

## Pakistan-Italy friendship

Romina Khurshid briefs students from Italy on climate change initiatives in Pakistan **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: A four-member delegation of students from Milan University, Italy, met with Romina Khurshid Alam, Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change, in Islamabad this week to discuss the urgent issue of climate change and its

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September, 8 - 14, 2024

93 Pakistanis heading to UK on Chevening, Commonwealth scholarships

British High Commissioner Jane Marriott gives tips for living in the UK **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistani students from every corner of the country have been given British High Commissioner Jane Marriott's top tips for living in the UK, ahead of a year studying at British universities. This year marks the 65th

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# Pakistan, China to start work on five new economic corridors

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Islamabad and Beijing will start work on five new economic corridors with the support of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), a civil-military hybrid body set up by Pakistan last year to attract foreign investment. Pakistan says it has completed more than 50 projects worth \$25 billion under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, with more than \$65 billion pledged for

road, rail and other infrastructure developments in the South Asian nation of 241 million people. "The second phase of CPEC has been started with the facilitation of the Special Investment Facilitation Council," Radio Pakistan reported, adding that the two nations would "work closely" on five new economic corridors linked to CPEC. "These economic corridors include Innovation Corridor, Livelihood Corridor, Green Energy Corridor, Regional Development Corridor and Employment Creation Corridor." Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal has said the new corridors are part of CPEC Phase II.



China and Chinese commercial banks hold about 30 percent of Pakistan's total external debt of about \$100 billion, most of which has been loaned for CPEC projects. The projects have also been threatened in recent years by militants, especially in the Balochistan province where China is building a deep sea port at Gwadar and runs a gold and copper mine. On Tuesday, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said a series of coordinated attacks by separatist militants in Balochistan on Sunday night were aimed at stopping development projects that form part of CPEC. The assaults, killing more than 50, were the most widespread in years by ethnic militants seeking to win secession of the resource-rich province. Beijing has previously flagged concerns about the security of its citizens working on projects in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan. Six Chinese engineers working on a dam project were killed in March in the country's northwest. Separatist militants have also targeted Balochistan's Gwadar port, which is run by China. Chinese targets have previously come under attack by several Baloch militant groups, who say they have been fighting for decades for a larger share in the regional wealth of mines and minerals denied by the central government. The state denies exploiting Balochistan.



## Prince Christian of Denmark will spend this autumn in East Africa



**Covert Report**

Copenhagen: Prince Christian of Denmark, who graduated from high school in June, will spend some time traveling before he begins any further studies or military training. "On 4 September, His Royal Highness The Crown Prince will set out for an extended stay in East Africa," the Royal House of Denmark announced this week. "There, The Crown Prince will be involved in the daily operation of two farms, which will, among other things, include practical and administrative tasks and also give The Crown Prince insight into local nature protection. The plan is for The Crown Prince to return to Denmark in December." Specifically where in East Africa that Prince Christian will stay has not been shared. The Danish Royal house

noted that King Frederik, Queen Mary, and Prince Christian hope "that there will be an understanding that the stay abroad remains a private matter from beginning to end. For this reason, no additional details about the stay will be made public." The Royal House also said Prince Christian is following in his family's footsteps to spend time abroad. "In The Royal Family, there is a long tradition that the successors to the throne go on extended stays abroad during their youth and have the opportunity to develop and experience the world," they write. "Thus, His Majesty The King took part in an expedition to Mongolia in 1986 focused on the nomads and, in 1989, worked for a year at a vineyard in California. Her Majesty Queen Margrethe also went on longer trips to the East and South America in the 1960s."

## Bilawal Bhutto terms Punjab power subsidy 'unsustainable'



**Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad: The decision of the Punjab government to provide a subsidy to power consumers in the province remains a bone of contention between the two major allies, with Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari calling the move 'unsustainable' in a speech this week. The PPP chief, whose party rules Sindh, also compared the relief with a petrol subsidy announced by the PTI government during its last days in power. Such moves could provide "short-term relief but [may] lead to long-term suffering," he said while speaking at the Chief Minister's House to mark the launching ceremony of the solar home systems project. The project aims to provide solar panels to 1.6 million low-income households across the province in phases. In the first phase, 200,000 households will be solarised. "We welcome the [Punjab government] announcement to the extent that it aims to lower electricity costs, but the decision remains perplexing to me. If short-term relief leads to long-term

suffering, such projects are not in the public interest," said Mr Bhutto-Zardari. "Frankly speaking, I am unable to understand this decision [of the Punjab government]," he said, adding that "it could cause a year-long pain" to the people of the province. "It reminds [me of] the same decision which Khan Sahib [Imran Khan] had taken when his government was about to fall [due to the opposition's protests] ... At that time, he reduced the price of petrol by Rs20 per litre. That relief, however, had lasted a week or two but we are still facing the challenges due to that decision," he added. "Today, there's neither a long march nor a threat of a vote of no confidence. So I am unable to guess that why such a decision has

been made." He reiterated his desire for a sustainable solution to the electricity crisis and asserted that relief to the masses in electricity bills could be achieved through green energy. He also highlighted the plight of the people of Larkana, who endure 18 hours of load-shedding daily. However, he asked Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to discuss the electricity relief matter with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for Sindh consumers and find ways to facilitate the inflation-hit people. "If the federal government can convince us of its cheaper electricity plan, we are ready to forego our solar home system project and follow theirs. But if they cannot, they should support us," he said, linking the relief with renewable energy. The event was attended by Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, former CM Qaim Ali Shah, PPP Sindh President Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, Sindh Energy Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, provincial ministers, and other party leaders.

# PCI's All Parties Moot reaffirms unwavering support to CPEC

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistan-China Institute (PCI), headed by Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, this week successfully organised a unique event under its 'Friends of Silk Road' series, which brought together leaders of eight political parties on one platform to reaffirm support for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Leaders belonging to parties from Government and Opposition, PML-N, PPP, PTI, MQM, BAP, NP, NDM and JUI-F, from all provinces, were represented. They discussed the results of the recently-concluded 3rd Plenum of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and its impact on China and its foreign relations, a news release said.

Chairman Pakistan-China Institute, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed emphasised the pivotal role of the CPC in China's ongoing journey of reform and modernization, adding CPC is the world's biggest political party with 100 million members and longest-serving political party, which has transformed China.

Citing figures of China's phenomenal progress since the 1979 Reform & Opening Up, he said then China had per capita income of \$ 157 while now it's \$ 12,000, then China's GDP was \$ 150 billion, now it's \$ 18 trillion. And Fortune 500 now counts China with 142, largest number of companies. Senator Mushahid Hussain listed 5 reasons for the China Success Story in such a short time: Quality of Leadership, Ability to do Course Correction, Continuity of Policy, Learning from others, and Peaceful Foreign Policy.

