

High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri highlights beauty of wildlife in Pakistan

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week highlighted the beauty of wildlife in Pakistan. "Beauty of nature. Kalij Pheasant in Margalla Hills National Park," he posted on X with a picture. The

(Page-5)

Tomiko Itooka of Japan, world's oldest person, dies at 116

Tokyo: Tomiko Itooka, a Japanese woman born before the start of World War I and the sinking of the Titanic who was believed to be the oldest person in the world, died this week at a nursing home in Ashiya, Japan. She was 116. In a statement,

(Page-9)

China confident of continuous economic recovery in 2025



Henan Daily

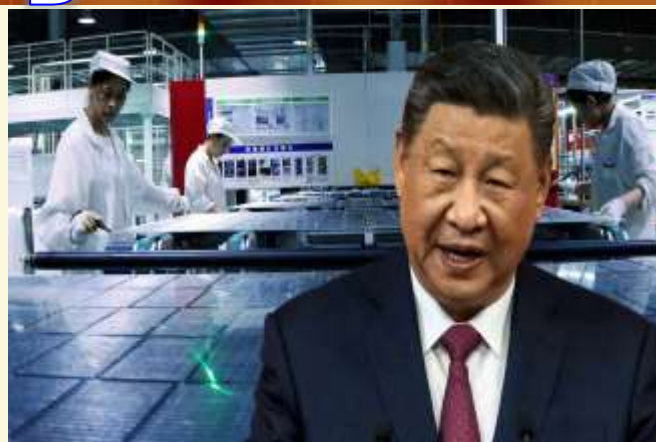
Zhengzhou: When setting economic growth targets for 2025, China will consider both needs and possibilities and ensure coherence with medium and long-term planning, an official with the country's top economic planner said this week. A senior National Development and Reform Commission official, Yuan Da, told a press conference that China's economy will face many new difficulties and challenges in

2025. The external environment is becoming more complex and severe, with deepening adverse impacts.

However, Yuan believes there are "positive factors". China's economy has a stable foundation, multiple advantages, strong resilience and great potential. Further comprehensive deepening of reforms, development of new quality productive forces, and boosting the domestic circulation of the economy will stimulate the internal momentum of economic development.

The effects of policies introduced last year will continue to be evident, and there remains ample space for macro policies this year. Coupled with richer macro-control tools, these can provide strong support for achieving the 2025 economic growth targets, Yuan said.

"We are full of confidence in promoting the continuous recovery of the economy in 2025, and also fully confident in completing the goals and tasks of the 14th Five-Year Plan with high quality," the official said.



Denmark releases updated list of jobs for foreign workers



Ambassador of Denmark in Pakistan His Excellency Jakob Linnell

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Copenhagen: Denmark this week updated the Positive List for Skilled Work and Positive List for people with a higher education looking for jobs in the country. The Positive List is a scheme that allows foreign workers to work and reside in Denmark if offered a job.

The Positive List for Skilled Work and Positive List for people with a higher education are updated twice a year – 1 January and 1 July. The Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI) has updated the Positive Lists. The new lists will take effect on 1 January 2025.

The Positive List for Skilled Work has fewer positions as fewer positions where there is a labour shortage have been registered. The new Positive List for People with a Higher Education includes 162 job titles, while the Positive List for Skilled Work includes 48. In the current update, more positions have been added to the Positive List for People with a Higher Education. This is partly due to slightly more positions where there is a labour shortage, and partly because the positions on the list with effect from 1 April 2023 are on the list for at least 2 years at a time. The Positive List for Skilled Work has



Bilawal Bhutto hopes for progress, prosperity in 2025



Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari this week extended his heartfelt and warm greetings to all Pakistanis on the eve of start of year 2025. In his message of greetings, Bilawal Bhutto said that on this occasion we should review our struggle and celebrate our victories. Bilawal Bhutto said that year 2025 will bring progress and prosperity for the people of Pakistan. He vowed to renew oath for progress of Pakistan and converting the country according to dreams of Father of the Nation Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

He said that it is need of the hour that we should forget our differ-

ences and strengthen our relations for Pakistan's progress. Bilawal Bhutto said: "we have to work hard to achieve justice, equality and peace and will continue our struggle to end poverty, inequality and uneducated. Our country needs progressive movement for conversion in strong economic state." PPP Chairman said that he believed in people's strength and courage which will play vital role in bringing Pakistan back on the track of development and progress. He said that the PPP will control the challenges being faced by Pakistanis and we create environment of hope and tranquility. Bilawal Bhutto vowed to make Pakistan a developed country in year 2025.

'144-hour visa-free transit' booming the tide of inbound tourism in Henan

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: Since July 15, Zhengzhou Aviation Port has implemented a 144-hour transit visa-free policy for 54 countries, and the stay permit with a stay area is the administrative region of Henan Province. In the last two months, waves of foreign tourists came to Henan with this "visiting card", setting off a tide of Henan Travel.

In order to further create an impressive "city Henan" trip for foreign tourists, Henan recently issued the "Henan Province Implementation of the 144-hour Transit Visa-free Policy for Foreigners", taking a series of measures for travel security.

Such as the seamless customs clearance, convenient payment, creating international consumption scenes, providing special tourist routes, etc... The 144-hour visa-free entry that fascinates foreign tourists has been opening a door to multicultural integration and has become a stunning name card for Henan to go global.

Since July 15, the 144-hour transit visa-free policy has given Henan a "full scene". Henan's inbound tourism orders have increased significantly with an increasing number of foreign tourists arriving at Henan.

According to Ctrip data, the Mid-Autumn Festival holiday, as the first statutory holiday after the "144-hour transit visa-free" landing at Zhengzhou, has seen Henan inbound travel orders increasing by 110% year-on-year, with Zhengzhou, Luoyang, and Kaifeng inbound travel orders increasing by 129%, 109% and 60% respectively year-on-year. The top 10 countries for inbound tourism in Henan during the Mid-Autumn Festival are South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Italy, the United Kingdom, Australia, Thailand, Indonesia, Germany, and Canada.

According to the statistics of Zhengzhou Airport Economy Zone in Henan Province, in the first seven months of this year, Zhengzhou Airport resumed five passenger routes from Bangkok to Zhengzhou and Kuala Lumpur to Zhengzhou, with international passenger routes reaching 15; international passenger flights exceeded 3,000, an increase of 236.6% over the same period last year; and the number of passenger entry and exit personnel was nearly 490,000, an increase of 256.4% over the same period last year.

"This policy takes a very significant effect on inbound tourism," said Wang Yalei, a senior researcher at the Strategic Research Center of Ctrip Research Institute. In Henan, as a major tourism province, the increasing inbound tourism market will also become a highlight of the tourism market this year.

Culture is the most attractive name card of Henan, such as the Central Plains culture, the Yellow River culture, the root culture and the red culture have all left precious imprints here. Besides, Shaolin Kung Fu, Taijiquan and other Henan elements have also gone viral overseas, which has become the attractions for foreigners to fall in love with Henan.

Du Jiangfeng, manager of the entry center of Henan Kanghui International Travel Service, told the top news reporter that Shaolin Temple, Longmen Grottoes and other places, with a huge flow IP, are the most attractive places that foreign tourists have learned from their own countries. The

foreign tourists have a natural yearning for Shaolin KungFu and curiosities about Henan, once a "less-known" province for inbound tours. And this time, foreign tourists did not intend to miss this rare opportunity brought by the visa-free "visiting card". The 144-hour, 6-day itinerary was fully arranged.

Among the five route products launched by Henan Kanghui International Travel Agency, the "Meet with Henan, Land of Mystery", compared with the 5-day, 4-night and 4-day, 3-night trips, the 6-day and 5-night "Zhengzhou, Kaifeng, Luoyang, Yantai Mountain, Linzhou, Anyang" route is more welcomed by tourists. Ancient city walks, cultural exploration, special food, and folk customs experience... none of them was missed. After fully appreciating the history, culture and natural scenery of Henan during the trip, it can be said that "normal foreigners" have turned to be "totally invigorated".

