

Bulgaria second European NATO nation to receive the modern F-16 block 70

Newsire

Sofia: Bulgaria continues its military modernization efforts, now surpassing NATO's 2% defense spending target by dedicating 3% of its GDP to defense, writes Peter Suci from the National Interest. The country's latest acquisition, the F-16 Fighting Falcon, (Page-7)

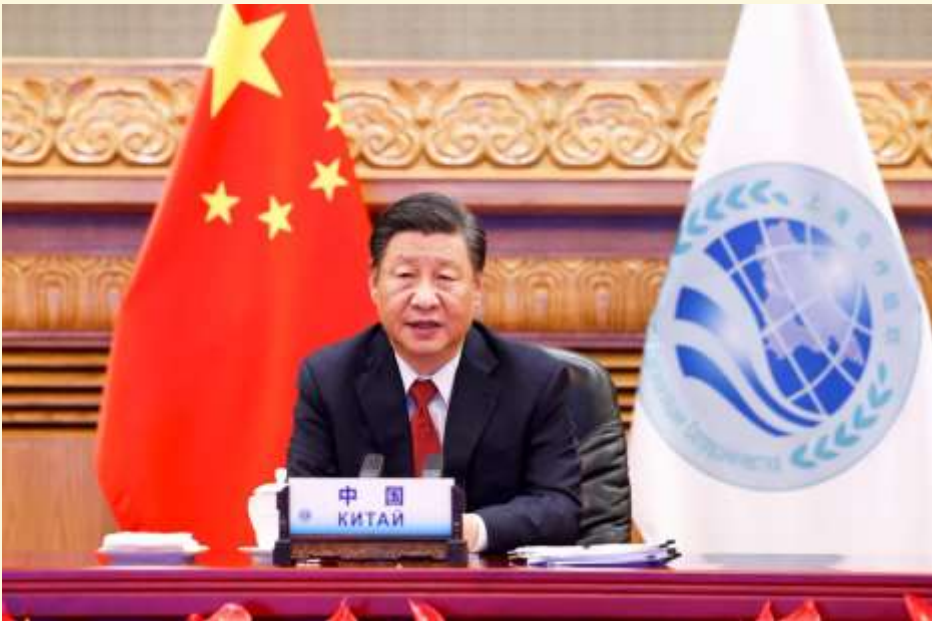
High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri strengthens Pakistan-Australia bilateral ties through strategic diplomacy **Celina Ali**
Islamabad: Pakistan's High Commissioner to Australia, Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri, continues to play a pivotal role in bolstering bilateral relations between Pakistan and Australia through proactive diplomacy, economic engagement, and people-to-people (Page-5)

China-SCO trade hits record \$890 billion



Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: The trade volume between China and the member states, observer states and dialogue partners of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization reached a record high of \$890 billion in 2024. The figure, representing 14.4 percent of the country's total exports, was disclosed during a conference on

industrial cooperation for sustainable development among SCO members in Tianjin this week. The conference marked the inaugural gathering in a series of events leading up to the SCO summit in the city this autumn. At the event, Tianjin companies signed contracts totaling 4.8 billion yuan (\$655.5 million) with companies from eight SCO members, including United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Uzbekistan. Numerous prominent SCO companies and organizations expressed eagerness to collaborate with Chinese firms and highlighted the promis-



ing future of their joint projects in China. Asset Magauov, vice-president of KazMunayGas, said: "The company is strengthening partnerships with several Chinese companies, including Sinopec and CITIC, with a focus on advancing regional sustainable development."

"The industrial park provides a top-tier business environment for Chinese companies and has seen significant success in collaboration with Chinese firms," stated Kirill Koroteev, the first deputy general manager of China-Belarus Industrial Park Development Company.

