

The stunning seaside town in Italy with a 'Santorini feel' you may have never heard of **Newswire**

Rome: A quaint little town in the southern region of Puglia offers up the quintessential Italian experience, described as being similar to Santorini but with much a calmer ambiance. Monopoli charmingly combines its historic medieval centre with its pictur
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EU warns Pakistan GSP+ status dependent on 'list of issues,' including human rights **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: The European Union's mission in Islamabad this week reminded Pakistan that trade benefits it received under the GSP+ scheme depended on progress the country made on addressing a list of is
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China's Spring Festival goes global

Stephen Ndegwa

Beijing: The Chinese Spring Festival, also known as the Spring Festival, has a remarkable history spanning over 4,000 years. Originally an agrarian tradition marking the end of winter and the beginning of spring, it has evolved into one of the most widely celebrated cultural events worldwide. Today, nearly one-fifth of the world's population celebrates the festival in different forms, with approximately 20 countries designating it as a legal holiday. Its global significance reflects its universal themes, cultural richness and adaptability to modern times. Ancient texts such as Matteo Ricci's Notes on China vividly describe the Spring Festival's early practices. These included rituals to honor ancestors, ward off the mythical Nian beast and welcome a prosperous year. Traditional customs such as offering sacrifices, lighting lanterns and preparing feasts were deeply rooted in the

rhythms of rural life and community. Over centuries, these customs have been preserved, modified and reimagined to suit the changing lifestyles of those who celebrate. Modern technology and innovation have transformed the way the Spring Festival is celebrated, both in China and abroad. Fireworks, once the dominant spectacle, have been enhanced by dazzling drone light shows, while digital advancements have made traditional practices like giving red envelopes more accessible. Popular platforms such as WeChat now enable people to send virtual "hongbao" globally, fostering participation even in distant regions. Globally, the Spring Festival has transcended its origins to become a multicultural phenomenon. Cities like Sydney and New York City host elaborate parades and fireworks displays, while countries like Canada and Indonesia integrate local traditions into the celebrations.

In the Philippines, for example, the festival is celebrated alongside indigenous rituals, reflecting a blending of cultures that enhances its global appeal. Such adaptations ensure the festival is not just an imported event but a meaningful part of diverse cultural landscapes. The festival's popularity outside China can be attributed to several factors. Its universal themes of family, renewal and hope resonate across cultures, making it accessible and relatable. Additionally, the Chinese diaspora has played a crucial role in sharing and sustaining these traditions in new environments. With about 60 million Chinese living overseas, communities worldwide have embraced the festival as a vibrant way to connect with their heritage and share it with others. China's growing global influence has also been instrumental in spreading the Spring Festival. Initiatives like the "Happy Chinese New Year" campaign and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have introduced millions to Chinese traditions through cultural exchanges, performances and exhibitions. The Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) further amplifies these efforts, promoting the value of cultural diversity and mutual respect. For instance, Chinese embassies and cultural centers regularly organize events showcasing the festival's traditions, from zodiac animal symbolism to the art of paper-cutting and dumpling-making. The adaptability of the Spring Festival has been key to its longevity and global relevance. While the core values of family, gratitude and renewal remain intact, the festival has embraced change, making it appealing to new generations. This balance between preservation and innovation highlights the importance of community involvement, education and formal documentation in safeguarding cultural heritage. China's approach, such as including traditional festivals in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, serves as a model for protecting and promoting traditions globally. Moreover, the Spring Festival's evolution offers valuable lessons for other nations. Its ability to unite people across borders demonstrates the power of shared celebrations in fostering mutual understanding. By blending traditional narratives with contemporary forms of media, such as film, music and digital platforms, China has



made the festival accessible to a global audience. The diaspora and international partnerships have further amplified its reach, creating opportunities for cultural exchange and collaboration. The festival's global resonance also underscores the importance of cultural diplomacy in today's interconnected world. Through initiatives like the GCI, China emphasizes the significance of cultural heritage as a unifying force, celebrating diversity while promoting shared human values. This approach not only enriches the global cultural landscape but also strengthens relationships between nations, contributing to a more inclusive and harmonious world. As the Spring Festival continues to grow in relevance, it

serves as a shining example of how traditions can thrive in a modern context. Its enduring appeal lies in its ability to adapt without losing its essence, offering a sense of continuity and connection in an ever-changing world. By embracing innovation and fostering inclusivity, the festival inspires people across cultures to celebrate their own heritage while appreciating the beauty of others. Ultimately, the Spring Festival is more than just a Chinese tradition. It is a global celebration that bridges cultures, fosters unity, and enriches the shared human experience. As more countries integrate the festival into their cultural calendars, it stands as a testament to the enduring power of tradition, resilience and the universal values that bind us all.



Denmark to halt offshore wind tenders to revamp subsidy model



Ambassador of Denmark to Pakistan His Excellency Jakob Linulf

this year with a capacity of two to three gigawatts (GW), where state subsidies might be offered, energy minister Lars Lagaard told a press conference. "Our assessment right now is that we might be required to support offshore wind. It's not because we're happy about it, but it's necessary," Lagaard said. Denmark has been a pioneer in both onshore and offshore wind, and is home to turbine maker Vestas (VWS.CO), opens new tab and the world's largest offshore wind developer Orsted (ORSTED.CO), opens new tab. Orsted said on Friday it would replace its CEO as it seeks to arrest an 83% slump in its share price since its 2021 peak. The government also said it planned to help finance a hydrogen pipeline running from Denmark to the German border. Using excess power generated by wind at times when it is not needed by users to produce so-called green hydrogen is seen as critical to Europe's green transition, but development has stalled. "At this stage, time is of the essence, and therefore the government is committed to making export to Germany possible from 2030," the energy ministry said in a statement.