Senator Sherry Rehman noted that the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee will have far-reaching impacts not only on China but also on the world. "China has played a crucial role in the development of the Global South, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has created numerous investment opportunities in Pakistan," Senator Rehman stated.

She praised China's Global Security Initiative, calling it a commendable effort that will ensure peace and stability globally. Additionally, she highlighted China's role in clean energy development under CPEC as a significant contribution to sustainable development in Pakistan and the region.

Saadia Khaqan Abbasi commended China's leadership in technological advancement, human development, and labour productivity. "The focus on security and development is a unique selling point of China," she added.

Leader of Opposition, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Senator Shibli Faraz emphasised China's development

story as a role model for the world and highlighted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as having the potential for shared development and prosperity across the globe. "CPEC stands as a beacon of hope for Pakistanis, symbolizing the transformative impact of our strong bilateral relationship," he added.

Senator Faraz also congratulated the Pakistan-China Institute for hosting this important timely event and lauded the role of Senator Mushahid in promoting the enduring friendship between Pakistan and China.

Member National Assembly (MNA), Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam, Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri underscored the enduring strength of Pakistan-China relations, praising President Xi Jinping's vital role in China's development. He noted that his leadership has been instrumental in driving China's remarkable progress on the global stage.

Senior Leader of National Democratic Movement, (NDM), Senator Afrasiab Khattak underlined that the Communist Party of China is more than just a political party; it is a popular ruling force that has steered China towards unprecedented development, adding 'Pakistan must learn from China, do a course correction and become a frontline state in economic development, focusing on geoeconomics, rather than being a frontline state in conflicts'.

Senator Jan Muhammad Jamali said, "The future of Balochistan is inextricably interconnected with Pakistan's broader development goals and yesterday's must not impede CPEC at any cost".

Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MNA Shezra Mansab Ali reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering support for the One-China policy and respect for China's unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty, adding, "China has consistently supported Pakistan on its core issues, including the Kashmir dispute."

Leader of National Party, Senator Jan Muhammad Buledi emphasized the importance of enhancing collaboration between Balochistan's universities and their Chinese counterparts. "Our universities in Balochistan should strengthen ties with Chinese institutions to foster academic and research excellence," he said.

Senator Abdul Qadir from Balochistan Awami Party emphasized the wealth of knowledge and experience that Pakistan can gain from China's successes across various sectors. "Pakistan can learn a great deal from China's experience, especially in areas like economic development, infrastructure, and governance," he said.

Taha Ahmed Khan from MQM highlighted the strategic importance of Karachi as Pakistan's trade hub, particularly due to its proximity to the China-Pakistan Econom-



ic Corridor (CPEC). "Karachi is not only the trade hub of Pakistan but also holds critical importance due to its close ties with the CPEC route," Khan stated.

He also expressed the MQM's strong condemnation of the recent attacks on Chinese nationals in Pakistan, reaffirming the party's commitment to ensuring the safety and security of all Chinese citizens in the country. "We stand firmly against any attacks on our Chinese friends and partners," he added.

Furthermore, Khan emphasized the importance of focusing on the Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Information Technology (IT) sectors under CPEC. "The AI and IT sectors are pivotal for Pakistan's future, and we must prioritize their development within the framework of CPEC to fully realize the potential of this partnership," he concluded.

Senator Ali Zafar from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emphasized the importance of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) approach of policy continuity and its principle of "seeking truths from facts." He noted, "The CPC's continuity of policy and countering corruption are key factors in China's sustained development, and

Pakistan can benefit greatly from adopting a similar approach."

Yang Nuo, Minister-Counsellor at the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, emphasized the importance of the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee, describing it as a pivotal event for China's future, stating, "This session serves as a blueprint for further reforms in China, setting the stage for continued progress and development."

Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh in his closing remarks as Chief Guest shared his experiences from numerous visits to China, emphasizing the country's consensus-oriented decision-making process. "In China, decisions are made through a consensus-driven approach, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered, which contributes to their effective governance," Sheikh remarked.

He also spoke about his visits to Gwadar, where he observed significant development under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). "The development I witnessed in Gwadar is a clear indicator of the transformative impact CPEC has had on the region," he said.

Sheikh further highlighted the potential and benefits of the Gwadar Airport, noting that it will play a crucial role in the region's economic growth and connectivity. He concluded by reaffirming the strong bond between Pakistan and China, stating, "Pakistan and China are iron brothers, and we will continue to work together to achieve our shared goals."

At the end of the event, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed read out a Joint Statement on behalf of all participating political parties. The statement reaffirmed Pakistan's political parties commitment to deepening relationship with China, acclaiming the significant outcomes of the Third Plenary Session of CPC and their unshakable resolve to support, strengthen and sustain CPEC as this initiative is a guarantor for a better tomorrow for Pakistan.

The event was attended by over 200 participants from different sectors like academia, media, industry, civil society, students, scholars and think tanks.

# Sino-Pak cooperation in art education expanding

**Wang Xiaotong**  
China Economic Net

Shijiazhuang: Hebei Academy of Fine Arts signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Quaid-i-Azam University to initial bilateral cooperation in art, history and archaeology.

Under the MoU, the China-Pakistan Institute will be established, in which undergraduate education, postgraduate education, doctoral education, student exchange, visiting scholars, short-term study trip,

etc. are being planned.

Zhen Zhongyi, President of Hebei Academy of Fine Arts and Niaz Ahmad Akhter, Vice Chancellor of Quaid-i-Azam University expressed their expectations for future cooperation, and emphasize the significance of art education in fostering understanding and friendship between different cultures and peoples at the meeting. They hoped the bilateral cooperation would contribute to cultural exchange and art development not only between the two



brotherly countries but also globally. Hebei Academy of Fine Arts has attached great importance to developing cooperation with Pakistani universities in art education. In 2022, Hebei Academy of Fine Arts signed an agreement with Uni-

versity of Education Lahore to build a culture education cooperation and exchange center. The two universities are offering joint programs in Art Theory and Cultural Heritage currently. In 2023, 2023 China-Pakistan Contemporary Art Ex-

change Exhibition and China-Pakistan Culture, Art and Education Exchange Forum were held by Hebei Academy of Fine Arts, University of Education Lahore and Lahore Museum.



# Participation by more than 100 Chinese companies in Colour and Chem Exhibition



**Gwadar Pro**

Lahore: Federal Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain this week praised the participation of more than one hundred Chinese companies at the 9th Color and Chem Exhibition here at the Expo Centre.

Speaking to journalists, he stressed the importance of increasing exports to stimulate economic activity and accelerate the nation's development.

The minister highlighted the ongoing restructuring of the Utility Stores Corporation, aiming to transform it into a profitable entity, ensuring that only the deserving population benefits from subsidized essential goods.

He expressed concern over Pakistan's current export volume of US \$30 billion, which he described as insufficient, especially when compared to neighboring countries like India and Bangladesh, whose export figures are significantly higher.

