

**AI training could transform Portugal's workforce by 2030** **NewsWire**  
 A recent study by McKinsey highlights that Portugal must retrain around 1.3 million workers, about 30% of its workforce, by 2030 to adopt generative AI and close its productivity gap with the rest of the European Union. Portugal has long struggled with low productivity, which has contributed minimally to GDP growth compared to (Page-8)

**UK pledges continued support for Pakistani educational initiatives** **Celina Ali**  
 Islamabad : British High Commissioner Jane Marriott this week announced that her country will continue supporting educational initiatives and cultural exchanges in Pakistan. The announcement came as Ms Marriott visited the Islamabad College for Boys G-6/3 along with education secretary (Page-11)

# China urges US to cease arming Taiwan



**Covert Report**

Beijing: China urges the United States to immediately stop arming Taiwan and stop its dangerous moves that undermine peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said this week.

The spokesperson made the remarks in response to a reporter's query that the U.S. Defense Department on Oct. 26 announced that the US State Department has approved 1.988 billion U.S. dollars in arms sales to Taiwan, including the "National Advanced Surface-to-air Missile Systems" and radar systems. The US arms sales to China's Taiwan region severely violate the one-China principle and the three China-US Joint Communiqués, especially the August 17 Communiqué of 1982. The sales seriously

infringe upon China's sovereignty and security interests, harm China-US relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and send a gravely wrong message to "Taiwan independence" separatist forces, the spokesperson said. China strongly condemns and firmly opposes the sales and has lodged solemn representations with the U.S. side, the spokesperson noted. The U.S. decision to use Taiwan to contain China and help advance "Taiwan independence" agenda by arming Taiwan goes against the US leaders' commitment of not supporting "Taiwan independence" and the two sides' effort of stabilizing the China-U.S. relations, the spokesperson said.



China urges the United States to immediately stop arming Taiwan and stop the dangerous moves that undermine peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, the spokesperson said. China will take resolute countermeasures and take all measures necessary to firmly defend national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.



# European Energy inaugurates 3-MW electrolysis plant in Denmark

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Danish renewables developer European Energy A/S has officially opened a 3-MW green hydrogen production facility that will supply Port Esbjerg and will later form part of a 12-MW electrolysis complex. The first electrolyser using the technology of Denmark's Stiesdal A/S was installed in the summer and successfully passed through the commissioning phase, European Energy said this week. The facility in Made, Esbjerg, is the company's first venture into large-scale green hydrogen production. European Energy expects the electrolyser to produce roughly 270 tonnes of hydrogen per year, which will be supplied to the Port Esbjerg and excess heat will be used by local heating utility



DIN Forsyning. The company's plan is to expand the Power-to-X site with two additional electrolysers, the next one of which is due to be installed in 2025. When all three units are brought into operation, the complex will be able to produce about 1,500 tonnes of green hydrogen annually. "This facility is just the beginning. Through the many learnings we have captured by designing, constructing and commissioning the plant, we will be able to reduce cost and time for future plants while improving project economics," said Emil Vikjaer-Andresen, head of Power-to-X at European Energy. European Energy has appointed Centrica to serve as balancing and optimisation contractor for the Made plant.



# Pakistan seeks Russia's support for BRICS membership bid, again

**Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistan has once again sought Russia's support for its bid to become a member of BRICS as the two countries reaffirmed their resolve to further strengthen bilateral ties. The development came during a meeting between President Asif Ali Zardari and the visiting Parliamentary delegation led by Speaker of the Russian Federation Council Valentina Matvienko here, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a statement this week. The statement said President Zardari sought Moscow's support for BRICS membership that would greatly help Pakistan to enhance its role in regional and global cooperation through the alliance. Pakistan had applied for BRICS membership last year in November. At the recent media briefing, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zehra Baloch said, Pakistan was not invited to the BRICS meeting held recently. "Pakistan is not a member of BRICS. Pakistan, as a developing country and an ardent supporter of inclusive multilateralism, believes that it can make important contributions in this grouping," she added. The spokesperson further said that by joining BRICS Pakistan can play an important role in furthering international cooperation and revitalisation of inclusive multilateralism. BRICS, the group of major emerging economies, is named after Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The bloc last year invited Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, Argentina and the United Arab Emirates to become members, in a move aimed at accelerating its push to reshuffle a world order it sees as outdated. In the meeting between President Zardari and Russian delegation, both sides also expressed resolve to boost ties in the areas of trade, commerce, investment, agriculture and energy for the mutual benefit of the two countries. The official statement said both sides underscored the importance of diversifying trade and economic cooperation, besides enhancing regional connectivity and commercial relations through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the North-South Transport Corridor. The Russian speaker emphasised that her country accorded priority to its relationship with Pakistan and expressed confidence that her visit would further enhance bilateral cooperation. She hoped that the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the parliaments of the two countries would further deepen bilateral relations. She expressed satisfaction over the growth in bilateral trade and also conveyed the special



greetings from President Putin. Earlier, Senate Chairman Yousuf Raza Gilani and the Russian speaker also signed an MoU on behalf of the parliaments of the two countries to strengthen bilateral relations. On the occasion, Gilani said that the Russian speaker's visit will be a stepping stone toward a brighter future of cooperation between Pakistan and Russia. He welcomed Speaker Valentina Ivanovna Matvienko and her high-level delegation at the Senate of Pakistan, and hoped that we have much to learn from each other's experiences. The presence of our esteemed guests from Russian Federation is not only a testament to the strengthening friendship between our two nations but also a reminder of our collective commitment to nurturing parliamentary ties, he mentioned. He added: "Today's address of Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Ms Valentina Matvienko to Senate of Pakistan represents another important step in strengthening the growing ties between Pakistan and Russia; two nations connected by a shared commitment to regional stability, peace, and prosperity." Matvienko also expressed her satisfaction with the growing bilateral ties, underscoring the ample scope for deepening these historic relations. Beginning her address to the Senate, Matvienko expressed her gratitude on visiting Pakistan. "On behalf of the entire Russian delegation, let me sincerely thank you for the hospitality and wonderful reception you have accorded us in Pakistan, and for the opportunity to speak in the Senate. It is a great honour for me," she said. "I am glad to visit your amazing country again, a country with an ancient history and culture, diverse and distinctive traditions," Mitvinko added. Mitvinko added that much needed to be done including the betterment of trade and economic ties between Pakistan and Russia. "Much remains to be done here, including for the progressive development of trade and economic ties," she told the Senate. The Russian speaker reiterated the commitment of Russia and Pakistan to maintain relations. "Even in difficult times, Moscow and Islamabad continued to maintain relations," she stated.

# Zhengzhou hosts first archaeological exploration skills competition, showcasing diverse talents



Director Gu Wanfang of the Zhengzhou Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics, an experienced archaeologist, shared insights with the competitors before the field tests began. He emphasized the importance of understanding the broader historical context, creating spatial and temporal frameworks, and continuously reading to stay informed about both specific knowledge and overarching themes.



