

High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri emphasises importance of girls' education

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week emphasised the importance of girls education. Referring to the International Partnerships for Education in Muslim Societies platform inaugurated at the 'Girls' Education in (Page-5)

Pakistani airline resumes Europe flights after EU ban lifted **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: A flight operated by state-run Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) took off for Paris from Islamabad this week as the carrier resumed direct flights to Europe following the lifting of a European Union ban. The EU blocked PIA in 2020 after one of its Airbus A-320s crashed in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi, killing 97 people. (Page-10)

China to boost consumption, expand imports in 2025



To attract foreign investment, China will expand voluntary and unilateral opening up in an orderly manner, give full play to the role of national economic development zones in attracting foreign investment, and improve services for foreign enterprises. Further efforts will be made to proactively align with high-standard international economic and trade rules, promote international cooperation in industrial chains and supply chains, and deepen Silk Road e-commerce cooperation.

Wang Wentao, Minister of Commerce, said that it is necessary to comprehensive-

ly promote reform and development tasks in the country's commercial work, and promote the drafting of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), adding that work should also be done to ensure the safety of production and stable market supply at the turn of the year.



Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: China will further implement the special campaign to stimulate consumption, actively expand imports and attract foreign investment this year, according to a national commerce work conference held in Beijing this week. The country will step up efforts to implement the consumer goods trade-in pro-

gram, according to the meeting. More diversified consumption scenarios will be created, and service and digital consumption will be promoted. In terms of foreign trade, China will actively expand imports, develop cross-border e-commerce and green trade, and promote trade digitalization, according to the meeting.

Queen Mary of Denmark opens up the royal couple's Circular Annex house



Covert Report

Copenhagen: Just 40 minutes from Copenhagen, where the Danish royal family's official residence Amalienborg is located, you'll find Fredensborg. With its village-like atmosphere, tall trees and shimmering Esrum Lake, peace and tranquillity reign. Here is the Baroque Fredensborg Palace, and the publicly accessible Palace Garden, renowned as an example of Baroque garden design. Nearby is Chancellery House, the residence of the current royal couple, H.M. King Frederik X and H.M. Queen Mary. Behind Chancellery House, close to the forest, is an annex. Architecturally, it stands out from the white palace buildings as it is made of wood and has two distinct elements. One half has a rustic, blackened and primarily enclosed exterior, while the second is brown-oiled and transparent with glass walls that slide aside to merge outdoors and indoors. The enclosed part of the annex consists of private quarters, while the open part houses a more 'official' area comprising a common room with a kitchen and meeting facilities. The royal couple and Danish architect Anders Lendager have designed the building to reflect its owners as representatives of a modern monarchy, rooted in a historical foundation yet seamlessly integrated into the present. Originally, the annex was an old workshop, constructed in 1890. It was no longer in use, so the royal couple had to decide its fate. The easiest solution would have been to tear it down and build something new. That was not the path they chose. To understand why, let's look back to September 2021. Lendager, a visionary architect with sustainable, circular principles, was commissioned by VisitDenmark to create a pavilion for the annual design fair in Milan. The walls were constructed from more than 700 chairs, stacked in every conceivable way and made using plastic sourced from Carlsberg kegs. It takes a mind as creative as Lendager's to have such vision. That, and an analytical person like Danish master carpenter and contractor Christian 'Iver' Chemnitz Iversen, who also thinks in circular terms and was on board when asked to bring the idea to life. In the annex's meeting area, a table called The Life of the Tree, which is made from leftover wood supplied by the royal family's carpenters. "When the building was finished we were able to start furnishing it, and in this context, we have also thought about maximising sustainability," Queen Mary explains. The pavilion became a showcase of what could be achieved in future Danish construction. As the crowning moment, Queen

Mary visited the pavilion and that evening she approached Lendager. The Queen vividly recalls her encounter with the architect. "During the official dinner, I seized the opportunity and asked—knowing full well that he primarily works with larger projects—if he would ever consider transforming an old workshop building. I shared my thoughts about incorporating and rethinking the use of the building and making it as sustainable as possible, both in its transformation and its operation. Fortunately, he saw potential in it, as the old two-storey building had a strong and beautiful structure and was built from good, solid materials. From there, it was crucial for the transformation to create a space for craftsmen, architects and construction managers, so that creative and innovative reuse and sustainable solutions could unfold." 'Free space' became a key concept, and both the planners and executors of the project enjoyed almost complete creative freedom to fully immerse themselves in their work. Iversen won the bidding round as the contractor with a proposal focused on the lowest possible CO2 emissions per square metre, which included a circular construction site with a covered carpentry tent right next to the scaffolding. The Circular Annex is located next to Chancellery House, so the royal couple was able to hold regular meetings on site. "My husband and I followed the project from start to finish, getting involved in what was possible. It's fascinating to see how much can come from building with what already exists. Everyone approached the task with curiosity, always asking: 'how can we make this as sustainable as possible?'" the Queen says.



Ambassador of Denmark to Pakistan His Excellency Jakob Linulf

Aseefa Bhutto for resolution of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa issues

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari this week urged for development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In a meeting with Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari discussed pressing issues faced by the province, including the deteriorating law and order situation and the alarming rise in polio cases. During the meeting, concerns were raised about the provincial government's lack of interest in addressing public grievances. Particular emphasis was placed on devising a comprehensive strategy under the supervision of the Governor's House to curb the increasing number of polio cases. Aseefa, also the Polio Eradication Ambassador, praised Governor Faisal Karim Kundi's initiatives aligned with the vision of the late Benazir Bhutto. She acknowledged his efforts to promote women's empowerment, youth engagement, and interfaith harmony through measures spearheaded by the Governor's House in Peshawar.



