

Italy aims for 2029 EU entry for Western Balkans **NewsWire**

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His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan meets President of Portugal **NewsWire**

Lisbon: His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan, the 50th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, met with His Excellency Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of Portugal, at the Palácio de Belém this week. This was His Highness's first official meeting with the President following his accession

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AI making presence felt in China like never before

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: A pack of 10 robot dogs leaped, spun and waded in perfect harmony to a traditional dance song during China Media Group's 2025 Intangible Cultural Heritage Gala on January 31, wowing audiences with their synchronized moves. The electrifying performance quickly ignited social media, where impressed users dubbed them "the most dedicated dance crew" and praised the fusion of cultural heritage and futuristic technology. The dancing Lite3 models belong to the agile intelligent robot dog series developed by DEEP Robotics,

based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. Capable of carrying payloads up to 7.5 kilograms with a 5-kilometer operational range and continuous motion of up to two hours, these robots can perform complex maneuvers such as high jumps and front flips. "Our proprietary joint modules, control systems and advanced algorithms enable unprecedented motion capabilities," said Lin Yi, the company's research and development manager. Users can develop additional training programs based on intelligent algorithms, including deep learning and reinforcement learning. Artificial intelligence is entering Chinese house-

holds like never before, seamlessly integrating into both daily life and entertainment. Dressed in colorful jackets, a group of humanoid robots were a highlight of this year's Spring Festival gala, broadcast on Chinese New Year's Eve. Sixteen robots danced the yangko, a traditional folk dance, alongside human performers. After the show, a "robot grandmother" was gently escorted offstage by dancers — a moment that quickly went viral on social media. Meanwhile, with its vast knowledge, eloquent expression and playful wit, DeepSeek, an AI-powered chatbot, has captivated users of all ages.

"I felt powerful after having a good command of DeepSeek," said a retiree surnamed Ma, who downloaded the open-source tool following his son's recommendation.

Beyond virtual interactions, AI is increasingly present in daily life, enhancing real-world experiences. Whether at temple fairs or tourist attractions, AI is replacing servers and trainers, making candy figurines, playing games, carrying heavy loads, delivering goods and even assisting climbers.

This year's Spring Festival was a celebration of AI-driven surprises, with each innovation sparking excitement. Social media is buzzing with users sharing their favorite high-tech experiences, making this a uniquely futuristic Chinese New Year.

"Wow! No more video calls for New Year greetings!" said a tech worker surnamed Li, who uploaded a photo to the Baidu App, entered prompts like "firecrackers on Mars" and "dragon dance on the Forbidden City rooftop," and added a festive message. In just over a minute, AI created a digital greeting card, making the process

effortless.

AI's mainstream success is driven by two key factors — practical application and strong technology. The key to widespread adoption is aligning technological advancements with real-world needs, according to Baidu chairman and CEO Robin Li.

"The success of AI is measured not by lab-based computing power, but by its impact on everyday users," Li said. "Advanced technologies must be integrated into daily life, making them accessible to all."

China's AI industry ecosystem spans chips, algorithms, data, platforms and applications. More than 4,500 companies are involved, with the core industry reaching a scale of nearly 600 billion yuan (\$82.1 billion). In the past year alone, 238 new generative AI products have been registered.

Demand for large AI models continues to grow. On Feb 2, DeepSeek topped app markets in 140 regions, with daily active users exceeding 30 million. By last November, Baidu's ERNIE had reached over 1.5 billion daily calls, a 30-fold increase from the previous year, while ByteDance's Doubao saw daily token usage rise 33-fold by December 2024 after its launch in May 2024.

Omdia, a consultancy focused on the tech industry, forecasts that China's generative AI market will grow 5.5 times over the next five years. Looking ahead, DeepSeek continues to expand its ecosystem, driving growth across the AI industry. Major cloud service providers, including Huawei Cloud, Tencent Cloud, Alibaba Cloud and Baidu AI Cloud, have integrated DeepSeek's large models into their platforms.



Petition calling for Denmark to buy California reaches 200,000 signatures



Ambassador of Denmark to Pakistan His Excellency Jakob Linnar

Covert Report

Copenhagen: A satirical counteroffer to President Donald Trump's proposal to buy Greenland has popped in the form of a petition that suggests that Denmark should buy California. More than 200,000 people have signed up for the plan, which says the Scandinavian country needs "more sunshine, palm trees, and roller skates." "Make California Great Again," reads the top of the petition website, replacing some English letters with Danish ones. Among the listed "supporters" of the petition are the ancient Scandinavian king Sven the Viking, Karen from accounting and Lars Ulrich, the Danish drummer and founding member of the band Metallica. "Imagine swapping your rain boots for flip-flops," the petition says, perhaps cognizant of the fact that during the dark winter months Denmark gets just an hour of sunlight a day. By contrast, California gets 300 days of sunshine a year. As part of the buyout plan, the petition — launched on the website denmarkification.com — has set a crowdfunding goal of \$1 trillion, "give or take a few billion," and a target of 500,000 signatures. Denmark's Foreign Affairs Ministry and California Gov. Gavin Newsom's office did not immediately respond to requests for comment. And at the bottom of the petition's website, which does not mention Greenland, is a message reading, "Disclaimer: This campaign is 100% real... in our dreams." The United States has considered buying Greenland at least twice, in 1867 and again in 1946, when President Harry S. Truman proposed purchasing it for \$100 million. Trump has suggested several times that the United States should buy Greenland, the largest island in the world, which sits between the North Atlantic Ocean and the Arctic Ocean and is technically part of North America. It has been under Denmark's control since the 14th century,

but it became a self-governing territory in 1979. Denmark has repeatedly rejected his overtures, insisting that Greenland is not for sale. Last week, the Danish Parliament passed a bill to prevent political parties in the country from receiving foreign or anonymous contributions. The bill "must be seen in light of the geopolitical interests in Greenland and the current situation where representatives of an allied great power have expressed interest in taking over and controlling Greenland," the document said. While there has been a popular and long-standing movement calling for independence from Denmark in Greenland, most of the island's 56,000 inhabitants — the majority from Inuit tribes — appear to agree that it is not for sale. "Greenland is for the Greenlandic people. We do not want to be Danish; we do not want to be American," the territory's prime minister, Múte B. Egede, said last month. Xávier Dutoit, "chief pastry officer" of the campaign, said the idea for the petition came to him one night in the Philippines, where he was having a beer with some friends. "While on vacation, I was at a bar with some friends, and overheard a rather loud American tourist discussing Donald Trump's bid to buy Greenland from Denmark," he wrote in an email. "That American didn't seem to grasp how unhinged and absurd it was for any country's President — especially in a stable democracy that the USA claims to be — to offer or threaten to take over another sovereign country's territory."

