

Portugal's Evora plans tourist tax from 2025 to address overtourism **NewsWire**

Lisbon: Evora, a popular tourist destination in Portugal known for its ancient ruins, plans to introduce a tourist tax in 2025. Visitors will have to pay a fee to stay overnight at the UNESCO World Heritage site, according to the mayor of Alentejo's capital. Draft regulation approvals from the municipal assembly are expected.

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Theodora, daughter of former Greek king, holds Orthodox wedding in Athens

Athens: Princess Theodora of Greece and Denmark, the youngest daughter of the late King of Greece Constantine II, married her fiancé in an Orthodox ceremony in Athens this week. Royals from both countries joined the service at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens where the funeral was held.

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EU-China in last gasp bid to avoid EV-driven trade war



NewsWire

Beijing: China has suggested setting minimum prices for the electric vehicles (EVs) it ships to the European Union, a compromise bid to persuade the bloc to drop plans to impose 17-35.3% tariffs on Chinese EVs. The European Commission planned to vote on the proposed tariffs on September 25 but delayed it without explanation. Nikkei reported that the vote will be held within the week beginning September 30. The vote's delay came after Chinese Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao met with European Commission Executive Vice President and Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis in Brussels on September 19. "Both sides agreed to intensify efforts to find an effective, enforceable and WTO-compatible solution to the battery EV case," Dombrovskis said in a post on X on September 19. "This without prejudice to the EU investigation and its deadlines." He Yongqian, a Chinese Ministry of Commerce spokes-

person, said in a media briefing on Thursday (September 26) that both China and the EU have clearly expressed political willingness to address disputes through consultations. During the Wang-Dombrovskis talks, the two sides agreed to push forward negotiations on a "price commitment agreement" and fully commit to achieving a mutually acceptable solution through amicable dialogue and consultations, she said. "Currently, technical teams from both sides are actively discussing a flexible price commitment solution, following the direction set during the talks," she said. "They are striving to reach a consensus on a solution framework before the final ruling." She stressed that China has the "utmost sincerity" to appropriately resolve disputes through dialogue and consultations, but at the same time, it is fully determined to safeguard the legitimate interests of Chinese companies. Some Chinese commentators opined that China's proposal of a "price commitment agreement" is an attractive deal for many EU members who want to avoid a full-blown trade war with China. However, they said, the offer may not be enough to change the EU's tariff decision. "Spain has said that China and the EU should not have a trade war while Germany's stance against the EV tariffs has also become clearer," Zheng Chunrong, director of the Center for European Studies at the School of Foreign Studies Tongji University, told Beijing Daily in an interview.

"However, such an opposition voice has not reached a level that can stop the tariffs," he said. "It's good that the EU continues its negotiations with China. But it's hard to tell how things will develop." According to the EU's qualified majority voting (QMV), at least 15 countries representing 65% of the EU population must block the proposed EV tariffs. If implemented, the tariffs will last for at least five years. In a non-binding vote held in July, 12 out of 27 EU members voted for the EC's decision to impose provisional tariffs on Chinese EVs. They included France, Spain and Italy. Four countries voted against it. The remaining 11 members, including Germany, abstained. "It is very difficult to gather enough European countries to vote down the EC's anti-subsidy probe results," said Cui Fan, a professor at the School of International Trade and Economics of the University of International Business and Economics. Cui said even if Spain, Italy and all the 11 abstaining countries join hands, they only represent 61.4% of the EU population and thus cannot vote down the tariffs. In August, Chinese EV makers individually proposed to the EU to set minimum sale prices and sales quotas to prevent disruption of the bloc's EV markets. However, the EU rejected all these offers. "Our review focussed on whether these offers would eliminate the injurious effects of the subsidies identified in our investigations and whether these price undertakings could be effectively monitored and enforced," a spokesperson of the EC said on September 12. "The Commission has concluded that none of the offers met these requirements." After this announcement, Wang traveled to Europe to make one last push to lobby the EC against the tariffs. It's still unclear, however, whether his efforts will work to change EU minds. One Hubei-based columnist opined that would be unreasonable for the EU to reject China's "price commitment" proposal. He said BYD has already priced its flagship Tang SUV at 72,000 euros (563,000 yuan) in Europe for 2025 while the same model was priced at about 200,000 yuan in China. He said the Tang model may have to be priced at 800,000



yuan in the EU to match European EV maker rivals. He said forcing Chinese automakers to raise product prices will only hurt the interest of EU consumers. Retaliatory trade moves are already in the pipeline. China's MoC launched anti-dumping probes into EU pork imports in June and dairy imports in August. Last year, China imported 2.6 billion euros (US\$2.9 billion) worth of pork products and 1.76 billion euros of dairy products from the EU. At the same time, China exported 438,034 battery EVs worth 9.7 billion euros to the EU over the same period. If a China-EU trade war breaks out, Chinese EV

makers will pay more tariffs in absolute value than the EU's pork and dairy product makers but they could conceivably more easily absorb the pain considering their higher margins.



