

### High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri appreciates Consular Camp in Perth

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week appreciated the Consular Camp in Perth organised by the High Commission of Pakistan. "@PakinAustralia organised a Consular Camp in Perth, providing essential services directly to ??? community in WA. The overwhelming response, (Page-5)

### EU office issues 'scam alert' for Pakistanis seeking visas, consular appointments Celina Ali

Islamabad: The European Union (EU) office this week issued a "scam alert" to warn Pakistanis about "criminal organisations" spreading misleading information about visa and consular appointments via fake entries of embassies and telephone numbers. (Page-10)

# China launches first Type 076 amphibious assault ship



aimed to better facilitate aviation operations, a full-length flight deck and an electromagnetic launch system, or electromagnetic catapult, which will be used to launch fixed-wing aircraft, the PLA Navy said in a news release. After a brief launch ceremony on Friday morning at Hudong-Zhonghua, water was pumped into a dry dock in which the ship's hull was built. Guests at the ceremony — leaders from the Navy and the Sichuan provincial government, executives of China State Shipbuilding Corp, as well as some of the vessel's designers and construction workers — applauded as they watched the launch pro-



**Henan Daily** Zhengzhou: China unveiled its largest and most advanced amphibious assault ship this week in Shanghai, naming it after the southwestern province of Sichuan. With a hull code of 51, the CNS Sichuan is the first in the Type 076 class and is being built at Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding, a Shanghai-based subsidiary of China State Shipbuilding Corp, the nation's dominant naval hardware contractor. According to the People's Liberation Army Navy, the ship will displace more than

40,000 metric tons of water and will carry fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters and amphibious landing craft. It has a two-island superstructure configuration, a design that has never been used on any other Chinese ships and is



cess. In shipbuilding terminology, launch refers to the process during which a nearly-finished ship is moved into water. It is one of the most important stages in a ship's construction because once a ship is launched, it means that its major structures have been readied and major work on the entire construction project has been done. The Navy added that in the next phase, engineers will start outfitting and fine-

tuning the vessel's equipment before mooring tests and sea trials are conducted. Currently, the PLA operates three Type 075 amphibious assault ships, which were named after three provincial-level regions: Hainan, Guangxi and Anhui. All of the Type 075s were built at Hudong-Zhonghua. The model has a full displacement of nearly 40,000 tons and can carry several helicopters and landing craft as well as dozens of tanks and armored vehicles.

## Denmark to boost Greenland's defence after Trump repeats controversial remarks seeking US ownership

**Celina Ali** Islamabad: Denmark moves to boost Greenland's defence capabilities after US President-elect Donald Trump doubles down on controversial remarks of US dire to control the arctic nation. The Danish government this week announced a major plan to bolster Greenland's defence capacity just hours after US President-elect Donald Trump publicly

freedom throughout the world". In response, Greenland Prime Minister Mute Egede said, "Greenland belongs to the people of Greenland." He also stated that his country is "not for sale and will never be for sale. We must not lose our long struggle for freedom."



repeated his desire to purchase the Arctic country, home to just 56,000 people. Without giving specifics, Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen told Danish media outlet Jyllands-Posten that Copenhagen would invest a "double digit" billion amount in Danish krone to upgrade the country's defences. The unspecified defence spending could amount to anywhere from €1.34 billion to €13.27 billion. Trump said on Sunday on his social media platform, Truth Social, that the US would seek ownership and control of Greenland for "purposes of national security and

Greenland has its own extensive local government but is still affiliated with the Danish crown. The country was a Danish colony until 1953, when it was reclassified as a district of Denmark. Greenland was then fully integrated in the Danish state under the constitution of Denmark, making its people, citizens of Denmark. Trump has recently expressed an interest in the US taking control of neighbouring Canada and territories such as Panama, citing economic stakes in the eponymous canal. He also pledged to confront drug-producing gangs in Mexico, likening his plans to the US intervention against the so-called IS terrorist group in Syria.

## Surprised why fish only cut Pakistani internet cables: Bilawal Bhutto

**Liaquat Ali** Islamabad: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari this week criticised the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)-led government over "slow internet speed" in the country, wondering why fish only cut Pakistan's undersea fibre optics cable.

"PML-N's politics is based on motorways ... infrastructure for our generation is digitalisation, internet and its speed," Bilawal, who also served as the top diplomat during Shehbaz Sharif's previous stint as prime minister, said while speaking to journalists. Users across various cities in Pakistan continue to face sporadic internet disruption and slow speed, resulting in difficulties with browsing, as well as downloading and sharing media. According to a list issued by Ookla Speedtest Global Index, Pakistan was ranked 100 out of 111 countries in mobile internet speeds with a download speed of 20.61Mbps and upload speed of 8.53Mbps. Meanwhile, the index ranked the country at 141 out of 158 countries in broadband speeds with a download speed of 15.60Mbps and upload speed of 15.53Mbps. Bilawal — whose party is an ally of the PML-N in Centre — said they should have increased the internet speed instead of reducing it. "How can the government retract from its own statements," he asked, noting first they claimed the internet cable had been cut, later they retracted it. "Why bother with VPNs when the public doesn't even have reliable high-speed internet?" the PPP chairman asked. Responding to a question, he said that water is everyone's fundamental right and the PPP has always tried to resolve the problems being faced by the people. "We agreed that the development budget of all four provinces would be chalked out with mutual consultation," he said, adding that it seems the federal government "is not treating smaller provinces well".