The following morning, he wrote, he pulled together a "funny campaign website" that "was fully intended to entertain my friends for a few days." Instead, it went viral. The campaign began to have explosive growth Tuesday, Dutoit said, and it's now getting up to 1,000 new signatures an hour. "We've been especially touched by lots of warm and enthusiastic support from Californians — and laughed when folks from other parts of the US raised their hand asking to have their state purchased by Denmark!" he wrote. "It seems that a lot of people needed this little bit of fun and levity, at a time when much of the public discourse is increasingly tense and worrying."



Aseefa Bhutto only MNA not receiving salary

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, a member of the National Assembly and prominent leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), has become the only lawmaker among 314 members to refuse her monthly salary. The daughter of President Asif Ali Zardari and sister of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari was elected unopposed from NA-207.

Since taking office as a Member of National Assembly (MNA) last year, Aseefa has declined to accept any government pay. In June 2024, just two months after her swearing-in, Aseefa announced that she would not be taking any salary or allowances. She has been also active in development work.

Last month, the First Lady inaugurated the groundbreaking ceremony for the People's School, a transformative educational initiative aimed at fostering quality education and youth empowerment. The SPWT, founded by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto in February 1987, continues with her legacy of uplifting communities through education and healthcare.



The People's School will be constructed in Karachi and is designed to provide a state-of-the-art educational environment. Under the first phase, the project will include primary and secondary school facilities, an administrative block, ensuring a modern and holistic learning experience for students.

Henan's renewable energy output exceeds 30m kilowatts



Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: At 11:31 AM on February 7, Henan's renewable energy output hit a record high of 30.77 million kilowatts, including 24.4 million from photovoltaic power and 6.37 million from wind power, accounting for 51.1% of the province's total electricity load at that moment. According to the State Grid Henan Electric Power Company, this marks an increase of 1.4 million kilowatts compared to the previous record of 29.37 million kilowatts on August 11, 2024.

Henan's new record high in renewable energy output is primarily driven by the rapid growth in installed capacity of renewable energy. By the end of January this year, Henan's renewable energy installed capacity has reached 68.77 million kilowatts, an increase of 8.6 million kilowatts year-on-year, replacing coal-fired power as the province's largest energy source. Notably, the distributed photovoltaic capacity grew by 6.3 million kilowatts, remaining the main contributor.



1,000 Pakistani agricultural graduates to get advanced training in China

Gwadar Pro

Islamabad: Federal Minister for National Food Security & Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain, this week chaired a high-level meeting to review progress on Prime Minister's Initiative for Short-Term Training of 1,000 Agricultural Graduates in China. The initiative aims to enhance the skills of young professionals in nine priority areas of modern agriculture through three- and six-month training programs at leading Chinese institutions. The first batch of 300 students is set to depart for China in March, 2025, followed by a second batch, while the selection process for the final 300 students is under-

way. The training will be conducted at Northwest Agriculture & Forestry University and Yangling Vocational & Technical College, Shaanxi Province, China. During the meeting, Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain emphasized the need to speed up the dispatch process and ensure maximum facilitation for students. The ministry is actively coordinating with Chinese authorities, stakeholders, and financial institutions to streamline logistical arrangements. The Pakistani government has ensured merit-based selection,

with 10% additional quota for students

from Balochistan.

The meeting also discussed the Joint



Ambassador Hashmi holds meeting with Vice Administrator CNSA



NewsWire

Beijing: Pakistan Ambassador to China, Khalil Hashmi met with Vice Administrator of China National Space Administration, Bian Zhigang who called on him at the Pakistan Embassy here this week. The two sides reviewed, with satisfaction, Pak-China robust space cooperation including the milestones achieved in 2024.

Ambassador Hashmi said that he was looking ahead to further strengthening this partnership. "We reviewed, with satisfaction, our robust space cooperation including the milestones achieved in 2024. Looking ahead to further strengthening this partnership," Ambassador Hashmi posted on X formerly known as Twitter.



Italy aims for 2029 EU entry for Western Balkans



Italian Ambassador to Pakistan, Marilina Armellin



Newsire
Rome: Foreign Minister Tajani this week proposed simplifying the process, enhancing gradual integration, and improving strategic communication. The plan has been presented to EU officials and Balkan representatives, emphasising Rome's commitment to regional stability Accelerating EU accession. At a ministerial meeting in Rome on Monday, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani presented a national position paper outlining concrete proposals to accelerate the EU accession process for candidate countries, including those from the Western Balkans. The Italian proposal focuses on three key areas: gradual integration in strategic sectors such as cybersecurity, public administration reform, migration management, and business cooperation; simplification of the accession process to avoid unnecessary delays and political deadlocks; and strategic communication to highlight the benefits of EU integration for local populations. Tajani presented Italy's plan during bilateral meetings to Kaja Kallas, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Marta Kos, the European Commissioner for Enlargement. The proposal was also shared with ministerial representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Austria, Croatia, Greece, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Tajani's timeline for accession. The discussions emphasised Italy's commitment to regional stability and the importance of expediting EU membership for these countries. "We are in favour of admitting all candidate countries before 2030. Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, and North Macedonia have made significant progress, and I

believe 2029 is a realistic target," Tajani stated. "We also support Bosnia's accession, though it may require more time." The conclusions of the ministerial meeting

reiterated the priority given to the Balkans' EU integration. Trieste as a regional hub. During the

meeting, Tajani highlighted Trieste's strategic role as the primary port for the Western Balkans. "Trieste can serve as the main port of

reference for all the Balkans," he stated, underlining the need for infrastructure improvements to strengthen connections between Belgrade and Trieste.



