

## High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri says PHC in Australia ready to serve

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said that the Pakistan High Commission in Australia was ready to serve the community. "Serving the community is our top priority," he wrote on X tagging a High Commission state (Page-5)

## Pakistan, EU agree to continue cooperation on food, climate change challenges Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and the European Union this week agreed to continue cooperation on emerging challenges of food, energy security, and climate change, underlining sustained engagement, particularly (Page-10)

# Maryam Nawaz urges Huawei to invest in Pakistan, especially in Punjab

**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif this week visited Huawei Technologies's Bantian headquarters in Shenzhen Longgang district and vowed to enhance cooperation.

According to a statement released here by Huawei, she met Huawei's Government Affairs Director Wang Chengdong to discuss various initiatives to make Lahore a modern digital city. She also discussed with him issues relat-

ing to e-commerce, ecosystem and ICT infrastructure development, digitalization of health and education department. Chief Minister was briefed in detail by Huawei President Wang Chengdong about Huawei's ongoing projects in Pakistan,

especially in Punjab. She took keen interest and discussed with him Huawei's projects in the health and education sectors. She apprised him of the Safe City projects in different cities of Punjab, and vowed to make Lahore Pakistan's first modern smart city with the help of Huawei.

She invited Huawei to invest in Pakistan, especially in Punjab, and offered them full cooperation to set up Huawei office in Nawaz Sharif IT City. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif also assured Huawei to set up Huawei



office and after-sales service center across Punjab. She said, "The vision of Digital Punjab will be realized with the cooperation of Huawei." She added: "We want to benefit from Huawei's expertise in telecommunication and digitalization." She highlighted, "Punjab's first full-fledged AI university will benefit from Huawei's professional skills." The Chief Minister said, "Huawei will

assist in capacity building and IT research at Nawaz Sharif IT City." She added, "We want to introduce Punjab's youth to the latest digital technologies with Huawei's assistance." She underscored, "Huawei will also assist Punjab in ecosystem development." She added: "Lahore's first Safe City project was established in collaboration with Huawei." She visited Huawei Technologies and saw its various sections.



## Denmark pledges support for Malaysia's green transition initiatives



### Newsire

Kuala Lumpur: Denmark is deeply committed to supporting Malaysia's green transition through knowledge, strong public-private partnerships, and investments, Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen said this week. He said Danish companies are eager to contribute Danish solutions to Malaysia through the newly established Green Transition Alliance, which will be a part of Denmark's future strategic activities in this country. "The Alliance aims to support Malaysia's green transition by bringing together green thought leaders, expertise from Denmark's green transition journey, and key local stakeholders to explore joint public-private opportunities," he said during the reception at the official reopening of the Royal Danish Embassy in Malaysia here. According to Rasmussen, there is already a strong Danish commercial presence in Malaysia, particularly in the renewable energy, green fuels, energy efficiency, and water and waste management sectors. The Embassy of Denmark in Kuala Lumpur, in a posting on its Facebook page, said Rasmussen launched the Green Transition Alliance - a partnership to foster even closer cooperation within green transition - during his two-day visit here.

The Alliance will provide a strong platform for Danish companies to showcase solutions that can help fulfil Malaysia's ambitious goal of carbon neutrality by 2050, the posting added. Rasmussen noted that Malaysia and Denmark have a longstanding partnership on sustainable development - from the Danida Environment Programmes which started in the 1990s and ran until 2010 - to the current Memorandum of Understanding on Food and Agriculture. On the reopening of the Royal Danish Embassy here, the Foreign Minister said it demonstrates Denmark's strong wish to strengthen bilateral ties, seize upcoming opportunities, and build on the great potential of both countries' growing collaboration. "Malaysia is too important for us not to be here," he added. The Royal Danish Embassy here was closed in 2021 before resuming in August this year. Between January and October 2024, Malaysia's total trade with Denmark has increased by 12.9 percent to RM2.19 billion (US\$1=RM4.45), compared with the corresponding period in 2023. As of June 2024, there are more than 100 Danish companies in Malaysia, with investments in the manufacturing sector valued at over RM2.2 billion, creating 5,024 job opportunities, according to Malaysia's Foreign Ministry.