Covert Report

Copenhagen: Denmark will halt all ongoing offshore wind tenders as the existing framework where no subsidies are offered does not work under current market conditions, its energy minister said this week. The global offshore wind industry has been hit by surging costs, rising interest rates and supply chain bottlenecks. Denmark said in December that its latest tender for wind at sea had failed to attract any bids. The government will now start preparations to launch a new offshore wind tender



Complain to me about Sindh govt: Bilawal Bhutto

Liaquat Ali

Karachi: Days after a Karachi trader joked about exchanging the Sindh chief minister with the chief executive of Punjab, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told the city's businessmen that they should come to him with their grievances. This week, Bilawal hosted a lunch for the city's prominent businesspersons and invited them to form a sustainable partnership with the Sindh government. Last week, during a meeting with Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal, a Karachi-based trader had jibed about substituting Sindh CM Murad Ali Shah with Punjab CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif. However, Mr Bhutto-Zardari defended his party's performance and reminded the traders of Karachi of the situation that prevailed before 2008, when the PPP formed the government. Comparing the law and order then and now, he said that people are no longer being extorted and threats are not being made. "No one is forcibly taking factory workers to public meetings by closing businesses, and everyone is doing business in peace," he claimed. The PPP chairman told businessmen that his party had never sought extortion or donations from them. "You should tell me today if you have any complaint against me. Did I ever harass you? So why would I want anyone else to harass you in my name or in the name of my government?" he questioned. In an apparent reference to the business community's concern over alleged corruption in provincial departments, he said the government was responsible for addressing these complaints and instructed the Sindh chief minister to establish a special cell of the Anti-Corruption Establishment and police to address this issue. He urged the businessmen to name officers involved in corrupt practices. Talking about the public-private partnership model introduced by the Sindh government, Bilawal said the scheme was a role model for strengthening the economy and creating opportunities for people.



The PPP chairman asked the business community to come up with "win-win projects" to promote green energy and improve infrastructure, according to a press release issued by the media cell of Bilawal House. He said Sindh was the only province where several public-private projects are running successfully. He stressed that the problems faced by Karachi could be solved under the same model. The PPP chief added that no other province had the potential to generate as much energy as Sindh and stressed the need to increase private investment in solar and wind sectors. The PPP chairman said the federal government claimed that load-shedding had been eliminated, but most areas were still facing 18-hour power cuts. He said the electricity tariffs are fixed in Islamabad without taking the business community and provincial government into confidence. "You and I bear the brunt of such policies." He announced that the Sindh government would take over the electricity distribution companies (Discos) privatised by the federal government under the PPP model.

China's railways see over 200 million passengers since start of Spring Festival rush

Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: China's railways have transported over 200 million passengers since the 40-day Spring Festival travel rush kicked off on Jan. 14, China State Railway Group Co., Ltd. (China Railway) said. As of Jan. 30, the country's railways had transported a total of 206 million passengers, according to the China Railway. The transportation was safe, stable and orderly. China's railways transported 22.95 million passengers during the first three days of the Spring Festival holiday starting from Jan. 28, China Railway said. Railway authorities across vari-

ous regions have increased capacity on popular travel routes, enhanced station and train services, and implemented measures to provide passengers with a better travel experience, according to China Railway. The country's total railway operating mileage has exceeded 160,000 km, with the high-speed railway surpassing 46,000 km, China Railway said in early December. The railway network covers 99 percent of the Chinese cities with a population of over 200,000 each, and the high-speed railway network covers 97 percent of cities with a population of over 500,000, it said.



FO rejects 'unfounded allegations' targeting Pak-China friendship



Celina Ali
Islamabad: The Foreign Office (FO) this week categorically rejected "baseless and unfounded allegations" targeting Pakistan-China friendship, a day after Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi's strong reaction against media speculations over his alleged participation in an anti-China event during his recent visit to the United States (US). Naqvi had vehemently rejected allegations of involvement in any anti-China event in the United States, labelling them as "malicious fabrications" and "baseless campaigns" designed to tarnish his reputation. In a statement, FO spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the foundational principle of the One-China Policy. He added that the commitment "is a consistent cornerstone of Pakistan's

foreign policy and remains unchanged" and emphasised that China was Pakistan's all-weather strategic partner. "This relationship is characterised by mutual trust, shared values, support on issues of core concern and a commitment to regional and global stability," he concluded. Chinese investment and financial support for Pakistan since 2013 have been a boon for the nation's struggling economy, including the rolling over of loans so that Islamabad is able to meet external financing needs. Beijing has over \$65 billion in investment in road, infrastructure and development projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. The clarifications come after reports in Indian and local media outlets, as well as social media posts, claiming that the interior minister attended a lobbying group's event which was involved in campaigning

against China's ruling Chinese Communist Party. Naqvi had clarified that he did not attend any event against China in the US, adding that his attendance at a youth event was "misinterpreted and blown out of proportion". The interior minister also accused certain elements of instigating the US Congress against Pakistan, urging political opponents not to harm the country for political gains. He also highlighted that the purpose of his visit was to meet American politicians to devise an effective plan against terrorism. The interior minister further said that his meetings with members of the Congress were productive, stressing that terrorism is not just Pakistan's issue but a collective fight. The interior minister was on a visit to the US where he attended various events and meetings with US senators and Congressmen including Thomas Richard Suozzi, Jack Bergman, Joe Wilson, Rob Bresnahan, Henry Cuellar, and Maxine Waters. During his meetings with the US lawmakers, he held discussions on strengthening Pakistan-US bilateral ties and regional peace, particularly the situation in neighbouring Afghanistan.

China's exports to over 160 countries, regions achieve growth in 2024

Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: China's exports to over 160 countries and regions saw growth in 2024, according to the General Administration of Customs (GAC). The country's exports grew 7.1 percent year on year, reaching 25.45 trillion yuan (about 3.55 trillion U.S. dollars) last year, marking the eighth consecutive year of growth, according to the latest data released by the GAC. Exports to Brazil, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia increased by 23.3 percent, 19.2 percent and 18.2 percent year on year, respectively. Exports to ASEAN countries and nations participating in the Belt and Road Initiative grew by 13.4 percent and 9.6 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, exports to traditional markets, such as the European Union and the United States, rose by 4.3 percent and 6.1 percent, respectively. Lyu Daliang, a GAC official, said that despite growing uncertainties and challenges, China's exports -- characterized by a wide range of products -- are expected to remain resilient and dynamic, supported by both incremental and existing policies.



The stunning seaside town in Italy with a 'Santorini feel' you may have never heard of



H.E. Marilina ARMELLIN,
Italian Ambassador to Pakistan.

Newsire Rome: A quaint little town in the southern region of Puglia offers up the quintessential Italian experience, described as being similar to Santorini but with much a calmer ambiance. Monopoli charmingly combines its historic medieval centre with its pic-

turesque coastline and is one of the loveliest places to stroll. The town is home to a number of small coves, pristine beaches and delicious local cuisine serving up the authentic southern Italian atmosphere. Add in a photogenic harbour, old town architecture, beautiful villages and the heavenly Adriatic coast, and you'll get a slice of Monopoli. Social media user @CharmOfCulture

spoke of Monopoli in a thread on X in which they rated the less known Italian spots they have visited. They said: "The town was buzzing with life at night which made it great to walk around in. "Being on the water too made the sunsets here incredibly picturesque". They added how, despite only being there

for a few hours, "I recall being surprised by how nice it was. "Some parts of the town reminded me of Santorini with its white-washed buildings".



