

Pakistan wants to enhance cooperation with Fiji: High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said this week that Pakistan desired to enhance cooperation with Fiji in different sectors. "Pakistan is ready to enhance cooperation with Fiji in diverse areas including health sector," he (Page-5)

Portuguese journalist & author Teresa Nicolau visits Pakistan **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Acclaimed Portuguese journalist and author, Teresa Nicolau, arrived this week in Pakistan at the invitation of the Portuguese Embassy, to participate in events and activities in Islamabad and in Lahore, where she participated in the 2025 LLF-Lahore Literary Festival. Teresa Nicolau, a (Page-8)

China ranks 2nd in global soft power index



Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: China has become the world's second most influential soft power nation after the United States, according to the sixth annual Global Soft Power Index released here by Brand Finance this week. The report shows that China surpassed Britain to claim second place with a score of 72.8 out of 100, marking its highest-ever ranking. The country demonstrated

statistically significant growth across six of the eight soft power pillars and two-thirds of measured attributes, driven by initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, an increased emphasis on sustainability, and the strengthening of domestic brands. The index, based on a survey of more than 170,000 respondents from over 100 countries, captures global perceptions of all

193 United Nations member states. The findings were unveiled during the Global Soft Power Summit 2025. The United States retained its top ranking with a record score of 79.5 out of 100. However, its global reputation dropped four positions to 15th since the last assessment. Additionally, the country's governance matrix fell four spots to 10th. David Haigh, chairman of Brand Finance,

said the 2025 ranking reflects China's "sustained efforts to enhance its economic attractiveness, showcase its culture, and boost its reputation as a safe and well-governed nation."

Denmark to boost defence spending by €6.7bn over next two years



Covert Report
Copenhagen: Denmark will spend an additional 50bn kroner (€6.7bn) on defence over the next two years, amid the ongoing threat Russia poses to Europe, the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced this week. Speaking beside her foreign and defence ministers at a press conference at the Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen, the Danish leader promised a massive rearmament drive, saying it was "Denmark's security that is at stake". Frederiksen stressed that it had been a mistake for countries like Denmark to have cut defence spending in recent decades. "Don't cut back on defence again," the Danish prime minister said. "It must never happen again." As a result of Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions in Ukraine, European security is under threat, she said. "We don't know what he [Putin] is planning, but we know that he and Russia are in the process of rearming," Frederiksen

added. In a message to her Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen, she instructed him to "buy, buy, buy!". "If we can't get the best equipment, buy the next best. There's only one thing that counts now, and that's speed." However, Danish political commentators said the press conference was short on details about what the new budget would actually be spent on. Denmark will now be spending more than 3% of its GDP on defence, according to Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen. The additional spending pledged on Wednesday comes after the Danish authorities' announced last year that they would spend 190bn kroner (€25.5bn) on the military over the next 10 years. He latest expansion of the Danish military budget comes after the new US President Donald Trump has called on European nations to spend more on defence. Trump's administration sent shockwaves through Europe last week when the US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth told the continent's leaders that they — and not the US — should guarantee European security. European leaders have also been alarmed by Trump's decision to sideline the Ukrainians from talks this week in Saudi Arabia about a potential ceasefire in Ukraine. Trump has even attacked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy personally. In a social media post on Wednesday, the US president called the democratically elected war-time leader a "dictator".

Bilawal Bhutto defends Pakistan's N-programme

Liaquat Ali
Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Thursday called out the hypocrisy of Western countries, questioning what makes a state entitled to nuclear weapons. During a wide-ranging speech at the Oxford Union, a pre-stigious debating society that invites world leaders to speak on key issues before students and academics, he said he was "concerned that Pakistan's bal-istic missile programme is sanctioned by the US" and ask-ed who defines the rules for a country's defence capabilities. "I am struck by the hypocrisy... Is it that every Western or White country is allowed nuclear weapons and others aren't? Pakistan's is not an aggressive nuclear weapons programme." He also made a veiled jibe at recent remarks made by US President Donald Trump, saying "We don't have an expansionist policy to take over the Panama canal or conquer Canada. Ours [nuclear weapons] are only for self-defence." The event was an ode to the former PPP prime minister, titled the 'Benazir Bhutto Memorial Lecture' to discuss democracy in a divided world. A portrait of the late Benazir hung in the hall, overlooking the podium where the Bhutto scion spoke. Bilawal spoke at length about his mother, an alumna of the prestigious university and also the Union's first Asian woman president. He hailed her sacrifices for democracy, her commitment to politics, and her position as a woman politician who was also a mother.



"My mother... came to Oxford at the age of 16 to study and then went to Pakistan at the age of 25 to participate in politics," he said. "She was an extraordinary woman, with whom people would establish a personal relationship." "My mother did not teach me to take revenge, that is why I say that democracy is the best revenge." He spoke about strides Pakistan had made to appoint women to leadership positions, including having a female foreign minister, a female chief minister and even a female speaker of parliament. "What made male politicians ambitious made [women] greedy. What makes male politicians charismatic, made her loud. But she took all this in her stride," he said. "Despite the restrictions imposed on women, Benazir Bhutto paved the way for women to come forward in Pakistan, today the Chief Minister of Punjab is also a woman. Many attempts were made to target Benazir, but she continued to participate in politics without fear." He also said that the future of Pakistan is linked to the "supremacy of the people, an independent judiciary and journalism". "The people of Pakistan are right to demand a better future," he said, adding that people deserve a better future that populists promise. "They certainly do not deserve another military coup."