He praised the participation of over one hundred Chinese companies at the Expo, noting their contribution to the introduction of advanced products and technologies in Pakistan.

Highlighting the government's broader economic agenda, the minister noted that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is focused on reviving Pakistan's economy, aiming to double the country's export volume within three years.

Rana Tanveer Hussain pointed out that while Pakistan was once the 24th largest economy in 2017, it has since fallen to around the 40th position. However, he reiterated the government's ambitious goal of elevating Paki-

stan into the ranks of the world's top 20 economies within the next three years.

He acknowledged the challenges posed by the current power tariff and policy rate, which are not conducive to industrial growth, but expressed optimism that the situation would improve in the coming months, especially as inflation has recently declined to 16%.

The minister also mentioned that the chemicals and dye

industry has been actively working on proposals to enhance export potential.

He also discussed ongoing discussions with the finance minister and the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) regarding the high taxes on the tractor industry, expressing hope for a favorable resolution that would benefit farmers and prioritize agriculture.



# Pakistan-Italy friendship

## Romina Khurshid briefs students from Italy on climate change initiatives in Pakistan

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: A four-member delegation of students from Milan University, Italy, met with Romina Khurshid Alam, Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Climate Change, in Islamabad this week to discuss the urgent issue of climate change and its impact on Pakistan.

During the meeting, the students were informed about the socio-economic effects of climate change and the government's policy measures aimed at enhancing the country's climate resilience.

Romina Khurshid Alam outlined various adaptation strategies being implemented by the government, including flood management projects, improved water resource management, and early warning systems. She also highlighted initiatives to promote climate-resilient agriculture and sustainable land use practices.

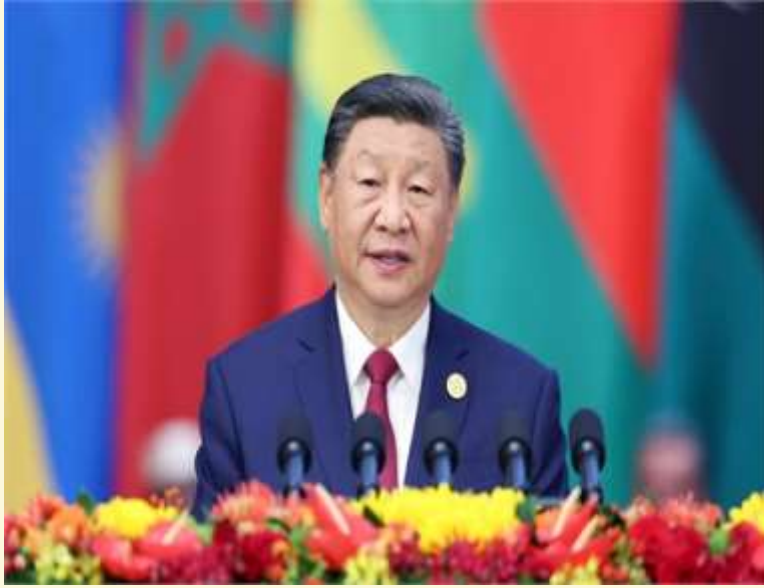
Additionally, she discussed the ministry's efforts to secure funding for adaptation and resilience-building measures.

Romina Khurshid Alam emphasized that climate change is the most pressing global issue of this century, requiring robust international cooperation.

The students expressed their gratitude to Romina Khurshid Alam and her team for the informative briefing on the climate risks faced by Pakistan and the government's efforts to address them.



# China is creating a new form of modernity



**Martin Jacques**

Modernization has become one of the great subjects of discussion in China. Ever since the century of humiliation, the quest for modernization had eluded China. By the time of the revolution in 1949, China lagged hugely behind the West. The need to modernize was China's greatest challenge. In the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping learned from the Asian tigers and the West. His answer was to open up to the rest of the world, most notably the West.

China was still very dependent on Western technology. However, from 2010, China became increasingly innovative in its own right, with the emergence of companies like Huawei and Tencent, which are now leaders in global technology. China was emerging as a global technological leader.

The US did not believe it was possible. Some would still argue that China was a copier, incapable of invention and innovation. In a speech in 2014, Joe Biden, then US vice president, said, "I challenge you. Name me one innovative project; one innovative change; one innovative product that has come out of China."

In 2015, the Chinese government published "Made in China 2025," which listed the 10 high-tech industries that should become world leaders in a decade. Western governments and leading Western companies did not take the program seriously. In 2024, China's EVs are already recognized as global leaders, with BYD already becoming number one in the world.

China's economic and technological transformation was one of the main reasons why America turned from friend to foe in less than a decade between 2009 and 2017. The US feared that, as a result of its economic and technolog-

ical transformation, China would challenge US global hegemony. Historically, modernization has enabled countries to exercise huge power for good or ill. Europe is a case in point. It was only after the Second World War when the developing world started to modernize.

This brings us to the global significance of China's modernization. Ever since 1945, China has considered itself to be part of the developing world. The most important example is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The purpose of the BRI is to assist the economic development of developing countries in Eurasia, Africa and Latin America. Another example is BRICS. In 2018, the BRICS countries overtook the G7 countries share of global GDP measured by purchasing power parity (PPP). At present, BRICS accounts for 35 percent of the world's GDP, compared to 30 percent by the G7 countries.

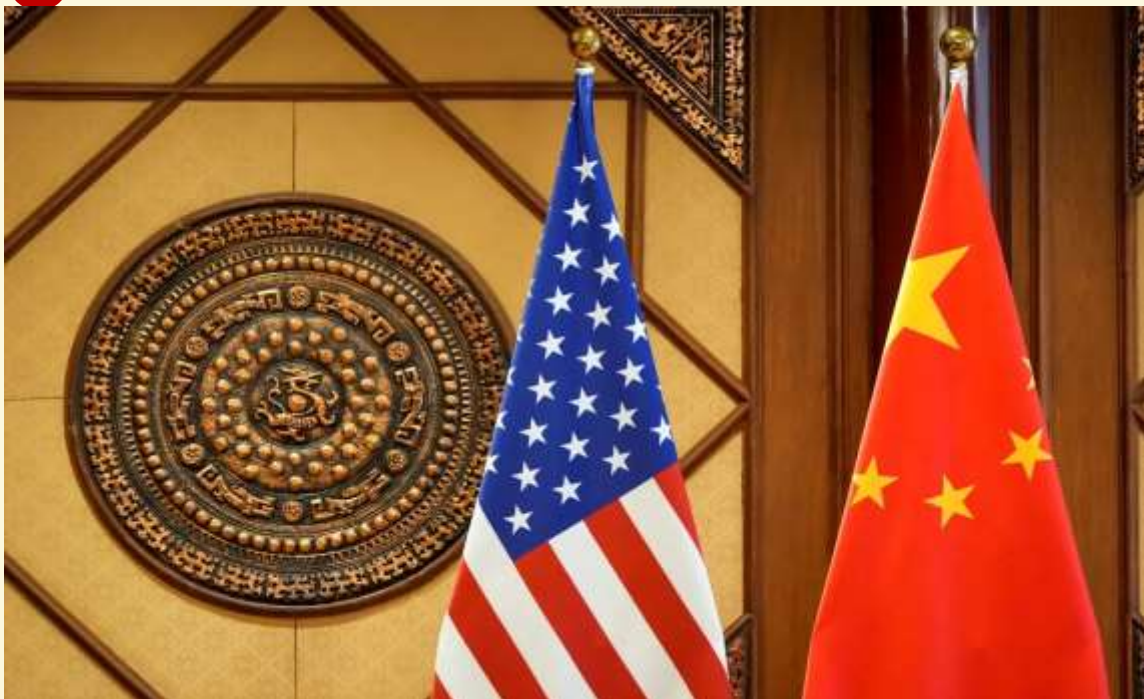
Will Chinese modernity be different from American modernity? The US was a product of European migration and the near elimination of the native population, and was only founded in 1776. China is rooted in a