"It's amazing here! Everything is so beautiful, it's incredible." Samuel from Germany yearned for Shaolin Kung Fu. On his first field trip, he was amazed by the scenery of Shaolin Temple. He told the top news reporter that his great grandfather was a Kung Fu master, so he was also learning Chinese Kung Fu.

In face of the increasing foreign tourists, both the government and the travel agencies are considering how to "arouse the longing" from the bottom of their hearts for a trip to Henan.

According to the official in charge of the Foreign Exchange and Cooperation Office of the Henan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, Henan Province is designing and producing a multilingual travel guide manual, sorting out the white list of inbound tourism enterprises of the Henan Museum, and providing reservation facilitation services for inbound tourists.

Meanwhile, the government is promoting the tourism construction on different aspects, such as the building of scenic spots above the national 4A-level, resorts above provincial level, hotels above three-star level, national tourism and leisure blocks and night tourism consumption gathering areas, natural, first-class museums, art galleries, theaters and key rural tourism villages, etc. Some foreign exchange sites in key areas are to be planned to set up to facilitate inbound tourism payment and facilitate inbound tourists' consumption in Henan.

For the implementation of the policy, Zhengzhou Airport has opened an overseas guest payment service center at the end of April this year; Zhengzhou Entry-Exit Border Inspection Station will set up a specialized 144-hour transit visa-free processing area and channel at the entry and exit site to optimize the entry and clearance process for foreigners.

Data show that in the first half of 2024, Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport served a total of 373,000 international and regional passengers, an increase of 296% over the same period last year, and opened 16 international and regional routes.

At present, the intelligent health quarantine channel at the customs clearance site has been upgraded, with dynamic infrared temperature measurement and intelligent sampling interception functions. The average

customs clearance time for passengers has been reduced by more than 30%, realizing "seamless customs clearance".

Previously, citizens of 54 countries including the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom needed to apply for visas at Chinese embassies and consulates abroad in advance to visit Henan Province. Apart from spending different amounts of visa fees, they also had to set aside a few days to apply for visas. But now you don't need to apply in advance. Just buy a flight ticket to Zhengzhou airport, take your passport to the application window, and you can get the stamp of "visa-free transit" seal without spending a penny in 3 minutes. Then just enjoy the happy time of "visiting and eating in Henan" for 6 days.

"We have added tourism products from 1-day to 6-day tours, including traditional world cultural heritage, four ancient capitals, natural scenery and cultural content, as well as fashionable city walks, art performances, night tours and experience products," said Cui Zhan, deputy general manager of Henan Zhongyuxin International Travel Service Co., Ltd. In order to meet the different needs of international guests, they have adjusted and upgraded many items, including product types, geographical diversity, resource procurement, as well as tour guide service training.

Du Jiangfeng said that Henan Kanghui International Travel Service is making great efforts to strengthen the cultivation and training of tour guides of minor languages. "Receiving foreigners from all over the world for inbound tours actually has extremely high requirements for tour guides. It is necessary to make reasonable arrangements for the guests' itinerary, properly handle the various problems they may encounter, and pay attention to their psychological state in a foreign country. It is not just as simple as scenic spot explanation."

Zhang Xiangyu, President of Henan Provincial Institute of Culture and Tourism Planning, pointed out that we should build new landmark cultural tourism projects and fashion tourism products which are unique and world-leading from a high starting point, plan and design public service facilities for urban tourism and resort with high standards, especially foreign language guidance system and service equipment, and plan overseas publicity and promotion work with high quality, so as to improve the international popularity of "Walking in Henan - Understanding China" cultural tourism brand.

As the first choice and first stop for many inbound tourists, Shaolin Temple, Longmen Grottoes and other popular attractions familiar to foreign tourists are called the "fresh village" of inbound tours in Henan.

The manager of Dengfeng Tourism Service Center told the reporter that after the implementation of the 144-hour transit visa-free policy, the Shaolin Temple has focused on multiple fields such as play and consumption, and launched a number of facilitation measures.

For example, they have made preferential policies aiming at foreign tourists. Inbound tourists can enjoy preferential treatment for visits, performances and accommodation in Shaolin Temple, and enjoy food discounts with tickets to Shaolin scenic spots. On the basis of the inclusive policy, those over 60 years old and specific children can visit 8 of 11 world

cultural heritage sites in Dengfeng, inbound tourists from 6 international

In July, 29 Internet celebrities from 24 countries visited the Longmen



friendly cities can enjoy discounts of delicious food and some scenic spots on the basis of the preferential policies.

In the Longmen Grottoes, there are also a series of measures to facilitate inbound tourists. The scenic area is equipped with intelligent voice guide equipment with artificial foreign language explanation and free English explanation service. Even without a tour guide, foreign tourists can learn more about the historical and artistic value of each Buddha statue and each cave during the visit.

In order to facilitate the tour experience of foreign tourists, a number of rest areas are also set up in the scenic area, equipped with international charging facilities, which is convenient for tourists to charge mobile phones, cameras and other electronic devices. Besides, the medical emergency services are provided to ensure the safety and comfort of tourists during the tour.

Grottoes, and many of them expressed their surprise and admiration, "Look! This is one of the largest Buddha statues in the world!", when seeing the Lushana Buddha for the first time.

At the end of the trip, foreign Internet celebrities also dressed up in Han-style clothing and joined the crowd to watch the brilliant performances and enjoy the dazzling intangible cultural heritage. They took photos with Chinese tourists and took out their mobile phones to introduce Luoyang to foreign fans. Words such as "beautiful", "amazing", "love" and "reluctant to leave" popped out of their mouths from time to time.

Distance never matters for a knowing friend, even ten thousand miles apart we can still be neighbors. How can 144 hours be enough to visit such a great Henan? Out of the 144-hour "fresh village", the 145th hour in Henan is still to be open globally.

Chinese researchers advance vegetable freshness preservation



China Economic Net
Beijing: Chinese researchers at the Beijing Academy of Agriculture and Forestry Sciences are on the frontline of postharvest technology, dedicated to preserving the freshness and nutritional value of vegetables while reducing waste. Their work extends beyond shelf life alone, focusing also on maintaining the quality of produce.

One key focus is rapid precooling, a critical step in preserving freshness. This involves lowering the temperatures of freshly harvested vegetables to optimal levels quickly for long-term storage.

"It's like enveloping them in invisible freshness 'armor,'" said Wang Qing, a researcher on the academy's preservation processing team.

However, achieving effective precooling is not without its challenges. Different vegetables and varying levels of ripeness require precise temperature controls.

To address this issue, the researchers created advanced experimental platforms in their laboratory, meticulously recording physiological changes under various conditions to identify the ideal temperature range for each produce type.

Through months of intensive research, they developed innovative techniques such as the integrated control of air cooling speed and humidity, flowing-ice cooling in multilayered containers, and micro-nano ozone sterilization.

"Beyond the technology, we've developed a range of precooling equipment tailored to various vegetables," said Zhao Xiaoyan, an official at the academy's agricultural product processing and nutritional food research institute.

These breakthroughs have not only enhanced the efficiency of precooling processes but also doubled -- or even quadrupled -- the shelf life of vegetables supplied to urban areas.

Discoloration and texture changes also pose significant challenges for vegetable preservation. "Discoloration during storage often results in entire shipments being rejected, causing financial losses for farmers and busi-



nesses alike," said Wang Dan, a member of the team who focuses on this issue.

Starting with white radishes, the team recreated and analyzed the vegetable's blue discoloration process in laboratory and real-world conditions.

They identified a plant compound that oxidizes to produce the unwanted blue pigment and discovered that controlling gas composition within packaging could effectively prevent discoloration.

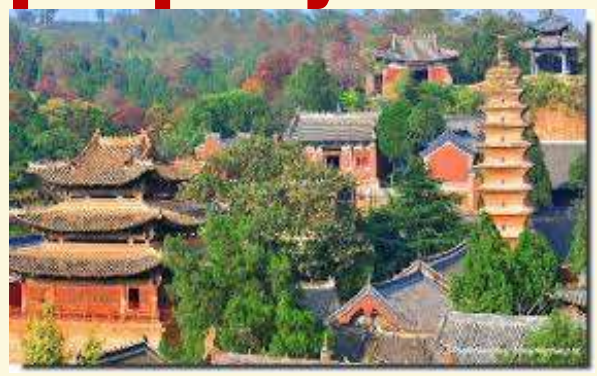
Building on this success, they expanded their research to other vegetables, identifying key enzymes and molecular mechanisms behind color changes and texture deterioration.

