within the SCO framework to promote dialogue, cooperation, and long-term regional and global stability, positioning the organisation as a vehicle for shared progress and constructive engagement.



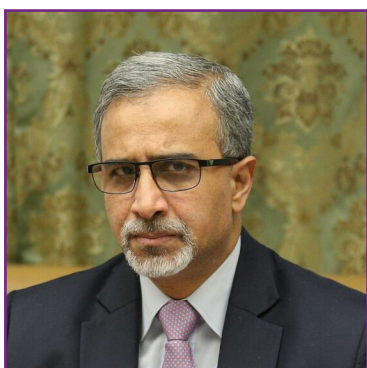
**GENERAL (RETD.) M.M.
NARAVANE**

Former Chief of Army Staff

General Naravane placed today's challenges in a long historical arc, reminding the audience that India and China once accounted for nearly half of global trade together. While 1962 and Galwan remain difficult memories, he stressed these should not eclipse centuries of civilisational contact.

He drew attention to the risks posed by heavy deployments along the LAC since 2020, urging renewed efforts to restore peace and tranquillity. Quoting Prime Minister Modi, he argued that border tensions must not be allowed to overshadow the broader relationship. He welcomed recent references to the 2005 "guiding principles" agreement (referring to the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question) during Doval-Wang talks in mid-August, suggesting this may mark a revival of stalled talks.

Gen Naravane also responded candidly to a question on Myanmar, emphasising India's need to engage all neighbours regardless of their domestic political system. He described Myanmar as vital for India's "Act East" policy, noting that sustained engagement benefits both countries' peoples.



**AMBASSADOR (RETD.) D.B.
VENKATESH VARMA**

Former Ambassador to Russia

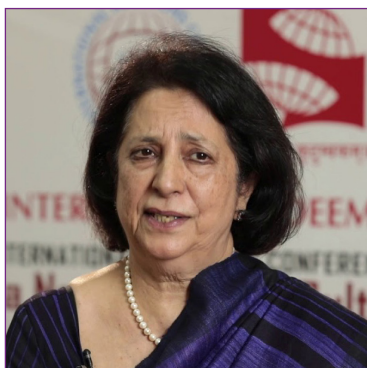
Ambassador Venkatesh Varma described the timing of the panel as "propitious," situating India's SCO engagement within its broader Eurasian policy. He traced India-China relations since 1976, highlighting landmark moments such as Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit and the 2005 Agreement on political parameters and principles, which established a template for managing differences while expanding cooperation. This template, he argued, had successfully prevented disputes from escalating for decades but must now be reimagined in light of post-2008 asymmetries and the 2020 border clashes.

Amb. Varma underscored that India-China relations are shaped by a long history, shared geography, and contemporary interdependencies. He emphasised that previous periods of disruption were always followed by pragmatic restoration, thanks to wise leadership on both sides. He highlighted the importance of strategic patience, realism, and constructive dialogue in managing differences, noting that recent engagements- including the October 2024 Indian operations- opened channels for renewed conversation and cooperation.

He recommended:

- Updating border management frameworks.
- Enhancing transparency in third-country partnerships.
- Deepening trade and investment ties as stabilisers.
- Focusing on cooperation in multilateral platforms like the SCO and the BRICS.

Concluding his speech, Amb. Varma highlighted that India and China must accommodate each other's regional interests, build trust through dialogue, and leverage shared history and civilisational ties. By managing differences pragmatically and expanding complementarities, he argued, the two countries can stabilise bilateral relations and contribute constructively to regional peace, development, and global order.



**AMBASSADOR (RETD.)
NEELAM D. SABHARWAL**
Former Ambassador of India to
the Netherlands

Ambassador Sabharwal reflected on the strategic significance of India-China ties in ensuring peace and stability not only in Asia but also globally. She underscored that both countries, as rising powers with strong leadership, growing economies, and demographic weight, had sufficient space for cooperation and peaceful competition.

She emphasised that constructive India-China relations could act as anchors of stability in a volatile international order, contributing to the progress of humanity as a whole. Drawing on her academic and professional experience, she pointed to the need for greater intellectual exchanges and sustained academic correspondence, which she noted has often lagged despite recognition of its importance.

Sabharwal concluded that peace and stability in the India-China bilateral relationship will shape the wider security and developmental trajectory of Asia and beyond.



