

Democratic values bind India, U.S., says Blinken

Modi welcomes Biden's commitment to strengthening ties

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Democratic values and free citizenry bind India and the U.S. together, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said here at the end of talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday.

The two sides discussed cooperation on a wide range of issues, including Afghanistan, countering COVID-19, the Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad. During his day-long visit to New Delhi, Mr. Blinken also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, members of civil society and a representative of the Dalai Lama.

After meeting Mr. Blinken, who is the third member of the Biden administration to visit India, Mr. Modi said he welcomed U.S. President Joe Biden's "strong commitment to strengthen the India-U.S. strategic partnership that is anchored in our shared democratic values and is a force for global good".

After the bilateral talks, Mr. Blinken and Mr. Jaishankar told mediapersons about their conversation on "shared values" of democratic freedoms.

"The relationship between our two countries is so important and so strong be-



Sharing views: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday. ■ AFP

cause it is a relationship between our democracies. One of the elements that Americans admire most about India is the steadfast commitment of its people to democracy, pluralism, to human rights and fundamental freedoms," Mr. Blinken replied to a question about whether he had raised a recent "backslide" in India's human rights record. Mr. Blinken pointed at the free press and independent judiciary as part of the "self-correcting mechanism" that he said could repair challenges to any democracy.

Mr. Jaishankar said he had responded to the U.S. concerns on the issues with a number of points, making it clear that the "quest" for a more perfect democracy applied to both the U.S. and India.

He said the Modi government's policies "of the last few years" had been done to "right wrongs done historically", and that while freedoms are important, they should not be "equated with the lack of governance".

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 10

A PIVOTAL FORCE ► PAGE 13