Furthermore, he said, the PML-N-led government lacks a mandate for "unilateral and controversial" decisions — referring to the federal government's plan to build new canals to draw additional water from the Indus River for farming purposes. "Such projects are controversial if we move ahead in violation of the IRSA [Indus River System Authority] agreement," he added. Bilawal pointed out that Kalabagh Dam was also a unilateral decision, which the PPP did not allow to be implemented. "It is challenging to get work done from any government in Pakistan," he said, hoping that the issues of the provinces would be resolved through negotiations. He vowed that the PPP would leave no stone unturned to provide relief despite limited resources.



# Pakistan, China unveil sculptures of premier leaders

**NewsWire**

Islamabad: Pakistan and China this week unveiled sculptures of the founding fathers of both nations – Chairman Mao Zedong of China and Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah of Pakistan – at an event here presided by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. A visiting Chinese delegation performed the inauguration. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called the event a testament to the historic bonds between the two nations. The niece of Chairman Mao Zedong, Mao Xiaoping also graced the event. The event honoured the pivotal roles of Chairman Mao and Quaid-e-Azam in shaping the

destinies of their respective nations. Chairman Mao led China through a transformative revolution, laying the foundation for its rise as a global power, while Quaid-e-Azam, revered as Pakistan's father of the nation, spearheaded the movement for the creation of an independent homeland for Muslims in South Asia. Last year, Pakistan's diplomatic mission in Beijing unveiled similar statues of the two leaders during a ceremony attended by high-ranking Chinese officials and dignitaries. The sculptures unveiled in Pakistan's federal capital were created by veteran Chinese artist Yuan Xikun, who expressed his pride in contributing to this historic project. "It's a great honour for me to be here at the Prime

Minister's Office for the unveiling ceremony of the sculptures of Pakistan's father of the nation Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the brave leader of China, Chairman Mao Zedong, which I had been invited to create," Yuan said. "It's the best commemoration of the 148th anniversary of the birth of Jinnah and the 131st anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong," he added. Pakistan marked Quaid-e-Azam's birth anniversary, which falls on December 25, just a day ago, while China commemorated Chairman Mao's birthday on Thursday December 26. The Chinese sculptor said the inauguration of the statues reaffirmed the common admiration and respect that the two nations have for their leaders. He maintained the ceremony symbolized the brotherhood between the two countries. On the occasion Prime Minister Sharif underscored the depth of Pakistan-China relations, describing them as a model of mutual respect, trust and cooperation.

"The historic bonds between Pakistan and China forged over decades are a testament to our shared values, mutual respect, trust, and cooperation," he said. Highlighting the multifaceted collaboration between the two nations, Sharif praised initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), cultural exchanges and educational programs. "Hundreds of young Pakistani students visiting Chinese universities and learning Mandarin are building a bridge between Beijing and Islamabad," he added, adding the first batch of Pakistani agriculture graduates would visit China early next year to gain expertise in modern farming techniques. He said the historic bonds between Pakistan and China spanned over decades was a testament to our shared values, of mutual respect, trust and cooperation. The Prime Minister highlighted that both leaders recognized the immense Pakistan-China relations and "today



our all-weather strategic partnership is an anchor of regional stability under these challenging global circumstances". He said Quaid-e-Azam was the founder of Pakistan and his great leadership played a decisive role in carving out Pakistan from the sub-continent through outstanding leadership and great sacrifices by the Muslims. Appreciating the great work done by Chinese renowned artist and sculptor Yuan Xikun who made the sculptures of the great leaders, the prime minister said he had wonderfully, captured the essence of these two iconic leaders. The Prime Minister recalled that during his recent visit to China in June this year, on the recommendation of President Xi, he went to Xian and had the opportunity to visit the Terra Cotta museum, a symbol of past glorious heritage. He said Pakistan proudly traced its history to the Indus Valley civilization, whose relics were preserved in

Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. "So by these accounts, today's ceremony is very special and unique as we honour the vision and legacies of our founding fathers who held a common vision of independence, justice, equity, emancipation and self-respect for the two nations," he added. The Prime Minister said that hundreds of Pakistani young students were visiting Chinese universities and was a bridge between the two countries. "The first batch of agricultural graduates is going to visit China and have education in the field to attain modern techniques and expertise in agriculture to boost production of Pakistan agriculture next month which is yet another step towards our economic cooperation," he said. In his speech, Information Minister Attullah Tarar said Pakistan and China were enjoying strong bonds for decades and the relationship was further strengthening with the passage of time.

# Pakistan starts domestic production of high-speed passenger coaches, goods wagons with Chinese help

**Gwadar Pro**

Islamabad: With help from China, Pakistan has started domestic production of high-speed passenger coaches and goods wagons. This achievement follows a successful technology transfer agreement with China, according to Pakistan Railways (PR). The advanced manufacturing process is underway at PR's workshops in Islamabad and Lahore, where Chinese experts have played a key role in enhancing the technical skills of Pakistani engineers and technicians. This transfer of knowledge has enabled Pakistan to produce modern rail components independently. The Pakistan Railways Carriage Factory in Islamabad has been tasked with assembling 184 state-of-the-art passenger coaches over the next three years. This initiative is expected to significantly improve the

quality and capacity of the country's rail transport system. The project is part of a broader effort to modernize Pakistan's infrastructure under the multi-billion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Recent developments in rail, road, and economic zone projects were highlighted during a meeting last month between Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong and Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal. China is also playing a key role in upgrading and dualizing Pakistan's Main Line-1 (ML-1) railway track. Spanning 1,872 kilometers from Karachi to Peshawar, the ML-1 was originally constructed in the late 19th century. The \$6.8 billion modernization project aims to transform this critical corridor into a high-speed, dual-track railway system.



