

## India, Pak. avoid blaming each other at SCO meeting

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar held an “informal interaction” at the conclusion lunch for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of Government meeting in Islamabad on Wednesday.

The lunch was hosted by Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif who chaired the SCO session where, unlike on past occasions, both India’s and Pakistan’s national statements avoided contentious language on sensitive issues.

According to sources, Mr. Jaishankar had also held a brief discussion with Mr. Dar at the SCO dinner on Tuesday evening as well, where they were joined by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, who is also Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board. Pakistan has been keen to host the Indian team as part of the Champions Trophy due to be held in Pakistan in early 2025, but the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has not confirmed their participation. Officials stressed that the conversation was part of normal diplomatic discourse, given that Mr. Jaishankar was attending the lunch along with dignitaries from all 10 SCO nations including Russia, China, Iran, Belarus, and the central Asian states, and that “all leaders talked to each other during lunch and in the waiting lounge”.

Leaving Islamabad at the end of what had been the first visit by an Indian External Affairs Minister to Pakistan in nine years, Mr. Jaishankar thanked Mr. Sharif and Mr. Dar, commending them for a “productive” meet. Mr. Jaishankar referred to cross-border terrorism, but in terms of the SCO’s 2001 charter’s phrasing of the “three evils” in the region: terrorism, separatism, extremism.

Mr. Sharif made no references to the Kashmir dispute in his speech, a departure from his own speech at the UN General Assembly on September 27, where he had likened India’s actions in Kashmir to Israel’s “colonial settler’s project” in Palestine.

### Economic cooperation

Among the documents signed by the SCO countries in Pakistan were proposals for an Economic Dialogue Programme and new economic strategy, cooperation between the trade promotion organisations of the SCO member states, cooperation in the field of “creative economy” development, and the passing of the SCO’s annual budget.

# WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

# Hope status of UT is temporary, says Omar, takes oath as new CM of J&K

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



National Conference (NC) vice-president Omar Abdullah on Wednesday was sworn in as Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. At the ceremony presided over by Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha, Surinder Kumar Choudhary, from Jammu, took oath as Deputy Chief Minister. Five MLAs, three from Jammu and two from Kashmir, also took oath as Ministers.

Those who were sworn in as

Ministers included Satish Sharma from Jammu's Chamb constituency, Sakina Yattoo from south Kashmir's D.H. Pora, Javid Dar from north Kashmir's Rafiabad, Mr. Choudhary from Jammu's Nowshera, and Javid Rana from Jammu's Mendhar.

## 'Equal treatment'

It is Mr. Omar's second term as CM after 2009. He has also become the first CM of the Union Territory after the Centre ended the region's special status in 2019 and granted more powers to the L-G.

## 'Many challenges'

Mr. Abdullah took Guard of Honour at the Civil Secretariat in Srinagar and held his first meeting with top officials. The Chief Minister, in his first instructions, asked the Director-General of Police (DGP) not to create a "green corridor" or traffic halts during his road movements. "I have instructed him [the DGP] to minimise public inconvenience and the use of sirens is to be minimal. The use of any stick waving or aggressive gestures is to be totally avoided," Mr. Abdullah said, as he urged his fellow Cabinet Ministers to follow the same approach.

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has just 10 ministerial berths, including the Chief Minister. None of the six Congress legislators took oath in spite of being a part of the coalition. Several leaders of the INDIA bloc attended the swearing-in ceremony, who included top leadership of the Congress — Rahul Gandhi, Mr. Kharge and Priyanka Vadra. Besides, Samajwadi Party president and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, CPI (M) leader Prakash Karat and D. Raja were present. Members of Parliament Kanimozhi and Supriya Sule also attended the ceremony. Former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti and Member of Parliament Sheikh Rashid attended the function.



*"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."*

*—Benjamin Franklin*

## NPPA increases ceiling prices of 8 scheduled drugs

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has approved an increase in the ceiling prices of 11 scheduled formulations of eight drugs by 50% of their current ceiling prices. Most of these drugs are low-cost and generally used as first-line treatment crucial to the public health programmes of the country. These drugs are used for treatment of asthma, glaucoma, thalassemia, tuberculosis, mental health disorders, and so on.

#### Need for the revision

Elaborating on the need to bring in the increase in price, the authority said that this was done to ensure availability of essential drugs at affordable prices without jeopardising access to such medicines. The essential drugs must remain available to address the public health needs of the country, and their price regulation should not lead to a situation where these drugs become unavailable in the market.