MR MANISH CHAND
CEO, Centre for Global India
Insights (CGII)

Mr Chand emphasised the importance of restoring people-to-people and academic exchanges between India and China, which had stagnated in recent years. He noted that visas for Indian scholars remain a challenge, while Chinese scholars have begun visiting India post-pandemic. He called for systematic efforts to normalise scholar exchanges, revive think tank dialogues, and rebuild trust through intellectual engagement.

On counterterrorism, Mr Chand affirmed that terrorism is a common enemy and that India and China should find common ground in fighting it. He pointed to SCO mechanisms as a useful platform for joint efforts against terror networks, even while acknowledging

sensitivities around Pakistan. He concluded that track-two and academic diplomacy must complement official negotiations, creating constituencies for stability and cooperation in both societies.

Closing Remarks & Vote of Thanks

In his closing remarks, Mr Priyadarshi underlined the need for a structured yet pragmatic approach to improving India-China relations. He proposed what he termed the “ABCD framework” for the future of bilateral engagement:

- **A - Acceptability:** acknowledging differences while recognising the value of coexistence and cooperation.
- **B - Building Blocks:** advancing incremental steps in areas of convergence to strengthen the foundation of ties.
- **C - Confidence Building Measures:** fostering trust through consistent and transparent interactions.
- **D - Dialogue:** sustaining open and continuous channels of communication to prevent misunderstandings and manage disputes.

He emphasised that adopting this framework could help both sides move beyond the cycle of mistrust and chart a steadier course toward stability. By focusing on gradual progress and sustained dialogue, Mr Priyadarshi noted that India and China can better align their bilateral relationship with the broader objectives of peace and cooperation within the SCO and the wider Asian region.

Mr Priyadarshi thanked the speakers and participants for their candid contributions. He also summarised key themes from the event, which are- the SCO as a practical framework for cooperation; the centrality of border stability; and the role of trade and exchanges in stabilising ties.

Question and Answers

During the Q&A, participants asked about China’s stance on Pakistan-sponsored terrorism and educational collaboration. Ambassador Xu responded that terrorism in all forms must be condemned and tackled, and stressed China’s willingness to find balanced approaches within the SCO. While answering a question on educational collaboration, he agreed on the importance of restoring collaboration and expressed support for deeper exchanges in this field, as well as knowing our roots of shared civilisational ties.

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inar Hall 1





*The Shanghai
Cooperation
Organisation stands
as a testament to the
power of dialogue,
cooperation, and
multipolarity in shaping
a stable and equitable
world order.*

CONCEPT NOTE

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi expected to visit China to participate in the SCO summit on August 31-September 1, 2025, the multi-layered relationship between India and China has become the subject of much speculation and discussion. The process of normalisation of relations that started with an agreement on border patrolling in October 2024, followed by a meeting between the leaders of India and China in Kazan, Russia, has acquired a new momentum. Recent developments such as the resumption of e-visas to Chinese citizens and the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, after a hiatus of five years, signal mutual desire to improve bilateral relations. The visits by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to China in the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and their wide-ranging talks with Chinese leaders have set the stage for forging cooperative and harmonious relations between India and China.

These constructive steps, which seek to boost people-to-people ties, underscore mutual determination to move beyond prolonged stress following the border clashes in Ladakh in the summer of 2020 and forge a multi-dimensional win-win relationship. Rebuilding the relationship will entail mutual respect and mutual sensitivity to each other's core concerns. Given huge stakes in building a cooperative relationship, there is a compelling need to rethink the narrative of India-China relationship from that of adversaries to partners in development and co-creators of an Asian Century. Looking ahead, there will be opportunities as well as challenges as the two Asian giants seek to forge a new model of peaceful co-existence and mutual empowerment that is in tune with their national interests and realities of the 21st century.

Opportunities & Challenges

As the world's second largest and fifth largest economies accounting for combined GDP of \$18 trillion, a dynamic and balanced economic relationship will bring benefits and new opportunities to both India and China. The business community in both countries are pitching for resumption of economic ties. While China wants removal of restrictions on investment which were imposed after the Galwan clashes, India has pressed China for removal of trade restrictions and enhanced market access for Indian products in China. Bilateral trade has grown to around \$125 billion, but trade deficit has also increased to around \$100 billion. This kind of huge trade deficit is untenable and needs to be addressed with urgency. Chinese investment in India remains sub-optimal. According to DPIIT, China's cumulative foreign direct investment into India till March 2025 (since April 2000) was \$2.5 billion. Given the untapped potential, Chinese investment in India needs to be scaled up significantly that will help create new jobs as well as help in addressing trade deficit.