In another case, they uncovered the biochemical processes behind the softening of fresh-cut peppers and developed an integrated storage system combining microbial reduction, light exposure regulation and low temperatures. These advances extended the shelf life of fresh-cut peppers by two to three days.

Over the past two years, the team's innovations have been implemented in 75 cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen.

The researchers' customized preservation technologies and equipment have revolutionized the vegetable supply chain, generating additional sales revenue and increasing profits for related industries.

Ruzhou's "Shi Liu flower and fruit mountain" produces "fruits of prosperity" - a model of rural revitalization in Henan Province



NewsWire
Ruzhou: The much-anticipated list of the first "Yu Nong You Pin" trademark users was recently released, showcasing high-quality agricultural products from Henan Province. Among them, the Shibo Ecological Agriculture Soft-Seed Pomegranate Production Base in Ruzhou City stood out as a shining example of high-quality agricultural development in the region.

On December 17, the "A Thousand Villages, A Thousand Faces - Meeting You in Henan" rural revitalization series brought its interview team to Ruzhou. The team visited Shibo Ecological Park, located in Shuigou Village, Jiaocun Town.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Hunan native Dai Kaihua and his wife, Li Caixia, the ecological park has grown from a modest start in 2014 with 608 acres to its current size of 2,000 acres. The park has achieved remarkable milestones, including recognition as a Green Food Demonstration Base in Henan Province and obtaining China's first Ecological Origin Product Protection Certificate for the pomegranate industry in November 2019.

Today, the park is home to over 200,000 soft-

seed pomegranate trees, producing an annual yield of 1.5 million pounds of pomegranates with a market value of nearly 30 million yuan. The "Shi Liu Flower and Fruit Mountain" brand has become a flagship agricultural product for Ruzhou City.

Li Caixia, General Manager of Shibo Ecological Agriculture Development Co., highlighted the unique qualities of their soft-seed pomegranates: large and juicy seeds, a transparent and crisp texture, a sweet and refreshing taste, and vibrant, attractive colors. These characteristics make them easy to store and transport. For several consecutive years, national authorities have certified the fruits as meeting all standards for pesticide and heavy metal residue.

In 2014, Li Caixia and her husband returned to their hometown of Shuigou Village in Ruzhou City after working elsewhere. Inspired by the local environment, they decided to transform the largely abandoned hillside land into a pomegranate orchard.

Over the past decade, the couple has invested 33 million yuan to establish a 2,000-acre ecological pomegranate base. This venture has grown into a modern agricultural enterprise that integrates



ecological planting of soft-seed pomegranates and seedless grapes with the breeding and sales of wild geese and black chickens under the orchard canopy. The base generates an annual revenue of over 10 million yuan.

Li emphasized their commitment to eco-friendly

and sustainable farming. Using methods like "grass cultivation throughout the orchard, geese for weed control, chickens for pest control, biological pest management, mechanical stubble clearing, and green grass mulching," they have eliminated the need

How Italy's Carabinieri cultural heritage protection squad foiled tomb-raiders



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

Covert Report
Rome: Looking towards the semicircular apse with a frescoed image of a partially identifiable Christ on a throne staring back at them, the archaeologists crouching in the small space deep beneath a residential building in Naples were left speechless. They were amid the remains of an 11th-century church. The archaeologists, however, could not take the credit: the historic jewel, which had just been seized by police, was dug up by tombaroli, or tomb-raiders, illicit gangs who for decades have been plundering Italian cultural sites, in turn fuelling the global market for stolen art and antiquities. Investigators believe the group's leader was a local entrepreneur, currently under investigation, who owns two apartments in the building above. His cellar was turned into a well-organised excavation site, from where

the tomb-raiders dug a warren of tunnels leading them about 8 metres down into ancient Naples, where they unearthed medieval art from under the heart of the southern Italian city. But impressive though their workmanship was – they even installed concrete pillars to prevent the structure from collapsing – officers from the Naples unit of Italy's Carabinieri cultural heritage protection squad unmasked the gang and confiscated the church after a covert investigation. The force also recovered 10,000 fragments of Roman and medieval pottery from the alleged gangmasters' homes and 453 intact artefacts, including vases, terracotta lamps and coins. Experts are assessing whether the relics came from the church or other plundered sites. So-called tomb-raiders are a key part of the illicit trade in antiquities, with their loot usually smuggled overseas to traffickers. The gangs commonly work by marking out clandestine excavation spots close to known archaeological sites, which in the Campania region surrounding Naples can include Pompeii, Herculaneum, Paestum or areas where there were Roman settlements. So uncovering a clandestine dig in the middle of the city took the specialist squad by surprise. "When you think of Pompeii, for example, you know a

dig can lead to a wealthy domus where prestigious objects can be found," says Massimo Esposito, the chief of the squad's unit in Naples. "But it's rare to find one in the heart of Naples." The group's alleged leader is believed to have had an inkling that there might be something beneath his home when construction works nearby on the city's metro were interrupted and the site cordoned off after a small part of the remains of another, albeit less historically interesting, church emerged. The group worked for several months, carrying out their noisiest activity during the day, but not loud enough to attract complaints from the building's residents. Little did the gang know that their comings and goings were being observed by Esposito's team, with the squad staking out the building and wiretapping its alleged leader's phone. Suspicions were especially aroused after seeing him carrying boxes filled with materials. "Keeping an ear to the ground is essential," says Esposito. "We were informed about anomalous construction activity, and intuited that it could be an illegal excavation after records showed there were no public or private works happening in or near that building to justify such activity." It is not yet clear if the intention was to sell the loot or amass a private collection.

to identify thieves. A trove of funerary treasures, believed to have belonged to Etruscan princesses and illegally excavated from an underground tomb in Umbria, was retrieved in November after police came across a photo of the bungling thieves posing on Facebook as they attempted to sell it online. "Despite the risk, there is sometimes this egotistical element: they want to boast about the beautiful items they've found," says Esposito.

As with other returned relics, the long-term plan for the medieval church in Naples is to make it accessible to the public. "This is always the ultimate goal," says Esposito. "Italy is an open-air museum, so rich in cultural heritage. This makes our job very arduous, but we are also driven by a passion to ensure that Italy's property is returned."



The Carabinieri's cultural heritage protection squad was established in 1969 with the task of protecting Italy's priceless cultural assets. Since then, more than 3m stolen artworks and relics have been retrieved, including those that ended up on display in some of the world's biggest museums, such as the Getty in Los Angeles. Art and relics thieves in Campania especially thrived in the 1980s, taking advantage of a devastating earthquake at the beginning of that decade to ransack churches of paintings. The long-lost La Desposizione, a 2-metre high masterpiece painted by Angelo Solimena in 1664 depicting the crucifixion, was recently returned to Campania only after it was spotted on display in a museum in the Marche region. Esposito met the Guardian in his unit's office located in Castel Sant'Elmo, a medieval fortress overlooking Naples. He was surrounded by relics recuperated by the force in Campania, including a wine amphora and a house-shaped sarcophagus, believed to have contained the remains of a child, and various other funerary objects dating back to the fourth century AD. The artefacts are usually kept there pending the conclusion of judicial cases, before being either returned to their origin or entrusted to museums. The tomb-raiders still ply a decent trade, but with the police consistently on their tail, their loot is not as fruitful as it used to be. Data in recent years indicates a gradual decrease in crimes against cultural heritage. Laws for crimes against cultural heritage have been tightened, and work intensified to return stolen assets from abroad. The unit has a database listing more than 1.3m stolen assets, which can be consulted by police forces overseas. Use of social media, especially over the past decade, has also made it easier for the squad



US policymakers should carry on Carter's understanding of China

Ding Gang

On December 29, 2024, former US president Jimmy Carter passed away, at the age of 100. Carter's contributions to US-China relations were significant. As the driving force behind establishing diplomatic ties between the two nations, he played a pivotal role in fostering cooperation and mutual understanding over the decades. Among all US presidents in the past 40 years, Carter stood out. His knowledge of China was not limited to policy briefings or secondhand reports; it was rooted in firsthand experiences.

