

India, ADB sign USD 400 mn loan pact to build urban infra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Government on Monday signed a USD 400 million policy-based loan with the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) to support its urban reform agenda to create high-quality urban infrastructure, improve service delivery, and promote efficient governance systems.



The programme supports the government's urban sector strategy with a focus on reforms aimed at making cities livable and centres of economic growth through the provisioning of inclusive, resilient and sustainable infrastructure.

Specifically, ULBs will promote the modernisation of building bylaws, land pooling, urban agglomeration, and comprehensive urban mobility planning through transit-oriented development to help cities become well-planned centres of economic growth, the ministry added.

Procurement from GeM portal crosses ₹2 L crore so far this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The procurement of goods and services from the government portal GeM has crossed Rs 2 lakh crore so far this fiscal due to higher buying activities by different ministries and departments.



The portal provides a wide range of products from office stationery to vehicles. Automobiles, computers and office furniture are some of the major product categories.

Gujarat, Maharashtra, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and Uttarakhand have placed significant amounts of procurement orders in the current financial year.

Inflow in mutual fund industry drops to ₹34,765 crore in Q2

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The mutual fund industry continued with the positive momentum in the September quarter, attracting Rs 34,765 crore, although it was a massive reduction as against the Rs 1.85 lakh crore inflow in the preceding quarter, primarily due to withdrawal from debt segment.



In the September quarter, net inflows during the July-September period of the current financial year barring the fixed-income or debt segment, which witnessed net outflows.

FinMin asks Ministries to follow guidelines on issuance of mobiles, laptops to officers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry has asked various departments and ministries to follow the guidelines with regard to issuance of mobiles, laptops and similar devices to officers and withdraw any policy which is at variance with the Department of Expenditure's guidelines.



This which are not in line with the spirit of the finance ministry's guidelines. Ministries/Departments are hereby directed to stop/withdraw their own policies on the subject and strictly adhere to the instructions issued by this Department in letter and spirit.

As per the guidelines issued in July, central government officers were entitled to mobile, laptop or similar devices costing up to Rs 1.3 lakh, which can be retained by them for personal use after 4 years.

In the case of Section Officers and Under Secretaries, 50 per cent of the sanctioned strength can be issued such devices.

Raymond's billionaire head announces separation from wife

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Billionaire industrialist Gautam Singhania on Monday said he has separated from his wife Nawaz, in an announcement that comes amid speculation over the future of the 32-year relationship.

The couple has two children and Singhania said they grew together in their years of companionship and were a source of strength for each other.

Sensex, Nifty fall amid caution ahead of inflation data

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty declined on Monday due to selling pressure in IT, consumer durables and financial stocks as investors turned cautious ahead of the release of inflation data.



The Indian rupee's weakness keeps FIIs cautious. However, the market's downside is limited by strong earnings, economic stability, and domestic institutional flows.

With gains. The US markets ended with significant gains on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.20 per cent to USD 81.27 a barrel.

sumer durables fell by 0.75 per cent, teck (0.66 per cent), FMCG (0.39 per cent), services (0.20 per cent) and financial services (0.17 per cent).

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Coal Ministry to ensure sufficient dry fuel at thermal power plants

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The coal ministry on Monday said it has plans to produce additional quantity of the dry fuel to ensure sufficient availability for thermal power plants.



2030 from the current level of production of about one billion tonnes per annum.

would be around 400 MT at 85 per cent PLF (plant load factor), and the actual requirement may be lower depending on the generation requirements in the coming times due to contributions from renewable sources," it said.



FIRST COLUMN

RADIANCE AND HAPPINESS WITHIN

Diwali is celebration of victory of light over darkness, awareness over ignorance



RAVI VALLURI

During our several visits to Chandigarh in my childhood, I remember Mr PH Vaishnav, a close family friend and then a serving IAS officer, would always mention that the best Diwali celebrations in the country were at the Golden Temple, Amritsar.

With childlike enthusiasm, he used to describe how the temple was lit in a captivating manner, fireworks illuminated the sky, while simultaneously mellifluous and soulful singing by the granthis reverberated through the holy precincts.

Let us pause and recall the iconic lyrics by Simon and Garfunkel:

*Hello darkness, my old friend I have come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain remains,
within the sound of silence.*

The message and import of this haunting song, with indelible lyrics is the trajectory from darkness to light, from cacophony to symphony.