**Newsire**  
Zhengzhou: This week, the first-ever Zhengzhou Archaeological Exploration Skills Competition commenced at the Gangcui Ruins, located at the southeastern corner of the Dashi Gu City site. Participants, ranging from seasoned veterans to young newcomers, competed in field exercises, performing

clock. The participants included experienced professionals with decades in the field and young archaeologists, some fresh out of university, each showcasing their expertise in the excavation pits. The competition began with a theory exam on the morning of October 26 at Songshan Hotel, where participants underwent qualification checks and drew lots before sitting for the written test. The event is co-

Wei Xingtiao explained the critical role of archaeological exploration in identifying the distribution and characteristics of cultural relics. "Exploration is an essential aspect of archaeological work and serves as a foundation for subsequent excavation and preservation efforts," he noted, stressing that Zhengzhou's archaeological work stands out in the Central Plains cultural heritage core region. The competition featured over 40 participants, including



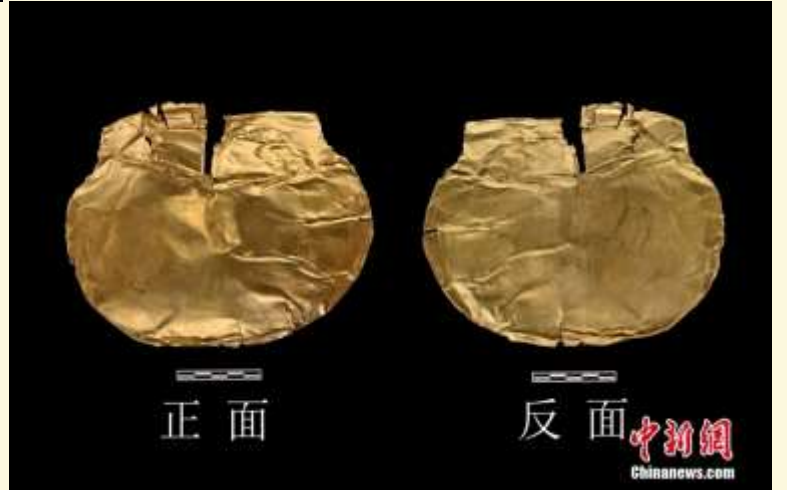
tasks such as drilling holes, observing soil samples, and sketching findings. Eleven teams from various cultural and archaeological institutions across Zhengzhou, including the city's Archaeological Research Institute, participated in the event. The competition saw contestants of all ages—from 24 to 59—demonstrating their skills in a race against the

organized by the Zhengzhou Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics and the Zhengzhou Federation of Trade Unions, with support from local archaeological and educational institutions. It aims to promote the craft of archaeology, highlight the skills of cultural relics professionals, and identify top talents for the national archaeological skills competition.

four women. Among them was Li Xiaoyu, a 25-year-old from the Xinmi Cultural Relics Bureau. A graduate of Henan University, Li has worked on archaeological sites for two years. "I love the atmosphere of field archaeology," she said, adding that while the work is tough, she enjoys the challenge and values the learning opportunities the competition provides. Dubo Min, a 59-year-old veteran from the Xinzheng team, has spent over 30 years in archaeological exploration, contributing to major discoveries such as the Huzhuang cemetery and Han King's Mausoleum. He expressed pride in his lifelong profession despite the physical toll it has taken. "This is my first time competing, and it feels great to see so many young people joining the field," he remarked.



Wang Shixuan, a 24-year-old participant, shared that his passion for history fuels his interest in archaeology, while Gao Yue, a 37-year-old competitor, reflected on her mixed performance due to a recent shift from fieldwork to administrative tasks. "I need to practice more on-site," she concluded. The event, described as a vital part of the city's archaeological "pre-exploration" model, aims to strengthen the skills of field archaeologists and promote the development of a Chinese-style archaeological system. By identifying and showcasing top talents, the competition seeks to encourage more individuals to pursue careers in cultural relics and archaeology, injecting new vitality into Zhengzhou's cultural heritage sector.



# Islamabad's new eatery Tommasini Pasticceria is straight from the coast of northern Italy



**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Islamabad's new eatery Tommasini Pasticceria is straight from the coast of northern Italy. The café is the first franchise of a family-run bakery in the Italian town of Riccione. Nestled in a small coastal town called Riccione in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy is the Pasticceria Tommasini Caffetteria. The family-run bakery was started over 30 years ago in the family's hometown. It has three outlets in the same region — two owned by the parents and one by their son, Francesco. Their very first franchise is located in Islamabad's F-7 Markaz. The family are very particular about the quality and repute of Pasticceria Tommasini, which is why it took Omer Chaudhry, the barista-chef-entrepreneur, a very long time to convince them to allow him to set up a franchise in Pakistan. "It took me six months and five trips to Riccione, Italy to convince the Tommasinis, starting from their grandmother to the father, the mother and finally Francesco, the young Tommasini lad, to agree to my business proposal, calling it a leap of faith," he told Images. Walking into the Pasticceria itself was like stepping into an Italian café — setting it apart from its counterparts, the décor was similar to a café in Milan. Handmade tiles lining the backplash, beige floor tiles arranged in a herringbone pattern on the floor, handmade wooden tables and chairs artfully arranged to accommodate no more than 40 guests at a time — the café has a warm and welcoming feel to it. As we got comfortable, Francesco recommended the melanzane alla parmigiana and arancini con pomodoro followed by margherita pizza and tagliata di carne, a grilled beef with rosemary potatoes. Dessert was a surprise. The melanzane alla parmigiana was triple-layered crumb fried eggplant slices covered with parmesan cheese and tomato sauce. "It is quite popular in the south of Italy," Chaudhry explained. I trust him — he has over 20 years of experience in the food industry, after all. The presentation was picture-perfect and the eggplant was cut into a slice, much like a cake. With balanced seasoning, the overpowering essence of eggplant simmered well in the tomato sauce and the aroma of aged parmesan cheese combined with the Midas touch of