Pakistan, Denmark forge \$2 billion maritime partnership to modernize ports



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and Denmark this week announced a significant partnership worth \$2 billion to modernize the country's maritime infrastructure. This collaboration aims to improve port operations and enhance global trade competitiveness. The announcement came during a meeting between Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Junaid Anwar Chaudhry and Danish Ambassador Jakob Linulf. They agreed to accelerate the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed last year, with Danish shipping giant AP Moller-Maersk leading the investment. The discussions included plans to upgrade logistics infrastructure and incorporate green technologies in shipping. Both parties stressed the importance of using renewable energy in port operations. They also emphasized the need for workforce development and

cultural exchange to strengthen their partnership. Maersk CEO Vincent Clerc is scheduled to visit Pakistan this week to meet with the prime and other senior officials. Chaudhry highlighted efforts to adopt sustainable practices to reduce emissions at Pakistani ports. The initiative will integrate renewable energy sources like solar and wind to cut reliance on fossil fuels. Additionally, he noted that training would be provided to maritime professionals to manage eco-friendly vessels effectively. These steps aim to position Pakistan as a responsible trading partner in global markets. By adopting green shipping practices, Pakistan hopes to enhance its brand image and boost export competitiveness. The minister stated that lowering operational costs would benefit the economy in the long run. Overall, this partnership is seen as a crucial move towards fostering economic and environmental sustainability in Pakistan's maritime sector.

Bilawal Bhutto re-elected as PPP chairman



Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was re-elected as Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) this week for another four-year term following the party's intra-party elections held at the Central Secretariat in Islamabad. The elections, conducted in accordance with the PPP's constitution, finalised key leadership positions for the next four years.

Alongside Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Humayun Khan was elected as the party's Secretary General, while Nadeem Afzal Chan was chosen as Secretary Information. Aamna Piracha has been elected as Secretary Finance, completing the list of newly appointed senior officials. All party officials were elected for a four-year term as per PPP's internal electoral framework.

China nearly closes AI performance gap with US: Report

China Economic Net

Beijing: China has nearly closed the artificial intelligence (AI) performance gap with the United States, with its leading models achieving near parity with American counterparts on key benchmarks, a Stanford University report released April 7 showed.

Top U.S. and Chinese AI models achieved near parity on these performance benchmarks by the end of 2024, Stanford’s latest AI Index report found. The U.S. lead over China shrank to 0.3% on MMLU, 8.1% on MMMU, 1.6% on MATH, and 3.7% on HumanEval tests, the data showed. That contrasts sharply with U.S. advantages of 17.5%, 13.5%, 24.3%, and 31.6% respectively on the same benchmarks at the end of 2023, according to the annual analysis.

These benchmarks test distinct AI capabilities. MMLU assesses broad knowledge; MMMU tests combined text and image understanding; MATH measures complex mathematical problem-solving; HumanEval evaluates code generation, CEN reported on Friday.

Notably, top-tier U.S. models have generally required significantly more training compute than their Chinese counterparts, the analysis found. Since late 2021, the compute used for the top 10 Chinese language models scaled about three times per year, slower than the five-times-per-year rate seen elsewhere since 2018, ac-



cording to Epoch AI data cited in the report.

This compute difference is reflected in estimated costs, with some prominent Chinese models like DeepSeek-V3 reportedly trained for millions of dollars, compared to figures exceeding \$100 million or even approaching \$1 billion cited for

some leading U.S. models.

China leads globally in AI publications and patents filed, the report said. Chinese institutions produced 15 ‘notable’ AI models in 2024, second only to the U.S. (40 models) and ahead of Europe (3 models).

The report cited DeepSeek’s R1 model

from China ranking among top global AI systems. Separately, the performance lead held by the best U.S. model over the best Chinese model narrowed from 9.26% in January 2024 to 1.70% by February 2025, the data indicated.

This near parity was reached despite U.S. private AI investment (\$109.1 billion in

2024) significantly exceeding China’s (\$9.3 billion), the Stanford report noted.

Published annually by Stanford’s Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI), the AI Index report is a comprehensive resource tracking global AI trends.

Hebi cherry blossom viewing festival a blooming success

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: As the cherry blossoms bloom, the city of Hebi in Henan province offers visitors an annual festival dedicated to strolling through the drifting petals, past stalls selling local delicacies, with live music playing in the background.