civilization dating back more than 5,000 years and its population is four times larger than US. China is shaped by Confucian values, which are rooted in social relations, while the US is the home of individualism. Chinese and American modernity will look very different. Let's consider a number of examples. The US will continue to rely on the market for its innovations. In contrast, as the Third Plenum showed last month, the Chinese government will continue to play the crucial role in charting the future of the economy. Firms like Meta and Google have been subject to little or no regulation, be it in respect of monopoly behavior, the exposure of young users to online bullying and sexual abuse, or their addiction to smartphones. China, in contrast, has introduced a range of controls. For example Tencent and ByteDance are required to implement controls to address excessive use by minors and anti-social content. We should not expect the two countries to converge. In the longer run I expect Chinese modernity to exercise more global

influence than the US, as China's development outpaces that of the US. China is inventing new and superior forms of production: China's EVs are a classic example. The Third Plenum demonstrated its clear commitment to hasten and deepen the process of modernization by laying central emphasis on the development of "new quality productive forces" and creating a "high-standard socialist market economy." China is in the process of creating a new form of modernity.

**The writer is a visiting professor at the Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University and a senior fellow at the China Institute, Fudan University**

# China becomes pro in West's game. How should West react?



**Ding Gang**

The Paris Olympics have ended, and we witnessed a nail-biter. Team USA and Team China ended up in a dead heat, each securing 40 gold medals. Talk about a photo finish!

This tie reflects the changing dynamics of global power. However, when discussing the geopolitical meaning of China's challenge, many Western analysts need to pay attention to one fact: China, adhering to the rulebook of

the Olympic Games, is playing a game, the rules of which were written by the West.

Think about it. After World War II, when Uncle Sam and his European buddies were calling the shots, who would've thought that one day China would be going toe-to-toe with the US at the Olympics? For a long time, China wasn't even invited to the party. Now, China has become a heavyweight contender. The West wrote the rules, and China learned to play and is now a pro. That's going to ruffle some feathers among the old-timers.

On the Olympic stage, Chinese athletes fight for gold alongside their American counterparts. They're playing fair and square. They're training hard, competing honestly and following that "faster, higher, stronger - together" motto. Isn't that what the West has been preaching all along?

But when China starts bringing home the bacon, some Westerners get their knickers in a twist. Chinese swimmer Pan Zhanle, known as China's "flying fish," passed 21 drug tests from May to July and broke a world record

during the competition. Yet an Australian coach questioned the achievement, saying that "it's not humanly possible."

This skepticism exposes the extreme bias some in the West have against global and human development. Their arrogance is built upon such biases. Facts are facts, and gold is gold, regardless of the color of the winner's skin; it doesn't lessen the weight of the gold medal. Sure, China has its "state-run system" approach to sports, but what nerve has that touched in the Americans? Has it broken any Olympic rules?

The New York Times (NYT) even published a piece asking if China's "state-run system" in sports has changed, which seems like an unnecessary worry. Instead, the NYT should explore three key questions to better understand China's growing influence on the global stage: Why do these established entities feel threatened by China's success and compliance with the rules they initially set? Can the existing systems accommodate China's rise? How might the West respond to China's rise, to ensure it can sustain its influence while still cooperating with China?

Overall, the content emphasizes the need for a deeper analysis of geopolitical power shifts and the implications for global governance. History has a funny way of repeating itself. Once upon a time, the US was the new kid on the block, and Europe wasn't too thrilled about it. Now, it's China's turn in the spotlight.

Olympic medals are like a big pie - when someone gets a bigger slice, others get

less. The global economy works the same way. The pie is getting bigger, and everyone still wants a bigger slice of it. We have to remember that the US and the West do not necessarily get a bigger share, even if the procedures and rules for dividing the pie are made by them.

Why shouldn't Chinese people stand on the podium? If you lose, you can catch up, but thinking that Chinese people shouldn't be up there and finding all sorts of reasons to obstruct Chinese athletes from competing is itself a disdain for rules and order.

The Paris Olympics might be over, but the competition between China and the US continues. Uncle Sam will keep throwing hurdles onto China's track. But can the US push China off the track? Fat chance! In the future, it is expected to see more Chinese athletes on those podiums at the Olympics.

China's rise isn't a threat - it's an opportunity. It's proof that human civilization can bloom in different ways. It can't be stopped.

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# High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri celebrates achievements of talented young Pakistani-Australians



**Covert Report**

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week celebrated the achievements of talented young Pakistani Australians. "It is always a pleasure to celebrate the achievements of talented young Pakistani Australians. The Pakistani diaspora is one of our most valuable national assets. No matter where they are, their hearts always beat with

Pakistan," the envoy posted on X with a picture. Earlier, the Pakistani High Commission in Australia celebrated the incredible talents of our youth at the Pakistani Youth Talent Awards. "We are immensely proud of all the winners who have showcased their extraordinary skills, passion, and dedication," said a statement issued by the HC. The awards were distributed by the High Commissioner

of Pakistan, Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri, and Ned Mannoun - Mayor of Liverpool, adding even more prestige to this special occasion. "Your achievements are a testament to the bright future of our nation, and we are excited to see how you will continue to inspire and lead in your respective fields," the HC statement said.

