

## Govt to spend €11.1 million on rehabilitating Portugal's rivers, streams

News wire

Lisbon: Portugal's AD government pledged this week to spend €11.1 million rehabilitating 10 rivers and streams "from the north to the south of the country," covering 214 kms. According to information provided by the press office of the Ministry of the Envi (Page-8)

## US embassy in Pakistan reduces appointment wait time for these types of visas

Celina Ali

Islamabad: The United States Embassy in Pakistan this week reduced appointment wait times for specific visa types from 440 to 230 days. Through this move, authorities aim to facilitate the visa application procedure for several categories, including student visas, business visas, (Page-9)

# Shehbaz Sharif vows to follow China model for economic success

Celina Ali

ISLAMABAD, August 2: Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif this week pledged to revamp Pakistan's economy by emulating China's model. The PM stressed that the objective would be to achieve similar economic success on a smaller scale. Speaking to a 12-member Chinese delegation led by Wang Fukang, the prime minister said that during his recent visit to China, he requested President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Qiang to send experts to Pakistan. "The goal is to model Pakistan's economy after China's. Today, these experts are here, and we're confident that progress will follow soon."

Welcoming the delegation by emphasizing that China and Pakistan were eternal friends, with a friendship that knew no bounds, he emphasized that industrial cooperation was crucial at this time and expressed hope that it could be shifted to Pakistan. He believed that joint ventures and cooperation would create a win-win situation. He said the delegation's visit was highly reassuring, and expressed hope that it would be both useful and productive for Pakistan. He anticipated that it would enhance bilateral arrangements in areas such as industry, agriculture, economic zones, and help increase Pakistan's capacity to produce agricultural items in high demand in China. He noted that Pakistan could meet Chinese requirements by exporting high-quality goods and exploring opportu-

nities in mining and minerals, IT, and export zones. He also suggested relocating certain industries to Pakistan due to China's shift towards more advanced and sophisticated industrial ventures. He stated that the federal cabinet has decided to offer free visas to Chinese citizens starting August 14, demonstrating Pakistan's commitment. He emphasized that Sino-Pak relations were higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the oceans. The delegation, comprising representatives from 10 different Chinese ministries, was visiting Pakistan to enhance cooperation across various sectors. They will provide input on Chinese investment, the second phase of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and boosting Pakistani exports. Additionally, they will review and offer recommendations on IT, agriculture, industry, investment, energy, minerals, special economic zones, and communication.

The PM said that Pakistan has implemented robust measures to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens, with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal overseeing these efforts. The government was committed to maintaining stringent security and preventing any breaches. Those responsible for any harmful acts will be held accountable. He conveyed deep sorrow on behalf of his government and people for the loss of Chinese citizens in Bisham a few months ago. The Prime Minister maintained that those responsible for the killings of Chinese citizens have been arrested and will get exemplary punishment. He mentioned that he has held several meetings with law enforcement agencies, the Interior Secretary, and NECTA. Speaking on the occasion, delegation head, Wang Fukang stated that technical cooperation would further strengthen Pak-China strategic relations and expressed gratitude to Pakistan for its hospitality.



The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi, Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Finance Muhammad Aurangzeb, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Fatmi, Coordinator to the Prime Minister Rana Ahsan Afzam, and Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong, along with other senior officials.



## A greener getaway? Danish capital tests climate reward scheme for tourists



Covert Report

Copenhagen: Tourists visiting Copenhagen this summer are encouraged to participate in unusual kinds of vacation fun, including plucking floating trash from the Danish capital's waterways, cycling to museums instead of going by car, or volunteering at an urban garden. All these activities are part of a new, four-week pilot project called CopenPay that rewards tourists for "climate-friendly actions." "We must turn tourism from being an environmental burden into a force for positive change," said Mikkel Aarø-Hansen, the CEO of tourist board Wonderful Copenhagen, which runs the scheme. "We want visitors to make conscious, green choices and hopefully end up getting even better experiences while they visit," Aarø-Hansen said in a statement earlier this month. Among the over 20 attractions participating in the project is the environmental non-profit organization GreenKayak which offers water tours for tourist volunteers. They can paddle through Copenhagen's 17th-century waterways aboard green-colored kayaks, plucking floating trash from the water. The reward? A free two-hour litter-picking cruise. One main sailing lane heads out to the Baltic Sea. "When you are in the ocean, you get invested in the ocean. So, I hope that that will keep inspiring people to not leave trash in the ocean," Elisabeth Friis Larsen, a spokeswoman for GreenKayak, said. Elsewhere, tourists can trim flower beds, harvest coriander or feed chickens at Oens Have urban garden, then stay for a complimentary lunch. Or get free ice cream if they cycle or take public transport to the country's National Museum instead of going by taxi or rental car to reduce emissions. Visitors to SMK, Denmark's National Gallery, can attend workshops where they're taught how to transform plastic waste into jellyfish sculptures. "The whole idea was that people should bring their own plastic waste. And out of that, the children will build a jellyfish," explained workshop leader, artist

Susanne Brigitte Lund. Copenhagen's climate-friendly vacationers' project — which began on July 15 and is set to wrap up on August 11 — comes as the world's top destinations are grappling with the burdens of mass tourism. Copenhagen also gets its fair share of tourists with more than 12 million overnight stays last year. Amid demonstrations and protesters firing water pistols at visitors, Barcelona City Hall announced last month that it would not renew any tourist apartment licenses after they expire in 2028. Italy's Venice recently extended a pilot program charging day trippers a five-euro (\$5.45) entrance fee to the fragile lagoon city. And the town of Fujikawaguchiko recently constructed a large black screen to block the view of Japan's iconic Mount Fuji. The reason: misbehaving foreign tourists. On a recent busy summer weekend, tourists thronged Copenhagen's historic Nyhavn harbor area, as sightseeing ferries squeezed down its narrow waterway, packed with smartphone-snapping passengers. Tourist Fiona Veira from northwest Spain said the CopenPay scheme is a "really good idea," but only if visitors have the time. "It depends how long you're going to stay in the city. But if you're here for more than two days then yeah," she said. "It's also a really nice way of seeing, interacting with the city." Veira was aware of the city's climate-supporting programs, but did not participate in any of them because she was visiting Copenhagen for one day only and didn't have enough time. Many others, however, admit to leaving their green principles at home, once summer holidays come around. "I think about it when I'm at home, but when I travel, I do think about convenience more," said Caroline Kraneffuss from Boston. University of Copenhagen researcher Berit Charlotte Kaas said the CopenPay scheme is interesting because it "puts some action to the concept of sustainability." "It's interesting to give this hands-on experience," she said. But in order to address the true environmental problems of mass tourism, tourism authorities must look to the source — transportation. "We need to work more on aviation fuels, maybe better train service, to avoid the short distance flights," she said.

