

**High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri pays tribute to Palestinian people's bravery, courage**

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner in Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week paid tribute to the Palestinian people's bravery and courage. "Amid the ruins of war, resilience shines through. Sharing from today's The Australian a powerful image of people gathering for Iftar, sharing a meal" (Page-5)

**Why northern Portugal should be your next road trip destination** **Newsire**

Lisbon: In Portugal's wild northern borderlands, survival and spirituality go hand in hand with the changing seasons, as they have for millennia. A road trip through its remote reaches uncovers pagan festivals, age-old crafts and Roman relics in the country's only national park, (Page-8)

# Chinese military vows to achieve PLA centenary goals on schedule



**Henan Daily**

Zhangzhou: The Chinese military will spare no effort to reach the goals set for the centenary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 2027, a spokesperson said this week.

Wu Qian, spokesperson for the delegation of the PLA and the People's Armed Police Force, described reaching the PLA centenary goals and speeding up the building of world-class armed forces as "strategic imperatives" in China's efforts to build a modern country in all respects. "We must dedicate our efforts to ensuring that we achieve our goals with strong performance on schedule," Wu said during the annual national legislative session. Wu said deputies from the armed



forces pledged to intensify troop training and enhance combat preparedness across the board, accelerate the transformation and upgrading of military training, strengthen new-

domain forces with new combat capabilities, boost military preparedness in various aspects, and enhance the ability to win informatized and intelligent warfare.



## Denmark says it remains open to possible troop deployment in Ukraine



"I promise that our enemies will not like us meeting here." Frederiksen said that discussions had also covered bolstering Ukraine's defense industry and ensuring long-term security guarantees for Kyiv.

The Danish prime minister also addressed Denmark's relationship with the US. "We have a good relationship with the USA, and so does Ukraine."

However, she admitted feeling "sad" about recent developments in Washington, referring to Friday's events in the Oval Office. On Friday, a heated exchange took place between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, US President Donald Trump, and Vice President JD Vance at the White House. Trump criticized the Ukrainian leader's attitude during the exchange, while Zelenskyy expressed his expectation of support for his country.

**Covert Report**

Copenhagen: Denmark Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen on Sunday said her government remains "open-minded" about deploying Danish soldiers to Ukraine as part of a potential peacekeeping force.

"As I have said before, we have an open mind as a Danish government," Frederiksen told TV2 following a high-level meeting in London hosted by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

The meeting focused on recent developments in the Russia-Ukraine war and broader European security concerns. However, she acknowledged the challenges of securing Ukrainian territory, emphasizing that "it will be difficult for European soldiers to guard every centimeter."

Frederiksen expressed optimism about Europe's security despite the ongoing conflict.

"We must secure our own continent, and I am actually an optimist. There is leadership," she stated, adding that discussions at the meeting had been productive.



Islamabad: March 12, 2025: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Jawad Anwar Chaudhry, presents a memento to the Ambassador of Denmark, Jakob Linulf, during their meeting on bilateral Maritime Cooperation.

## Bilawal Bhutto meets key envoys, bilateral relations discussed

**Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari this week held separate meetings with the ambassadors from key Western countries and discussed with them ways to enhance mutually beneficial relations, particularly in trade, economic growth, and regional peace efforts. Bilawal Bhutto met with British High Commissioner Jane Marriott, French Ambassador Nicolas Galey and US Charge d'Affaires Natalie Baker at his residence in Islamabad.

According to a party statement, the engagements underscore the PPP's dedica-



tion to promoting international cooperation. The discussions focused on strengthening bilateral relations, expanding trade partnerships, and addressing mutual interests, the statement said. "The meeting also covered regional stability and diplomatic engagements," it added. "These meetings reaffirm PPP's commitment to strengthening Pakistan's diplomatic and economic partnerships," the PPP said.

# Chinese-invested rooftop solar project accelerates energy transition in Pakistan

**Mia Shah – Gwadar Pro**

Beijing: CHINT Solar, a clean energy solution provider based in China, is leveraging its advanced photovoltaic technology and high-quality products to successfully contribute to the construction of multiple rooftop solar projects in Pakistan.

These initiatives offer clean and reliable energy solutions for local residents and businesses, further accelerating Pakistan's energy transition and promoting sustainable development.

According to the company, its four partners in Pakistan, which include clothing manufacturing plant, hotel, and hospital, have a combined annual power generation capacity of over 3,000

MWh. This capacity can reduce carbon emissions by more than 3,000 tons. Notably, the Naveena Denim project, with a capacity of 1.2 MW, generates 1,611 MWh of electricity annually, resulting in a reduction of 1,546.56 tons of carbon emissions.

Kaizer Bhatti, a staff member at Capital Hotel, one of CHINT Solar's partners in Pakistan, noted that prior to the installation of the solar system, the hotel's monthly electricity bill ranged from 2.1 to 2.2 million PKR. Now, the cost has decreased to less than half of its previous amount, significantly enhancing the hotel's operational efficiency.

All projects utilize CHINT's flagship ASTRO N5 series, which incorporates the company's independently developed N-type TOPCon 4.0 battery technology. This cutting-edge technology provides enhanced performance in terms of power output, temperature coefficient, low-light

efficiency, and resistance to LID (Light Induced Degradation) and LETID (Light and Elevated Temperature Induced Degradation). These features ensure long-term and stable energy generation, with a lifespan of approximately 30 years.

Pakistan is facing a rapidly increasing demand for energy; however, the country has long grappled with power shortages due to its limited traditional energy resources and underdeveloped power infrastructure. This issue is especially acute in remote areas, where electricity supply is either unstable or entirely unavailable, significantly affecting local livelihoods and hindering economic growth.

At the same time, Pakistan is abundant in solar resources, receiving over 3,000 hours of sunshine annually, which makes it an ideal location for photovoltaic energy development. In recent years, the Pakistani government has actively promoted renewable energy projects, particularly rooftop solar installations, to alleviate power shortages and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.



CHINT, leveraging its robust technological expertise and extensive global project experience, has swiftly responded to this demand. By offering high-efficiency and reliable photovoltaic

solutions for various rooftop projects in Pakistan, CHINT not only delivers clean energy but also generates local job opportunities, thereby fostering the growth of the green economy.

# Zhengzhou's efforts on becoming international consumption center city

**Henan Daily**

Zhangzhou: In its bid to become an international consumption center city, Zhengzhou city, capital of Central China's Henan province, is focusing on the development of new consumption spaces, scenarios, models and growth drivers.

Large commercial complexes play a pivotal role as significant consumption hubs. Over the past two years, Zhengzhou has continuously driven its commercial innovation and development forwards.

The vibrancy within its commercial districts has led to the emergence of new brands in Zhengzhou. In the first half of 2024, some 132 high-quality flagship stores were established in the metropolis.

In recent years, Zhengzhou has delved into the city's cultural elements, integrating the considerable historical heritage, urban narratives and distinctive architecture from the various districts to renovate old factory buildings, infusing them with new elements, as well as harmonizing the blend of historical significance and modern aesthetics.

According to Zhengzhou Municipal Bureau of Commerce, the average monthly footfall in 21 distinctive commercial districts has surpassed 28 million visitors, with average monthly revenue topping 540 million yuan (\$74.28 million). In 2024, Zhengzhou hosted a series of internationally renowned conferences and events,

including the World Henan Entrepreneurs Convention, the Zhengzhou Cross-border E-commerce Conference and the International Shaolin Wushu Festival, putting the city in the international spotlight.