# Kazakhstan's Kumiyán: Ancient ruins hold untapped mysteries

**Covert Report**

Astana: The rich, undiscovered sites of Kazakhstan continue to reveal their secrets, with excavations shedding light on the ancient city of Kumiyán, also known as Meiramtoobe. Located in the Zhanakorgan district of the Kyzylorda Region, this mysterious site remains only partially explored, offering just glimpses into its storied past. The remains of ancient city of Kumiyán, also known as Meiramtoobe, located in the Zhanakorgan district of the Kyzylorda region. Photo credit: kzvesti.kz Click to see the map in full size. The map is designed by The Astana Times. Situated approximately 30 kilometers southwest of the modern village of Kelintobe, Kumiyán was a bustling settlement from the 12th to 13th centuries. The city's ruins are nearly four kilometers from the dried-up Syrdarya riverbed. The city, which occupied a rectangular area of roughly 210 by 180 meters, was fortified with walls up to six meters in height and three and a half meters in width. Historical records and excavation evidence suggest that with a gate located in the southwest, five towers stood on

each side of the city, spaced 35 meters apart. A moat, eight meters wide and nearly two meters deep, encircled the city, providing additional protection. In addition, there was a citadel with an area of 45 by 45 meters in the center of Kumiyán. Local historian Alimzhan Yerzhanov noted that only a tiny elevation remains on the city's northwest side, an intriguing feature yet to be fully explored. "Presumably, these could be remains of inner-city buildings. While studying Kumiyán, scientists uncovered many ceramic artifacts, such as the jugs with elaborately crafted edges, swells and handles. The city's applied arts were advanced, as seen in the beautifully decorated tableware. The paints used resemble those found in Otyrar, another ancient city in the region," said Yerzhanov. Kumiyán's existence coincides with other ancient cities in the Syrdarya region. The architectural similarities among these settlements suggest that they maintained close ties, possibly through trade and cultural exchange. The city's name, Kumiyán, may derive from the Kazakh word kum, meaning sand, hinting at its

location in a sandy landscape. However, the origin of its other name, Meiramtoobe, remains unclear. A local legend, passed down through generations tells a story of Kumiyán's tragic end. Rakymzhan Tursynbekuly, a resident of the Zhanakorgan district, tells about an old lady who lived in Kumiyán city with her only son. They were poor, living off the milk of their only goat. One day, she noticed that someone had drunk the milk and left a gold coin in return. This mysterious occurrence repeated daily, slowly elevating the family's wealth. The old lady eventually discovered that it was a snake, which enriched the family. The snake spoke and urged the old lady to keep the secret, warning that unveiling the truth would bring disaster to the city. However, the city's ruler, curious about the woman's sudden prosperity, demanded an explanation. Under the ruler's persistent persuasion and pressure, she revealed the secret, leading to an invasion of snakes that decimated the city's population. Only two people escaped and joined the cattle drivers in Bukhara. Following advice to protect themselves from a snake bite with a ketmen (an ancient hand tool) and bread



placed under their heads, they avoided death. The legend suggests that this catastrophe may

have led to Kumiyán's demise, though the truth remains uncertain.

# Ambassador Saima Sayed meets DG Agence Presse Senegalais



**Covert Report**

Islamabad: Pakistan's Ambassador to Senegal Saima Sayed this week met Director General Agence Presse Senegalais Thierno Ahmadou SY. "He was very forthcoming & expressed interest in connecting with Pakistani counterparts. Hope to strengthen linkages between Pakistan-Senegal media organisations," a post quoting the ambassador on X said. Director General of APS, Thierno Ahmadou Sy, welcomed the ambassador. The meeting was marked by a desire to work together, to strengthen cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the media sector, a press statement of the Senegalese state news agency said.



Ambassador Saima Sayed also welcomed the initiative to digitalize the contents of the Senegalese press agency.

# Free solar system

## Umar Rehman Malik highlights PPP's commitment to provide relief to the poor



**Abdullah Jan** Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week highlighted the PPP's commitment to resolve the energy crises for the poor. "In line with the PPP's manifesto, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is delivering on the

promise of free solar power for the most deserving in Karachi and Larkana," he said in a statement. The PPP leader said this was a commendable initiative by the PPP-led Sindh government to lead the energy transition by offering subsidies to the middle class and scaling up solar projects across Sindh. "Solarising tube wells and establishing solar parks under public-private partnerships exemplifies the #PPP's commitment to affordable, sustainable energy for all. The PPP government has been a pioneer in developing sustainable public private partnership projects in a myriad of sectors," he added.

point 'Awami Muashi Muahida', which pledged to provide free solar electricity to underprivileged families. The PPP Chairman inaugurated the first phase of the solar energy project, which aims to provide relief to the people severely affected by expensive electricity and load shedding. The project, initiated by the Government of Sindh, will see 200,000 families, eligible under the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), receive free solar home systems in two districts of the province. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony held at the Chief Minister House here, Chairman PPP emphasized his party's commitment to sustainable solutions for public issues. He stated that this project aligns with the PPP's manifesto vision, which, if given the federal mandate, would have been implemented nationwide to support the poor through solar energy. He furthered that PPP wants to ease the burden on the lower-income segments of society. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari highlighted that when he initially proposed the idea of providing solar energy to low-income families, it was met with criticism from various quarters, including the media and caretaker government. However, he noted with satisfaction that the entire nation has now recognized the need to facilitate the poor with affordable electricity. He further explained that BISP beneficiaries are the top priority for this initiative, which will eventually be expanded to all districts of Sindh.



Earlier, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari fulfilled yet another promise made under his election manifesto, the 'Awami Muashi Muahida' (People's Economic Agreement). This week, he launched an ambitious project to distribute solar home systems to 1.6 million low-income households across Sindh in phases. This initiative is a key component of the 10-

promise of free solar power for the most deserving in Karachi and Larkana," he said in a statement. The PPP leader said this was a commendable initiative by the PPP-led Sindh government to lead the energy transition by offering subsidies to the middle class and scaling up solar projects



# Is it time for Greece to change its tourism model?

## NewsWire

Athens: As temperatures soar and tourist arrivals swell, Greece is under pressure to reimagine a tourism model that climate change is making increasingly untenable. With its turquoise waters and reliable sunshine, Greece has long been a popular holiday destination, attracting nearly 33 million visitors last year and generating 28.5 billion euros in revenue (\$31.7 billion). This year's total visitor numbers are expected to rise further, as global tourism sets new records from pre-pandemic levels, but the surge in holidaymakers could undermine the economic mainstay in the near future. Anger over 'overtourism' has even sparked protests in recent years on the beaches of the Cyclades, a collection

of Aegean islands. "People in Greece are getting more concerned that the (Cycladic islands) are changing very rapidly and, in a few years, what is special is going to be lost," said Dimitris Vayanos, an economist at the London School of Economics. Greece is not alone. Residents in other popular European destinations say visitors are harming the environment and local economies, particularly as short-term rentals from home-stay websites like Airbnb drive up housing costs and price people out of their towns and cities. But Greece is among Europe's hardest-hit countries by global warming, and rising sea levels, scorching heat-waves, erratic rainfall and frequent wildfires are changing the landscape.

