

India, Uzbekistan upgrade ties, agree on uranium deal

Uzbekistan is at the heart of India's engagement in Central Asia, says PM as the two nations elevate relations to comprehensive strategic partnership and set a \$5 billion annual trade target by 2030

Press Trust of India

TASHKENT

India and Uzbekistan on Sunday decided to elevate their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership and set a target of \$5 billion in annual trade by 2030 following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

The two sides inked 11 agreements for boosting engagement in several key sectors, including mining and tourism, and agreed to establish a framework for long-term supply of uranium from Uzbekistan to India in line with cooperation in the civil nuclear energy sector.

The talks focused on expanding cooperation in areas of trade, investment,



Hand in hand: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Tashkent on Sunday. ANI

infrastructure, critical minerals, mining, defence and security, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, health, information technology, ayurveda, digital public infrastructure, including UPI, and education.

"We are celebrating the 15th anniversary of our strategic partnership. I am

delighted that, on this special occasion, we are elevating our ties to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership," Mr. Modi said.

"We will move forward by setting concrete goals within this framework," he said. Mr. Modi said both sides would also elevate

their existing joint commission from the level of secretaries to that of ministerial level.

Mr. Mirziyoyev said Uzbekistan was determined to boost ties with India in diverse sectors. "We are aiming to advance cooperation in sectors such as energy, culture, critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, jewellery, and agriculture," the Uzbek President said. The current volume of bilateral trade between the two nations is over \$1 billion.

"Uzbekistan is at the heart of Central Asia and is at the heart of India's engagement in the region," Mr. Modi said.

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PM VISITS MEMORIAL

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India and Uzbekistan agree on uranium deal

A joint statement said they agreed to expand cooperation in field of critical minerals through the implementation of joint projects in geological exploration, mining, mineral processing, and the development of integrated value chains.

On trade and investment, he said issues relating to market access, banking, payment systems and connectivity will be addressed in a structured way. "The close defence and security cooperation between our two countries reflects our deep mutual trust. In the future, we will promote direct linkages, co-production, and co-development between our defence industries," Mr. Modi said. "We believe that terrorism, extremism, and separatism pose serious challenges to the entire region."

A Letter of Intent for the restoration and conservation of the Buddhist sites of Fayaz Tepa and Kara Tepa in Uzbekistan was also agreed upon. These ancient Buddhist monasteries in southern Uzbekistan highlight how Buddhism spread along the Silk Road and flourished in Central Asia.

The two sides announced a commercial pact was firmed up between NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL) and Uzbekistan's National Interbank Processing Centre JSC to enable UPI apps of India to scan Uzbekistan's national QR (UZQR) for making merchant payments in the Central Asian nation. The announcements included a grant of \$1 million for afforestation in the Aral Sea region.

AMID SHIFTING GEOPOLITICS, WAR IN WEST ASIA

Modi at SCO today, will hold talks with Putin, may meet Xi

Look forward to advancing India's vision for region, says PM ahead of Bishkek gathering

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, August 30

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is expected to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek Monday where leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation are gathering for a two-day summit amid shifting geopolitics and the conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia.

Modi reached Bishkek from Tashkent Sunday night. This year marks 25 years of the SCO. For India, the Bishkek gathering is a lead-up to the BRICS summit in New Delhi on September 12-13. Both Putin and Xi are expected to attend the summit.

Officials said that while a bilateral meeting with Putin has been slotted, Modi and Xi are expected to meet each other during the summit.

Calling the SCO an "important organisation", Modi said,

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PM Narendra Modi receives the 'Order of Highest Friendship' from Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in Tashkent, Sunday. PTI

Delhi & Tashkent discuss long-term uranium supply to India, upgrade relations

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ELEVATING THEIR ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership, India and Uzbekistan Sunday discussed establishing a framework for long-term supply of uranium to India and set a bilateral trade target of USD 5 billion by 2030.

These were the key take-aways after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev

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E. EXPLAINED

Expanding footprint

India's engagement with Central Asia has been on the rise. Security cooperation has deepened in the wake of Taliban rule in Afghanistan. India has to deal with China's influence in the strategically vital region, establish connectivity projects and meet its growing energy needs.