As per the Ramayana, Dipawali or Diwali is celebrated to mark Lord Rama's triumphant return to Ayodhya after vanquishing the ten-headed hydra monster Ravana. The ten heads of the rakshasa are symbolic of the antipathetic elements in our minds, such as lust, anger, attachment, greed, pride, jealousy, selfishness, injustice, cruelty, and ego. Though an ardent Shiv-bhakta, Ravana could not overcome these ill feelings and emotions.

Rama, on the other hand, stands for the light and radiance within us. Indians celebrate Holi, Dusshera and Dipawali with tremendous fervour and gaiety. Unfortunately, there is the unholy spectre of carousing during the festivals rather than celebrating them with solemnity and propri-



ety. Drunkenness, playing of cards, hooliganism, and committing acts of disrepute tend to sully the purity and significance of these festivals. These mar the majesty of the occasion.

Dipawali is another name for happiness. There are certain fundamental and cardinal principles to ensure joy. Every moment that humans spend on the planet needs to be joyful and spread a big smile. Sage Patanjali has expounded on certain tenets to remain happy which include Ahimsa, Satyam, Asthaya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha. Thus, the festival of Diwali is meant to radiate happiness.

This is a Zen-like state of maintaining poise.

In such a monk-like state, humans transcend trivia and are in a state of bliss, with illumined hearts. And an emblazoned and embellished heart spreads the true sparkles of Diwali.

Sage Patanjali further elaborates on some pointers of inner development. These include such (maintenance of cleanliness), santosha (being contented, irrespective of situation and events – not to be subsumed by events), tapas (or deep penance), swadhyaya (observing the mind and feeling how it operates, how it responds to different situations) and finally Aishwarya pranidhana (surrender to the Divine will).

Diwali is an occasion to celebrate the victory of light over darkness, awareness over ignorance, an occasion to celebrate life and let happiness, peace and joy into our lives and of those around us – so go the oft-repeated lines. We say this to each other with great fervour. But let us ponder and think, do we mean and practice it? Perhaps in a corner, a Zen Master may be crouching and murmuring, "Is it so?"

By practising the cardinal principles as elucidated by Sage Patanjali in entirety and completeness, seekers, the devout and commoners can maintain equanimity. And equanimity is another name for ecstasy and contentment within us. This inner contentment is reflected in the radiating lights of Diwali, verily a true celebration of the festival of lights.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Perils of religio-cultural one-upmanship



JS RAJPUT

India needs to speak in one single voice and expedite its role as the nation striving hard to bring hostilities to an end in Gaza and ushering peace in West Asia

The Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, shocked every conscious human being with the severity of the cruelty that was inflicted upon innocent children, women, the elderly and all those who had gathered there on a festive day to celebrate. Retaliation was inevitable, and it was launched with full ferocity and revenge.

It continues even after a month, with supporters of both sides lining up in their camps to augment the war efforts of their preferred side! Religion has entered it in a big way, as it does in most of the instances of war and violence. Western powers are visiting Israel regularly, and the Organisation of Islamic countries has come together to support Hamas! Is this a truly civilised world? If not, what is the use of all the progress made in science, technology and ICT?

Will it ever be possible for humanity to be realistic and pragmatic, and come together that its survival depends upon the acceptance of equality of all human beings and equality of all religions? There is no other way out. Non-acceptance of equality is a sure prescription for the elimination of humans from the planet Earth.

How have we reached such a state of affairs where animal instincts overshadow all that human civilization could be proud of? It deserves a serious – and fact-based – analysis by the top-level influencers, policymakers and decision-makers. A cursory peep into the circumstances could remind one of the human instincts that make Every conscious and alert citizen invariably proud of various aspects of his heritage, culture and the contributions of his race to the evolution of civilization. An Indian claim to great strides in the field of surgery, space vehicles, and astronomy in ancient times may be immediately countered by the Chinese and ridiculed by the Westerners.

There may be someone from another culture to claim ownership of the discovery of zero. It applies to all such claims of the superiority of one's religion, extending to the sole ownership of Truth! It could be well understood that people would like to see their clan grow, adherents from other religions joining them would be very welcome. Practically in every existing civilization and culture, there are forceful claims and beliefs concerning the origin of man, and the growth of knowledge and wisdom in the civil society as it exists today. Each one has its claims on the great contribution made by their people, religion and community for the first time in exploring the secrets of nature. Such claims are often duly supported by reference to their Holy books and scriptures.