Spring Festival's extraordinary vitality never ceases to amaze

Global Times

For many Chinese, the heart of the Spring Festival lies in family reunion. This year, what makes the festival more special is that the Spring Festival has been inscribed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This gives the Chinese festival a global connotation. The Global Times selects the opinions of some foreign experts to share their experiences and understanding of the Spring Festival.

The initial significance of the Spring Festival, or the Chinese New Year, was that it represented the reawakening of the natural world after the sleep of the winter. Crops were planted and livestock could breed. Family life held a very high priority.

Modern China has undergone a rapid urbanization process, and the latest census (2020) puts the proportion of people living in cities at 63.89 percent of the total. But the tradition of the importance of the family remains strong.

In practice what that means is that the Spring Festival is the time for family reunions. People go back to their hometown or village to see their grandparents or reunite with those they have not seen for a while due to the demands of work. I single out grandparents because in my observation young people are very respectful and loving toward the old, and vice versa. As a frequent teacher in China, I have often been told by colleagues and students about returning to see their elderly parents or grandparents during the Spring Festival. This is the season for banquets and enjoying good food and drink in a collective way.

Returning for family reunions has an important implication for the travel system. Family reunions involve the biggest temporary migration in the world. Fortunately, the high-speed trains make China railway system the best in the world, by far. But there are other ways of travel too. China's enormous population makes crowds very common. However, I have witnessed Chinese adapt to crowds

very well in the sense that they remain calm in dealing with the discomfort and inconvenience that is often involved in this travel.

The significance of the Spring Festival is underlined internationally by the fact that, in December 2024, the UNESCO added the "Spring Festival, social practices of the Chinese people in celebration of the traditional New Year" to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It is clear that the family system remains very strong for Chinese not only in China but all over the world. And there is a significance that shows the nature of the Chinese to others as well. The family system defines Chinese culture and gives the Chinese a strong sense of identity. It also unites Chinese people in a way I personally find beautiful.

Erik Solheim, former under-secretary-general of the United Nations and former executive director of the UN Environment Programme

This year, we are about to welcome a truly "intangible heritage Spring Festival," as it marks the first celebrated under the prestigious recognition of being inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. As a long-time friend of China, I have had the privilege of witnessing the splendor of the Spring Festival many times. Yet, what never ceases to amaze me is its extraordinary vitality - a cultural tradition that is deeply woven into the lives of countless generations.

Today this spirit is vividly demonstrated by Chunyun - the world's largest annual migration, creating the largest human movement on the planet. At the close of the year, millions return to their hometowns and families, finding emotional nourishment in the warmth of reunions, the dazzling fireworks and heartfelt New Year greetings.

As we look ahead to 2025, the uncertainties of the future weigh heavily. Will the challenges deepen divides, or could they inspire a renewed commitment to collaboration and shared progress? The answers, as always, rest in how we choose to respond.



As we approach the Chinese New Year, I remember my first experience of the holidays, in 1983 in Beijing. I was living on the west side, near the Diaoyutai, working for an American organization that sent students to study in China, one of the earliest such programs, at a time when relations between our countries were expanding and China was embarking on the era of reform and opening-up. Despite the bitter cold of the winter weather, the campus where I was staying was filled with the warmth of new encounters between our students and our hosts. As the New Year approached, everyone eagerly anticipated the coming of the Year of the Pig.

We Americans learned about the traditions of renewal and the rituals of family and community that bound people together at this important time of the year. On the night of the New Year there were celebrations on campus, and fireworks were set off to welcome the new day.

Over the 42 years since that first Spring Festival, I have celebrated the holiday with friends and family both in China and here in America. The Chinese New Year is a truly global event, as both overseas Chinese communities and the many friends and admirers of China in countries around the world join in marking the turning of the annual cycle and the spirit of solidarity and of shared hopes for the future of all humanity. Now another year is about to turn. Much has changed in China since 1983. The lives of the people have been dramatically improved, and the country is steadily advancing along the path of development and socialist construction. Let us all welcome the Year of the Snake, and join together in working for a better tomorrow.

Global Times



Why Chinese Spring Festival becomes a 'global moment'

Global Times

As the Spring Festival of the Year of the Snake draws near, regardless of one's location or the hustle and bustle of daily life, the chime of the Spring Festival always evokes a deep sense of nostalgia and longing for home inside Chinese people's hearts. Today, the Spring Festival, the most important traditional festival in the hearts of the Chinese, is also being empowered by advancements in economy, culture, society, and technology, becoming a shining emblem that showcases Chinese modernization.

Once, the Spring Festival travel rush was a crowded journey on green-coated slow trains. Today, the country's comprehensive multi-layered transportation network spans 6 million kilometers, with railway passenger trips expected to exceed 510 million during the Spring Festival travel season. New lines such as the Shanghai-Suzhou-Huzhou and Jining-Datong-Yuanning lines have commenced operations. Over 30,000 charging stations and nearly 50,000 charging spaces on highways serve the growing number of new energy vehicle owners. Sixteen domestically produced C919 large aircraft have

joined the "warm journey home" for the Spring Festival. Cities like Shanghai, Tianjin, and Guangzhou are witnessing a new surge in cruise travel, with the "Spring Festival travel rush on the sea" expected to surpass 100,000 passenger trips. The increasingly convenient and comfortable journey home for the Chinese during the Spring Festival is a testament to the transformative changes in China's transportation infrastructure.

The enhancement of happiness during the Spring Festival by Chinese modernization extends far beyond a single dimension. Smart lanterns, augmented reality light shows, and digital temple fairs infuse the festival with a sense of technological advancement that keeps pace with the times. Innovations like "rotational holidays" and "intelligent logistics" enable people to fully embrace the Spring Festival through high-quality development. From the Spring Festival Gala to Chinese New Year movies, and from games and live streams to micro-dramas, the cultural life during the Spring Festival is vibrant and diverse. Beijing Daxing International Airport provides special care bracelets for passengers such as the elderly and pregnant women, while Shenzhen North Station introduces the "Easy Travel" service, allowing passengers to bid farewell to the hassle of carrying heavy luggage. Centered on people's livelihoods, Chinese modernization adds warmth

to our Spring Festival celebrations.