PM-Putin

“India has been an active and constructive member of the SCO since 2017. I look forward to advancing India’s vision for the region, anchored in Security, Connectivity and Opportunity, and to working with fellow members for a region free from the scourge of terrorism, separatism and extremism, which continue to threaten peace and stability in our neighbourhood and beyond.”

“I also look forward to meeting (Kyrgyzstan) President Sadyr Zhaparov and other SCO leaders, and to attend the Opening Ceremony of the 6th World Nomad Games, a celebration of the rich living heritage of Central Asia that India holds in deep respect,” he said.

The SCO comprises 10 member states: Belarus, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; 15 Dialogue Partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Egypt, Cambodia, Kuwait, Laos, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Sri Lanka; two Observers: Mongolia and Afghanistan.

The war in West Asia is ex-

pected to figure in the discussions, especially since Iran is a member of SCO.

India has been a member of the SCO since 2017 and Delhi’s priorities in SCO are based on what it had espoused in the 2018 summit – a ‘SECURE’ SCO, i.e., Security; Economy and Trade; Connectivity; Unity; Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity.

The war that followed US and Israeli strikes against Iran in February this year has become a global talking point on the respect for “sovereignty and territorial integrity”. For India, connectivity with Central Asia, through Iran, has been a subject of great interest.

In Bishkek, Iran will be in the room with Saudi Arabia and UAE and all eyes will be on the dynamics between these countries. For India too, this will be important. These countries are going to be in Delhi for the BRICS summit where the Indian side will try to bring some consensus on the war in West Asia. The BRICS Foreign Ministers meeting in Delhi in May had ended with no consensus on the war.

It will be important to see how the Indian delegation navigates given that Pakistan too will be present at the SCO. India has always put forward its policy of

“fight against terrorism, separatism, extremism”, describing them as “three evils”.

During the period of its membership, India has held the chair of the SCO Council of Heads of Government in 2020 and of the SCO Council of Heads of State during 2022-2023. And, one of India’s priorities has been “Central Asia as Core of SCO”, and that will be tested in Bishkek again because Tajikistan has put its hat in the ring for the UNSC non-permanent member’s elections for 2028-29. India is also contesting for the same spot.

Given that the theme of the SCO Heads of State Meeting this year is “25th anniversary of the SCO: strengthening stability, expanding cooperation for further joint development”, the Indian side will be looking at Kyrgyz Republic’s negotiating strategy to come up with joint documents.

According to sources, there are 27 documents proposed to be signed/adopted, including the Bishkek Declaration, Protocol to Amend SCO Charter, MoUs (Climate, Information Sphere, and Artificial Intelligence, Protocol to amend the Agreement on Combating Crime, Regulations on Universal Center and Anti Drug Center, Regulations on SCO ‘Partner,’ Cooperation between SCO and African Union.

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Tashkent

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Modi was conferred Uzbekistan's highest award for foreign leaders, Oliy Darajali Do'stlik Order, which he dedicated to the "enduring bond" between India and Uzbekistan.

"Uzbekistan is at the heart of Central Asia, and at the heart of India's engagement with the region. There is a deep alignment between the thinking and aspirations of India and Uzbekistan. Youth, innovation, inclusive growth, and modern technology lie at the core of both 'Yangi Uzbekistan' and 'Viksit Bharat 2047'. Guided by this shared vision, we are working for the welfare of the people of both our nations," Modi said.

"This year marks the 15th anniversary of our Strategic Partnership. On this special occasion, we have decided to elevate

our relationship to the status of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Today, we have prepared an ambitious agenda to advance this new phase of our partnership with rapid momentum and concrete results," he said.

Mirziyoyev said his country is determined to boost ties with India in diverse sectors. "We are aiming to advance cooperation in sectors such as energy, culture, critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, jewellery and agriculture."

"We will prepare roadmaps for each of these sectors; specific teams from India will visit here, and our teams will travel to India, enabling us to clearly define our objectives in these fields," he said.

In his remarks, Modi said, "We will also establish a long-term arrangement for the supply of uranium."

Later, Sibi George, Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs, said, "Positive discussions have happened on long-term arrangement of

supply of uranium to India. We are closing in on the signing of an agreement very shortly." New Delhi has been looking to procure uranium from Uzbekistan civilian nuclear power programme.