Denmark embassy, AKF sign agreement to mitigate climate risks in Pakistan



Celina Ali

Islamabad: The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Pakistan and the Embassy of Denmark in Islamabad this week signed an agreement to improve coastal communities' resilience to climate change and mitigate climate risks in Pakistan, says a press release. The project 'Sindh Coastal Resilience Integrated Programme (SCRIP)' focusses on tackling climate vulnerability in coastal districts where the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)'s existing presence on the ground and strong capacity can be leveraged. Through a human-centred approach and partnering closely with government and local civil society actors and knowledge institutions, it will deploy cost-effective and locally relevant solutions to improve resilience to climate change and enhance fragile ecosystems that are critical to people's lives and sustainable development. The project will build on AKF's global Indian Ocean Coastal Regeneration Initiative which has been designed as a response to the converging crises of climate change, deforestation and biodiversity loss that threaten the earth's capacity to recuperate and regenerate. The partnership agreement was signed by Jakob Linulf, Ambassador of Denmark, and Akhtar Iqbal, CEO, Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan (AKF, Pakistan). The signing ceremony was also attended by other senior represent-

atives from the Danish Embassy and the Aga Khan Development Network, Pakistan. Speaking at the occasion, Jakob Linulf, ambassador of Denmark shared, "The province of Sindh has a diverse and unique climate profile, ranging from drought-prone interior districts, desert landscapes, hills, to long coastal areas spreading across 330 kilometres from the borders of India to the borders of Balochistan. With such rich and fragile ecosystems, the impacts of climate change are as varied - from droughts and heatwaves impacting agricultural production to severe flooding leading to fragile socio-economic conditions and livelihoods. The project aims to respond to these challenges, focusing on tackling climate vulnerability in coastal districts along the Arabian Sea coast." Akhtar Iqbal, CEO AKF, Pakistan noted that AKF is pleased to collaborate with the Embassy of Denmark on a critical component as communities in Pakistan have been experiencing firsthand the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation in Pakistan. Aga Khan Foundation and agencies of the AKDN have been fully committed to doing our part for responsible stewardship of the environment. The Sindh Coastal Resilience Integrated Programme encompasses a science-based ecosystem approach and builds on the premise that in order to address climate change and ensure environmental sustainability, it is essential to engage communities and by doing so, improving the overall quality of life and economic opportunities. The project will be implemented by the AKDN agencies including the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, Pakistan (AKAHP) and the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP).



Constitutional court come what may: Bilawal Bhutto

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari this week categorically said that the formation of the constitutional court is compulsory and his party will ensure its formation come what may. Addressing the Sindh High Court Bar Association on Tuesday, the PPP chief said that 19th constitutional amendment was introduced under duress "following a threat from the Supreme Court". "The judicial reforms would be undertaken in line with the Charter of Democracy (COD) come what may," he vowed. The government pushed the proposed constitutional package amid speculation about a potential extension in the tenure of Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa, who is set to retire in October this year, following the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) request last month for the early issuance of a notification regarding the appointment of the next top judge. Bilawal continued that the parliament had replaced the judges' appointment procedure with a globally recognised law via 18th amendment. "In the United States, entire parliament decides on the appointment of judges that is why martial law is never imposed in the US," he added. Terming the ex-premier Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's death sentence a "judicial murder", Bilawal said that it was "necessary and also our compulsion" to establish a constitutional court so no other prime minister could be executed and justice would be served to the people. He came down hard on military rulers and said that her mother Benazir Bhutto had seen the military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq's era in which all political workers went through brutal torture. The politico recalled: "Shaheed Benazir knew that our system was broken. At that time, [former chief justice] Iftikhar Chaudhry was not a revolutionary but a PCO judge." "[...] nor there was any 'dam wala judge,'" Bilawal said while referring to ex-CJP Mian Saqib Nisar without naming him.



He said that a decision was taken to form a constitutional court citing the need of the people to get justice "when courts were fixing the prices of pakora and tomatoes at that time". Despite claims of securing the "magic number" needed to push the bill through, the government failed to table the judiciary-centric amendments — possibly including the establishment of a separate constitutional court — in parliament and postponed its move indefinitely. To pass the constitutional amendments, the government is short of 13 votes in the National Assembly (NA) and nine in the Senate. To attain the required parliamentary strength for passing the judicial package, the ruling coalition parties — the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) — held a flurry of meetings to woo Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, but to no avail. The ruling coalition is inclined towards the politico-religious party as it remained a close ally of both parties in the previous government led by the Pakistan Democratic Movement. This multi-party alliance successfully ousted former premier Imran Khan from office via a no-confidence motion in 2022. However, the JUI-F chief, whose party's lawmakers are now sitting on the opposition benches, had rejected the constitutional package introduced by the incumbent government, alleging that it aimed at protecting the coalition government and would disturb the balance of power among state institutions.

75th National Day of China celebrated at Chinese Consulate in Lahore

NewsWire

Lahore: 75th National Day of the People's Republic of China was celebrated here at the Chinese Consulate this week. Speaking at the event as the chief guest, Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif highlighted the significance of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a vital indicator of the robust and enduring relationship between Pakistan and China. The CM views CPEC as a crucial development initiative that not only enhances economic ties but also reflects the deep-rooted partnership and mutual cooperation between the two nations.

The CM expressed greetings on behalf of the Pakistani people, stating, "On the occasion of China's 75th National Day, I extend my warm wishes to the Chinese people." She conveyed that the people of Punjab also send heartfelt congratulations to their Chinese brothers and sisters, expressing pride in attending the event. She lauded the Chinese nation for achieving remarkable heights in development and innovation while extending a hand of friendship to the global community. Maryam Nawaz emphasized that China's greatness lies in its unwavering commitment to peace, cooperation, and humanitarian well-being.