basil leaf and the crunch of the crumbs was delectable. With a price tag of Rs895, the portion size was justified but not able to be shared. It was now arancini con pomodoro's turn to hit the palates and ask for a judgement. "You can call it a street food or a comfort food. Italians love to order arancini balls as appetisers before starting their main course," Francesco explained. Dressed in marinara sauce, the rice balls were served three per each guest, priced at Rs1,280. "It is supposed to be eaten warm so that the mozzarella stuffed inside does not get cold. Dip each bite in the tomato sauce to cut down on the crunchiness," suggested the Italian chef who has been in Islamabad for over a month now. The amalgamation of mozzarella, homemade tomato sauce and the crusty rice balls was just divine! It must have been a big risk to open an Italian patisserie in a country where the only Italian food known is pizza, pasta and lasagna, I asked Chaudhry. "Business is all about intuition and risk. Pakistan is a very nascent market. I feel for the past 10 years or so, a certain lifestyle has developed amongst the food aficionados and one sees an adrenaline rush for pan-asian and mediterranean cuisine so why not get into the queue and introduce something extraordinary?" he asked. Omer Chaudhry has brought a taste of Italy to Islamabad! "Islamabad's denizens have reached the first Plato, where they at least understand what's what, so they clearly know the difference between a croissant and a pastry. Plus Islamabad's consumer is very well travelled and, not to forget, there is a big diplomat community in Islamabad who love authentic Italian food. I always say that food in Pakistan is a big source of entertainment," he explained, with a promising smile. With imported Italian ovens, grinders and coffee machines, the chances of things going south are minimal. It was interesting to watch Francesco constantly supervising and training the chefs behind the ovens and Chaudhry, who has been a coffee distributor for 30 years as well as a certified barista, behind the espresso machine. Picking the right ingredients must have been your biggest challenge, I asked Francesco. "Well, the hazelnut is from north of Italy, a place called Langhe which produces the best hazelnuts in the world and pistachio is from Bronte, in the south of Italy, the best you can find! The difference between Italy and Pakistan is that in Italy, a pasticceria does not serve food, but only coffee and pastry items, whereas it's all in one [here]," replied the thirty-something Italian. Once done with the appetisers and the margherita pizza, which left much to be desired, it was time for dessert. A cornucopia of colourful, intricately decorated desserts were placed on our table — langhe, citron meringue, and tiramisu. The presentation was a masterpiece, a work of a craftsman rather than a patisserie chef. The langhe, named after the place in Italy, was a hazelnut mousse with almond sponge, and caramel and milk chocolate glaze. It was hard on the crust but creamy and silky once the spoon made its way to the mouth. The tiramisu was served in a short glass with coffee sponge,

mascarpone and vanilla mousse and was very smooth, with a perfect balance between the sweetness of the mousse and acidity of mascarpone melting in the mouth in nanoseconds. The meringue citron tart was a bit too sweet for someone who doesn't have a sweet tooth. In a nutshell, Tommasini is here to stay. The Pasticceria opens its doors at 8am for an authentic healthy Italian breakfast, followed by lunch hours, whereas dinner time starts at 7pm keeping in mind the expats. Keeping in mind Pakistanis, the eatery closes at midnight.



# EU states face confusion amid clashing views, economic woes

**Warwick Powell**

Tied into a war in Ukraine, confused about its identity and autonomy, the European political establishment has consigned EU member states to a period of considerable perturbation. The eurozone economies are being buffeted by major headwinds. Hampered by high energy costs, eurozone economies are witnessing industrial hollowing out as energy-intensive industries shutter.

How EU member states, individually and collectively, deal with the present impasse will determine the medium-term prosperity and security of the zone's citizens. In the face of its myriad challenges, the EU is showing signs of fragmentation. There are doubts about the European Commission's capacity to build a genuine and robust sense of common purpose. This is apparent across all key policy vectors: the Ukraine war, migration and industrial development.

The unquestioned commitment to the war in Ukraine is now being questioned. The loss of low-cost Russian gas and oil is like Voldemort, the villain in Harry Potter. Mario Draghi's recent report to the European Commission on European competitiveness acknowledges the centrality of energy costs, but did not dare name the role played by EU and American sanctions against Russian energy.

Voters are angry at the costs of the war, in

terms of local industries, jobs and the adverse impact on the cost of living. Many increasingly want peace through negotiations. Hungarian and Slovakian leaders have spoken out against the continuation of the war, despite coming under intense pressure from the political mainstream. The dominant establishment view, from Brussels, is to continue arming the Ukrainians.

A schism is apparent. Not just among political leaders. Since the Russian special military operation of February 2022, an estimated 6 million or more Ukrainians have fled into Europe. While welcome at first, there are increasingly more signs that the refugees are beginning to overstay their welcome.

The Ukraine conflict and Europe's economic problems are interrelated, resulting in increasingly high energy costs. The German economy has been in protracted stagnation. As the beating heart of European industry, the rest of the eurozone isn't doing much better. The eurozone as a whole is expected to achieve GDP growth of around one percent this year. With economic woes and concerns about migration, voters turn toward anti-immigration and anti-war candidates.

European nations' responses to proposed tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles (EVs) is further evidence of growing schisms across the region. The European Commission initiated a closed-door in-

quiry into alleged subsidies for Chinese manufacturers, resulting in proposals to impose a range of tariffs. At a vote of the 27 member states, the proposal for tariffs was supported by 10 nations; five opposed the tariffs and 12 abstained. The Commission proceeded to impose the tariffs anyway, despite the overwhelming majority of member states not supporting them.

The UK, while no longer a member of the EU, is also on the cusp of economic challenges. The new Labour Government's austerity measures are more likely to exacerbate the economic woes than to alleviate them, while already leading to a collapse in the administration's public standing.

Divided on critical issues, European nations and the EU generally face an uncertain future. The economic conditions are dire for many. The social embodiment of these problems, particularly in terms of growing hostility toward migration, feeds

a feverish political environment that destabilizes institutions and elites. Without addressing the elephant in the room - namely, resolving the energy uncompetitiveness problem - European economic policy is likely to be piecemeal. Without a coherent long-term vision, the tensions between protectionists and others are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

French President Emmanuel Macron once said that Europe will not be a geopolitical priority for the US. Like before,

Macron laments the loss of European autonomy; and like before, there seems to be little clarity about the root causes of Europe's confusion and discomfort. Meanwhile, and as a consequence, the social-political situation across Western Europe is likely to become more volatile.

**The author is adjunct professor at Queensland University of Technology, senior fellow at Taihe Institute and a former advisor to Kevin Rudd, former Australian prime minister.**



# Capitalizing on opportunities for China and India to grow together

**Ding Gang**

China and India have reached resolutions on issues concerning the border area. It's a big step toward cooling off the four-year border tensions. But to understand why this is such a big deal, we need to zoom out and examine how the global and Asia-Pacific geopolitical landscape has been shifting over the past four years.

Six years ago, I participated in an amazing exchange program organized by the Global Times and several Indian media outlets. We flew from Baotou, a steel hub in Inner Mongolia, to

Guizhou, a province in Southwest China. Now, Baotou itself was no megalopolis - less than 3 million people called it home back then. But let me tell you, the Baotou Steel and Iron Company name carried some serious weight in China.

I gave my Indian colleague a quick history review. Baotou Steel started with just one furnace back in the 1950s. Fast forward to today, and they're cranking out hundreds of different types of steel. They went from making mud pies to baking a gourmet buffet.

I explained how China's economic boom over the past 40-plus years had led to the construction of numerous massive transport hubs such as

Baotou Airport. Baotou Steel played a starring role in that narrative. They rode the wave of China's unprecedented rise and became an indispensable cog in the country's industrial machine.

During our exchange, we couldn't stop talking about the golden opportunities for growth in both China and India, and how the two countries could capitalize on them. Of course, we were also excited about the potential for collaboration between our countries. When we arrived in Guiyang, capital of Guizhou, we realized that China and India could form a dynamic duo in areas like software, cloud storage and big data. The two countries were already cooking up some exciting joint projects in these fields.