Henan introduces new standards to strengthen protection of ancient and notable trees



Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: Ancient and notable trees are hailed as "green national treasures" and "living cultural

relics". How should they be protected? According to Henan Provincial Forestry Bureau on February 16, the Technical Specifications for the Conservation of Ancient and Notable Trees in Henan Province has officially been released as a provincial standard for their protection and will come into effect on April 20, 2025. Henan is rich in ancient and notable trees, boasting a total of 319,461 such trees. This includes 32,954 scattered ancient trees and 777 ancient tree clusters of 286,507 trees in total. Henan ranks fourth in China in terms of the total number of such trees. On October 26, 2024, Henan issued the No. 2 Provincial Chief Forester's Order, requiring comprehensive efforts to improve the protection of ancient and notable

trees. The focus will be on strengthening technological support, enhancing the preservation and utilization of the unique genetic resources of Central China's ancient trees, actively promoting the application of R&D achievements, and improving the effectiveness of conservation. To this end, organized by Henan Provincial Forestry Bureau and led by Henan Agricultural University, with the participation of Henan Academy of Forestry Sciences and Henan Provincial Forestry Resource Monitoring Institute, the Technical Specifications for the Conservation of Ancient and Notable Trees in Henan Province was officially released after going through stages including project initiation, expert discussions, feedback solicitation, standard pre-review, and technical review. The specifications are divided into six main sections: terminology and definitions, conservation scope, conservation principles, health diagnosis, conservation measures, and inspection and archival management. They specify that the conservation of ancient and notable trees



follows the principles of protection priority, "one tree, one strategy", and balanced

conservation, ensuring their health and long-term survival.

China and Pakistan in for wheat improvement with molecular breeding

China Economic Net
Beijing: An agreement on China-Pakistan Joint Laboratory for Wheat Germplasm Innovation and Biological Breeding was recently reached among Hebei Agricultural University (HEBAU), COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI), and the National Institute for Genomics and Advanced Biotechnology (NIGAB), marking a significant step in boosting the development of wheat seed industry and related sectors in the two countries. "Wheat plays a crucial strategic role in both China and Pakistan. Due to different geographical conditions, there is great genetic diversity in wheat germplasm resources between the two countries, exhibiting great potential for wheat variety improvement through germplasm exchange," said Prof. Liu Dongcheng, Dean, College of Agronomy, HEBAU in an interview

with CEN. As Prof. Liu observed, China boasts advantages in basic research and molecular breeding while Pakistan has rich experience in soilless cultivation and tissue culture. Through cooperation, the cultivation level and efficiency of wheat varieties with high and low amylose content can be lifted. "Low amylose wheat varieties can notably improve the quality of Chapati, a representative Pakistani flour-based food, while high amylose wheat varieties can help diabetics and promote weight loss," he added. The two sides are jointly conducting research on "Rapid Improvement of Starch Quality in Wheat and Cultivation of New Wheat Varieties by Genomics". Several high-amylose wheat germplasms and local high-yielding and high-quality wheat germplasm materials rich in iron

and zinc from Pakistan have been introduced to China. I learned that the joint laboratory will focus on molecular breeding research to improve the protein, starch, and nutritional qualities of Pakistani high-yielding wheat varieties, to cultivate new high and low-amylose wheat varieties for the two nations. Simultaneously, the cooperation between HEBAU and Pakistani institutions is expected to cover basic research, breeding application, cultivation techniques, and machinery production for crops including wheat, corn, and cotton, and industries of grain, oil, vegetable, fruit, and livestock in the future.



Henan's black stork population hit new high



Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: Following the first recorded sighting of velvet scoters, new discoveries in bird monitoring have been made at the Yellow River Wetland in Mengjin county of Luoyang city, Central China's Henan province. Researchers at the wetland have recently monitored 95 endangered black storks, a species under China's first-class national protection. Known as the "panda of the

bird world" due to its rarity, the black stork is a symbol of endangered species. This marks the largest number of black storks ever recorded in the Mengjin Yellow River Wetland Reserve, also a new record in Henan. The black stork is a treasure bird, known for its large size and graceful appearance. It has long, red legs and beak, and its black feathers shimmer with a beautiful metallic sheen under the sunlight, making

it a sight to behold. It is a globally endangered species and wildlife under first-class state protection. The black stork mainly inhabits lakes, marshes, and rivers, requiring high-quality habitats with clear water, abundant food, and minimal human disturbance.

In recent years, Mengjin has been continuously advancing the national strategy for ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin, while also strengthening wetland conservation and the restoration of bird habitats, sobird diversity at the Mengjin Yellow

River Wetland has steadily increased. A total of 331 bird species have been recorded so far, including 73 species under national key protection, attracting lots of experts and birdwatchers to observe and photograph them.



Italy supports education of young Christians in Pakistan



Italian Ambassador to Pakistan, Marilina Armellin

On the occasion," reads a note, "the ambassador handed over 825 scholarships financed by Italy through the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation to young Pakistanis from the most disadvantaged communities, particularly Christian ones, but also including Muslim students.



Newsire
Lahore: The Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan, Marilina Armellin, accompanied by the head of the AICS Office in Islamabad, Francesco Zatta, visited the Don Bosco Technical Training Centre in Lahore this week, the largest Salesian institute in Pakistan.

Through the Belief project (Welfare, Empowerment, Work, Education and Training) entrusted to the execution of the Trade Union Institute for Development Cooperation (Iscos), the Don Bosco educational community in Pakistan will promote the vocational training and education of young Pakistanis in professional sectors, such as car-



penry, electricity, aesthetics, tailoring, IT, etc. Also present at the ceremony were Paolo Pozzo and Eugenio Mozzarelli from Iscos.

Looking ahead, Italy is also thinking about training Pakistani workers in professional profiles that are in short supply in the Italian labour market, including Italian language courses.



China's AI applications reshape global tech, defying US containment

Ding Gang

Apple is reportedly to reveal its latest iPhone SE4 on Wednesday. Expected to sell for roughly \$499 in China (with government subsidies making it cheaper for some), the new device signals Apple's effort to tap into the mid-range market without losing its signature premium appeal.

Why does the global tech application pattern increasingly revolve around China?