To achieve 'Avocado Freedom,' US should find ways to open up more



avocados has skyrocketed, driven by their reputation as a "superfood" and the rise of health-conscious diets. But this price spike isn't just about supply and demand - it's also tied to Washington's tariff policies and closely tied to the US administration's recent renewed tariffs on steel and aluminum. Washington once again wields the tariff stick. It's being referred to as the Melt and Pour Requirement, which is a policy that requires steel to be made in North American blast furnaces and aluminum to be cast in North American smelters. In simpler terms, it's like a rule that says the steel has to be made in North America, and cannot be imported from other countries, such as China. This is akin to putting GPS trackers on the supply chain, ensuring even semi-finished Chinese steel processed in Mexico or Canada can't slip through. Under the new tariff policies, even seemingly unrelated products like avocados are caught in the crossfire. Ninety percent of avocados in the US come from Mexico, but the steel shelves they're stored on, the aluminum refrigerated trucks used to transport them, and even the tin-coated steel packaging all face higher costs due to the tariffs. These added expenses inevitably trickle down to consumers, making everyday items like avo-

cados more expensive. Reconstructing the supply chain for steel and aluminum disrupts global trade, and if more countries retaliate, this could escalate into a full-blown tariff war. The interconnected global trade system - where "I rely on you, and you rely on me" - is now being replaced by an "I sanction you, and you sanction me" cycle of retaliation. Everyone ends up worse off, battered and bruised in the process. Avocados in the American market are a good example of this. The US' intention is clear: to stop other countries from making more money off the US while ensuring the US makes more money off others. In theory, this means getting more countries to buy more American goods. However, in practice, the outcome of these unilateral tariffs is the opposite: more countries are forced to buy fewer American-made products. Instead of picking fights on the tariff battlefield and inviting retaliation from all sides, it makes more sense to figure out how to make American goods as desirable as Air Jordans in the Chinese market. The goal should be to make American products indispensable to Chinese consumers. Take Tesla's new energy storage mega-factory, which recently opened in China. Its products are likely to soon become hot commodities.

Perhaps we should take a leaf out of Starbucks' book, and use their "hidden menu" strategy to untangle this mess. The basic idea is to offer customers a menu that allows them to participate in creating their unique products. This satisfies their needs and turns them into loyal, repeat customers. China certainly has the financial capacity to buy American goods. The question is: Can you provide products that China actually wants to buy, and if so how? Solving trade imbalances boils down to answering this question: How can you get China to buy more American goods? This dynamic balancing act requires constant improvement and competition; perhaps more important is confidence in one's competitiveness. Americans should find ways to open up more. That's the key to help more American families to realize "Avocado Freedom." The writer is a senior editor with the People's Daily, and currently a senior fellow with the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at the Renmin University of China

Ding Gang

"Three dollars for one of these?!" I stared in disbelief at the avocado prices on my computer screen. Years ago, when I was working in New York, avocados were one of the cheapest fruits in the supermarket, selling for just 99 cents each. Looking at the price tags on e-commerce

platforms, I can suddenly understand why TikTok is full of darkly humorous hashtags like "Avocado Freedom." The term "Avocado Freedom" described the ability to buy avocados without worrying about the price - a luxury that now feels out of reach for many. Over the past decade, global demand for

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Canada stages a 'value-confused diplomacy'



of neighboring countries as the center of its foreign policy. Historically, Canada has suffered under Jacksonianism, and its experience should have given it a more rational and thorough understanding of its pros and cons than others. Yet, its current display of "naive syndrome" is truly astonishing. Ottawa attempts to use China as a bargaining chip in US-Canada dealings, failing to realize Canada's actual weight when placed on the scale - Washington's offer will likely leave Ottawa disappointed. For years, Canadian politicians have repeatedly followed the misguided logic of trading political favor for special treatment, and they are continuing down this erroneous path. To appease the US, Canada has wavered on the Huawei 5G issue, delaying its own technological transformation. It has blindly followed a China-containment policy in its "Indo-Pacific strategy," making itself a "disruptor" in the eyes of Asian nations. The Meng Wanzhou incident and the unilateral imposition of a 100 percent tariff on Chinese electric vehicles were blatant attempts to swear "oath of allegiance" to the US, severely damaging China-Canada relations. Now, once again playing the "China card" in an attempt to gain US favor, Canada further reinforces its image as a weak nation lacking strategic autonomy. Over the years, Canada's international reputation and credibility have deteriorated significantly, a trend that is inseparable from the short-sightedness and opportunism of its foreign policy.

the country to a pawn in America's geopolitical chess game, which shows that the country is actively dismantling its own international image. The worst effect of Canada's "group plea" is that, while suffering from unilateralism itself, it seeks to become a tool of unilateralism to reap benefits. Canada often claims to "oppose economic coercion," yet it recklessly stigmatizes and labels China, politicizes trade issues. This double standard effectively makes Canada an accomplice in undermining the global trade order and dismantling the foundation of the multilateral trade system. The illusion of gaining benefits by sacrificing its relationship with China actually serves to narrow Canada's path step by step. China, as the world's second-largest economy, has a strong trade foundation with Canada, and cooperation with China serves Canada's national interests. Viewing China as an "economic enemy" will not only fail to solve Canada's current problems but will also leave it in a more passive position on the international stage. Which direction Canada should take remains an unanswered question. But history repeatedly proves that building foreign policy on fantasies of great power will ultimately lead to painful consequences. Canada's way forward does not lie in the conference rooms of Washington, but in a strategic awakening in Ottawa. First, Canada must stop instrumentalizing China-related issues, and take an objective and rational attitude toward the common interests between China and Canada on a wide range of issues. The country should return to a rational and pragmatic diplomatic path, seeking true national interests in promoting multilateral cooperation and maintaining fair trade, rather than indulging in geopolitical confrontation.