Devout adherents of Sanatan Dharma, mostly identified as Hindus are confident that Vedas consist of all the knowledge that humanity and scientists would take ages to explore in future. Their task would be much easier if instead of striving hard in the laboratories and libraries, people learn Sanskrit, and study Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads with respect and faith! On the religious front, Hindus are unique in the sense that they give full liberty to the individual to follow his chosen path, they are not confined to the way given in any one of the books of his choice of 'reverence'.

Even those who do not follow any of the Vedic rituals, or have no faith in the exis-



... HOW CONVERSIONS CONSIDERED DIVINELY MANDATED THEIR ADHERENTS TO LAUNCH SUSTAINED CAMPAIGNS AND CRUSADES TO EXPAND THEIR RELIGIONS

(Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity; views are personal)

tence of God, could be part of Hindu society. Sanatan Dharma permits every person to worship one God, many gods or no god, he could remain a Sanatani based upon his conduct of life and living. How one conducts his personal religious life is one's own choice. In the same household, there could be the devotees of Durga, Krishna, Ram, Shiv or Vishnu! The multiplicity creates no issues. So long as one has acquired the samskaras as part of social and cultural moors, one is welcome as a Hindu, irrespective of his adherence to the god of his choice.

Adherents of Islam are equally; if not more; convinced by their religious interpreters that the world needs to study and decipher only the single text, the Quran – and if comprehended properly, that would suffice to lead a magnificent life on the planet Earth and also ensure the mercy of Allah and the bounties of the afterlife, which have been duly listed. It was this conviction – amongst the ignorant and unaware – of all knowledge being contained in the single holy book that led to the burning of libraries in Egypt/Alexandria and Nalanda in India.

No doubt, devout Muslims also read more books, write great books, and receive appreciation for their contributions. Strange are the ways of democracy and politics of the day! Near Nalanda, there is a railway station named after Bakhtiyar Khilji who burnt the

library of the great Nalanda University of Yore which had a global reputation as the seat of knowledge, learning and the creation of new knowledge. The invader Bakhtiyar Khilji destroyed the monastery, killed the monks and burnt the library. It is said that this library had nine million books and ten thousand students were studying there.

Taxila University had also suffered a similar fate. Christianity has its Bible and Judaism its Talmud. These two and Islam are convinced that their way – contained in these treatises they adore – provides the only true path to every human being, and each one who is not within the pale of their religion, must come and join it if he wants to be saved from the wrath of Hell! Conversion of those outside their faith is considered a desirable, even divine task that could bring in great rewards.

The principle of equality of all human beings does not apply in this context. After all, the missionaries came to India to "salvage the souls of the savages"! History has detailed descriptions of how conversions considered divinely mandated their adherents to launch sustained campaigns and crusades to expand their religions. These expansions and conversions were not always peaceful and through persuasive methods, convinced the other person about the superiority of the preacher's faith!

Aurangzeb is only one of the examples from the authenticated history of how conversions were achieved in India, and what happened to Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib and Banda Bahadur! One wonders whether any other nation could have acquired a prolonged, torturous and tragic experience as India did!

Will Durant and Ariel Durant who together authored Eleven-Volume History of Civilization, wrote in 1930: "The British conquest of India was the invasion and destruction of a high civilization by a trading company (the British East India company) utterly without scruple or principal, careless of art and greedy of gain, over-running with fire and sword a country temporarily disordered and helpless, bribing and murdering, annexing and stealing, and beginning that career of illegal and 'legal' plunder which has now (1930) gone on ruthlessly for one-hundred and seventy-three years." This has been quoted by Shashi Tharoor in his widely read book: "An Era of Darkness". Despite such a past, and every effort made for around two hundred years by the British to fan communal tension, Indians could live together, even after the partition of 1947. India needs to speak in one single voice, endorse the stand of the Prime minister, and expedite its role as the only nation equipped enough in leadership to bring peace to Israel and Gaza.