Let's step back for a moment to see the bigger picture. Despite being an undeniable icon of Silicon Valley innovation, Apple owes much of its success to China. From the hardware that powers its products to the more than 5 million third-party app developers building the iOS ecosystem, China's influence has been quiet but unequivocally reshaping global tech.

However, Apple isn't the only one that relies on China. China is having a huge effect in shaping

global technology trends as the world's largest smartphone market and one of the few countries to fully embrace and deploy 5G at scale.

China doesn't just consume technology, it builds, refines and scales it, ultimately leading to its application in ways that the rest of the world often strives to match. Furthermore, what's happening in China right now is nothing short of a tech revolution - with AI as its crown jewel.

To understand why China plays such a unique role, you must first grasp the sheer scale of its tech ecosystem. With over 1.1 billion internet users, China is home to the world's largest pool of smartphone users. Paired with an advanced 5G network ubiquitous in most urban areas, this environment is perfect for innovation, making China a force to be reckoned with in the global tech landscape.

Whether it's online shopping, video streaming or mobile payments, these technologies thrive in

China because they're backed by millions - or even hundreds of millions - of daily users. But more importantly, this scale generates vast amounts of data, which fuels artificial intelligence, and China has an inexhaustible supply of data. Combine this with a rapidly growing pool of AI talent trained in some of the world's best universities and hundreds of billions of dollars in research funding, and you start to see why China has become one of the leaders in the AI race.

One clear example of China's AI leadership is the recent emergence of DeepSeek, a cutting-edge AI project poised to play a key role in what some call the "second digital revolution." This revolution, characterized by the widespread integration of AI into various industries and daily life, is a testament to China's pioneering role in shaping the future of technology. China is creating specialized models that solve specific medical, education, manufacturing and agriculture problems, demonstrating the practical and inspiring potential of AI in our daily lives. It's not just about cutting-edge research papers or flashy demos. Currently, about 250 million Chinese people are deeply learning the operational techniques of AI applications and the intelligent tools produced.

Here's where it gets interesting from an American perspective. Washington has been doubling down on policies to curb China's tech ascendancy, with restrictions on semiconductor exports and limits on AI model access. These measures, aimed at limiting China's access to key technological components and knowledge, reflect the growing concerns about China's rapid technological advancement.

However, the truth is much of this effort feels like swimming upstream against a surging



current. China's ecosystem has reached a point where outright containment is no longer feasible. Its AI industry isn't shaped by lone-star geniuses or serendipitous breakthroughs; it's fueled by a collective national effort, a robust industrial base and a market hungry to try, adopt and refine new technologies, and last but not least, hundreds of millions of people are learning to apply AI. All this creates a larger market with more significant potential for companies like Apple that are developing its AI technology.

In a world increasingly driven by AI, competing with China isn't just about building better tools or writing better algorithms. It's about learning to develop better ecosystems that enable innovation to thrive in labs and

the real world. And that's where the future will be decided.

The author 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@globaltimes.com.cn. Follow him on X @dinggangchina

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



Stabilizing China-US relations is also in the interests of the US

Global Times

Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, who is also Chinese lead person for China-US economic and trade affairs, held a video call Friday with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on bilateral important economic issues. The two sides exchanged in-depth views on the implementation of consensus reached by the two heads of state during their phone talks, and on important issues between China and the US in the economic field.

This is another recent interaction between China and the US in the economic and trade field. Both sides agree on the importance of bilateral economic and trade relations.

Earlier, Member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi had a phone call with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio upon request. He also held discussions with people from various sectors in the US while chairing the United Nations Security Council high-level meeting in New York. Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao sent a letter to the newly ap-

pointed US Secretary of Commerce, Howard Lutnick. Exchanges between China and the US are taking place at the levels of diplomacy, economy and trade, business circles and strategic circles.

It has been more than a month since the new US administration took office, and international public opinion generally believes that China-US relations have had a relatively mild and cautious start. It should be said that the gradual development of China-US communication at all levels continues this momentum.

However, recently, the US State Department updated the fact sheet on US relations with Taiwan island by removing the wording that the US "does not support 'Taiwan independence'." It also revised its China fact sheet, which is now an expanded section on economic ties emphasizing the US-China trade deficit and US companies' alleged concerns about China.

Such moves have not only raised doubts about the backsliding of the US' position on the Taiwan question, but has also led to global concerns that it may aggravate global trade tensions.



From various complex signals, it is not difficult to discern the ambivalence in Washington about Beijing and about China-US relations. On one hand, the US continues its containment, suppression against China, and promotes the old trick of gaming against China by exaggerating the "China threat" rhetoric. On the other hand, the relevant information just proves the importance of stable China-US economic and trade relations to the US.

The New York Times stated that "Trump Eyes a Bigger, Better Trade Deal With China," which shows that Washington is in need of benefiting from stable China-US economic and trade relations, and this concern trumps most other issues. This entanglement reflects the US' strategic anxiety of "wanting to

suppress China without harming itself."

It is worth emphasizing that no matter what complex considerations Washington may have about China, its decisions cannot be divorced from the basic logic of state-to-state relations, and confrontation with China is not a good choice. Data shows that during the trade war launched by the US in 2018, over 90 percent of the costs from US tariffs on China were borne by American businesses and consumers. Time magazine reported that the recent tariff increases on China will directly raise costs for American households in 2025. New York Times columnist Paul Krugman wrote that "American consumers bore the great bulk of the burden" and "consumers would pay the tariffs after all." The tariff war has not brought tangible benefits to the US, a fact widely recognized within the country.

The trade war and tariff war have no winners - this is not just a piece of advice from China to the US, but an undeniable fact. China's vast market provides abundant opportunities for American businesses, while the US' advanced technology and management expertise also provide references and aids to China's industrial upgrading and economic growth. According to the latest report from the American Chamber of Commerce in China, 53 percent of US companies operating in China plan to increase their investment in 2025.