Global Times

Canada, long known for championing "value-based diplomacy," recently staged a textbook example of "value-confused diplomacy." Amid persistent calls from the US "wanting" Canada as its 51st State and ongoing threats of tariffs, 13 Canadian premiers recently visited Washington for lobby. However, what drew particular attention was not the US-Canada relations, but their decision to play the "China card," hoping to paint the country as a "common economic enemy" in exchange for leniency from the US. It can be said that the country vividly demonstrated political opportunism, showcasing their

diplomatic naivety. Canada is currently facing significant external pressures, and with the country under a caretaker government and facing an impending election, the "premier delegation" to Washington was essentially a rather reluctant move. However, the fact that they collectively used the "China card" as their primary strategy and attempted to cater to the anti-China sentiments in the US to gain sympathy - reveals much about the political character and vision of certain Canadian politicians. They unhesitatingly prioritized short-term electoral gains over long-term strategic autonomy, and temporary lobbying opportunities over the

fundamental principles of international relations and diplomatic dignity, which will lead Canada deeper into the maze of national development and foreign policy. The core message conveyed to the US on this visit is simple: As long as the US continues to cooperate with Canada, Canada is willing to act as a "vanguard" against China. It must be said that Ottawa has both underestimated and overestimated itself. Some have referred to the current US foreign policy style as the Neo-Monroe Doctrine or Neo-Jacksonianism, which centers on taking the idea of "America First" to its extreme. It not only pursues the law of the jungle, "trade is justice," but also takes control

As a moderately developed nation with abundant natural resources and a stable economy, Canada has the capacity to pursue a more independent foreign policy on the global stage. From Lester Pearson's mediation in the Suez Canal crisis to Jean Chrétien's leadership in advancing the Ottawa Treaty, banning anti-personnel landmines, there are many examples showing Canadian politicians have played a constructive role within multilateral frameworks historically. However, today, some Canadian politicians willingly reduce

Global Times

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Committed to serve Pakistani community: High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri

Covert Report

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said this week that the Pakistan High Commission in Australia was committed to serve the Pakistani community.

“Ensuring the welfare of the Pakistani community in Australia remains our top-most priority,” the envoy posted on X. Earlier, Consul General Mr. Qamar Zaman visited Mr. Talah Javed in Plumpton after his recent attack with a metal pole, offering best wishes for his recovery on behalf of High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri. A court has issued AVO against attacker.

An international student recalled the terrifying moment he was allegedly beaten with a metal pole during a neighbourhood dispute.

A thud was heard as Mr Javed fell to the ground and was knocked unconscious after hitting his head against a car

parked in the driveway. The alleged attacker is seen walking away in CCTV as Mr Javed's friends rushed to his aid. Mr Javed suffered internal bleeding and was rushed to Nepean Hospital. He also required stitches to a gash to his head. 'He just (allegedly) slammed me with an iron rod and the next thing I know, I'm in hospital,' a shaken Mr Javed said. 'I'm like feeling dizzy and the pain and the headache, it's not going away. 'I'm still scared as that's not what I was expecting to happen in Sydney.' Mr Javad has been told by doctors that it could take him two months to fully recover.



Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad says developing nations strongly committed to inclusive social development



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan has said it hoped the UN's Second World Social Summit to be held in Doha later this year would be a "turning point" in stepping up financial and structural support for developing nations to achieve the goal of inclusive social development. On Feb. 26, 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 78/261, officially establishing the "World Social Summit" under the title "Second World Summit for Social Development." The summit, running from Nov. 4-6, will be a significant global event aimed at fostering inclusive social development and addressing key challenges to achieve well-being for all. It will serve as a platform for governments, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and other stakeholders to collaborate on creating policies and strategies that promote inclusivity, equity, and sustainability. "While we [developing nations] are strongly committed to inclusive social development, the financial and structural resources required

to achieve that are lacking," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Pakistan's Alternate Permanent Representative to the United Nations, said while speaking at the 63rd Session of the Commission on Social Development. "The Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha later this year must serve as a turning point. It must move beyond aspirations and deliver tangible outcomes to bridge the growing social divide." Ahmad said despite decades of international commitments to social progress, inequality remained widespread, pointing out that 65 percent of the world's population lived in countries where income disparities were growing while 57 percent people in these nations reported distrust in public policies, making social cohesion even harder to achieve. "We are conscious of how indispensable social cohesion is to achieving prosperity and sustainable development," Ahmad said, adding that Pakistan has prioritized poverty eradication, employment generation and social inclusion through national initiatives such as the Benazir

Income Support Program (BISP), the Prime Minister's Youth Program, micro-financing schemes, universal health coverage, and e-governance reforms aimed at improving public service delivery and economic stability. At the upcoming Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha, Ahmad called for stronger commitments to expanding social safety nets, greater support for labor rights, including minimum wage guarantees, protections for informal workers and equal pay policies, arguing that these measures were essential for sustainable economic development. The diplomat also stressed the need for greater transparency and accountability in governance, linking these to efforts to combat corruption, improve public service delivery and reform tax policies. Ahmad also called for an overhaul of the global financial system to make it more equitable, pressing for comprehensive debt relief for developing nations and the reallocation of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) toward social welfare programs.