The Spring Festival of the Year of the Yi Si (according to the Chinese lunar calendar) will be the first "World Intangible Cultural Heritage Edition" Spring Festival. The Chinese New Year is also a "World's New Year," not merely as an impression but as a vivid reality. During the upcoming global "Spring Festival Week," if we stroll through Trafalgar Square in London, witness a grand parade in San Francisco, learn paper-cutting and sugar painting at the Frankfurt temple fair, shop for New Year goods at Singapore's Chinatown, or see thousands of lanterns illuminating the winter night in Nagasaki, and hear the melody of Chinese folk song Jasmine Flower, or Mo Li Hua, at a concert in Toronto, we are certain to deeply appreciate and feel the immense global influence of the Spring Festival today.

As of now, nearly 20 countries worldwide have already designated the Spring Festival as a public holiday, and the number of countries and regions celebrating the festival with traditional activities has reached nearly 200.

The Spring Festival has "flown into the homes of ordinary people" around the world, carrying profound significance in terms of civilization exchange. The Spring Festival is endearing and respectable. Chinese people always reserve the most solemn sense of ceremony and the best wishes for this festival. A couplet, a paper-cut, a reunion dinner - all embody the deep affection of the Chinese people and their aspirations for a happy life. When people from different cultural backgrounds are attracted to the dragon and lion dances, window paper-cuts, couplets and traditional Tang and Han costumes during the Spring Festival, they are, in fact, drawn by the Chinese people's enthusiasm for life. When people greet each other with "Happy Chinese New Year," despite potentially different cultural backgrounds, the shared sense of mutual respect resonates universally among humanity.

The Spring Festival possesses immense inclusiveness. Although customs vary from north to south, China and the world celebrate the same Spring Festival, and this precisely reflects the Chinese cultural concept of "harmony and unity." This concept manifests in our attitude toward different cultures and civilizations, advocating for living in harmony, harmony in diversity, and prioritizing cooperation.

The Spring Festival is increasingly embraced by the



world, revitalizing itself through inheritance, innovation, and mutual engagement with the global community. We have reason to believe that with the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and the expansion of its opening-up

policies, "visiting intangible cultural heritage activities and celebrating an authentic Chinese New Year" is bound to become a long-standing favorite on the "China Travel" menu.

From the long journey home to "sharing this moment from afar," the Spring Festival is increasingly becoming a "world moment," representing a culture and an ideology. The warmth gained from the companionship of friends and family during the New Year, the hope of welcoming a new year, and the aspiration for a harmonious world, are being shared with more people around the globe. May the cultural spirit

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Editor-in-Chief: S. Ali
Associate Editor: Afzal Butt
Email: editor@covert.com.pk
Phone/Fax : +92-51-2723419
690. Street 17 Block E Bahria Town phase 8, Islamabad, Pakistan



High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri felicitates Mohammad Yasin on appointment as UK's Trade Envoy to Pakistan



Covert Report

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week felicitated British-Pakistani member of Parliament Mohammad Yasin on appointment as UK's Trade Envoy to Pakistan. "Congratulations on your appointment as the UK's Trade Envoy to Pakistan, @YasinForBedford! Wishing you success in further strengthening trade ties between our two countries," the envoy posted on X. Earlier, Mohammad Yasin was appointed as UK's Trade Envoy to Pakistan. Labour's Yasin, who was elected in July 2024 general elections as member of Parliament for the third consecutive term from Bedford, is part of a new "Global Growth Team" appointed by Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds. In a statement, Yasin, who was born in Mirpur, AJK and graduated from Degree College in Mirpur before moving to the UK, termed it an honour for him to work as a trade envoy for Pakistan, a country where he was born. "I am deeply honoured to be appointed as the UK's Trade Envoy to Pakistan. This is an incredible opportunity to foster stronger

trade ties, promote investment, and unlock mutual growth between our two great nations". Yasin said that in his new role as a trade envoy, he's looking forward to working with the British High Commission in Islamabad as well as the Pakistani High Commission in the UK to further strengthen the economic ties between the UK and Pakistan. "Pakistan holds immense potential with a dynamic economy, thriving sectors, and talented people. I look forward to engaging with businesses, stakeholders, and leaders from both sides to build a prosperous future together". According to the recent statistics released by UK government, the total trade volume between UK and Pakistan was more than £4.4 billion in 2024. Total exports from UK to Pakistan were £2.1 billion while the imports from Pakistan stood at £2.3 billion. For Pakistan, United Kingdom is third biggest trading partner after USA and China while for the UK, Pakistan was its 49th largest trading partner in 2024. Yasin is hopeful that his appointment will make a positive impact on trade for both countries. "This new role complements that work by bringing real



benefits back home in the UK: supporting businesses, exploring export opportunities, and creating connections that open doors for growth and shared success. Looking forward to making a positive impact on both fronts". Yasin is among 32 parliamentarians who will work along with Business and Trade Secretary Reynolds as special trade envoys to drive UK exports and investment for various countries and regions around the globe to drive economic growth under its "Plan for Change".

Princess Tatiana of Greece breaks silence after Prince Nikolaos' engagement

NewsWire

Athens: Princess Tatiana of Greece has spoken out about her "painful" past year for the first time since her split from ex-husband Prince Nikolaos. The news of estranged royal couple's divorce was announced by the Greek royal family's office on April 19, 2024. "We wish to inform you of a significant and heartfelt decision made by TRH Prince Nikolaos and Princess Tatiana. After 14 years of marriage, they have chosen to amicably dissolve their union," the statement reads. But in recent days, it has been announced Prince Nikolaos is now engaged to Chrysi Vardinogianni and the two are planning to marry next month. Now, Princess Tatiana reflected on the past year, describing it as "difficult" and "filled with moments of uncertainty and pain. "I learned the importance of allowing oneself to feel, to grieve, to process one's emotions, and to move forward with compassion for oneself," she said in an emotional interview with Tovima. The Princess continued, "Through these challenges, I

understood that while we cannot control what happens to us, we can choose how we react. I move forward with hope, knowing that even in the darkest moments there is always light and the opportunity to grow." "Life's challenges remind me how important it is to endure, to hope, to have faith in the power of the human spirit," she added. Later on, Princess Tatiana shared the interview on Instagram, acknowledging that it was written "a few weeks back" but adding, "Sometimes before moving forward we need to take a step back." Princess Tatiana married Nikolaos in an extravagant ceremony in 2010, with the couple known as the darlings of Greek society.