Carter visited numerous places across China, including locations such as Shenzhen, the city that became the engine of China's economic reform, and Xi'an, one of the oldest cities in China. His extensive

interactions with people from all walks of life in China were rare among Western leaders.

I still have some photos (reproductions) from Carter's visit to Xi'an in the summer of 1981, when he and his wife Rosalynn toured the city. During that trip, Carter made a point to visit Fenghuo village, a rural village near Xi'an. I visited the village's historical museum a few years ago, where several photos from Carter's visit are prominently displayed. During his time there, Carter observed the villagers' grain and oil storage and learned about their cotton farming practices. Although Fenghuo village was considered relatively advanced at the time, Carter's conversations with local farmers and his experience enjoying a meal in a farmer's home provided him with a direct understanding of rural life in China.

Some scholars believe that one of Carter's most significant legacies was turning Richard Nixon's initial "engagement policy" into a reality, allowing it to take

root and flourish.

Another key legacy was his work through the Carter Center to help Americans better understand China. While many of the Center's projects were not directly related to bilateral relations, they contributed to fostering greater awareness of China among ordinary Americans.

In stark contrast, many of today's policymakers in Washington lack Carter's depth of understanding. While they may have received an excellent education in Western political systems and are well aware of the challenges facing America's global leadership, their knowledge of China is often superficial. Some have never visited China, let alone engaged with Chinese people from various backgrounds. Many rely solely on virtual tools or online sources to form their views of China. This contrasts sharply with Chinese officials' comprehensive understanding of the US. For a country like China, with its rich history and deep cultural traditions, it is impossible to fully grasp its complexities without firsthand experience.

I often wonder how Washington's decision-makers can be so confident in their views of China. It may be a sense of Western cultural superiority. Yet, Carter, a typical US leader nurtured by Western civilization and a deeply religious man whose faith earned him the American people's trust, approached China with humility and a desire to understand.

Today, Washington's policymakers seem intent on dismantling the foundation of Carter's policies. They are working to construct an image of China as a hostile adversary, even



resorting to spreading misinformation to achieve this goal. This is the most concerning aspect of the future of US-China relations.

Carter's passing marks the end of an era, and US-China relations are now entering a period of profound change. Both sides have expressed the need to effectively manage the relationship to prevent it from escalating into open conflict. Achieving this will require enhanced communication and deeper mutual understanding, including engagement at all levels. Ultimately, much depends on whether Washington's current and future leaders are willing to follow Carter's example: to step into China, meet its people and engage with them directly. Only through such efforts

can the two nations build a foundation for lasting peace and cooperation.

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Anchoring on 'future', China-Japan-SK cooperation this year worth expecting

Global Times

The Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) recently announced the results of the "CJK Spirit Word of the Year 2025" selection, with the Chinese word for "future" winning the highest number of votes. This has sparked sustained attention across public opinion in the three countries involved - China, Japan and South Korea. TCS secretary-general Lee Hee-seop noted that "future" reflects the optimism and determination of the people in the three countries to build closer ties in the coming years. Japanese media quoted voters in the voting process who expressed hope of overcoming historical and cultural differences through tourism and cultural exchanges, a sentiment symbolized by the term "future." Meanwhile, Chinese netizens commented that warming trilateral relations and the benefits of cooperation are already evident, heralding a highly promising future. Alongside the positive expectations represented by

"future" as the word of the year, recent diplomatic engagements and cross-border tourism have shown a strong and vibrant momentum in China-Japan-South Korea relations. China's Ambassador to South Korea, Dai Bing, recently arrived in South Korea to assume his new post and met with South Korean officials, where both sides agreed to jointly promote a healthy, stable, and upward development of their strategic partnership. Late last year, Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Takeshi Iwaya visited China. Both sides have sent positive signals about deepening multi-faceted cooperation. With China's visa-free policy now expanded to include Japan and South Korea, outbound tourism to China from both countries has surged. Meanwhile, South Korea is considering a trial visa waiver for Chinese group tourists, and both China and Japan are working to facilitate cross-border travel further. These developments suggest the potential for a booming "weekend tourism circle" among the three nations in 2025.

Amid domestic political changes in South Korea and increasing uncertainty in the regional and global development, maintaining this positive trajectory of trilateral interaction and cooperation is no small feat and deserves careful nurturing. It underscores the significance of the renewed momentum for collaboration following the Ninth ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Summit in May last year. This re-energized cooperation reflects the importance of breaking away from narratives of bloc confrontation and returning to the intrinsic logic of trilateral partnership.

When rooted in the actual needs of the three nations and using strategic vision toward the future, this cooperation can play a vital role in overcoming crises and creating shared prosperity for their citizens and the region.

The combined economies of China, Japan, and South Korea account for about 24 percent of the global total, while their total foreign trade accounts for 20 percent of the global volume. It takes less than three hours to fly from major cities in Japan and South Korea to Shanghai, Dalian, Qingdao and other cities in China, highlighting the substantial demand for stronger connections and the immense potential for deepened cooperation among the three countries. Compared to European countries implementing the Schengen visa system or the highly liberalized trade framework in North America, the current level of integration among China, Japan, and South Korea falls short of their strength and demand for cooperation.

Beyond historical factors, the primary obstacles to deeper cooperation stem from geopolitical

pressures, with some relationships that could have been mutually beneficial and win-win being constrained by distorted views of competition or bloc politics, which is regrettable.

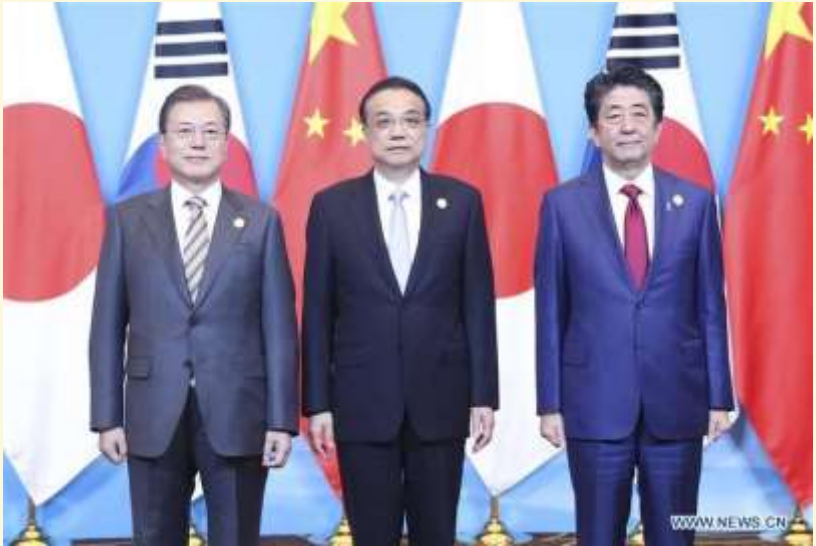
At present, the aspiration of China, Japan, and South Korea to build a bright future together is presented with new opportunities. The visa-free policies, which have spurred a boom in tourism and exchanges, have created new growth points for the development of trilateral relations and are also strengthening mutual goodwill and understanding among the peoples. The public sentiment and mutual understanding between China, Japan, and South Korea have been stagnating at low levels in recent years, influenced by various factors, many of which stem from misunderstandings and misconceptions caused by communication barriers and gaps. As more Japanese and South Korean tourists "head to China after work on Fridays," in addition to enjoying China's culinary and recreational offerings, they also personally experience China's development and the friendliness and hospitality of its people. This closer interaction and familiarity are expected to substantially improve mutual goodwill and the overall atmosphere between the three nations.

