

## Pakistan invites Indian PM Narendra Modi for SCO Summit in Islamabad after eight years

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Pakistan has sent a formal invitation to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the meeting of heads of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) governments scheduled in the middle of October in Islamabad, official sources confirmed on Sunday. They said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif invited Modi and other SCO leaders for the gathering of regional leaders on October 15 and 16 in Islamabad. This is the first time Pakistan invited the Indian leader in 8 years. The last time Modi was invited to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit was in 2016. The summit never took place after India boycotted it and since then the regional organisation has been all but dysfunctional. But skipping the SCO meeting in Islamabad will not be easy for Modi given the presence of other powerful countries. Diplomatic sources are sceptical that Modi would travel to Islamabad given the current state of the relationship between the two

neighbours. But in the past, such regional groupings provided an opportunity for the two countries to reset their ties. That seems unlikely now keeping in view the divergences in the positions of Pakistan and India for initiating the normalization process. SCO is a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance, founded in 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. It has since expanded to include India, Pakistan, and Iran as full members, with Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia as observers, and other countries as dialogue partners. The SCO is often seen as a counterbalance to Western alliances like NATO and plays a significant role in fostering regional cooperation. Pakistan attended all the meetings of SCO hosted by India last year either in person or virtually. Bilawal Bhutto visited Goa for the meeting of SCO Foreign Ministers in May 2023. India invited Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to the SCO summit held in New Delhi. Before Pakistan could decide whether to attend the summit in New Delhi, India suddenly decided to host the meeting virtually instead of in person. It is believed that India decided at the last moment because of its tensions with China and Pakistan. The SCO is pivotal in addressing regional security concerns, including terrorism, extremism, and separatism. It conducts joint military exercises and intelligence sharing among member states. The SCO promotes economic cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It seeks to enhance trade, energy partnerships, and infrastructure development across Eurasia. It also provides a platform for

member states to align on major international issues, often advocating for a multipolar world order and challenging Western dominance in global affairs. The 23rd SCO Summit was held on July 4, 2023, hosted by India via video conference.