Meeting the challenges of pharmaceutical companies

Providing a suitable moisture-free environment free from unwanted microorganisms is essential for making pharmacy products of international standards

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is growing at an exponential rate. Observing a massive evolution in the past three years, majorly fast-tracked under pressure projected by COVID-19, at present it is valued at \$50 billion, as per the report by InvestIndia. Supplying pharmaceuticals to more than 200 countries, India has risen to the prominence of being recognised as the 'pharmacy of the world.' Where the industry is emerging as a leading pharmaceutical producer across the world, the market is becoming highly competitive owing to the perennially growing population. Furthermore, in the pursuit of serving a large number of people, at present India enjoys a presence of



DHIRENDRA CHOUDHARY

(The writer is the CEO, of Bry-Air, views are personal)

more than 3000 pharma companies with a robust network of over 10,500 manufacturing facilities. Therefore, it can be said that the industry is thriving at a phenomenal pace. Moreover, with the country being positioned as the third-largest producer of pharmaceutical products by volume and 14th-largest by value, it is further committed to improving the healthcare infrastructure and providing universal health coverage. In the process, it seeks to strengthen its foothold in the international market and at the same time penetrate deeper into the market.

Given the progressive aspirations, there is an incessant need for the industry to produce superior-quality products meeting the highest

industry standards, conforming to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) specifications. This requires the industry to reinvent continuously and upgrade the manufacturing standards invariably to garner a resilient pharmaceutical infrastructure that produces the highest-quality products to meet the surging demand projected domestically as well as internationally.

To scale the production and offering of the pharmaceutical sector, the manufacturers must be aware of the looming threats plaguing the industry. Here, it has been observed that moisture is a major deterrent, posing a serious threat to the pharmaceutical industry. Even the slight presence of moisture in the sur-



roundings is capable of deteriorating the quality of the products. It comes with the ability to trigger biochemical reactions by initiating organic corrosion. Providing a suitable environment for the germination of unwanted microorganisms can severely interfere with the accuracy and potency of products. Looking at the moisture menace more closely, it has been seen that the materials coming into contact with humid-

ity resist the various grinding and pulverising operations by becoming resilient. With the materials clinging to the grinding machine, they defy conveying from one source to another. In addition to this, humidity increases the chances of lumping and caking of powder at the time of tablet compression. Consequently, this results in the failure of entire tablet processing and also gives rise to the rough and translucent coating of tablets.

All these factors can together lead to the revocation of products from the market and severely impede the growth of the pharmaceutical industry. Therefore, to curtail the damaging effect of moisture, it is necessary to ensure an uninterrupted supply of

moisture-free air at every stage of the pharmaceutical process.

Hence, gauging the destructive impact of moisture, it is a prerequisite that the industry invariably focuses on maintaining air quality throughout the processing, manufacturing, storage, research, testing, and packaging of pharmaceutical products to keep humidity in check.

To achieve quality air during the various pharmaceutical processes, the industry must deploy dehumidification solutions. Installing desiccant dehumidifiers that are well supported by advanced technology, comes in handy in maintaining a constant relative humidity (RH) throughout the production,

processing, storage, and packaging of the products. It comes with the ability to achieve RH as low as 1% to ensure the superior quality of the products throughout their shelf life.

Consequently, with the country strengthening its foothold in the international market, manufacturers are adopting dehumidification solutions with agility.

The process of achieving stringent environmental conditions within the manufacturing space helps in the production of the highest-quality pharmaceutical products. As India is recognised as the 'pharmacy of the world,' advanced dehumidifiers offer a roadmap to not just preserve the title but also expand the offerings of the country.

World shares mostly higher ahead of Biden, Xi meeting

AP ■ HONG KONG
World shares were mostly higher Monday ahead of the release of economic data in the US, China and Japan, and a meeting this week between US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Germany's DAX rose 0.4% to 15,287.05 and the CAC 40 in Paris advanced 0.4% to 7,072.32. Britain's FTSE 100 gained 0.4% to 7,386.42. The future for the S&P 500 lost 0.3% and that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average edged 0.2% lower. Biden and Xi are due to meet on Wednesday on the sidelines of a Pacific Rim summit in California for the first face-to-face encounter in a year between the leaders of the world's two biggest economies.