This year, the 11th Hebi Cherry Blossom



Festival hosted its opening ceremony on April 2. The festival, which will run until April 21, includes interactive experiences, performances and markets, as well as three business forums to discuss the integration of culture, technology and tourism.

According to Wang Junwei, deputy head of the Hebi Cherry Blossom Culture Asso-

ciation, the city has been associated with the flower since the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC). Cherry trees were planted at the imperial palace in Zhaohe, then the capital city, which is located in Qixian county.

“Since 2006, Hebi has been planting cherry trees on a large scale along Huaxia South Road in the city center. Now, there are more than 300,000 cherry trees in 87 different varieties in the city,” Wang says.

As the blossoms became an annual attraction, the festival was launched in 2015. The road, which is around 4 kilometers in length with 17 cherry tree varieties, was named “China’s most beautiful cherry blossom avenue” “in 2016 by the China Cherry Industry Association.

“When the first edition was held, it attract-



ed tens of thousands of visitors, but after a decade of development, we registered 2.16 million visitors last year,” Wang says.

The festival seeks to boost cultural tourism and economic development through

cultural events, live performances, and interactive technological experiences.

This year’s festival is placing a stronger emphasis on traditional aesthetics through a series of immersive experiences.

Growing numbers take to water sports

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: As spring brings longer days and milder temperatures, urban dwellers are rediscovering the joy of outdoor activities. While running and cycling remain staples of Beijing’s fitness scene, a quieter yet growing trend is unfolding on the water.

Against Beijing’s iconic skyline, Chaoyang Park offers a rare urban oasis where colorful kayaks and paddle boards dot the lake as people embrace water sports.

“Even complete beginners like me can pick it up quickly, and the stunning views make for such a relaxing experience. I’ll definitely bring friends and family next time,” said one netizen on Dianping, a popular online review platform.

The rising tide of interest in water sports is driving demand for coaches, clubs and equipment, creating a host of new opportunities in this sector.

“We kicked off this year’s boating season in March and expect to see 200 to 300 visitors per day during the summer peak,” said Cheng Helong, founder of Beijing Whalesports Club, which offers kayaking, rowing, stand-up paddle boarding and various other water activities. With four bases operating across Beijing from March to October, the club expects to host around 30,000 participants this year.

“Since opening our first base in Chaoyang Park

in 2018, we’ve seen a growing enthusiasm for water sports,” Cheng said. “With support from national and local sports bureaus, we’ve organized multiple paddle board competitions to promote aquatic activities.”

Near Chaoyang Park’s paddle board hub, the Liangma River has become another popular water recreation spot for locals and visitors.

In 2019, Chaoyang district launched a waterfront vitalization project, transforming the river from a polluted, sediment-choked channel into a serene retreat for city dwellers.

While Beijing’s water sports scene is on the rise, Shanghai, already a city deeply connected to its waterways, continues to expand its offerings.

The 2024 Head of Shanghai River Regatta, for instance, transformed the bustling downtown stretch of the Suzhou Creek into a 4.2-kilometer racecourse winding past centuries-old historical landmarks such as the Garden Bridge and Shanghai Postal Museum.

The event attracted elite rowing teams from around the world, including the British and Australian national teams, as well as crews from the University of Cambridge and Oxford Brookes University.

“Racing through Shanghai’s city center was an incredible experience, the winding course was challenging, and the cheering crowds made it even more exciting. I’d love to return,” said

British rower Daniel after the race.

The event’s impact extends beyond the sport itself. According to the Shanghai Sports Bureau, the 2024 Head of Shanghai River Regatta, along with the 2024 Shanghai Marathon and the 2024 Shanghai Sailing Open, generated direct economic benefits of 962 million yuan (\$134 million).

This aquatic enthusiasm has gone viral. Kayaking-related hashtags on short-video platform Douyin have amassed nearly 1.2 billion views. The trend isn’t limited to megacities.