In fact, there are many areas where the three countries can and should cooperate. Last month, the 17th Tripartite Health Ministers' Meeting and the 24th Trilateral Intellectual Property Offices Heads Meeting were held in Tokyo, Japan, and Shanghai, China, respectively. Looking ahead, there is great anticipation for joint efforts to maintain the stability and smooth functioning of industrial and supply chains, as well as achieving breakthroughs in economic and trade cooperation. Exploring collaborative potential in addressing climate change, aging populations, and emerging fields such as artificial

intelligence could become new focal points. The solid implementation of cooperation in these areas in 2025 will not only help improve the developmental environments of each country, but also create shared opportunities to achieve higher levels of mutual benefit and win-win outcomes.

The selection of "future" as the Chinese character of the year for 2025 sets a positive tone for trilateral cooperation this year and holds significant implications for the long-term development of China-Japan-South Korea relations. As immovable neighbors, the three nations have vast potential and promising prospects for creating a shared future. Joining hands with a focus on the future is a "1+1+1>3" scenario, benefiting not only the three nations themselves but also contributing to regional peace, stability, and integrated development.

With 2025-2026 designated as the China-Japan-South Korea Year of Cultural Exchange, the three countries should seize this opportunity to strengthen people-to-people and cultural exchanges, activate their cooperation reserves, and "foster greater mutual understanding and strengthened ties between our nations."



Global Times

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High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri highlights beauty of wildlife in Pakistan

Covert Report Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week highlighted the beauty of wildlife in Pakistan. "Beauty of nature. Kalij Pheasant in Margalla Hills National Park," he posted on X with a picture. The Kalij pheasant is one of the most beautiful pheasants found in forests and thickets. They are especially found in the area of the Himalayan foothills.

In Pakistan, they are found in Margalla Hills National park in a large number. It is also considered as the bird of Margalla. Both male and female are beautiful, male is having glossy bluish-black plumage and females are brownish. In Margalla they are found everywhere in thick forests and also foothill area of Margalla hills. They are very shy birds so mostly avoid human presence. As in the Margalla Hills area, they are protected from hunting so they are growing in good numbers. I hiked 2 Km to reach a water stream where they mostly come to drink water.



Palestine must be recognised: Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad

Celina Ali Islamabad: Pakistan this week demanded that Palestine must be recognized as a full member of the United Nations, a moral imperative that will ensure the irreversibility of the two-state solution. Delivering a statement in the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian Question, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar, Alternate PR of Pakistan to the UN, urged the Security Council to demand an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to halt the bloodshed and destruction in Gaza; lift the inhumane blockade of Gaza allowing for supply of food, medical supplies, and humanitarian aid. He advocated carrying out independent and transparent investigations into the targeting of medical infrastructure

and other war crimes, ensuring that perpetrators are held to account; The Ambassador demanded to establish safe and secure humanitarian corridors to allow people to access life-saving care & prioritize reconstruction efforts and rebuilding of Gaza's shattered healthcare system; He asked to initiate the process to realize the Two-State solution based on relevant UN resolutions, putting an end to occupation and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination.



Kazakhstan boosts tourism with record growth and bold investments

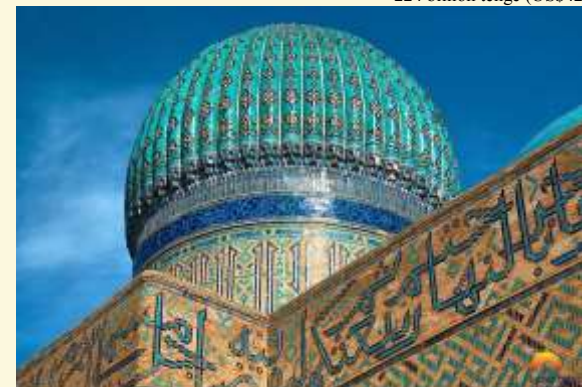
Covert Report Astana: Kazakhstan's tourism sector continues to grow steadily, with an increase in both domestic and international visitors and rising investments in infrastructure. In 2025, domestic tourists are expected to ex-

ceed ten million, while international arrivals are projected to surpass 15 million—a nearly 60% rise compared to 2023, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. Revenue from accommodation facilities grew by 27% in the first nine months of 2024, reaching 224 billion tenge (US\$425.6 million). Government-approved funding for tourism infrastructure tripled this year, reflecting robust support for the sector. Over 30 promotional events were held across major Chinese cities during Kazakhstan Tourism Year in China, boosting international interest. The newly introduced Neo Nomad visa, designed to attract remote workers and digital nomads, is also

expected to increase foreign visitor numbers. Tourism plays a significant role in Kazakhstan's economy, creating jobs, attracting investments, and generating tax revenues. Employment in the tourism industry is projected to reach 800,000 by 2029. "We position Kazakhstan as a country open to the world. Currently, citizens from 83 countries can visit visa-free, with plans to expand this to 100 countries," said Yerzhan Yerkinbayev, the Deputy Minister of Tourism and Sports. Government initiatives have improved infrastructure, accessibility, and private investment levels. Key 2024 projects include the Tourism District of Astana, a 194 billion tenge (US\$368.6 million) investment expected to create 2,000 jobs and generate ten billion tenge (US\$19 million) annually in taxes, and the Caspian Riviera Project, a 137.4 billion tenge (US\$261 million) development in the Mangystau Region featuring a beach resort and golf hotel. Upgrades to hotel complexes in cities like Almaty and Turkistan are also underway.

Despite these positive trends, the tourism sector faces challenges, including the need to improve service quality, advance education in tourism, enhance infrastructure, and promote Kazakhstan more effectively on the global stage. Tourism's contribution to economic growth is undeniable. By creating jobs, attracting investments, and developing infrastructure, it serves as a powerful economic driver. To fully harness its potential, Kazakhstan must adopt a comprehensive strategy that prioritizes service quality, accessibility, and the promotion of its rich

cultural and natural resources. Global success stories demonstrate tourism's potential as a transformative economic engine. By implementing strategic measures and targeted initiatives, Kazakhstan can position tourism as a cornerstone of its economy.



Ali Rehman Malik calls for urgent action to address the ongoing crisis in Parachinar



Abdullah Jan Islamabad: Ali Rehman Malik, Chairman of the Institute of Research and Reforms (IRR) and the Rehman Malik Foundation, this week visited Zainabya Academy in Islamabad, where he met



concern about the humanitarian crisis in Parachinar, which has been completely cut off from the rest of the country for over 70 days. This isolation has left residents without access to food, medicine, or basic supplies, exacerbating an already dire situation, he said. Ali Rehman Malik expressed "The horrific attack on November 21 and the ongoing suffering in Parachinar are a grim reminder of the failures in ensuring the safety of our citizens. It is a national tragedy that must not be ignored."

briefed Malik on the worsening situation. They expressed gratitude for his compassion and the Rehman Malik Foundation's donation of essential medicines, which provided some relief to the beleaguered community.

Ali Rehman Malik, the elder son of former Interior Minister Senator A. Rehman Malik, pledged to continue supporting the people of Parachinar and raising awareness about their plight. He emphasized the need for national solidarity in addressing the crisis and ensuring that no citizen is left behind.



with representatives from Parachinar and expressed profound grief over the tragic killing of more than 100 men, women, and children in a brutal attack on a convoy carrying passengers from Parachinar on November 21.

alone, Ali remarked. It is our collective responsibility to ensure they feel valued, loved, and supported in every possible way, he added. Chairman IRR International voiced his deep

Malik called upon the Federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Governments to urgently reopen the road connecting Parachinar to the rest of Pakistan and ensure the security and well-being of its people. "It is the government's foremost responsibility to protect its citizens. This crisis requires immediate action, not just words of sympathy," Ali Rehman Malik stated. Community representatives, including Syed Sibtain Al Hussaini, Riaz Ali Turi, Shaukat Ali Turi, Riaz Khan Turi, Ayaz Haider Turi and Danish Haider Turi



Bulgaria, a sanctuary for the red-breasted goose

Covert Report

Sofia: In the summer, the beach of Shabla, a small town in northeastern Bulgaria, hosts families and tourists eager to spend time in a quiet natural place overlooking the Black Sea. A few kilometres away, right near the border with Romania, the town of Durankulak features a Neolithic archaeological site and a lake that provides refuge to more than two hundred different species of animals.