Tourism is placing an extra burden on scarce water resources and threatening fragile coastal environments, leading to calls from local authorities and the national ombudsman to regulate construction, restrict tourist flows and invest in water management and infrastructure. The government has to balance mitigating these threats against protecting critical tourism earnings. Tourism contributes between 62.8 billion euros and 75.6 billion euros to the Greek economy, roughly a third of gross domestic product annually, according to the Hellenic Tourism Business Association (INSETE). A law in July updated regulations for tourism agencies, guides and rentals that Tourism Minister Olga Kefalogi-



anni has said will make the country a "global tourism power," part of "critically important" efforts to safeguard the industry and benefit the economy. But climate change poses existential questions for the industry. A lengthy heatwave in June, followed by the hottest July on record, forced tourist attractions to close and caused a spate of heat-related deaths. Wildfires, made more intense and frequent by hotter, drier weather linked to climate change, also threaten the tourism industry. A massive blaze earlier this month came within miles of the capital Athens. Last year, more than 8,000 forest fires raged across the country, and thousands of tourists had to be evacuated from islands, including Rhodes. "What we want to see is that tourism is sustainable or even regenerative. It has to invest in conservation of the ecosystem, and it has to assist with the cost of managing the tourists on the ground," said Megan Epler Wood, director of the Sustainable Tourism Asset Management Program (STAMP) at Cornell University in the United States. The ombudsman, a Greek official who investigates public complaints, said in a June report the country needs to reduce construction and protect water resources and coastal areas to maintain healthy tourism. It warned of the growing environmental risks from tourism, particularly the additional demands on water supplies for drinking, swimming pools and water parks. A pilot study, carried out by Greek researchers and

Unesco, the UN cultural agency, found that smaller islands in the Aegean Sea already need double the amount of water they can naturally produce to meet demand from tourists, which is set to increase twofold by 2030. "The more these islands are developed, the less attractive they will be to visitors," said Vayanos. Greece should tailor tourism to make it more compatible with environmental standards, including the use of zoning, and concentrate development in specific areas, he said. The introduction this year of a tourist tax, dubbed the climate resilience fee, is meant to help finance recovery from worsening forest fires and floods. The fee for guests staying in hotels and short-term rentals is expected to generate up to 300 million euros in additional revenue in 2024. But Epler Wood said that historically, tourist taxes have gone towards destination marketing rather than benefiting local communities. Research by STAMP found water, waste, energy utilities and affordable housing often did not gain at all. The Central Union of Greek Municipalities (KEDE) is calling for the revenue from the tax to go to local government to help them manage tourists. There is also little evidence that tourism taxes reduce arrivals, according to a report by strategy company Group NAO. Nikos Zorzos, the mayor of Santorini, wants to cap the number of daily cruise-ship visitors at 8,000 from as many as 17,000 people.



# Bulgaria calls 7th election in less than four years

## NewsWire

Sofia: Bulgaria will hold a new snap vote on October 27, its seventh general election in three and a half years, its head of state said on Monday after parties failed to form a government.

The Balkan country has been plagued by political turmoil since massive anti-corruption protests toppled the cabinet of conservative three-time Prime Minister Boyko Borisov in 2021.

The last election in June had the lowest voter turnout since the collapse of communism in the Balkan country at just 34 percent, and analysts expect an even lower turnout in October, as well as a rise in support for pro-Russian parties.

"I will issue a decree calling for early elections on Oct. 27," President Rumen Radev said after approving a new caretaker cabinet proposed by the outgoing interim premier Dimitar Glavchev who will be tasked with organizing the vote.

Six consecutive votes in the EU's poorest country since 2021 have merely produced two short-lived administrations, with interim governments in charge during much of the time.

Borisov's conservative GERB party won the vote in June but lacked the majority to push its cabinet through parliament.

The way you make your fist reveals something crucial about your personality.

Two more attempts by parties to piece together a governing majority also failed, forcing the country to head to its seventh general election. The political hiatus is unprecedented in Bulgaria's post-communist history since 1989.

The prolonged political instability has also threatened to jeopardize the country's bid to join the eurozone in 2025 and the allocation of billions of euros from the EU.



# Portugal's TAP profit falls on foreign exchange losses



million euros, despite an 18% jump in wage costs as it reversed pay cuts imposed under a tough restructuring plan. Passenger numbers rose 2.2% to around 4.2 million. TAP's recurring earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) rose

19.6% to 289 million euros and its EBITDA margin – a measure of profitability – rose to 26.1% from 22.6% a year ago. In July, Infrastructure Minister Miguel Pinto Luz said that the centre-right government wanted to privatise TAP sooner rather than later to

take advantage of market interest in the airline and was moving forward with preparatory work. TAP has so far attracted interest from Lufthansa (LHAG.DE), opens new tab, Air France-KLM (AIRF.PA), opens new tab and British Airways owner IAG (ICAG.L), opens new tab.



**NewsWire**

Lisbon: Portuguese airline TAP said this week its second-quarter net profit fell 10% to 72.2 million euros (\$80.3 million), as foreign exchange losses from the devaluation of the Brazilian real offset an operating income increase. The state-owned flag carrier's operating income rose 3.4% to 1.1 billion euros during the period, with passenger revenues up 0.8% to 986.4 million euros.

TAP said net profit was "impacted by foreign exchange losses following the depreciation of the Brazilian real". Chief Executive Luis Rodrigues said in a statement that TAP remained on "the necessary path of structural transformation". "We continue on the path we set out to follow, with the commitment of our people and the support of our stakeholders, to establish TAP as a sustainably profitable company and one of the most attractive companies in the industry," he said. The airline's operating costs fell 0.8% to 938.6

# Portugal's Madeira wildfire brought under control after 11 days

Lisbon: Firefighters this week brought under control a large forest fire in the Portuguese island of Madeira that had been burning for 11 days, but authori-

ties said on Aug 25 they would remain on the ground to stop it flaring up again. The blaze, which started on Aug 14, has burnt more than 5,000ha of vegetation, mostly in mountainous areas where the

slopes are steep and the access is often difficult. "The fire has now been brought under control, but cannot yet be considered



extinguished so the teams will remain vigilant on the ground to prevent possible reignitions," regional civil protection commander Antonio Nunes told news agency Lusa. Attempts to fight the flames have been hampered by adverse weather conditions, including high temperatures, strong winds and low humidity. EU authorities provided two Canadair planes to help put out the blaze. The re-

gional government said there had been no injuries, no houses torched and no essential infrastructure destroyed. The Atlantic island of Madeira is an autonomous region of Portugal with around 250,000 residents and is a popular tourist destination. Rising global temperatures due to climate change have led to more frequent wildfires, from southern and eastern Europe to North America and parts of Asia.