Highlighting the deep-rooted friendship between Pakistan and China, she remarked that their relationship was built on trust, respect, and a shared vision for a bright future. "Our bond is not merely based on strategic interests; it is a connection of hearts and souls," she asserted. The CM acknowledged China's significant achievements in lifting millions out of poverty and praised its role as a model for the world in technology, infrastructure, and industry. She noted China's indispensable contribution during global crises, affirming its commitment to providing resources to countries in need. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, China has consistently promoted peace and development, exemplified by its Belt and Road Initiative, she said and added



that the fruits of China's economic development are benefiting people around the world and that China is emerging as a leader with a vision that transcends borders. CM Maryam Nawaz expressed pride in the strong and resilient friendship between Pakistan and China, affirming that both nations were progressing together towards prosperity and a peaceful future. She prayed for the continued strengthening of the Pakistan-China friendship. Zhao Shirin, the Chinese Consul General in Lahore, acknowledged the Chief Minister's people-friendly initiatives, highlighting projects like the

IT City, cancer hospital, air ambulance services, and solar panel programs that provide real relief to the public. He commended the Punjab government for delivering excellent services to the people and called out "Long Live Pakistan-China Friendship." The ceremony featured the national anthems of both countries, traditional Chinese cultural performances, and the cutting of a cake to celebrate China's 75th anniversary. Various cultural presentations included Chinese music, songs of love for the homeland, and a dragon dance. Prominent attendees included Governor of Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider, Speaker of the Punjab Assembly Malik Ahmad Khan, Senior Minister Maryam Aurangzeb, Provincial Minister for Industry Chaudhry Shafique Hussain, Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman, and IG Usman Anwar.

OGDCL signs MoU with major Chinese company

Gwadar Pro

Islamabad: Pakistan's Oil & Gas Development Company (OGDCL) this week signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CCDC, the major player in drilling and upstream Oil field Services of China, for the development of shale and tight gas potential of Pakistan and address the country's energy needs through indigenous solutions. The MOU was signed by OGDCL's Executive Director (Production), Mumtaz Ali Soomro, and CCDC's Vice President, Zhang Zhidong, during the 8th Silk Road International Exposition and Investment and Trade Forum for Cooperation Between East and West China in Xi'an city of Shaanxi province of China, according to a press statement. The government of China has specially invited Pakistan to attend the event as the Country of Honor. The signing ceremony was attended by the Federal Minister for Energy (Petroleum Division), Dr Musadik Malik, and the Ambassador of Pakistan to China, Khalil Hashmi. The Minister expressed gratitude to the Chinese side for hosting Pakistan as the Country of Honor at the event. He said that this cooperation

would strengthen ties in the energy sector for the mutual benefit of both nations. The cooperation on shale gas and tight gas between OGDCL and CCDC will open up a new chapter of untapped energy potential that our country possesses. Earlier on August 12, the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) had announced to commence production from Pakistan's first tight gas project in the Sujawal district of Sindh. The OGDCL spokesperson said that the North-west Well-1 in Sujawal is producing 1.5 million cubic feet of gas per day. The company said that 1.5 million cubic feet of gas is being injected into the Sui Southern Network. "The OGDCL is committed to increasing the country's energy resources," the statement read. Meanwhile, the OGDCL also shared the development in a notice to the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX). "OGDCL is pleased to report the commencement of early commercial production of tight gas from Nur West Well-1. OGDCL holds 100% working interest in Nur Development & Production Lease (D&PL), located in district Sujawal, Sindh," the notice read.



Chinese companies encouraged to invest in Pakistan's energy section

Gwadar Pro



Islamabad: Pakistan's Minister for Petroleum, Dr. Musadik Malik, this week called upon the Chinese companies, particularly those from Shaanxi province, to explore investment opportunities in Pakistan's energy and petroleum sectors. Speaking at the China (Shaanxi)-Pakistan Conference for Economic and Trade Cooperation, held alongside the 8th Silk Road International Expo in Xi'an, Shaanxi, Dr. Malik expressed gratitude to the Shaanxi government for inviting Pakistan as the Guest Country of Honor and supporting the establishment of the Pakistan Pavilion at the event. According to an official statement issued

here, he highlighted that Pakistan's participation in the expo was a direct outcome of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's earlier visit to Xi'an this year. He emphasized that leading Pakistani companies involved in upstream, midstream, and downstream sectors of petroleum and coal are eager to collaborate with Shaanxi-based firms through investments, joint ventures, and technology transfers. The Minister stressed the importance of enhancing provincial-level cooperation, particularly in fostering Business-to-Business partnerships across various sectors, including mining, petroleum, energy, and technology. He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to fostering shared growth, sustainable development, and a lasting friendship with China, grounded in mutually beneficial cooperation.

Call to enhance ties between Pakistan, Italy through cultural exchanges, youth development programs

Celina Ali Islamabad: Convener of the Pakistan-Italy Parliamentary Friendship Group Shazia Marri this week called for enhancing 'ties between Pakistan and Italy through cultural exchanges, youth development programs and people-to-people contact.

Pakistan as well as the Ambassador of Pakistan to Italy. The agenda was to discuss the prospects of enhancing bilateral and trade ties between the two countries. Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan, Marilina Armetlin reaffirmed her country's unwavering commitment to supporting Pakistan in mutually

dor for their generous support to the flood victims in 2022. The Italian Ambassador responded that they were also airing a radio program on Climate related issues in order to raise awareness among the masses. The Italian Ambassador reaffirmed the commitment of her government towards enhancing



Shazia Marri expressed these views while chairing the maiden meeting of Pakistan-Italy Parliamentary Friendship Group (PFG). Besides the officers from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce, the meeting was also attended by the Ambassador of Italy to

agreed priority sectors such as economic growth projects for rural development. She highlighted the long visa processing times particularly for the students and underscored the need to minimize processing times for them. Shazia Marri also thanked the Italian Ambassa-

economic cooperation with Pakistan through various projects. She also referred to Italy's flagship initiative that aims to build a multi-professional olive and olive oil in Pakistan to enhance production and improve food security through technical assis-



tance and training of relevant stakeholders. Talking about the development of Baluchistan, the Italian Ambassador informed that they were working on delivering olive oil based cosmetic products for the development of rural women of Balochistan. The Italian government was ready to supply necessary equipment/ machinery for the olive oil extraction and dairy sector. Ms. Marri outlined the need to expedite the process of finalizing the pending MoUs/Agreements between the two countries particularly the visa abolition agreement on diplomatic passports so that the officials of the

two countries could frequently interact with each other without barriers of visas. In order to translate the existing relations between Pakistan and Italy in to essential people-to-people contacts, Shazia Marri stressed on enhanced parliamentary linkages, youth engagement programs and sports diplomacy between the two countries. Shazia Marri emphasized that Parliamentary Friendship group of both countries could significantly strengthen bilateral relations, fostering a stronger connection between the both countries.