## Bilawal Bhutto calls for united efforts to safeguard human rights

**Liaquat Ali**  
Islamabad: Chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari this week called for united efforts to safeguard and promote human rights as the cornerstone of a just, inclusive, and peaceful society. In his message on the occasion of International Human Rights Day being observed globally on December 10, he said that human rights are universal rights and cannot be compromised anywhere. Reflecting on the United Nations' 2024 theme, "Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now," Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari underscored that the realization of human rights is pivotal for a sustainable and prosperous future. He stated: "Human rights are not mere ideals to aspire to but essential building blocks for dignity, equality, and justice. The future of any society depends on guaranteeing these rights to all individuals without discrimination." The PPP Chairman reiterated the Party's steadfast commitment to upholding the constitutional rights introduced in the landmark Constitution of 1973 by Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He highlighted how Quaid-e-Awam's vision of "One citizen, one vote" laid the foundation for empowering the people as the true source of power in Pakistan. He also praised the legacy of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, the first female Prime Minister of the Islamic world, who championed human rights through transformative initiatives. These included preventing gender discrimination by advancing women's autonomy, enacting laws to prevent honor killings and violence against women, repealing authoritarian-era laws to protect freedom of expression, and safeguarding the rights of minorities and workers. Bilawal further lauded President Asif Ali Zardari's historic contributions to human rights during his presidency, notably through the 18th Constitutional Amendment, which restored democratic principles and safeguarded human rights. He highlighted the addition of Article 25-A, ensuring the right to education as a constitutional guarantee, and the enactment of laws against workplace harassment and domestic violence. Under President Zardari's leadership, Pakistan also signed several international conventions and charters on human rights, promoting the true spirit of Pakistani society globally. Initiatives like the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) provided a social safety net for disadvantaged segments, particularly poor women, further demonstrating the PPP's commitment to inclusivity and social justice. Chairman PPP urged the federal and provincial governments to intensify their efforts in protecting civil liberties, advancing inclusive development, and ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens, particularly the vulnerable and marginalized. He encouraged the youth to actively defend their rights, emphasizing that their involvement is vital for shaping a brighter future.





# Chinese embassy holds CPEC's outstanding Pakistani staff awarding ceremony

**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: The Embassy of China in Pakistan this week organized the awarding ceremony for outstanding Pakistani staff of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects to recog-

nize 43 persons from different projects who have contributed to the CPEC construction. Pakistan's cuisine Addressing the ceremony, Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong emphasized that we should look at reality, trends and prospects, and strengthen

our confidence in practical cooperation between the two countries, especially the CPEC construction. He said: "We have favorable opportunities for the development of our two countries. The continued recovery of the economies of the two countries has



created new opportunities and injected new impetus into our promotion of practical cooperation, especially the CPEC construction." The ambassador said, "We have high-level strategic guidance from the two countries. The important instructions and consensus of the leaders of the two countries have provided us with fundamental guidance and enhanced confidence in promoting high-quality joint construction of the CPEC." Jiang Zaidong said, "We have a solid foundation for cooperation between the two countries. The fruitful results achieved in cooperation between the two countries, especially in the CPEC, have laid a solid foundation and provided important support for building an upgraded version of the CPEC." He said, "We are ready to work with Pakistan to draw the blueprint of the CPEC to the end, coordinate high-quality development with high-level security, coordinate quantitative growth with quality improvement, and

coordinate the advancement of major landmark projects with the construction of "small but beautiful" livelihood projects, coordinate cooperation in traditional fields with cooperation in emerging fields, create an "upgraded version" of the CPEC, and write a new chapter of pragmatic cooperation, building a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, and continuously enriching the vivid practice of high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road". "In this process, we are ready to continue to provide a broad stage for each and every staff of the CPEC to display their talents and realize their dreams," he added. Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal, Deputy Director General of the Department of International Cooperation of National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of China, Chen Shuai and Executive Vice Chairman of China Chamber of Commerce in Pakistan Zhou Bo attended the event.

# Over 200 ancient tombs discovered in Luohe, Henan

**Henan Daily**  
Zhengzhou: A joint archaeological team formed by Henan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and Luohe Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology excavated a tomb complex dating from the Warring States Period to the Han Dynasty in Luohe city of Central China's Henan province recently, according to Luohe Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. The densely but orderly arranged tomb complex was a chance discovery during the construction of the Pingdingshan-Luohe-Zhoukou High-speed Railway, dating from the Warring States Period to the Han Dynasty, lasting about 400 years. The majority of the tombs are well-preserved with abundant burials. So far, over 200 tombs have been discovered, with more than 1,000 artifacts unearthed,

including bronze swords and daggers of the Warring States Period and the pottery, iron wares and jade articles of the Han Dynasty. Cultural relics unearthed in this area are in great variety. Previously, important remains such as the walls, roads and large architectural foundations of the Warring States Period as well as the coins and pottery workshops of the Han Dynasty have been found in its surrounding area. It indicates that during the Warring States Period and the Han Dynasty, Yan-cheng (the present-day Luohe) had been well-developed, attaining a considerable scale, which is of great significance for studying the urban development of Luohe in history.



# China's largest diameter SPB TBM for South Korean project rolls off production line in Zhengzhou



**Henan Daily**  
Zhengzhou: The "CREC 1448" SPB TBM, developed by China Railway Engineering Equipment Group Co., Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as CREG), passed the acceptance inspection by the Korean contractor and was rolled off the production line in Zhengzhou, according to CREG on December 10. This machine, the largest diameter SPB TBM independently developed and exported by China to South Korea, will be used to construct the first section of the Gangneung-Pyeongtaek Railway project. The first section of the Gangneung-Pyeongtaek Railway project is located in the original Gangdo area of Gangneung City, South Korea, bordered by the Sea of Japan to the west and the East Sea to the east. The entire route traverses coastal lowlands and the Taebaek Mountains. This section includes a tunnel that is 2,869 meters long, with a design gradient of 0.17% over a continuous uphill stretch, and a minimum turning radius of 900 meters. The project will pass through various complex geological layers, including gneiss, weathered soil, weathered rock, and soft rock, with the rock strength reaching 150 MPa. Both the design and construction face significant technical challenges. In response to the project's unique geological conditions, CREG meticulously designed and developed the "CREC 1448" SPB TBM. This machine features a cutting diameter of 8.98 meters, a body length of approximately 76 meters, and a total weight of about 1,250 tons. It