# Spike in tertiary sector workforce boosting GDP

**Henan Daily**

Zhengzhou: China has seen a growing workforce in the tertiary industry in recent years, driven by the country's improving economic structure and robust employment policies, senior officials said. Based on the fifth national economic census conducted last year, the tertiary industry contributed 56.3 percent to the nation's GDP in 2023, an increase of two percentage points compared to 2018. Meanwhile, the workforce in the tertiary industry surged by 25.6 percent to 265 million last year from its 2018 level. Experts attribute these changes in workforce distribution to industrial restructuring, technological advancements, and the emergence of new forms of employment and societal needs in recent years. "The tertiary industry has accounted for an increasing proportion of the nation's GDP and has a stronger ability to attract workers," said Wang Guanhua, an official from the National Bureau of Statistics, at a news conference in Beijing on Thursday. According to the census results, approximately 164 million people were employed in the secondary industry by the end of 2023, a decrease of 4.8 percent, or 8.26 million people, compared to 2018, the year of the previous national economic census. Wang noted that technological advancements have also

played a significant role in shaping the current division of labor. "China's manufacturing efficiency has improved with the help of smart facilities and tools. Some roles previously part of the manufacturing sector, such as design or quality detection, have transitioned into jobs within the tertiary industry due to internet technology development and a more refined social division of labor," she said. She added that the tertiary industry has demonstrated a strong capacity to attract workers, bolstered by the growth of newly emerged service-related sectors over the past five years. "By the end of 2023, the working population in the information transmission, software services, and information technology services sector had grown by 5.07 million compared to 2018, thanks to the development of the digital economy," Wang said. She emphasized that these workforce shifts between the secondary and tertiary industries align with the regular patterns of socioeconomic development in the context of structural transformations. However, Wang cautioned that structural imbalances in employment remain a challenge, necessitating more supportive government policies. China conducted its first national economic census in 2004. The fifth census aims to survey the development, layout and economic scale of the nation's secondary and tertiary industries.





# Italy: A year of bold policies to curb irregular immigration



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



building started in 2024. With this bilateral agreement signed between Italy and Albania, Italy hoped to process the asylum claims of people it classifies as non-vulnerable male asylum seekers in Albania, but under Italian law. This form of off-shoring is designed to speed up the asylum process, and allow anyone rejected to be sent back to their country of origin more easily without ever setting foot on Italian soil. Under the terms of the agreement, only those rescued in international waters by the Italian authorities, who don't immediately present as vulnerable and who are from a country deemed safe by Italy, can be taken to Albania. Once there, it was planned that asylum seekers would undergo medical checks, and a speedy asylum process.



**Newsire**  
Rome: Italy's right-wing government wants to set an example the rest of the EU can follow with its migration policy. But it ran into legal obstacles with its cornerstone project – to process asylum claims in Albania. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government has pointed out repeatedly this year that it has

succeeded in reducing irregular migration, with the number of undocumented migrants entering Italy in 2024 down to around 40 percent of last year's arrivals figure. The government says this is because many elements of its migration policy – from agreements with North African countries to the deal with Albania – are beginning to work. The plan was actually announced in 2023, but

The estimated costs of the deal have been set at 650 million euros over five years. Around 252 million euros of the total sum will be used to cover travel between the two countries by officials of the Italian ministries of the interior, justice and health, ANSA reported. There were major delays with the opening of the centers. They eventually started operating in October. 16 migrants arrived on October 16 in the port of Shengjin, but almost immediately, four of them were sent back to Italy. Within 48-hours the remaining 12 were also returned to Italy.





# Has US considered why it can't stop China from developing in Latin America?

**Ding Gang**

Wang Xuguang, then a project manager at China Harbour Engineering Company, witnessed the same scene every day: cargo ships loaded with containers slowly passing through the Panama Canal, heading toward the Atlantic Ocean in the distance.

When I interviewed in Panama a decade ago, his company was building a terminal for the Taiwan company Evergreen Marine Corp. at Colón Port in Panama.

A Panamanian local half-jokingly told me that if Latin America is called the "backyard" of the US, then the location of this terminal must be regarded as the "front gate" of that backyard.

Fast forward 20 years - again, at this port, a terminal renovation project led by Hong Kong's Hutchison Whampoa Limited drew criticism from several American politicians and media outlets. They claimed that the investment posed a potential threat to US shipping lines and pressured Washington to pay attention to the possibility of China gaining operational control over the Panama Canal.

However, in the 2010s, China Harbour Engineering Company won the contract for this project through international bidding, and this time, no American media expressed excessive concern.

Chinese companies and manufacturing in Panama and other Latin American countries have become commonplace.

Over the past 100 years, the canal's operation has changed little. Yet the Panama Canal's

shipping routes have expanded from dozens to 144, now serving over 1,700 ports across 161 countries and regions. The "nationality" of the ships passing through the canal has also quietly transformed.

When entering the top-floor exhibition hall of the Panama Canal Museum, visitors are immediately greeted by a model of a COSCO shipping vessel. Above it is a large photograph of a container-laden cargo ship passing through the canal.

Currently, China is the second-largest user of the Panama Canal, next only to the US. It is also the second-largest source of cargo using the canal and the second-largest destination for cargo transported.

Meanwhile, the Colón Port, the world's second-largest free trade zone after Hong Kong, has become a vital trade hub connecting China with Latin America. Over 90 percent of Chinese goods exported to the region, including neighboring countries such as the US, pass through this port. Panama has also emerged as a focal point for Chinese business investment in Latin America.

However, US President-elect Donald Trump has recently cited this development as a reason to take back control of the Panama Canal, hinting that the US cannot allow China to control such a strategically vital waterway.

On December 21, Trump posted on social media: "When President Jimmy Carter foolishly gave it away, for One Dollar, during his term in Office, it was solely for Panama to manage, not China, or anyone else."