Recently, the Globalization and World Cities Research Network, a globally recognized think tank, released the 2024 World Cities Rankings. This revealed that Zhengzhou had climbed 27 positions since 2020, to now be at the 89th spot globally. Looking ahead, Zhengzhou is widely said to be poised to embrace a bright and flourishing future.



# Tongwei signs 650MW solar module supply agreement with leading Pakistani companies

**Mia Shah – Gwadar Pro**

Beijing: Recently, Tongwei Group entered into a strategic cooperation agreement with three Pakistani companies—Perfect Services, Nimir Energy, and Mateen Sons—for the supply of 650 MW of solar modules. This collaboration emphasizes Tongwei's high-efficiency TNC-G12/G12R modules.

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, Pakistan receives over 3,000 hours of sunlight each year, providing outstanding conditions for solar power generation. However, the country has historically depended on thermal and hydroelectric power, which together constitute approximately 50% of its energy mix. This reliance has resulted in energy shortages and raised environmental concerns.

Those prominent Pakistani energy companies that signed contracts with Tongwei this time possess extensive experience in the development, investment, and operation of solar pro-

jects. Their decision to partner with Tongwei for the 650 MW solar module supply agreement reflects not only their acknowledgment of Tongwei's leadership in the global solar industry but also their confidence in the quality and technological capabilities of Chinese products.

Pakistan's extreme climate conditions—characterized by high solar radiation and significant temperature fluctuations—require exceptional heat resistance and long-term stability in solar modules. Leveraging its robust research and development capabilities, Tongwei has created tailored solutions specifically designed for the Pakistani market.

The TNC-G12/G12R series high-efficiency modules have successfully addressed various technological challenges to adapt to Pakistan's distinctive plateau climate. These modules have undergone rigorous UV120 and UV300 testing, demonstrating outstanding UV resistance and long-term stability in harsh conditions.



# The entire coastline will be cemented over. The tiny town in Italy set to become a dock for giant cruise ships



which lie just north of Isola Sacra. "The breakwater has altered the marine ecosystem," he says. "Now there's only sand, but in the past there used to be shellfish, such as tellins, and octopuses." An artist's impression of harbour with small boats and a cruise ship docked at a long breakwater outside it. An impression of how the Fiumicino cruise port in Isola Sacra would look when it is finished. Illustration: Fiumicino Waterfront

**Newsire**  
Rome: On a cloudy day in January, Isola Sacra, a hamlet in Fiumicino, 20 miles from Rome, does not look like a place that would attract masses of tourists. Low-rise family homes with small gardens alternate with meadows and fields and life has the sedate pace of a provincial town. An old lighthouse now lies in ruins and not far away is the *arsena dei bilancioni*, the beach that takes its name from the stilt houses, or *bilancioni*, once used for fishing. But this coastal spot at the mouth of the Tiber River is at the centre of a controversy threatening its future tranquility. It is the intended site of a new port called Fiumicino Waterfront, a joint venture between the cruise company Royal Caribbean and the British investment fund Icon Infrastructure. Local authorities support the project because they believe it will bring in tourism, but many grassroots groups oppose it because of the impact they think it will have on the marine environment. "The lighthouse and the *bilancioni* are a natural film set. Actors like Charlize Theron, Andy Garcia and Uma Thurman have come here," says Gianfranco Miconi, who is nicknamed Attila. He is a retired 72-year-old who, for the past 30 years, has been living in and renovating one of the stilt houses now threatened with demolition. "This is a lovely place," he says. "If it looks degraded, it's because authorities never took care of it." For many years the area has been unloved. In 2010,

plans were signed off for the construction of what would have been the largest marina in the Mediterranean, comprising four large docks, a hotel and convention centre, commercial spaces and luxury flats. But two years later, the developer, Francesco Bellavista Caltagirone, was arrested for fraud (he was later acquitted) and the project was abandoned for another decade. Then, three years ago, the land was bought by Royal Caribbean for €12m (£10m). It later sold 90% of its holding to Icon, with permission to transform the port into a facility specifically for cruise ships. Now, as well as berths for hundreds of smaller boats, there will be one dock for Oasis-class cruise liners, which were the world's largest and longest passenger ships until 2023. At 72 metres high, they are twice the height of Fiumicino's lighthouse and can carry up to 5,000 passengers. "They say this port will bring work," says Giancarlo Petrelli, a retired engineer who is part of the *Tables of the Port*, a group of local associations that has been fighting the development plans since 2010. "But in these cases the sailors are not hired locally and the tourists won't be interested in Fiumicino, but in Rome. "Does no one think about the traffic and pollution generated by 5,000 people going to and from Rome?" There is already a port that serves Rome – Civitavecchia – but the new facility will provide extra capacity for the cruise industry. Petrelli also worries about the impact on coastal erosion. The most significant legacy of the original port plan is an 800-metre-long breakwater. This altered the currents by taking sand from the beaches of Focene and Fregene,



Italy's ambassador to Pakistan Marilina Armenlin

and Attila stops to look out of the window of his stilt house. "I don't know anything about bureaucracy," he says. "I

just know that this is the most beautiful place in the world and I have no intention of leaving unless I am dead."



# What is behind the rise of 'China AI threat' narrative in the West?

**Ding Gang**

The US anxiety and fear of China is nothing new. It has played out like an endless drama with infinite sequels since the Cold War. The latest installment in this long-running saga features a flashy new twist: the "threat" of Chinese artificial intelligence (AI). This time, the "theme song" is straightforward: "China must not dominate AI technology!"

Take a look at the Western mainstream media, where officials and experts tirelessly paint a picture of China's "ambitions" in a world that will be overrun by "an invading army of AI robots made in China."

A recent article in *The Economist* argues "why China can't be allowed to dominate AI-based warfare," taking this hysteria to new heights. It's so far removed from basic logic that it borders on absurdity - suggesting that China's AI might somehow march onto the battlefield and start fighting wars. This narrative conveniently ignores the simple truth that wars are not determined by "technology" but by national strategy and policy. Technology is fundamentally a tool.

The logic chain of certain US Department of Defense officials and think tank experts is practically "performance art": "China's AI advancement will cause the military power of China's People's Liberation Army to skyrocket, which, in turn, inevitably leads to war with the US."

On the policy level, China is clearly a defensive power. Decades of development show this beyond doubt. In contrast, the US has long championed "offensive realism" and pursued a

strategy of preemptive strikes. So why has the "China threat" script shifted so dramatically to AI this time? The answer is simple: Anxiety's inertia spills into a new domain.

Suppose you examine the ingredients of this "AI threat" concoction. In that case, it's mostly a Cold War mentality mixed with a dose of US fear of losing technological leadership, topped off with a splash of ideological coloring.

The rise of AI has struck a nerve. What the US fears is not just China's AI technology itself, but what AI represents: a stronger, more open and more influential China that could challenge US hegemony. AI has become a symbol of China's future potential, and that potential is what truly terrifies Washington.

While China uses AI to develop more efficient healthcare, optimize supply chains and bring autonomous driving closer to reality, the US is obsessed with who will challenge it by using AI in warfare. This mind-set itself reveals the US' own aggressive intentions. In other words, while accusing China of posing an AI threat, the US inadvertently exposes its vision of how AI could be dangerously weaponized.