# Pakistan keen to expand cooperation with Japan in areas of mutual benefits:

## Yousaf Raza Gilani Senate chairman meets Japan's Amb Wada Mitsuhiro



**Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad: Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani said this week that Pakistan attached great importance to its relationship with Japan and was eager to expand cooperation in various areas of mutual benefits. During a meeting with Wada Mitsuhiro, Ambassador of Japan in Pakistan, the Chairman Senate recognized

Japan as a key development partner. He said that both the countries enjoyed cordial and friendly relations based on mutual respect and shared objectives of regional development, said a news release. During the meeting, crucial aspects of the Pakistan-Japan relationship were discussed with an aim to further explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration.

The meeting underscored Pakistan's commitment to enhancing its partnership with Japan across various domains. Gilani gave special acknowledgment to Japan's support following the devastating floods in Pakistan in 2022. He recalled former Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's visit to Japan from July 1-4, 2023 and

his meetings with Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi and Prime Minister and highlighted the significance of high-level diplomatic ties and said their interactions provide further direction and momentum to deepen ties in diverse sectors. He said that the current bilateral trade volume stands at \$1.27 billion, falling short of its potential. Both the countries are encouraged to work together to boost bilateral trade" he added. The chairman further said, Pakistan also highly values Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) development initiatives and seeks to establish visible flagship projects. He said that Japan remained a key investment partner and Pakistan welcomed increased Japanese investment. Gilani has called on Japan to take an active role in the international effort to address the repatriation of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. He urged Japan, as a key international player to support and contribute to the initiatives aimed at facilitating safe repatriation of

refugees. The Chairman said that two nations have established various bilateral mechanisms for discussion and informed the Ambassador that the Senate of Pakistan had established a Pak-Japan Friendship Group which would provide a suitable forum and should be regularly utilized to review and advance the relationship, emphasizing that regular parliamentary exchanges are deemed crucial for strengthening bilateral relations. Such visits enhance mutual understanding and promote people-to-people connections, he added. Gilani lauded that encouraging progress had been made in exporting Pakistani manpower to Japan through Memoranda of Cooperation on the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and Specified Skilled Workers (SSW) Programs signed in 2019. He said that the 25,000-strong Pakistani diaspora in Japan played a significant role, contributing to sectors such as used automobiles, carpet trade, and Halal food. This community remains a vital asset to the Japanese economy, he added.



# USAID - Hunza's journey: From education to cultural revival

**Mahroo Sajid**

Islamabad: Pakistan is a home to culture, traditions and customs. The beauty lies in the fact that every region has its own heritage, language and culture. This is one of the reasons why Pakistan is a big attraction from people all around the world to come and experience the unique and beautiful customs around the country.

Talking about the culture and heritage, Gilgit-Baltistan and if I speak particularly, Hunza district is a major landscape and home to beautiful people, traditions, heritage and culture. Recently, when I got a chance to visit Hunza, I couldn't help noticing that a lot of developmental work there was done by USAID/Pakistan. I decided to write about what I observed there in terms of cultural preservation. Also, most of the projects were already concluded so sustainability of resources also became a factor which I wanted to pen down.

USAID has always been proactive and supportive when it comes to gender equality and girls' education. A pleasant surprising fact was the literacy rate of Hunza which is 100% which basically means that every school going boy and girl residing in Hunza is attending school and getting at least the basic education that makes them able to read and write. This brings me back to the subject of USAID's initiatives to support girls' education. This is the key reason for the foundation of the girls' hostel at Al Ameen School so every girl from near or far may get a chance to attend school.

According to Abdul Waheed, who was the General Secretary of Gulmit Educational and Social Welfare



Society (GESWS) back in 2011 and is currently working in the Finance department at Al Ameen Model School, GESWS applied for a grant for a girls' hostel after the 2011 Attabad lake formation incident as it was difficult for the girls to travel from distant places because the whole area was submerged underwater. At this time, USAID supported GESWS and provided a \$10 million grant to develop a girls' hostel in Gulmit, Gojal, right next to the Al Ameen Model School. The hostel is designed to house 40 female students from remote areas, 4 teachers, and 5 staff members each year. The students come from areas 30-60 kilometers away, and the hostel aims to improve their ability to stay in school and attract more female students from these remote regions.

The hostel was initially planned to be a temporary place where the girls could stay to avoid the difficult travel back and forth. However, due to a great influx of girls from distant areas to avail of this facility and attend school, the hostel continued its operations until 2019. Currently, the building serves as home to the Bulbulik Heritage Centre, another significant initiative of USAID in Hunza, for cultural preservation. With USAID's support, the center hired trainers, and collected artifacts, including old photographs, written material, and musical instruments.

The Bulbulik Heritage Centre was developed with the idea of preserving the historical Wakhi language and passing it on to the new generation through music and poetry. In its first year, 80 young students enrolled in the

Bulbulik Heritage Centre, where they were taught the beautiful Wakhi language in the form of songs along with six musical instruments, including Rubab, Gajik (Violin), Surenai, Bansuri, and Sitar. After successfully completing this musical and linguistic training, these students performed nationwide, gaining immense appreciation and recognition. Many of these youngsters are now settled abroad, benefiting from the training they received through USAID's support in the first year. Their recorded songs, like "Dilet Diwona (Wild Heart)," are broadcast on local media. These "Nightingales of Pamir" are using music to preserve their ancient language and culture. The Bulbulik Heritage Centre is still successfully running under Ali Aman Gojali, Chairman of the Bulbulik Heritage Centre, and not only teaches music and language to the new generation but also performs all over the country.



# Love passport stamps? Get an EU stamp by November 10, before it's eliminated



H.E. Dr. Riina Kionka, Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan

**Covert Report**

Brussels: If you love the tradition of collecting passport stamps, you might be in for disappointing news, and would want to prioritise getting one from the EU before November 10, 2024.

This is because, after this date, the manual stamping of passports will become a thing of the past, and will be replaced by a new automated system that could leave stamp enthusiasts longing for a nostalgic keepsake. As per the latest news reports, the European Union is phasing out passport stamps in favour of the Entry/Exit System (EES), a significant upgrade designed to streamline border controls and improve security. According to the EU, the current manual stamping process is cumbersome, lacks systematic data collection, and fails to effectively track overstayers. The EES aims to address these issues by registering travellers digitally, capturing their biometrics,

and recording their entry and exit details with precision.

Under the new system, each time a non-EU visitor crosses an external border, the EES will log their name, type of travel document, biometric data (such as fingerprints and facial images), and the date and place of their entry and exit. The system will also document refusals of entry, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate record of border crossings. This shift is expected to enhance border security and expedite the travel process, reducing wait times and improving efficiency for travellers.

However, this transition has not been without its challenges. The EES, originally slated for a 2022 launch, has faced delays and is now set to go live on November 10, 2024. There are concerns about potential teething problems and the preparedness of the airline industry and border control authorities. Despite these uncertainties, the EU is optimistic that the EES

will ultimately benefit travellers by streamlining border procedures and reducing manual processing.

For those who relish the charm of traditional passport stamps, the shift to digital registration may come as a disappointment. The physical stamp, often considered a treasured souvenir and a tangible reminder of one's travels, will soon be replaced by an electronic record. So, if you are seriously keen on adding an EU passport stamp to your collection, it's advisable that you plan your trip before the November deadline.