The so-called "political correctness" that generalizes economic and trade issues into security and ideological matters is actually being deconstructed by market laws and business rationality. The China-US relationship is an organic ecosystem, and any attempt to crudely reconstruct it will have an overall impact. A stable China-US relationship is in the common interest of both nations.

The notion, entertained by some in Washington, that the US can achieve a sweeping victory without any cost does not align with reality. As long as the US can correct its perception of China and work together with China on the basis of broad common interests, it is entirely reasonable to expect that China-US relations will stabilize and improve. Beyond trade and economics, there remains room for cooperation in areas such as technology and cultural exchanges, military communication and joint crackdown on transnational crimes. Both countries can also work together to advance artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and other technologies for the benefit of humanity, while



helping more nations in the Global South to unlock their growth potential.

At the same time, maintaining overall stability in China-US relations is crucial for global stability. The international community expects cooperation, not confrontation, between the two nations. Even among US allies, most countries do not wish to be forced to take sides between China and the US.

For some time now, China has made its principled stance on developing China-US relations abundantly clear on multiple occasions. We are ready to build a stable, healthy, and sustainable bilateral relationship with the US based on the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation.

We hope Washington will make the right choice and meet China halfway, taking

concrete actions to inject new vitality into China-US economic and trade relations while contributing to global stability. This is not only a call from reality, but also the right path toward the future.

Global Times

Editor-in-Chief: S. Ali

Associate Editor: Afzal Butt

Email: editor@covert.com.pk

Phone/Fax : +92-51-2723419

690. Street 17 Block E Bahria Town phase 8, Islamabad, Pakistan

Pakistan wants to enhance cooperation with Fiji: High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri

Covert Report Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said this week that Pakistan desired to enhance cooperation with Fiji in different sectors. "Pakistan is ready to enhance cooperation with

Fiji in diverse areas including health sector," he posted on X after holding meetings with the Fiji leadership. Fiji is an island country in Melanesia, part of Oceania in the South Pacific Ocean. Fiji consists of an archipelago of more than 330 islands—of

which about 110 are permanently inhabited—and more than 500 islets, amounting to a total land area of about 18,300 square kilometres (7,100 sq mi). The most outlying island group is Ono-i-Lau. About 87% of the total population live on the two major islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. About three-quarters of Fijians live on Viti Levu's coasts, either in the capital city of Suva, or in smaller urban centres such as Nadi (where tourism is the major local industry) or Lautoka (where the sugar-cane industry is dominant). The interior of Viti Levu is sparsely inhabited because of its terrain. Fiji has one of the most developed economies in the Pacific through its abundant forest, mineral, and fish resources. The currency is the Fijian dollar, with the main sources of foreign exchange being the tourist industry, remittances from Fijians working abroad, bottled water exports, and sugar cane. Pakistan and Fiji have friendly relations. The two are focusing on translating the friendship into partnership.



UNSC urges Rwanda to pullout troops from Congo; Ambassador Asim Ahmad for peace talks



Celina Ali Islamabad: The UN Security Council unanimously this week

adopted a resolution condemning Rwanda for backing a rebellion in the eastern Democratic Republic of Con-

go (DRC), and ordering its troops to withdraw from the country, with Pakistan urging the parties to comply with the verdict to restore peace and stability there. "All parties must prioritize dialogue and diplomacy and recommit to the peace and mediation processes in place, going forward," Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, alternative permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, told the 15-member Council as the situation as the situation in DRC worsened. The meeting took place as M23 rebels and Rwandan soldiers took over two main cities in Congo's mineral-rich east over the last month and continued to expand their territory, displacing nearly a million people and bringing the central African Great Lakes region to the brink of war. The resolution called on the Rwanda Defence Forces to stop supporting the armed group and immediately withdraw from Congolese territory "without preconditions." The Council reiterated its urgent appeal for all parties to conclude an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, as called for by leaders from

East and Southern Africa. They also strongly urged the DRC and Rwanda "to return without preconditions to diplomatic talks as a matter of urgency to achieve a lasting and peaceful resolution of the protracted conflict in the region." The resolution was submitted by France whose Ambassador, Nicolas de Riviere, who thanked Council members for their commitment during negotiations over the past week. "This delivers a clear message: there is no military solution to the conflict in the east of the DRC," he said. "The offensive carried out by the M23 supported by Rwanda must be put to an end." The situation in the eastern DRC has deteriorated since January as M23 fighters advanced across North and South Kivu provinces, with the crisis spreading to Iтури. They have captured the regional capital Goma and the second city, Bukavu. Thousands of people have been killed and even more displaced, including to neighbouring countries such as Burundi. The resolution strongly condemned all attacks directed against civilians and infrastructure, including UN, humanitarian and medical personnel. It also condemned summary executions and maiming, sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking and the recruitment and use of children.

The Council demanded all parties to allow and facilitate safe, immediate and unhindered humanitarian access to all people in need, as well as the restoration of basic services such as healthcare, water, electricity and communications. The Council also reaffirmed full support to the UN mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, and stressed that attacks against peacekeepers may constitute war crimes. In his explanation of vote, the Pakistan envoy said there was no military solution, only a peaceful settlement through dialogue. "All parties must prioritize dialogue and diplomacy and recommit to the peace and mediation processes in place, going forward," Ambassador Asim Ahmad said. "We cannot afford a failure," the Pakistani envoy said. "We must not let everything unravel before our eyes." Pakistan, he said, believes that the resolution was an important and necessary step towards that objective. Noting that the resolution reaffirms the Security Council's strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the DRC, he welcomed the regional efforts and processes, and high-level engagements led by the African Union and other sub-regional organizations to bring peace to the DRC. "We expect and call on all parties to cooperate and fully comply with the provisions of this resolution and their respective obligations in a genuine and timely manner," Ambassador Asim Ahmad added.