But then 2020 rolled around, and old injuries resurfaced. The border clash put a major spanner in the works. It was as if someone had poured cold water on our budding friendship, which really dampened China-India economic ties.

Since then, the bilateral relationship has been complicated. Geopolitical shifts have thrown us for a loop at every turn.

The US decided to paint China as its arch-rival, which led to its "China Plus One" strategy that aims to diversify manufacturing and source away from China to other countries. Suddenly, everyone looked at India as their backup plan, attempting to drive a wedge between China and India.

On the surface, it seemed like India had hit the jackpot. But here's the

reality check: India can't just snap its fingers and transform into a manufacturing powerhouse overnight. China is still India's go-to source for goods and industrial products.

Plus, India isn't exactly thrilled about being a pawn in America's grand chess game. It understands that playing by US rules won't let it become the independent powerhouse it aspires to be.

What's more, if the US keeps pushing its agenda, the whole region could end up divided and at each other's throats, which would be detrimental to India's growth plans.

For years, it seems the US has been trying to pit China and India against each other in a zero-sum game. But here's the thing - foreign policy always reflects what's happening at home. Take Modi's government, which has been laser-

focused on internal reforms lately, trying to unleash India's full potential. Additionally, trade between China and India has steadily climbed, indicating that as both countries grow, we're not running out of ways to work together; in fact, we're finding more.

This isn't about one country replacing another. When one of us grows, it creates more opportunities for both of us.

If I ever get another chance to talk to my Indian colleagues, I'll

mention Baotou Steel again.

When we talk about Baotou Steel, we should also highlight India's Tata Steel. These two giants are in the same league regarding technology and output, but each has its own strengths.

The difference? Baotou Steel seized the wave of opportunity and rode it to become a steel pillar supporting China's national development strategy.

The million-dollar question is: Can Tata do for India what Baotou did for China? Can it provide the backbone for India's massive infrastructure and overall development?

As India rides its own unprecedented wave of growth, how Indians answer this question will determine how much more opportunity and space they can create for China and India to grow together.

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# High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri urges world to stand with Kashmiris



**Covert Report** Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week urged the world to stand with the Kashmiris amid Indian oppression. “Senator @DavidShoebridge remarked that Kashmir faces one of the harshest military occupations, with 900,000 troops deployed. The world must not ignore these human rights abuses,” he posted on X, citing international support for the Kashmiris. Annually since 1947, October 27 is commemorated as one of the darkest days for the people of Kashmir. It was following the long freedom struggle from British colonial rule which resulted in the independence of India and Pakistan, that Indian troops positioned themselves in Kashmir’s largest city, Srinagar to occupy the Valley. The anniversary of India’s action is

observed by Kashmiris and opponents of its long-drawn occupation as “Black Day”. **In October 2017, the Indian army launched what is referred to as “Operation All Out.” Under this policy, Indian occupation troops were given carte blanche to shoot and kill any Kashmiri youth suspected of being a “militant” or even a “militant sympathizer.”** This shoot-to-kill order has augmented the already oppressive law, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, under which Indian colonial troops are exempt from prosecution if they kill innocent Kashmiris.



# Amb Asim Iftikhar Ahmad leads special event to mark Kashmir Black Day

**NewsWire** Paris: The Embassy of Pakistan in France organized a Special Seminar marking the Kashmir Black Day this week, to express solidarity with the Kashmiris in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir

(IIOJK), Messages of the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan were read out on the occasion. In his speech, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad said that durable peace and stability in South Asia remained contingent

upon peaceful resolution of J&K dispute in accordance with UNSC resolutions and wishes of the Kashmiri people. 27 October 1947 was one of the darkest days for the Kashmiri people as the Indian occupation of J&K, which began on that day, stifled

the legitimate aspirations of the Kashmiris to determine their own destiny and subjected them to decades long gross and systematic violations of human rights.

For several generations, the Kashmiri people have been looking towards the global community, especially the United Nations, to deliver them their promised right to self-determination. India’s illegal and unilateral actions and continuing grave atrocities since 5 August 2019 had further exacerbated the situation and completely alienated the Kashmiri people who were united in rejecting any attempts by the occupying power to undermine the internationally recognized disputed status of Jammu and Kashmir and to alter the demographic composition of the occupied territory. India must realize that it cannot suppress the genuine aspirations of the Kashmiri people through its continued forcible occupation and brutalities. The Ambassador further said that the Kashmir case stood on strong political, legal and moral grounds and Pakistan will continue to extend all possible support to the Kashmiri brothers and sisters for the realization of their just cause. History was witness that legitimate freedom struggles could not be suppressed for long by use of force and violations of international law. The Ambassador noted that self-determination was a fundamental right enshrined in the UN Charter and international human rights covenants. Kashmiri peoples’ right to self

determination was guaranteed by UNSC resolutions which stipulated that this right would be exercised through a free and impartial plebiscite to be held under the auspices of the United Nations. Speaking on the occasion AJ&K Minister for Small Industries and Trade Kausar Taqdees Gillani voiced strong concern for the inhuman treatment being faced by all Kashmiris especially women and children at the hands of Indian occupation forces. She called the attention of international community to come together and formulate policy in accordance with UNSC resolutions to help free Kashmiris from Indian occupation and protect their basic human rights. Prominent speakers condemned the gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law being committed by the Indian occupation forces against innocent Kashmiri men, women and children. They called upon the international community and media to highlight the miseries of the defenseless Kashmiris and to hold India accountable for its atrocities, war crimes and crimes against humanity in IIOJK. People representing Pakistani diaspora, Kashmiris, academicians, journalists and other distinguished guests participated in the event that highlighted the seven decades long legitimate struggle of the Kashmiri people for their right to self-determination in accordance with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir. A photo exhibition was specially arranged to highlight grave human rights situation in the IIOJK.



# Republic Day of Kazakhstan celebrated in Islamabad



**Celina Ali** Islamabad: The Republic Day of Kazakhstan was celebrated in Islamabad this week. The event’s distinguished guests included the Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan, Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani, the Minister for Communications, Privatization and Investment Board, Abdul Aleem Khan, and the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Culture and National Heritage, Attaullah Tarar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Syed Tariq Fatemi.

Diplomatic corps members, officials, business leaders, academics, experts, and prominent Pakistani media representatives were invited to the reception. In his welcoming address, Ambassador Yerzhan Kistafin highlighted the outcomes of 2024, emphasizing Kazakhstan’s active role on the international stage and the key Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) events recently held in Astana and Islamabad. The chief guests underscored the importance of strengthening bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Pakistan, expressing their interest in further enhancing the multifaceted partnership between Astana and Islamabad, while emphasizing the need to foster cooperation at both

bilateral and interregional levels. The event welcomed children with disabilities and special needs from the Care for Special Persons Foundation as special guests. Serena Hotel’s CEO Aziz Boolani and the Foundation’s head, Hina Hasnain, spoke about the organization’s activities and showcased its main areas of focus. An auction was held as part of the event, featuring handcrafted items made by the Foundation’s special students. The proceeds from the auction were given to support the Foundation.