The two sides also set a target of USD 5 billion bilateral trade by 2030. India is among the top 10 trading partners of Uzbekistan. Bilateral trade in 2025-26 stood close to USD 1 billion.

On defence and security ties, he said, "The close defence and security cooperation between our nations reflects our deep mutual trust. In the future, we will promote direct linkages, co-production, and co-development between the defence industries of both countries."

On terrorism, he said, "We believe that terrorism, extremism and separatism pose serious challenges to the entire region. Maintaining a policy of zero tolerance against these threats has been, and will continue to be, our shared resolve."

According to the joint statement, the leaders "unequivo-

cally condemned terrorism, including cross-border terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, reiterated zero tolerance approach to terrorism and rejected justification of terrorism on any ground whatsoever". "Leaders called for concerted actions against terrorist entities and for disrupting terrorism financing networks, safe havens and infrastructure. Leaders stressed that those responsible for terrorism should be held accountable and their perpetrators, their backers, facilitators and affiliates should be brought to justice," it stated.

"The Leaders expressed satisfaction with the activities of the Joint Working Group on Military Cooperation, wherein new avenues of cooperation in the defence industrial domain are being explored. They welcomed the successful conduct of the Uzbekistan-India Joint Military Exercise 'Dustlik', the latest of which was held in Namangan Region, Uzbekistan, in April 2026," it said.

MEA spokesperson Randhir

Jaiswal said, "The talks focussed on expanding cooperation in the areas of trade and investment, infrastructure, critical minerals, mining, defence and security, innovation, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, health, information technology, digital public infrastructure including UPI and education, among others."

"Both leaders witnessed the exchange of several MoUs and agreements covering a wide range of areas, including mining, culture, education, tourism, ayurveda, among others. A Letter of Intent for the restoration and conservation of the Buddhist sites of Fayaz Tapa and Kara Tapa in Uzbekistan was also agreed upon," he said. A total of 11 pacts were signed during the visit.

Besides 11 pacts, announcement of a grant of USD 1 million for afforestation in the Aral Sea region, 100 Lal Bahadur Shastri Scholarship for Hindi Language Scholarships and a ICCR Sanskrit Chair at Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies were made.

Nepal floods: 788 dead, over 2,500 still missing; efforts under way to rescue those trapped in tunnels

Sanjeev Satgainya

KATHMANDU

Four days after the flood in Nepal, the death toll in the disaster touched 788, and 2,502 people remained missing even as the preservation of recovered bodies became a challenge for the authorities who continued with the rescue efforts.

'Need freezer units'

Foreign Secretary Amrit Bahadur Rai said Nepal urgently required freezer units and DNA-testing kits, warning that the bodies must be preserved and identified quickly to prevent decomposition and contain public-health risks.

Mr. Rai said the government is "putting all our resources at disposal in relief and rescue operations."

"We have requested several countries," he said.

"Some other immediate requirements, like airtight



Nature's fury: A house lies partially submerged following the flash flood in Nuwakot district of Nepal. PRABHAT KHANAL

bags for storing bodies, have started to arrive and other equipment are expected to arrive soon," he added. More than 900 workers are missing from hydropower sites, and officials believe around 100 people trapped inside tunnels are alive.

Mr. Rai said experts from India, China, and South Korea have joined the Nepal Army's efforts in rescuing these workers.

The Nepal Army said that after floodwaters receded, its rescue teams resumed efforts to locate tunnel entrances using drilling machines, excavators, hydraulic cutters and other heavy equipment.

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DATA POINT

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788 dead, over 2,500 still missing in Nepal

Authorities also began mass burials of unidentified bodies in Chitwan, around 200 km from Rasuwa, on Saturday after collecting DNA samples so that the remains can be exhumed if the victims are identified. Madan Lama, an information officer at the District Administration Office in Chitwan, said around 170 bodies had been buried since Saturday, including 96 on the first day, after collecting DNA samples.

An Indian forensic team specialising in DNA testing and analysis arrived to support health officials in collecting samples.

India's External Affairs Ministry said in New Delhi on Saturday that more than 275 Indians and 128 persons of Indian origin remained missing. On Sunday, it shared a list of 149 people who were rescued. The Nepal Tourism Board said 591 foreign nationals remain missing and 289 have been rescued, including 180 Indian and 89 Chinese nationals.