Panama's President José Molino strongly condemned such hegemonic threats.

Trump's comments emphasized the strategic significance of the Panama Canal. Still, he conveniently ignored an elementary truth - China's growing influence in the region comes entirely from peaceful economic engagement and trade-based energy rather than military force. China has never sent a single soldier to the area.

China's economic engagement has significantly expanded in the Caribbean, with trade volumes rising to over \$11.8 billion in 2023. In the past two decades, Chinese companies have initiated major infrastructure and economic projects in Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Trinidad and Tobago.

These projects showcase how China is fostering deeper ties with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean by emphasizing mutual economic benefits and sustainable development rather than geopolitical rivalry. It has delivered the material for mutual economic development, including products supporting US and Chinese trade. The development of the Caribbean region is also beneficial to the US.

Washington had no intention of calculating how much profit it had gained through the canal due to its investments and trade with China. Instead, it monitors others' ledgers while ignoring how Latin America benefits from the trade relationship with China. What is deeply hidden here is why the US

wants to, but cannot, stop China's economic and trade relations from developing in this region.

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

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# China relies on competitiveness to retain position as world's largest car exporter



**Global Times**

After China became the world's largest car exporter in 2023 for the first time, with an export volume of 5.221 million units, several media outlets and market organizations recently predicted that the country will maintain its position as the top car exporter in 2024. Cui Dongshu, secretary general of the China Passenger Car Association (CPCA), confirmed to the Global Times that with just one month left in 2024, "there is no doubt" that China's car export volume will continue to lead globally. The performance of new energy vehicles (NEVs) also remains impressive. In the first 10 months of 2024, China's share in the global market for new energy passenger cars reached 68.9 percent. The overall development of the automotive industry in 2024 is equally impressive. Export volume is essentially a natural extension of the strength and competitiveness

of China's entire automotive sector. According to statistics, China's total car production and sales are expected to stay above the 30-million mark this year. Additionally, the production and sales of NEVs in China are set to reach a historic milestone of 10 million units. Moreover, China's retail penetration rate for NEVs has exceeded 50 percent for six consecutive months since July, and for the first time, two Chinese automakers have made it to the global top 10 list in the third quarter of this year. When media outlets listed the key terms of China's automotive industry in 2024, words like "intelligent" and "innovation" topped the charts, reflecting the intense competition and constant innovation that have become the common characteristics of the industry. As export volumes increase, the reputation and recognition of Chinese cars globally have also risen, which is

evident to all. At internationally renowned auto shows like the Paris Motor Show, Chinese NEVs have dazzled audiences, becoming a focal point of attention. Reviews of Chinese NEVs have become a trending topic on foreign social media platforms, with customers abroad praising their performance. According to some estimates, the average manufacturing cost of Chinese NEVs is 35 percent lower than that of similar vehicles produced in European or other major automobile manufacturing countries. Moreover, in various crash tests, Chinese car brands have demonstrated excellent standards. This surge in Chinese NEVs exports is not only beneficial for global consumers seeking high-quality, affordable products, but also contributes positively to the global green transition. It is estimated that each NEV reduces carbon by about 1.66 tons per year. In countries where

the energy transition process has stalled, the robust growth of Chinese NEVs has provided a powerful boost to the global energy transformation.

Since the beginning of this year, Chinese automakers have established factories and begun production in countries such as Thailand, Spain, and Mexico. Established automakers like Japan's Toyota, Germany's Volkswagen, and the US' General Motors have also shown confidence in the future prospects of the Chinese market, increasing investment through factory setups and other initiatives.

The movement of these major automakers reflects the unchanged reality of the global automotive industry's interconnectedness in the wave of globalization - "you have me, and I have you." This is a historical trend that no "decoupling," supply chain disruption, or trade protectionism can fundamentally block.

It is undeniable that, as China's automobile exports continue to grow and maintain their position at the top globally, traditional automakers and leading automobile-producing nations have responded with a complex range of public reactions.

However, the evolution of the modern automotive industry over the past century has been primarily driven by market competition.

The increase in Chinese NEV exports is driven by the advantages of its entire industrial chain, along with the comprehensive competitiveness stemming from technological innovation, product quality, and price advantages. This has earned the favor of global consumers.

Politicizing the challenges faced by some traditional automakers in the current competitive market or simplistically attributing them to a "China responsibility theory" is a distorted and irresponsible interpretation of changes in the global

automotive market landscape.

The development of China's automotive industry is rooted in an open and cooperative international environment, and hopes to continue to promote equal competition and cooperation with all parties in an open and cooperative environment. Almost all international car brands have benefited from China's reform and opening-up policies. Now, as NEVs take center stage, China is becoming a crucial hub for competition and innovation in the global auto industry. Chinese and foreign automakers can still find pathways to mutual success through competition and collaboration.