The meeting concluded with a commitment to tackle provincial issues collaboratively, ensuring that effective solutions are implemented for the benefit of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Henan's inbound mail services go mobile with one-stop platform trial



outbound mail services. "It's much more convenient than handling it at the counter or through an agent," Mr. Tian said.

On January 1, the one-stop platform for inbound and outbound mail services began its trial operation, with Zhengzhou and five other places nationwide as pilot sites. The platform aims to streamline the handling of inbound international mail, providing integrated services and a one-stop solution to meet the needs of public, and eliminating the unnecessary business procedures.

"The functions are now available on six platforms, including the 'Single Window' for international trade and 'Internet + Customs', and users can log in through any of these portals for full services, including mail inquiries, supplementary declarations, tax payments, tax refunds, and return shipment applications," said Wang Lei,

head of the General Affairs Department at Zhengzhou Post Office Customs. Previously, when handling inbound mail services, users had to submit supplementary

declaration materials to the business side, which would then forward them to customs for review. After the trial operation of the inbound and outbound mail one-stop platform, the intermediate steps were eliminated, enabling direct communication between the sender and customs, while saving a 30-yuan supplementary declaration agency fee.

Since the platform's debut, as of 12:00 noon January 6, Zhengzhou Post Office Customs has processed 200 supplementary declarations for inbound mail.

In recent years, Henan has consistently deepened mail supervision reforms, continually improving the efficiency of customs clearance for inbound and outbound mail. In 2024, Zhengzhou Post Office Customs supervised a total of 5.609 million inbound and outbound mail items, marking an 8.4% year-on-year increase. Among them, 4.3 million were outbound mail items, reflecting a 14.5% year-on-year growth. "This time, Zhengzhou was selected as a pilot site for the trial operation of the one-stop platform for inbound and outbound mail services, making it possible to handle all mail-related procedures online, which has further enhanced the efficiency and convenience of inbound and outbound mail customs clearance,"

said an official from Zhengzhou Customs. (Chinese source: Henan Daily Reporter; Wang Ge Translator; Yang Jiaxin Proof-reader; Jiao Dan and Zhao Hanqing)

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: "The online system allows users to complete various operations, such as supplementary declarations and tax

payments. Once the customs review is approved, tax payment can be processed online, all without any fees." On January 6, Mr. Tian, the recipient of an interna-

tional mail item, completed the process with the remote directions from officers at Zhengzhou Post Office Customs, by using the one-stop platform for inbound and

Pakistan Railway Capacity Boosted with Chinese-Made Freight Wagons

China Economic Net

Lahore: In a busy factory in Lahore, Pakistan, the hum of machinery and the hustle of workers mark a new chapter for local railway freight transportation. Right now, 115 flat wagons are being assembled in Complete Knocked Down (CKD) form, with plans for them to roll out in April this year. These wagons are part of a larger order of 620 freight wagons being jointly produced by Pakistan Railways and the Chinese company Baotou Beifang Chuangye Co., Ltd. "Once all 620 freight wagons are fully operational, they will double the current railway transportation capacity," said Philippe Mi, the Chinese project director for the 820 High-Capacity Wagon (HCW) project, in a recent interview.

In 2021, Beifang Chuangye won a contract to supply 820 high-capacity railway freight wagons

to Pakistan Railways, including four types of vehicles: open-top wagons, flat wagons, covered wagons, and cabooses. By 2022, 200 wagons were delivered and put into operation.

In 2024, 115 high-capacity open-top wagons, assembled in semi-knocked-down (SKD) form at the Risalpur factory, were deployed on key freight routes connecting Karachi Port to inland destinations. This not only increased transportation capacity but also eased the pressure on Karachi Port's warehousing operations.

"This initiative will bring significant economic benefits to Pakistan, marking a crucial step toward reducing import dependence and promoting local industries," said Aamir Baloch, CEO of Pakistan Railways, praising the local production of railway freight wagons. It's a major leap toward economic self-sufficiency and the start of a new era in freight transportation in Pakistan.

The standardized design of the wagons ensures compatibility and consistency across different models, helping reduce operational and maintenance costs for Pakistan Railways. Ishaq Butt,

the Pakistani Project Director for the 820HCW project, highlighted the importance of this efficiency, especially in a country where infrastructure development is a key priority.

The production process also created around 450 direct jobs. "This local production project has trained many young technicians and skilled workers for our railway department, significantly boosting our manufacturing capabilities and sustaining them for the future," said Ishaq Butt.

Beifang Chuangye has provided both theoretical training and hands-on support in setting up the wagon assembly lines in Lahore and Risalpur. Their assistance covers personnel training, equipment upgrades, inventory management, process planning, quality control, and system development, ensuring a comprehensive improvement of the factories.



Henan's tourism revenue exceeds 1 trillion yuan in 2024

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: On January 6, the Information Office of the People's Government of Henan Province held a press conference.

Huang Dongsheng, director-general of the Department of Culture and Tourism of Henan Province, highlighted at the conference that the year 2024 witnessed significant growth in the province's cultural and tourism sectors.

For the first time, Henan welcomed over 1 billion tourists, generating a total tourism revenue exceeding 1 trillion yuan. With its long supply chain and substantial impact on driving domestic demand and consumption, the cultural and tourism industry plays a crucial role in economic development.

Looking ahead to the first quarter of this year, with the successful inclusion of the "Spring Festival" on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list and an extended 8-day holiday, Henan's cultural and tourism market is expected to reach new heights.



PM Meloni hails 'excellent' Italy-Greece relations, announces February conference



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

proach, including security, defense, migration – which affects few European countries as profoundly as ours – and environmental efforts to address extreme climate events.” Meloni pointed to the growing influence of southern European nations, referencing the recent North-South Summit. “Countries once seen as ‘not exactly serious’ are now united in addressing major European secu-

rity concerns,” she said. Looking ahead, Meloni announced an Italy-Greece inter-governmental conference in Rome this February, during which new agreements and a joint declaration will be signed. “Our goal is to formalize the breadth of our cooperation with agreements on particularly important issues,” she said. Meloni also highlighted their collaboration within the European Council and forums such as the MED9 and MED5. “Prime Minister Mitsotakis and I sit at the same table, playing leading roles in shaping the region’s future,” she added.