adopts a modular design for efficient assembly and commissioning. Equipped with a new slurry balance system, it can tackle the complex geological environment, where soft and hard strata alternate, ensuring stable and efficient tunneling. Additionally, the shield machine is equipped with an advanced intelligent control system that enables automated operation and precise control, significantly improving both construction efficiency and safety. The Gangneung-Pyeongtaek Railway project is a key part of the East Coast Northern Line in South Korea, connecting the cities of Gangneung and Pyeongtaek. The entire project spans 110.6 kilometers and is divided into nine sections for phased construction. Notably, the "CREC 1448" SPB TBM will be deployed in the first section, which is the first to commence construction and features the most complex construction conditions. It is important to note that due to the aging of the original infrastructure, the East Coast Northern Line has been out of service since 1976. The successful rollout of the "CREC 1448" marks the imminent revival of this significant railway after more than 50 years of dormancy. Upon completion, the railway will become a new economic engine for the East Coast of South Korea, greatly stimulating regional economic growth and advancing the modernization of the transportation network.



# Italy: PM Giorgia Meloni named 'most powerful person in Europe'



**NewsWire**

Rome: Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni has been named as the "most powerful person in Europe" by Politico. The media outlet released its annual ranking list of 28 most influential people in the continent. "The list captures another continental trend: the ascent of right-wing populists and ultranationalist figures. These leaders, who have undermined civil-rights and targeted minorities and asylum-seekers, have gained traction as centrist leaders flounder," Politico said. Leader of the far-right wing Brothers of Italy party, Giorgia Meloni, has undergone a significant transformation. From being

image of a stable government. The media outlet also described the Italian prime minister as a "straight-talking alpha", listing instances of Meloni's strong response and hit backs to other leaders. Meanwhile, Donald Trump's reelection in the United States is likely to give the Italian PM more momentum. While she might not be even closely there



perceived as an ultranationalist to taking charge of Italy's highest office, Meloni is a powerful woman, with whom several leading countries can talk business. In 2022, Meloni gave Italy its first far-right government since the end of World War -II and also became the first woman to serve as the country's prime minister. A skilled orator with a modest suburban background, the Italian PM has been vocal about several issues immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, among others. Since taking the office, she also brought in policies to address the aforementioned issues. Meloni kickstarted her political journey as a teenage activist, making her way to become a councilor of the Province of Rome from 1998 to 2002. After this, she became the president of Youth Action. In 2008, the far-right leader was appointed as the Minister of Youth in the Berlusconi Cabinet, a role



## GIORGIA MELONI: EUROPE'S 'ALPHA' LEADER DOMINATING 2024 POLITICS

on Trump's radar, Tesla CEO Elon Musk's admiration of her policies has been globally known. Meloni has also praised Musk as an "added value" in the incoming Trump administration.

### Italian Ambassador to Pakistan, H.E. Marilina Armellin

she held till 2011. Then in 2012, Meloni co-founded her political party, Brothers of Italy, and became its chief in 2014. In the 2018 general elections of Italy, her party secured just four per cent of the total votes, however in 2022, her alliance claimed around 43 per cent of the votes. Her party alone took 26 per cent of the votes in an election with a record-low turnout. Notably, Meloni also holds a strong stance on the Ukraine war, with her sternly supporting the EU sanctions against Russia for the war in Kyiv. Politico said that the leader's carefully cultivate, "no-nonsense" appearance ensures the





# Respect creates resonance: the way for NBA to interact with China



**Ding Gang**

The National Basketball Association (NBA) has signed a multiyear deal to play pre-season games in Macao Special Administrative Region from 2025. The Brooklyn Nets and the Phoenix Suns will play two pre-season games hosted in Macao in October next year.

The location is obviously carefully chosen. And make no mistake - this is not just about basketball. It's a delicate, calculated step in the diplomatic dance of China-US cultural relations, a test of whether the NBA can once again warm its way into the hearts and wallets of Chinese fans. However, the story here is about more

than sports or commerce. It's about rediscovering the core principle of cultural exchange: respect.

Let's rewind to the debacle of 2019 when a single tweet by then-Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey triggered widespread dissatisfaction. His message was seen as an insult to Chinese people

and cost the NBA sponsorship deals, broadcasting rights and a staggering loss of untold millions.

That tweet was, in essence, a failure to grasp a simple truth: cultural exchange is not about lecturing or imposing ideologies. It is, at its best, a two-way street paved with understanding and mutual respect.

The NBA isn't just a professional sports league. It's a global cultural force. From fashion to music, it transcends the boundaries of the hardwood.

But here's the rub: being "global" isn't just about exporting your brand to other markets or making more money in the world market. It must start with respecting and embracing the other's culture; it's not about winning or losing on the basketball court. It's about fitting that brand into the mosaic of different cultures. This is where the art of cultural exchange matters most.