## Rubina Khalid emphasizes zero tolerance against misbehavior with women beneficiaries

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid during her visit to the Peshawar Tehsil Office this week emphasized that there will be zero tolerance against any misbehavior with the women beneficiaries. The purpose of the visit was to monitor the arrangements at the deserving and review the facilities provided for the deserving women receiving Kafaalat and educational stipends. Rubina Khalid engaged with the beneficiaries, listened to their issues, and provided guidance, particularly to the needy and elderly women in the program. In her conversation with the media, Senator Rubina Khalid reflected on the vision of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto for the welfare of poor women in Pakistan, which led to the establishment of BISP. "The program was founded by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto while she was in exile in Dubai and was implemented by President Asif Ali Zardari in 2008," she recounted. Highlighting the transparency measures in place, she noted that BISP payment centers were set up following instructions from President Asif Ali Zardari. Rubina Khalid also announced that President Asif Ali Zardari directed the opening of bank accounts for deserving women to streamline their access to stipends. Stressing the importance of skill development and technical education, she stated, "Empowering women with skills and technical education is crucial for their economic independence and the overall development of our



society." She called upon the media to play a proactive role in creating awareness among beneficiaries about the program's benefits and guidelines. Rubina Khalid issued a stern warning to beneficiaries to ignore any communication from numbers other than the official 8171 and cautioned against handing over their National Identity Cards to anyone to prevent fraud. She reaffirmed BISP's dedication to protecting the rights of women and ensuring they receive their due support with dignity.

# China-Pakistan JVs to boost expansion of Pakistan's leather industry

Mia Shah - Gwadar Pro

Beijing: Pakistan and China are forging joint ventures expected to propel Pakistan's leather industry to new heights. These collaborations involve setting up manufacturing plants, tanneries, and R&D centers dedicated to leather product innovation, according to Khalid Waleed, advisor to the Pakistan Tanners Association. In June, the Association of Guangdong Shoe Manufacturers visited Pakistan to explore relocating their operations to the country. The Prime Minister's Office Media Wing reported that these companies are prepared to invest between USD 5 and 8 billion in the local industry. The Prime Minister highlighted significant opportunities for the relocation of industries, including textile, leather, and footwear sectors from China to Pakistan. Pakistan's leather industry, a crucial export-oriented sector and the second most dynamic after textiles, has recently faced competitive challenges. It is the only country in the region to see a decline in leather exports, signaling a critical issue within the industry. In fiscal year 2022-2023, Pakistan's leather exports fell by 7%, dropping to USD 887 million from USD 953 million the previous year. This downturn was paralleled by an 18% decrease in other leather products and an 11% reduction in leather garments, as noted by the Pakistan Leather Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association. China, a leading global producer and



exporter of leather and leather products, manufactures over 4 billion square feet of leather annually. In 2023, China exported leather, fur, and related products worth USD 96.98 billion, according to the China Leather Industry Association. The synergy between China's production capabilities and Pakistan's advantages—

including high-quality leather and lower labor costs—presents significant cooperative potential. Pakistan's market also shows strong consumer demand for fashionable footwear and bags. Furthermore, preferential import policies for these products create a conducive environment for joint ventures under the China-Pakistan

Economic Corridor (CPEC). These joint ventures are poised to boost the growth of leather-related small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Pakistan, providing opportunities for modernization and

technological upgrades through Chinese investment and support. The enhanced infrastructure and trade routes under CPEC offer Pakistani leather products improved access to the vast Chinese market, promising a boost in sales and increased market presence.

# Pakistan's exports to China witness increase of 33.67% in FY 2023-24

Gwadar Pro

Islamabad: Pakistan's exports of goods and services to China witnessed an increase of 33.67 percent during the twelve months of the fiscal year (2023-24) as compared to the exports of the corresponding period of last year, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported this week. The overall exports to China were recorded at \$2.707 billion during July-June (2023-24) against exports of \$2.025 billion during July-June (2022-23), SBP data revealed. On a year-to-year basis, exports to China also surged by 12.59 percent from \$136.546 million in June 2023, against the exports of \$153.745 million in June 2024. Pakistan's overall exports to other countries witnessed an increase of 11.53 percent in FY 2023-24, from \$27.875 billion to \$31.090 billion, the SBP data mentioned.



# Pakistani business officials draw inspiration from China-aided poverty alleviation projects

Mia Shah - Gwadar Pro



Beijing: A group of 19 officials, business representatives, and experts in charge of economic development cooperation from Islamabad, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab participated in a two-week seminar from July 11-24 in China. The seminar, hosted by China Center for Urban Development of the National Development and Reform Commission, is one of the 2024 bilateral training programs supported by China aid. From China's land system and the development history of China's urbanization, to the background and experience of China's relocation for poverty alleviation, as well as China's industrial poverty alleviation policies and practices, food security, smart agricultural development, and rural public services improvement, the trainees gained a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of China's poverty alleviation process. In Zunyi and Bijie City of Guizhou Province in southwest China, the participants gained first-hand experience of China's poverty alleviation and rural revitalization efforts. The delegation experienced batik and embroidery techniques of the Miao ethnic group in Zhijin County, which has a history of more than 2,000 years. The delegation visited local production workshops and folk villages to gain a detailed understanding of the output, value, and market of local traditional

handicrafts, and how they improve the employment and income of local people. In Huaawu, once a village mired in poverty, now it embraces clean and tidy roads and charming antique houses. All the participants spoke highly of its transformation and marveled at its successful organic connection between poverty alleviation and rural revitalization, as well as the integration of rural ecological revitalization, industrial revitalization, and cultural revitalization. During the exchange and discussion session, the participants introduced the work content of their units and relevant information about their work and business. The officials shared the progress of poverty reduction, improvement of public services, and promotion of sustainable development in their provinces. They also discussed the prospects of China-Pakistan cooperation in the field of poverty alleviation within the context of the "Belt and Road" international cooperation. "I am deeply grateful to China for opening its doors and sharing with us its excellent experience and fruitful results in poverty alleviation policy initiatives. Pakistan faces enormous challenges in rural development and poverty alleviation, but after witnessing China's achievements in the fight against poverty, we are more confident than ever that we can overcome these challenges by combining and applying experiences we have learned in China," one of the attendees said.

# Italy: Venice limits tour groups to 25, bans megaphones in fightback against overtourism



### Covert Report

Rome: It's about to get just a little bit quieter in Venice, at least that's the hope of the city council, which has banned tour guides from using megaphones and limited the groups to 25 people. Exceptions to the changes, which came into force this week, include children under 2 years of age, and visiting students and educational trips. The new rules were supposed to come into effect in June but the introduction was delayed because many guides had already booked group tours.

Tourists and guides who break the 25-person limit or use loudspeakers will face fines of approximately \$50-\$100. The rules also apply on the Venetian islands of Murano, Burano and Torcello.