Newswire
Rome: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni this week hailed Italy’s “excellent” relations with Greece, emphasizing their shared geostrategic identity and close cooperation on key issues such as security, migration and climate challenges. “Our two countries share a common geostrategic identity,” Meloni said during her annual press conference, highlighting her strong working relationship with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. “We collaborate on many issues with a shared ap-



China's foreign trade 'beats expectations,' but not surprising

Global Times

According to data released by the General Administration of Customs of China on January 13, the total value of China's import and export of goods trade in 2024 was 43.85 trillion yuan (\$5.98 trillion), a year-on-year increase of 5 percent, the scale of which hit a record high. Among them, foreign trade gained momentum in the fourth quarter, especially in December, when the import and export scale exceeded 4 trillion yuan for the first time, with a growth rate of 6.8 percent. The whole year's foreign trade concluded successfully. These figures have received widespread attention from the outside world, with many Western media outlets describing them as "surprising" and "beating expectations." To a certain extent, this foreign trade "report card" can be regarded as a summary of the ratings of China by trading entities around the world, showing the international community's true attitude toward dealing with and doing business with China.

Many people have noticed that the performance of China's foreign trade in 2024 is not merely a numerical growth in the statistical sense. It has achieved "three simultaneous increases" in total volume, increment and quality. In addition, in terms of structure, more new products with high-tech attributes are accelerating to go overseas. The exports of electric vehicles, 3D printers and industrial robots have grown by 13.1 percent, 32.8 percent, and 45.2 percent respectively. From a domestic perspective, China's foreign trade has traditionally focused on the eastern coast which plays a leading role. However, now the import and export of the eastern, central, western and northeastern regions have all achieved growth. Externally, while trade with emerging markets, such as the Belt and Road partner countries and ASEAN countries, has increased significantly, China has also maintained its trade momentum with the traditional markets of Europe and the US. What is commendable is that these achievements have been made on the foundation of a massive existing stock of 40 trillion yuan in our country. All of this demonstrates China's determination and ability to promote high-level opening-up to the outside world.

At the micro level, the continuously increasing endogenous momentum of China's foreign trade is even more evident. In 2024, Chinese foreign trade practitioners actively expanded through traditional channels, cross-

border e-commerce, and other avenues. Various market entities adapted flexibly, with a record-breaking nearly 700,000 entities involved in import and export activities. Upgraded small commodities from Yiwu reached global markets, Shenzhen's "new trio" gained worldwide popularity, exports of snow sports equipment from Northeast China to Europe multiplied, and fresh salmon from Xinjiang was directly supplied abroad. As more Chinese enterprises engage in global trade, it highlights the broader scope and deeper integration of China's opening-up to the world.

For the eighth consecutive year, China has maintained its position as the world's largest trader of goods. This achievement reflects not only the industriousness, determination, and entrepreneurial spirit of the Chinese people but also the genuine global demand for Chinese manufacturing. Even trade between China and the US, whose relationship is often framed by Washington and the West as "competition," grew by 4.9 percent in 2024, aligning closely with China's overall trade growth rate. This reveals a more nuanced China-US relationship and underscores the power of mutually beneficial cooperation.

Some US media outlets, however, are reluctant to acknowledge these evident conclusions. Instead, they adopt an alternative view, perceiving the close economic and trade ties as a "threat" rather than a win-win situation. For instance, The New York Times hinted it's dangerous that "Chinese factories are dominating global manufacturing," arguing that imposing tariffs on Chinese goods could prompt retaliatory measures, "bringing the world closer to a trade war that could further destabilize the global economy." This perspective, in essence, exposes one of Washington's true intentions behind its spreading of the "China's overcapacity" rhetoric - to shift the blame for its destructive tariff wars onto China and make it a scapegoat.

China's stability and opening-up are crucial to the global economy, a fact that has been repeatedly proven. According to the latest data from the World Trade Organization, China's contribution to global exports exceeded 30 percent in the first three quarters of 2024, demonstrating that China remains the largest driving force behind global export growth. The United Nations has just released its flagship report, World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025, which not only forecasts stable



growth for China this year but also indicates that global trade witnessed a rebound of 3.4 percent in 2024 driven by improved exports of manufactured goods from Asia and strong services trade. China's green trade continues to lead the global energy transition process, with wind turbine exports increasing by 71.9 percent, photovoltaic product exports exceeding 200 billion yuan for four consecutive years, and lithium battery exports reaching 3.91 billion units, all of which strongly support global confidence in addressing climate change.

On September 26 last year, a meeting held by the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee decisively deployed a package of incremental policies. Following the swift introduction of a new round of measures to promote stable growth in foreign trade, a noticeable acceleration in China's foreign trade occurred. This indicates that there are still many tools in China's policy toolbox. In the new year, despite facing various uncertainties, China's foreign trade, and indeed the Chinese economy, have consistently achieved new

accomplishments by overcoming difficulties, repeatedly bringing "surprises" and "exceeding expectations" to the world. As China is a major engine of global economic growth, we hope that the country can strengthen connections and engage in healthy competition with countries around the world in the global market, jointly achieving a good "report card" for the new year.

