

# The SCO Military Alliance Appraises Membership of Iran, Pakistan

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Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is assessing Iran and Pakistan's applications for membership and reviewing its criteria for membership, the new SCO Secretary-General Muratbek Sansyrbayevich Imanaliev told a press conference yesterday in Beijing.

In addition, procedures for Sri Lanka and Belarus to enter a dialogue partnership with the SCO are currently under review by SCO member countries for final approval, hopefully to be finalized at the Tashkent Summit this year, according to Imanaliev.

SCO has set up expert panels to establish principles and standards for incorporating new members. "One important principle is that the new member should be good for SCO's growth and unification, not the other way round," Imanaliev stressed.

"Enlarging membership is an important task for SCO at present and for a long time in the future. We will continue to enhance cooperation within the SCO framework," Imanaliev said.

At present the SCO membership comprises: China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov speaking earlier to Itar-Tass said that "active work is underway to prepare the SCO summit in Tashkent" this year. But no specific date has been set yet."

Imanaliev added that the SCO will sign a series of bilateral memorandums with the dialogue partner countries to outline cooperation areas including economy, trade, science and culture.

Imanaliev said the major tasks facing the SCO are to develop a solution to terrorism in Afghanistan, to increase economic cooperation among the SCO members and to promote cooperation with other international organizations.

He said the SCO will continue to actively respond to the world's anti-terrorism needs, and provide economic and humanitarian aids to Afghanistan for its peace and stability.

Zhang Deguang, SCO's first secretary-general, said of the work plan for SCO this year. "It will carry on with its current work, including the activities of SCO-Afghanistan contact group, and continue to attend international meetings on the Afghan issue."

The contact group, established with the purpose of developing proposals and

recommendations on cooperation between the SCO and Afghanistan on issues of mutual interest, conducts its activity in the form of consultations.

At the international conference in London held on Jan 28, which was attended by the foreign ministers of SCO member countries, much attention was paid to the development of regional cooperation, including those within the SCO framework, aimed at making Afghanistan free of terrorism and drug crime.

The next conference on the peace settlement in Afghanistan will take place in Kabul at the end of this year. Imanaliev said new proposals will be raised to promote an earlier resolution.

Mentioning cooperation on energy, Imanaliev highly praised and promoted the "Energy Club" proposed by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin last year during his visit to Beijing.

"The Energy Club should have multiple roles including collection and analysis of information, energy export and import under the Business Council of SCO," Imanaliev said.

The Business Council is a non-governmental body which brings together the most members of the business communities of the six SCO members with the aim of boosting economic cooperation in the framework of SCO.

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