Ambassador Mumtaz Zahra Baloch holds meeting with Director Asia Benoit Guidee

NewsWire

Islamabad: Pakistan Ambassador to France Mumtaz Zahra Baloch this week held a meeting with Director Asia Benoit Guidee at the French Foreign Office. "They discussed a wide range of bilateral and international issues. Agreed to further strengthen Pakistan-France relations and enhance bilateral cooperation and dialogue," a post on X said.



Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad meets Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee

Covert Report

Islamabad: Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Alternate Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN met with Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Africa at the UN headquarters this week.



Their discussion focused on African issues on the agenda of the Security Council; imperative of a coordinated, comprehensive and collective approach for durable peace and stability; conflict prevention and peace-keeping as well as reaffirmation of Pakistan's continued strong support and active role.

China is time-tested friend of Pakistan: Umar Rehman Malik



Abdullah Jan Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week said that China is a time-tested friend of Pakistan.

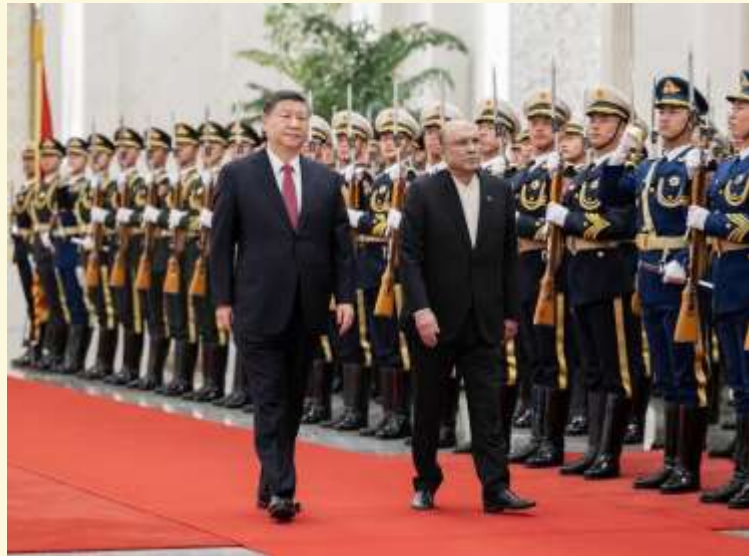
"Heartfelt wishes to the great people of China for a prosperous and joyous New Year 2025. As we step into the Year of the Snake, may this year bring blessings of success, harmony, and well-being to

your nation," he posted on X. Thw PPP leader added: "Pakistan greatly values its time-tested friendship with China and looks forward to 2025 as a year where our Pak-China relations will be further strengthened, paving the way for greater cooperation, mutual prosperity, and shared progress." Lunar New Year — which includes Chinese New Year, Seollal in Korea, Tet in Vietnam and more — began on January 29, kicking off more than two weeks of parties, customs and copious feasts. The holiday, also known as the Spring Festival, celebrates the arrival of spring

More specifically, this year is that of the wood snake, with the wood element holding profound meaning across the three major organized Chinese religions. In Daoism, the wood is a sign of returning to one's natural state or true nature, while in Confucianism it symbolizes becoming a more polished person. In Buddhism, it's associated with letting go for growth. The positive qualities attached to the snake are anchored in two folklore tales, Lee explained. In the story of the creation of the Chinese zodiac, the snake was once a four-legged, happy creature who became angry after other animals isolated him because of his appearance. Blaming the Jade Emperor for creating him that way, the snake's anger morphed into physiological changes, like growing fangs, and prompted him to snap at the other creatures. Word reached the Jade Emperor, who punished him by taking away his legs. The heavenly ruler promised



tion against the other animals, which would eventually dictate the order of the zodiac, the snake could win a prize and potentially get his legs back. Though the snake didn't win, he placed sixth, impressing the emperor with his perseverance and dedication. The ruler made him one of the 12 animals of the zodiac. The race changed the snake's path in other ways, too.



and the start of a fresh year based on the Chinese lunisolar calendar. that if the snake won a race competi-



ECB President confident in Bulgaria's Eurozone progress



NewsWire

Sofia: Bulgaria has made progress in meeting the convergence criteria for joining the eurozone, according to European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde. Speaking at a news conference, she noted that the assessment primarily falls under the European Commission's jurisdiction but emphasized that the process in Bulgaria is advancing. Lagarde highlighted that the ECB's role is limited to evaluating inflation convergence while also monitoring fiscal position and sustainability. Based on discussions with Bulgarian authorities, she expressed confidence that the country is on the right track. At the press conference following the ECB meeting, Lagarde announced that the central bank had unanimously decided to cut its three key interest rates by 25 basis points. She stressed that there was no debate over the appropriateness of the decision, which had been put forward by ECB Chief Economist Philip Lane. Lagarde also clarified that the Governing Council had not considered a larger 50-basis-point reduction. She reiterated that the ECB's monetary and interest rate policy remains in constrained financial conditions and cautioned that it was too early to discuss ending the rate-

cutting cycle. Future decisions on monetary policy, she said, would depend on economic data gathered in the coming weeks and months. Lagarde pointed out that the eurozone economy remains weak in the short term, citing fragile consumer confidence and declining output. Although household incomes have risen in real terms, Lagarde noted that consumers have not yet been sufficiently encouraged to increase spending. She remained optimistic about a potential recovery, citing the solid labor market, low unemployment, and expectations of improved working conditions and higher incomes, which could strengthen consumer confidence and spending. More accessible credit should also support consumption and investment, while exports could contribute to growth—provided that trade tensions do not escalate. However, Lagarde warned that increased global trade frictions could hamper eurozone growth by slowing exports and weakening the broader economy. She also said that inflation projections remain uncertain due to ongoing geopolitical tensions, including the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, which could drive up energy prices. The ECB expects inflation to fluctuate in the short term before stabilizing around its 2% target over the medium term. Discussing tariffs, Lagarde cautioned that their introduc-

tion could have a negative global impact. She dismissed the idea of imposing tariffs as "completely unrealistic," arguing that such a move would only heighten economic uncertainty. She also pointed out that the effects of tariff adjustments would depend on various factors, including whether they are applied universally or at differ-

ent rates across countries. Additionally, she warned of potential trade diversions and the risk of retaliatory measures from affected nations. Towards the end of the press conference, Lagarde expressed confidence that none of the central banks

within the ECB's General Council would hold bitcoin as part of their foreign exchange reserves. She emphasized that reserves should be "liquid, safe, and secure" and should not be associated with risks such as money laundering or other criminal activities.