Global Times

Western world should recognize, practice values of 'Hehe'



Jerry Grey

The concept of "Hehe" in Chinese culture, with the first "He" embodying harmony, peace and balance and the second representing convergence, unity and cooperation, is central to both the individual and collective mind-set in China. Rooted in thousands of years of philosophy, the idea of "Hehe" serves as a guiding principle for living in harmony with others, nature and oneself. In a broader context, the concept of "Hehe" has significant relevance to the world today, as addressing the global challenges we face in various areas requires the principles that "Hehe" emphasizes. Viewed through a contemporary lens, "Hehe" is a timeless and universal concept that can guide China and the world toward a more harmonious, peaceful and balanced future. The Global Times gathers opinions from experts and scholars around the world to explore the global significance of "Hehe" culture from various perspectives. This is the eighth piece of the series.

"Hehe" consists of two Chinese characters that relate to a concept that has profound importance in Chinese culture. Daily interactions with Chinese people have subcon-

sciously but obvious links to a traditional past embracing many aspects of inherent Chinese tradition including the concepts of peace and harmony; unity and cooperation. The philosophy of living in harmony with each other, with nature, and with our world, has thousands of years of history, but is as important today as it was in bygone years.

One great example witnessed recently is China's opening up to people-to-people exchanges. These exchanges serve as a living testament to the principles of peace, harmony and mutual understanding embedded in Chinese culture. By fostering dialogues and creating shared experiences, they not only break down stereotypes but also build bridges of trust and friendship. Such interactions allow the world to see a China rooted in its traditions, yet open and welcoming, countering the often biased narratives found in Western media.

For instance, China has implemented a series of visa-free policies that highlight its commitment to openness and cooperation. Visitors from 38 countries can now enter China without a visa for up to 30 days, offering business people, students and families an unprecedented oppor-

tunity to experience the country's culture firsthand. Additionally, citizens of 54 countries can enjoy visa-free transit for up to 10 days, enabling them to connect with China's historical, cultural and natural richness. These policies are not merely administrative gestures - they embody the spirit of "Hehe" by inviting the global community to share, learn and grow together in harmony.

China is defined by Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede in his cultural dimensions theory as a collectivist nation, one that thrives on groups working together to achieve goals that are beneficial to all, be they in family groups, workplaces or as a nation. It's something we Westerners often struggle to understand; our individualism leads us to wonder: "What's in it for me?" The same research shows that most Western nations, which thrive on individualism, will seek instant gratification. We Westerners are likely to desire to achieve our goals as quickly as possible, while the Chinese might wait years, even a generation, to achieve the same result.

Because of these fundamental differences, most Western experts get China so badly wrong. When certain events occur, we'll react in a certain way. Therefore, we think that others, in the same circumstances, will do the same as we would. That's why the experts get China so wrong.

The "Hehe" concept is a great example of our differences. Think about this for a moment: When was the last time China invaded and occupied a foreign land? The answer is, it never has. When was the last time China even threatened to invade a foreign land? The answer is, once again, it never has. Despite what many so-called Western experts suggest, there has never been a single event where China has threatened military action against another country. At the same time, think about all the major conflicts the US has been involved in, just in our lifetimes.

The concept of "Hehe" is at the heart of Chinese culture, with the second "he" symbolizing cooperation and collective effort. This cooperative spirit has been a driving force behind China's growth and is visible in the country's efforts to build partnerships globally. When we look at the growth of China since 1949, a time when China was among the poorest nations on earth, there has been exponential economic growth, as well as a significant and constant rise in both the standard of

living and life expectancy. China now holds the world's largest middle-income earning group and has lifted the entire nation out of absolute poverty through a concerted poverty alleviation program. This was one nation striving toward a common goal, and after it achieved this goal, went on to do better.

Look also at China's green transition, it has now become the leading manufacturer and installer of wind, solar and many other green energy solutions, transforming from a country that was demonstrably polluted. This serves as an example of a nation working toward a common goal, and equally important, it demonstrates a commitment to harmony with nature.

The "Hehe" concept doesn't stop at home. Through its Belt and Road Initiative, China has extended this concept to many other regions, particularly those that have been known for poverty, strife and hardship for hundreds of years. It was recently estimated by the World Bank that 600 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa live without electricity. China's energy programs with partners in Africa could be helpful. Many of the coun-

tries, once colonies, where China now constructs hydroelectric power and installs solar, wind or even wave power, are still mired in poverty - something China has significant experience with.

Harmony has another way of manifesting itself. China does not approach these countries with the intent to colonize or impose conditions for change. Instead, China goes to these countries with prospects of cooperation and agreements to work together to harness resources, build infrastructure, improve health and education, all leading to the betterment of the region and the people who live there. Rather than imposing its ideology, China treats these

countries as individual sovereign nations, collaborating with them and their neighbors to build infrastructure that benefits all.

We can ask African nations whether they agree, and according to the Africa Policy Institute, the answer will be a resounding yes. The headline of their December 2024 report states, "China-Africa Development Drives Sustainable Growth." This sentiment is echoed in much of the rest of the developing world.

China's Hehe culture offers a unique perspective on the country. It represents a positive, well-established, historical and traditional approach to dealing with neighbors, friends, families, the economy, the environment and even adversaries. Rooted in ideals of harmony, peace, co-existence and balance, it emphasizes cooperation rather than confrontation. This is one of China's greatest strengths and if those "experts" in the Western world could not only realize this but attempt to practice it, the world would be a better place.

The writer is a British Australian freelance writer who has studied cross-cultural change management in China and has lived in China

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High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri emphasises importance of girls' education



Covert Report

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week emphasised the importance of girls education. Referring to the International Partnerships for Education in Muslim Societies platform inaugurated at the 'Girls' Education in Muslim Communities: Challenges and Opportunities' conference on January 11-12, 2025, organized by the Government of Pakistan and the Muslim World League, he said Pakistan was committed to provide equal opportunities to the men and women. This girls education initiative aims to create a network dedicated to advancing girls' education in Muslim communities worldwide. The two-day summit hosted by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) concluded in Islamabad, with participating leaders and scholars emphasizing the critical importance of ensuring education for girls across the Muslim world. The conference, which focused on the education of Muslim girls, ended with a resolution urging governments to prioritize access to education for all. Delegates reaffirmed that denying education to women and girls is a profound injustice that should not be associated with Islam.