Look no further than Yao Ming, a walking masterpiece of cultural diplomacy wrapped in seven feet and six inches of humility. When Yao first entered the NBA, many doubted he could measure up to the intensity of the league. Instead, his efforts transcended sports, bridging cultural divides and showing America a face of China based on respect and sportsmanship.

Yao wasn't just an athlete, he symbolized what cultural exchange could and should look like, mutual understanding rather than ideological squabbling.

Contrast that with the tone-deaf swagger and, let's be honest, arrogance that marked the

aftermath of the Morey incident.

The NBA would finally discover that a beloved brand can't rubber-stamp its ideals onto a foreign audience. China wasn't having it, and rightfully so. A cultural exchange, whether through diplomacy, business or basketball, should inspire dialogue, not contempt.

Fast forward to the present. The NBA's choice to host a pre-season game in Macao seems like a deliberate attempt to test the waters. It is trying to cautiously stepping back into Chinese market.

But make no mistake, challenges still loom. What's the solution? For one, the league must invest in cultural sensitivity training, a proactive approach to fostering understanding rather than waiting to clean up the inevitable mess.

More importantly, the NBA, and any global enterprise, must catch on to an undeniable cultural truth: humility never hurts. Just as Yao Ming's gentlemanly demeanor won hearts off the court, the same ethos should underpin how brands act in foreign markets.

Cultural exchange isn't some glossy ideal for soft-power theorists - it's an essential tool in navigating our fractious, interconnected world.

Yes, the political climate between the US and China is frosty, and ideological differences remain stark. But sports, like the arts, is one of the few universals that can transcend these lines.

Most importantly, look to one simple truth that transcends the politics and profits of cultural exchange: Respect creates resonance.

If the NBA can master that principle, it will build more than courts and bridges between the Pacific Ocean.

The writer is a senior editor with the People's Daily, and currently a senior fellow with the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at the Renmin University of China

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# China-US strengthening dialogue and cooperation meets global expectations

**Global Times**

This Wednesday, Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the 2024 Gala Dinner of the US-China Business Council (USCBC). The letter conveyed China's sincere hope for long-term peaceful coexistence and greater dialogue and cooperation between our two countries, as well as its firm commitment to deepening reform comprehensively and opening up wider to the world. On the same day, US President Joe Biden also sent a congratulatory letter to the event. These simultaneous actions by the top leaders of both countries demonstrate that China and the US regard each other as significant economic and trade partners. Furthermore, representatives from the Chinese and US governments on Friday in Beijing extended the Agreement between the US and China on Cooperation in Science and Technology for additional five years, effective from August 27, 2024, which is exciting news. As one of the world's most significant bilateral relationships, the trajectory of China-US ties has profound implications not only for the two nations' peoples but also for the future of humanity.

We have noticed there have been frequent high-level economic interactions between China and the US recently. On Wednesday, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen urged the

next US administration to "maintain the dialogue channels" that she re-established with China. Meanwhile, China's Ministry of Commerce spokesperson He Yadong confirmed on Thursday that the Chinese side has maintained close communication with the US Department of Commerce and is also open to contact and communication with the new administration's economic and trade team. Following a meeting of the two countries' economic working group at the G20 finance ministers' meeting in South Africa on Thursday, a financial working group meeting is scheduled to take place in Nanjing from December 15 to 16. It is evident that the need for strengthened communication and expanded cooperation between China and the US in the economic and trade sectors has not diminished with changes in government, nor has it been shaken by the "anti-globalization" trend.

As an organization representing over 200 US member companies conducting business in China, the USCBC reflects a significant portion of US corporate interests. In July, its delegation was the first from the US business community to visit China after the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Last month, at the 7th China International Import Expo, USCBC President Craig Allen remarked, "China remains a very important market to the US." This year, high-ranking executives from

leading companies such as Apple, Boeing, and Goldman Sachs have visited China to participate in exhibitions, attend conferences, and explore business opportunities. Clearly, US businesses still view their operations in China as a priority, recognizing the strong resilience and vitality of the Chinese economy and hoping to share in the vast opportunities it offers.

As the world's two largest economies, China and the US have highly complementary and resilient economic and trade relations. "Making the pie of cooperation bigger" is the best choice for both sides. China has a robust manufacturing sector and is advancing toward higher-end, smarter, and greener development, serving as a critical link in the global production and supply chain. The recently concluded Central Economic Work Conference reaffirmed that the Chinese economy has posted a generally stable performance while making progress and outlined policies for next year to "comprehensively deepen reform, and expand high-standard opening-up," injecting certainty and momentum into the global economy. The US, meanwhile, also has a vast market, world-class research capabilities, innovation capacity, and rich talent resources. If the two countries leverage their respective development strengths and resource endowments to collaborate, the result will undoubtedly be greater than the sum of its parts, achieving the "1+1>2" effect that benefits both nations and contributes to shared prosperity worldwide.