A German cyclist's journey through Pakistan for peace

Covert Report

Taxila: Frank Zak, a 49-year-old cyclist from Germany, is currently on a global cycling expedition, making his way through Pakistan. According to Zak, his journey is an effort to experience diverse cultures up close and spread a message of global peace. Zak began his journey from Germany on August 30, 2020, traversing multiple countries before entering Pakistan via the Wagah border after crossing India.

He revealed that he draws inspiration from the legendary traveller Ibn Battuta and aspires to follow in his footsteps by exploring the world. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call Frank Zak the Ibn Battuta of the modern era. The renowned Moroccan explorer, born in 1304, covered an astonishing 75,000 miles over 28 years, visiting regions that include present-day Pakistan, India, Iran, Syria, Tunisia, the East Indies, Russia, Egypt,

Damascus, Turkey, Africa, Palestine, Jerusalem, and China. Ibn Battuta documented his travels in *Aja'ib al-Asfar fi Gharab al-Aqdar* ("Wonders of Travel in Strange Lands"). Like his inspiration, Frank Zak is also chronicling his adventures. He has already penned a book titled *Boundless: My Long Path to Inner Peace*, spanning 349 pages, and is working on another travelogue based on his ongoing journey. During his travels across Turkey, Bangladesh, Iran, and India, Zak encountered



diverse civilisations, cultures, and religions. However, he says the hospitality he received in Pakistan stands out as the most memorable. Upon his arrival, locals gave him a warm welcome, leaving him deeply impressed by their generosity. Zak is eager to explore Pakistan's culture and natural beauty. He travels with a specially equipped bicycle that carries everything he needs - camping gear, cooking essentials, and other necessities, essentially making his bike his mobile home. After Pakistan, he plans to continue his journey to Japan, spreading a message of peace, love, and cultural harmony.

Portugal might grant citizenship to stateless people after 3 years of residency under new proposal



News wire
Lisbon : Portugal's green political party, Livre, has proposed to grant Portuguese nationality to stateless people who have been residing in Portugal for at least three years, provided they have sufficient knowledge of the Portuguese language and don't pose a risk to national security.

The bill proposed by Livre was discussed in the Parliament on January 30, Schengen.News reports. Individuals born in Portuguese territory as well as on board a ship flying the Portuguese flag or an aircraft registered in national territory be considered Portuguese, provided they do not have another nationality.

Based on the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the law affects people born in the former colonies who reached Portugal during the wars of independence as well as those who failed to retain Portuguese nationality and children and young people who arrived in this country without documentation and in many cases unaccompanied by adults. The director of the Legal Department

of the Portuguese Council for Refugees, Cláudia Pedrosa, told Jornal de Noticias that the identified stateless people entering Portugal come from Palestine, Iraq, and Western Sahara. Every individual has the right to have a nationality and that the absence of this link has a serious and lasting impact on people, who are often subject to serious human rights violations.

In 2023, the Parliament of Portugal adopted a law that introduces the definition of a stateless person and recognises that stateless persons are entitled to a travel document and statelessness status. Several parts of the Asylum Act and Immigration Act were updated through Law No. 41/2023. However, further legislation must be approved to create a

process for determining statelessness, safeguards for applicants as well as the rights granted upon recognition of statelessness status. Under Law No. 37/81 provided in the Official Gazette, "new-born children who have been exposed in Portuguese territory shall be presumed to have been born in Portuguese territory, unless there is proof to the contrary." The same emphasises that the government of Portugal shall grant nationality by naturalisation to minors born in this country, children of foreigners aged 16 who fulfil some requirements, among them have one of the parents Portugal residents for at least five years, one of the parents has a legal residence in Portugal and the minor has attended at least one year of pre-school or basic, secondary or vocational education.



PM Shehbaz Sharif, Ambassador Akamatsu Shuichi discuss friendship



Pakistan's desire to further strengthen trade and investment cooperation with Japan. The ambassador of Japan reiterated his country's commitment to

supporting Pakistan's development goals and promoting bilateral cooperation in various fields. While observing that last year Japan had celebrated 70 years of

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to Pakistan, the ambassador said Japan was keen to continue its partnership in Pakistan's development.

Celina Ali Islamabad: Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan Akamatsu Shuichi, paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the Prime Minister House on Monday and discussed matters of mutual interest. During the meeting, the Prime Minister said Pakistan and Japan

enjoyed friendly ties, which was evident by the tremendous goodwill that existed among the people of both countries towards each other. He recalled the excellent history of bilateral cooperation and appreciated Japan's support for Pakistan's economic and industrial development efforts. The Prime Minister expressed



Gentry Beach announces multi-billion dollar investment in Pakistan's luxury real estate

Celina Ali Islamabad: Gentry Beach, a leading international investor from the US, has announced plans for a multi-billion-dollar investment in Pakistan's luxury real estate sector through his holding company, White Bridge Real Estate. The company is set to develop ultra-luxury properties in Islamabad and Karachi, including high-rise landmarks and exclusive

mixed-use developments, while actively exploring opportunities to bring renowned international brands to Pakistan. During his visit to Pakistan, Gentry Beach engaged with government officials, business leaders, and key stakeholders, highlighting the enormous potential of Pakistan's real estate sector. His vision is to introduce world-class residential, commercial, and hos-

pitality projects, setting new benchmarks for luxury, sustainability, and architectural excellence. "We see Pakistan as a high-growth market with massive untapped potential in luxury real estate. Through White Bridge Real Estate, we are prepared to invest in and develop landmark projects that meet global standards. The scale of investment over time could reach billions of dollars, as we introduce interna-



tional expertise, brands, and cutting-edge designs to Islamabad and Karachi," said Gentry Beach. White Bridge Real Estate, under Gentry Beach's leadership, is already in discussions with leading global luxury brands and hospitality groups to establish their presence in Pakistan. The company's developments will focus on high-end residences, commercial towers, and branded real estate, offering state-of-the-art amenities and unparalleled lifestyle experiences. A representative from White Bridge Real Estate added, "This investment marks a turning point for Pakistan's real estate

sector. By introducing iconic, globally recognized luxury brands and world-class infrastructure, we aim to make Islamabad and Karachi premier destinations for international investors, high-net-worth individuals, and luxury seekers." With this unprecedented investment potential, White Bridge Real Estate is set to redefine Pakistan's urban landscape, unlocking new opportunities in premium real estate, tourism, and commercial development. Further announcements regarding flagship projects, international partnerships, and groundbreaking timelines are expected in the coming months.