Speaking at the summit, Mohammad Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League and President of the International Islamic Scholars Organization, condemned restrictions on education for women and girls. He called such policies "unjust" and "categorically contrary to Islamic teachings." "Denying women and girls access to education, whether partially or fully, and associating such denial with Islamic law, is categorically incorrect," Mr. Al-Issa said. He also urged governments to avoid misusing religion to justify oppressive policies, describing education as a fundamental right affirmed by a consensus of Muslim scholars. Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif echoed these sentiments, calling restrictions on education for girls "the most significant challenge of our time." The conference concluded with calls for concrete actions, including agreements between Islamic institutions to support education initiatives for girls. Delegates emphasized that providing education to women and girls is not only a moral imperative but also essential for the future of Muslim communities worldwide. High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri hoped the efforts to promote girls education will succeed to ensure a peaceful world.

Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad advocates for right of self-determination to Kashmiris



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Alternate Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN this week advocated for the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people. "Self-determination is a universal right enshrined in UN Charter and International Covenants ICCPR and ICESCR. For the people of Jammu and Kashmir this right is explicitly affirmed in relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Kashmiris deserve the freedom to decide their future," he said. The envoy said the right can no longer be delayed or denied. "Pakistan stands with the Kashmiri people in their just struggle. The global community must act to

ensure Kashmiris can freely exercise their right to self-determination in accordance with UNSC resolutions," he added. On 5th January 1949, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) adopted unanimously a resolution that guaranteed a free and fair plebiscite under the auspices of the United Nations, to enable the Kashmiri people to realize their right to self-determination. This week marked the 76th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations' Resolution, the OIC General Secretariat reaffirmed the importance of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on the internationally recognized status of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. It also repeated the OIC's support for the Kashmiri people's inalienable right to self-determination, and for the final settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. It called again on the international community to ensure the implementation of those resolutions.



Greece lays down rules to regulate 'murky' cryptocurrency market



Covert Report

Athens: Greece's Ministry of National Economy and Finance this week announced implementation of European Union rules for the protection of cryptocurrency holders as the number of

people using digital currencies in the country has grown, and fears that they could be targeted by scammers have also increased. "The new regulation does not eliminate the risk of investments in cryptocurrencies, the prices of

which fluctuate sharply upwards or downwards," the ministry warned. It also underlined that, despite the new provisions "the level of protection ... is weaker than that applicable to traditional investment products". Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Friday that the Greek government is attempting to regulate cryptocurrency services, a field that remains "largely murky and unregulated". "We [the Greek government] are not demonising a rapidly growing market, however, we are attempting to establish some rules for the protection of the public including safeguards for safe information, warnings about the very high risks involved in such investment activities," said Mitsotakis. He added that the government wants to align the national framework with the EU regulation in order to tackle abusive practices. In the absence of an overall framework regulating cryptocurrency in the European bloc, the EU adopted its Markets in Crypto-Assets regulation

in May 2023. It was designed "to support innovation and fair competition while ensuring a high level of protection of retail holders and the integrity of markets in crypto-assets", it said. Greece said the national supervisory authorities for cryptocurrencies will be the Hellenic Capital Market Commission, HCMC and the Bank of Greece. Until recently, HCMC's role was limited to whether the rules on money laundering had been violated. During 2025, legislation to tax cryptocurrencies as investment products will also be implemented, the government has said. Under the new regulation, issuers of electronic money tokens must ensure that holders can redeem them at any time and at the nominal value of the currency to which the tokens refer. Issuers are required also to inform potential investors by issuing a special document containing general information about the characteristics, functions and risks of the cryptocurrencies they intend to purchase. To address risks to the stability of the financial system, issuers of tokens with reference to assets

should have a minimum level of funds. "They should also create and maintain an asset reserve, corresponding to the risks associated with the cryptocurrencies. If issuers choose to invest part of this reserve, they should invest it in safe, low-risk, and readily liquid assets," the ministry said. When cryptocurrencies are deemed to constitute a risk to the smooth functioning of payment systems, financial stability, monetary policy and monetary stability, central banks will be able to ask the relevant authorities to withdraw the authorisation of the issuers of such assets. CoinWire, a cryptocurrency news and analysis website, has reported that Greece's trading volume in cryptocurrency was \$57,428,877,863 from 2022 to 2024 – the 15th highest amount of 43 countries in Europe. In December last year, Greek Criminal Investigation Service investigators told SKAI.gr that they made the first seizure of cryptocurrencies in Greece, totalling more than 267,000,000 euros in current monetary equivalent, in a follow-up probe to an EU-wide VAT fraud case.

Umar Rehman Malik highlights Bhutto Expressway



Abdullah Jan
Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week highlighted the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Expressway by the PPP-led Sindh government. "Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Expressway, another landmark development project under the Private Public Partnership mode. The PPP government under the pragmatic leadership of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has been at the forefront of delivering infrastructure projects that are financially viable and sustainable, gaining worldwide recognition by the likes of the Economist and the global financial community," he said in a statement.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari earlier inaugurated the first phase of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Expressway (Malir Expressway) by driving his vehicle and paying toll fee.

The Malir Expressway which has been renamed as Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Expressway is the largest Public-Private Partnership (PPP) project in Sindh. It features a three-lane dual-carriageway with modern, access-controlled infrastructure. Spanning approximately 40 km, the expressway connects Korangi Creek Avenue (DHA) to the M-9 Motorway (Superhighway) near Kathore, offering a critical link for commuters and significantly reducing travel time.

