In boost to ties, Xi accepts Modi invite for ‘summit’ in India

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PM Narendra Modi kicked off his bilateral engagements at the SCO summit in Qingdao with a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in which both leaders essentially underscored the significance of their Wuhan informal summit in Sino-Indian bilateral relationship.

While Xi described Wuhan as a new starting point, Modi called the summit a milestone in the relationship. Stating that the spirit of Wuhan “underpinned” the Qingdao meeting, foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale called Xi’s acceptance of Modi’s invite for another informal summit in 2019 in India as a significant takeaway from the meeting on Saturday.

Another development was that Modi and Xi agreed to identify a project in “capacity building” in Afghanistan on which the two countries can work together.

The idea the two countries can work together in Afghanistan on economic projects had originated in the Wuhan summit. Significantly for India, China also agreed to renew an agreement which calls for sharing of hydrological data of the Brahmaputra river in flood season (May 15 to October 15) with India.

Modi and Xi, who have met on more than a dozen occasions in the past four years, have been for some time trying to rise above the historical and policy trappings that has held India-China relations in an unsettled state for decades.

India, China ink pacts on Brahmaputra data sharing

The announcement about Xi’s visit is seen as a signal to the people of India and China that the two leaders have finally agreed on a plan to resolve past disputes to the extent possible.

A plan is afoot to create a mechanism at the level of the two leaders to provide strategic guidance to the two militaries to keep peace on the border and take forward connectivity projects in third countries, starting in Afghanistan. The signal came on the sidelines of the SCO summit, which is being attended by Pakistan’s President Mamnoon Hussain. The decision to take forward the system of informal summits is a message to Pakistan because Islamabad has been counting on India’s support in its disputes with India.
India and “China also signed two bilateral agreements on continuing the sharing of hydrological data on the Brahmaputra river and on expanding rice exports to China.

During his meeting with Xi, Modi highlighted the negative balance of trade arrangement for India and expressed the hope that China would buy a range of products like rice, sugar and pharmaceuticals from India. The decision on rice exports could be a starting point for sale of Indian farm produce and processed products like sugar to China in order to reduce the trade imbalance.

Under an MoU between China’s Ministry of Water Resources and India’s Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, China has agreed to share flood season data with India from May 15 to October 15 every year. China has now pledged to share data with India during the flood season, and to also provide data if the water levels exceed mutually agreed level during the non-flood season.

China’s customs administration and India’s department of agriculture on rice exports will enable India to now export non-basmati rice varieties, expanding an earlier 2006 protocol on rice exports. China’s ambassador to India Luo Zhaohui said on Twitter that Saturday’s meeting will discuss the blueprint of relations going forward. India and China also decided to intensify bilateral engagements in keeping with what was decided in Wuhan. Before the end of this year, Chinese foreign defence and security ministers will visit India for bilateral meetings.