The NPPA explained that it has been receiving applications from the manufacturers for a revision of prices citing reasons such as increased cost of active pharmaceutical ingredients and cost of production, and change in exchange rate, resulting in unviability in sustainable production and marketing of drugs. Companies have also applied for discontinuation of some of the formulations on account of their unviability.

Formulations for which ceiling prices have been revised include Atropine injection 0.6 mg/ml; Streptomycin powder for injection 750 mg and 1000 mg; Salbutamol tablet 2 mg and 4 mg and respirator solution 5 mg/ml; Pilocarpine 2% drops; Cefadroxil tablet 500 mg; Desferrioxamine 500 mg for injection; and Lithium tablets 300 mg.

## Climate change impact harsher on poorer farmers in India: FAO report

### ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT



Poor households globally lose 5 % of their total income in an average year from heat stress and 4.4% from floods compared with households that are relatively better off, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations said in a report on Wednesday, warning about the negative impacts of climate change on the farming population in India.

Senior FAO economist Nicholas Sitko presented the report “The unjust climate. Measuring the impacts of climate change on rural poor, women, and youth” in New Delhi.

The report said on-farm income sources of the rural poor in India were affected in different ways depending on the type of climate stress. In case of droughts or such events, poor households dedicated more time and resources to agricultural production to sustain themselves, as off-farm employment opportunities reduced.

The total incomes of poor households reduce compared with those of families that have not been

exposed to a significant climate stressor, it said. “The vulnerability of poor households to climate stressors is likely to be rooted in structural inequalities,” the report said and asked the government to take policy measures such as expanding the social security net.

Anticipatory social protection programmes can be scaled up and scaled out to more beneficiaries in anticipation of an extreme weather event, the report suggested. “Providing effective livelihood support ahead of extreme weather events can help reduce reliance on adverse coping strategies and limit the number of people pushed into poverty because of these events”. The report recommended improving workforce diversification and enhancing off-farm employment opportunities. It urged policymakers to address “gendered barriers” in non-farm employment.

Responding to the report, NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand said India was doing its best to deal with the issue of climate change. “We have implemented National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) much earlier to address the problem of climate change. We were first in the world to do so for all crops. We also have a contingency plan for all agriculture districts. We were the first country to implement an employment guarantee scheme as a social safety net.”

## Manufacture, marketing of antibiotics may be regulated; prescription to be mandatory

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) has recommended inclusion of all antibiotics in the definition of “new drug” in the New Drugs and Clinical Trial (NDCT) Rules, 2019. The recommendation to the Drugs Consultative Committee (DCC) is aimed at curbing the growing antimicrobial resistance which is now recognised as a public health threat globally.

#### Implications of move

If brought into the new drug bracket, the manufacturing, marketing, and sale of antibiotics will be documented. Also, the manufacturing and marketing clearance will have to be obtained from the Union government instead of the State drug administration, and patients will be able to buy antibiotics only on prescription. The board is also looking at amending the labelling requirements under the Drugs Rules, 1945, and adding a blue strip or box for antimicrobial products.

A recently released report by the Indian Council of Medical Research’s Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance Network said that drug-resistant and difficult-to-treat urinary tract infections, blood stream infections, pneumonia, and typhoid are among the diseases that are showing resistance to commonly used antibiotics in India.

The problem of antimicrobial resistance has been highlighted as a global health priority in multiple high-level platforms and in view of this, it was proposed to include all antibiotics in the definition of “new drug” in New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules, 2019,” noted the minutes of the meeting. The DTAB added that antimicrobial resistance can be due to misuse of antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals, and so on, and recommended that the matter may be deliberated in the DCC.

*“Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you’re finished.”—Leslie Nielsen*

# September trade gap eases, oil exports hit 32-month low

## ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT



India's goods trade deficit narrowed sharply in September to a five-month low of \$20.78 billion, relative to August's \$ 29.70 billion figure — the second highest on record — with imports declining \$9 billion from an all-time high of \$ 64.4 billion in the previous month.

The value of outbound goods shipments rose 0.5 % in September to \$ 34.6 billion, breaking a two-month streak of year-on-year contractions in merchandise exports. However, this tally was 0.4 % below August's tally. Just six of India's top 30 export items recorded a contraction in September, but outbound petroleum

products' shipments from India continued to plummet sharply, declining almost 27 % to a little over \$ 4.7 billion, the lowest in 32 months for India's second largest export product. Petroleum imports fell about 10.4 % to \$ 12.5 billion last month. The import bill grew 1.6% to \$55.36 billion over last September, but was 14 % below the previous month's surprise spike that was fuelled by an all-time peak for gold imports which hit \$ 10.1 billion. By contrast, September's gold import bill was significantly lower at \$ 4.4 billion, reflecting a 6.9 % rise year-on-year.