Kazakhstan, Pakistan keen on strengthening interparliamentary cooperation

Celina Ali Islamabad: The ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan, Yerzhan Kistafin, met with the Deputy Chairman of the Senate Sardar Syedaal Khan Nasar this week, to discuss a wide range of issues on bilateral and regional agenda. During the meeting, ambassador Kistafin informed about the planned events for the current year, emphasizing the high dynamics of Kazakh-Pakistani relations. In turn, Pakistani Senate Deputy Chairman highlighted the long-standing friendly relations between the two countries and expressed deep interest in further expanding cooperation across the entire spectrum of the bilateral agenda. As a result of the negotiations, it was agreed to hold events this year with the participation of the upper chambers of the parliaments of Kazakhstan and Pakistan. Earlier it was reported that Kazakhstan and Pakistan had pledged to deepen bilateral ties.



Benazir Bhutto was more than a leader: Umar Rehman Malik



Abdullah Jan Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik said this week that Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was more than a leader. "Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was more than a leader—she was a symbol of resilience and transformation," he said in a statement. The PPP leader said that as the first woman to lead the Islamic world, she carried the weight of history with unwavering courage, dignity, and determination. "Nearly five decades ago, she broke new ground as the first female Asian President of the Oxford Union—a milestone that foreshadowed her lifelong fight for democracy, equality, and justice. She ulti-

mately gave her life for these ideals," he added. On February 20th, Umar Rehman Malik said, her legacy was honored at the Oxford Union, the very place where she once stood as a young visionary, destined to shape the future. Benazir Bhutto was a popular politician and stateswoman who served as the 11th prime minister of Pakistan from 1988 to 1990, and again from 1993 to 1996. She was also the first woman elected to head a democratic government in a Muslim-majority country. A liberal and a secularist ideologically, she chaired or co-chaired the PPP from the early 1980s until her assassination in 2007. She studied at Harvard University and the University of Oxford, where she was President of the Oxford Union. Her father, the PPP leader Zulfikar Bhutto, was elected prime minister on a socialist platform in 1973. She returned to Pakistan in 1977, shortly before her father was ousted in a military coup and executed. Bhutto and her mother, Nusrat Bhutto, took control of the PPP and led the country's Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). Bhutto was repeatedly imprisoned by Zia-ul-Haq's regime and self-exiled to Great Britain in 1984. She returned in 1986 and—inspired by Thatcherite economics—transformed the PPP's platform from a socialist to a liberal one, before leading it to victory in the 1988 election.



Pakistan, Germany strengthen ties to boost carbon market development

Celina Ali
Islamabad: In a significant step toward advancing climate action, prominent government leaders from Pakistan and Germany convened at the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (MoCC&EC) for a high-level bilateral meeting.

The discussions focused on strengthening Pakistan's carbon market rules and regulations, policies, integrity, and infrastructure, with an emphasis on leveraging climate financing to support the country's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.

The meeting, held under the patronage of Secretary (In charge) MoCC&EC, Aisha Humaera, highlighted the critical role of international cooperation in achieving sustainable climate goals.

Humaera expressed her optimism about the technical expertise and capacity-building support provided by the German government, which she believes will help establish robust carbon projects with high environmental integrity.

"We eagerly look forward to Pakistan's first carbon market transaction and signing bilateral agreements with at least two countries for Article 6 cooperation this year," she stated, underscoring the ministry's priority to harness climate financing for sustainable development.

Germany, a global advocate for scaling up carbon markets, has been actively supporting Pakistan through the Supporting Preparedness for Article 6 Cooperation (SPAR6C) program. This initiative, led by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK), aims to assist Pakistan in implementing Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, which facilitates international cooperation on carbon markets.

The SPAR6C program, implemented by the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) in collaboration with the UNEP Copenhagen Climate Centre and GFA Consulting Group, has been instrumental in developing carbon market guidelines, providing technical reviews, and building institutional capacity in Pakistan.

Pakistani cuisine recipes German Ambassador to Pakistan, Alfred Grannas, emphasized Germany's commitment to supporting Pakistan in building a high-integrity carbon market. "Through the SPAR6C program, we are strengthening institutional capacity, refining regulatory frameworks, and advancing technical expertise to enhance Pakistan's preparedness for international carbon transactions," he said.

Ambassador Grannas also highlighted the potential for market-based climate action to drive long-term emissions reductions and sustainable growth in Pakistan.

The meeting was attended by key stakeholders, including SPAR6C program focal points Ms. Malin Ahlberg and Mr. Thomas Forth from BMWK, GGGI Global Program Manager Mr. Marshall Brown, and UNEP Copenhagen Climate Centre's Senior Expert Ms. Xianli Zhu. Discussions centered on developing a pipeline of viable carbon market projects, such as the Lakhodair Landfill Project in Punjab, and establishing bilateral agreements for carbon transactions with purchasing countries.

Mr. Thomas Forth, Senior Expert at BMWK, noted that the SPAR6C program lays a strong foundation for attracting investments and scaling up carbon finance in Pakistan. "This collaboration positions Pakistan to effectively leverage market-based solutions for sustainable growth," he said.

Ms. Xianli Zhu of UNEP-CCC highlighted the program's efforts to foster a conducive environment for carbon market development through toolboxes, guides, sectoral reports, and mentorship programs.

Meanwhile, Mr. Marshall Brown of GGGI reiterated the organization's commitment to supporting Pakistan across the full spectrum of

carbon market implementation, from readiness under SPAR6C to facilitating bilateral cooperation through the Carbon Transaction Facility. The visit of the German delegation also includes

a series of strategic and technical discussions with Pakistani private and government institutions at the federal and provincial levels. These meetings aim to increase awareness of opportu-

nities under Article 6 and the SPAR6C program, while deliberating on interprovincial coordination and strategic priorities for carbon market implementation.