Both are looking to bring a greater measure of stability to a relationship that is being defined by differences over export controls, tensions over Taiwan, the wars in the Middle East and Europe, and other points of friction. Investors also are focusing on readings of US consumer prices and retail sales due Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively. Japan will report its economic growth figures on Wednesday and China will give a monthly update on factory output and other indicators. On Monday, the Hang Seng in Hong Kong surged 1.4% to 17,440.73, while the Shanghai Composite index rose 0.3% to 3,046.53. Alibaba Group Holding and JD.com reported a pickup in sales for this year's Singles' Day shopping festival as they grapple with a stop-start economic recovery in China and a brutal price war. But neither company disclosed exact revenue figures. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gained 0.1% to 32,585.11. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.4% to 6,948.80. In South Korea, the KOSPI was 0.2% lower at 2,403.76. Investors also are focusing on readings of US consumer prices and retail sales due Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively. Japan will report its economic growth figures on Wednesday and China will give a monthly update on factory output and other indicators. On Friday, Wall Street rose sharply to add to an already strong November, which is on track to be one of the market's best months of the year. Expectations fell for an interest rate hike by the US Federal Reserve in December,

despite a report showing consumer inflation expectations on the rise. The S&P 500 jumped 1.6% and the Dow gained 1.2%. The Nasdaq jumped 2%.



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The Federal Reserve has said it wants to keep such expectations low because they otherwise could lead to a vicious cycle that keeps inflation high. High interest rates and bond yields hurt prices for stocks and other investments, while slowing the economy broadly and raising the pressure on the financial system in hopes of getting inflation under control. On Thursday, a jump in Treasury yields knocked stocks lower to break an eight-day winning streak for the S&P 500, one of its longest in the last two decades. That came after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell dashed some of the hopes building among traders that the Fed may finally be done hiking its main interest rate. But by late Friday, traders were betting on only a 9.1% chance

that the Fed will raise its main interest rate at its next meeting in December, according to data from CME Group. That's down from 14.6% a day earlier. Oil prices fell further, extending three weeks of losses as worries over the potential impact on supplies due to the Israel-Hamas war eased and crude shipments from Russia and the United States rose. Early Monday, a barrel of benchmark US crude for delivery in December lost 73 cents to \$76.44 in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It rose \$1.43 on Friday to settle at \$77.17. Brent crude, the international standard, was down 80 cents at \$80.63 per barrel. On Friday it added \$1.42 to \$81.43 per barrel. Both still lost nearly 4% last week on worries about supplies outstripping demand.

Tea, nickel on agenda as Biden hosts Indonesian president

AP ■ WASHINGTON
President Joe Biden will host Indonesian President Joko Widodo at the White House on Monday, one day before the US leader leaves for San Francisco to attend a summit of Asian leaders. The two presidents will share an afternoon tea and meet with top advisers, according to senior administration officials who insisted on anonymity to preview the schedule. They will also talk about ways to expand the trade of critical minerals like nickel, which can be used to produce electric vehicle batteries. Indonesia is the world's largest producer of nickel. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said they "will explore opportunities to enhance cooperation on the clean energy transition, advance economic prosperity, bolster regional peace and stability, and reinforce our people-to-people ties." Biden's meeting with Widodo comes shortly before he sits down with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. Indonesia is the world's third-largest democracy — after India and the United States — and a key player in Southeast Asia. The U.S. has been working to strengthen relationships in the region in hopes of deterring China's influence, and Vice President Kamala Harris attended a summit there



in September. However, events in the Middle East are expected to intrude on the agenda. Widodo will be arriving in the US after making a previous stop in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, for a summit of Muslim leaders. While there, he joined in calls for a ceasefire and denounced the Israeli bombardment and invasion of Gaza, which began after Hamas attacked on October 7. Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim country, and a senior administration official said "their views and their engagement are critical" on the war between Israel and Hamas. The official said Biden would seek to have Widodo "play a larger role" in the Middle East, although it was unclear exactly what that would entail.

China on alert for COVID relapse

PTI ■ BEIJING
Chinese experts have sounded an alert about the relapse of COVID-19 infections during the current winter season and asked elderly and vulnerable populations to get vaccinated. The Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Chinese CDC) shows that a total of 209 new severe COVID-19 cases and 24 deaths caused by COVID-19 were reported across the country in October, with the prevalent strains all being XBB variants, official media reported on Monday. China's top respiratory disease expert Zhong Nanshan warned of a small COVID-19 spike in the winter and reminded the elderly and vulnerable populations to get vaccinated as soon as possible, state-run Global Times reported. The virus is undergoing mutations, while the general population's ability to fight off the disease is declining because their antibody levels are lowering as time passes, Lu Hongzhou, head of the Third People's Hospital of Shenzhen, told the Daily.