The move is part of a multi-pronged effort by the local government to take back some control of the city after it saw record-breaking tourism numbers in the wake of the pandemic.

In April, Venice became the first city in the world to charge a €5 (around \$5.40) entrance fee, under a pilot program that ran for 29 days and netted the city more than \$2.5 million. There were protests on the day the charge was introduced, with locals waving banners and holding up their passports in anger at the city being put behind a barrier, like a theme park or museum.

However, the city has said it will double the charge when it reinstates it, probably later this year. The city says the fee was paid 485,062 times during the pilot. Venice is not alone in its battle against overtourism. Anti-tourism protests have been sweeping across Europe this summer, with demonstrations taking place in the Netherlands, Greece and Spain. Officials on the Greek island of Santorini are considering limiting the number of cruise ships that can dock off its shores.

And in early July, protesters marched through popular tourist areas in the Spanish city of Barcelona, spraying unsuspecting visitors with water pistols while chanting "tourists go home."



The Italian Ambassador to Pakistan H.E. Marilina Armellini



# For South Pacific, China is opportunity, not threat

**Kalinga Seneviratne**

I spent about 18 months at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji in 2022 and 2023. During that time I observed that the Pacific media's coverage of Asia was dismal.

I have noted that the Australian media in particular, as well as some of their think tanks, spread the message that Australia and New Zealand and their Western allies are the region's traditional friends and partners, and they are here to help the Pacific.

This lecturing is tempered with China-bashing rhetoric, where China is painted as an outsider infiltrating the region to exploit the people and the resources.

When I hear this rhetoric, I often think, what about Papua New Guinea, one of the most mineral-rich countries in the world, whose mineral resources have been exploited by Australian and Western mining companies for over half a century, and what have the Papua New Guineans got in return? They are still citizens of one of

the poorest countries in the world.

I still remember the very first international news feature I did in the early 1990s. It was about how the American Tunaboat Association was plundering the fish resources of the South Pacific without paying any licensing fees to Pacific Island countries because the Americans don't recognize the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea.

They still don't, while they lecture about protecting a "rules-based order" in the Pacific.

**RULES-BASED ORDER: WHOSE ORDER?**

A popular mantra of Americans and their allies today is that they are protecting a "rules-based order" that is under threat from the rise of China and its partnership with Russia. However, it is seen as mired in hypocrisy rather than reality outside the Western bloc.

The United States and its European allies have been imposing unilateral sanctions and breaking international law at will -- the latest being efforts to take some 300 billion U.S. dollars of Russian money held in Western

banks to help pay for the arms supplied to Ukraine.

The rules they are talking about are rules they have set themselves, to rig the international economic and political order, to help themselves. Now, a majority of the world's nations, known as the "Global South," are challenging these rules.

The problem is that the West only knows how to lecture to others; it doesn't know how to listen and respect other points of view.

**DEBT TRAPS: WHOSE TRAPS?**

Ever since the West established the so-called Bretton Woods institutions -- the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the West has set the terms of international lending to the so-called Third World, their former colonies.

For half a century, the West has used these debts, which they call "aid," employing the IMF to impose structural adjustment policies to dictate economic and foreign policies to poor countries.

At the turn of the century, when a rising China started to lend money to developing countries, especially to build infrastructure such as roads, ports and railways which are designed to link cities not only domestically but across regions, the West got alarmed. It no longer controlled the global development agenda that favors it, especially after China introduced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013.

Australia too has realized that. In 2015, the Northern Territory government granted a 99-year lease over the Port of Darwin in Northern Australia to China's Landbridge Group. After a security review, just before Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited China in November 2023, the Australian government announced on its website that the deal could go through. Darwin is slated to be Australia's link to the BRI and Asia.

South Pacific countries are in its rim and to benefit from it, the Pacific needs to link up with the region through connectivity, media exposure, cultural interactions and intellectual ideas.

In June, Chinese Premier Li Qiang visited New Zealand and Australia. In New Zealand, the leaders of the two countries discussed enhancing their partnership through improving trade in services and goods, and intellectual exchanges. The same was agreed in Australia between the two countries.



While Australia and New Zealand are trying to benefit from China's economic rise, calling it a "comprehensive strategic partnership," their leaders and think tanks come to the Pacific to warn the region of Chinese "debt traps" and security threats.

**PACIFIC LINKING UP WITH ASIA**

In a recent commentary in the China Daily, Chinese political science professor Li Wei argued that China-U.S. competition is set to be a long-term three-dimensional battle, with diplomacy, capital flows and technological innovations playing pivotal roles.

In terms of diplomacy, he points out that the U.S. system is based on its military alliance system, "which is relatively exclusive and rigid." In contrast, China's diplomacy is founded on a global network of partnerships that focus on cooperation, "which is more open and flexible."

It is the latter that the Pacific Island leaders and policy-makers need to understand. When China builds a port in the Pacific it needs to be looked at in terms of linking up with the BRI, and China's aid to the region needs to be seen in terms of building partnerships.

In 2023, I did a story for the South China Morning Post on how Chinese agriculture specialists are training Fijian farmers in rice cultivation. There are no loans here and it is an aid project building partnerships between the Chinese and Fijian agriculture sectors introducing Asian know-how.

When China offers to build a fishing harbor in Daru, Papua New Guinea, alongside a Chinese-

built fish processing plant to export seafood products to China, it is again building partnerships between the Pacific fisheries sector and the Chinese market. But, when this was announced in 2021, the Australian media was up in arms, seeing it as building a naval base 200 km from its shores.

China has built a 414 km-long railway in Laos, a former French colony. I took this railway in May this year and it is an impressive technological feat built through rugged mountain terrain.

It is through a direct experience of Asia that you can have a balanced view of the geopolitics in the region, and help develop win-win situations.

Right across Southeast Asia, the Chinese are building railways which would open up a huge market for goods, services and tourism that could be bigger than the European Union's market in years to come.

**The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the positions of Covert Magazine.**

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# 'Radiant' Chinese youth dazzle Paris with Olympic spirit

**Global Times**

As the hashtag "Radiant post-2000s" have started to take responsibility" gains traction on Chinese social media, young Chinese athletes are making youthful waves in Paris. On the global stage of the Olympics, these athletes embody the spirit of the games with their exceptional performances, breaking records and achieving miracles through their determination and perseverance. They pay tribute to the Olympic motto of "Faster, Higher, Stronger, Together" with their best competitive state, setting records and making miracles with a spirit of daring to fight, never giving up, and striving for national glory. Not only are they showcasing their competitive prowess, they are also promoting unity and friendship with athletes from around the world. Whether it's through their sharp or lively responses to media inquiries or their heartwarming interactions with competitors of various countries, these young athletes are presenting China's confident and open image with a "radiant" image.