While the new system promises more reliable data and quicker border crossings, it may also lead to the loss of a beloved travel tradition. As travellers will kind of take their sweet time to adjust to the new EES, they may, hopefully, find solace in knowing that long waits at European borders could soon be a thing of the past, even as they bid farewell to the lovely charm of passport stamps.



# 93 Pakistanis heading to UK on Chevening, Commonwealth scholarships

## British High Commissioner Jane Marriott gives tips for living in the UK



**Celina Ali** Islamabad: Pakistani students from every corner of the country have been given British High Commissioner Jane Marriott's top tips for living in the UK, ahead of a year studying at British universities. This year marks the 65th anniversary of the Commonwealth Scholarship programme and 46 Chevening and 47 Commonwealth scholarships have been awarded to Pakistanis, says the press not issued from British High Commission in Islamabad this week. These long-standing programmes have developed a network of over 1,500 Commonwealth and nearly

2,000 Chevening alumni in Pakistan, who regularly meet to discuss live issues. Scholars come from diverse backgrounds, representing the rich cultural tapestry of Pakistan. This year's cohort come from Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Pakistan Administered Kashmir, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and the Federal Capital Territory. Over 60 percent of this year's Chevening scholars are women. The British High Commission strongly encourages people from all backgrounds and across Pakistan to apply. British High Commissioner, Jane Marriott CMG OBE, said: "The

Chevening programme helps develop a new generation of Pakistani leaders and changemakers. Many of our alumni have gone one to achieve extraordinary things back home. Not only do they get the benefit of studying at some of the best universities in the world, they also get to experience the best of living in the UK. From climate studies to football coaching, I am looking forward to seeing what they achieve, and encourage all those interested to apply early." Fareeha Gull Hashmi, Assistant Manager of Oral History Project Citizens Archive of Pakistan and upcoming Chevening scholar, said, "I am

thrilled to be joining the University of Essex for my MA in Heritage and Museum Studies. This programme is exactly what I was looking for to help me on my journey to improve heritage and cultural preservation in Pakistan. I can't wait for my journey to begin." The cohort includes those on a scholarship in Football Science, with the

This month, the British High Commission launched Chevening Connect in Karachi, a new debate series bringing together industry experts and Chevening alumni. The first debate, on tackling climate, looked at the technical, economic and political leadership needed to support Pakistan with adaptation and resilience. Applications for Chevening Scholar-



support of Swindon Town Football Club. For the first time, this year's cohort also saw an additional scholarship for Heritage and Museum Studies with the support of Essex University. This scholarship will cover tuition fees, living expenses, and travel costs. This, and a University of Essex Scholarship for Climate Studies, are again available in this year's application cycle, as are additional scholarships from the University of Birmingham.

ships to study in the UK from 2025-26 will close on 5 November. Applications for the South Asia Journalism Programme, a two-month journalism fellowship with the University of Westminster, are open and will close on 10 October. Applications for the Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies fellowship, a five-month fellowship, are open and will close on 5 November 2024.

**“Life is never fair, and perhaps it is a good thing for most of us that it is not.”**  
Oscar Wilde

**“The only impossible journey is the one you never begin.”** – Tony Robbins

# Meloni coalition told Italy's budget must match EU pledges

## Newsire

Rome: Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government was told by Italy's finance minister that its budget plans mustn't deviate from any pledges to Brussels to fix the public finances.

In a cabinet meeting this week, Giancarlo Giorgetti set out the process that the country needs to follow to conform to newly revamped fiscal rules to bring its deficit down to the European Union's 3% ceiling, according to a finance ministry official.

Italy, along with France and other members, were reprimanded by Brussels in June for running large shortfalls last year — the first stage in a process that will test nations' willingness to comply, and the bloc's resolve to enforce that regime.

Giorgetti has until September 20 to submit plans to the EU explaining how the government will tame its deficit with a view to reducing the second-highest debt pile in the region. The budget for 2025 must then be finished by the middle of October.

Before the cabinet, coalition leaders met in their first gathering since the summer break and pledged to stay together until the end of the current parliament — a key priority for Meloni, who has sought to break with Italy's past of unstable governments.

“The unity of the coalition was reiterated, and their determination to forge ahead with their reform plan, and the program voted for by citizens, for the duration of the legislature,” the alliance said in a joint statement.

The cabinet meeting didn't square the circle of how to reconcile giveaway pledges to voters with the need to bring the deficit in line — a showdown that will have to take place in the coming weeks.

For now, the coalition insists it won't renege on its promises, and in its statement it pledged that the budget will be “balanced.” Meloni, in remarks to the cabinet, reiterated that a legacy of costly measures that the government inherited won't be repeated.

“It will be a budget inspired by common sense and seriousness, like the previous ones,” she said. “The era of money thrown out the window and bonuses is over, and won't return while we're in power. All available resources must in my view continue to be concentrated in support to companies that hire and create jobs to increase the purchasing power of families, with special attention to families with children.”

Separately, the government agreed to nominate EU Affairs Minister Raffaele Fitto for the European Commission.



# Serbia and France sign \$3bn deal for sale of French fighter jets

## Covert Report

Paris: France and Serbia have signed a \$3bn agreement for the sale of 12 French-made Rafale fighter jets, as European countries try to coax Serbia away from close ties with Russia. The landmark sale, signed by Serb Defence Minister Bratislav Gasic and Dassault Aviation CEO Eric Trappier on Thursday, comes as French President Emmanuel Macron visits Belgrade in a bid to bolster ties between the two nations.

“We are happy to become part of the Rafale club. We thank

the president of France for making this decision and for enabling us to purchase the new Rafales,” Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic told reporters during the signing. Macron says that the move will help bring Serbia, which has maintained close political and economic ties with Russia for years, closer to the European Union (EU). Thursday's deal marks the largest weapons sale to Serbia, a frequent buyer of Russian weapons, since 2006. The French leader called the deal an act of “strategic courage” and a “true demonstration of European spirit”. Critics have said that the deal rewards an increasingly auto-



cratic government in Belgrade that continues to embrace revisionist narratives about past human rights abuses and harbour territorial ambitions that threaten the integrity of its neighbours.

The deal could help advance Serbia's efforts to modernise its military, long reliant on Soviet-era technology and military hardware.

Belgrade has moved away from military cooperation with Moscow since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, but has not joined other European states in issuing sanctions.

Serbia has expressed interest in joining the EU, but those ambitions have been set back by issues such as corruption, the rule of law, and thorny relations with neighbouring Kosovo, which declared its independence from Serbia in 2008 in a move that angered Serb nationalists.

The Vucic government has recently faced street protests against a potential lithium mining project, viewed positively by the EU and previously suspended following large demonstrations in 2022.