Earlier on Sunday, authorities warned of possible fresh flooding and urged residents in affected districts to remain on high alert as water levels rose in the Bhotekoshi River.

Prakash Pokharel, a geologist and researcher at the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Authority, said flood warnings had been sent to people's phones. He said the immediate risk later eased after the rain receded and a barrier lake that had formed in Gyirong county in Tibet fully drained.

The flood, triggered by a glacial collapse, left hundreds missing on the Tibet side, where Chinese authorities reported 16 deaths and 546 people unaccounted for. It remains unclear whether some of those missing on the Chinese side are Nepali citizens. Asked about the status of Nepali citizens in the disaster-hit area of Tibet, Mr. Rai said China has provided a list that will be updated.

The disaster had struck on Wednesday when a glacial collapse near the Nepal-China border in Rasuwa district triggered a massive surge of water, mud and debris through the Bhotekoshi and Trishuli river systems.

All workers shifted to VB-G RAM G; e-KYC not mandatory, says Rural Development Ministry

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Rural Development Ministry on Sunday said that every worker registered under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), irrespective of whether e-KYC of their job cards has been completed, has been migrated to Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM G].

In a statement, the Ministry also underlined that pending e-KYC does not prevent a worker from demanding or receiving employment.

The statement was issued in response to *The Hindu's* report on Saturday, which flagged that the



So far, e-KYC has been completed for 15.89 crore workers, including 10.27 crore of 10.84 crore active workers. FILE PHOTO

job cards of 57 lakh active workers have not yet completed the e-KYC process.

95% e-KYC completed

So far, e-KYC has been completed for 15.89 crore workers, including 10.27 crore of 10.84 crore active workers, which is approximately 95%.

While not disputing the numbers given in *The Hindu* report, the government said that e-KYC is a database-authentication measure and not a precondition for exercising the statutory right to demand employment under VB-G RAM G.

"Every worker regis-

tered under MGNREGA, irrespective of whether e-KYC has been completed, has been migrated to VB-G RAM G. Pending e-KYC does not prevent a worker from demanding or receiving employment. An appropriate exception mechanism is also available to facilitate employment demand and the provision of work for workers whose e-KYC is pending," the statement said.

Simple process

The Ministry further said that e-KYC of workers is the responsibility of the concerned State and Union Territory governments and is being undertaken to strengthen authentication and maintain an accurate and credible worker database.

"The process is simple and can ordinarily be completed in less than 30 seconds," the statement said.

2.11 cr. offered jobs

The government further underlined that every worker who has demanded employment has been offered work as per demand, and around 2.11 crore workers have so far been offered employment under VB-G RAM G. Simultaneously, the Centre has advised States to expeditiously complete e-KYC of all active workers.

"The Ministry is continuously supporting and monitoring States/UTs in this exercise while ensuring that no willing worker is deprived of employment merely because e-KYC is pending," it said.

• DEFENCE

Why India took 16 years to acquire fire-and-forget Javelin missiles

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, August 30

AFTER YEARS of deliberation, India finalised a deal last week to purchase the Javelin anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) system from the US through the latter's Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process.

The journey to procure the Javelin system, which began in 2010 and has now culminated after several paused attempts, highlights the lengthy and complicated nature of major defence acquisitions in India.

Initial interest

In August 2010, then Defence Minister A K Antony told Parliament that the government intended to procure third-generation Javelin ATGMs through the FMS route, which would also include a transfer of technology (TOT). The move was fuelled by a shortage of ATGMs in the Indian Army's inventory and a delay in the original timelines of indigenous ATGM systems developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

The idea was to replace the ageing



Milan-2T and the Konkurs missile systems in use with the Army. Javelin was highlighted as the choice to immediately fill up the ATGM gaps, after the US forces actively showcased them during the 2009 bilateral exercise "Yudh Abhyas".

But the acquisition was eventually shelved owing to stringent technology transfer restrictions imposed by Washington. The US refused to share the missile's core seeker technology under a 100% TOT model,

The Javelin anti-tank guided missile system.

LOCKHEED MARTIN

causing India to pivot to Israel's Spike missile system — manufactured by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd — in 2014.