UN Summit of the Future: From a sketch to a picture

Andrey Kortunov

Large-scale high-level events at the United Nations (UN) seldom generate immediate practical results dramatically shifting the course of international relations. As a rule, the result of such events, which take a lot of time and energy to put together, are very general and legally non-binding statements, short-term media splashes and criticism from frustrated experts and analysts looking for something more radical or more practical. Yet, these events remain important - they serve as political barometers indicating the ongoing changes in the predominant concerns, ambitions and priorities within the international community. With any luck, they can also become long-awaited catalysts for badly needed change within the international system.

The UN Summit of the Future that took place in New York on September 22-23 was no exception to this general rule. It clearly reflected rapidly shifting global security and development agendas, as well as new challenges and opportunities for multilateral cooperation on a broad range of fundamental issues the humankind has to confront in our turbulent times. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the main driving force behind the Summit, urged member-states to demonstrate "vision" and "courage," calling for "maximum ambition" to strengthen international institutions, which struggle to respond effectively to today's and tomorrow's threats. There is no time for further procrastinators; suffice to say, to date, only 17 percent of the 2015-2030 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are on track.

Nobody at the meeting in New York questioned in principle the urgent need to democratize the international system by giving a more powerful voice to developing nations. The outcome of the summit, Pact for the Future, outlines 56 "actions," including a continuous commitment to multilateralism, upholding the UN Charter and peacekeeping. It appropriately calls for reforms to international financial institutions and the UN Security Council, along with renewed efforts to combat climate change, promote disarmament and guide the development of artificial intelligence.

Who in his or her right mind would object to these noble and timely goals? These goals are commendable, yet seem a bit vague. For instance, critics could argue that



none of the documents adopted at the Summit directly addressed the issue of specific financial commitments regarding the green transition or a particular role that the UN should play in reforming international financial institutions.

The odds are that deep disagreements on the central points of the global development and security agendas will not disappear in the foreseeable future. There are many reasons for nations to stick to their current positions beyond the regretful

inertia of the old political thinking or the vicious logic of the ongoing geopolitical confrontation.

The complex issues facing the modern world are not simply the result of misunderstandings or communication breakdowns. The challenges are too deep-rooted to be resolved merely by bringing together leaders for diplomatic discussions. While dialogue is important, the problems require more substantive solutions beyond just conversation. They are often rooted in real

divergences of national interests and in the very nature of the forthcoming international transition that will inevitably be more painful and more costly for some nations than it will be for others.

The international community has to continue its search not for an elusive general consensus on the desirable world order, but rather for attainable compromises on specific matters. Such compromises will not be ideal or not always sustainable over long periods of time and inevitably they will be vulnerable to criticism. However, a tactical compromise that is less than perfect on practical problems is much better than a continuous uncompromising fight around matters of principle.

The Summit of the Future, with all the reservations one might have about its specific outputs and outcomes, can be an important step in the right direction. Provided, of course, that the Summit will be followed by a whole trail of problem-focused events addressing each of the 56 "actions" in much more detail. In other words, it's high time to start gradually moving from an initial rough sketch to a carefully drawn picture, even if completing the drawing will turn out to be a long process.

The writer is academic director of the Russian International Affairs Council

Market competition determined by technology, quality, not geopolitics

Ding Gang

Washington seems to be on a stimulant called "contain China." This stimulant has put the US government in a state of excitement, constantly rolling out restrictive policies against China. It has given Washington a temporary illusion of power, making it believe it can curb China's advancement in the global market.

While the US government can dictate which Chinese-made products Americans may use, such as electric vehicles or textiles made from Xinjiang cotton, it cannot halt the global advancement of Chinese manufacturing or determine its fate.

Fundamental economic principles and Chinese people's pursuit of a better life and contribution to the world's common development determine this reality. I have witnessed the pivotal role of Chinese manufacturing in global supply chains. From large-scale infrastructure projects in Africa to high-tech products in Europe, Chinese-made goods are ubiquitous, acting as an invisible yet resilient thread weaving through the global economy net. Even in the US, Chinese-manufactured products are deeply embedded in various aspects of the economy, from everyday items on supermarket shelves to electronic devices and components. In Africa, I have observed how Chinese-backed investment and construction projects have stimulated local economies, catalyzing development



aspirations among the populace. In Southeast and Central Asia, Chinese investments have become an important driver of economic growth, fostering regional connectivity.

Despite being US allies and maintaining political alignment, even some developed nations find it challenging to sever their deep economic ties with China. The German automotive industry, for instance, is inextricably linked to the Chinese market and accessories supply chain, much like vines entwined around a tree.

If we liken the global economy to an intricate, colorful jigsaw puzzle, Chinese manufacturing is deeply integrated into its fabric. Removing any piece would fragment the entire picture. Attempting to

exclude China from global supply chains would not enhance security for the US and its allies. Instead, it could introduce more significant uncertainty and risk, akin to arbitrarily removing a gear from a precision timepiece, potentially causing the entire mechanism to malfunction. Moreover, China is not a passive player in the global economy but a key protagonist.

