

Need to combat terrorism in Asia is stressed at SCO meeting

Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Murli Deora, who led the Indian delegation to the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), reiterated New Delhi's commitment to work closely with the SCO to combat terrorism in the region.

India has an observer status in the SCO, which comprises China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Other nations with observe status are Mongolia, Pakistan and Iran.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai was invited as special guest this year — the fifth anniversary of the SCO, which was launched on June 15, 2001.

Minister Deora, in his address at the June 15 meeting in Shanghai, said that India shares the main SCO objectives, which are to “combat all forms of intolerance, extremism and fundamentalism in our region”.

“India, as a victim of terrorism, appreciates SCO's firm stand against terrorism and commits itself to working closely with all SCO countries in countering these threats and challenges to peace and stability,” the Minister said.

While acknowledging that the SCO nations had made dramatic economic progress in recent years, Minister Deora dwelt on the need to “recognise that there are disparities of growth and development in our region”.

“We believe that an important challenge before the SCO countries is to see how economic growth and development can be more widely spread in the region to bring greater prosperity for the people and usher in peace and stability in the region,” he said.

He said India, which was admitted to the SCO as an observer in July 2005, is keen on “working together for greater intra-SCO trade, development of banking and financial services, including robust capital markets”.

“We feel that transportation networks and transit facilities are a vital



Leaders of SCO member-countries and observer nations at the SCO Summit in Shanghai on June 15. India's Murli Deora, Minister for Petroleum and natural Gas, is third from left, and Afghan President Hamid Karzai is third from right.

area for SCO's consideration as some SCO countries are land-locked. We have to work together to see that products from these countries reach world markets at a cost-efficient basis,” he said. “Energy security is another area where cooperation is needed, as SCO member- and observer-countries are the major producers and consumers of energy in the world,” the Minister noted.

He also called for more people-to-people contacts and a greater cultural dialogue and interaction among SCO member-countries. ■

SCO MEMBERS

China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Observers:

India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan.

President Karzai, a special invitee, seeks SCO's cooperation to fight terror



President Hamid Karzai, who was a special guest at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting on July 15, has said his country wants the forum to focus on the fight against terrorism and the narcotics trade in the region.

In his address to the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO, President Karzai said: “Afghanistan wants to strengthen cooperation with the SCO members, particularly in the fight against terrorism and extremism and is ready to be part of those efforts.”

Declaring that the fight against terrorism in the region was a “collective responsibility”, Karzai also reiterated his government's resolve to combat the production and smuggling of narcotics from Afghanistan. He

sought the international community's support in the battle against the drugs trade.

The President also referred to Afghanistan's recent entry into the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and said he hoped the country could act as a bridge between SAARC and the SCO member-nations.

President Karzai also expressed his country's gratitude to countries in the region as well as SCO member-nations for aiding Afghanistan's reconstruction process.

“I am confident that continuation of this friendship will prove beneficial in creating a safe world and contribute to long-term peace and prosperity of our people,” he said.

India has committed over \$600 million to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. ■