The expressway features dedicated interchanges, providing seamless access to key residential and commercial areas along the route. The first segment will feature a ramp to facilitate immediate traffic flow and will be complemented by a connecting flyover from Korangi, which is expected to be completed within two months.

The construction of the Jam Sadiq Interchange and road rehabilitation projects at the EBM and Shah Faisal Interchanges are progressing steadily. Encroachments at the Quaidabad Interchange have been

cleared, and construction is ongoing to enhance connectivity. A Toll Plaza will manage traffic flow, charging Rs100 for cars and jeeps, and Rs200 for heavy vehicles. Security measures will include patrols by traffic police, fire brigades, and Rescue 1122 ambulances. The CM directed law enforcement agencies to deploy district and traffic police at key entry and exit points,

including the Jam Sadiq, EBM, and Shah Faisal Interchanges. The traffic police will patrol both sides of the expressway continuously in vehicles. Dedicated traffic police will be present on the expressway to ensure proper traffic flow. Umar Rehman Malik said that PPP chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was committed to serve the nation.



Germany launches online portal for visa applications

Covert Report Berlin: Germany's Foreign Ministry this week launched a new digital platform for visa applications, with its Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock hailing it as "a real administrative revolution" in a press release.

The digital portal, available here, aims to ease access to necessary documents for those wanting to work, study or join their family in Germany. The applicants can choose between 28 categories of national visa online. The new portal is available since January



1, 2025 to all 167 of Germany's visa offices all over the world. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock praised the new system, saying the reform was "long overdue." "Every year, Germany is short of at least 400,000 skilled workers," Baerbock said. "At times like these, we cannot afford to

downright put the best off coming here to roll up their sleeves because of long paper application forms and even longer waiting periods," she added. Baerbock stressed that Germany, as an immigration country, requires "a national visa process that is state-of-the-art — modern, digital and secure."

Sales of superluxury cars in Bulgaria reach new record in 2024

Newsire Sofia: Sales of luxury and superluxury cars in Bulgaria reached a new record in 2024, according to data on new car registrations quoted by Dnevnik news outlet this week. Although Bulgaria remains the EU's poorest country, Bulgarians purchased cars costing as much as €2.5mn, such as the limited edition

Mercedes AMG One. Four Bulgarians have already ordered the model, of which just 275 cars will be produced. Three Rolls-Royce Spectre cars were purchased by Bulgarians last year. In 2023, the first Spectre ever produced was also acquired by a Bulgarian. The total number of Spectre cars sold in the country reached qw by the end of 2024. Bulgarians also purchased

20 used Rolls-Royces last year. Ferraris were popular, with Bulgarians acquiring nineteen new vehicles last year, which was the highest ever number. They include five Purosangues – Ferrari's first SUV model – as well as a 296 GTC and a 812 Competizione A.

Sales of Bentleys also posted a record last year with nine cars bought. That includes four Continental GT Convertible vehicles and three Bentayga models. Bulgarians also purchased 69 used Bentleys. Aston Martins beat records with nine new cars sold in 2024 to Bulgarians com-



pared to a total of twelve in the previous five years. 11 used Aston Martins were also sold last year. 12 new and 45 used Lamborghini automobiles were sold in 2024. BMW remains the preferred automobile brand among the luxury models.

Bulgarians acquired 1,868 cars from that brand, followed by 1,572 Mercedes vehicles and 981 Audi cars. Among the electric vehicles, Tesla was the preferred brand with 310 sales last year. However, compared to 2023, sales decreased by 17%.



What to expect for golden visa program of Portugal in 2025: Predictions & key developments



including investments in donations for the arts or cultural heritage, the creation of ten jobs, and scientific research. Figures from the Association of Americans Resident Overseas provided in November 2024 revealed that in November 2023, more than 5.4 million Americans were living abroad, with a significant number of them choosing European countries such as France, Germany and Spain. Nonetheless, when it comes to acquiring residency and citizenship in EU countries, Portugal is among the most sought-after European countries, particularly due to its Golden Visa Program. The increase in demand for Portugal's Residency by Investment Program was driven by the election of Donald Trump as the new President of the US and other social and economic factors.



high. This came particularly after the exit of the UK from the European Union.

figures from Imi Daily for 2023 revealed that in addition to Americans, nationals of China and Britain were also among the top beneficiaries of Portugal's Golden Visa Program.

NewsWire

Lisbon: In 2025, an increasing demand is expected for Portugal's Golden Visa Program from North America as well as the United Kingdom.

The demand from the Asian market is expected to remain consistent throughout 2025.

In 2025, authorities in Portugal are aiming to streamline the processing of applications to meet the surge in demand for the Golden Visa Program.

Increased demand from North America and the United Kingdom, consistent demand from Asian markets, more significant market awareness and enhanced processing to meet the increasing demand are among the key predictions for Portugal's Golden Visa Program for 2025.

The Residency by Investment Scheme of Portugal offers residency to nationals from non-EU countries in exchange for financial investments made in this country, Schengen. News reports.

The most famous option in Portugal's Golden Visa Program was real estate investment. However, this route was terminated in October 2023 to better manage the housing crisis.

Yet, other options available through the Golden Visa program continue to attract a large number of foreigners.

According to a report from Imi Daily, investors from North America and the UK are particularly attracted to the investment fund option.

However, other options, in addition to fund investments, are also very famous,



As for Britons, the interest in Portugal's Golden Visa Program continues to remain

Increased demand is also noted in the Eastern market, particularly in China. The

Authorities in Portugal are also working to streamline the processing of applications in order to meet the ongoing surge in demand for the Golden Visa Program.

Long waiting times have left hundreds of applicants for Portugal's Residency by Investment scheme in limbo, according to a report provided in October 2023.

