

# India, Uzbekistan to deepen defence, counter-terrorism ties

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IN THE first concerted effort from New Delhi to open strategic communication channels, India on Monday broadened defence and counter-terrorism cooperation with Uzbekistan.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held bilateral talks with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the two sides agreed to hold joint military training exercise in the area of counter-terrorism, cooperate in the field of military education and military medicine, set up Joint Working Group to support and sustain enhanced, mutually-beneficial defence-related activities. They

agreed to set up a defence wing at Uzbekistan embassy in Delhi.

The two countries have also decided to institute a regular dialogue on Afghanistan.

Both Delhi and Tashkent share the view that countering terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is important for sustainable peace and security in Afghanistan. The two countries also expressed continued support for reconstruction and revival of the country. Sources also told *The Indian Express* that officials from both sides were in agreement on the root causes of the situation in Afghanistan.

"They discussed the situation in Afghanistan and... reiterated support for efforts of the government and the people for a gen-

uine Afghan-owned, Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace and reconciliation process that would allow for a peaceful, secure, united, inclusive and prosperous nation," a joint statement issued after the meeting said.

The two sides signed 17 pacts in the sectors of defence, agriculture, science and technology and space, among others, which Mirziyoyev termed as "historic".

"We have had very comprehensive discussions. We have taken a long-term view to deepen the strategic partnership between the two countries," the statement quoted Modi as saying. According to the statement, the PM said a stable, democratic, inclusive and prosperous Afghanistan was beneficial for everyone.