During my recent visits to Chinese cities like Shenzhen and Shanghai, I witnessed firsthand the remarkable progress of Chinese enterprises in technological innovation. The innovative atmosphere is palpable, reminiscent of vibrant spring growth, full of vitality and potential. Faced with external pressures, China can fully consolidate its position through further market

opening and deepening international cooperation.

When one gains a deeper understanding of the Chinese economy, particularly the dedicated workers and enterprises striving for development opportunities, the enduring momentum of Chinese manufacturing becomes clear.

The global expansion of Chinese-made automobiles is inevitable and merely the beginning. The US and other developed

countries that have long dominated the global automotive market must confront the reality of China's emergence as a formidable competitor in this field. While accepting this reality may be challenging and costly, it's crucial to recognize that Chinese manufacturing is expanding

globally through peaceful means. Any competition is based on technology, quality, cost, and price.

Washington may leverage its limited hegemony to sever ties with Chinese manufacturing, but it cannot reconstruct the intricate, globalization-aligned connections.

While intensifying its policies to contain Chinese manufacturing may create pressure on China's development, from a broader and long-term perspective, the global advancement of Chinese manufacturing is unstoppable.

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High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri has a good news for Urdu lovers

Covert Report
Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week announced that Urdu Language School Canberra is now a member of the ACT Community Language Schools Association.

“Delighted to share that Urdu Language School Canberra is now a member of the ACT Community Language Schools Association. To celebrate this achievement and to

honour the founder of Urdu School Mr. Tanveer Khan and the volunteer teachers a ceremony was organised,” he posted on X. The ACT Community Language Schools Association is an umbrella



body for community based language schools in the Australian Capital Territory. It has over 50 member schools and about 2500 students learning different kinds of community languages. Languages offered include: Arabic, Bangla, Cantonese, Chinese

(Mandarin), Croatian, Dutch, Filipino, Finnish, Greek, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Karen, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian, Maori, Mon, Japanese, Persian, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Samoan, Serbian, Sinhalese, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Tongan and Vietnamese.

UNESCO's Lidia Brito meets Chairman NDMA, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad



Celina Ali
Islamabad: UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, Lidia Brito, this week met with Chairman NDMA, Lieutenant General Inam Haider Malik to discuss Pakistan's innovative approach to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in Paris along with Pakistani Ambassador to France Asim Iftikhar Ahmad. The meeting emphasized Pakistan's DRR model, recognized globally as a best practice, integrating science, technology, and data-driven methodologies for risk management. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) emerged as key components of modern DRR strategies, underscoring their role in predictive analytics and enhancing early warning systems. The Chairman NDMA stressed the importance of a regional approach to collaboration for effective disaster management. He introduced Disaster Impact Reduction (DIR) as an innovative concept aimed at minimizing the aftermath of disasters through timely action and resource allocation. Both leaders emphasized the need for credible early warning systems, stating that timely information-sharing and resource allocation are vital to prevent unnecessary losses. Lt. Gen. Malik also highlighted the importance of simplifying complex scientific data to make it accessible to at-risk communities and decision-makers. Lidia Brito lauded Pakistan's efforts in DRR and its integration of early warning systems. She emphasized that Scientific data including AI and ML will play a critical role in mitigating disaster impacts globally. This meeting marks a significant step forward in global cooperation for disaster risk reduction and resilience-building, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.



Kazakhstan pledges full support for Pakistan in SCO endeavours

Celina Ali
Islamabad: Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Pakistan Yerzhan Kistafin this week vowed to support Pakistan in all its endeavours within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) framework, adding his country is excited about the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organization Heads of Government meeting in October in Islamabad. The Ambassador expressed these remarks at the Conference on "Rising Kazakhstan: Agenda for building regional cooperation" which was organized by Institute of Regional Studies Islamabad on Tuesday. He said that this gathering offers them an exceptional platform to engage in meaningful dialogue on Kazakhstan's progress, while also highlighting the significance of fostering cooperation with Pakistan, which is a key partner for Kazakhstan in South Asia. He said that the leadership of his country, on multiple occasions, has emphasized that Islamabad holds critical importance in Kazakhstan's foreign policy, particularly in South Asia. He added that the development of strong



and mutually beneficial ties with Pakistan is of principal importance to them, and they see enormous potential for cooperation across a wide range of sectors. The Ambassador expressed confidence that their partnership with Pakistan will grow stronger, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation for the benefit of peoples of the two countries as well as for the region. He said that Kazakhstan's national agenda hold key

importance not only for their country's internal development but also for enhancing cooperation in the broader Central and South Asian region. He added that Pakistan and Kazakhstan can extend their cooperation in business development, energy security, water resource management, and environmental protection to further deepening their ties. He maintained that Kazakhstan and Pakistan are already holding active talks on several dimensions, with the goal of intensifying cooperation and mutually benefiting from each other's experiences. He said that they believed bilateral cooperation will not only strengthen the bonds between their two nations but also contribute to greater regional stability and prosperity. He also shared his views about national agenda of Kazakhstan and said that President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in his recent address emphasized the key goals of his nation: sustainable socio-economic progress, the realization of citizens' potential, and the enhancement of national well-being.

He added that the President talked about political and social reforms, economic reforms and development, enhancing the investment climate and improving business conditions, and tax reforms. He added that President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also discussed infrastructure and digitalization, gas infrastructure, water sector, improving the environmental situation and foreign policy during his speech. President of the Institute of Regional studies, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, Pakistan Minister of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhry, Additional Secretary of the Ministry of foreign affairs of Pakistan, Ambassador Ahmad Naseem Warraich, Vice-Chancellor of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Dr. Nadeem ul Haque and Professor Dr. Shabir Ahmad Khan from the Area Study Centre of the University of Peshawar also attended the conference.