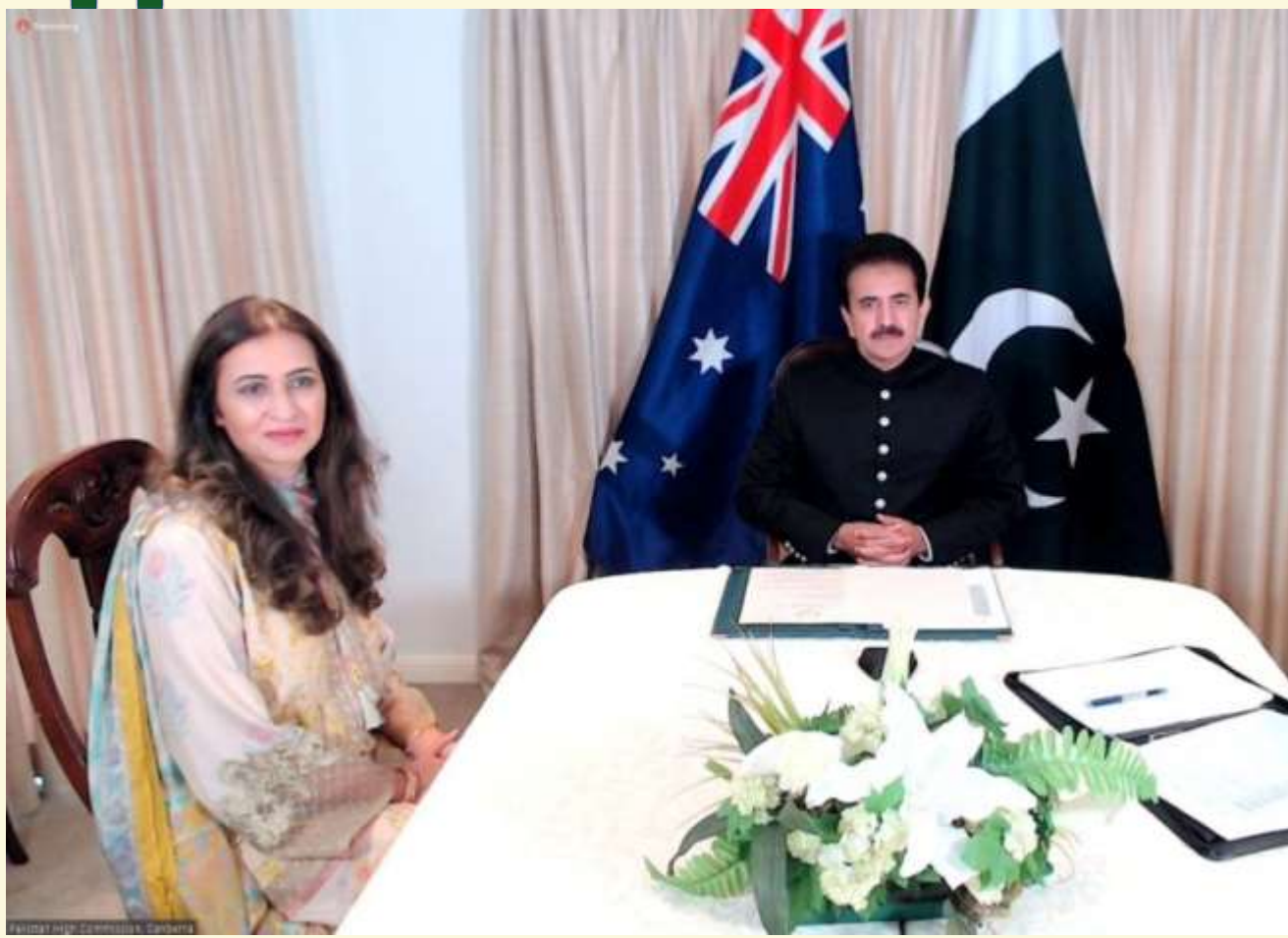
Companies like Volkswagen and Toyota are accelerating their cooperation in China, jointly promoting the development and application of electrification technologies. Meanwhile, Chinese automakers are expanding overseas, enhancing their presence, and strengthening partnerships in supply chains and production with local stakeholders. Sharing opportunities while navigating major transformations together is the most effective way to address the profound changes in the global automotive landscape.

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# High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri appreciates Consular Camp in Perth



**Covert Report**

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week appreciated the Consular Camp in Perth organised by the High Commission of Pakistan. “@PakinAustralia organised a Consular Camp in Perth, providing essential services directly to the Pakistani community in WA. The overwhelming response, reflected community’s trust,” he posted on X. The envoy added: “The effort underscores our commitment to enhancing accessibility & convenience in delivering consular services.” Earlier, the Pakistan High Commission in Australia successfully concluded the two-day Consular Camp in Perth. The camp provided essential consular services to the Pakistani community in the region, ensuring greater accessibility and convenience. “We appreciate the community’s participation and cooperation, which contributed to the smooth service delivery,” said the High Commission.

# Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad assumes charge as APR at UN



**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Seasoned diplomat Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad this week assumed charge as Additional Permanent Representative (APR) of Pakistan at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York. He was Pakistan’s Ambassador to France before moving to the UN headquarters. Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad will become the country’s permanent representative (PR) at the headquarters in April this year on the retirement of incumbent Munir Akram. Till then he would continue to work as APR. Additional Foreign Secretary for PD/SC in the Foreign Office Ms Mumtaz Zehra



Baloch has already been appointed ambassador in Paris. She is the spokesperson for Foreign Affairs at the headquarters. It is likely that she would move to French

# Kazakhstan maintains diplomatic relations with 186 states



**Covert Report**

Astana: Kazakhstan currently maintains diplomatic relations with 186 countries. Members of the Senate and the upper house of the Kazakh Parliament approved amendments to some legislative acts regarding diplomatic service, international treaties and official development assistance. According to Galiaskar Sarybayev, a member of the Senate, the geography of Kazakhstan’s diplomatic relations includes 109 foreign embassies in 71 countries. “So far, 4,430 international treaties have been signed, with 3,266 coming into force. In 2023, the list of visa-free nations was enlarged to 82 countries for various types of passports, including 29 countries, the citizens of which enter with regular civil passports. In January-November, 67



agreements were concluded,” said Sarybayev. The law equates citizens who formerly held positions in international organizations to veterans of diplomatic service.

Also, payments to diplomatic staff for knowledge of other languages have been adjusted to encourage advanced training and self-improvement among the diplomatic corps.