Eurostat: Bulgaria has lowest percentage of online shopping in EU

NewsWire
Sofia: Bulgaria had the lowest percentage in the European Union of internet users who made online purchases in 2024, EU statistics agency Eurostat said this week.

Online shopping in the EU continues to expand, according to the latest annual survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals, Eurostat said.

In 2024, 77 per cent of internet

users bought or ordered goods or services for personal use online in the previous 12 months, increasing from 59 per cent in 2014, marking a 17 percentage point (pp) rise.



The highest percentages of internet users who made online purchases in 2024 were in Ireland (96 per cent), the Netherlands (94 per cent) and Denmark (91 per cent). Conversely, Bulgaria had the lowest share at 57 per cent, followed by Italy and Roma-

nia, both at 60 per cent. From 2014 to 2024, significant growth was observed in Romania (+43 pp, from 17 per cent to 60 per cent), Hungary (+37 pp, 42 per cent to 79 per cent), and Lithuania (+36 pp, 36 per cent to 72 per cent), Eurostat said.

Portuguese journalist & author Teresa Nicolau visits Pakistan



Pakistan Academy of Letters
National Heritage & Culture Division

Meet a Writer
with renowned author and cultural journalist from Portugal

Teresa Nicolau
A renowned author and cultural journalist from Portugal

Session Chair
H.E. Manuel Frederico Pinheiro Da Silva
Ambassador of Portugal to Pakistan

Note of Thanks
Dr. Najeeba Arif
Chairperson, Pakistan Academy of Letters

Moderator
Dr. Arshad Waheed

📅 Wednesday, 26 February 2025
🕒 11:00am
📍 Committee Room # 1,
Pakistan Academy of Letters
Pitras Bukhari Road, H-8/1, Islamabad

Teresa Nicolau is a renowned Portuguese journalist and author, currently serving as the Director of Culture at the Santa Casa da Misericórdia in Lisbon. Nicolau's work focuses on the intersection of culture, media, and society. She is the author of the book "A Room That is Yours" and has written extensively on social and cultural topics. Her work has been recognized with several awards, including the Pro-Author Award and the Cultural Journalism Award. Her visit aims to foster cross-

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Acclaimed Portuguese journalist and author, Teresa Nicolau, arrived this week in Pakistan at the invitation of the Portuguese Embassy, to participate in events and activities in Islamabad and in Lahore, where she participated in the 2025 LLF-Lahore Literary Festival. Teresa Nicolau, a distinguished journalist and author known for her compelling storytelling and deep insights into culture, and media's influence on public discourse, has made significant contributions to Portuguese journalism and literature. She is currently the Director of Culture at the Santa Casa da Misericórdia, in Lisbon. With a solid career in journalism, Teresa Nicolau authored the regular media column "A room that is yours", in the "Jornal de

Letras, Artes e Ideias" (the most impactful Portuguese printmedia on art and culture), in which she deeply reflected on social and cultural topics. With RTP (Radio Televisão Portuguesa) she worked as Art and Culture Editor between 1996 and 2023, being the author and coordinator of a landmark cultural daily program "As Horas Extraordinárias (The Extra Hours)", broadcasted by RTP from 2015 to 2023, achieving great recognition and vast audience. Her career was recognized with the Pro-Author Award from the Portuguese Society of Authors, in 2017, and with the Cultural Journalism Award, conferred by the same institution, in 2020. During her visit to Pakistan, Ms. Teresa Nicolau engaged in panel discussions, academic and scholar visits, interviews, sessions

with students and professors, and interactive diverse sessions, sharing her views and expertise and fostering cross-cultural literary and cultural exchanges between Portugal and Pakistan. Her participation in this year's Literary Festival, from 21st to 24th February, was a continuation of the Portuguese participation in the 2024 edition of the literary festival, then with the author José Luis Peixoto, highlighting the engagement of the Embassy of Portugal in Islamabad in promoting cultural diplomacy in Pakistan, with the support of the Camões-Institute for Cooperation and Language I.P., based in Lisbon, Portugal.



Teresa Nicolau
Teresa Nicolau, Director of Culture at Santa Casa da Misericórdia in Lisbon, is a journalist, film critic, and former Arts and Culture editor at RTP. She hosts As Horas Extraordinárias and has won the Cultural Journalism Award (2020) and Pro-Author Award (2017) from the Portuguese Society of Authors.

Japan's Ambassador Akamatsu Shuichi hosts reception to celebrate emperor Naruhito's 65th birthday



"There still lies an unlimited space for cooperation between our two countries," he remarked. Discussing global affairs, the ambassador underscored Japan's commitment to restoring peace and stability in an increasingly divided international landscape. "The rule of law is being challenged in many ways, making it our urgent task to uphold international harmony. Japan is committed to working with Pakistan to achieve this goal," he stated. On the bilateral front, Ambassador Akamatsu reaffirmed Japan's long-standing support for Pakistan through over 70 years of Official Development Assistance (ODA). He emphasized Japan's development philosophy of sustainable assistance, saying, "Not only providing fish, but also teaching how to fish, based on mutual respect and collaboration." Highlighting cultural and people-to-people exchanges, he encouraged greater participation from Pakistan in Expo 2025, scheduled to take place in Osaka, Kansai from April to October this year. Referring to the Japanese saying "seeing is believing," he invited Pakistanis to experience Japan firsthand.



The evening also featured a vibrant showcase of Japanese culture. Students from the Islamabad Japanese School performed traditional taiko drumming and the folk dance 'So-ran bushi.' Exhibitions of Ikebana and Bonsai, organized by the Lahore Sogetsu Study Group and the Lahore Bonsai Society, were also on display, along with exhibits by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Japanese companies. Ambassador Akamatsu concluded by expressing his hope for stronger ties between the two nations, saying, "I wish for more active exchanges between Japan and Pakistan, fostering a friendship that meets the demands of this new era."