Greece plans financial aid for border village relocation

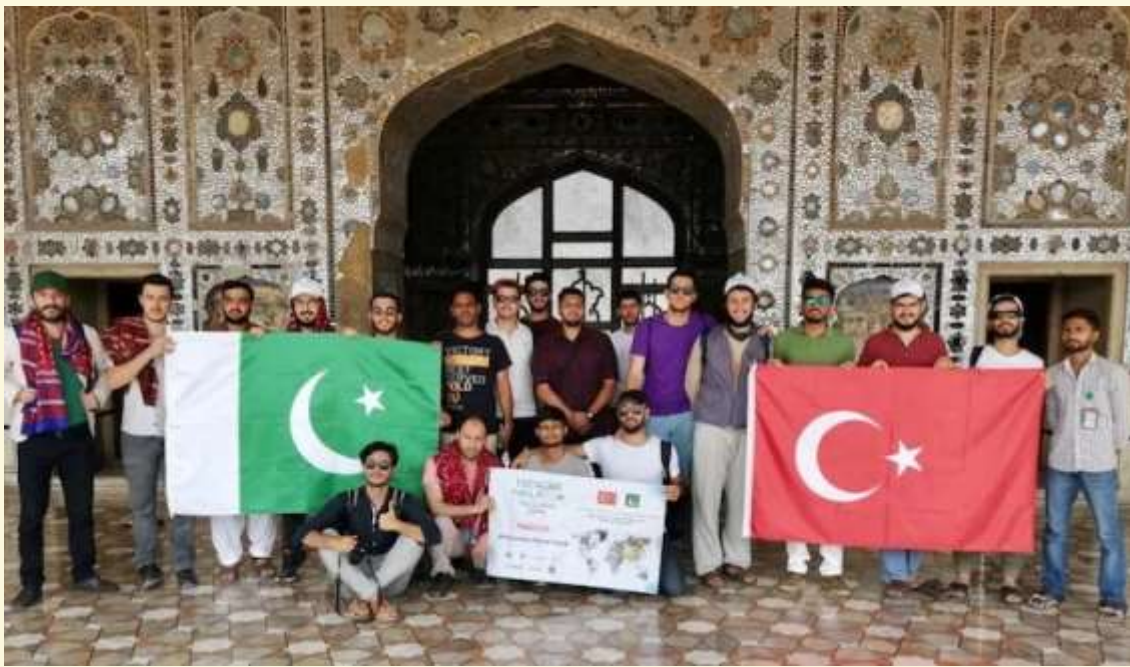


Covert Report

Athens: According to a proposed legislative measure, Greece plans to offer financial incentives to citizens who choose to live in villages along the Evros River, which marks the border with Türkiye. Social Cohesion and Family Affairs Minister Sofia Zacharaki has introduced a bill to the parliament that envisages a 10,000 euros (\$10,500) subsidy for families opting for permanent residence in the villages of Soufli, Orestiada, and Didymoteicho — strategically situated along the border in the Evros region, News.Az reports citing Hurriyet daily news. Under the legislation, which is expected to secure parlia-

mentary approval, households relocating to settlements with fewer than 500 residents will be eligible for the full 10,000 euros grant. Those settling in areas with a population exceeding 500 will receive 6,000 euros, with additional increments of 1,000 euros per child, up to a maximum of 10,000 euros. Designed exclusively for the Evros region, this legislative framework is embedded within a comprehensive demographic reinforcement, development and reconstruction strategy. The total allocation for the program stands at 8 million euros. Amid the demographic imbalance between urban and rural populations, Greece is also grappling with persistently low birth rates. Greece, which saw its lowest number of births in 2022, plans to spend 20 billion euros (\$22 billion) through 2035 on incentives to halt the decline, including cash benefits and tax breaks, its family ministry said. Greece currently spends around 1 billion euros a year on pro-child measures but, like other European countries, to little effect.

Pakistan, Türkiye historic friends: Umar Rehman Malik



Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week said that Pakistan and Türkiye were historic friends. "The historic visit of President @RT Erdogan marked by President @AAliZardari and First Lady @AseefaBZ's gracious welcome, reflects the enduring bond between Türkiye and Pakistan—rooted in brotherhood, shared history, and a future of mutual cooperation," he said citing the recent visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Turkish President had arrived in Pakistan for a two-day visit this week to



boost trade and military ties between Ankara and Islamabad. Erdogan, accompanied by a high-level delegation and the Turkish first lady, arrived in Pakistan's capital late on Wednesday and held high-level meetings on Thursday.

He was greeted by his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and other senior government officials. "President Erdogan was received at the airport with red carpet treatment and a 21-gun salute. Later as he arrived at the prime

minister's house, he was given guard of honour and Air Force jets did a fly past in honour of the Turkish president," said Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder, reporting from the capital, Islamabad. Umar Rehman Malik said the visit Paki-

stan and Türkiye were bound to enhance cooperation in the years to come. Pakistan was the third stopover of Erdogan's three-nation trip, which also brought him to the two Southeast Asian nations of Malaysia and Indonesia.



German chancellor rebukes Vance for supporting party that downplays Nazis



starkly laying out the threat from Russia's battle-hardened military and making an impassioned appeal for Europeans to take their security into their own hands, including by forming an "Army of Europe" that would supplement U.S. power on the Continent. His speech drew standing ovations, in contrast to Mr. Vance's speech the day before. Saturday's sessions of the security conference were dominated by reactions, predominantly negative, to Mr. Vance's speech. Mr. Scholz was joined in his criticism by Friedrich Merz, his rival as the chancellor candidate for the conservative Christian Democrats, who polls suggest is the favorite to be Germany's next leader. Mr. Vance spent much of his speech on Friday scolding Europeans for what he suggested were Soviet-style restrictions on free speech across the continent. On Saturday, Mr. Merz defended Germany's laws that prohibit particular forms of speech, including hate speech and banned Nazi slogans, including on social media. He also suggested that Mr. Trump's administration was suppressing speech in the United States, after it moved on Friday to kick The Associated Press out of reporting pools and off Mr. Trump's plane because the news agency refuses to go along with Mr. Trump's directive to change the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America. "We stick to the rules which are given by our democratic institutions," Mr. Merz said. "Free speech remains free speech and remains part of our open, democratic society. And fake news, hate speech and offenses remain subject to legal restraints and controlled by independent courts." "I think I should say," he added, "that in front of the events which took place in D.C. yesterday — we would never kick out the news agency, out of the press room of our chancellor." The comments were the latest in a series of critiques of Mr. Vance's speech from German politicians before the election next Sunday. Mr. Scholz's Social Democrats are running third or fourth in most polls. The AfD is running second, and its chancellor candidate, Alice Weidel, met Mr. Vance on Friday in Munich. No party in the German Parliament will join with the AfD to form a government. Parts of the AfD have been classified as extremist by German intelligence. Some of its members have been convicted of violating German