# Umar Rehman Malik stands for Kashmiris' freedom



**Abdullah Jan**  
Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week said that freedom was the birth right of the Kashmiris. "Expressing solidarity with the oppressed Kashmiris who continue to struggle courageously for their right to self-determination, facing unimaginable brutalities daily. This right is enshrined as their fundamental right under United Nations resolutions," he said. The PPP leader said it was time for the international community to step up and honour this commitment, ensuring Kashmiris are granted

the dignity and freedom they deserve. Earlier, Pakistanis and Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control and worldwide observed the Kashmir Black Day, marking 77 years since Indian troops illegally entered the Valley, holding protests and rallies to condemn Indian brutalities against the Kashmiri people. Rallies and processions were brought out across Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) despite restrictions. The participants demanded of India to withdraw from the Valley and grant Kashmiris their inalienable right to self-determination. The call to observe the Black Day was given by the top Kashmiri leadership, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and the AJK government. The Kashmiri leaders

and the Pakistan government called for international intervention, urging the United Nations to facilitate a peaceful resolution. Posters were displayed in Srinagar, Baramulla, Pulwama, Islamabad, Kulgam, Kupwara and other regions of IIOJK urging residents to participate in a shutdown. Put up by the APHC and other pro-freedom groups, they characterised October 27, 1947 as the darkest chapter in the history of Kashmir. On the occasion, anti-India and pro-freedom messages were widely shared on various social media platforms, including X, Facebook and WhatsApp, amplifying calls for solidarity and resistance against the Indian occupation of IIOJK. In Muzaffarabad, the AJK capital, a large number of



people from all segments of society, including women and children, gathered at the Burhan Wani Chowk, waving black flags and chanting anti-India and pro-freedom slogans. They burnt tyres, effigies of Indian leaders and blocked the main road. Referring to the Indian atrocities, the speakers said that the people of IIOJK were struggling for freedom. They maintained that international laws gave the people of disputed states the liberty to decide their future and the United Nations had already passed resolutions for a plebiscite in Kashmir. They said that India always tried to depict Kashmiri freedom fighters as terrorists even though millions of people living in Kashmir admired their sacrifices. They stated that their struggle was legitimate according to UNSC resolutions. The speakers said that the military occupation by India posed serious threats to peace in the South Asian region, adding that despite the passage of 77 years, the Kashmiri people had never accepted India's military rule but had continued a tireless struggle for freedom from Indian oppression. They lamented the role of the United Nations in that, although thousands of people had been killed by Indian

occupation forces since 1947, the stance of all human rights organisations as well as the UNSC was little more than that of a silent spectator. The rally demanded the withdrawal of the Indian army from Kashmir, the undoing of all actions taken by the Indian government on August 5, 2019, and the release of Hurriyat leaders, including Mussarat Alam Bhatt, Shabbir Ahmed Shah, Yaseen Malik, Asia Andrabi, Ayaz Akbar, Saifullah and others. The rally was led by AJK Speaker Latif Akbar and attended by Opposition Leader in AJK Assembly Farooq Ahmed, AJK Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Mushtaq Khan, Pasban-e-Hurriyat Chairman Uzair Ahmed Ghazali, AJK government Minister Muhammad Rasheed and others. In Mirpur, AJK, a Black Day rally was taken out from district court premises under the auspices of various social, political and public representative organisations with the coordination of Mirpur district administration. Similar rallies were also brought out in all cities and towns of AJK. Addressing a Kashmir solidarity rally in the federal capital, Mushaal Hussein Mullick, wife of Kashmiri leader Yasin Malik, emphasised the importance of observing the Black Day annually and called upon the youth to play a vital role in keeping the Kashmir cause alive. "Every Pakistani stands in solidarity with the Kashmiris on this day," she said. She encouraged young Pakistanis to launch campaigns through social media, highlighting that Pakistan's founding leader, Quaid-e-Azam, had also placed his trust in the power of youth. Gilgit-Baltistan also observed the Black Day in solidarity with the Kashmir cause in all districts. In this connection, a rally was organized by the Gilgit district administration to condemn the illegal occupation of IIOJK by Indian forces. In Karachi, the APHC brought out a rally from the Arts Council, Karachi to the Karachi Press Club on the occasion. Leaders of various political parties participated in the rally to show solidarity with the Kashmiri people.



## The mysterious ancient tablet found in Greece that's at the centre of an archaeology row



**Newsire** Athens: A badly damaged tablet from 5079 BC discovered in Greece may shatter archaeological consensus about the earliest human writings.

Archaeologists believe that the first writing wasn't developed until 3,000 to 4,000 BC in Sumeria, which is modern-day Iraq. However, academics have been debating whether the Dispilio Tablet's markings are forms of written communication or simply art ever since it was dredged up in 1993. The wooden tablet was found by George Hourmouziadis, the professor of prehistoric archaeology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and painstaking efforts have been made to preserve it.

It was widely considered to be the case that Neolithic societies were societies without writing, but the Dispilio Tablet throws all that into doubt.

The question is whether researchers will ever be able to establish if the markings are to be considered writing or not.

However, the late Dr Hourmouziadis - who died in 2013 - was cautious about truly understanding the etchings as "text", and branded them "Neolithic 'messages' that we will never be able to decipher." Nevertheless, the race

is on for specialists to determine what the markings mean and if works out that they are indeed text, it will radically alter the narrative around human communication.

Professor Yorgos Facorellis from the University of West Attica in Athens wrote in the journal Radiocarbon:

"The dating of the Dispilio engraved finds is similar to those that appeared in southeastern Europe around 5300 BC, some 2000 [years] earlier than any other known writing.

"These signs and inscriptions are considered by some scholars a specific script of literacy."



## Bulgarian authorities dismantle major counterfeit money-printing operation

**Newsire** Sofia: Authorities in Bulgaria say they have seized a large quantity of counterfeit banknotes after dismantling an operation for their production in the northern town of Shumen.

Law enforcement agents on Tuesday said the fake bills, made in 50 Bulgarian lev, \$50, and €500 denomina-



tions, had been released into circulation, passing through several banks



and ATMs.

Boyan Raev, deputy head of the General Directorate for Combating Organised Crime, said the authorities found a significant batch of the Bulgarian 50-lev banknotes.

"The \$50 bills were found in preparation, as well as the printing plates needed to produce these bills," Raev said at the press conference in Sofia. "€500 notes were also found ready and printed."

Two men with prior criminal records were placed under arrest, according to local authorities.

The group had successfully circulated some 37,500 Bulgarian lev in counterfeit banknotes and had produced around half a million euros in fake €500 bills.



According to an assessment by the European Central Bank, counterfeit euro banknotes were considered among the most elaborate fakes so far and have already been spotted in

several EU member states. "The analyses of the €500 banknotes found that this was a so-called super-bill, namely a counterfeit of extremely high quality," authorities said.