In winter, this area is a favourite destination for the red-breasted goose (*Branta rufficollis*), a species that migrates to the western coast of the Black Sea to avoid the cold of northwestern Siberia, its main habitat. According to various experts, between 70 and 90 percent of the red-breasted goose specimens in the world find refuge in the wetlands of Bulgaria during the coldest months; the rest are concentrated mainly in the neighbouring areas of Romania and Ukraine.

Bulgaria is the first country in the European Union in terms of share of surface area covered by protected areas, and among the first in terms of biodiversity. Thirty-four percent of its territory is protected by Natura 2000, a European network of protected areas that aims to safeguard the continent's rarest, most precious and threatened species and habitats.

The red-breasted goose, one of the smallest ducks in the world, frequents about thirty of Bulgaria's 340 protected sites, mostly along the coast. Lake Durankulak, along with Lake Dobrudzha and Lake Shabla, are the places where one is most likely to come across this bird of Arctic origin, about half a metre long: they are wetlands that do not freeze, close to vast expanses of cereal fields. The number of this animal has halved in the world over the last 25 years, so much so that the red-breasted goose

has been included as a "vulnerable species" in the Red List drawn up by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. It is estimated that today there are about 50,000 specimens in total.

According to the European Union Biodiversity Information System, the species is also "near threatened", and it is no coincidence that it appears both in the EU Directive on the protection of wild birds and in the list of protected species annexed to the Agreement on the conservation of African-Eurasian migratory waterbirds. For these reasons, several environmental associations are involved in protecting the heritage that the red-breasted goose represents for Bulgaria. From awareness-raising interventions to monitoring and research initiatives, the various projects often also benefit from European funds, both from cohesion funds and from the LIFE programme, dedicated to environmental protection and the fight against climate change.

"Until the 1950s and 1960s, this species wintered along the western coast of the Caspian Sea, especially in Azerbaijan. In the 1960s, the Soviet Union decided to change the crops in the area, no longer focusing on wheat but on cotton. There was no more food available: the red-breasted geese had to change their wintering area and began to move towards the north-western coast of the Black Sea.

Now, due to rising temperatures, they may gradually spend the winter in Russia". This is what Nikolai Petkov, ornithologist and project manager of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, the main Bulgarian organisation active in this field, tells us.

Founded in the 1990s on the initiative of volunteers, this NGO has acquired an increasingly professional status over time, also working on transnational projects. "Our first effort for the conservation of the red-breasted goose focused on limiting the impact of hunting through the control of poaching episodes", continues Nikolai. "The reckless behaviour of some hunters disturbed the geese, preventing them from obtaining sufficient resources to overwinter and prepare for the return migration".

As a protected species, the red-breasted goose cannot be hunted, but inexperienced hunters can confuse it with the white-fronted goose, a not too dissimilar huntable species that inhabits the same habitat. Over time, through constant monitoring and awareness-raising work, the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds has managed to change the mentality of local hunters, but problems persist. "Some visiting hunters do not know the rules about where not to shoot and are unable to identify the different species correctly. Some of the new hunters simply buy guns and, in many cases, the license exam. Then they go and start shooting", says Nikolai.

In addition, there are plans to build wind turbines, which on the one hand promote sustainable energy production,

but on the other force birds of all kinds to change their routes. Right in the north-eastern tip of Bulgaria, between the districts of Dobrich and Varna, as many as five new wind turbine construction projects are clashing with the interests of the red-breasted goose. In the area, fog is common, which increases the risk of birds colliding with the blades.

"One of our greatest successes was to align the legislation of non-EU countries with some European Union nature conservation rules, which led to the closure of spring hunting in southern Russia and Kazakhstan", says Nikolai Petkov, referring to the European project "Life For safe flight", launched in 2017 to reduce hunting and poaching along the route that takes migratory birds from Siberia to the coasts of Romania and Bulgaria.

"In previous projects, we noticed that the number of red-breasted geese wintering between Romania and Bulgaria was decreasing. So we decided to launch a transnational project together with other associations in Romania, Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan, in order to limit the main threats to this species and ensure a safe route for them", Nikolai continues.

The results achieved include increasing the hunting-free areas around lakes and wetlands, but also operations such as securing four kilometres of power lines around Lake Durankulak, in order to reduce the risk of collisions for the birds.

According to Nikolai, the European funds provided through the LIFE Programme have been decisive for his association. "Before, our NGO was working on a much smaller scale due to limited funding. Thanks to the financial possibilities offered by the EU, we have been able to expand the scope of our work: GPS monitoring, for example, is very expensive.

Conservation work in Bulgaria depends largely on funding from the LIFE programme, which is administered directly by the European Commission without going through national authorities. Let's be honest: there is a lot of corruption in Bulgaria, the money [from other state or European programmes, ed.] goes to certain companies or organisations. For LIFE projects, however, you are really evaluated based on the proposal".

The most recent project for the red-breasted goose in Bulgaria, which was concluded in the first half of 2024,



was funded by the European Regional Development Fund. With an investment of almost half a million Euros, the goose has been one of the species on which European cohesion funds have focused the most in recent years in Bulgaria. The project was managed by the Municipality of Shabla, which houses the main areas where the animal usually spends the winter. New studies were carried out, a centre was created to assist injured specimens, educational initiatives were carried out in schools and to raise awareness among the population and hunters, and even a "winter festival of the red-breasted goose" was planned. Without sexual dimorphism (i.e. male and female have the same appearance), the red-breasted goose is monogamous: once formed, the pair remains together for life. During the breeding season in Siberia (July-August), these animals tend to nest near the nests of predatory

birds, so as to protect themselves from dangerous animals such as the Arctic fox. The journey they make every autumn to south-eastern Europe is one of the longest journeys travelled by migratory geese, equal to about six thousand kilometres. Although Bulgaria remains its favourite winter refuge, the red-breasted goose tends to move in an increasingly uneven way. Due to the increasing drought affecting the wetlands and the rising temperatures, the flow of these birds towards the Black Sea has decreased in recent years. However, ornithologists and volunteers like Nikolai and the Bulgarian Society for the protection of birds monitor the routes via GPS tracking, so as to evaluate possible future interventions in other areas.



Greece boat tragedy: Notorious smuggler among five arrested

Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) this week arrested five suspects including a notorious human trafficker allegedly involved in the Greece boat tragedy. The operation was carried out by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in Gujrat, Gujranwala, Sialkot, and Mandi Bahauddin.

According to FIA Director Abdul Qadir Qamar, one of the

arrested smugglers, Abdul Majeed, had allegedly taken 4.2 million rupees from a citizen named Fahad to smuggle him into Greece. Fahad has been reported missing since the ship incident

The arrested smugglers are accused of deceiving people and extorting large sums of money in exchange for illegal passage to foreign countries.

Earlier, an investigation committee probing the recent Greece boat tragedy revealed the involvement of 31 officials of the FIA. The committee decided to place the names of FIA officers, including



inspectors, sub-inspectors, and constables in the Passport Control List (PCL).

According to sources, 19 FIA officers from Faisalabad Airport, three from Sialkot Airport, two from Lahore Airport, two from Islamabad Airport, and five from Quetta Airport have been implicated in the scandal.

The FIA has decided to put the names of all 31 officers on the passport

control list, effectively banning them from traveling abroad.

The investigation, which is still ongoing, has revealed that the 31 officers were involved in smuggling people onto the ship that sank off the coast of Greece, resulting in significant loss of life.

At least five Pakistanis who were being smuggled died in the Greece boat tragedy.

VFS global pledges to assist Portugal in addressing its visa backlog

NewsWire

Lisbon: VFS Global this week vowed to help Portugal resolve its visa backlog. The company's announcement came following delays in processing work visa applications in particular for Brazilians in Portugal.

The processing of work visa applications for Brazilians in Portugal sometimes exceeds 200 days.

The outsourcing and technology company for governments and diplomatic missions, VFS Global has vowed to help resolve the visa backlog concerning Brazilians in Portugal "as quickly as possible".

The company that is assisting Portuguese consulates made this announcement after some local media in Portugal reported that delays in processing work visa applications for Brazilians in Portugal sometimes surpass 200 days, Schengen.News reports.