law against the use of Nazi slogans. Others have been arrested for trying to overthrow the federal government. That collective shunning of the AfD and other extremist parties is known as the firewall. Mr. Vance took aim at it on Friday, saying the AfD and other hard-right parties across Europe represented legitimate voter concerns about high levels of migration into European countries from the Middle East and elsewhere. "There is no room for firewalls," Mr. Vance said. The vice president also called restrictions on free speech a greater threat to Europe than military aggression from Russia or China. Mr. Scholz chided Mr. Vance for that focus in a question-and-answer session after his speech. He was asked by Zanny Minton Beddoes, the editor in chief of The Economist, if Mr. Vance had made any points in his speech worth reflecting on. "You mean all these very relevant discussions about Ukraine and security in Europe?" Mr. Scholz said, drawing laughter from the audience. Then he addressed Mr. Vance's critique of European speech restrictions directly. "We should be very clear that free speech in Europe means that you are not attacking others in ways that are against legislation and laws we have in our country," Mr. Scholz said. "And that's the case. There is no difference between the digital world and the analog world to say it like this. And we have to be very clear that hate and all this, which is so bad for our societies, should be not the reality of public debate." Mr. Zelensky, in his remarks, focused on the question of European defense. He reiterated his position that the United States would be pivotal in securing any ceasefire in Ukraine but that it would need Europe to also step up. He pointed to what he said were intelligence warnings of Russian plans to conduct military exercises in Belarus next summer. He noted that Russia had invaded Ukraine after deploying troops to Belarus under the guise of exercises. "Europe just needs to come together and start acting in a way that no one can say 'No' to Europe, boss it around, or treat it like a pushover," Mr. Zelensky said. In a conversation with the CNN anchor Christiane Amanpour after his speech, Mr. Zelensky also said that Ukraine needed to be at the table at any cease-fire talks, and he asked to meet with President Trump before any meeting that Mr. Trump has with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. "It's up to them, they can discuss anything they want, but not Ukraine without Ukraine," he said.

Covert Report
Munich: Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany on Saturday accused Vice President JD Vance of unacceptably interfering in his country's imminent elections on behalf of a party that has played down the atrocities committed by the Nazis 80 years ago. A day after Mr. Vance stunned the Munich Security Conference by telling German leaders to drop their so-called firewall and allow the hard-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, to

enter their federal government, Mr. Scholz accused Mr. Vance of effectively violating a commitment to never again allow Germany to be led by fascists who could repeat the horrors of the Holocaust. "A commitment to 'never again' is not reconcilable with support for the AfD," Mr. Scholz said at the conference on Saturday morning, in an address opening the gathering's second day. Mr. Scholz said the AfD had trivialized Nazi atrocities like the concentration camp at Dachau,

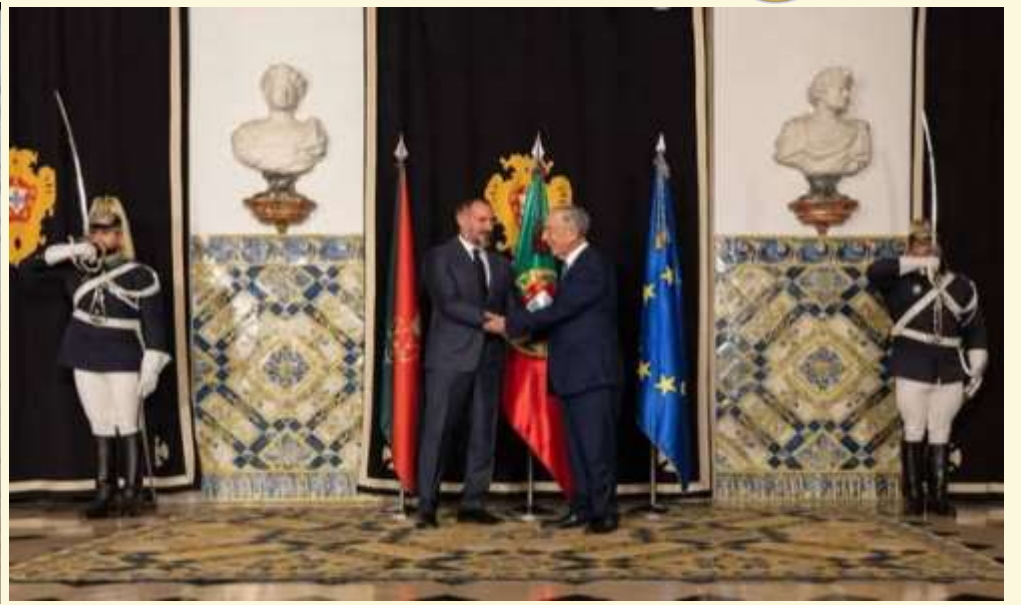
which Mr. Vance visited on Friday. The chancellor said Germany "would not accept" suggestions from outsiders about how to run its democracy — or directives to work with such a party. "That is not done, certainly not among friends and allies," Mr. Scholz said. "Where our democracy goes from here is for us to decide." Attendees at Mr. Vance's speech had been expecting to hear details of the Trump administration's plans for Ukraine peace talks and NATO defense policies. On Saturday, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine himself put the focus on the Ukraine war in his remarks,