On the other side, there are challenges arising from the un-demarcated boundary which lies at the heart of off-and-on tensions between India and China. Border tensions, which have increased sharply in the last few years, erode trust and stall the relationship. There are also complications arising from third-party relationships. While China is suspicious of India's deepening strategic partnership with the US, New Delhi has long-standing issues with Beijing's overt and covert support to Pakistan. Reports about China supplying air-to-air missiles to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor has fuelled negative perception of China in India.

The Big Picture

Keeping challenges and opportunities on mind, there is a pressing need to develop a consensus on resetting relations between India and China as it concerns the lives of over 3 billion people living in these large Asian countries. The terms of engagement need to be reappraised and thought afresh. The ongoing normalisation of relations is for real. The Panel Discussion will help generate recommendations from diplomats, economists and strategic experts on steps and initiatives required to forge a future-focused stable and cooperative partnership that is not only good for the two countries but for the region and the world.

Event Objectives

The panel discussion will examine the following issues with the overarching goal of building harmonious and constructive relations between India and China.

Maintaining Border Peace and Security

- Ways to boost border peace pending the final resolution of the boundary question.
- Ways to ensure Galwan-like clashes and Doklam-like incidents are not repeated.

Enhancing Economic Relationship

- To examine the current state of economic relationship and suggest ways for reducing trade deficit.
- Steps to boost two-way investment. Identifying sectors for investment such as infrastructure, EVs and renewables.

Regional and Global Issues

- Role of regional organisations such as SCO in promoting India-China cooperation.
- Enhancing cooperation in multilateral and plurilateral groupings such as G20 & BRICS.

Rebuilding Trust

- Ways to enhance mutual trust and communication.
- How to boost people-to-people and cultural contacts.

EVENT AGENDA

1800-1805h	Welcome Remarks Shishir Priyadarshi, President, Chintan Research Foundation
1805-1820h	Keynote Address H.E. Xu Feihong, China's Ambassador to India
1820-1905h	Panel Discussion Moderator/Chair: Mr. Shishir Priyadarshi, President, Chintan Research Foundation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General (Retd.) M.M. Naravane, Former Chief the Inidan of Army Staff • Amb. Venkatesh Varma, Member of National Security Advisory Board & India's former Ambassador to Russia • Amb. (Retd.) Neelam D. Sabharwal, India's former Ambassador to the Netherlands and foreign policy analyst • Mr Manish Chand, CEO of Centre for Global India Insights (CGII)
1905-1925h	Q & A session
1925-1930h	Vote of Thanks

MEDIA COVERAGE





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Silence will only embolden the bully: Chinese Ambassador on U.S. tariffs

Possibly setting the tone for the upcoming SCO Summit in Tianjin, Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong said China stands with India and blamed the U.S., which he called a “bully”, for “using tariffs as a bargaining chip to demand exorbitant prices”

Published – August 21, 2025 10:50 pm IST – NEW DELHI

SUHASINI HAIDAR




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NEWS

China to stand firm with India, slams US tariffs as ‘bullying’

Speaking at a conference on India-China relations, Xu said Beijing will firmly back New Delhi in safeguarding multilateral trade under the WTO

By PTI
Updated - August 22, 2025 at 09:31 AM. | New Delhi











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Diplomacy

Pakistan too a ‘victim’ of terrorism, says Chinese envoy to India Xu Feihong

Speaking at event organised by think tank, China’s envoy in India also defended Belt and Road Initiative and said all countries ‘are welcome’ to participate in the \$1tn infra project.

KESHAV PADMANABHAN 21 August, 2025 10:35 pm IST

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'Silence Only Emboldens The Bully': Chinese Envoy Says Beijing Opposes Trump Tariffs On India

China's envoy to India criticized US tariffs on India, emphasising China's opposition and support for multilateral trade. He stressed China and India are partners, not rivals, advocating for cooperation and trust.

By : **ABP Live News** | Updated at : 21 Aug 2025 10:13 PM (IST)

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"Silence Only Emboldens The Bully": Chinese Envoy To India On Trump Tariffs

The Chinese Ambassador to India said that the international order is going through a big change, which is why, China and India as major developing countries, should be united and cooperate with each other.

Reported by: [Himanshu Shekhar Mishra](#) Edited by: [Anushree Jonko](#) [World News](#)
Aug 21, 2025 22:04 pm IST

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China stands by India, firmly opposes 50% US tariff & threat to hike it: Envoy

TNN / Updated: Aug 22, 2025, 08:50 IST

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