According to Lu, there may be a rise in COVID-19 cases during the winter seasons. Also, autumn and winter are known for high influenza rates, so people should also be cautious of potential co-infections, according to Lu. While it is still necessary to continue implementing prevention and control measures in the winter season, there is no need to be overly concerned about it, said Lu. The coronavirus which first emerged in Wuhan towards the end of 2019 had spiralled into a

massive pandemic in which millions of people died all over the world while it affected the health of millions more. China steadfastly denied the allegations that the virus that shook the world was leaked from a bio-lab in Wuhan. While the world grappled with the fast-emerging variants of coronavirus, China disconnected itself from the rest of the world by banning or restricting flights from abroad. At home, China resorted to periodic shutdowns of various cities including Shanghai which severely affected its economy. As a result, the world's second-largest still remained in slow-down mode despite various efforts by the government to revive it. As the winter approached, apart from the risk of COVID-19 infection, there has been a high incidence of mycoplasma pneumoniae pneumonia (MPP) and influenza in recent weeks, the CDC said and cautioned about mixed infection of multiple respiratory pathogens until next spring, the Global Times report said.

Dozens of migrants missing after boat capsizes off Yemen, say officials



AP ■ SANAA
A migrant boat capsized off the coast of war-torn Yemen, leaving dozens of people, mostly from the Horn of Africa, missing, Yemeni officials said Monday. Khalid al-Subeihi, an official with the Yemeni coast guard in the coastal city of Mocha, said the boat with 75 migrants on board capsized Sunday. He told The Associated Press that 26 people survived but at least 49 others remain missing. Another coast guard official, Lt. Col. Olwan al-Qameri, said the search was still underway Monday. Citing an unnamed coast guard official, Yemen's state-run SABA news agency reported that the boat capsized due to strong winds and that all those on board — including women and children — fell into the water. The shipwreck was the latest sea disaster involving African migrants seeking a better life in oil-rich Gulf countries. Thousands of people each year seek to make the perilous voyage from Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia to Yemen and on to richer Gulf countries as they flee poverty and insecurity in search of work.

Cipher case: Pak's caretaker Govt approves jail trial of Imran, his aide

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
Pakistan's caretaker government on Monday approved the jail trial of former prime minister Imran Khan and his close aide ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in a case against them for allegedly leaking state secrets and violating the laws of the country. Both Khan, 71, and Qureshi, 67, are currently detained in the Adiala jail on judicial remand. The case is based on alleged violation of the Official Secrets Act while dealing with a communication by the embassy of the country in Washington in March 2022 and it was launched in August this year by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). The summary for the jail trial of Khan and Qureshi in the Adiala jail due to security concerns was moved by the Ministry of Law and the cabinet gave its assent to it. The ministry stated in the summary that it had issued a no-objection certificate (NOC)



Khan has been in the Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi after he was shifted there on September 26 from the District Jail Attock where he was taken after arrest on August 5 following conviction in the Toshakhana case. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu, and Pakistani envoy Asad Majeed Khan last year. Khan, who served as prime minister of Pakistan from August 2018 to April 2022, is accused of misusing the contents of the cipher to build a narrative that his government was ousted due to a conspiracy hatched by the US, a charge denied by Washington. Khan and Qureshi have pleaded not guilty to the charges. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on September 30 presented the charge sheet against Khan and Qureshi who signed its copies. The FIA invoked in the charge sheet sections 5 and 9 of the Official Secrets Act which may lead to a death sentence, or two to 14 years' imprisonment if convicted. Khan was ousted through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022. More than 150 cases have been registered against Khan since his ouster from power.

Nepal Govt bans Tiktok

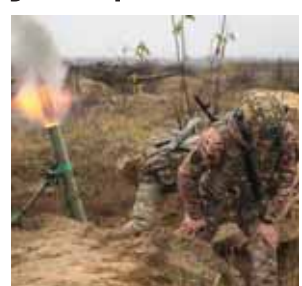
PTI ■ KATHMANDU
The Nepal government on Monday decided to ban the Chinese-owned social network platform Tiktok, citing its negative effects on social harmony. According to government spokesperson and Minister for Communication and Information Technology, Rekha Sharma, Monday's Cabinet meeting decided to prohibit Tiktok's use. The decision to ban Tiktok will be implemented through the Ministry of Communication and IT, she said. The Nepal government decided to ban Tiktok due to its negative effects on social harmony, The Kathmandu Post newspaper reported. A Cabinet meeting on Thursday made it mandatory for social media sites such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Tiktok and YouTube, among others, to open their liaison offices in Nepal. Although freedom of expression is a basic right, a large section of society has criticised Tiktok for encouraging a tendency of hate speech, the government said. In the past four years, 1,647 cases of cybercrime have been reported on the video-sharing app, the report said. The Cyber Bureau of the Nepal



