

ONE PROBLEM LESS ON BORDER: JAISHANKAR

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Sharing concerns: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with his French counterpart, Catherine Colonna, in New Delhi. PTI-

India on Wednesday “recognised” that the latest disengagement at Patrolling Point (PP) 15 in the Gogra-Hot Springs area of eastern Ladakh amounted to “one problem less” along the India-China frontier.

The comment from External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar came a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to travel to Samarkand in Uzbekistan for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, which is expected to witness participation of all the heads of governments of the member countries of the SCO, including President Xi Jinping of China.

Speaking at a joint press meeting with visiting French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, Mr. Jaishankar said, “You have heard me speak many times about the border. I don’t think I would say anything new there today, except I would recognise that we had disengagement at PP-15 and that disengagement as I understand was completed and that is one problem less on the border.”

The Hindu had reported earlier that the withdrawal of troops from PP-15 had been verified after India and China announced that their Armies had begun to disengage from PP-15 at Gogra-Hot Springs, which is being considered as a positive step towards ending the tension that erupted in May 2020 in Ladakh. The Ministry of External Affairs, however, had pointed at the remaining issues at the Line of Action Control (LAC).

By referring to the problems on the India-China border, Mr. Jaishankar has indirectly drawn attention to the friction points at Demchok and Depsang that remain. That apart, the overall situation at the border remains far from a complete resolution as Beijing continues to maintain that it would not accept India’s demand for *status quo ante* at the LAC.

The issue of the military tension between India and China came up during the interaction with the media when both the French and the Indian Ministers referred to the Ukraine crisis and the tension over China’s military drills in close proximity to Taiwan.

Mr. Jaishankar referred to France as a “player” in the Indo-Pacific which had a long history of being active in the Indo-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean.

India-France ties

Ms. Colonna indicated that Paris had been following the India-China tension in the Himalayas, saying, “When the core principles of the international rules-based order are flouted anywhere, they are weakened everywhere, including in the Indo-Pacific, where respect for international law has been undermined for some time now. India knows this better than anyone else.” “We are very concerned about the development in Ukraine but not forgetting what is happening in the Indo-Pacific....What applies to Europe and the Indo-Pacific applies everywhere: France and India reject a world where ‘might makes right’.

This is the significance of our cooperation at the United Nations Security Council [UNSC], where France will continue to push for a permanent seat for India.” The reference to Indo-French

cooperation at the UNSC is significant as France has supported India's campaign against Pakistan-based terror outfits at the UNSC, which has been blocked by China repeatedly.

Ms. Colonna said that the war in Ukraine had to end and that the war was especially difficult as it was started by a permanent member of the UNSC which had undermined the "fundamentals" of the international affairs.

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