VFS Global told Publico that it has intensified its efforts to resolve the backlog, in spite of the fact that responsibility for a final response rests with the Portuguese representation.

Ricardo Cardoso told Publico that he has been waiting for a work visa in Portugal for a total of 202 days. Cardoso said that the request was made through the Portuguese consulate in Salvador.

I haven't worked since August, because the expected date (for the visa to be issued) was the first half of that month. In addition to the financial loss, there is also the emotional one.

Earlier this month, the Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, António Leitão



Amaro, said that Portugal aims to grant work visas to immigrants in less than a month.

The Minister's comments came following reports of long delays in obtaining a work visa in Portugal.

Extended delays related to visa issuance by Portuguese embassies and consulates have significantly increased following the termination of the Expression of Interest program in June last year, which allowed all persons to enter the country as tourists and then apply to work legally in Portugal.

In this regard, the lawyer, Elizabeth Lima, who works in immigration told Politico that the proposal of the Portuguese's government 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.

Lima considered that there are not enough resources that would allow authorities in Portugal to achieve this goal of issuing visas in such a short period of time.

In spite of the extended waiting times for those interested to obtain a visa in Portugal, in particular for work purposes, the country needs a significant number of foreign workers to maintain its economy.

A study introduced by the General Union of Workers (UGT) revealed that due to the low number of births and the ageing population, Portugal will need between 50,000 and 100,000 foreign workers yearly.



Tomiko Itooka of Japan, world's oldest person, dies at 116



democracy. Growing up in prewar Japan, she played volleyball in high school before marrying the owner of a textile company, Kenji Itooka, with whom she had two daughters and two sons. During World War II, she stayed in Japan to run the business while her husband went to Korea, then a

Japanese colony, to oversee a factory there. "She single-handedly managed a Japanese office and raised her children during this period," according to the Gerontology Research Group, which keeps a database of the world's oldest people. In 1979, her husband died after 51 years of marriage. Ms. Itooka then moved to Ashiya, a city outside Osaka, where she

remained an avid hiker into her 80s. At 100, she was said to be still ascending the stone steps of her local Shinto shrine without a cane. When once asked by local news media for the secret of her longevity, she reportedly credited eating bananas and drinking Calpis, a Japanese dairy drink. Ms. Itooka is survived by one daughter, one son and an unknown number of her five grandchildren. Miharu Nishiyama and Hisako Ueno contributed reporting.



Covert Report

Tokyo: Tomiko Itooka, a Japanese woman born before the start of World War I and the sinking of the Titanic who was believed to be the oldest person in the world, died this week at a nursing home in Ashiya, Japan. She was 116. In a statement, the mayor of Ashiya said Ms. Itooka passed away last Sunday. He did not give a cause, but local news media reports said she died peacefully of complications related to old age. "I offer my deepest condolences," said the mayor, Ryosuke Takashima. "Ms. Itooka gave us great courage and hope throughout her long life. I would like to express my gratitude once again." Ms. Itooka was declared the oldest living person by Guinness World Records in September after the death of Maria Bran-

yas Morera of Spain at age 117. Ms. Itooka was born Tomiko Yano on May 23, 1908, in the city of Osaka, one of three children in a family that ran a clothing store. At that time, her country was a rising imperial power that had just defeated czarist Russia in war and was embarking on expansion into mainland Asia. In the year of her birth, Japan signed an agreement with President Theodore Roosevelt's secretary of state that averted conflict with the United States in exchange for Washington recognizing Japan's annexation of the Korean Peninsula. During the span of her life, she saw her nation emerge as an Asian colonial empire, fall in fiery defeat in 1945 and rise again as an industrial giant and peaceful

US vows to continue investment in Pakistan's future

Celina Ali

Islamabad: The United States said this week it will continue investing in the future of Pakistan through initiatives in areas such as education, English language learning, entrepreneurship and exchange programmes. These projects reflect a strong and sustainable partnership between the United States and Pakistan, aimed at fostering mutual growth and development, according to a spokesperson for the US Embassy in Islamabad. "The United States, through strategic investments in various sectors including energy,

water, agriculture and infrastructure, is helping build the future of Pakistan," she said in a video message on the New Year. The spokesperson noted that 2024 had been a significant year for US-Pakistan relations, marking a period of stronger partnership and mutual progress. She said that the United States played a crucial role in enhancing Pakistan's energy capacity, especially through investments in the Mangla and Tarbela hydropower projects. "These initiatives increased the energy supply and improved access to electricity for hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis," according to her. She also highlighted the US Climate Smart Agriculture project, saying the \$24 million initiative is pivotal in reducing flood risks and hazards, restoring groundwater levels, and ensuring people's year-round access to clean drinking water in the Indus River Basin.



The spokesperson said that the US partnership helped improve agricultural productivity in Pakistan with modern seeds, skills, technology and better access to the market, boosting agricultural income by \$1.4 billion and creating 0.1 million employment opportunities. She also underscored the growing number of US

-funded healthcare projects in Pakistan, which, she said, contributed to improved public health and well-being. According to her, initiatives in the areas of disease prevention, malnutrition, and improvement of sanitation helped improve living standards and saved lives in the country. "In 2014, US-backed programmes helped Paki-

stan combat diseases such as polio and tuberculosis, as well as improved access to clean drinking water and sanitation." Expressing confidence in the creative potential and resilience of Pakistan's youth, the spokesperson highlighted the US investments in the country's education sector, especially for youngsters.



EU-Japan strategic partnership: Framework agreement enters into force



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



proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore the SPA will boost sectorial cooperation in fields such as: space, information and communication technologies, industrial policy, energy, transport, education, research and innovation. A joint committee will coordinate the overall partnership providing a forum to discuss all the issues covered in the agreement. In addition the agreement sets up a dispute settlement procedure to deal with possible controversies. On 17 July 2018 the EU and Japan signed the agreement in Tokyo. The European Parliament gave its consent on 12 December 2018, and on 5 April 2024, the ratification proce-

dures of the agreement by member states were finalised. In parallel to the negotiations on the SPA, the EU and its member states opened negotiations for an economic partnership agreement with Japan on 29 November 2012. These began in April 2013 and the contents of the first-ever bilateral

framework agreement between the EU and Japan were finalised in April 2018. The decision on the conclusion of the strategic partnership agreement was adopted by the Council on 22 April 2024, clearing the path for the agreement's entry into force.

Newswire

Brussels: The first-ever bilateral framework agreement between the EU and its member states and Japan, the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), entered into force this week. This milestone agreement will guide future engagement between the parties and ensure closer political and economic cooperation on an array of bilateral, regional

and multilateral issues. Thanks to the SPA, the EU and Japan will be better placed to strengthen the multilateral and rules-based global order having the UN at its core, and defend joint values and principles such as: the rule of law, democracy, respect for human rights, open markets, free and fair trade. Concerning the bilateral dimension, the agreement will enhance security cooperation, collaboration in the fight against terrorism and serious international crimes, as well as against the



UK foreign policy: The top five priorities for 2025



NewsWire

London: The UK's new government has now had six months to settle in to office. And by the general standards of new governments, Keir Starmer's was well prepared in terms of foreign policy. Once in office, the government hit the ground running. Defence secretary John Healey visited Ukraine within 48 hours of entering office.

But 2025 is set to be a tumultuous one. So following this strong start, there are five foreign policy priorities for the UK in 2025.

We can expect to see Starmer's government continue to emphasise its commitment to Ukraine. So far, the UK has provided almost £13 billion in aid and another £3 billion is committed for 2025. This includes both military equipment, training and non-military support.

However, over two years into the conflict, there is increasing talk of what an end to the war may look like. After the US president-elect Donald Trump implied that he would effectively cut Ukraine out of negotiations, the UK will want to ensure that any peace talks include Ukraine. Historically, the UK has served as the bridge between the US and Europe, and the government will not want to relinquish such a role if they can help it.

Since Boris Johnson's premiership, the UK has maintained a close relationship with the Ukrainian leadership. The government may use this and the historically close relationship with the US to help influence the format of negotiations.