During the Cold War, the US created CoCom (Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls), a name that sounded like a public transportation system but was actually a technology embargo organization targeting the socialist bloc. China was one of the targets. Its mission was to prevent China from acquiring high technology beneficial for military and strategic purposes. From nuclear technology to aerospace, from satellite systems to precision manufacturing, CoCom erected layer upon layer of restrictions. The Western rhetoric was clear then: China must not possess anything that could threaten "Western leadership."



History is repeating itself, this time in the form of AI. The refrain of "China must not develop this, China must not have that" has become a mechanical mantra. Behind it lies the reality of China's technological rise. At its core, the emergence of the "China AI threat" is a hysterical reaction to China's technological progress.

In the age of digital civilization, the fire of technology can no longer be monopolized - it will find its way through the sparks of global open-source communities, the circuit boards of

Shenzhen's Huaqiangbei and the lines of code in Beijing's Zhongguancun.

The "China AI threat" narrative is an alternative acknowledgment of China's technological march and a stumbling confession of an old hegemon struggling to face a new world. As for those embargoes, they will likely end up alongside the dusty archives of CoCom as exhibits in the "museum of technological history."

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ple's Daily, and currently a senior fellow with the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at the Renmin University of China

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# Global AI governance cooperation needs to carry on despite transatlantic disputes



**Andrey Kortunov**

Conventional wisdom suggests that these days the only really big fight around AI takes place between the US and China and the rest of us are sort of idle observers of this epic struggle. It argues that we can cheer on Washington or Beijing, while enjoying many fascinating features of GPT-4 or of DeepSeek, but the main line of demarcation in the emerging AI space has already been drawn and this space will inevitably be divided between a bunch of omnipotent US and Chinese high-tech giants. Furthermore, geopolitical logic seems to imply that the West at large will inevitably go with the US, while a very significant part of the rest will stick to China.

However, this simplistic black-and-white picture

might be misleading. Just look at the outcomes of the landmark AI Action Summit that took place last month in French capital Paris. Sixty-one participating nations, including France, China, India, Japan, Australia and Canada, signed the final declaration stating the goal of keeping AI "open, inclusive, transparent, ethical, safe, secure and trustworthy, taking into account international frameworks for all" and "making AI sustainable for people and the planet."

However, two major countries - the US and the UK - refused to subscribe to the document thus raising doubts about whether a global consensus on developing and regulating AI technologies was attainable. The US and

the UK clearly prefer flexible AI guidelines to any binding regulations, with the noteworthy exception of the restrictions on hi-tech cooperation with China.

The outcome of the Paris Summit suggests that the real line of demarcation in the AI universe runs not between the US and China, but rather between the Anglo-Saxon world and all the other international actors, including the European Union. In the vast AI space, clashes of interest between Washington and Brussels turn out to be no less significant than disagreements between Washington and Beijing.

Most European nations are less confident that market mechanisms on their own can provide magic solutions to the numerous problems of AI development. The EU economic model implies more rigid regulatory frame-

works and more attention to the potential social repercussions of high-tech development. Therefore, the existing EU legislation mandates strict rules for high-risk AI applications, focusing on safety, transparency and accountability.

On the other hand, many EU member states are reluctant to break their long-standing partnerships with China, including AI cooperation. The US and UK demands on fully terminating these partnerships are often perceived in Europe as excessive, inappropriate and explicitly self-serving, therefore, it comes as no surprise that the line of demarcation in Paris questioned the perceived Western cohesion in the AI area.

This is not to say that there are no significant disagreements among other international actors on AI. Still, the reality is that in Paris the European Union managed to find a mutually acceptable compromise with the Global South, India turned out to be able to overcome its frictions with China, and only the US and the UK preferred to challenge the emerging global AI consensus.

It is yet to be seen how the ongoing transatlantic disputes will be resolved. It is clear, however, that the disagreements go far beyond the AI domain, reflecting much more profound political, social and even civilizational divergences between the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental European worlds.

Nonetheless, the numerous AI management challenges cannot wait until both sides of the Atlantic Ocean sort out their disagreements and come to a common denominator. The AI global governance should move on - with the US and UK governmental participation, or even without it for the time being.

If a comprehensive universal and legally binding AI code of conduct is not yet within

our reach, we should focus on relatively modest incremental and voluntary steps that could pave the way to addressing more sensitive and controversial matters in the future. For instance, the time has come to fight for more AI transparency at all levels, including enlightening the general public, promoting expert dialogues and demanding more information on AI plans from governments and private companies alike.

At the same time, in order to counter unavoidable algorithmic biases of diverse AI platforms one should find a way to fully integrate leading models and databases through user-friendly interfaces; for end users, GPT-4 and DeepSeek should become not alternatives, but rather mutually complementary tools. Finally, robust public oversight of AI development remains an essential, if not sufficient, safeguard against any apocalyptic "rise of the machines" scenario.

"We must all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately," wisely noted Benjamin Franklin at the very dawn of the American Revolution. This logic fully applies to the existential AI challenge to the humanity that we now see at our doorsteps.

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# High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri pays tribute to Palestinian people's bravery, courage



**Covert Report** Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner in Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week paid tribute to the Palestinian people's bravery and courage. "Amid the ruins of war, resilience shines through. Sharing from today's The Australian a powerful image of people gathering for Iftar, sharing a meal surrounded by

devastation—but not defeated by it. A testament to faith, unity, & the enduring human spirit," the envoy posted on X. The Australian in its report said: "As the sun set over a neighbourhood in Rafah, where fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants has left barely a handful of buildings standing, hundreds of Gazans of all ages dug into their Iftar meal marking the end of the day's fast." "People are deeply saddened, and everything around us feels heartbreaking," said Malak Fadda, who had organised the communal meal. "So, we decided to bring joy back to this street, just as it was before the war". As the crowd sat down to eat, uncertainty loomed over the next stages of the Gaza ceasefire, the first phase of which was drawing to a close on Saturday after largely bringing an end to more than 15 months of fighting. A second stage is supposed to pave the way for a more permanent end to the war, but negotiations have so far been inconclusive. Music wafted from loudspeakers through the crowd in Rafah, who sat on a long row

of plastic chairs under bunting, Palestinian flags and lights strung between the broken concrete. The war has left over 69 percent of Gaza's buildings damaged or destroyed. Israeli bombardment or fighting has displaced almost the entire population and triggered widespread hunger, according to the United Nations. The truce that took effect on January 19 has enabled greater aid flows into the devastated Palestinian territory, but hundreds of thousands continue to live in tents, with many camped out in the rubble of their former homes. "On the first day of Ramadan, we had hoped to return to our houses to break our fast with our families and be together at our homes," Rafah resident Umm al-Baraa Habib said. "But this is God's will, and we remain steadfast," she added. High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri reiterated Pakistan's support to the peaceful settlement of the Palestine issue.

# At UN, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad proposes key themes for 2026 UN Water Conference

**Celina Ali** Islamabad: Pakistan this week proposed transboundary water cooperation and the water-climate-environment nexus as key themes for inclusion in the interactive dialogue of the upcoming 2026 UN Water Conference. Delivering a national statement during the organizational session of the 2026 UN Water Conference at the ECOSOC Chamber, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Pakistan's Alternate Permanent Representative to the UN, emphasized that the conference presents a crucial opportunity to accelerate global efforts toward achieving SDG 6—ensuring clean water and sanitation for all. Ambassador Asim underscored the significance of the discussion, stressing that it directly concerns future generations. He warned that time is running out and that implementation remains a fundamental challenge.