# Ali Rehman Malik and Umar Rehman Malik celebrate Christmas with Christian brethren, reaffirm commitment to minority rights



Pakistan's diversity is its greatest strength, and every citizen deserves equal rights." He assured the community of his continued support, adding that inclusivity and equality remain at the heart of his father's legacy.

Riaz Ali Turi commended Malik brothers for continuing their father's mission. He said, "Senator Rehman Malik was a staunch advocate of interfaith harmony and regularly celebrated Christmas with the Christian community. It is inspiring to see his sons uphold these values and traditions with such dedication."

The Christian community expressed their gratitude for the Malik family's long-standing support. Priest Samson called Senator Rehman Malik "a beacon of interfaith harmony" and praised Ali and Umar for their efforts to foster unity.

The event concluded with prayers for peace, prosperity, and a united Pakistan, highlighting the enduring spirit of interfaith harmony and inclusivity.



**Abdullah Jan** Islamabad: Ali Rehman Malik, Chairman of IRR International and the Rehman Malik Foundation, along with Umar Rehman Malik, celebrated Christmas with the Christian community at a church in Islamabad this week. They distributed presents, joined prayers for peace, and expressed their commitment to fostering unity and equality in Pakistan. Felicitating the Christian community, Ali Rehman Malik said, "Christmas is a celebration of love, compassion, and unity. It reminds us of the importance of standing together as one, embracing diversity, and ensuring that every citizen feels valued and included". My father, Senator A.

Rehman Malik always believed in treating every citizen with equality and dignity, and we are committed to carrying forward this vision, he added. He reaffirmed his dedication to minority rights and announced initiatives through IRR International and the Rehman Malik Foundation to address key challenges faced by the community, focusing on education and healthcare. "Unity and inclusivity are the cornerstones of a strong, progressive Pakistan," said Ali Rehman Malik. Umar Rehman Malik highlighted the PPP's unwavering support for minority rights and extended heartfelt Christmas greetings. Quoting PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Umar Malik said, "Chairman Bilawal often reminds us that





# Bulgaria's Perperikon: A European counterpart to Peru's Machu Picchu



**Newsire**  
Sofia: The ancient rock city of Perperikon has recently received international recognition, with its latest accolade coming from the renowned US tourism website, Islands.com. In an article published on December 20, 2024, the site compared Bulgaria's Perperikon to Peru's Machu Picchu, dubbing it the "European Machu Picchu." This follows the site's inclusion in The Guardian's top ten most intriguing archaeological destinations in Europe just a month earlier. Bulgarian travel packages The article highlights the unique qualities of Perperikon, noting that while Machu Picchu was built only 550 years ago, Perperikon was already on the decline by that time, having been abandoned in the 14th century after a 6,000-year history. The author of the article also emphasizes

es that Perperikon is believed to have housed the Temple of Dionysus, a site where ancient pilgrims sought oracles, as recorded by Herodotus. The article, which gained significant attention online, was quickly shared on platforms such as Newsbreak, Tripadvisor, and Threads.net. Professor Nikolay Ovcharov, who has overseen the excavations at Perperikon, expressed his enthusiasm about the recognition but also pointed out that Bulgaria's Ministry of Tourism should take advantage of such international exposure. He suggested that this "free advertising" could do a lot to raise awareness about the country's historical sites beyond the typical tourist spots on the Black Sea coast. Describing the site, Armstrong explains that Perperikon offers an easily accessible alternative to the challenging terrain of South America's Machu Picchu. The ancient city, perched 1,400 feet above sea level, offers breathtaking views over the Perpereshka River valley. Visitors can explore the remains of the city, including its walls, palaces, and the foundations of what was once a royal residence of Thracian tribes. The ruins also bear witness to its Roman period, followed by the Goths' destruction in the 4th century, and later became a significant religious center during the rise of Christianity. The article also encourages visitors to explore nearby Kardzhali's History Museum, which houses some of the best artifacts from the ongoing excavations at Perperikon. Visitors are also advised to venture into Bulgaria's capital, Sofia, to discover the Serdika Archaeological Complex, and the Roman city of Philippopolis in Plovdiv. For those seeking more ancient wonders, the Valley of the Thracian Kings, home to over 1,500 tombs, and the Varna Necropolis with its gold treasures dating back to 4600 BC, provide additional glimpses into Bulgaria's rich historical legacy. Bulgarian travel packages Ovcharov's call for increased recognition of such sites is aimed at drawing attention to the broader cultural significance of places like Perperikon, encouraging tourism that could help preserve and promote the country's ancient treasures.



Bulgaria ambassador to Pakistan H.E. Irena Gancheva



# Greece boat tragedy: 31 FIA official's name to be placed in PCL

**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: An investigation committee probing the recent Greece boat tragedy revealed the involvement of 31 officials of the Federal Investigation Agency (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.

Earlier on December 27, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the authorities concerned to take strict action within a week against culprits involved in human trafficking.

The prime minister chaired a review meeting regarding the prevention of human trafficking in the country. During the meeting, a report of the committee formed under the chairmanship of Mushtaq Sukhera was presented in view of the migrant's boat capsizing incident occurred near Greece in December 2024.