The outstanding performances of a big team of athletes born in the 1990s and 2000s are undoubtedly making the Chinese delegation a prominent presence at the Paris Olympics this year. The average age of the 405 Team China athletes in this Olympics is just 25, with 11-year-old skateboarder Zheng Haohao as the youngest athlete at this Olympics. These young athletes, called "Brother kid" or "Sister kid" by netizens, have lived up to the expectations, from the first gold medalist Huang Yuting, to the record-breaking Pan Zhanle. The young Chinese athletes have shown their strength at this Olympics, with 10 of the first 13 gold medals won by the "post-2000s." In addition to leaving a mark in terms of results, they are also infusing the competition with their unique style and characteristics.

China's young athletes are more confident, leaving a strong impression on some foreign media staff who have

been paying attention to China for a long time. These young athletes are undoubtedly powerful shapers of this impression. Domestic audiences also praise the "post-2000" athletes for being "unyielding and resilient," and are moved and inspired by their sporting spirit and inspirational stories. Some joke that watching them compete requires a strong heart, as they often fall behind by large margins before turning the tables with their fighting spirit. Zheng Qinwen staged a comeback against world number one Iga Swiatek and Fan Zhendong's semi-final victory after a tough start are just two examples. These breath-taking moments showcase the competitive spirit, mental toughness, and strong will of these athletes.

In the arena of competitive sports, aspiring for gold and chasing victory is natural and expected, but from these young athletes, we also see many valuable qualities that transcend gold medals and result. These young Chinese athletes increasingly manage to combine the courage to fight hard with the enjoyment of the competition and the process. "Winning glory for the country" is the phrase these young athletes say most often before and after competitions, and the waving of national flags in the stands has become a source of spiritual strength for these athletes during their arduous battles. Of course, this Olympics has seen some of our athletes being put under considerable pressure due to inaccurate foreign media reports and political manipulation by a few countries. Even so, our young athletes have demonstrated with nearly perfect performances what it means to let their strength and adherence to rules speak for themselves, embodying the spirit of fair competition in sports.

On the Olympic stage, we have also seen young athletes' multidimensional understanding and practice of the Olympic spirit and competitive sports. Although Zhang Yufei didn't win a gold medal, she proved that Chinese athletes are not flashes in the pan. Yang Siqi, 15, the first Chinese athlete to compete in Olympic surfing, expressed her desire to "show the vitality and confidence of Chinese youth on the broader ocean." The Chinese women's rugby team exclaimed, "We made it to the top six!" All this demonstrated the charm of the Olympics that goes beyond winning and losing. Some young



athletes see the Olympics as a stage for promoting their niche sports, while others see it as a platform for exploring the world. These attempts are continually deepening the connection between China and the Olympics, and between the Olympic spirit and ordinary people.

From the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics to the 2024 Paris Olympics, from the "post-1950s" to the "post-2000s" generation, Chinese athletes have consistently built upon and passed down their legacies at the Olympics. Time and again, their resilient performances have proven that "the younger generation truly has immense potential." These young athletes carry on the fine traditions of Chinese sports on the Olympic stage, while also showcasing a new image of confidence, vitality, and openness in contemporary Chinese sports. They are confident yet ambitious, patriotic yet global-minded, eager for success yet accept-

ing of failure. In fact, these confident and open young Chinese athletes are a natural reflection of the confident and open Chinese sports community and the entire country, as well as a manifestation of the deep integration of China and the Olympic spirit.



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# Secretary General Commonwealth Patricia Scotland says Pakistani youth full of rich potential in creativity, innovation



She mentioned that the passion, energy, equity and knowledge at the symposium gives great hope. Commenting on her visit to National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), she said that she had witnessed innovation, creativity and solutions that gave her joy, help and hope to fight climate crisis with the possibility of a bright future. "This youth bulge is the richest gold reserve in this part of the country. The Commonwealth nations represent one-third of the world whereas that demographic diversity give us a chance to grapple with the problems of tomorrow. AI will add \$15.7 trillion to the global economy, and we should ensure our youth take benefit of it," she mentioned. The Commonwealth had developed a consortium with the Silicon Valley to develop an AI Academy to train the youth as mankind amid AI revolution have the chance to be master or mastered by it. Chairman, PMYP, Rana Mashood Ahmad Khan in his keynote address commended the Commonwealth Secretary General, Patricia Scotland for forging alliances among the member nations. He also commended the donors and partners for their support. "Youth empowerment is the way forward and the Prime Minister Youth Programme is running Green Youth Movement under which green clubs have been established in 137 varieties out of the total 268 universities which will be further rolled out at all educational levels," he said. Under the PMYP, he said the programme is educating youth and driving advocacy drive through them at the

community level. "Youth of Pakistan has to take a stand to keep house in order. The government is going to launch the National Volunteer Corps whose logo will be launched today by the Commonwealth Secretary General," he added. He further mentioned that 200,000 youngsters would be trained under the Corps for disaster management activities due to rising natural calamities intensity and frequency throughout the country. It would also engage the community at large on the lines of Green Youth Movement, he said, adding, "Youth must visit Pakistan youth portal to see government initiatives being launched for the younger generation. On the occasion, guest of honour, Prime Minister's Coordinator for Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam said the symposium like forums play a crucial role in giving voice to the youth. "Youth of Pakistan has great will to do and are committed to achieve any task, whereas it's important to have effective communication between parliamentarians and youth to share ideas and give voice to the younger people for solutions," she said. Romina Khurshid said international youth should join hands for collective whereas the Commonwealth can play a great role in driving climate agenda. She suggested the Commonwealth Secretary General to collaborate on educational scholarships imparting knowledge and exposure to talented youth to drive solutions to climate change. Earlier, in his welcome remarks, Executive Director, SDPI, Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri briefed the distinguished guests that the Institute is the oldest independent think-tank of Pakistan that represents itself as a shadow government due to its collaborative role as part of the solution and guiding the government for its course correction in the strategic and policy realms of economy, climate change, food security, international relations and others.

Dr Suleri underlined that major challenge of how policies like Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) will affect the future of nations like Pakistan as its exporters like other nations would be forced to share carbon emissions at every step of their export products. He also highlighted that it would affect countries like Pakistan having sovereign territories like EU as its export partners. Dr Abid Suleri mentioned that Artificial Intelligence (AI) and climate change will affect the job market of the future as many present-day knowledge and disciplines will become irrelevant. However, the Commonwealth secretariat can intervene as its 56 nations that are its member to workout collaborative efforts, he added. High Commissioner Canadian High Commission, Leslie Scanlon said youth perspectives needs to be centered while considering climate action as they are the most impacted due to climate change impacts. She added that the youth have the most effective and strong voices against climate inaction as they are disappointed of the role of their decision-making leaders for not addressing the vagaries of climate catastrophes effectively. She added that the youth need to be supported, whereas their climate education is crucial in this regard as Population Council report highlights lack of knowledge among disaster-hit population about causes of climate change. Resident Representative, UNDP, Samuel Rizk said its important to recognise youth role and concerns in efforts combating climate change. He said the youth interested in human security and sustainable development is important as climate change is going to be a formidable challenge in the future. At the conclusion, PM's aide, Romina Khurshid Alam, Secretary General Commonwealth, Patricia Scotland, Executive Director, SDPI, Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri and others launched the COP in My City project.