# AI training could transform Portugal's workforce by 2030



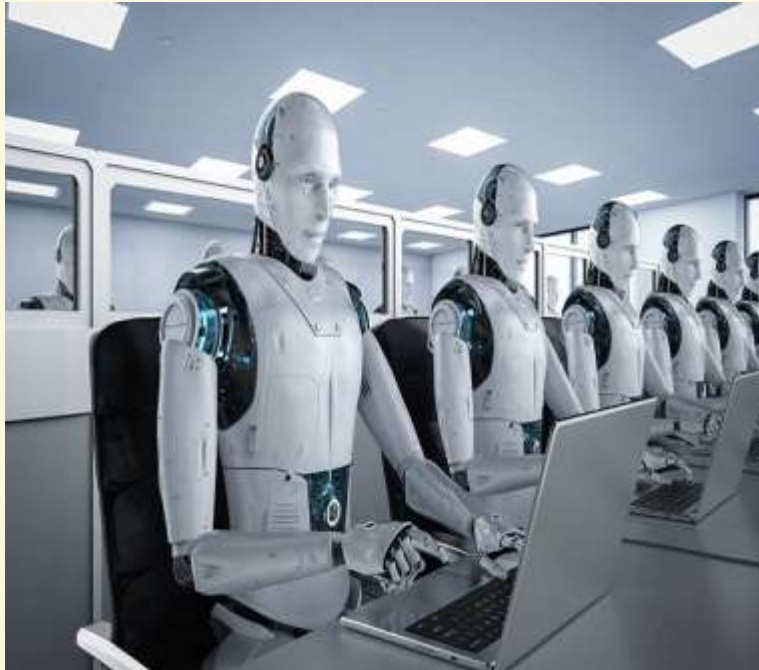
**Newsire** Lisbon: A recent study by McKinsey highlights that Portugal must retrain around 1.3 million workers, about 30% of its workforce, by 2030 to adopt generative AI and close its productivity gap with the rest of the European Union. Portugal has long struggled with

low productivity, which has contributed minimally to GDP growth compared to the EU average. However, the study predicts that by rapidly integrating AI and automation, the country could significantly boost productivity, matching projected EU levels. Generative AI, which creates content like text and images based on

past data, could help Portugal compete with more developed economies if the workforce is prepared for the technological shift. This change will also require the public, private, and education sectors to collaborate in reshaping job roles and work processes. For every euro invested in AI technology, McKinsey sug-

gests that three euros will be needed for managing organisational transitions. Besides upskilling 1.3 million workers, the study indicates that around 320,000 employees in

roles like customer service will need to transition to new jobs. This large-scale transformation could position Portugal for stronger economic growth in the coming years.





# Japan average pay hike tops 10K yen for 1st time amid inflation



bridge the salary gap between firms of different size. The latest survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, conducted between July and August, obtained responses from 1,783 firms that employ more than 100 people. The number of firms that have raised pay or are planning to do so grew to 91.2 percent, up 2.1 percentage points

from last year, according to the survey. By industry, all firms in mining, utility, healthcare sectors either raised pay or plan to increase wages. By contrast, only 74.4 percent of companies in the transportation and postal services sector responded the same way, the survey showed. Of firms that have adopted a regular pay raise system based on workers'

seniority and years of service, the percentage of firms that raised base pay or are planning to do so rose 2.6 points to 52.1 percent, according to the survey. Among the factors that led to wage hikes, 35.2 percent of the firms cited better earnings results, followed by a need to secure workforce at 14.3 percent, the health ministry said.



**Covert Report**

Tokyo: The average monthly pay increase at Japanese businesses this year rose 2,524 yen (\$16) from 2023 to a record 11,961 yen, a government survey showed this week, exceeding the 10,000 yen mark for the first time amid rising prices. The figure, representing a 4.1 percent rise from last year, came as management and labor unions agreed on historic wage hikes in this year's spring wage negotiations. A growth in the minimum wage also contributed to the increase, according to the labor ministry. Both the value and rate of wage increases exceeded the previous year for the third straight year and hit the highest figure since comparable data became available in 1999.

The results indicate that the recent wage hike trend is gaining traction in a country where companies were traditionally reluctant to raise pay following a long period of deflation. But the country's real wages fell for a record 26th straight month in May. Although they turned higher in June and July, the figure declined in August, indicating that pay hikes still have not caught up with rising prices and households are struggling to make ends meet. The country's biggest labor union decided earlier this month to demand pay hikes of 5 percent or more next spring, the same level as the target it set for this year. The Japanese Trade Union Confederation has also set a higher goal for small- and medium-sized companies to help

# Ambassador Blome celebrates completion of Frere Hall restoration, reaffirms Pak-US partnership

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: The United States and Pakistan have built a long-term partnership over seven decades, rooted in shared interests across health, education, energy, economic growth, and security sectors. US investments in Pakistan have grown by 50% in the past year, underscoring the strong economic ties between the nations. This includes our investments in clean energy and sustainable agriculture through the US-Pakistan Green Alliance, in public health through tuberculo-

sis control, in people-to-people ties, and in preserving Pakistan's rich cultural heritage. In Ambassador Donald Blome's October 22-25 visit to Karachi, he reinforced the long-term partnership between the US and Pakistan at the closing ceremony of a \$350,000 US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) grant to restore the historic Frere Hall. At the closing ceremony, the ambassador noted: "It's rare for one project, a partnership between the US Consulate and the Sindh Exploration and Adventure Society, to sum up so much of what the United States and Pakistan work on together. After the 2002 bombing that damaged both US assets and

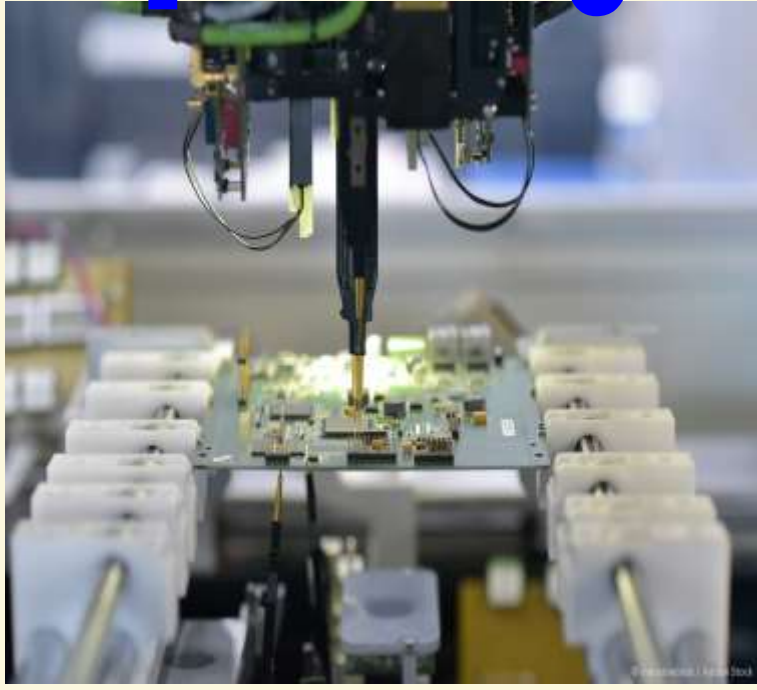
Frere Hall, we felt a responsibility to help restore what was harmed. Today, this iconic space symbolizes our bond – a commitment to cultural heritage, civic engagement, and community empowerment." The project restored Frere Hall as a public space, reopening its library and gallery, and is one of several AFCP initiatives in Sindh, with similar efforts underway in Balochistan. In a move to reinforce Pakistan's fight against tuberculosis (TB), Ambassador Blome handed over five state-of-the-art diagnostic vans and three mobile X-ray machines to the Government of Sindh.