Umar Rehman Malik highlights 'Parhega Sindh, Barhega Sindh' initiative



Abdullah Jan
Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week highlighted 'Parhega Sindh, Barhega Sindh' initiative by the Sindh government. "Under the 'Parhega Sindh, Barhega Sindh' initiative, Sindh government and

initiative will facilitate education for the children in the province. The Sindh Textbook Board (STB) administration earlier completed the delivery of textbooks to government schools at the district and tehsil levels across the province, while visiting teams are reviewing

education to every child under the banner of "Sindh will learn and Sindh will grow." They were actively involved in the process of delivering free textbooks to every child, he added. Lashari said that for the first time in history, the process of distributing textbooks on time had been completed transparently. A total of 4,453,686 sets of books were printed, including 24,351,475 individual

books, and these have been delivered to the children on time. They reviewed the ongoing work of providing free textbooks, and this process is still continuing. Wherever there is a greater need for books, we are delivering them. When the children of Sindh receive education, Sindh will develop further and move forward, he remarked.



the PPP under leadership of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has distributed 4,453,686 free book sets to students in public schools across the province," the PPP leader said. He expressed the confidence that the

the process of distribution of books to schools. STB Chairman Abdul Aleem Lashari said that Chief minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah were making efforts to provide



Theodora, daughter of former Greek King, holds Orthodox wedding in Athens



Covert Report
Athens: Princess Theodora of Greece and Denmark, the youngest daughter of the late King of Greece Constantine II, married her fiancé in an Orthodox ceremony in Athens this week. Royals from both countries joined the service at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens where the funeral service for Constantine II, Greece's last king and second cousin of Britain's King Charles III, was held in January 2023. Dozens of onlookers and enthusiastic admirers of the Greek royal family lined the streets outside the ca-

thedral to watch Theodora, 41, in a white embroidered dress with a long veil attached to a tiara, walk down the aisle escorted by her older brother Pavlos, to marry Matthew Kumar, a Los Angeles-based lawyer. Among the guests was Spain's former Queen Sofia, paternal aunt of Theodora. "The couple's desire to have their wedding in Athens reflects their love for Greece, the strong ties they maintain with the country and their desire to share Greek culture and hospitality and identity with their guests," the Greek royal family said in a statement published on its website on Friday. Constantine II was 27 and had been king for three years when he was forced into exile in 1967. The junta who seized power that year abolished the monarchy in 1973 and a referendum in 1974 rejected the monarchy again. Born in London and holder of a bachelor degree in the theatre arts, Theodora moved to Los Angeles in 2010 to become an actress. She made her debut in the TV soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* a year later.



Bulgaria expects to become full member of Schengen zone by the end of 2024

NewsWire
Sofia: Bulgaria hopes its full membership to the Schengen Zone will be finalized by the end of this year. Yordanka Chobanova, who heads the European Commission's representation in Bulgaria said that a proposal to abolish land border controls for Bulgaria and Romania will be made on October 10. Financial losses for Bulgaria remaining outside Schengen, in terms of land borders, have reached €400 million. Bulgaria believes that a decision regarding its full membership to the Schengen Area will be taken by the end of this year. Authorities in Sofia expressed their hope that the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in the Schengen Zone, in terms of land borders, will soon be finalized, Schengen.News reports. On 10 October, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, together with Hungary's interior minister, are to

propose to the Council of the European Union that checks at land borders be abolished. Chobanova told Euractiv that expectations in Bulgaria are that the European Commission will strongly support Schengen. Remaining outside Schengen, in terms of land borders, caused financial losses to Bulgaria that reached €400 million, based on the figures from the Institute of Economic Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, which were presented by caretaker Economy Minister Petko Nikolov, back in July. Bulgaria and Romania became members of the Schengen Zone on March 31, 2024, lifting controls for sea and air travel. However, both countries' partial accession to Schengen means that land border controls continue to remain effective. In July this year, the Deputy Minister of the Interior of Hungary, Bence Retvari, highlighted the importance of including Bulgaria and Romania in the borderless area of

Schengen in terms of land borders by the end of 2024. Retvari said that unnecessary delays for the finalisation of this process should be avoided in order to reach a resolution. Migrants arriving at the EU's southern borders do not seek to obey the law, often attacking border guards. They do not respect the EU; they do not cooperate with the authorities. At present, Hungary is holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which began on July 1, 2024, and will last until the end of this year. In June, the Hungarian Ambassador to the EU, Balint Odor, said the abolishment of land borders for both Bulgaria and Romania, would be among the top priorities of Hungary. Odor also added that reducing the number of irregular migrants who attempt to reach these two countries in an irregular way, will also be among the key priorities of Hungary.



Portugal's Evora plans tourist tax from 2025 to address overtourism



Newsire
Lisbon: Evora, a popular tourist destination in Portugal known for its ancient ruins, plans to introduce a tourist tax in 2025. Visitors will have to pay a fee to stay overnight at the UNESCO World Heritage site, according to the mayor of Alentejo's capital. Draft regulation approvals from the municipal assembly are expected by December, with the tax set to be imple-

mented by the beginning of 2025. Before the tourist tax takes effect, explore Evora with our guide to the best things to do in Portugal. The process for Evora's tourist tax began in 2019, but the plans were halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The tax's goal is to minimise the effects of over-tourism by using its earnings to improve heritage restoration, waste management, and tourism promotion. Evora's tourist tax will be exempted for specific groups.



Athletes affiliated with sports clubs, hospital patients and members of non-profit organisations (who have to stay overnight) will not need to pay this fee. Furthermore, there are plans to exempt tourists who stay for more than 2-3 days from paying the tax, encouraging them to spend more time in the city, according to SchengenNews.