Bulgaria stops 1620kg of refrigerant



Newswire
Sofia: Customs officers from the district of Rousse in Bulgaria have stopped an attempt to smuggle 1620kg of refrigerant at the border with Romania. The truck, driven by a Bulgarian national, was stopped on the ring road of the city Vidin on the approach to the Vidin to Calafat bridge crossing to Romania. Also known as New Europe Bridge or Danube Bridge 2, the international bridge is a key road and rail link between Bulgaria and Romania, spanning the Danube as part of Pan-European Corridor IV from Dresden to Istanbul. The driver of the truck provided the customs officers with four bills of lading for groupage cargo. On the basis of a "risk analysis", the customs inspectors diverted the vehicle to the Customs Office-Vidin for an X-ray inspection, during which areas of unusual density were identified. When opening the cartons, which, according to the documents, contained "chains for transport machines", actually concealed refrigerant cylinders totalling 1620kg. The Bulgarian authorities have not revealed what refrigerants were in the shipment but, from the photographs, at least some of it was R407C.

His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan meets President of Portugal



Newsire
Lisbon: His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan, the 50th Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, met with His Excellency Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of Portugal, at the Palácio de Belém this week. This was His Highness's first official meeting with the President following his accession as Imam.

During their discussion, the President extended his condolences on the passing of Prince Karim Aga Khan and congratulated His Highness on his accession. His Highness expressed gratitude for the President's longstanding support for the Ismaili Imamate and his presence at the recent ceremony honouring the late Prince Karim Aga Khan. He also expressed appreciation

for the support of the Portuguese authorities in facilitating the ceremonies. His Highness and the President reaffirmed the deep and enduring relationship between the Ismaili Imamate, the Aga Khan Development Network and the Portuguese Republic. His Highness and the President reaffirmed

the deep and enduring relationship between the Ismaili Imamate, the Aga Khan Development Network and the Portuguese Republic. His Highness and the President reaffirmed the deep and enduring relationship between the Ismaili Imamate, the Aga Khan Development Network and the Portuguese

Republic. They discussed the ongoing collaboration, grounded in shared values and reflected in innovative agreements. They also expressed their commitment to further strengthening this partnership. His Highness was accompanied by Mr Nazim Ahmad, Diplomatic Representative of the Ismaili Imamate to Portugal.



Photo exhibition 'Beautiful Japan' showcases ambassador's captivating lens

Celina Ali Islamabad: A mesmerizing photo exhibition titled 'Beautiful Japan – Through the Eyes of an Ambassador' opened this week at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), offering a stunning visual journey through the many facets of Japanese life. The exhibition, capturing the essence of Japan's culture, landscapes, people, and technological marvels, is the work of former Ambassador of Pakistan to Japan, Farukh Amil. The diplomat-turned-photographer meticulously documented his time in Japan, forging deep connections between the two nations through his lens. His

work has also been recognized internationally, earning him the prestigious Grand Prix in Japan's Ambassador's Photo Exhibition competition. The exhibition was inaugurated by Hassan Nasir Jamy, Secretary of the National Heritage & Culture Division, alongside Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Akamatsu Shuichi. Also in attendance were PNCA Director General Ayoub Jamali and other distinguished guests. The exhibition, a collaborative initiative between the Embassy of Japan, the MEXT Alumni Association of Pakistan (MAAP), and PNCA, will run until February 19. Featuring around 40 selected photo-



graphs, the exhibition not only highlights the breathtaking beauty of Japan but also serves to strengthen cultural ties between Japan and Pakistan. The collection offers Pakistani audiences a unique perspective on Japan's rich heritage and contemporary society. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Ambassador Akamatsu lauded Amil's keen eye and deep appreciation for Japanese culture. "Each pho-

tograph is a testament to his understanding of our society. As Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan, I am delighted to see my country through the lens of someone who knows it so well," he remarked. He further emphasized the exhibition's role in fostering cultural diplomacy. "This exhibition powerfully connects our two nations, allowing us to share Japan's beauty and complexity with the people of Pakistan. It

reminds us that despite geographical distance, we share common values, respect for traditions, and a deep appreciation for beauty and the human experience." Ambassador Akamatsu also extended his gratitude to PNCA and MAAP for their invaluable support in organizing the exhibition, underscoring the significance of cultural collaborations in strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Japan.

Naqvi hopes Pak-US relations to gain momentum during Trump's tenure

Celina Ali Islamabad: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi this week expressed the hope that bilateral relations between Pakistan and the US would gain momentum during the tenure of President Donald Trump. The minister held a meeting with US Chargé D'affaires Natalie Baker who called on him where they discussed matters of mutual interest, and ways to enhance bilateral cooperation. During the meeting, discussions were also held regarding Naqvi's recent visit to the US. The minister said his meetings with members of the US Congress were very positive. Mohsin Naqvi said the discussions focused on developing a joint strategy to combat terrorism and further strengthening bilateral relations. He emphasized that terrorism is an international issue, and the global community must work together to address it. The interior minister also highlighted that Pakistan and the US have excellent relations, which have spanned several decades. The US cooperation in enhancing the capacity of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies held great importance, he added. Mohsin Naqvi also invited the acting US ambassador to attend the Spring Festival programme in Islamabad.



The EU and Pakistan, stronger together EU-Pakistan dosti celebrated at EuroVillage 2025



European Union ambassador to Pakistan Dr Riina Kionka

Celina Ali Islamabad: Thousands of participants gathered at the Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) this week to enjoy the vibrant "EuroVillage" festival, organised by the Delegation of the European Union in collaboration with the EU Member States.