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Secretary General, Commonwealth, Patricia Scotland this week said the Pakistani youth full of rich potential in creativity and innovation are the key to brighten future and embrace climate resilience. She was addressing as special guest at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) jointly held symposium, titled "Driving the Change: The Dynamic Role of Pakistan's Youth and Civil Society in Climate

Resilience", in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) and the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination here at the Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Studies (PIPS). Secretary General Commonwealth, Patricia Scotland said the courage and equity of the youth would drive the future of the world amid climate crises. She said it's the first generation to face the worst impacts of climate change and the last to take action against climate change risks.

# High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri holds productive meeting with SBS chief James Taylor

**Covert Report** Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week had a productive meeting with the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) chief James Taylor. "Had an excellent meeting with Mr. James Taylor, Managing Director SBS. Discussed opportunities for enhanced collaboration - more Pakistani content including movies, TV drama serials, music, qawwali, tourism, and much more," the envoy posted on X. As Australia's most diverse broadcaster, the SBS holds a unique place in the Australian media landscape, inspiring all Australians to

explore, respect and celebrate our diverse world and in doing so, contributes to an inclusive and cohesive society. SBS is a modern, multiplatform media organisation with a free-to-air TV portfolio spanning six distinctive channels in SBS, NITV, SBS VICELAND, SBS Food, SBS World Movies and SBS WorldWatch; an extensive SBS Audio network providing over 60 communities with services in their own language; and an innovative digital offering, including SBS On Demand, available to audiences anytime and anywhere.



# Amb Asim Iftikhar Ahmad reaffirms support to Kashmiris' right to self determination

**Covert Report** Paris: Ambassador of Pakistan to France Asim Iftikhar Ahmad this week reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to support the Kashmiri people in achieving their legitimate right to self-determination. He was speaking at a webinar regarding Youm-e-Istehsal, marking the 5 years of India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019 in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Ther envoy called for making synergized efforts

across political, diplomatic, legal, and human rights fronts to promote and project the Kashmir cause effectively, with an emphasis on enhanced outreach by the diaspora to the international community. He said a just and peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, aligned with UN resolutions and the wishes of the Kashmiri people, is essential for regional peace and stability. The Ambassador urged the UN Security Council to fulfill its primary responsibility and ensure the implementation of its resolutions on Kashmir. While strongly condemning India's illegal actions of 5 August 2019, he said it is moral responsibility of the international community to bring an immediate end to Indian oppression, widespread atrocities and grave violations of human rights of the Kashmiri people. Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad rejected India's illegal actions and highlighted the continued determination of Kashmiris in their pursuit of self-determination and freedom from Indian occupation.



# Umar Rehman Malik acknowledges Fatima Jinnah's unwavering dedication, tireless contributions to Pakistan



**Abdullah Jan**  
 Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week acknowledged Mother of the Nation Fatima Jinnah's unwavering dedication and tireless contributions to Pakistan. "On the birth anniversary of Madar-e-Millat Fatima Jinnah, we pay rich tribute to her unwavering dedication and tireless contributions to Pakistan," he said in a statement.

**FATIMA JINNAH**



An active member & dedicated worker of **Pakistan movement**

She played a vital role along with her brother Quaid-e-Azam **Muhammad Ali Jinnah**, for the creation of Pakistan.

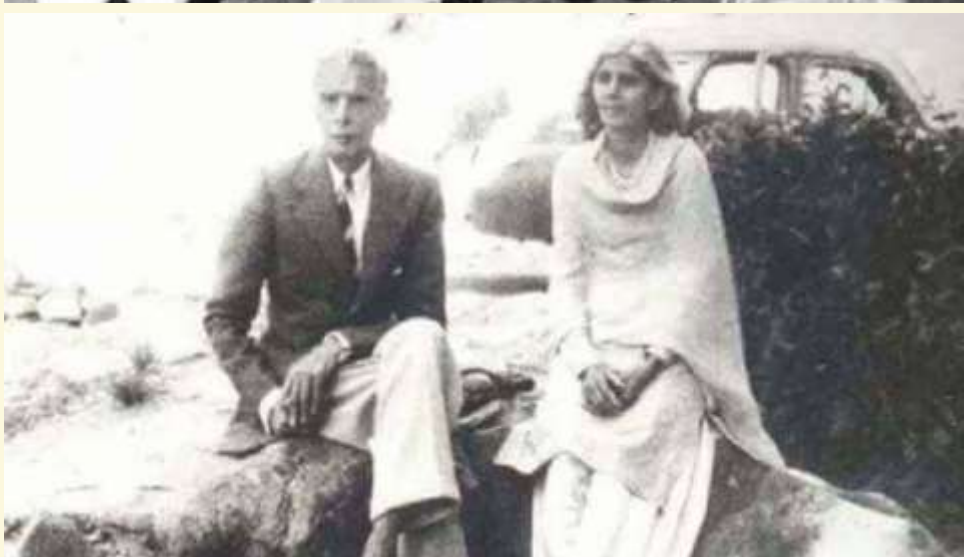
Mohtarma Jinnah particularly motivated the women of the subcontinent and supported them in the struggle for the creation of Pakistan.

Fatima Jinnah is still remembered for her passionate support for **civil rights** and **devoted struggle** in Pakistan Movement.

(31 July 1893 – 9 July 1967)



Umar Rehman Malik added: "As a pillar of strength for Quaid-e-Azam, she played a pivotal role in creating Pakistan and later championed democracy, freedom, and progress, carrying forward her brother's dream." Pakistan observed the 57th death anniversary of Fatima Jinnah, the revered sister of the nation's founder, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah this week. Her contributions to the Pakistan Movement remain unforgettable, with her enduring legacy celebrated through these solemn commemorations. The memorial service not only honoured her sacrifices but also reminded the nation of her unwavering dedication to the country's independence and development.