The proposed tourist tax in Evora was initially suggested to be EUR 1 per night (approximately HKD 8.70) in 2019. However, the final amount is expected to be higher when the tax is implemented in 2025. The city has not yet announced the official rate for the tourist tax. Besides Evora, many other destinations in Portugal's Algarve region are imposing tourist taxes for overnight stays. Albufeira is set to launch a tourist tax in May 2025, and during the high season, tourists will have to pay EUR 2 per night (approximately HKD 17.43). Portimão, Olhão, Faro and Vila Real de Santo Antonio also plan to start tourist fees.



Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz meet Japanese Amb to discuss cooperation in various sectors

Abdullah Jan

Lahore: Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) President Nawaz Sharif and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz met with Japanese Ambassador Mitsuhiro Wada this week to discuss matters of mutual interest, enhancing bilateral relations, and increasing cooperation in various sectors. During the meeting, Nawaz Sharif emphasised the commitment to further expand the excellent relations between Pakistan and Japan, highlighting Japan's remarkable dedication on the global stage. Maryam Nawaz expressed that Nawaz Sharif was interested in increasing the bilateral trade volume between the two countries. She commended Japan's coop-



eration with the Punjab government in improving education, health, and urban facilities.

She further mentioned the significant investment potential in Punjab across various sectors, stating

that the province offered a conducive environment and incentives for investment.

Ambassador Mitsuhiro Wada expressed Japan's desire to further strengthen relations with Pakistan.

US Funded EnglishWorks! tackling global, regional challenges

Celina Ali

Lahore: US Ambassador Donald Blome and US Consul General in Lahore Kristin Hawkins this week welcomed 150 new students in Sialkot to the US-funded EnglishWorks! program. EnglishWorks! offers young people the opportunity to enhance English language, entrepreneurial, and leadership skills. "These skills will help young Pakistanis become community leaders who contribute to a prosperous, proud, and peaceful future for Pakistan," Ambassador Blome said. The EnglishWorks! program symbolizes the enduring partnership between the United States and Pakistan. Since 2015, more than 6,000 Pakistani students have graduated from the program. The United States looks forward to expanding its educational initiatives across Pakistan. During his visit to Lahore, Ambassador Blome also met with members of the Central Punjab Chapter of the Pakistan-U.S. Alumni Network. Alumni of U.S. exchanges play vital roles in business, education, government, and the non-profit sector, significantly contributing to their communities with the knowledge and connections they gained through their U.S.-funded programs and strengthening the U.S.-Pakistan relationship.



EU tourism nights increase in second quarter of 2024



NewsWire
Brussels: In the second quarter of 2024, there were 780.1 million overnight stays in tourist accommodations across the EU, a slight increase of 0.2% compared with the same quarter of 2023. April recorded 193.6 million nights (-8.7% compared with April 2023), May 272.1 million (+7.9%) and June 314.5 million (-0.1%). Note that Easter fell in March in 2024 whereas in 2023 that popular tourism weekend was in April. Foreign visitors (non-residents of the country, EU and non-EU) accounted

for approximately half (49.0%) of all overnight stays in the second quarter of 2024, with large differences among EU countries. The biggest share of foreign overnight stays at the beginning of the year was recorded in Cyprus (94.8%), Malta (94.7%) and Croatia (91.0%). In contrast, foreign guests accounted for less than one-fifth of overnight stays in Poland (18.2%), Germany (18.7%) and Romania (19.6%). The rise in nights spent by foreign visitors in the second quarter of 2024 (+3.1% compared with the second quarter of 2023) was much more



pronounced than the fall in domestic nights (-2.5%). The largest increases in overnight stays by foreign visitors

were recorded in Luxembourg (+23.8%), Malta (+13.3%) and Romania (+10.5%). At the other end of

the range, the Netherlands (-5.7%), Austria (-4.3%) and Belgium (-1.9%) experienced the biggest decline.



UK's grassroots minorities empowerment programme expands to Sindh



and she is now helping others in her community to understand their rights. Now the UK is expanding this work to Sindh.

There is an urgent need in Pakistan to take action on exclusion, abuse and exploitation. Pakistan ranks amongst the lowest in the world on gender equality and rule of law. Honour killings, forced religious conversions and child marriage persist, with 18% of girls married before adulthood.

The expansion of Aawaz II to Sindh will engage with communities in 5 districts. The UK aims to strengthen laws, policies and data on child protection and women's rights, enable communities to raise their voice against harmful practices, and prevent conflicts and discriminatory practices such as forced conversions and child marriages. Aawaz II works by empowering the community, including women, children, the youth, religious minorities and other marginalised groups, to have a voice in their future, and to join forces to prevent exploitation, discrimination and intolerance at all levels.

British High Commissioner, Jane Marriott, said: "We are delighted to expand Aawaz II to Sindh. Tackling inequalities, supporting reforms, and strengthening services to support marginalised groups are top priorities for the UK. Aawaz has already had great success in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad and Punjab in supporting locally led action, and I look forward to seeing the impact it will have to build a safer and more inclusive Sindh."

A key part of Aawaz II's work in Sindh on strengthening systems is led jointly by UNICEF, UNFPA, Care International, and Oxford Policy Management, who work closely with both



federal and provincial governments. To formally launch the programme in Sindh, the British High Commissioner held a launch event where she was joined by Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah.

Minister for Social Welfare Sindh, Mir Ali Khan Talpur said: "We need to work collectively to protect the rights of children and other vulnerable groups. I am committed to fully support the Aawaz II programme in Sindh."