The Pakistani Alternate envoy highlighted that the additional themes proposed by Pakistan hold particular relevance for developing countries, given their vital role in promoting regional integration, peace, and sustainable development, as well as addressing climate change impacts. He further stated that enhanced focus on these themes would enable participating nations to share challenges, best practices, and integrated solutions. "In Pakistan, our 'Living Indus' and 'Recharge Pakistan' initiatives offer multiple co-benefits, including climate mitigation and adaptation, improved water quality, flood resilience, and biodiversity conservation," he added.



# Ambassador Mumtaz Zahra Baloch presents credentials to President of France

**NewsWire** Paris: Ambassador Mumtaz Zahra Baloch this week presented her letters of credence as Pakistan's Ambassador to France to President Emmanuel Macron. At a dignified Presentation of Credentials ceremony held at the Elysee Palace, Ambassador Mumtaz Zahra Baloch conveyed the best regards of President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to President Macron.

Highlighting the strong foundation of Pakistan-France relations, the Ambassador expressed the desire of Pakistan to further expand and strengthen bilateral ties with France and affirmed her commitment to contribute to the expansion of bilateral relations in political, economic, scientific, educational and cultural domains and promote people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and France.



# Women have played an inspiring role in Pakistan: Umar Rehman Malik



liberation along with the women's rights movement. International Women's Day gives focus to issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights, and violence and abuse against women.

Spurred by the universal female suffrage movement, International Women's Day originated from labor movements in Europe and North America during the early 20th century, with the modern holiday, March 8, being declared by Vladimir Lenin.

The earliest version reported was a "Woman's Day" organized by the Socialist Party of America in New York City on February 28, 1909. In solidarity with them, communist activist and politician Clara Zetkin proposed the celebration of "Working Women's Day" approved at the 1910 International Socialist Women's Conference in Copenhagen, albeit with no set date; the following year saw the first demonstrations and commemorations of International Women's Day across Europe. Vladimir Lenin declared March 8 as International Women's Day in 1922 to honour the women's role in 1917 Russian Revolution; it was subsequently celebrated on that date by the socialist movement and communist countries. The holiday became a mainstream global holiday following its promotion by the United Nations in 1977. International Women's Day is a public holiday in several countries. The UN observes the holiday in connection with a particular issue, campaign, or theme in women's rights. Umar Rehman Malik said Pakistan was fortunate to have produced some of the leading women leaders, bureaucrats, diplomats and journalists. "Women in Pakistan have demonstrated that they are equal members of the society and have proved their talents in all fields," the PPP leader said.

**Abdullah Jan** Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik said this week that the women have played an inspiring role in the country.

"On International Women's Day, we honour the resilience and contributions of Pakistani women in shaping our nation.

From Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah to Shaheed Benazir Bhutto—the first female Prime Minister of the Islamic world—women have led with courage. PPP remains unwavering in its commitment to empowerment, equality, and a future free from discrimination," he said in a statement. International Women's Day (IWD) commemorates women's fight for equality and



# How Germany's car industry is bracing for Donald Trump's tariffs

**Covert Report**

Berlin: US President Donald Trump this week sparked a tariff war with the US' three largest trading partners, slapping 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico, and doubling an already imposed import tariff on China to 20%.

On Thursday, he backtracked and postponed the tariffs on multiple imports from Mexico and some from Canada, but emphasised he would impose additional tariffs at the start of April.

The prospect of an international trade war sparked by Trump's tariffs comes at a bad time for the German economy, which shrunk for the second year in a row in 2024.

Once an economic powerhouse, Germany is projected to be the bloc's weakest performer in 2025.

Yet experts suggest that the impact of a tariff war between China, Mexico, and Canada would have a limited effect on Germany—at least for the time being—aside from impacting German manufacturers and suppliers in these three countries.

"At least in the medium run, one would expect some trade diversion in the sense that products that were designed to go to the US, for example from China, would now end up on the European markets," Julian Hinz, Professor of International Economics at Bielefeld University and head of the Research Group Trade Policy at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, told Euronews.

The US could however also import slightly more from Europe in place of China, Mexico and Canada. "The effects blur the overall picture, abit" Hinz says.

German car companies, including Audi, produce cars in Mexico. According to data from the German Car Association (VDA), German carmakers produced 716,000 cars in the country — primarily for the US market.

If Trump's tariffs mean German cars produced in Mexico cannot be sold as easily, or are much more expensive now in the US then this "could have a bigger effect," Hinz says.

On Thursday, Trump granted automakers in Mexico and Canada a one-month tariff exemption after negotiating with leading industry figures.

However, once the month is over, German economist Thomas Hutzschenreuter says that tariffs and subsequent decreased demand for German cars from Mexico would impact German, European, Mexican workforce.

"Unemployment rates will be affected" Hutzschenreuter told Euronews.

Experts warn that the picture changes dramatically if Trump decides to slap tariffs on the European Union — a proposal he threatened in late February.

"It means that individual companies will have to diversify their sales throughout the world. In other words, they have to deprioritise the US market and higher prioritise other markets. That is currently being discussed in most German companies," Hutzschenreuter said.

"However, the problem is that you cannot react as quickly as tariffs are being imposed. Reaction takes more time. And therefore you will be affected short term." One sector particularly exposed is the country's automotive industry, which in 2023 made up 17% of Germany's total



exports, according to figures from the Germany Trade and Invest (GTAI) office. Germany's automotive industry entered crisis mode last year, with once-might carmakers such as Volkswagen closing factories and cutting thousands of jobs. The head of the VDA, Hildegard Müller, commented in February that Trump's tariff threats of 25% on the European Union were a "provocation". "Tariffs are the wrong negotiating tool," Müller said. "The risk of a global trade conflict with negative effects on the world

economy is high." According to simulations undertaken by the Kiel Institute for World Economy, increased tariffs would lead to economic losses and inflation in both the EU and the US. In Germany, this would impact the automotive and mechanical engineering industries, with the Kiel Institute showing that total production would decrease by up to 4% for cars. "That's a big number for an industry that is already struggling," Hinz says.

One thing that needs to be emphasised for Germany however, and the EU as a whole, is that although the US is an important trading partner, roughly 10% of exports go there, Hinz said. "Even in the worst case scenario of dramatic tariffs imposed by the US, most EU imports stay in the EU, and there are plenty of other trading partners with which trade under WTO rules and free trade agreements works perfectly well, will continue to work as before." "The US hurts itself most here," Hinz concludes.

# Zelenskyy: We deeply appreciate the solidarity of the Bulgarian people



the Bulgarian people," said Zelenskyy, who is attending the special European Council meeting on March 6 on the security of Europe and ways to help Ukraine. Zelenskyy said that he and Zhelyazkov had discussed ways to achieve a just and lasting peace for Ukraine. "A key component of this is effective security guarantees, which will only work if they are shared and upheld by all our partners," Zhelenskyy said. He said that he had briefed Zhelyazkov on his recent discussions with the leaders of partner countries. "I am grateful for Bulgaria's willingness to work together to bring closer the day when a just and lasting peace is established in Ukraine. This unity is exactly what we need right now," Zhelenskyy said.