# Greece: Asylum procedure statistics 2023



unfounded," largely based on "safe country of origin" grounds. 3 444 inadmissibility decisions were made on "safe third country" grounds, predominantly regarding Türkiye. 29 885 cases remained pending at the first instance, with 14 142 of these awaiting interviews. Appeals for a second-instance procedure were numerous, with many receiving free legal assistance. Despite some procedural dismissals, the recognition rate at the second instance slightly increased, with more subsidiary protection granted: 10 973 appeals were lodged, with 6 892 receiving free legal assistance. 1 610 appeals were dismissed due to non-

rate (22.6% – an improvement on previous years), with many applications pending. The review process faces delays pending key legal judgments, with 1 589 judicial review applications pending at the time of publication. Greece saw a significant number of new arrivals via the Aegean islands and the Evros land border, with the Reception and Identification Service registering many people in reception procedures: 40 365 arrivals (7 079 via the Evros land border; 39 016 via the Aegean islands; 2 370 via other entry points). The Reception and Identification Service (RIS) registered 55 785 people in reception procedures. The majority of initial asylum applications were



**Newsire**  
Athens: In 2023 the asylum process in Greece was marked by significant activity, with a high number of asylum applications and an even higher recognition rate, highlighting the clear need for international protection for asylum seekers. This report looks at the monthly statistics published by the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, alongside figures provided in response to parliamentary questions. It is published by Refugee Support Aegean (RSA) and gives an overview

of key figures and trends within the Greek asylum system, focusing on initial and subsequent applications, procedural outcomes, and judicial reviews. Greece received a substantial influx of asylum seekers in 2023, with many initial and subsequent applications, particularly on the islands. A notable portion of subsequent applications included those following inadmissible initial claims: 57 783 initial applications were filed, primarily on the islands. 6 326 subsequent applications were lodged,

including 994 following inadmissible initial claims. Among these, 852 applications were subject to a €100 fee. The first-instance procedure had a high recognition rate, mostly granting refugee status. Many applications were rejected as unfounded or inadmissible, particularly those involving Türkiye as a safe third country. Key figures here include: 76.6% application recognition rate, mostly granting refugee status. 98% recognition rate in border procedures. 5 164 applications were rejected as "manifestly

appearance, and 1 523 due to late submission. 14.8% recognition rate at second instance, with a notable increase in subsidiary protection. Judicial reviews showed a moderate approval

rate. filed in Closed Controlled Access Centres on the Eastern Aegean islands and mainland Reception and Identification Centres. Asylum seekers were mostly Syrian, Afghan, and Somali. A significant percentage of applications were dismissed as inadmissible, mainly due to subsequent applications without new elements and on the basis of the safe third country concept, particularly regarding Türkiye. Border procedures were widely applied, often exceeding their intended scope. Many decisions that should have been processed under regular procedures were handled through border procedures: 7 662 decisions were made in border procedures, with a 98% recognition rate. 6 349 in-merit decisions in border procedures should have been processed under regular procedures. The Appeals Committee's decisions highlighted trends in dismissals and inadmissibility, focusing on subsequent applications and the safe third country concept. A large number of first and second-instance applications, along with judicial review cases, remained pending at the time of publication, indicating ongoing systemic challenges: 29 885 pending first-instance applications, with 14 142 awaiting interviews. 2 845 pending second-instance applications. Systematic postponements in judicial reviews, with significant cases pending before the Greek Council of State and the CJEU. Recognition rates remained high for major countries of origin, with almost universal acceptance for applicants from countries such as Palestine, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Iraq, and Somalia. Over 99% for Palestine and Afghanistan. Over 98% for Syria and Yemen. Over 95% for Sudan and Iraq, and nearly 90% for Somalia. Several critical legal issues, including the application of the safe third country concept and procedural rules, await resolution. The figures from 2023 highlight the emerging need for international protection among asylum seekers in Greece. With high recognition rates and significant procedural challenges, the Greek asylum system faces both opportunities and challenges in addressing the needs of those seeking international protection.



# Govt to spend €11.1 million on rehabilitating Portugal's rivers, streams

**News wire**

Lisbon: Portugal's AD government pledged this week to spend €11.1 million rehabilitating 10 rivers and streams "from the north to the south of the country," covering 214 kms. According to information provided by the press office of the Ministry of the Environment and Energy, the projects include

In the same note, the Ministry of the Environment and Energy added that interventions are being completed on another 97 kms of rivers, worth €3.4 million, financed by the Environmental Fund.

The government has set itself the goal of restoring "at least 500 kms of rivers and tributaries" by 2030, concludes Lusa.



restoration work on the River Tua (in the north east), Esteiro de Salreu (in the north, near Aveiro), River Arunca (in Leiria municipality), Ribeira de Carnide (also Leiria), River Cértima (Aveiro), River Lena (Leiria), Ribeira da Ferveça (Serra da Estrela area), Olhos da Ferveça (Coimbra/ Cantanhede region), River Zela (Viseu district) and the tributaries, Ribeira Espiçandeira (Viseu district), River Este (in north, running from Braga to Póvoa de Varzim), River Leça (in north), River Vizela (again north), Bugio (north) and Ferro (north).

The curious thing about this announcement is that not only there no interventions in the south of the country, as stated in the opening paragraph – but interventions in the rivers Vizela, Bugio and Ferro were equally announced by Fafe municipality last year in a €1 million investment backed by APA, Portugal's environment agency.

Lusa makes no reference to this, however, simply reporting that the announcement of these investments "comes on a day when the minister for the environment and energy, Maria da Graça Carvalho, is visiting various interventions (again all in the north) – in Braga, Porto, Maia, Águeda, Aveiro, Oliveira do Bairro and Tomar – worth €5.3 million.

The aim of rehabilitating the 10 rivers and streams is, according to the government, "to recover their original characteristics, after many years in which they have undergone profound changes".

The investment, coordinated by the Portuguese Environment Agency (APA), will be financed by the Environmental Fund, under the Ministry of the Environment and Energy, and by European funds.





# US embassy in Pakistan reduces appointment wait time for these types of visas

**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: The United States Embassy in Pakistan this week reduced appointment wait times for specific visa types from 440 to 230 days. Through this move, authorities aim to facilitate

the visa application procedure for several categories, including student visas, business visas, and family reunion visas, VisaGuide.World reports. Prior to this move, the US Embassy in Islama-

bad and Karachi processed nearly 10,000 applications monthly. With the new initiative, this capacity is expected to increase further. Those who have sent their visa applications will find it noteworthy to know that the embassy has



launched a system for case reviews through emails. This implies that every application will be handled individually while decisions will be made usually within three to four working days after the interview. Regarding fees, the embassy explained that it charges only the regular application fee in accordance with the global visa application fees. Official statistics show that the number of US visas granted to Pakistani nationals has significantly surged over the past three years. According to the country's Bureau of Consular Affairs, 107,183 Pakistanis obtained US visas in the 2023 fiscal year, representing a 32 percent increase compared to 2022. Meanwhile, the highest share of visas granted to Pakistani citizens in 2023 were for tourism and

business purposes. In addition to the overall figures, the US saw an increase in the number of Pakistani students, as revealed during a recent informative session on Facebook by the US Embassy in Pakistan. More specifically, the number of active Pakistani students in the US surged by 16 percent. More than 10,000 Pakistani students were studying in the US for the 2022/2023 school year, a 16 percent increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, during the 2023 fiscal year, the US granted 3,848 student visas to Pakistanis, including F1 and F2. With the reduced waiting appointment wait times, the number of student visas is expected to increase further.