For some time now, Washington's approach to China has exhibited a contrast between the competition in high-profile rhetoric in public discourse and closer cooperation in practice. A compelling example is that despite US efforts of "de-risking" through tariff wars, trade wars, and technology restrictions, the total trade value between China and the US rose to 4.44 trillion yuan in the first 11 months of this year, a year-on-year increase of 4.2 percent. When factoring in "indirect trade" through third-party markets like ASEAN countries and Mexico, economic exchanges between the two nations have only grown rather than diminished. The hawkish stance in Washington is increasingly out of sync with the steady progress of China-US economic relations. The recently passed National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2025 by the



US House of Representatives continues to cite the "China threat" as a pretext for imposing numerous restrictions on China, including a bizarre provision banning the sale of "Chinese garlic" in US military stores. However, the act notably excludes areas such as cross-border e-commerce, biopharmaceuticals, and investments in China - fields in which US interests are significantly involved.

The facts prove that the economic interests of China and the US are deeply intertwined, which is the fundamental logic behind why the two countries should not, and cannot, become "parallel worlds." For China and the US to strengthen dialogue and cooperation is not only in the fundamental interests of both nations and their peoples but also aligns with the widespread expectations of the world. The way these two large countries interact will, to a large extent, determine whether the world leans toward unity or division, whether global supply chains follow a "globalized arrangement" or a "bloc-based arrangement," and whether the pace of

human productivity growth and civilizational progress will accelerate or slow down.

As the Chinese saying goes, "A new year brings new beginnings." It is hoped that in the coming year, China-US relations can start on a positive note from a new starting point.



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# High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri says PHC in Australia ready to serve



of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad and at Pakistan Missions abroad. Prior to his appointment as High Commissioner to the Commonwealth of Australia, he served as Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Additional Secretary responsible for Asia Pacific. Mr Chaudhri has earlier served as Director General (Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey), Director General (South Asia & SAARC), Director (India), Deputy Director (South East Asia and the Pacific), Deputy Director (Economic Coordination) and Assistant Director (Personnel) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has also served as Director General (Economic Coordination) at President's Secretariat and Joint Secretary (National Security) at the National Security Division. He has also served at key Pakistani Missions abroad including the Embassy of Pakistan, Washington DC, USA; High Commission for Pakistan, London, United Kingdom; and the Consulate General of Pakistan, Dubai, UAE. He holds an LL.M (International Economic and Trade Law) degree from the University of London, United Kingdom and MBA from the University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. He is also an alumnus of the American University and the National Defence University, Washing-



**Covert Report**

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said that the Pakistan High Commission in Australia was ready to serve the community. "Serving the community is our top priority," he wrote on X tagging a High Commission statement: "To better serve the Pakistani community in Western Australia, we

are bringing consular services to their doorstep." The High Commission later organized a Consular Camp in Perth on December 23-24. Prominent diplomat Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri is a career diplomat who joined the Foreign Service of Pakistan on September 30, 1993. He is known for being a people-friendly officer. Mr Chaudhri has served at key positions in the Ministry

# Pakistan, France hold productive consultations on UN Security Council matters



**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistan-France this week held productive consultations in Islamabad on UN Security Council matters. The consultations were co-chaired by Director for UN affairs of the French Minis-

try of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Le Fraper du Hellen and Additional Foreign Secretary (UN & OIC) Ambassador Syed Haider Shah. The two sides reaffirmed their commitment to bilateral cooperation and dialogue and working together for international

peace and security. As members of the UN Security Council, Pakistan and France will constructively engage with each other in strengthening multilateralism and addressing global challenges.



# Kazakhstan Embassy participates in grand ceremony to unveil Silk Road Culture Center

**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: The Embassy of Kazakhstan to Pakistan participated in the grand ceremony of unveiling the Silk Road Culture Center, this week organized by renowned artist and former Minister of National Heritage and Culture of Pakistan, Jamal Shah, Kazinform News Agency cites the Kazakh MFA. The event was jointly organized with the embassies of Azerbaijan, Iran, China, Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. During the event, Ambassador of

Kazakhstan Yerzhan Kistafin delivered a speech, emphasizing the importance of cultural cooperation in strengthening relations among the countries of the region. He also outlined plans for enhancing cultural collaboration between Kazakhstan and Pakistan. The head of the Kazakh diplomatic mission highlighted that the opening of the Center marks a significant step in fostering cultural and diplomatic ties among the countries of the region, reaffirming Kazakhstan's full support for the initiative. As part of the exhibition organized within the event, visitors had the opportunity to explore paintings, books and photographs, which showcased the rich cultural heritage, scenic landscapes, traditions, and customs of the Kazakh people.





# Umar Rehman Malik misses illustrious father Senator Rehman Malik



Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week missed his illustrious father, Senator Rehman Malik, on the late PPP stalwart's birthday.

"Missing Senator Rehman Malik on his birth anniversary. May Allah grant him the highest place in Jannah. Ameen," Umar Rehman Malik wrote on X. Senior politician and former interior minister Rehman Malik passed away at the age of 70 in February 2022. He is survived by his widow and two sons.

The PPP senator, who had received an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Karachi, served as the interior minister of the country from 2008 to 2013. He was one of the closest



est aides of former premier Benazir Bhutto. Prior to his entry in national politics, Malik had pursued a successful career in the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) as a special officer, eventually becoming the Additional Director General of

the Federal Investigation Agency in 1993 until 1996. During his stint as Director, he coordinated successful counter-terrorist operations in the country as well as abroad. Later, Senator Malik began political activity through the PPP platform.