Zhelyazkov, who is attending the European Council meeting, posted on X: "Thank you President [Zelenskyy] for the fruitful conversation about the common goal to achieve just and lasting peace".



Sofia: In a post on X this week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he had had a meaningful conversation with Bul-

**Newswire**

garian Prime Minister Rossen Zhelyazkov and had "expressed gratitude for Bulgaria's unwavering support for Ukraine". "We deeply appreciate the solidarity of

# Why northern Portugal should be your next road trip destination



**Newsire**

Lisbon: In Portugal's wild northern borderlands, survival and spirituality go hand in hand with the changing seasons, as they have for millennia. A road trip through its remote reaches uncovers pagan festivals, age-old crafts and Roman relics in the country's only national park, Peneda-Gerês. Of all the seasons in Portugal, summer is the longest and most beloved, with warm days crowned by burnished sunsets reaching well into the harvest months. In the busy cities and beach towns of the country's south, it can be easy to deny the subtle shifts in the landscape that signal the tiptoe into autumn. But in the country's untamed north, the scenery demands to be read: amber grapes swell on trellised vines, chestnut groves pound the earth with their fruit and fat mushrooms bloom in forests simmering with golden leaves. The signs are unmistakable on my drive from Porto to the hamlet of Amares, in the depths of the Minho region. Yet perhaps I still have summer on my mind as I launch myself from a meadow bank into the waters of the Cávado River in Amares. The cold is breath-stealing but I swim determinedly for the centre and then float, skittish water boatmen gathering around my limbs as the ripples settle. This riverbend, cradled by forest and serenaded by the rush of a nearby cascade, was once the refuge of Cistercian monks. Their grand 12th-century monastery is just up the hillside, now the region's most striking and storied five-star hotel, Pousada Mosteiro de Amares. It's hard not to imagine their white-robed presence in this place, so little changed by time; and to think of how they'd have relished the silence and perhaps marked the presence of the divine in nature. A shallow waterfall in a stony, sloping river bordered by vegetation. Portugal's lesser-visited northern borderlands, which I'm here to explore on a week-long road trip, are said to be the most pious part of the country. In the south, the locals speak of it in reverent tones — of its wild beauty, hearty mountain cuisine and seemingly ceaseless calendar of Catholic festivals. Perhaps it is no bad thing I have baptised myself in its river waters. Pousada Mosteiro de Amares is an apt place to spend my first night, too: the style with which the abandoned monastery was renovated by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Eduardo Souto de Moura in the 1990s speaks to a trend that continues to gather momentum in these parts — of salvaging and celebrating the heritage of the region for posterity. The next morning, skies that were yesterday cornflower blue are blanketed with bruised clouds. "The first rains of the season," says my energetic, long-haired mountain guide Bryan Viche of Gerês Equi'Desafios when we meet at the

adventure company's headquarters in the village of Campo de Gerês. "Hiking is my first love but a 4WD tour is a great compromise in this weather." We're heading into Peneda-Gerês — Portugal's only national park, which sprawls for almost 270sq miles over four granite massifs. It's dotted with a hundred traditional stone villages that appear to have changed very little since the country's founding in the 12th century. Bryan parks his battered 4WD at a viewpoint that turns out to be blanketed in thick fog, forcing us to admire the smaller details we might otherwise have missed: feathery lichen, bright gorse and a profusion of violet blooms around our feet. "These flowers only appear at the cusp of spring and autumn," he says. "This is my favourite time of year. Out on remote trails, you can hear the goats clashing horns and the deer calling for mates." We drive on, pursuing snaking roads paved along ancient cattle tracks, occasionally crossing into Spanish territory. Steep waterfalls and tumbledown shepherd huts loom out of the haze. There are also semi-wild garrano horses, long-horned cachena and barrosa cows, all endemic to the region. "Weather like this is perfect for the park's 300 wolves, too — the mists camouflage them for hunting. They'll be busy today," Bryan says. My guide grew up exploring the park and knows its secrets and stories, and those of the people who've attempted to tame this land over the millennia. We tour remnants of a 205-mile Roman trading road, Via XVIII, first built almost 2,000 years ago to connect modern-day Braga, Portugal's oldest city, and Astorga in northwestern Spain. Clusters of tall, cylindrical mile-markers and stone tablets, some still showing Latin characters, erupt from the moss at intervals throughout the woods — the finest collection of their kind anywhere in the world. We also stop to take in a hydroelectric dam that flooded the thriving village of Vilarinho da Furna in 1972 during the dying years of the Estado Novo regime, a year after the national park was designated. "The dictatorship wanted to crush the resistance of this community — it was remote, self-governed and aided smuggling operations across the closed border," Bryan says. During hot spells or when the water levels drop, the village appears to rise from the reservoir. The abandoned houses offer a ghostly premonition of what may yet happen to the park's remaining agricultural settlements. "This ancient way of life — of communal farming, the agricultural wisdom, the folk traditions — is worth preserving," he says. But with some 40% of the Peneda-Gerês population moving away in the last 30 years, it'll take a new generation to turn the tide. A laughing woman leaning against a wooden table in front of

a wooden wall. Bryan takes me to meet Rita Costa Pinto de Barros in her whimsical produce shop, Loja do Parque, in the unfortunately named village of Covide. Watercolours of mushrooms decorate the walls between shelves stacked with herbs and honey, while a gargantuan 35lb gourd occupies most of the counter. "During the pandemic, my husband and I had the idea of moving out of Braga and opening a centre up here to promote organic products and resurrect lost traditions," she says. "We're not alone — we've met lots of people coming north to make art, to build lives, to live more communally in nature." Rita has built a network of 70 producers to supply her shop, not just from around the national park but more broadly from the UNESCO-designated trans-border Gerês-Xurés Biosphere Reserve. "The border with Spain is just 900 years old. We've been the same people for millennia, sharing the same culture," Rita explains. Every jar and bottle has a story: the beekeeper experimenting with sweet craft beer; the distiller using mountain herbs to make gin in an abandoned school; the botanist nun harvesting medicinal plants. "There's so much to learn from these locals, their creativity and sense of community," she says, ringing up a jar of honey that smells of wildflowers then waving us off into the rain. While not blessed with the romance or riverfront settings of Lisbon and Porto, venerable Braga — Portugal's third-largest city, about an hour away from Rita's Loja do Parque shop — pulls out all the stops when it comes to religiosity. On Sunday mornings, pews are packed, which I discover as I attempt to tour a selection out of more than 200 bombastically ornate churches, chapels and oratories. Among the most notable is the hilltop Bom Jesus de Monte, reached by a 17-landing staircase or a creaky funicular. By the time I arrive at the main event, Braga Cathedral, and meet my affable city tour guide João Gomes, it's late in the day and a serious charm offensive is required to gain access. It pays off and we're let inside to marvel at the building's grand bones. Dedicated to the Virgin Mary in 1089, it predates the founding of the country and shows off soaring architecture that climbs through layers of romanesque, gothic, Manueline and baroque style. A series of mausoleums are unlocked for us by a stooped acolyte wielding heavy, antique keys, one of which reveals the remains of mummified archbishop Lourenço Vicente, who died in 1397. "In Portugal, we have a saying if something's old: 'it's more ancient than the cathedral of Braga.'" João whispers. A look into the arched interior of a cathedral with its altar and mosaic windows. "What really sets the north apart is the power of the church. The influence in daily life here is significant; even the main newspaper is run by the church," João tells me once we're back outside, now stood in the shadow of the adjacent Archbishop's Palace. "And there are historical reasons for this." Even during the long rule of the Moors in the Middle Ages, Christianity flourished in these parts, making it a strategic base for crusaders to retake the kingdom. The bishops of Braga were rewarded with vast lands for their help in creating a unified Portuguese state under King Afonso I in 1143, ruling as feudal warrior-lords until the republican uprising of 1910. Though I don't encounter any religious festivals during my time in Braga, I do stumble upon another form of city pageantry in the Praça da República. Here in the heart of Braga, accordion players have gathered around the bandstand, leading a sea of couples in a jaunty fandango. I'm savouring the music and the autumnal incense of a nearby chestnut-roasting cart when an elderly gentleman offers me his hand. "These folk dances will die if young people don't learn them," João scolds lightly, as I politely turn him down, feeling too shy to join the festivities. Alarm clocks turn out to be redundant in Braga, thanks to the cheerful pealing of church bells for first prayers, but the early start allows me a leisurely drive to the pretty town of Barcelos with its medieval bridge and ruined ducal palace — an important stop for pilgrims walking the Camino de Santiago. Here, I've arranged a workshop with brothers Moisés and Vitor Baraça, fourth-generation ceramicists — part of a network of artists specialising in folk crafts that gained the town a UNESCO Creative City designation in 2017. They meet me at the door wearing paint-splattered aprons and warm smiles. The light-filled atelier is lined with figurados, brightly painted pottery animals and rural characters. The brothers work in the same rustic style their grandmother Ana Baraça became known for in the 1960s. At that time, female potters, whose uncelebrated work was sold cheaply as children's toys at markets, started drawing the attention of academics and collectors. "We make these as a living memory of the old times, preserved for future generations," Moisés says, carefully applying paint to figurines of a religious procession on his workbench. "This art form wasn't valued until more recently. Our