These cutting-edge tools, provided through USAID's Integrated Health System Strengthening activity, will improve access to early diagnosis and treatment, particularly for vulnerable populations in remote areas. Ambassador Blome also visited Nutrilov, a local food processing company and a beneficiary of USAID's Investment Promotion Activity (IPA), to discuss how US support is driving entrepreneurship and job creation in Pakistan. The visit showcased the production of healthy, locally made products such as cereal and granola bars, which contribute to the country's growing consumer market. While in Karachi Ambassador Blome participated in

a luncheon with key human rights advocates to address pressing issues such as religious freedom and labor rights in Pakistan. During a dinner with the American Business Council Executive Committee, Ambassador Blome reaffirmed the US Mission's commitment to supporting American businesses and promoting US-Pakistan trade relations. Ambassador Blome's Karachi visit underscores the US government's long-standing investment in Pakistan and the Pakistani people. "Through partnerships like these, the US and Pakistan are working together to improve lives, strengthen communities, and preserve the rich history and culture that defines this great nation," Ambassador Blome noted.

# EU to spend €900M on expanding critical technologies



**Pieter Haeck**  
Brussels: The European Union has set aside hundreds of millions of euros to grow companies working on critical technologies, such as microchips and quantum technology. A new scale-up scheme is set to get the green light early this week, with a budget of €300 million for next year, according to a draft plan seen by POLITICO. The total budget for the next three years — until the end of the EU's current budget — amounts to €900 million. With the fund, the European Commission aims to dissuade the bloc's tech companies from tapping non-EU funds when they want to expand their operations significantly after their initial build-out. The United States, for example, is known to have far larger scale-up funds than Europe.



But even before she assumes office, the EU executive is already lining up cash to avoid strategically important tech compa-

"European Innovation Council Fund," which allowed it to make up to €15 million in equity investments.



It has made the EU dependent on other regions, such as the U.S. and China, for technologies such as microchips and cloud services. The EU's incoming tech boss, Finland's Henna Virkkunen, is responsible for making the EU technologically "sovereign" again.

panies from falling into foreign hands. Under the new program, eligible companies can apply for an equity investment of between €10 million and €30 million — giving Brussels effective part ownership of these companies. The fund is meant to scale up companies working on tech, clean tech or biotech that have already raised money. The companies should also be able to demonstrate interest from other, private, investors in joining the funding round. Brussels' share is also a minority of the funding round: The total sum should be three to five times Brussels' investment. For next year, the EU will specifically

In her program for the next mandate, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised to expand the EIC even further. Companies that won Brussels' support under the previous program — like French chip designer SiPearl — could now seek a follow-up investment. Just two weeks ago, a Commission expert group sounded the alarm on the EU's poor scaling capacity. "The EU is comparatively weaker than the U.S. and China with regard to the uptake, commercialization and scaling of new technologies," the expert group wrote in a report.



focus on chips and quantum technology companies. The new scale-up fund joins a program Brussels already has in place, called the

Other reports, like those drafted by former Italian Prime Ministers Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi, also lamented startups' poor access to funding.



# UK pledges continued support for Pakistani educational initiatives



**Celina Ali** Islamabad : British High Commissioner Jane Marriott this week announced that her country will continue supporting educational initiatives and cultural exchanges in Pakistan. The announcement came as Ms Marriott visited the Islamabad College for Boys G-6/3 along with education secretary Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani and examined facilities, including the library, gym, IT park, IT labs, Google labs, and art room.

She appreciated the 'vibrant learning environment and state-of-the-art infrastructure' and highlighted the role of such initiatives in promoting education and strengthening relations between Pakistan and the United Kingdom. The British envoy said that with UK funding, Teach For Pakistan, a national non-profit company, had trained over 500 talented university graduates and young professionals through a two-year fellowship. Fellows are trained to advance student learning and to work in schools

that are experiencing challenges in low-income regions. Over 34,000 students, including around 23,000 girls, have benefited from the initiative, according to her. The principal thanked Ms Marriott for the visit and support. The British envoy later watched a street cricket match in the college's playground. The event, organised by the British High Commission with support from the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, brought together Teach For Pakistan, Lahore Qalandars, Pakistan Cricket Board

women players, and Barmy Army, a group of British cricket fans known for supporting the English cricket team in both domestic and international matches. The British high commissioner said it was electric to see seasoned professionals like Tania Saeed, Humna Bilal, Syed Faridoun Mehmood and Salman Fayaaz play with students, who were clearly the future of Pakistan's cricket. "I can't wait to see the kids in today's match one day play against England

in a future test match series," she said. CEO of Teach For Pakistan Khadija Bakhtiar said a happy and safe learning space where students looked forward to participating in intellectually and physically invigorating activities was the bedrock of Teach For Pakistan's approach to whole child development. She said today's match was yet another stride in that direction via the Teach For Pakistan's partnership with FCDO and the education ministry.



**We cannot solve problems with the kind of thinking we employed when we came up with them.”**  
- **Albert Einstein**

**Stay away from those people who try to disparage your ambitions. Small minds will always do that, but great minds will give you a feeling that you can become great too.**  
- **Mark Twain**

# Meloni battles judges in Italy over her anti-migrant plan



**Emma Bubola**

Rome: Italy's prime minister, **Giorgia Meloni**, had scored a coup. She pushed through a tough anti-migration plan that would force some asylum seekers headed for Italy instead into a detention center in Albania while their claims are heard. At a time when anti-immigration sentiments are rising in Europe, the program caught the eyes of other European leaders who viewed it as a potential blueprint. Then, within days of the first migrants arriving in a newly built detention center in a former Albanian military base, an Italian court upended Ms. Meloni's plans. The judges this month demanded that the migrants be sent to Italy, saying their detention would violate a European court ruling. The decision set off a public row between the judiciary and the government that is falling along familiar battle lines, in which conservative officials accuse judges of having an activist, and often liberal, bent.