Silver imports, however, continued to surge, and were up over 205% at \$ 325.7 million in September. In the first half of 2024-25, silver imports have grown 376.4% to almost \$2.3 billion, while gold imports have risen 21.8 % to around \$ 27.1 billion. The narrowing in the trade deficit from August levels was driven almost entirely by the fall in gold imports.

Between April and September, goods exports have now risen 1 % to \$ 213.2 billion, while imports have grown 6.16 % to \$ 350.7 billion. "The sluggish growth in exports in the year so far is partly explained by weak demand from major trading partners, and lower commodity prices for select major exports. The latest data available up till August showed exports declined year on year, across the EU, U.S., China and the UAE.

Exporters were sanguine about the minor rebound of sorts in September but called upon the government to ease liquidity concerns and expand existing schemes for them. The urgent and immediate need of the hour is to take steps on the liquidity front with deeper interest subvention support and extension of interest equalisation scheme for at least 5 years, creating a predictable business environment for the exporters.

Apart from extending the Remission of Taxes and Duties on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme to all sectors as was the case before the pandemic, Mr. Kumar sought an immediate restoration of the Interest Equalisation Scheme with a cap of ₹10 crore for all Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) for all 410 tariff lines.



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# Centre increases MSP for wheat, five other rabi crops

## AGRICULTURE & RELATED MATTERS

### Better support



The Cabinet increased the minimum support prices for rabi crops

Crop	MSP for rabi 2025-26*	MSP for rabi 2024-25*	Increase in MSP
Wheat	₹2,425	₹2,275	₹150
Barley	₹1,980	₹1,850	₹130
Gram	₹5,650	₹5,440	₹210
Lentil (masoor)	₹6,700	₹6,425	₹275
Rapeseed & mustard	₹5,950	₹5,650	₹300
Safflower	₹5,940	₹5,800	₹140

(\*per quintal)

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday increased the minimum support price (MSP) for rabi crops for the next marketing season of 2025-26 with the MSP for wheat going up by ₹150 a quintal. The new MSP for a quintal of wheat is ₹2,425 in comparison to ₹2,275 per quintal, which was in place for the 2024-25 season.

The Centre said the MSP for six rabi crops are higher by 50% to 105% than the production cost. Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the steady increase in the MSP of wheat, barley, gram, lentil, rapeseed and mustard, and safflower shows the commitment of the Narendra Modi government towards farmers' welfare.

This comes in line with the Union Budget 2018-19

announcement of fixing the MSP at a level of at least 1.5 times of the all-India weighted average cost of production.

# Army to commemorate 62 years of the Battle of Walong with China

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



To mark the 62nd anniversary of the iconic Battle of Walong during the 1962 war with China, the Army is planning a month-long series of commemorative events beginning on Thursday. They will continue till November 14. In addition to a series of activities, the newly renovated Walong War Memorial, Shaurya Sthal at Lama Spur, and some key infrastructure projects in the border areas are also set to be inaugurated.

In 1962, the Indian Army halted the advancing People's Liberation Army soldiers for 27 days which



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forced them to commit their reserve Division from Tawang Sector to Walong as fierce battles unfolded in the unforgiving terrain of Kibithu, Namti Tri Junction (famously known as Tiger's Mouth), Walong, and adjoining features.

In October 1962, as Chinese forces advanced into the eastern most parts of Arunachal Pradesh, the task of defending it fell on the 11 Infantry Brigade under the Second Infantry Division. The Brigade had 6 Kumaon regiment, 4 Sikh regiment, third battalion of 3 Gorkha Rifles, in addition to second battalion of 8 Gorkha Rifles and 4 Dogra.

The Chinese offensive with more than 4,000 soldiers could not breach the forward defences held with 800 men for over 27 days and the Chinese Army was subsequently forced to employ additional division size force of approximately 15,000 soldiers. Vastly outnumbered and with little ammunition and no resources, the Indian soldiers fought till the last man, last round. Capturing this, the Time magazine wrote in January 1963, "At Walong, Indian troops lacked everything. The only thing they did not lack was guts." This year's commemoration promises a vibrant mix of activities aimed at engaging the local communities and honouring the memory of the fallen heroes, one Army official said. "The events include white water rafting, motorcycle rallies, bicycle rallies, battlefield treks, adventure treks and a half marathon, all designed to reflect the adventurous spirit of the Indian Army in the rugged terrain of Arunachal Pradesh."