grandmother didn't sign her work — it was just something to earn a little extra money," Vitor adds, absent-mindedly rolling clay between his fingers. Back then, men were the main artisans and breadwinners, and women like Ana worked with their clay offcuts, plugging gaps in the kiln with their small creations. Today, figurados produced in Barcelos are considered part of Portugal's cultural patrimony — one of the brothers' ceramic roosters was even gifted to a president of France. They show me how to sculpt a miniature version, shaping balls for the rooster's body and head, and making impressionistic cuts with a wooden tool for its beak and comb. My fingers fumble the clay, refusing to mimic the surety with which the brothers can form creatures from mere earth. "We learnt at our grandmother's knee. Clay is therapy for us," Vitor says, as we move our creations into the sun to dry. Their children have other interests and the brothers say they're not sure what will become of the family business, but they remain upbeat. Where once young people left Barcelos to make their fortunes, art and tourism are creating opportunities. "Ana would be very surprised — and very proud," he adds. Less than an hour's drive away, in the small parish of Vila Verde, another tradition rooted in the landscape of the north

Arriving in the remote village of Podence, I meet up with adventure guide João Neves, a former army major and co-founder of tour company PortugalINTN. "This is the real Portugal. In the interior, you find the essence of the country," he promises. "The people are kind, the landscape is wild and the food is better, too." Over the coming days, João will prove his points, taking me to drink at the mineral-rich hot springs of his hometown, Chaves; to picnic and sail amid the serpentine waterways of Lagos do Sabor; and to try meat-heavy dishes at restaurants where the portion sizes seem designed to hospitalise diners. But this morning is all about showcasing the licentious and pagan traditions cultivated in Trás-os-Montes over centuries of isolation, for which Podence takes the crown. João takes me on a walk through the community, home to some 200 people, where the stone cottages are decorated with giant murals of masked monsters covered in tassels and cowbells, called caretos. I'd have said they belonged in a nightmare except there are two galloping down the lane towards us, João looks at ease so I try to relax as the men, clearly friends of my guide, growl and leap around us in what must be incredibly heavy costumes. "I asked the guys to give you a taste of what happens here



has been lovingly revived — and has hit the mainstream. "We were amazed to see that the lenços dos namorados ['lovers' handkerchiefs'] inspired patterns on the Portuguese Olympic team's uniforms in Paris," Cristina Lopes tells me when I sit down with her and her four colleagues in their embroidery shop and atelier. "Although I don't think many people know the tradition was saved here." Looking over the shoulder of a woman hand stitching a handkerchief with love-related motifs. Hand-stitched handkerchiefs like the ones made at Aliança Artesanal are a tradition rooted in the landscape of the North. Examples of these handkerchiefs are spread across the table: squares of white linen finely stitched with colourful nature motifs and romantic messages in looping writing. In the 1970s, a young Cristina decided to research the faded 18th-century courtship tradition of minhotas — young country girls from the Minho region — gifting these to intended suitors. "Depending how prominently the boy would wear her handwork, the village knew if they were a couple," Cristina says. "I discovered lots of love stories as I talked to families, and lots of broken hearts, too." Aliança Artesanal was founded in 1988 to continue the art form, complete with misspelled words reminiscent of a lovelorn teenager. Today, the women also take commissions, creating custom pieces to celebrate engagements and special occasions. "The work is hard but the power of the original love stories keeps me motivated; every girl had a story she wanted to tell through her sewing," Cristina says. "If this is my legacy, I am proud." While the northern reaches of the Minho feel a world apart from the rest of Portugal, they do little to prepare me for the drive east, along meandering mountain roads, into Trás-os-Montes. The landscape is stark and elemental, like nothing else in the country: weather-beaten high plateaus and terraced fields are punctuated by lonely cottages, while lumpen peaks fold dark lakes into their crevasses. With patchy phone reception, I pull over to ask directions from an aged shepherd. He's puffing on a rolled cigarette to keep the insects at bay. "Everyone loves the cheese but no one wants to look after the sheep these days," he grumbles, pointing me in the right direction. A trail with views on a green-covered, mountainous landscape, along fenced orchards.

each year in the four-day run-up to Shrove Tuesday," João explains, laughing. "The Carnival of Podence pre-dates the Romans, that's how deep its roots are." Since time immemorial, the young men here have donned costumes and leering masks to become caretos and playfully terrorise the community and its young women, scaling balconies to steal kisses and sneaking into cellars to taste wine. Some 30,000 people descend on the community for the party — and interest in the festival has boomed since UNESCO added it to the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list in 2019. Dancers dressed in tasseled costumes with leather masks covering their faces, dance in front a museum dedicated to the carnival. "It's our most important event. People living abroad, or who've left the village, don't come home for Easter or Christmas — they come home for this," says Sofia Pombares when we visit her caretos costume workshop, Quinta do Pomar. In her mid-20s, she's by far the youngest artisan I've met during my time in the north. Here, since 2017, she has welded tin and crafted leather for the angular masks and elaborated woollen outfits on an antique loom. Where once the crafting of costumes was an expression of individuality and creativity for each family, she's now one of only two people in the community with the knowledge to make them. "It's a lot of pressure," she admits. As with the rural areas of the Minho, Trás-os-Montes has weathered significant depopulation over recent decades. But Sofia is proud to have stayed, to be a part of a movement weaving traditions into the present day. When she was growing up, women weren't encouraged to participate as caretos — but today, it's open to anyone. "That's how I met my husband, actually. I asked to borrow his costume. I wanted to run through the streets, to jump over the bonfires," she says. Fire, symbolising the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, is a key part of the carnival. On the final night, a giant effigy of a caretos will be set ablaze — its flaming, raised arms signalling the end of winter and the start of spring. It's a rite I'm keen to return for. In Portugal's far north, a land both pious and pagan, the landscape demands to be read, to be celebrated. Survival and spirituality go hand in hand with the changing seasons, as they have for millennia.