Starmer's government has been significantly less clear about its intent in relation to the Middle East. The changing picture in the region has made this even harder. The end to the war in Syria in the final weeks of 2024 caught many by surprise, and the UK will want to



follow the international community in its approach to the new regime in Damascus. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the group in charge of the alliance that overthrew the Assad regime, is still deemed a terrorist organisation in the UK. A decision on whether to change this classification will be needed before the UK can decide if it will

work with the new Syrian leaders. Meanwhile, international condemnation of Israel's actions in Gaza is growing. Washington may continue to support Benjamin Netanyahu – and US support is crucial to prevent international opposition from restricting Israel's ability to act as they wish in Gaza. That leaves

the UK little room to manoeuvre. However, the incoming Trump administration may equally be just as distracted by issues at home. If US support for Israel is reduced, this may increase the possibility of international pressure on Netanyahu leading to negotiations for peace or at least a longer-term ceasefire.

Given the salience of Gaza for Labour voters, foreign secretary David Lammy will likely want to maintain pressure on Tel Aviv to seek a peaceful resolution. The UK revoked 30 of 350 licenses for the sale of arms to Israel in 2024, as they may be used to commit "a serious violation of international humanitarian law". To increase pressure, the UK may seek to further restrict arms sales. However, remaining contracts continue to provide crucial parts for the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, particularly parts for F-35 fighter jets. UK arms sales to Israel are also estimated to be worth nearly half a billion pounds, meaning the cost to the UK economy if more licences are revoked would not be insignificant.

Initial attempts to reset UK-EU relations following the July election had only limited success due to the summer break in Brussels. However, since then, Starmer has met Commission president Ursula von der Leyen. The UK has signalled an intent to build on previous deals by looking to appoint another negotiator and by establishing yearly summits with the EU. The UK has also set out negotiation points for mutual benefit such as security (both counter-terrorism and confronting Russian aggression), and on easing trade barriers in key trade areas. While European leaders will have their own issues to confront domestically in 2025, the change in tone from the UK government towards the EU is good groundwork for potential deals this year.

Trump's re-election is also significant here. His past comments on European allies and disinterest in international cooperation mean that Europe may need to develop plans to deal with the US being less present as a partner on international challenges such as the Ukraine conflict, international trade deals and climate change. For the UK, a more isolationist US could increase the need for other partnerships, as was the case during his last presidency. Europe is the most obvious candidate.

Trump's condemnation of Nato may also increase the need for European Nato members to take a leadership role within the alliance. The UK has played this role in the past, although typically this was in support of the US.

Trump's election victory means that the UK's "special relationship" with Washington will look very different than it would have if Kamala Harris had won. Prior to the UK election, Labour figures put in significant effort to build relations with the Republicans. But Lammy has fiercely criticised Trump in the past and a controversy over Labour volunteers helping the Harris campaign appears to have left Trump especially hostile to the Labour government again now.

However, apart from the same brush as foreign policy, so we cannot rule out the possibility of a reinvigorated special relationship. Nevertheless, Trump's isolationism and proposed tariffs on imports to the US mean the UK will still need to develop policies to help mitigate decisions coming out of Washington in 2025. For any government, foreign policy is an important signal of intentions to both allies and opponents. Lammy has set out "progressive realism" as his approach. While the Chagos Islands deal with Mauritius, there has been little indication of how this approach will manifest in practice. In 2025, Lammy will need to ensure that "progressive realism" doesn't become tarred with the same brush as Boris Johnson's "Global Britain" approach – he can't allow it to become an empty term. With the conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and Syria all at different stages, and the return of the "disruptor-in-chief" to the White House, world politics in 2025 looks like it will continue to be unpredictable. This unpredictability makes the setting of priorities even more important.



“Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced.” - Soren Kierkegaard

“Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people.”

Leo Burnett

Italy PM says she is 'in tune on many issues' with Keir Starmer



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

Angela Giuffrida

Rome: Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, has said she is "in tune on many issues" with her British counterpart, Keir Starmer, especially "the fight against mass illegal immigration" and the need to explore "innovative solutions" when it

comes to processing asylum claims, touting Italy's controversial agreement with Albania. Meloni told the weekly magazine of the Corriere della Sera newspaper that her relations with Starmer, who is from the opposite end of the political spectrum to her far-right Brothers of Italy party, were "very good". She added: "We are in tune on many issues. I think, for example, about the governance of migratory flows and the fight against mass illegal immigration, because it's a problem that affects the entire European continent, even beyond EU borders." Meloni also spoke about her "excellent" relationship with Donald Trump's billionaire ally Elon Musk, who on Thursday launched a fresh attack on Starmer's government. "Elon Musk is a brilliant man and it's always interesting to debate with him," she said, adding that it made her smile to think that those who once praised Musk as "a genius" now depicted him as a "monster" because he chose "the wrong" side of the barricade. She said she and Starmer agreed on the need "to intensify the fight against traffickers, work towards greater cooperation between our police forces, strengthen the commitment on assisted voluntary repatriations and to not be afraid to also explore innovative solutions, such as the one that Italy initiated with the protocol with Albania to process asylum claims in a non-EU country, but under Italian and

European jurisdiction". However, she did not mention that the €670m (£556m) deal, which was intended to transport 3,000 people intercepted in Italian seas each month to Albania, has proved fruitless since getting under way in October because of legal problems. The pact attracted great interest from Starmer during his meeting with Meloni in Rome in September, but to date the facilities that were supposed to accommodate the asylum seekers, including a detention camp in Gjadër, are empty. A report by the daily newspaper Domani in late November revealed that the centre in Gjadër was instead occupied by the stray dogs adopted by prison officers deployed there. During a speech in December at Atriju, the annual festival of her party, Meloni insisted that the deal "will work, even if I have to spend every night and day there from now until the end of the [term of the] Italian government". Starmer, who in September also said the UK would send Italy £4m to support Meloni's crackdown on irregular immigration, has faced criticism over his praise of her policies from Labour backbenchers and NGOs. The Refugee Council and Amnesty International urged him in September to avoid any more "gimmicks" after the failure of the previous government to implement the Rwanda scheme. Since her coalition government came to power in October 2022, Meloni said she had "never made a choice that I'm ashamed of".



France sends first batch of Mirage jets to Ukraine

Dylan Malyasov

Paris: The first batch of French Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets is set to arrive in Ukraine by January 20, 2025, according to reports from Avions Legendaires. The initial batch is expected to include three to six aircraft, which will likely replace Ukraine's aging fleet of Su-24 bombers. These Mirage 2000-5 jets, originally part of the French Air and Space Force inventory, have been retrofitted with advanced capabilities by

France's Directorate General of Armaments (DGA). Designed primarily as interceptors, the modified jets are now equipped to carry and deploy SCALP-EG and Storm Shadow cruise missiles, both of which are currently in Ukraine's arsenal. The deal for the Mirage 2000-5 jets was the result of prolonged negotiations between French President Emmanuel Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The transfer underscores France's commitment to bolstering

Ukraine's defense capabilities. Similar to earlier contributions of Caesar howitzers and AMX-10RC armored vehicles, the Mirage jets highlight the depth of French military support. The Mirage 2000-5F jets will join the growing list of Western aircraft supplied to Ukraine, including the General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon. While smaller and lighter compared to Soviet-



era MiG-29s or Su-27s, the Mirage jets are highly maneuverable and capable of delivering precision strikes. Ukrainian pilots have reportedly praised the aircraft's agility and combat effectiveness. Although official sources have not confirmed the jets' current operational status, there are indications that training flights are already underway. The first operational sorties are anticipated shortly after the formal delivery. The deployment of the Mirage 2000-5F strengthens Ukraine's ability to counter Russian aerial

threats and launch precision strikes against critical targets. The jets' compatibility with long-range cruise missiles significantly extends their operational reach, enabling strikes deep within enemy-held territory if necessary. This delivery also marks the first European-designed and manufactured combat aircraft to be transferred to Ukraine, following the earlier arrival of American-made F-16s. The inclusion of the Mirage jets further diversifies Ukraine's air force capabilities, providing a blend of Western technological advancements.