## Five Eyes supports Canada in spat with India on Nijjar

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



The United Kingdom has "full confidence" in the Canadian judicial process, the Foreign Office in London declared on Wednesday, expanding the ambit of the unprecedented diplomatic crisis that has broken out between India and Canada over the alleged involvement of Canada-based Indian diplomats in the 2023 killing of pro-Khalistan preacher Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

U.K. is the fourth member of the 'Five Eye' countries to extend support to Canada's position. Earlier New Zealand, the United States and Australia had backed Canada. The Five Eye countries —

Australia, Canada, New Zealand, U.S., and U.K. — often coordinate closely on issues of common security interest.

### The key pillar

The protection of political and civil rights, including the right to peaceful protest, is a key pillar of the Five Eye democracies. In the recent years, India has been uncomfortable with the campaign for so-called (online) referendum on Khalistan in all the five countries but India's arguments did not prevent the Five Eye countries to crackdown on the pro-Khalistan campaigners.

Earlier, New Zealand became first among the friends of Canada from within the Five Eye democracies to express support for the Canadian position expressing concern about the allegations from Canada.

### Diplomats expelled

Citing alleged involvement in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, Canada has expelled six Indian



diplomats, including High Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Verma. In a tit-for-tat move, India too expelled six Canadian diplomats, including the head of mission Stewart Ross Wheeler. Both sides have given time till October 19 for the diplomats to exit. Australia has also come forward to support Canada's allegations and urged for respect for sovereignty of nation states.

## SC censures Haryana, Punjab over lack of action in stubble-burning cases, summons Chief Secretaries

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court on Wednesday slammed Haryana and Punjab for their "defiant attitude" against taking penal action on persons burning crop residue ahead of the winter season and aggravating air pollution across north India, especially in and around the national capital.

A three-judge Bench headed by Justice A.S. Oka expressed shock at Haryana's submission that it could detect no fires despite information received from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) about their exact locations.

The court said there were 191 breaches, but people got off by paying a nominal fine. Penal action was not taken in even one case. Justice Oka asked why the Haryana Chief Secretary, who was "no politician", was worried about prosecuting offenders. The Bench directed the Chief Secretary to be present in court for the next hearing on October 23.

Turning to Punjab, the court said ISRO had detected 267 cases of stubble burning in the State. Of these, 103 were closed with a nominal fine and only 14 violators were booked.

The Bench ordered the Punjab Chief Secretary to be also present personally in court for the next hearing. The court told Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati, for the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas, to note that many of its members were found absent during its meetings.

### Expertise questioned

The Bench also questioned the expertise and talent within the CAQM. The court directed the Centre to provide it with a list of expert organisations in air pollution associated with the CAQM's work.

## SC verdict today on constitutionality of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

A Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud is scheduled to pronounce judgment on Thursday on the constitutionality of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955. Section 6A was a special provision inserted into the 1955 Act in furtherance of a Memorandum of Settlement called the 'Assam Accord' signed on August 15, 1985, by the then Rajiv Gandhi government.

### 'Ordinary resident'

Under Section 6A, foreigners who had entered Assam before January 1, 1966, and been "ordinarily resident" in the State, would have all the rights and obligations of Indian citizens. Those who had entered the State between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971, would have the same rights and obligations except that they would not be able to vote for 10 years. The petitioners had questioned why Assam alone, among the border States, had been singled out to implement Section 6A. They had blamed "rise in infiltration a consequence or an effect of Section 6A".

The court had, in turn, asked the petitioners to show material that benefits given to cross-border migrants, who arrived in India between 1966 and 1971 just before the Bangladesh Liberation War, led to radical demographic change which impacted the Assamese cultural identity.

The Constitution Bench had also made it clear that its ambit was limited to examining the validity of Section 6A and not the Assam National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The Constitution Bench had wanted details about the influx of illegals from Bangladesh and the steps taken by the Centre to detect and deport them according to law. A government affidavit filed in court had maintained that the detection, detention and deportation of foreign nationals who had entered India clandestinely was a “complex ongoing process”.

The Centre had also blamed the policies followed by the West Bengal government for creating a hurdle in the timely completion of fencing the Indo-Bangladesh border to prevent infiltrators and illegal immigrants. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre, had argued that the “far slower and more complex” land acquisition policies in West Bengal had been a thorn even for a vital national security project like border-fencing.

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