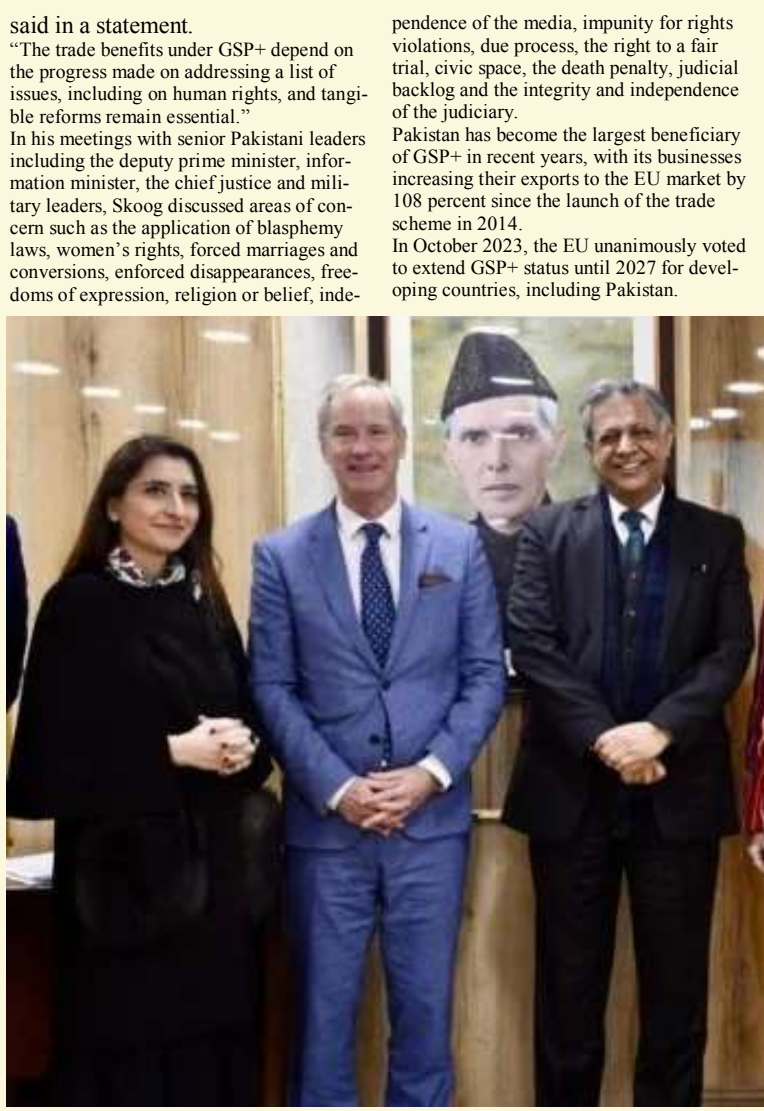
EU warns Pakistan GSP+ status dependent on 'list of issues,' including human rights



Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan, Dr Riina Kionka

Celina Ali said in a statement. "The trade benefits under GSP+ depend on the progress made on addressing a list of issues, including on human rights, and tangible reforms remain essential." In his meetings with senior Pakistani leaders including the deputy prime minister, information minister, the chief justice and military leaders, Skoog discussed areas of concern such as the application of blasphemy laws, women's rights, forced marriages and conversions, enforced disappearances, freedoms of expression, religion or belief, independence of the media, impunity for rights violations, due process, the right to a fair trial, civic space, the death penalty, judicial backlog and the integrity and independence of the judiciary. Pakistan has become the largest beneficiary of GSP+ in recent years, with its businesses increasing their exports to the EU market by 108 percent since the launch of the trade scheme in 2014. In October 2023, the EU unanimously voted to extend GSP+ status until 2027 for developing countries, including Pakistan.

Islamabad: The European Union's mission in Islamabad this week reminded Pakistan that trade benefits it received under the GSP+ scheme depended on progress the country made on addressing a list of issues, including human rights, saying "tangible" efforts remained essential. The statement came after a week-long visit to Pakistan by Ambassador Olof Skoog, EU Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR), to engage the country on human and labor rights issues and to discuss Pakistan's plans to address them, including in view of the ongoing assessment under the GSP+ trade scheme. The GSP+ scheme grants beneficiary countries' exports duty-free access to the European market in exchange for voluntarily agreeing to implement 27 international core conventions, including on human and civil rights. Multiple developments on the human rights front have raised concerns over Pakistan's GSP+ status in recent weeks. The EU last month openly criticized Pakistan for sentencing over 80 civilians in army courts after charging them for anti-government riots in May 2023 in which military installations were attacked, saying it was "inconsistent" with Pakistan's international obligations. This week, the country's GSP+ status was once more in the spotlight after parliament passed a controversial cybercrime law that journalists and digital rights activists have widely said aims to crackdown against dissent on social media platforms. The government denies this. "As we approach the midterm of the current monitoring cycle, we encourage Pakistan to continue on its reform path as it prepares for reapplication under the upcoming new GSP+ regulation," the EU mission in Islamabad



Pakistan may suffer \$1.2tr climate losses by 2050: Martin Dawson

British Deputy Head of Mission calls for urgent action



Celina Ali
Islamabad: British Deputy Head of Mission Martin Dawson said this week that if Pakistan fails to take urgent action to curb the impact of climate change, it could face losses of up to \$1.2 trillion by 2050. Speaking at the launch ceremony of the '60th Wildlife Photographer of the Year' exhibition at the British Council Karachi on Friday, the envoy said that the damage

posed by climate change to the lives and livelihoods was immeasurable. "To adapt to climate change's effects, climate finance is essential," Dawson said during the event being held under the aegis of the Natural History Museum, London.

In this regard, he said, the United Kingdom (UK) had recently launched its Climate Finance programme, which would help mobilise half a billion people in climate finance and invest in new climate-friendly technologies, business models and private sector solutions. Through its climate programmes, he said, the UK government had helped over 1.5 million people increase their resilience against extreme climate events. "We're working with climate-vulnerable communities in Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to help them improve their water systems." This is the first time, photo exhibitions of the 'Wildlife Photographer of the Year' are being held in Pakistan. After Karachi, a similar exhibition would be held in Lahore. Supported by the Natural History Museum in London, it is the longest-running and most prestigious competition of its kind and has received around 60,000 entries in

its 60th year. Each year, 100 wildlife photographs are selected for their originality, narrative and demonstration of ethical practice. The competition was founded in 1965 for the BBC Wildlife Magazine, then called Animals. The competition exhibits the very best of nature photography and is used to empower people wanting to protect the planet. "This competition and these photographs are reminders of the world's beauty and that we must protect it. That's a mission close to the UK's heart," Dawson said. He said that the UK government led the Darwin Initiative, a grants scheme that helped conserve biodiversity worldwide and support the communities that live alongside areas with biodiversity through locally led projects. He added that the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund was another initiative supported by the UK government that aimed at protecting biodiversity. He said that globally, these initiatives had prevented over 400,000 hectares of ecosystem from being destroyed. "And we're protecting 2.7 million hectares of land with sustainable management practices."