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Japan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Akamatsu Shuichi this week hosted a reception to mark the 65th birthday of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito at a local hotel. Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, attended the event as the chief guest, alongside a distinguished gathering of diplomats, government officials, and members of the business and cultural communities. In his address, Ambassador Akamatsu reflected on his experiences in Pakistan since his arrival in late November 2024, expressing appreciation for the warm sentiments toward Japan and the enthusiasm for strengthening bilateral ties.



PM Shehbaz Sharif reaffirms 'strong desire' to work closely with Trump administration for improved ties

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif this week reaffirmed his government's intention to work closely with the Trump administration for stronger bilateral ties with the United States. A news release issued from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said the premier expressed Pakistan's "strong desire" to work

towards the endeavour while recalling the "decades-long history of close cooperation" between the two countries in a meeting with US Charge d' Affaires Natalie Baker. The PMO statement added that she mentioned that the new US administration would also work with Pakistan in pursuit of common objectives to strengthen their



bilateral relationship. The prime minister also stressed the need for both countries to continue their close cooperation in the counter-terrorism domain, in particular, to deal with the

threat posed by the proscribed Islamic State and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan groups. The PM further emphasised the need to enhance trade, as well as cooperation in the areas of infor-

mation technology, agriculture, health, education, and energy, among other areas of mutual interest, the statement added. The senior US diplomat thanked the prime minister for receiving her.



EU ambassador pledges support for women empowerment

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Ambassador and Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Pakistan Dr Riina Kionka this week said the EU was committed to supporting initiatives that enhance human capital and empower women in Pakistan.

"I am excited to lay the foundation for a modern TVET centre that will prepare women for the digital transition, empowering them with the latest technological skills and fostering economic growth in the province," Dr Riina told the ground-breaking ceremony for the Centre of Excellence under the Team Europe's TVET Sector Support Programme at the IM SCIENCES. She said the initiative marked a significant step towards equipping women with cutting-edge skills in artificial intelligence, robotics, internet of things, and data science—all critical fields for Pakistan's growing digital economy. "The programme is part of the broad-



er Team Europe Initiative involving the EU, France, Germany and Italy to build back better through green jobs creation, but also contributes to the EU's Global Gateway Initiative in which the EU is trying to leverage public and private sector investments, including by investing in skills of young people in Pakistan," she said.

Country Director for the British Council in Pakistan James Hampson introduced the programme and highlighted its role in promoting gender equality through inclusive access to high-tech training. "The launch of this centre of excellence under the EU-funded TVET Sector Support Programme is a game-changer for

women's economic empowerment in Pakistan. By equipping women with cutting-edge digital and high-tech skills, this initiative will not only transform individual futures but also drive lasting change in the country's workforce and economy," he said. According to officials, the TVET Sector Support Programme (TVET

SSP) is a five-year programme designed to strengthen Pakistan's TVET sector, by providing training opportunities to men and women in high-demand professions. The action aims to advance Pakistan's human capital development through creation of decent jobs in green and digital areas.



British Council Pakistan announces study UK Alumni Awards 2025 winners



Celina Ali

Islamabad British Council Pakistan this week announced the national winners of the Study UK Alumni Awards 2025. The award ceremony held in Karachi was organised by the British Deputy High Commission and the British Council in Pakistan and attended by Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Minister of Federal Education and Professional Training of Pakistan (who is also a UK alumni) as the chief guests. The awards recognise UK alumni from Pakistan for their outstanding achievements as business professionals, entrepreneurs, innovative creators, and community leaders, and for their contribution to strengthening ties between the UK and Pakistan.

The independent judging panel selected recipients for four award categories: Business and Innovation Award, Culture and Creativity Award, Science and Sustainability Award and Social Action Award. James Hampson, Country Director British Council Pakistan said: "It is a privilege to honour the achievements of individuals who have all benefitted from the UK's world class higher education system and have gone to make a big impact on the world around them. This year's awards ceremony highlights the talent and accomplishments of UK alumni across Pakistan. Congratulations to the winners and finalists." The Business and Innovation Award was presented to Asad Aslam a graduate of Queen Mary University of London, a biomedical engineer, Asad developed an AI-based infant incubator to address the lack of locally made devices for premature babies in Pakistan.

The Culture and Creativity Award was presented to Zehra Shallwani a graduate of King's College, London, founder of Dastaan Tours Pvt Ltd, Zehra champions eco-tourism and community empowerment in Pakistan. The Science and Sustainability Award was presented to Dr Muhammad Abul Hasan a graduate of University of Glasgow, an Associate Professor at NED University, Dr Hasan co-leads Pakistan's first Neurocomputation Lab at the National Center for AI. The Social Action Award was presented to Sheeba Asad a graduate of University of Leicester, founder of FALAH, Sheeba created a groundbreaking application to tackle Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Pakistan. The Study UK Alumni Awards recognise the outstanding achievements of international UK alumni worldwide. These awards honour leaders who have leveraged their UK education to make significant contributions to their communities, industries, and countries. Now in their 11th year, the Alumni Awards are a truly global award: more than 1,300 applications were received from alumni in over 100 countries, representing close to 120 UK universities.

"The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me." - Ayn Rand

COVERT

TRUTH UNFOLD

March 2-8, 2025

"The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Italy: PM Meloni says Europe shouldn't adopt stance on Ukraine contradicting US

Newsire
Rome: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said Monday that the European Union should not adopt a stance that would contradict US policy on Ukraine. Reporting on an emergency meeting of

European leaders on Ukraine held in Paris that Meloni attended, the agency said she was not pleased with its restricted format, as it did not include the Baltic and Nordic states, who are the most exposed to the risk of expansion of the war in Ukraine.