Eight-year-old Wu Ze, who lives in Yongjing county, in the upper reaches of the Yellow River in Gansu province, began practicing paddle boarding last year.

“In winter, I can still practice after putting on warm clothes, and the Yellow River is just my theme park,” Wu Ze said.

The boy’s hard work paid off when he claimed the title in U9 group at the 2024 China stand-up paddling masters last July.

Building on young enthusiasts such as Wu Ze, China is using nationwide programs to nurture a new generation of water sports enthusiasts.

Last year, over 2,000 youths from more than 20 provinces and cities joined surfing, and paddle boarding camps organized by the Water Sports Management Center of the General Administration of Sport of China. Meanwhile, 79 universi-

ties have incorporated these activities into their curricula.

These national initiatives are being complemented by regional efforts. Jiangsu province, for instance, introduced guidelines last year to develop its water sports industry.

Key measures include improving public access through better facilities and specialized pro-

grams, boosting the market by integrating water sports with tourism and leisure activities, and promoting sustainable growth through better safety standards and government support.

According to the China Outdoor Sports Industry Development Report (2023-2024), more than one million people in China have purchased surfing and paddle boarding goods and services.



Pakistan, Italy target \$3 billion trade goal in coming years



Newswire

Rome: Pakistan and Italy this week set an ambitious target to double their bilateral trade volume to at least \$3 billion in the coming years, according to Consul General of Italy in Karachi, Fabrizio Bielli. Speaking at the Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI), Bielli emphasized the vast economic opportunities in Karachi, describing the city as one of immense potential. “There is significant untapped potential in various sectors, including energy, agriculture, water recycling, and industrial machinery,” he noted. Bielli, who took office as Consul General just two months ago, highlighted Italy’s position as a global leader in producing high-quality machinery for the textile sector, along with advanced medical equipment like incubators for newborns. He expressed Italy’s willingness to support Pakistan in addressing its growing healthcare infrastructure needs. “We are in a strong position to support Pakistan in these areas,” Bielli added. The event was attended by senior

KCCI officials, including Senior Vice President Zia ul Arfeen, Vice President Faisal Khalil Ahmed, Chairman of the Diplomatic Mission & Embassies Liaison Subcommittee Ahsan Arshad Sheikh, Former President Majyd Aziz, and other members of the KCCI Managing Committee. Bielli expressed his keen interest in exploring Karachi’s economic landscape and potential for collaboration, specifically highlighting opportunities in the pharmaceutical sector. “We should work towards creating joint ventures to manufacture Italian pharmaceutical products in Pakistan,” he said, stressing the need for greater cooperation between the two nations. To further these objectives, Bielli advised KCCI to develop and share a sectoral requirement report three times a year. This report would provide valuable insights for Italian institutions and businesses, helping them better understand the opportunities available in Karachi and across Pakistan. He also encouraged KCCI members to utilize the services of the Italian Trade Promotion Section at the Con-



sulate, which focuses on boosting bilateral trade and investment, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. “More than just a window, a door is open at the Italian Consulate for promoting trade and investment ties,” Bielli stated, urging both sides to work together to identify opportunities and strengthen economic and commercial relations. Zia ul Arfeen, Senior Vice President of KCCI, highlighted the growing significance of Italy as a trading partner for Pakistan within the European Union. “The bilateral trade volume between the two countries crossed \$1.6bn in FY24, with Pakistan’s exports to Italy reaching \$1.12bn,” he pointed out, noting that the balance of trade is favorable to Pakistan. Zia also emphasized the global economic challenges posed by the recent increase in US tariffs. He viewed this as an opportunity for Pakistan to strengthen its ties with strategic trade partners like Italy and explore new avenues for economic diplomacy. “This is also an opportunity for Pakistan and Italy to explore ways to boost exports and enhance bilateral trade,” he added. Zia further stressed the potential benefits of adopting globally renowned Italian brands and practices, such as the circular economy, water treatment, and renewable energy, to enhance the sustainability of Pakistan’s textile sector. “By incorporating Italian engineering and design expertise, we can significantly improve the local automotive industry,” he stated. Highlighting Pakistan’s strategic advantages, Zia noted the country’s robust GDP of \$374bn, a population

of 241.49m, and vast natural resources. “Pakistan’s coastal belt, special economic zones under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) make it an attractive destination for global business and trade,” he said. He encouraged Italian companies to seize investment opportunities in



CPEC and SIFC, focusing on sectors like mining, energy, agriculture, IT, and tourism. Additionally, he suggested that both

countries collaborate on public-private partnerships in tourism and hospitality to drive growth and attract more international visitors.