Deal for Spike

In 2014, India decided to go ahead with the Spike ATGMs as against the Javelin, after it was understood that it could offer greater flexibility of technology transfer and local production. The Defence Acquisition Council cleared the purchase of over 8,000 Spike ATGMs. But this also ran into long contract negotiations. Concerns over the Spike's performance in trials, technology transfer, and progress in India's man-portable ATGM programme led to a cancellation of the \$500 million order in 2017.

The deal was revived in 2018 following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit, but was subsequently shelved again. India, however, undertook an emergency purchase of a limited quantity of the fourth-generation Spike-LR ATGMs in 2019 to meet an immediate operational gap.

In August 2023, Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems Pvt Ltd — a joint venture between Indian conglomerate Kalyani

Group and Rafael — said it had bagged a Rs 287.51 crore order from the Defence Ministry for the supply of the missile systems.

Back to Javelin

The Javelin reappeared in India-US strategic discussions at a time when defence cooperation between both countries had deepened. A US Congressional Research Service report, updated in 2025, noted that co-production discussions involving the Javelin were ongoing.

In February 2025, the Javelin Joint Venture — a partnership between US defence majors Lockheed Martin and Raytheon — said it was exploring co-assembly and co-production opportunities of the Javelin in India. It signed a memorandum of understanding with Bharat Dynamics Limited.

The discussion gained pace after Operation Sindoor in May last year. By July 2025, India was negotiating to get the Javelin systems, both as an emergency procurement and through a long-term contract — the latter likely involving co-production of the weapon systems. In November 2025, Washington officially cleared the sale.

As glaciers melt, prepare for Himalayan challenge

THE HIMALAYAN mountain system is the ecological mainstay of large parts of the Indian Subcontinent. It is the wellspring of rivers and shapes the monsoon. Its forests support biodiversity, and the region is home to several pilgrimage centres. However, the range has become increasingly fragile in recent years. The mounting toll of the flash floods that struck Nepal last week after a glacier collapse near the country's border with China sent torrents of water down the Bhote Koshi River is a grim reminder of the region's precarity. It underscores how a disturbance in higher altitudes can swiftly become a downstream catastrophe.

Several studies, including IPCC reports, have documented the retreat of glaciers in the rapidly warming Himalaya. The melt-water accumulates in glacial lakes, many of which are held back by unstable dams of boulders. These lakes can suddenly burst, sending enormous volumes of water and debris down narrow valleys. Landslides, avalanches and erratic rainfall can trigger cascading events. The Nepal disaster appears to have involved an ice-and-rock avalanche. It is not an isolated incident. A glacial lake outburst in Nepal's Everest region led to massive flooding two years ago. A 2021 study by scientists from IIT Roorkee, IISc Bengaluru, University of Dayton, University of Graz, and the Universities of Zurich and Geneva flagged instability around South Lhonak Lake in Sikkim. The warning went largely unheeded — the lake burst two years later, killing at least 50 people.

The expansion of roads, hydropower schemes and tourism facilities in the valleys has added another layer of risk. Such projects are necessary for livelihoods, energy security and connectivity. But infrastructure development must factor in the idiosyncrasies of mountain ecology. Environmental assessments must account for the cumulative risks from infrastructure projects, while construction standards must reflect the requirements of an unstable landscape. Glaciers need continuous monitoring, with information shared across borders because Himalayan rivers and hazards do not respect political boundaries. Some efforts are underway. India is accelerating early-warning systems for the region's lakes, while Nepal and China share information on Himalayan ecology. But last week's disaster is a stark reminder of how much more needs to be done. The Bhote Koshi's warning system, designed to track the gradual movement of glacial water, could not detect the sudden surge of debris. The experience of Switzerland, where advance monitoring and evacuation helped limit casualties after a glacier collapse destroyed much of the Blatten region in 2025, offers useful lessons. The geology of the Alps and Himalaya is, of course, vastly different. Even then, the salience of sharing expertise across mountainous regions cannot be understated. These imperatives must now be integrated into technology transfer programmes under climate pacts.

China, Bangladesh to start 2+2 dialogue soon: Kobir

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Bangladesh-China two-plus-two dialogue will commence in the “very near future”, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Humayun Kobir announced in Dhaka on Sunday. Mr. Kobir announced this soon after the Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen called on him to discuss a number of projects including the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project (TRCMRP).