Celina Ali Islamabad: The UK Government this week launched its expansion of its Aawaz II programme to Sindh, helping to empower and protect the most vulnerable Pakistanis. This expansion follows Aawaz II's success in Punjab, Islamabad and KPK where it has been running since 2018. It has established over 1000 community led village forums. These forums have empowered members to intervene in and take action against potential conflicts and tackle entrenched views on key issues like child mar-

riage and domestic abuse. Aawaz's text message and radio campaigns have reached over 35 million people. Over 44,000 volunteers have already been engaged on social projects. Aawaz II works to support people across minority communities. It supported over 34,000 people with disabilities to access disability certificates, understand their rights, and access funds. This includes Kancez, who toiled day and night to support her husband, a gravedigger, despite her disability. Through Aawaz she was able to access a disability card and social safety nets,



“You’re braver than you believe,
and stronger than you seem, and
smarter than you think.”

—
A.A. Mine

COVERT

TRUTH UNFOLD

October 6 - 12, 2024

“Almost everything will work
again if you unplug it for a few
minutes, including you.”:

—
Anne Lamott

Italy's Meloni-themed restaurant opens near asylum-seeker camp in Albania

Covert Report

Rome: A restaurant dedicated to Giorgia Meloni has opened in the vicinity of a camp in Albania where the asylum claims of people who seek to enter the EU by sea will be processed as part of a controversial pact promoted by the Italian far-right prime minister.

Trattoria Meloni, a seafood restaurant in the northern port of Shëngjin, was opened by Gjergj Luca, a restaurant owner who is close to the Albanian prime minister, Edi Rama. The restaurant is filled with 70 portraits of Meloni, whose Brothers of Italy, a party with

neofascist origins, leads Italy's ruling coalition. There is a smiling Meloni, a serious Meloni, an angry Meloni, and Meloni as a child, teenager and politician.

“When cuisine, art and politics come together, you can make beautiful things,” Luca said. Meloni and Rama first hatched the migration plan, branded by human rights associations as illegal under international law but tacitly endorsed by the EU, last summer.

Meloni visited the site of the Shëngjin centre in June, before the restaurant opened. It is one of two centres expected to begin processing asylum

claims in the coming weeks. Under the Italy-funded deal, men crossing the Mediterranean from north Africa and intercepted by the Italian coastguard will be taken to Albania.

The UK prime minister, Keir Starmer, was criticised by human rights groups and his Labour party backbenchers after expressing “great interest” in the migration pact during a meeting with Meloni in Rome last week while vowing to send £4m to support her controversial crackdown on irregular migration.

Meloni once said Italy should repatriate migrants and then “sink the boats that rescued them”. In



the past she has also called for a naval blockade of north Africa.

However, the centres have been largely welcomed by local people for creating jobs in an impoverished region of Albania.

Luca, the son of a famous Albanian actor and a former actor himself, said he was charmed by Meloni's personality, calling her “extraordinary”.

He said he hopes she will come back to taste his food and admire her portraits, which adorn every inch of the restaurant's walls.

The portraits were all painted by Helidon Haliti, a well-known Albanian artist.

Meloni is a “very interesting, strong character and, even if her political convictions aren't my own, that hasn't stopped me from doing a passionate job,” Haliti said.

“Did I need a permission to paint her portrait?” he added. “Did Andy Warhol need permission to

paint Marilyn Monroe? In postmodernism, it's allowed, and I think that with Meloni, I've succeeded.”

Meloni was also the key protagonist in a deal signed in July 2023 between the EU and Tunisia that meant paying the north African country millions of euros to stop migrant boats from leaving, as well as to invest in businesses and education, all with the aim of deterring migration.

The policy bore little fruit in the early stages, but now the deal, along with another – first struck by Italy in 2017 – that equips and trains the Libyan coastguard to stop people leaving, is credited with reducing inflows.

The deal with Libya essentially pushes people back to detention camps where they face torture and other abuses. Shocking abuse against migrants in Tunisia was reported by the Guardian last week.

France appoints first AI minister amid political unrest as it aims to become global AI leader

Pascale Davies

Paris: France has named its first-ever artificial intelligence (AI) minister amid a political shake-up and as the country manoeuvres itself to become a global leader in the technology.

Clara Chappaz, the CEO of the government's start-up body La French Tech, will take up the role of Secretary of State for AI and Digitalisation.

“I am delighted to continue my commitment to public action on these major subjects of digital and artificial intelligence,” she said in a LinkedIn post said.

The position did not previously include AI in the title and highlights France's ambition to lead in the technology and meet President Emmanuel Macron's ambition to turn Paris into the “city of AI”.

Since US company OpenAI launched ChatGPT in 2022, France has propagated its own generative AI (GenAI) rivals, such as Mistral AI and H.

France will also host the International AI Summit in February, following the previous two in the United Kingdom and Seoul.

Last year, France published a national AI strategy with €500 million to be invested in the creation of AI clusters by 2030.

Between the dissolution of France's National Assembly in early June and the eventual appointment of Michel Barnier as prime minister earlier this month, the tech ecosystem has largely been left in a state of limbo as to who would be the next digital minister. Chappaz, 35, will report to the Ministry of Higher Education and Research instead of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, which was the case with her predecessor.

She has an impressive record while being the director of La French Tech and in her three-year tenure, she created an optional parity pact which has been signed by over 700 start-ups to date.

It imposes a minimum quota of 20 per cent of women on boards of directors by 2025 and requires all managers to be trained in diversity issues and the fight against discrimination and harassment.

Prior to her appointment at La French Tech, she was the chief business officer for the luxury second-hand clothing website Vestiaire Collective and also created a second-hand children's clothing marketplace, Lullaby. She is also an alumna of Harvard Business School.