The British envoy remarked that no other country could have been a better place to celebrate and showcase wildlife photography than Pakistan. "From the snow leopard who trails the north of the country to the hog deer here in Sindh, Pakistan's biodiversity is breathtaking, but it's also under threat," he asserted. Once found widely amongst the swamp areas and rivers in the forests of Sindh, he said, the hog deer had now lost much of its habitat to floods. "And while they are once the king of the mountains, there are now only 4,000 snow leopards left in the wild," he remarked, adding that it had been estimated that only 200 to 400 snow leopards, who were otherwise known for surviving tough conditions, were left in Pakistan. "Their fur, bones, and other body parts are highly sought after in the illegal wildlife trade. Additionally, their homes are being destroyed by construction, farming, rising temperatures, and extreme weather," Dawson said. Pakistan's biodiversity, he said, had decreased by 69% over the last 50 years or so from 1970 to 2022, while Karachi's coastline had seen 200 hectares of mangrove forests lost between 2010 and 2022 alone. "We are not just in a climate crisis, but a nature crisis as well," he said.



“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” - John Dewey

“Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children.” - Walt Disney

Italy, Saudi Arabia ink partnership deals worth \$10 billion

Covert Report

Milan: Italy this week signed agreements worth around \$10 billion with Saudi Arabia as part of a strengthened strategic partnership, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said after meeting Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Among the deals, Italy's credit export agency SACE said it would provide loan guarantees worth 3 billion dollars for Saudi Arabia's NEOM real estate project. The deal had already been reported on in November.

NEOM, a Red Sea urban and industrial development that is due to house roughly nine million people, is central to bin Salman's Vision 2030 plan to create new sources of growth beyond oil.

After talks with the de facto Saudi ruler in the Saudi oasis city of Al-Ula on Sunday, Meloni cited infrastructure, energy, defence, sport, entertainment and tourism as areas where bilateral cooperation could become "stronger, more effective and deeper".

SACE also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Saudi Electricity Company (5110.SE), opens new tab to provide credit guarantees for green projects as well as engineering, procurement and construction activities. Italian gas grid operator Snam (SRG.MI), opens new tab signed a deal with ACWA Power (2082.SE), opens new tab to explore partnerships and joint investments on the supply of green hydrogen to Europe, while Italian defence group Leonardo (LDOF.MI), opens new tab signed an MoU to boost cooperation with Saudi partners in aerospace and defence.

Italian electrode maker Industrie De Nora (DNR.MI), opens new tab said on Monday it inked an agreement with ACWA Power to study, develop and apply new solutions for water desalination.

De Nora also signed a deal with Saudi Water Authority, the government agency that regulates and oversees the water sector, to work on three pilot projects.

Meloni and bin Salman also discussed a "just and lasting peace in Ukraine", consolidating the ceasefire in Gaza, supporting post-war reconstruction efforts in Syria and helping Lebanon, Meloni's office said in a statement.

Speaking on Monday from Bahrain, Meloni said she backed Saudi Arabia joining the GCAP jet fighter programme, adding, however, that this would take some time.



2024, a record year for international tourism in France

Newsire

Paris: The ministry of economy this week announced a record year 2024 for French tourism, due to the growth of international visits. The 2024 attendance and revenue figures bear show that over 100 million international visitors came to France (+2 million), generating €71 billion in international revenue (+12%). An encouraging and promising balance sheet for 2025.

With the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the reopening of Notre-Dame de Paris, the 80 years of the Landing, "the year 2024 has been incredible and exceptional for France". As the French Minister in charge of tourism puts, "these figures confirm our position as leading global destination, and we must build on this year's results that improve France's image worldwide".

Indeed, for France the year 2024 has been rich. The year has been marked by sports and cultural events and boosted international markets. French tourism benefitted from "strong dynamism and an exceptional showcase throughout the world". This taste generated concrete results: France welcomed more than 100 million international tourists. In terms of attendance, international attendance is growing, mostly pushed by customers from Northern Europe and the United States. As the ministry puts, North America countries "are still, since the end of the pandemic, the engines of long-haul customers". With a 5% increase of nights spent, Americans became "a key customers group boosted by wide differences between economies and purchasing power". In addition, "Asian countries experimented a

boost in terms of nights spent in 2024", particularly China (+40%) and Japan (+20%). Finally, India, Mexico, Canada and South Korea are once again buoyant markets.

In terms of revenue, the Ministry in charge of tourism celebrates "the highest ever" international revenue, "a record reaching 71 billion euros" a figure up by 12% compared with 2023, with a positive Travel item in the balance of payments over 15 billion euros (difference between revenue generated by foreign traveller in France and spending of the French abroad). Five countries are the main "revenue providers" for France: Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and the United States, up from 5% to 15% compared with 2023. France is still the leading destination for Belgians. However, says the ministry, "though Asian markets continue their pickup started two years ago, performance in revenue is still inferior to those in 2019" (-60% for China, and -30% for Japan).

The trend continued throughout the year, with a significant tourism pickup registered for the late year holidays, boosted by ski stations and the increase of international attendance experimenting a +10% growth compared with last year. This uptum "can be attributed to this unprecedented and exceptional year for France, which considerably boosted its appeal on the international stage, as well as to the good snow conditions during the period". International attendance was also up sharply during this period, with European and long-haul customers showing good momentum across the board (rural, coastal, urban and mountain). English customers are on the increase, as well as

Italian, Swiss, Spanish, Dutch and German customers (all up sharply). "Far-away markets" such as Japan, Australia and China are also up, while "the United States market is stable and Canada is receding".

According to the French Ministry of the Economy, the "first estimates drawn from the field" show that initial trends for French tourism in the first quarter of 2025 are very favourable. For example, international air arrivals are up by 10% over the first three weeks of the year compared with last year, with strong performances from Americans (+15%), Brazilians and Indians (+7%) and Chinese (+16%). More specifically, the Paris dynamic is still going strong, boosted



by a post-Olympic Games period and the reopening of Notre-Dame: more than seven points in hotel occupancy rates are expected in January 2025, and four points ahead in terms of booking rates for next February.