# Pakistan-Japan parliamentary group discusses strengthening of expanding economic, development cooperation

**Celina Ali** Islamabad: Pakistan-Japan Parliamentary Group meeting this week focused on strengthening bilateral relations and expanding economic and development cooperation between Pakistan and Japan. Chaired by Senator Nadeem Ahmed Bhutto, the meeting highlighted the mutual benefits of strong diplomatic ties between the two countries. Senator Bhutto, along with senior officials from the Senate Secretariat, warmly welcomed Ambassador of Japan, Akamatsu Shuichi. During the discussion, Senator Bhutto informed about the Pakistan's rich natural landscapes, particularly in the northern regions, suggesting that the country could leverage its scenic

beauty to boost the tourism sector. He also underscored Japan's strong ties with the World Bank and other economic institutions that have supported Pakistan's economic stability. The Senator said that bilateral trade between Pakistan and Japan currently stands at \$1.72 billion, stressing the need to further enhance economic collaboration. He was of the view that platforms such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Foreign Investment Support Center (FISC) could facilitate increased foreign investments in Pakistan. He further highlighted Pakistan's reliability as an economic partner and encouraged greater Japanese investment, citing the 2023 Tokyo Investment Board, which saw participation from over 127 major invest-



ment groups. He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to exploring new opportunities for trade expansion and investment growth. On skills development, he mentioned the signing of technical internship and special skill work programs, acknowledging the contributions of the 25,000-strong Pakistani diaspora in Japan in fostering bilateral relations. Ambassador Akamatsu Shuichi expressed gratitude for the warm reception and recalled his recent meeting

with the Chairman of the Senate, calling it a privilege. He reaffirmed Japan's commitment to strengthening ties with Pakistan, highlighting that diplomatic relations have spanned over 73 years, with Japan providing economic cooperation for more than 70 years. The Ambassador said that over 80 Japanese companies are currently operating in Pakistan, significantly contributing to its economic and social development. He also pointed out

that around 1,000 Japanese tourists visit Pakistan annually, with expectations of increased numbers as security concerns stabilize. He highlighted the 2025 Osaka Conference as an important platform for Pakistan to showcase its economic potential and attract investment. He praised the ongoing parliamentary exchanges between the two nations and expressed hope for further engagement following Japan's upcoming elections.

# Pakistan hails renewed cooperation with US after Sharifullah arrest



**Liaquat Ali** Islamabad: Pakistan this week highlighted its counterterrorism cooperation with Washington after the arrest of Mohammad Sharifullah, whom it blames for a 2021 attack on US troops at Kabul airport, in a military operation along the border with Afghanistan.

"We will continue to partner closely with the United States in securing regional peace and stability," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said, hours after US President Donald Trump thanked the country for the arrest, adding Sharifullah was on his way to the United States. The United States has charged Sharifullah

with helping plan the attack and a hearing was scheduled for him in a federal court in Virginia on Wednesday, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. The 2021 bombing at Kabul airport killed at least 170 Afghans and 13 U.S. soldiers as they sought to help Americans and Afghans flee in the chaotic aftermath of

the Taliban takeover. The attack was claimed by ISIS-K, the Afghan branch of the Islamic State group. The U.S. Justice Department has charged Sharifullah with "providing and conspiring to provide material support and resources" to ISIS-K. "He confessed. This was the planner of that bombing," White House national security adviser Mike Waltz said in an interview with Fox News. Sharifullah is in US custody, FBI Director Kash Patel said in a post on X alongside a picture of agents standing in front of the plane that he was due to arrive on. Pakistan had launched an operation along its Afghan border to capture Sharifullah,

whom Sharif described as an Afghan national and top commander for Islamic State Khorasan. "We thank US President Donald Trump for acknowledging and appreciating Pakistan's role and support in counterterrorism efforts," Sharif added in another statement. Pakistan's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, Ishaq Dar, had spoken with US national security adviser Mike Waltz, according to a Pakistani foreign office statement. Dar "reiterated that Pakistan looked forward to building on its longstanding and broad-based relationship with the United States under President Trump and his administration", it said.



# The EU roadmap for women's rights: A renewed push for gender equality



Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan, Dr Riina Kionka



**Newsire**

Brussels: Returning home after sunset, a woman removes her headphones, lowers her hood, and keeps an eye on each man she passes. She cannot stop thinking about the man who followed her home and attacked her. She is 1 in 3 women to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the past 12 months and to have told no one. Meanwhile, a group of women walk back from a march for women's rights. Some men walk past yelling and gesturing from across the street. Because one in six men still consider it acceptable to catcall women. For many women in Europe, these stories are unfortunately all too familiar. So too is the fact that more than 60% of the time women are the ones doing the daily cooking and/or housework. This shows that progress towards gender equality remains far too slow. There are still countless structural discriminatory norms in our societies that need to be addressed and overcome. That is why today, ahead of International Women's Day on 8 March, the European

Commission is reinforcing its commitment to gender equality, with a long-term vision for progress. With the new Roadmap for Women's Rights, the Commission plans to further pave the way towards: freedom from gender-based violence the highest standards of health equal pay and economic empowerment work-life balance and care equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions quality and inclusive education political participation and equal representation

institutional mechanisms that deliver on women's rights The Roadmap aims to build on the significant progress achieved under the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. Thanks to this strategy, historic progress has been made in the EU over the past five years, with rules on pay transparency, gender balance on company boards, and on combating violence against women. The 2025 Report on Gender Equality in the EU – which was also published today – provides a more detailed overview of this progress and where more action is needed.



# British High Commission's Chevening Climate Mentorship Group celebrates success

## High Commissioner Jane Marriott says climate change a huge challenge



High Commissioner of United Kingdom to Pakistan Jane Marriott



**Celina Ali**  
Islamabad: The British High Commission in Pakistan this week held a closing ceremony to celebrate the achievements of the Chevening Climate Mentorship Scheme participants. Through the scheme, 25 young climate activists, journalists and professionals were connected with 11 Chevening alumni who are actively working in the climate sector. With support from their mentors and the wider group, mentees have developed podcasts, documentaries and articles on the impacts of climate change for major channels and publications. They have organised youth climate conferences and events on climate negotiations and climate



finance. They have established social media platforms for women in remote communities to share their climate stories. Further, they have been supported in submitting key policy proposals to government departments like the Ministry of Climate Change. They have been coached through presenting at COP 29. And they have set up new climate fellowships and internships to foster the new talent on climate. Alongside this, participants benefited from attending Chevening's series of climate debates, where the British High Commission brought together prominent Chevening alumni in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad to debate key themes like green finance, urbanisation and COP29. British High Commissioner, Jane Marriott said: "Climate change such is a huge challenge that it can be difficult to know how to engage and make a difference. Linking young climate professionals with more experienced experts is a win-win situation: expertise, enthusiasm and idealism are shared to try and make a difference to help humanity. I'm confident that the connections forged this year will grow and inspire others beyond this beginning." Ahmed Kamal, university student and climate mentee, established a toolkit with simple actions children can take to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. This is now being rolled out to Beaconhouse schools across the country. Reflecting on his work, Ahmed Kamal said: "I wanted to create something that motivated young people to take action on climate change, just as the Chevening Climate Mentorship programme was for me." Sana Munir, Chevening alumni, freelance journalist and director of local government audit, Lahore, said: "Participating in the Chevening Climate Change mentorship scheme as a mentor was a transformative experience. Witnessing the passion and dedication of the group was truly inspiring." Applications for the prestigious Chevening Scholarship will open in August. This fully funded scholarship offers Pakistani mid-career professionals the opportunity to pursue a one-year master's degree in the United Kingdom.