# Portugal to streamline entry of foreigners to deal with labour shortages



PORTUGAL NEEDS

100,000 SKILLED WORKERS

Every Year due to Workforce Shortage.



in eight schools in the north of the country. Earlier this month, the Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, António Leitão Amaro, said that Portugal aims to issue work

visas to immigrants in less than a month in a bid to deal with labour shortages. However, such goals for some people seem unachievable. In this regard, the lawyer Eliza-

needs more than 100,000 foreign workers. Such conclusions were reached in a study called Migrations and Human Rights, introduced by the General Union of Workers (UGT) earlier



**NewsWire**

Lisbon: The Minister of State and for Territorial Cohesion, Manuel Castro Almeida, said this week that the government is attempting to streamline the entry of some workers from other countries. He noted that the labour shortages with which Portugal is dealing remain an unresolved problem. In a bid to deal with the labour shortages, Portugal is attempting to streamline the entry of foreign workers. Manuel Castro Almeida, said the government is trying to facilitate the entry of some workers from other countries due to labour shortages amid the need to complete many of the projects

included in the PRR (Recovery and Resilience Plan). Minister Almeida explained that over 40 per cent of the Recovery and Resilience plan had been executed, stressing that today, the fifth instalment from Brussels, worth €2.9 billion, was deposited today into the State's coffers, quoted by Sic Noticias. The Minister of State and for Territorial Cohesion said that over 40 per cent of the PRR will be implemented by the end of this year. Almeida stressed that at the beginning of April, the execution rate was just 20 per cent. However, the Minister admits that the lack of manpower remains an unresolved problem. Workers who may be essential for executing contracts, such as the contracts signed today in Porto, related to works worth over €40 million

beth Lima, who works in immigration, told Politico that the proposal of Portugal's government 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. According to her, there are not sufficient resources to permit authorities in Portugal to achieve the goal of granting visas within such a short timeframe. In a bid to deal with labour shortages, Portugal

this year. In this regard, the Coordinator of Migrations and Human Rights Study, Jorge Malheiros, said that in the context of low birth rates and an ageing population, the southern European country will need 50,000 to 100,000 workers regularly over time. In a bid to attract a larger number of workers from other countries, the government of Portugal previously introduced new strategies that would accelerate the legal entry and stay of foreigners in Portugal for employment purposes.





# Japan approves record budget for ageing population, defence



Yomiuri newspaper on Thursday. “Now matter how great our military tanks or vehicles are, it’s pointless if we don’t have enough people to move them,” said the prime minister, who has pledged to fix a shortage of new troops.

**Covert Report**  
Tokyo: Japan’s government this week approved a record budget for the next fiscal year, ramping up spending on social welfare, as the population ages, and defence to tackle regional threats. The 115.5 trillion yen (\$730 billion) budget for the year from April 2025, green-lighted by the Cabinet, includes 8.7 trillion yen in defence spending. It also includes social security spending of around 38.3 trillion yen — up from 37.7 trillion the previous year. The defence ministry said in a briefing document that Japan was facing its

“toughest and most complex security environment” since World War II, repeating a warning from Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba. Japan has a pacifist post-war constitution, which limits its military capacity to ostensibly defensive measures. But it updated key security and defence policies in 2022, explicitly outlining the challenge posed by China, and committed to double its defence spending to the NATO standard of two percent of GDP by 2027. The 8.7 trillion yen approved Friday

will help pay for measures to help attract recruits to Japan’s Self-Defense Forces, and to improve relations between the US and Japanese militaries with locals in Okinawa. It will also go towards a system to collect satellite information on ballistic missiles, such as those fired by North Korea, and the movement of vessels in waters around Japan, including territories disputed with China. “Strengthening our defence capabilities is something we’re actively working on,” Ishiba said at an event organised by the



# USAID’s HumAhang Project hosts transformative conference on human rights and sustainable peace

**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) HumAhang project, implemented by the Center for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI), this week successfully concluded a two-day conference on “Human Rights as the Foundation for Sustainable Peace”. The conference brought together policymakers, academics, activists, and civil society leaders to address pressing human rights issues in Pakistan. Participants emphasized the critical role of human rights in fostering peace, inclusion, and social justice, exploring topics such as:  
Access to Education: Ensuring equal

access to quality education for all, particularly vulnerable groups.  
Rights of Vulnerable Groups: Protecting the rights of women, children, minorities, and persons with disabilities.  
Gender-Based and Conflict-Related Violence: Addressing the challenges posed by violence and promoting justice for marginalized communities.  
Speakers highlighted actionable steps to advance human rights in Pakistan, including:  
Raising public awareness and promoting education on human rights.  
Strengthening legislative frameworks and institutions to support human rights.  
Increasing investment in education and promoting inclusive development.



Enhancing the role of civil society in democratic governance and promoting social equity. Sindh Minister for Women Development Shaheena Shair Ali emphasized, “Human rights are the foundation for a peaceful and tolerant society. Legislative actions must align with international human rights commitments.” Vice Chancellor SALU, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Yousuf Khushk, highlighted the role of education

in preventing human rights violations and promoting democratic values. Representing HumAhang, Haseeb Iqbal stressed the importance of sustained collaboration, stating, “Collective efforts by all stakeholders are crucial to transforming human rights commitments into concrete action.” The event concluded with a powerful theatre performance, depicting societal challenges and

urging continued advocacy for human rights. HumAhang, a project of USAID, reaffirmed its commitment to fostering partnerships that promote social equity and peace, marking a significant milestone in achieving the program’s objectives of advancing peace, social cohesion, and inclusive development across Pakistan’s most vulnerable regions.