The same revealed that due to long visa processing times, some applicants regret the decision to invest in Portugal in exchange for obtaining a golden visa. As a result, authorities in Portugal have intensified their efforts to accelerate this process.



ISSI holds guest lecture titled 'Japan's perspective on regional issues'

Celina Ali

Islamabad: The China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) this week hosted a guest lecture on "Japan's Perspective on Regional Issues," delivered by Prof. Dr. KAWASHIMA Shin, from the University of Tokyo. Ambassador Akamatsu Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, also participated in the event. Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, in his welcome remarks, highlighted the enduring friendship between Pakistan and Japan. He underscored the historical and multifaceted ties between the two countries, rooted in mutual respect, shared interests, and commitment to peace and development. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood also noted Japan's prominent role as a steadfast partner in Pakistan's development journey and stressed growing collaboration in areas such as trade, investment, climate change, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and regional stability. He also stressed the importance of enhanced academic and policy dialogues and think-tank collaboration between Pakistan and Japan. Ambassador AKAMATSU Shuichi highlighted the long-standing Japan-Pakistan partnership and expressed hope for continued collaboration to address regional and global challenges. He also appreciated ISSI's efforts to foster mutual understanding through scholarly exchanges. Prof. Dr. KAWASHIMA Shin, in his lecture, focused on Japan's modernization and its evolving role in regional geopolitics.



Highlighting the transformative journey from the Meiji Restoration to its post-World War II economic resurgence, he underscored Japan's commitment to peace, democracy, and regional cooperation. He reflected on the enduring partnership between Japan and Pakistan, noting the 70th anniversary of bilateral relations celebrated last year. Dr. KAWASHIMA emphasized Japan's dedication to foster-

ing economic and cultural ties within the region, reinforcing its role as a proactive contributor to East Asian stability and prosperity. Dr. KAWASHIMA also discussed the challenges and opportunities in East Asia, focusing on the importance of balanced diplomacy and mutual cooperation. He highlighted Japan's steadfast belief in maintaining open dialogues with neigh-

boring countries to ensure regional stability. Stressing the necessity of economic interdependence, he acknowledged Japan's efforts to strengthen trade and investment networks while respecting the sovereignty and diverse aspirations of its partners. Earlier, Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director CPSC, highlighted Japan's unwavering support for Pakistan's development through Offi-

cial Development Assistance (ODA) and cultural exchanges. He underscored the mutual commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and addressing shared regional and global challenges collaboratively. The lecture was attended by a diverse audience, including practitioners, academics, and members of civil society and the media.

Outgoing US ambassador Donald Blome reflects on US-Pakistan partnership and experiences in Pakistan

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Outgoing US Ambassador to Pakistan, Donald Blome, has expressed pride in the enduring partnership between the United States and Pakistan, as he bid farewell at the conclusion of his three-year tenure. In a farewell video message, Ambassador Blome highlighted the achievements of the US-Pakistan partnership and shared personal reflections on his time in the country.

"During my time as US Ambassador to Pakistan, we have worked with our Pakistani friends to enter a new chapter in our partnership," said Ambassador Blome. He emphasized that the collaboration between the two countries had tackled significant global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating floods of 2022. "We have worked together to rebuild lives, create jobs, and expand access to quality healthcare and education," he added.

The Ambassador described his experiences in Pakistan as enriching and deeply personal. "From conversations over chai to Qawwali performances and the thrill of playing cricket, I have been privileged to experience the warmth and hospitality of Pakistan. Islamabad has truly become a home away from home," he said. Reflecting on his travels across Pakistan, Ambassador Blome praised the unique qualities of each region. "In Lahore, I witnessed how deeply culture and tradition are woven into the fabric of this historic city. In Punjab's fertile fields, I walked alongside farmers, where American technology and innovation have contributed to Pakistan's energy, water, and agriculture sectors," he shared.



In Karachi, the Ambassador admired the city's entrepreneurial dynamism. "Karachi is a city of entrepreneurs driving Pakistan's economic future. During my visits, I witnessed the City of Lights' resilience and innovation. Expanding trade and investment

between our countries has been a top priority as Pakistan works to overcome economic challenges," he noted. Ambassador Blome also spoke fondly of Pakistan's stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage. "From Gwadar to Gilgit, I have had the privilege of exploring this beautiful country, from the breathtaking peaks of the north to the heritage sites of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. I have been amazed by the diversity of Pakistan's landscapes and the richness of its culture," he said. Concluding his message, the Ambassador

expressed gratitude for his time in Pakistan and optimism for the country's future. "It has been an honor to serve as the US Ambassador to Pakistan. I am proud of the progress we've achieved together and remain hopeful for Pakistan's bright future. Phir Milein Ge (we will meet again)," he said. The outgoing Ambassador's reflections encapsulate the strong ties and shared vision between the United States and Pakistan as they continue to work towards a prosperous future together.

Pakistani airline resumes Europe flights after EU ban lifted



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

Celina Ali Islamabad: A flight operated by state-run Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) took off for Paris from Islamabad this week as the carrier resumed direct flights to Europe following the lifting of a European Union ban. The EU blocked PIA in 2020 after one of its Airbus A-320s crashed in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi, killing 97 people. Concerns about the airline's safety were heightened when the aviation minister at the time, Ghulam Sarwar Khan, said that nearly a third of Pakistani pilots had cheated on their exams. The ban, which was lifted in November, caused the airline, which employs almost 7,000 people, to lose nearly €146 million (\$150 million) a year in revenue, officials have said. Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif inaugurated the twice-a-week flights to Paris. He said that PIA would soon extend its flights to take in other European countries. In a speech, he said the European Union Aviation Safety Agency had imposed the ban because of what he called an "irresponsible

statement" by the former aviation minister. The flight to Paris was booked out, with the plane carrying more than 300 passengers, according to the airline. PIA, which was created in 1955 when a loss-making commercial airline was nationalized, flies to a number of cities inside Pakistan, as well as to the Gulf and Southeast Asia. The Pakistani government is currently seeking to privatize the airline once more.