**“The true test of character is not how much we know how to do, but how we behave when we don’t know what to do.” - John Holt**

**“It’s better to be at the bottom of a ladder you want to climb than half-way up one you don’t.” - Ricky Gervais**

# Stefano Pontecorvo-led Italy’s Leonardo signals rapid progress in collaboration with Türkiye’s Baykar

## Newsire

Rome: Italy’s leading aerospace and defense company, Leonardo, has indicated that its collaboration with Turkish drone manufacturer Baykar is progressing swiftly, according to the company’s chairman, Stefano Pontecorvo. At an event in Genoa showcasing Leonardo’s new digital archives, Pontecorvo addressed the potential partnership between Leonardo and Baykar. When asked about the pace of progress, he emphasized the urgency of the defense industry,



stating, “There is no room for delays in defense anymore. The era of empty words is over.” Leonardo’s CEO, Roberto Cingolani, is reportedly taking swift action regarding the collaboration. “He moves like a Formula 1 car, so yes, this process will advance quickly,” Pontecorvo said. Last week, Chairman Pontecorvo visited Baykar’s production facilities in Istanbul, highlighting the company’s success. “Baykar is managed by extremely competent individuals. If it weren’t an exceptional company, it wouldn’t have reached an industry-leading position in just 12 years,” he remarked.

While Leonardo has no direct ties to Piaggio Aerospace, which Baykar recently acquired, the Italian firm is closely monitoring the situation. “Since we aim to partner with the Turks, it is only natural that we keep a close eye on such a prestigious Italian company,” Pontecorvo added.

In an interview with the Genoa-based newspaper Il Secolo XIX, Chairman Pontecorvo hinted at upcoming developments regarding Piaggio Aerospace. “Soon, we will receive very positive news about potential cooperation with the Piaggio firm acquired by the



**Stefano Pontecorvo, Chairman, Leonardo**

Turks.” “Baykar is a global leader, and we are in talks to establish a working relationship. If successful, it will mark a significant comeback for the region,” Chairman Pontecorvo said. Leonardo has expressed clear intentions to collaborate with Baykar in the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) sector. In a previous interview with Anadolu Agency in January, Leonardo’s CEO Cingolani stated: “Leonardo’s technologies and Baykar’s technol-

ogies are highly complementary. If we collaborate, we can achieve a breakthrough in unmanned systems and expand into new markets, particularly in Europe.” The partnership discussions follow the Italian Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy’s approval of Piaggio Aerospace’s sale to Baykar on December 27, 2024. The acquisition marks a significant milestone for the Turkish defense industry as it expands its presence in the European market.



# France has a nuclear umbrella. Could its European allies fit under it?



## Newsire

Paris: As president of France in the 1960s, it was he who launched the policy of French strategic independence. Of course, he said, Americans were more our friends than Russians are. But the US too had interests. And one day their interests would clash with ours. In the world of today, his warnings have never seemed more clairvoyant. From his principle of superpower detachment, de Gaulle conjured the notion of France’s sovereign nuclear deterrent – whose existence is now at the centre of debates over European security. France and the UK are the only two countries on the European continent which have nuclear weapons.

Currently France has just short of 300 nuclear warheads, which can be fired from France-based aircraft or from submarines. The UK has about 250. The big difference is that the French arsenal is sovereign – i.e. developed entirely by France – whereas the UK relies on US technical input. On Wednesday President Emmanuel Macron aired the idea that France’s deterrent force (force de frappe) could – in this highly uncertain new era – be associated with the defence of other European countries. His suggestion drew outrage from politicians of the hard right and left, who say that France is considering “sharing” its nuclear arsenal. That – according to government officials as well as

defence experts – is a falsification of the argument. Nothing is to be “shared”. According to Defence Minister Sébastien Lecoq, the nuclear deterrent “is French and will remain French – from its conception to its production to its operation, under a decision of the president.” What is under discussion is not more fingers on the nuclear button. It is whether France’s nuclear protection can be explicitly extended to include other European countries. Until now French nuclear doctrine has been built around the threat of a massive nuclear response if the president thought the “vital interests” of France were at stake. The limits of these “vital interests” have always been left deliberately vague – ambiguity and credibility being the two watchwords of nuclear deterrence. In fact French presidents going back to de Gaulle himself have all hinted that some European countries might de facto already be under the umbrella. In 1964 de Gaulle said that France would consider itself threatened if, for example, the USSR attacked Germany. So in one way there is nothing new in Macron suggesting a European dimension to France’s deterrent. What is new, according to defence analysts, is that for the first time other European countries are also asking for it.

“In the past when France has made overtures [about extending nuclear protection], other countries were reluctant to respond,” says Pierre Haroche of the Catholic University of Lille. “They didn’t want to send out the signal that they did not have complete faith in the US and Nato.” “But Trump has clarified the debate,” Mr Laroche says. “It’s not that the Americans are talking of removing their nuclear deterrent – let’s be clear, that does not seem to be on the table right now.” “But the credibility of US nuclear dissuasion is not what it was. That has opened the debate, and led the Germans to look more favourably on the idea of coming under a French and/or British umbrella.” Last month the likely next German chancellor Friedrich Merz surprised the country’s partners by saying it might be the moment for discussion with Paris and London on the subject.

How a French or Franco-British European nuclear deterrent might operate is still far from clear. According to Mr Haroche, one option might be to position French nuclear-armed planes in other countries, such as Germany or Poland. The decision to press the trigger would still rest entirely with the French president, but their presence would send a strong signal. Alternatively, French bombers could patrol European borders, in the same way they regularly do French borders today. Or airfields could be developed in other countries to which French bombers could quickly deploy in an emergency. Numbers are an issue. Are 300 French warheads enough against Russia’s thousands? Maybe not – but in an alliance with the UK 300 become 550. Also (to repeat the point) the American nuclear deterrent is still in theory in place. There are US nuclear bombs in Germa-

ny, Italy and the Netherlands. Another question is whether to reformulate the French nuclear doctrine so as to state unambiguously that “vital interests” cover European allies too. Some say there is no need, because the strategic vagueness that exists already is part of the very deterrent. But Mr Haroche says there is a political dimension to stating more clearly that France will use its arsenal to defend other European countries. “If the US is to be less present, then European countries will be depending much more on each other. Our strategic world becomes more horizontal,” he says. “In this new world it is important to build trust and confidence among ourselves. For France to signal it is prepared to take on risk in support of others – that helps create a solid front.”