Police, Ministry of Home Affairs, and representatives of Tiktok discussed the issue earlier last week. Monday's decision is expected to be enforced following the completion of technical preparations, it said. Sharma clarified the decision to shut down Tiktok will be implemented promptly by setting a specific deadline. However, Nepali Congress General Secretary Gagan Thapa expressed reservations about the decision. "The government's decision to ban Tiktok is wrong; the gov-

Germany's support for Ukraine to be 'massively expanded' next year

AP ■ BERLIN
Germany's aid for Ukraine will be "massively expanded" next year, the foreign minister said on Monday as Kyiv heads into its second winter since Russia launched its full-scale invasion. Germany has become one of Ukraine's top military suppliers since the war started in February 2022, sending material that includes tanks, armoured personnel carriers, air defence systems and Patriot missile systems. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said as she arrived on Monday at a meeting with European Union counterparts that, even as Europe grapples with the war between Israel and Hamas, it's still important to "face the geopolitical challenge



here". She said that will include helping Ukraine through the coming winter months and "our support will be massively expanded for next year". Over the weekend, the Bild am Sonntag newspaper reported that Chancellor Olaf Scholz's governing coalition wants to increase Germany's military aid for 2024 from the 4 billion

euros initially planned to 8 billion euros (USD 8.5 billion). It said parliament's budget committee will need to sign off on the plan later this week. Officials haven't confirmed that. But, asked about the report in an interview on Sunday with ARD television, Defense Minister Boris Pistorius rejected the suggestion that it's due to fears the US could reduce its support. Pistorius said that, based on this year's experiences, the idea was to avoid having to seek more funding if the money available is used up quickly. "Right now, as Ukraine has to continue its fight and at the same time part of public attention worldwide is directed more toward Israel, this is a strong signal to Ukraine that we won't leave it in the lurch," he said.

US, South Korea sharpen deterrence plans

AP ■ SEOUL
The United States and South Korea on Monday updated a bilateral security agreement with the aim of more effectively countering North Korea's evolving nuclear and missile threats. The move followed high-level military talks in Seoul, where the allies also discussed enhancing three-way defense exercises with Japan and improving information-sharing on North Korean missile launches. US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin was in Seoul for annual security talks with South Korean military officials, including Defence Minister Shin Won-sik, which were focused on boosting nuclear deterrence against North Korea. They also talked about how the allies could coordinate over broader geopolitical issues, including Russia's war on Ukraine and China's regional assertiveness, Austin said. Tensions between the Koreans are at their highest point in years as the pace of both North Korea's weapons tests and South Korea's combined military exercises with the United States have intensified in a cycle of tit-for-tat. During their Security Consultative Meeting, Austin and Shin signed a new version of their countries' Tailored Deterrence Strategy agreement, which was revised for the first time in a decade to address the growing threat of the North's military nuclear programme. Shin said the new document spells out that the United States would mobilise its full range of military capabilities, including nuclear ones, to defend the South in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack. He also said the document will provide a template for the allies to strategise how South Korea



could assist US nuclear operations in such events with its conventional capabilities but didn't elaborate further. "Our deterrence commitment to the ROK remains ironclad — that includes a full range of our nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities," Austin said at a news conference, referring to South Korea's formal name, the Republic of Korea.

Arriving in South Korea over the weekend, Austin earlier met Shin during a three-way meeting with Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara, who participated in the talks through online video. They agreed to start as planned a real-time information sharing arrangement on North Korean missile launches in December. They also agreed to set up multi-year plans in coming weeks to enhance their trilateral military exercises, South Korea's Defence Ministry said. Austin also on Sunday met Yoon, who expressed satisfaction over the increased consultations with Washington over nuclear deterrence plans and the more frequent deployment of advanced US military assets to the Korean Peninsula in past months, which he described as crucial for keeping the North's nuclear and missile threats in check.