British High Commissioner Jane Marriott meets Interior Minister Naqvi to strengthen cooperation



Matt Cannell British Deputy High Commissioner to Pakistan



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and British High Commissioner Jane Marriott held a meeting this week to explore avenues for enhancing collaboration between Pakistan and the United Kingdom. High Commissioner Jane Marriott, an experienced diplomat and advocate of UK-Pakistan relations, expressed her strong desire to deepen ties in multiple sectors. She commended Pakistan's efforts in combating security challenges and reiterated the UK's commitment to fostering mutual growth and stability. During the meeting, Minister Naqvi praised the resilience of the Pakistani nation and its security forces, highlighting their immense sacrifices in the fight against terrorism. He assured that the government prioritizes the protection of all citizens, includ-

ing foreign nationals residing in Pakistan, while emphasizing legal action against undocumented individuals. Jane Marriott's proactive engagement marks a significant step toward bolstering cooperation between the two nations, particularly in areas such as counter-terrorism, trade, and development. Her diplomatic expertise and fo-

cus on collaboration underscore the UK's dedication to strengthening its partnership with Pakistan. This meeting reflected the shared vision of both countries to enhance their historic relationship while addressing pressing global and regional challenges together.



“It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” – J K Rowling

“The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.” – Albert Einstein

Italy: More than 120,000 migrants passed through Lampedusa since 2023



1,915 and a total of 80,609 people were hosted at the ‘hotspot’ situated in Contrada Imbriacola. The center has often become the focus of reports of overcrowding and is designed to offer initial help before migrants are moved to other reception facilities on mainland Sicily or the Italian mainland. “The 126 thousand people found assistance and support here, in Lampedusa,” stated the President of the Italian Red Cross, Rosario Valastro. “The global crises that push women, men, boys, and girls to look for a better future in our country, are continuous. Some crises, like that currently in the Middle East, are growing day by day. We are very concerned for the difficulties and hate that move thousands of people daily, pushing them to abandon their country of origin.” According to Red Cross data, Bangladeshi nationals accounted for the majority of



Newsire
Rome: From June 1, 2023 until today, the first reception center on the island of Lampedusa, in the Mediterranean has hosted a total of 126,000 migrants, says the Italian Red Cross, who manage the center. Between June 1, 2023 and mid-January 2025, the reception center, or hotspot on the Italian island of Lampedusa, in the Mediterranean has welcomed a total of 126,000 migrants, states the Red Cross in

figures released at the end of last week. “The year 2024 that just ended brought a total of 45,997 migrants to Lampedusa on 1,095 different boats. Most of the arrivals were adult men (74.3 percent), followed by minors (19.4 percent) and women (6.3 percent)”. The second half of 2023 was particularly busy. From June 1, 2023 –the date when the Italian Red Cross started managing the hotspot– to 31 December 2023 the number of boat arrivals on the island numbered



arrivals in that time, representing 21 percent of the total. Syrians accounted for 20 percent, Tunisians for 11 percent and people from Guinea and Egypt, 8 percent and 7

percent respectively. “For many of them,” continued Valastro, “the sea made their journeys even more difficult. Too many lives were lost at sea, too many goodbyes caused by the waves that separated mothers, fathers, children, and friends.” During his speech, Valastro recalled that Red Cross teams had tried to offer respect, dignity and help to those arriving, but had also seen many people filled with fear, shaking and defensive after the difficulties faced on their journeys.

Paris says au revoir to its last tourist office

Celina Ali
Islamabad: Paris is closing its last remaining brick and mortar tourist office in favour of TikTok and Instagram for local advice. This week, the city closed the doors of its last visitor reception centre near the Eiffel Tower on Quai Jacques-Chirac, where visitors could previously seek travel guidance and book shows

from consultants. The move has drawn criticism for prioritising a digital tourism strategy over face-to-face advice. Citing declining foot traffic and emerging tourism trends, Corinne Menegaux, the tourist office’s general director, defended the decision as a response to changing consumer habits. “Visitor behaviour has changed, particularly in favour of digital technology,” Ms Menegaux

told Le Parisien, a French newspaper. “Tourists, especially the younger generations, want information immediately, now, wherever they are... The single-point model is no longer the most effective.” Instead of heading towards physical tourist offices for information, consumers are increasingly relying on social media for help on what to see and where to eat. In 2024, the tourist office saw 150,000 visitors pass through its doors. That compares to 574,000 visitors in 2015, when the city had five tourist reception points. But Stéphane Villain, president of the National Federation of Institutional Tourism Organisations, called the decision to close the last physical tourist office in the French capital short-sighted. “The human element is central to travel,” he told the newspaper Le Monde. “Digital technology is no substitute for meeting someone who can advise you, reassure you and answer your questions.” Leaders in the travel industry also pointed out that the digital-centric strategy will shut out the elderly and those who lack digital literacy. In lieu of a physical office, the city will implement a digital concierge service by phone and email, and a WhatsApp instant messaging service



for personalised advice. Staff at around 30 newspaper kiosks around the city will also become trained as “tourist ambassadors”. “Our approach does not aim to eliminate physical reception but to reorganise it,” Ms Menegaux said. The closure and reorganisation of the tourism board opens a new year in which Paris is expected to reap the benefits of the

city’s international exposure during the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games. During the Christmas holiday period between Dec 20 and Jan 5, the city saw a 29 per cent spike in air travel arrivals and a 34 per cent increase in long stays of between six to eight days compared to the same period last year. January is also projected to see a 20 per cent increase in international visitors, compared to the year before. Paris attracts on average 30 million visitors a year.