The event provided a unique opportunity for the residents of Islamabad and Rawalpindi to immerse themselves in European culture and heritage through music, food, and interactive experiences. In her welcome remarks, Dr. Riina Kionka, the Ambassador of the Euro-



pean Union to Pakistan noted, "We celebrate the diverse cultures and identities that enrich Europe, forming the foundation of our shared values and our relations with the world, including Pakistan. Together, we are stronger, and our partnership in development, trade, and political engagement reflects this commitment." In its sixth edition, EuroVillage offered an afternoon of culture, music, and culinary delights. The festival featured a variety of engaging activities, including information displays from the EU and Member States, live performances, fun games, and an array of food options. Visitors had

the chance to connect with the Team Europe, learn about the diverse areas of collaboration between the European Union and Pakistan. The festival also showcased the positive impact of the EU on Pakistani communities. Attendees explored development cooperation booths, where beneficiaries shared personal stories illustrating how EU initiatives enrich their lives. This hands-on engagement emphasised the message that the EU and Pakistan are "Stronger Together" through their partnership. The event also featured live performances by both European and Paki-

stani artists and performers, including Farhan Saeed. The EuroVillage festival was co-organised by the diplomatic missions of the European Union alongside those of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, and Spain. The celebration of culture and partnership at the EuroVillage highlighted the bond between Europe and Pakistan, reinforcing a shared commitment to mutual development and cooperation under the spirit of "Stronger Together."



Pakistan, UK agree to strengthen economic ties moving forward British High Commissioner Jane Marriott meets Finance Minister



British high commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott



Celina Ali Islamabad: Pakistan and the United Kingdom this week agreed to continue working closely to enhance economic cooperation and explore new avenues for collaboration. This agreement reached during a meeting between Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and British High Commissioner Jane Marriott in Islamabad. During the meeting, both sides discussed matters of mutual interest, including ongoing economic reforms, financial cooperation, and initiatives under the UK's support programmes in Pakistan. The Finance Minister gave an overview of the economy and shared update on the government's reform agenda with focus on carrying on with the macroeconomic stability and leading the economy on the path to export-led growth. He further highlighted

the government's commitment to fiscal discipline, economic stability, and sustainable growth. He also appreciated the UK's continued support through various development and governance programmes.

The Finance Minister acknowledged the programme's contributions and stressed the need for sustained technical assistance and capacity-building efforts.



“Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.”

- Albert Einstein

COVERT

TRUTH UNFOLD

February 23 - March 1, 2025

“I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught.”

- Winston Churchill

Meloni aims to relaunch Albania centers, possibly opening repatriation facilities

Covert Report

Rome: Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni wants to find a solution for Italian-run migrant centres in Albania before a decision of the European Court of Justice. Premier Giorgia Meloni is considering plans to repurpose two controversial Italian-run centers in Albania to keep them operational after Italy's courts blocked the implementation of a protocol between Rome and Tirana for the fast-track processing of asylum seekers.

The goal is to revive the centers, which remain empty after Italian courts refused to validate the detention of the first three groups of migrants sent there in October, November, and January. Meloni has reaffirmed her commitment to the original plan and is seeking a solution ahead of a ruling by the European Court of Justice, according to well-informed sources.

Among the possible solutions under consideration, the two centers in Shengjin and Gjader, located on Albania's coast, could be converted into repatriation facilities. Following an initial debate on February 7 after a cabinet meeting, discussions between Premier Giorgia Meloni, Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, and Cabinet Undersecretary Alfredo Mantovano have led officials to explore alternative strategies. A meeting reportedly took place at Palazzo Chigi on February 10, with more expected this week, while Meloni also discussed migration with Austria's new Chancellor, Alexander Schallenberg.

This strategic shift in the "Albania model" is unfolding within a broader European context that the Italian government considers being in favor of the plan. Meloni and Piantedosi have emphasized Brussels' interest in the Italian approach, which they believe could serve as a blueprint for similar EU initiatives. Notably, during recent meetings with European counterparts, Piantedosi advocated for a more substantial and expedited reform of the repatriation directive, "providing for mechanisms of regionalization to transfer illegal migrants to neighbouring countries when it is not possible to readmit them to the countries of origin".

Several hypotheses are being considered for the centers in Albania, with the objective of bypassing courts which have so far failed to validate the detention of migrants, avoiding an outright clash. Experts at the premier's office, Palazzo Chigi, the interior ministry and the other ministries involved are believed to be considering possible options for the two centers in Shengjin and Gjader.

At the moment, no decisions have been taken on how to possibly implement new measures, whether through a decree, a bill or an amendment to legislation being debated in parliament, sources said.

The ongoing debate is believed to be focusing in particular on the possibility of changing the format of the two centers in Albania, transforming them into repatriation facilities. In this way, the structures would not host migrants rescued by Navy ships in international waters in the Mediterranean but would house irregular migrants who are already in Italy and against whom Italian authorities have issued an expulsion decree.



In this way, judges would not need to

validate the migrants' detention at the facilities, as is required for asylum seekers. One of the issues on the table could be the need to review the protocol between Rome and Tirana, with the revised agreement needing a new green light from parliament - a move that would delay the plan.

"We are moving forward, we will not abandon the job in Albania", said Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, who said "We shall see" when asked to comment on the idea of transforming the facilities in Albania into CPRs, a plan rejected by the center-left opposition.

Ambassador Nicolas Galey reiterates France's commitment to press freedom



Celina Ali

Islamabad: President of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Dominique Pradalié, met with Nicolas Galey, Ambassador of France to Pakistan, to discuss the current Pakistani media landscape including in light of developments in the legal framework in this regard. Pradalié emphasized the importance of upholding freedom of expression and press freedom, as enshrined in Pakistan's Constitution and international conventions to which Pakistan is party. During the meeting, Pradalié expressed her gratitude to Ambassador Galey for the support of the French authorities in helping Afghan journalists continue their crucial work, including facilitating the issuance of visas and collaborating to build the capacities of journalists through training programs/workshops, in partnership with the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and the IFJ. Ambassador Galey reiterated France's commitment to press freedom worldwide, stating that it is an essential pillar of democracy. The meeting was also attended by Mr. Shakeel Ahmed, Secretary General of PFUJ, and Dr. Furqan Rao, a member of the Federal Executive Council (FEC), who both underscored the significance of such collaborations in strengthening journalistic standards and protecting media freedoms in the region.

