

Trade, border dispute likely to dominate Modi-Xi talks

No joint statement, MoUs or agreements are expected after informal summit

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Trade issues, boundary disputes and multilateral cooperation are expected to dominate the "informal summit" at Mamallapuram as the sea-side resort on the outskirts of Chennai prepares to host Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday and Saturday.

Mr. Xi will land in Chennai past 2 p.m. – about two hours after Mr. Modi. He will head to the Mamallapuram temple complex for an evening with Mr. Modi, which will include a tour of the monuments and a dance performance at the Shore Temple at sunset, followed by dinner. On Saturday, the talks will be more structured and will include time for a "one-on-one" meeting, followed by delegation-level talks.

Beyond formalities

"The objective is to ensure that the communication between the leaders is one which is routinised, easy going and indicates that President Xi Jinping and PM Modi are getting down to business in an informal way, not simply at a structured meeting of a [limited time] where prepared statements are read out in a much more practical way," a senior official brief-

Modi-Xi summit: Great expectations



Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping in Wuhan during their informal meeting on April 28, 2018

- No MoUs or agreements are likely to be signed in Mamallapuram, only a joint communique is expected

- Talks likely on reducing bilateral deficit, opening market access for Indian companies and for Huawei in 5G trials, and on RCEP free trade agreement assurances

- After the informal summit, meetings are likely between the Special Representatives of the countries on boundary talks and between trade Ministers. Counter-terror exercises "Hand-in-Hand" will commence in December

- Extending "India-China plus one" diplomat training programme in Afghanistan, and joint projects for capacity building in other countries

- Enhancing Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar infrastructure project

ing the media about the expectations from the summit had said.

Both leaders would be received by Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, and MEA officials, including Indian Ambassador to China Vikram Misri.

Security forces have been deployed along the entire East Coast Road leading to the coastal resort, while special coast guard patrols will monitor the beaches and coastline along the route. Journalists covering the event will be sequestered at a media hotel nearby, according to the arrangements that Mr. Palaniswami perso-

nally inspected on Thursday afternoon.

No joint statement is expected after the talks, nor have any MoUs or Agreements been prepared as outcomes of the summit, officials involved in the planning of the summit said. They suggested that the Indian side will hope to keep discussions over the issue of Kashmir at a minimum.

Much will depend on the "personal chemistry" between the two leaders, say officials, who expect that the discussions over purely bilateral concerns and joint initiatives will be much smoother than the ones expected over contentious issues with other countries,

including ties with the U.S., India-Pakistan tensions, and Jammu and Kashmir.

In terms of specifics, the talks on bilateral trade will focus on India's continuing worry over the trade deficit. According to the latest figures, the trade deficit in China's favour reduced last year to about \$53 billion, but officials hope to bring it much lower by ensuring China provides market access to more Indian companies.

Mr. Modi will also seek guarantees from Mr. Xi ahead of the RCEP free trade agreement signing on November 1, where India still has last-minute hesitations over the flooding of the Indian market by Chinese goods.

In particular the two leaders will discuss Indian security concerns over including Chinese tech giant Huawei in its 5G trials, even as reports indicated that India had agreed to allow a Huawei 'demo' at a Mobile and telecom conference in Delhi next week.

Apart from trade, officials hope the leaders will guide negotiations to be held by the special representatives on boundary talks as well as other high-level exchanges.

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