# Romania, Bulgaria become full members of Schengen zone

**Newsire**  
Brussels: European interior ministers met in Brussels this week, where they voted to allow Bulgaria and Romania fully into the Schengen area, dropping borders between the two countries and the rest of Europe. The decision will be valid as of January 1, 2025. "It is a historic moment

an Union's rotating presidency. The process had already begun in March, when passport checks were ended for the countries' air and sea borders with other EU nations. Romania and Bulgaria have been EU members since 2007, and have filled the requirements to enter Schengen since 2010. However, over the years various states have objected to their accession over migration concerns.



to finally welcome Bulgaria and Romania," said Interior Minister Sandor Pinter of Hungary, which the Europe-

Since 2022, Austria in particular was holding out on approval. However, Vienna had already signaled ahead of Thursday's vote.

# Five dead, dozens missing in Greece migrant boat sinking

**Covert Report**  
Athens: Five migrants died this week when a migrant boat sank off Crete, Greece's coastguard said, leaving 40 people reportedly missing while 39 survivors were rescued. The boat sank 12 nautical miles southwest of the island, according to ERTNEWS, which reported the 40

missing. A huge rescue operation involving vessels and aircraft was underway in the sea south of the island of Gavdos, south of Crete, after the boat capsized shortly after midnight, the coastguard said. The first dead was found Saturday morning. Local media said another



man was taken by helicopter to a hospital in the city of Chania on Crete and was admitted to intensive care. Saturday afternoon, the coastguard said that the number of migrants

found dead had risen to five. Greece has seen a 25-per cent increase this year in the number of migrants arriving, with a 30-per cent increase to Rhodes and the southeast Aegean, according to the migration ministry.

Several similar accidents have occurred in recent weeks. In late November, eight migrants, six of them minors, died north of the island of Samos, on a route frequently used by people smugglers.



# Portugal's govt vows to issue work visas to immigrants within a month



**Newsire**

Lisbon: The Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, António Leitão Amaro this week, unfolded plans to accelerate the process of issuing work visas to immigrants. Portugal is currently dealing with labour shortages in several sectors amid ongoing visa delays. Portugal aims to grant work visas to immigrants in less than a month, the Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, António Leitão Amaro, has said. Following reports of long delays in obtaining a visa in Portugal, the Minister vowed that the process would be accelerated for immigrants,

Schengen.News reports. According to local media reports, waiting times for foreigners to obtain a Portugal visa have increased significantly, particularly for those from Brazil, which sometimes reach up to six months. Long delays related to visa issuance by Portuguese embassies and consulates have increased following the abolishment of the Expression of Interest program in June last year, which permitted all persons to enter the country as tourists and then apply to legally work in Portugal. While long visa delays continue for those interested in reaching Portugal, including for work purposes, the country needs between 50,000 to

100,000 international workers each year in order to deal with labour shortages, according to a recent survey introduced by the General Union of Workers. In addition, the employers have also warned the government of Portugal that without workers, the country's economy would lose momentum in comparison to growth targets. According to them, in the construction sector alone, it is estimated that about 80,000 workers will be needed. According to the proposal presented by the government to businesspeople, consular services are required to issue a statement on whether or not to grant a visa within 20 days.

We have made our commitment, and you can make yours. We have added 50 more employees to the consular posts, we have accelerated the response capacity of AIMA (Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum), and we have guaranteed a response time. The lawyer, Elizabeth Lima, who works in immigration, told Politico Portugal that Portugal's government's proposal to issue work visas

in less than a month is unrealistic. "Today, it takes months to get a visa. Just 50 more employees in the various consulates will not solve the problems. Portugal has many consulates," Elizabeth Lima, lawyer. According to lawyer Lima, there are not enough resources that would permit authorities in Portugal to achieve the goal of issuing visas in such a short period of time.





# Japan donates \$3.1 million to eradicate polio in Pakistan amid alarming surge

**Celina Ali** Islamabad: Japan has donated \$3.1 million to eradicate polio in Pakistan and ensure millions of children remain safe from the crippling disease, the Pakistan Polio Programme said this week, as Islamabad desperately looks to grapple with an alarming surge in cases of the infection this year. Pakistan, along with neighboring