Ms. Meloni, a conservative, denounced the ruling, and her supporters pointed to a leaked email from a judge that they said showed a political bias. The email to the judge's colleagues suggested Ms. Meloni was more of a "danger" than the conservative former Prime Minister **Silvio Berlusconi**, whose feuds with the judiciary engulfed Italy's political life for decades. Ms. Meloni later posted excerpts from the email on social media. Then, on Friday, Italy's popular weekly magazine *L'Espresso* splashed a drawing of Ms. Meloni and a red-robed judge fencing on its cover. "It's a longstanding and unresolved conflict" between the government and the judiciary, said **Serena Sileoni**, a professor of constitutional law at **Suor Orsola Benincasa University** in Naples. For Ms. Meloni, who has made curbing immigration a signature policy, the ruling was a blow, even though it is unclear if the roadblock is temporary or something more difficult to overcome. The standoff has echoes of battles that have played out recently in other countries, including in Mexico and

Israel, as leaders found themselves stymied by their courts.

The tensions in Italy began over a week ago, after 12 migrants picked up by Italian ships in the Mediterranean became the first to be held in Albania. Under Ms. Meloni's plan, only men coming from what Italy considers "safe countries" could be held in the Balkan country. The men in the first group were from Egypt and Bangladesh, both categorized as safe by Italy. But the judges in Rome ruled that because of a recent decision by the Court of Justice of the European Union, the men should not be held in Albania. That European asylum ruling found that no nation of origin could be considered safe if even only a part was dangerous. Based on that ruling, the Italian judges said the 12 men's home countries could not be considered safe. Ms. Meloni's government is trying to get around the Italian court decision by drafting a new list of safe countries and eliminating a few nations to meet the European standards, but it did not remove Egypt and Bangladesh. The government also appealed the Roman court's ruling, even as the Italian Navy took the 12 migrants in the middle of the dispute to Italy. "It's very hard to work and try to give answers to this nation when you face the opposition of a part of the institutions that are supposed to help you," Ms. Meloni said soon after the court order, suggesting the courts were blocking her attempts to address many Italians' concerns on immigration.

On Thursday, a group of liberal magistrates said the public debate had become so tense that its president, who was a judge on the Albania ruling, had received death threats. The group blamed the threats on the "climate of contrast, of hatred" created against the Roman judges. Because Italy's Constitution was written after **Mussolini's** Fascist dictatorship, the judiciary has long enjoyed great independence from the government. But in the 1990s, a sweeping inquiry of a large bribery scandal empowered and emboldened the judiciary as thousands of politicians and business leaders were put under investigation, and many were convicted. The so-called **Bribesville** scandal left many Italians angry and disillusioned with their ruling class, and in their eyes, the courts became a critical and trusted check on corrupt officials.

Over time, however, critics — mostly conservatives, but also some liberals — began to accuse the judges of overreaching to pursue political agendas. When Mr. Berlusconi came to power after the bribery scandal, he took the rivalry between the judiciary and the government to incendiary levels, setting himself up against what he called the "toghe rosse" or "red robes," Communist magistrates who he said persecuted him. Many of his supporters shared his outrage for what they saw as judicial activism, while his opponents saw the judiciary as a bulwark against Mr. Berlusconi, who was implicated in dozens of trials, many for corruption.

During Mr. Berlusconi's trials, as well as many others, a tight relationship between the judiciary and the news media meant that wiretaps from investigations and court documents became public during proceedings. The practice has long attracted criticism from supporters of the principle of presumption of innocence, who said it created a parallel media trial through which defendants were found guilty in the eyes of the Italian public even before a verdict was announced. The battle over the courts' role in Italian society has continued since, and it has recently centered on the issue of immigration. Now, Ms. Meloni has taken up the fight. Experts say that, like Mr. Berlusconi, Ms. Meloni and her allies see their mandate as the most legitimate expression of the will of the Italian people, and they chafe at having unelected people, including judges, interfere with their policies. The judiciary "should not use its power to change the laws or prevent the government from doing its job," Foreign Minister **Antonio Tajani** said after the migrant ruling. But the association of liberal magistrates, called **Democratic Judiciary** — which includes the judge who wrote the email — has countered that "no political majority, not even the widest, can compress inalienable human rights."

Under the Albania plan, if the asylum seekers were sent there and their claims were accepted, they would be transferred to Italy. If the claims were rejected, the migrants would be repatriated. (That is different from the Rwanda plan that Britain's former government tried to carry out. Under that program, even people who were granted asylum would have been resettled in Rwanda, rather than in Britain.) The Italian judges' decision did not apply to the Albania program as a whole, but only to the first group of migrants who were taken there. However, judicial experts said the judges could make similar arguments for other



**Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan, H.E. Marilina Armellini**

migrants, casting the viability of Ms. Meloni's program, an important piece of her agenda, in doubt. On the other hand, if after wrangling with the courts Ms. Meloni's plan gets the go-ahead, she could be seen as a leader in Europe on migration policy at a time when the European Union's stance is already tilting right. In any case, what is clear is that the two sides in Italy have no intention of giving up. "There is so much at stake on the topic of immigration," said Ms. Sileoni, the constitutional law professor. "That is why they are rekindling the fire of this historic conflict."

# France's absent public workers face benefits cut in savings blitz

## **NewsWire**

Paris: France's government said this week that state workers behind a massive rise in absenteeism will be targeted as it desperately seeks billions of euros in budget savings. Facing European Union pressure to slash spending, but similar heat from domestic parties over the planned penny-pinching, the minority conservative government set out another €5 billion (US\$5.4 billion) in proposed cuts on Sunday. It has already warned that more than 3,000 public jobs will have to be lost and also indicated that those taking increasing sick leave will also have to feel the budget pain. The government said the number of days of absenteeism in the public sector has risen from 43 million in 2014 to 77 million in 2022. The finance ministry said that almost €1.2 billion could be saved by only paying state workers after the third day of sick leave,

instead of the current one day, and by cutting the benefits paid. The measure would not affect maternity leave, work accidents and proven serious illnesses. "We must have the courage to take difficult decisions today to avoid more difficult choices in the future," warned public administration minister **Guillaume Kasbarian** in an interview with *Le Figaro* newspaper. Finance Minister **Antoine Armand** said on Sunday that France's budget deficit for 2024 would be between 6.1 per cent and 6.2 per cent, more than twice the 3 per cent EU limit. In a bid to bring the deficit back to 5 per cent next year, the government is aiming to raise €60 billion — €20 billion from increased taxes and €40 billion from spending cuts. Development aid would be cut by €640 million, money for cleaner vehicles reduced by €300 million and France's much-vaunted spending on culture would be slashed by €55 million, according to ministers.

Measures including delaying a rise in pensions for six months next year and making companies pay higher statutory fees — hoping to raise €4 billion — have already caused major disputes in parliament debates. Lawmakers for the far-right **National Rally (RN)**, the biggest single party in parliament, said they will vote against the government's planned budget because of the threat to pensions. The RN could bring down the government if it joined with left-wing parties in a confidence vote. "We warn the government ... you are creating the conditions for your censure," said the RN vice president **Sebastien Chenu**. Left-wing parties were forced through a vote to make a tax on the wealthy permanent, instead of for three years as the government wished. They have also called for special taxes on multinationals operating in France and high-value financial transactions.