# EU office issues 'scam alert' for Pakistanis seeking visas, consular appointments



**Celina Ali**

Islamabad: The European Union (EU) office this week issued a “scam alert” to warn Pakistanis about “criminal organisations” spreading misleading information about visa and consular appointments via fake entries of embassies and telephone numbers. Taking to X, the Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan stated that its “diplomatic missions in Islamabad have observed fake entries for



Member States embassies in Google Maps, with misleading information about visa and consular appointments, including fake telephone numbers”.  
“This is a serious scam by criminal organisations,” warned the office, stressing that citizens should only rely on authentic information and

It also highlighted that the EU Delegation to Pakistan does not issue passports or visas as they are issued by the embassy and/or consulate of each individual member state.  
It noted that Pakistani citizens require a Schengen visa for travelling in the Schengen area countries and a National visa for travelling to the EU member states outside the Schengen zone.



contact data available on the websites of the EU member states’ embassies.  
“The EU Delegation would like to stress that only the websites of EU Member States Embassies provide authentic information and contact data for all visa and consular issues of the respective countries, not entries in Google Maps or in other embassy directories,” it concluded.  
According to the EU official website, the border-free Schengen Area provides free movement to more than 400 million EU citizens, as well as to many non-EU nationals, businessmen, tourists or other persons legally present on the EU territory.

“At present, the Schengen Area comprises of most of the EU Member States, except for Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland and Romania. However, Bulgaria and Romania are currently in the process of joining the Schengen Area.”  
Of non-EU states, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland have joined the Schengen area and Liechtenstein is expected to join soon.  
The Schengen visa entitles the visitor to enter one country and travel freely throughout the Schengen zone.  
The office advised Pakistanis to contact the relevant embassy or consulate in the country for obtaining the required visa of their travel destination in Europe.

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



# High Commissioner Jane Marriott leads groundbreaking climate initiative in Pakistan highlights deepening ties, shared vision



**Celina Ali** Islamabad: Known for her resilience in some of the world's most dangerous hotspots, Jane Marriott, the UK High Commissioner to Pakistan, has unveiled a transformative climate finance programme aimed at helping Pakistan transition to a low-carbon economy.



International Finance Corporation (IFC), is designed to support local businesses in adopting innovative technologies and sustainable practices. The programme's goal is to address Pakistan's vulnerability to climate threats, with Marriott emphasizing that without urgent action, the country could suffer a staggering \$1.2 trillion economic loss by 2050.

Marriott is not just a climate advocate; she is a trailblazer in modern diplomacy. As the UK's first female High Commissioner to Pakistan, she champions women's rights in a country grappling with gender inequality and forced marriages. Her journey reflects the changing face of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), where women now lead 41% of UK missions worldwide.

Recalling her early days in diplomacy, Marriott shared, "I was often the only woman in the room. Expectations were low, but I proved my worth through action, whether in negotiations or crisis situations." Her mettle was tested in 2011 when protestors stormed the British Embassy in Tehran. "Evacuating amidst chaos felt like something out of a movie," she recounted. "But those moments teach you the importance of staying calm under pressure."



**British Deputy High Commissioner to Pakistan Matt Cannell**

Doncaster-born Marriott, 48, who has braved embassy sieges and terrorist threats during her distinguished diplomatic career, now considers climate change the most critical challenge humanity faces. "It's the defining issue of our time," Marriott said in an interview. "The devastating floods of 2022 in Pakistan submerged a third of the country, killing over 1,700 people and leaving millions homeless. This crisis underlines how urgent the need for action is."

The initiative, a pioneering £108 million collaboration between the UK government and the





“It is better to remain silent at the risk of being thought a fool, than to talk and remove all doubt of it.” ?

Maurice Switzer

# COVERT

TRUTH UNFOLD

January 5-11, 2025

“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to reform (or pause and reflect).”

Mark Twain

# PM Meloni vows to build strong Italy



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



### Covert Report

Rome: Premier Giorgia Meloni vowed to keep working to make Italy stronger in her message to the Italian people this week.

"Some people will not be able to stay at home with their loved ones at this time but will continue to be at everyone's service - I am thinking of the armed forces, the police, the

doctors and all those who guarantee essential services for the citizens," Meloni said in a video message posted on social media.

"Thank you for what you do and what you will do over the next few days".

She also mentioned those who will be at the side of the lonely, the sick and people in difficulty and in need.

"You are among the most beautiful parts of this nation and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you

do on behalf of Italy because, as Flaubert wrote, the heart is a rich that cannot be sold or bought, but only given as a gift," she said.

"So best wishes to everyone, may this time be an opportunity for hope, joy and serenity to look to the future with even greater confidence and optimism.

"Let's recharge our batteries because an equally challenging 2025 awaits us to continue together to build a strong and ambitious Italy, capable of looking far ahead and aiming ever higher".

# France, Pakistan have excellent diplomatic, political relations: Ambassador Nicolas Galley

Islamabad: French Ambassador to Pakistan Nicolas Galley said this week that Pakistan and France currently have excellent diplomatic and political relations.

Economic, trade and diplomatic relations between Pakistan and France will be further promoted, he said.

He expressed these views during a meeting with Sardar Zahoor Iqbal, Chairman of France-Pakistan Business Forum FPBF who called on him at the Embassy.

The Ambassador said, "France values Pakistan's efforts for regional peace and stability. Many French companies are investing in Pakistan. Partnership between the private sectors of both countries will be promoted. The resumption of PIA flights will be result oriented in promotion of bilateral cooperation in the fields of public relations, and increasing coop-

eration in trade and economic sectors."

He added: "A large number of Pakistani students are studying in France. Visa facilities have been increased for Pakistani students. The establishment of the France-Pakistan Business Forum is important. The establishment of this forum has increased cooperation in the trade sector."

Ambassador was hopeful that as a result of the recent meetings and consultations between the top leadership, a new era of cooperation will begin soon. He termed bilateral relations much better than before.

Sardar Zahoor Iqbal appreciated the efforts of the ambassador and said Ambassador Nicolas Galey have greatly improved the bilateral relations. Pakistani Ambassador to France Asim Iftikhar also played a key role in this regard.