Afghanistan, remains the last polio-endemic country in the world. The country has so far reported 59 cases of the infection this year. The nation's polio eradication campaign has hit serious problems with a spike in reported cases this year that have prompted officials to review their approach to stopping the crippling disease. "Today, the Government of Japan reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to Pakistan's polio eradication efforts by

supporting the program with a generous donation of \$3.1 million," the Pakistan Polio Programme said. "This funding will ensure millions of children are protected from this crippling disease in 2025, leading us closer to a polio-free Pakistan." Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication Ayesha Farooq expressed her gratitude to the Japanese government and highlighted the decades-long partnership between both nations in the "critical fight." "This generous grant reflects not only



financial support but also the profound bond between our nations, rooted in a shared commitment to health equity and safeguarding of future generations," she said. "A heartfelt thanks to the Government and people of Japan, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), and UNICEF for their enduring commitment to this life-saving cause. Together, we will achieve our goal of ensuring no child is left behind." Charge d' Affairs ad interim of Japan Takano Shuichi, JICA Chief Representative Miyata Naoaki, UNICEF representative in Pakistan Abdullah Fadil and other officials from the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and Pakistan Polio Program team were in attendance during the grant ceremony, the statement added. Of the 59 cases reported in 2024, 26 are from Balochistan province, 16 from KP, 15 from Sindh, and one each from Punjab

and Islamabad, the federal capital. Poliovirus, which can cause crippling paralysis, particularly in young children, is incurable and remains a threat to human health as long as it has not been eradicated. Immunization campaigns have succeeded in most countries and have come close in Pakistan, but persistent problems remain. In the early 1990s, Pakistan reported around 20,000 cases annually but in 2018 the number dropped to eight cases. Six cases were reported in 2023 and only one in 2021. Pakistan's polio program began in 1994 but efforts to eradicate the virus have since been undermined by vaccine misinformation and opposition from some religious hard-liners, who say immunization is a foreign ploy to sterilize Muslim children or a cover for Western spies. Militant groups also frequently attack and kill members of polio vaccine teams.

# PIA to restart US flights after 8 years hiatus



**Celina Ali** Islamabad: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) prepares to restart flights to the United States after an eight-year hiatus. An official Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between PIA and the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) addresses financial matters. Directorate General of Civil Aviation (CAA) Nadir Shafi Dar this week confirmed imminent financial settlements with the FAA. These payments will facilitate an anticipated FAA delegation visit to Pakistan in the upcoming months. Resolving financial obligations demonstrates Pakistan's commitment to meeting international aviation standards and regulatory requirements. Strategically timed financial settlements and diplomatic negotiations indicate PIA's proactive approach to

regaining its position in the international air travel market. The potential resumption of US routes could significantly impact the airline's revenue streams and global operational network. The ongoing negotiations increase Pakistan's potential reclassification to FAA's 'Category One' status, enabling direct US flight operations. This classification represents a critical benchmark for international aviation compliance and operational standards. PIA suspended its US routes in 2017, previously maintaining a weekly schedule of six flights. The airline's route network included four weekly flights to New York and two to Chicago before the suspension. Restoring these routes signifies a strategic recovery for Pakistan's international air travel infrastructure. The potential reclassification indicates the nation's commitment to meeting rigorous international aviation safety and regulatory requirements.





# Pakistan, EU agree to continue cooperation on food, climate change challenges



the validity of Proof of Registrations cards of Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan until June 30, 2025. The EU also reiterated its support for the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), aimed at providing lasting solutions for Afghan refugees and their host communities in neighbouring countries. Pakistan also called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied Arab territories. The EU reiterated its call for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza; the unconditional release of all hostages; and the urgent and

unimpeded humanitarian access and distribution at scale of humanitarian assistance; as well as an enduring end to hostilities in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2735. Both Pakistan and the EU stressed the need to find peaceful solutions to all conflicts, in full respect of the principles of international law and the UN Charter. It was agreed to hold the next session of the EU-Pakistan Joint Commission in Brussels in 2025.



**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: Pakistan and the European Union this week agreed to continue cooperation on emerging challenges of food, energy security, and climate change, underlining sustained engagement, particularly in areas such as trade, migration, human rights, political, economic and development cooperation with a focus on the Global Gateway strategy.

The bilateral relations and cooperation were discussed in the 14th Pakistan-European Union (EU) Joint Commission meeting which took stock of recent political developments besides the ongoing formation of the new College of Commissioners, according to a joint press issued Friday on the Joint Commission meeting held recently.

The Joint Commission was preceded by the Sub-Group on Democracy, Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights in which two sides agreed on the need for continued efforts to strengthen the electoral process. The EU reiterated the importance of political pluralism, democratic values, independent media, vibrant civil society, judicial independence, and international human rights standards, which are key for democratic elections.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the protection of all human rights, including women and children's rights, labour and migrant rights, as well as fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and opinion including growing problem of disinformation.

Pakistan presented its reform agenda, including in the framework of the National Action Plan on Human Rights, National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, as well as actions towards the full implementation of 27 international conventions related to GSP+.

Pakistan and the EU also exchanged views on freedom of religion or belief and the rights of persons belonging to minorities and vulnerable groups and concerns about anti-Muslim hatred. The meeting of the Pakistan-EU Sub-group on

Trade also preceded the Joint Commission in which both sides acknowledged the importance of a robust multilateral trading system and exchanged views on recent developments at the multilateral (WTO), plurilateral, and bilateral levels.

Both sides acknowledged that since the grant of GSP status in 2014, the bilateral trade relations have made significant strides.

In the meeting of the Sub-Group on Development, both Pakistan and the EU agreed on the continued relevance of key priority areas under the ongoing Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) including Green Inclusive Growth, Human Capital/TVET, and Governance including Rule of Law and Human Rights.