# OEC to send English language teachers to Japan



**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC) an attached department of Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD) would export Assistant (English Language) teachers at Japanese Public Schools.

An official source said that our esteemed client in Japan urgently seeking around 30 an Assistant English Language Teachers who meets the prescribed qualifications and experience as following bachelor's degree or equivalent with one year experience and age limit 24 to 45." He said that male and female both could apply for this

job and salary package could be exceeded 220,000 yen and free transportation. He told that this job will be on one year contract base from April 7, 2025 to March 24, 2026.

The eligibility criteria includes no criminal record, fit to work (no transmission disease, with proof of medical certificate 03 months prior to deployment), proof of financial reserve, a minimum of 600,000 yen in reserve after payment of flight tickets if the applicant is on the Private Residence Track, whereas with a minimum of 300,000 yen in reserve after payment of flight tickets if the applicant is on the shared accommodation track.

The candidate should include with CV a 'Self-Introduction Video' (up to a maximum of 03 minutes), ability to attend training sessions conducted by M/s Borderlink in Pakistan and arrive at the location(s) in Japan determined by M/s Borderlink not later than March 31, 2025.

The applicants must be able to pay upfront costs for apartments, ranging from 250,000 to 350,000 yen and must agree to share housing for a minimum of 01 years from date of employment.

Preference areas include basic Japanese skills, local teaching certificate, TESOL, TOEFL, and/or CELTA certification. The interested candidate could apply via OEC's website. ]

For further help, the applicants can reach out through their email or can call them at this number 0311-0011-632.

The applicant will submit/attach the deposited Bank challan amounting to Rs. 1000/- generated at the time of online application submission, closing date: 5 August 2024.



GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN  
MINISTRY OF OVERSEAS PAKISTANIS & HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT  
OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT CORPORATION  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor EOB House Mavee Area G-10/4, Islamabad  
Date: 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2024

Advertisement No. 132

Urgently Required Assistant (English Language) Teachers at Japanese Public Schools

Our esteemed client in Japan urgently seeks an Assistant English Language Teachers who meets the prescribed qualifications and experience listed below:

#	Job Title	Positions	Qualifications	Experience	Age	Gender	Salary
1.	Assistant English Language Teachers	30	Bachelor's Degree or Equivalent	01 Year	24-45 Year	Male-Female	220,000 Yen Transportation Included

**Terms & Conditions:**

- Period of Contract: One year (April 7, 2025- March 24, 2026)
- 12 years of education in English (medium of Instruction)
- No criminal record
- Fit to Work (no transmission disease, with proof of medical certificate 03 months prior to deployment)
- Proof of financial reserve
- A Minimum of 600,000 yen in reserve after payment of flight tickets if the applicant is on the "Private Residence Track" whereas, a minimum of 300,000 yen in reserve after payment of flight tickets if the applicant is on the "Shared Accommodation Track"
- Include with CV a 'Self-Introduction Video' letter (up to a maximum of 03 minutes)
- Ability to attend training sessions conducted by M/s Borderlink in Pakistan and arrive at location(s) in Japan determined by M/s Borderlink on later than March 31, 2025
- Private Residence Track: applicants must be able to pay upfront costs for apartments, ranging from 250,000 to 350,000 yen.
- Shared Accommodations Tack: applicants must agree to share housing for a minimum of 01 years from date of employment

**Preference Areas:**

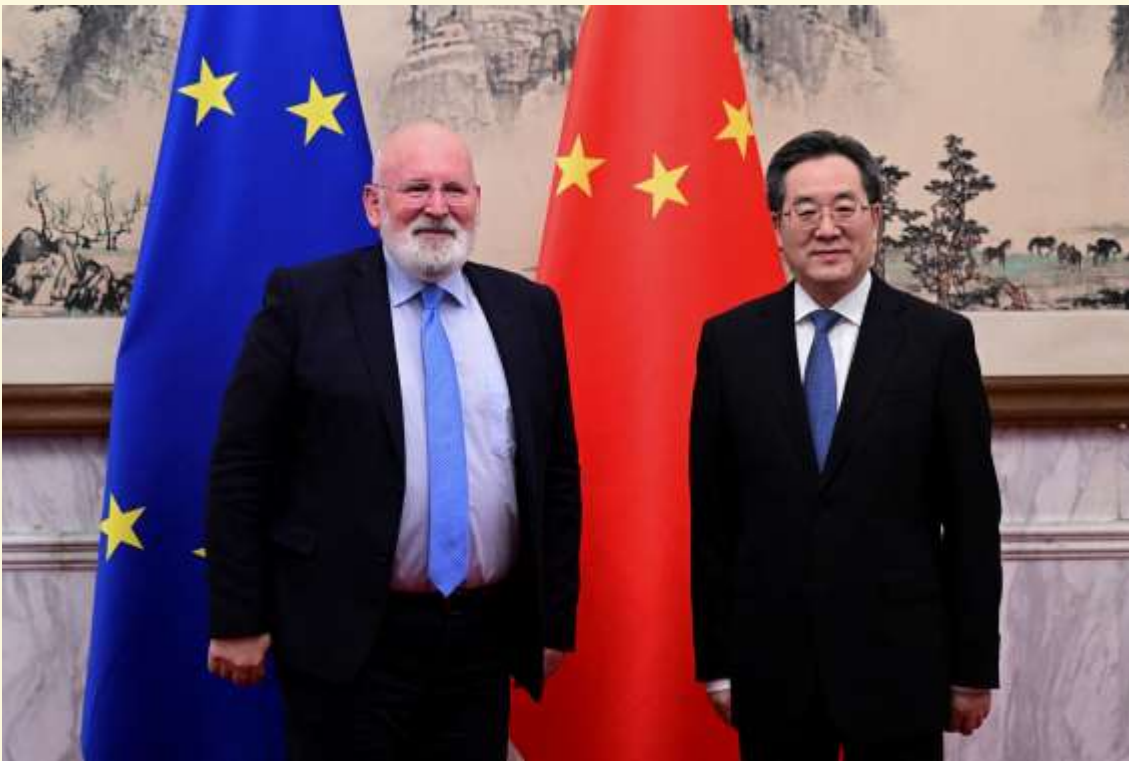
- Basic Japanese skill
- Local teaching certificate
- TESOL, TEFL, and/or CELTA certification

**How to Apply**

- Job Portal: Interested applicants can apply via OEC's website (<https://oec.gov.pk/>)
- Help-Desk Team: for technical support, contact the OEC-Helpdesk team at UAN: 0311-0011-632 or Email: [helpdesk@oec.gov.pk](mailto:helpdesk@oec.gov.pk)
- The applicant will submit/attach the deposited Bank challan amounting to Rs. 1000/- generated at the time of online application submission