“The groundwork for the 2+2 engagement is currently being laid for further interactions. So yes, it will commence at a mutually convenient time in the very near future,” Mr. Kobir told members of the media at the Foreign Ministry. Mr.



Humayun Kobir

Kobir, who was inducted into Ministry on August 21, said the dialogue will include diplomacy and defence verticals at the level of Minister of State and then will move to the Foreign Minister-level.

“We have not fixed any specific dates yet. However, discussions will take place at that level,” he said. The announcement came two months after Prime Minister Tarique Rahman

visited China where the two sides discussed major projects including the plans on the Teesta river. Mr. Kobir described China as an important development partner and reaffirmed Bangladesh’s commitment to ‘One China policy’.

In his meeting with the Chinese Ambassador, Mr. Kobir discussed a number of items that were taken up during Prime Minister Rahman’s China visit including the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project (TRCMRP).

They also discussed the China-Myanmar-Bangladesh corridor project, China Economic and Industrial Zone (CEIZ) and signing of a commercial contract for modernisation of Mongla Port.

Mojtaba calls for Muslim unity, says countries must identify 'real enemy'

The solution to the problems of Islamic nations is unity of words, friendship, and cooperation on the path of goodness, says Iran's Supreme Leader; he calls for national cohesion, advising citizens not to allow differences to arise among themselves

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei on Sunday called on Muslim countries in the region to unite against the United States and Israel, in a written message issued six months on from the start of the West Asia war.

Mr. Khamenei, in power since shortly after his father Ali Khamenei was killed at the start of the war on February 28, has yet to be seen in public since his appointment, and authorities have not released any video or audio of him.

"The solution to the problems of the Islamic na-



Motorists drive past a billboard depicting Ali Khamenei handing the country's flag to Mojtaba Khamenei, in downtown Tehran. AP

tions is unity of words, friendship, and cooperation on the path of goodness," he said on Sunday as Shia Muslims marked the birthday of the Prophet

Mohammed. "Anyone, in any position, who does anything that leads to division among Muslims and creates conflict in the Muslim community, knowingly

or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, has served the purpose of the enemies of Islam," he added, according to his official website.

The Supreme Leader called on the rulers of regional countries to "recognise your real enemy, understand its plan, and confront it", referring to the U.S. and Israel.

During the war, Iran targeted U.S. military bases across the West Asia including in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. Relations with those nations have since soured.

Mr. Khamenei, who has

the final say on major state policies, also called on Iranian officials and citizens to put aside differences and come together against Israel and the U.S. "Again, this servant's advice to the Iranian people is to not allow any differences to arise among themselves in any way," he said, echoing remarks made in another statement on Friday.

He also called on Friday for the gradual de-dollarisation of the Iranian economy and for boosting economic production to support growth following months of a U.S. naval blockade and years of crippling sanctions that have hit livelihoods.

Icelandic voters reject a proposal to restart negotiations to join the EU

Associated Press

REYKJAVIK

Iceland's voters rejected restarting negotiations to join the European Union more than a decade after previous talks ended, the national broadcaster reported on Sunday, in a referendum that pitted concerns about geopolitical stability against keeping national control of Iceland's prized fisheries.

Opponents defeated the measure by a margin of 52.8% to 47.2%, RUV reported. The capital of Reykjavik was the only area in the island nation of 400,000 people where a majority supported the referendum.

The vote on Saturday



A supporter of the 'No' campaign displays a placard against the EU ('EU - no thanks'), during a rally in Reykjavik on Thursday. AFP

was held in the shadow of repeated threats by U.S. President Donald Trump's to control nearby Greenland. Although Iceland is a NATO member, supporters said European solidarity would provide greater protection if Mr. Trump ever

made similar threats toward the volcanic island.

Iceland's left-leaning coalition government, elected in 2024, moved up the EU referendum it had planned for next year after Mr. Trump mistakenly named Iceland four times

while speaking about his designs on Greenland.

Prime Minister Kristrún Frostadóttir, who campaigned in support of the measure, said she hoped the result would not divide the nation.

Yes-or-no question

Voters faced a simple yes-or-no question: Should Iceland resume accession negotiations with the European Union?

Turnout was high with more than 82% of the eligible 270,000 voters casting ballots.

The count through the night had the nation on edge as the "Yes" campaign took an early lead before results swung in favour of the opposition.