The EU presented the details of the projects for the period 2025-2027 following the Mid-Term Review of the MIP and updated on the EU's policy framework and the Global Gateway. Pakistan appreciated the recent visit of the European Investment Bank in Pakistan held in September this year and agreed on the opportunity to enhance engagement within the framework of the Global Gateway by identifying new investments.

The EU expressed its continued support to Pakistan in developing green and clean energy. Reiterating their commitment to the Pakistan-EU Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP) signed in 2019, Pakistan and the EU reviewed the state of its implementation, five years on. Pakistan presented proposals to expand bilateral cooperation in additional areas, among others in agriculture, taxation, and disaster risk reduction.

The Joint Commission discussed the progress on joint commitments in the context of the Pakistan-EU comprehensive Migration and Mobility Dialogue, including in the area of return and readmission in the framework of Pakistan-EU Joint Readmission Agreement, as well as in the area of legal migration under the Pakistan-EU Talent Partnership.

The EU reiterated its appreciation for Pakistan's generosity in hosting Afghan refugees over the decades and welcomed the decision to extend





# Pakistan eyes UK flight resumption by early 2025 after British inspection

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan is expected to secure approval from British aviation authorities to resume direct flight operations by the first quarter of 2025, pending a critical inspection by UK officials scheduled for January.

Director General of the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) Nadir Shafi Dar has said that representatives from the UK Department for Transport and the UK Civil Aviation Authority would conduct an inspection visit in the third week of January 2025.

An online meeting between the two sides is also planned for the third week of December 2024.

“The inspection will follow criteria similar to the European Union assessment, which yielded positive results. We are optimistic that the evaluation will lead to operational clearance within weeks,” Dar stated.

Before the suspension, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) operated 21 weekly flights to the UK, including 10 to London, nine to Manchester, and two to Birmingham.

PIA officials anticipate a significant revenue boost once flights to the UK and Europe resume.

Earlier, Pakistan International Airlines said it will resume flights to Europe in January, starting with Paris, after the EU aviation regulator lifted a ban on the national flag carrier.

PIA’s authorisation to operate in the EU was suspended in June 2020 over



concerns about the ability of Pakistani authorities and its Civil Aviation Authority to ensure compliance with international aviation standards. “We have got approval for the first flight’s schedule we had filed,” PIA spokesperson Abdullah Hafeez Khan said, adding that the airline would be opening bookings on December 9 for its planned January 10 flight of a Boeing 777 to Paris. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency and Britain suspended PIA’s permission to operate in the region after Pakistan began probing a scandal over the validity of pilots’ licenc-

es in the wake of a plane crash that killed 97 people. The ban cost the loss-making airline Rs 40 billion (\$144 million) annually in revenue. PIA has a 23% share in Pakistan’s domestic aviation market, but its 34-plane fleet cannot compete with Middle Eastern carriers which have a 60% share, due to a lack of direct flights, despite having agreements with 87 countries and key landing slots. Pakistan’s attempt to privatize PIA fell flat when it received only a single offer, well below its asking price.





A rose by any other name  
would smell as sweet.

- William Shakespeare

# COVERT

TRUTH UNFOLD

December 22 - 28, 2024

He travels the fastest who  
travels alone.

- Rudyard Kipling

# Italy advocates for two-state solution for Israel and Palestine

## NewsWire

Rome: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Rome this week, emphasizing the importance of achieving a "lasting political solution" through a two-state solution, News.az reports citing foreign media.

According to an Italian government statement, she confirmed her country's commitment to a "lasting political solution based on the two states of Israel and Palestine" so that they can "coexist in peace and security for both."

She also underlined that her government is willing to play a "frontline" role to stabilize and strengthen Palestinian institutions.

Meloni pledged Italy's commitment "in all Palestinian sectors," particularly with the "Food for Gaza" initiative. On an official visit to Rome, Abbas met Pope Francis for half an hour on Thursday before meeting the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

The Holy See said that the meeting, described as "cordial," highlighted the Catholic Church's contribution to Palestinian society in support of the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and that they hope for a ceasefire and the release of all hostages as soon as possible.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas thanked the Pope for "his positions in favor of achieving a just peace in Palestine based on the two-state solution, his call for a ceasefire in Gaza, the entry of aid into the Strip and hospitals, schools and places of worship to enjoy all the necessary protection," according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa.



# New PM Francois Bayrou says he knows 'difficulty' of France's situation

## Covert Report

Paris: France's new Prime Minister Francois Bayrou says he is well aware of the scale of France's financial and political problems, comparing the country's budget deficit to the Himalayan mountain range.

"No one knows better than me the difficulty of the situation," Bayrou said at a handover ceremony with former Prime Minister Michel Barnier.

"I am fully aware of the Himalayas that loom ahead of us," he said of the budget deficit now at 6.1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

President Emmanuel Macron named Bayrou as his new prime minister after Barnier was forced by far-right and left-wing lawmakers to step down after just three months in office in a historic no-confidence vote last week.

Bayrou is a well-known figure in French politics whose political experience is seen as key in efforts to restore stability to the country.

The 73-year-old leader of the Democratic Movement (Mouvement Democrate, or MoDem) group, which has been allied to the president's centrist Renaissance party since he swept to power in 2017.