Closing Date: 5<sup>th</sup> August 2024.  
Operations & I.T Wing, Overseas Employment Corporation, Head Office, Islamabad

# EU prepares for COP29 showdown with China over climate aid



**Zia Weise**  
 Brussels: The European Union plans to pressure emerging economies such as China to contribute funding for climate action in developing nations at global negotiations in November, according to POLITICO.  
 Financing is at the center of this year's United Nations climate conference, known as COP29, with developing countries clamoring for a significant increase in funds to help them cut emissions and prepare for the consequences of global warming.  
 The current funding pledge of \$100 billion a year — which runs until 2025 and needs to be replaced with a new target at COP29 — is financed by countries classified as industrialized when the U.N. climate treaty was drawn up in 1992.  
 The EU is the largest contributor and intends to continue providing funding, but wants countries that have become wealthier in the past three decades to chip in as well, according to a draft of the bloc's COP29 position obtained by PO-

LITICO.  
 In the document, dated July 26, the EU calls for an expansion of the target's "contributor base" reflecting the "evolving nature of respective capabilities" since the 1990s.  
 "Such broadening of contributions provides an opportunity to increase the finance to support the most vulnerable countries and communities and reflects strong global solidarity towards them," the draft paper continues. "In this context [the EU] CALLS on all countries according to their financial capabilities, including emerging economies, to contribute to the new goal."  
 The statement does not mention a specific country, but European diplomats and officials have sought to push Beijing in particular to contribute funding, given China has not only become the world's second-largest economy but also the top emitter of planet-warming greenhouse gasses.  
 Last week, senior German climate negotiator Jochen Flasbarth told POLITICO that rich countries would only step up funding if China



starts paying up.  
 The draft position also suggests that the EU may push to limit the list of possible beneficiaries or direct more money to countries that are particularly vulnerable to global warming, rather than allow all countries classified as developing to access the same level of funding.  
 The bloc "stresses the importance" of setting up a new funding target "while taking into account the needs and priorities of the most vulnerable countries," such as island nations and members of a group known as the Least Developed Countries. The document shows that an earlier draft referred more broadly to "the needs and priorities of developing countries."  
 The fight reflects a dispute last year over wheth-

er China would donate to a fund to support damaged communities. China stared down the demands from the U.S., EU and their allies, despite the UAE breaking ranks and becoming the first country from outside the traditional donor group to give climate finance through an official U.N. fund.  
 That fund garnered around \$655 million. The showdown in November scales up the financial stakes many times over — with some developing countries setting \$1 trillion annually as their starting negotiating point — and is seen by European diplomats as a moment to fundamentally break with what they view as an outmoded distinction between rich and poor.  
 It is not only China that is seen as an able contributor. Wealthy Gulf states, with their own huge legacy of climate damage via sales of their fossil fuel reserves, such as Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia, are likely to be pressured to stump up. Singapore will likely receive pressure, as well.  
 In the draft document, the EU also suggests that the bulk of the new target can't come from national budgets, underlining that "private investments will have to undertake the largest share of the required investment in low emissions, resource-efficient and climate-resilient development."  
 The draft position, which was discussed by EU member country officials on Tuesday, is still expected to change before the summit starts in Azerbaijan on November 11. Officials will try to refine the text in September before handing the matter over to ministers.  
 EU finance ministers are expected to agree on the funding element of the position at their meeting on October 8, with the final COP29 position signed off by the bloc's environment ministers on October 14.



# UK to help resolve climate, water management issues: High Commissioner Jane Marriott



**Celina Ali** Islamabad: The British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott this week called on Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan at the Governor's House in Lahore. In the meeting, strengthening of bilateral relations and tackling the challenges of climate change were discussed. Governor informed the British High Commissioner about the efforts to solarise Governor's House Lahore

British High Commissioner Jane Marriott said that the Great Britain would cooperate with Pakistan in all possible ways to resolve the issues of climate change and water management. Speaking on the occasion, governor said that Pakistan attaches great importance to relations with Britain. He said that British cooperation in education, health, social and other fields is commendable. Climate change is a global issue, he said, adding despite



and universities in the province. having minimum contribution to carbon emissions, Pakistan has

suffered a lot due to climate change. He said that climate change is also having adverse effect on the agriculture sector of the country. Punjab Governor said that federal and provincial governments are working on various projects to deal with the issue of climate challenge. Pakistan has plenty of renewable energy resources, he said and added that there was a need to bring people towards solar energy to deal with the energy crisis. He appreciated the water management programme started in different districts of Punjab with the cooperation of Great Britain.



"Life just doesn't hand you things. You have to get out there and make things happen. That's the exciting part."  
- Emeril Lagasse

"So long as the memory of certain beloved friends lives in my heart, I shall say that life is good." - Helen Keller

# Italy-funded asylum centres in Albania to be fully operational by September



**Covert Report**  
Rome: Italy's controversial plan to open migrant processing centres in Albania has been delayed. Officials cite construction issues at the Gjadër site primarily due to the region's hot weather. Initially set to open this week, the centres are expected to be operational in several weeks, according to Italian Cabinet Secretary Alfredo



Mantovano. The agreement signed last year by Italy's Premier Giorgia Meloni and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama aims to process the asylum claims of migrants rescued at sea while keeping them in Albania, a move that has garnered both criticism and support. Locally, reactions to the centres are mixed. While protests have occurred in Tirana and Lezhë, many residents near the sites seem largely indifferent.



The Italian Ambassador to Pakistan H.E. Marilina Armellini

# Pakistan, France vow to deepen economic relations



**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: Pakistan and France this week affirmed their commitment to deepen economic relations, exploring investment opportunities, and expanding bilateral trade. This commitment was expressed during a meeting between Minister of State for Finance Ali Pervaiz Malik and French Ambassador Nicolas Galey in Islamabad. Ali Pervaiz Malik provided an overview of Pakistan's economic progress, highlighting positive trends such as increased foreign exchange reserves, decreased inflation, and a robust stock market, all corroborated by recent ratings from international agencies. He outlined key reforms underway, including privatization initiatives, energy sector advancements and restructuring of state-owned enterprises. The discussion also covered the Federal Board of Revenue's digitization initiative,

which is being implemented with support from McKinsey to enhance tax administration and compliance. The Minister of State highlighted the budget for 2024-25, focusing on strategies to expand the tax base by integrating untaxed segments and encouraging non-filers to comply. Significant projects in customs and Inland Revenue aimed at improving digitization and operational efficiency were also discussed. Ambassador Nicolas Galey expressed appreciation for the excellent reforms undertaken by Pakistan and offered technical support from France in areas of mutual interest. He recognized the progress made by the Government of Pakistan in stabilizing the economy and expressed confidence in the potential for further collaboration.