The meeting cannot be in "an anti-Trump" format, she noted, adding the US is working to reach peace and the EU should do its part in that context. During the meeting, Meloni also expressed opposition to remarks by British

Prime Minister Keir Starmer on the possibility of sending European peacekeepers to Ukraine. It would be the most complex and least effective solution, especially without sufficient security guarantees for Ukraine, she added. As a result, other avenues should be explored, especially those that include the US, Meloni said. "It is in the Euro-Atlantic context that European and American security is founded," she added. European leaders gathered earlier Monday amid concerns sparked by US President Donald Trump's direct engagement with Russia and his administration's intention to exclude the EU from Ukraine peace talks. Participating in the summit were the leaders of the UK, Germany, Poland, Italy and Denmark, as well as NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, apart from French President Emmanuel Macron as the host.



Italy's ambassador to Pakistan Marilina Armenin



Ambassador Nicolas Galey hosts grand reception Celebrates PIA's direct flights between Islamabad, Paris

Celina Ali
Islamabad: In a momentous celebration of strengthened air connectivity and diplomatic ties, French Ambassador to Pakistan, Nicolas Galey, hosted an exclusive reception this week at the French residence in Islamabad. The gathering marked the highly anticipated resumption of direct flights between Islamabad and Paris, operated by Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). The prestigious event brought together an esteemed audience, including PIA's Chief Executive Officer, Muhammad Amir Hayat, diplomats, media professionals, and distinguished guests. Their presence underscored the significance of this milestone in fostering bilateral relations between France and Pakistan. Ambassador Galey set the tone for the evening with a

symbolic "welcome aboard," expressing his joy at hosting this landmark occasion. He extended heartfelt gratitude to PIA's leadership for selecting Paris as the first European destination in the airline's renewed operations. "This choice reaffirms the strong and enduring ties between our nations and highlights the vital role of connectivity in our relationship," he remarked. Acknowledging the extensive efforts behind this achievement, the ambassador highlighted the dedication of PIA, the Pakistani government, and the civil aviation sector in regaining access to European airspace. He reflected on the rigorous compliance process undertaken with the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) following the Karachi tragedy, emphasizing the unwavering support provided by the EU delegation in Islamabad.

Ambassador Galey emphasized the economic and diplomatic significance of the reinstated flights, envisioning them as a gateway for political leaders, entrepreneurs, academics, artists, students, and tourists. Expressing optimism about future expansion, he noted that the current two weekly flights—and the potential addition of a third—would substantially boost people-to-people and trade exchanges between Pakistan and Europe. A major highlight of the evening was the announcement of a strategic partnership between PIA and Air France-KLM. This collaboration will enable seamless connectivity for travelers flying from Islamabad via Paris Charles de Gaulle (CDG) Airport to 21 destinations across Europe. Passengers will benefit from streamlined baggage handling and check-in procedures, ensuring a faster and more convenient travel experience. "With a flight time of approximately seven hours, reaching Paris and beyond is now not only quicker but also more cost-effective—saving both time and money," Ambassador Galey stated. He further underscored Paris CDG's status as a global aviation hub, offering non-stop flights to over 300 destinations in 112 countries through 160 airlines, thereby expanding travel opportunities for Pakistani passengers. Reflecting on the deepening collaboration between France and Pakistan in the aviation sector, Ambassador Galey highlighted existing technical partnerships. He noted that aircraft maintenance is already entrusted to Air France Industries and KLM Engineering & Maintenance, avionics are supplied by Thales, and a recent agreement between the French and Pakistani civil aviation authorities aims to enhance air safety and training. "As PIA looks to expand its European footprint, the demand for additional aircraft will grow. With Airbus and ATR planes already playing a key role in your fleet, European manufacturers stand ready to support PIA's modernization and expansion plans," he added. The ambassador concluded his speech with a note of enthusiasm for the strengthening ties between the two nations. He wished guests an enjoyable evening, signing off with a heartfelt "Shukria, and bon voyage!"—a gesture that encapsulated the spirit of friendship and cooperation. Taking the stage, PIA CEO Muhammad Amir Hayat expressed profound joy over the airline's return to Paris. "This event is not merely about restoring a flight route—it signifies the rekindling of a deep-rooted relationship



between Pakistan and France," he remarked. He extended sincere appreciation to Ambassador Galey and the French diplomatic mission for their unwavering support in facilitating the flight resumption. "Your commitment and collaboration were instrumental in achieving this milestone. I also wish to recognize the invaluable assistance of the EASA team, the CDG airport authorities, and Mathew, Director of Customer Relations, whose efforts made this possible," he added. Hayat recalled the longstanding ties between Pakistan and France, emphasizing the deep cultural, historical, and economic bonds that unite the two nations. He highlighted Paris as one of PIA's earliest European destinations and reflected on its influence on the airline's legacy. "From the first designer uniforms introduced in PIA to our flagship office at Champs-Élysées, Paris has always held a special place in our history," he shared. He also mentioned the Mont Blanc office—a landmark in Paris that PIA has owned for decades—and the Scribe Paris property, which remains a testament to the airline's heritage in the French capital. "The resumption of flights

is not just about reconnecting routes—it's about renewing a commitment that has existed for generations," he stated. Highlighting the immense potential for tourism, trade, and cultural exchange, Hayat emphasized that direct flights between Pakistan and France would create new opportunities for businesses and travelers alike. "These flights will not only provide greater convenience for the Pakistani diaspora in France and vice versa but will also pave the way for enhanced collaboration in sectors such as trade, investment, and cultural diplomacy," he said. Concluding his speech, the PIA chief expressed his optimism about the evolving partnership between the two countries. "We believe this is just the beginning of a new era of cooperation. We look forward to deepening our engagement and fostering stronger ties between our people and cultures," he affirmed. The evening ended on a high note, with guests celebrating this milestone achievement and the promising future of Pakistan-France aviation ties.