Revisit ‘Beijing Consensus’ to navigate challenges

Yang Xuedong

Currently, economic globalization is facing strong headwinds. The "Washington Consensus," once promoted by the US and other Western countries as the standard model for development, has not only lost its appeal among many developing nations but has also proven ineffective in addressing internal challenges within developed countries. Amid growing discussions about finding solutions that are better aligned with national realities and more responsive to domestic demands, the "Beijing Consensus" - a term that gained international attention over two decades ago - has been revisited by some observers as a possible approach to addressing today's global challenges.

In 2004, the phrase "Beijing Consensus" was coined by Joshua Cooper Ramo of the global advisory firm Kissinger Associates to describe China's economic development model as an alternative - especially for developing countries - to the "Washington Consensus." Innovation, development and self-determination are the three fundamental principles of the "Beijing Consensus." By adhering to these principles, China has effectively seized the opportunities presented by economic globalization, achieving rapid economic growth and long-term social stability. The "Beijing Consensus" encapsulates the successful experience of a late-developing nation actively engaging in globalization and achieving swift progress. The principles it outlines continue to hold unique value, especially as the process of economic globalization faces increasing challenges.

First, although economic globalization is encountering various obstacles and challenges, and the global situation remains turbulent, the overarching themes of peace and development have

not changed. Only through continuous innovation can we address the various "voids" created by power transitions and institutional stagnation; only through sustained development can we be equipped to tackle the growing "deficits" brought by increasingly complex and significant challenges.

Second, new uncertainties and risks continue to emerge in the world. It is neither viable to passively wait for problems to resolve themselves, nor effective to revert to the binary thinking of the Cold War era. Only by encouraging exploration and innovation at the levels of global norms and institutions, and by allowing space for inclusive trial and error, can we find appropriate paths and workable solutions to navigate this unprecedented global transformation.

Third, as countries around the world face widespread challenges in domestic governance, it is no longer feasible to simply "leave it to the system" to self-correct the complex interplay of old and new issues. Nor should hegemonic powers be allowed to create new turmoil and division in a straightforward and domineering way, using them to mask deep-rooted structural problems. Instead, innovation and development must be integrated coherently to lay a solid foundation for easing interest fragmentation and addressing related challenges.

Fourth, the hegemonic behavior of some major powers on the international stage has become a key driver of ongoing global instability. Some may claim that this is simply the "result" of independent decision-making taken to its extreme, but the opposite is actually true. Genuine independent decision-making does not mean advancing one's own interests at the expense of others, which only deepens existing problems. Maintaining and advancing exchanges and



cooperation in various fields is the prerequisite for independent decision-making.

In today's world, China has remained committed to high-level opening-up and promoting win-win development for all countries. China will continue to uphold genuine multilateralism and work with more partners to advance an inclusive and beneficial form of economic globalization. This position offers timely insights into what the "Beijing Consensus" might contribute to the world today.

As a major developing country, China has consistently advocated for common development and shared responsibility. In an already deeply interconnected world, there is no room

for building a "small yard, high fence" centered solely on self-interest. Economic and trade issues must not be arbitrarily politicized or securitized. These actions are portrayed as measures to ensure "security." However, the truth is that they run counter to basic economic principles and reflect a form of deglobalization that will only spark greater turmoil across the globe.

China has never separated domestic development from international development in a simplistic manner. Instead, it has consistently sought a positive and mutually reinforcing relationship between the two. China's successful experience vividly

illustrates that economic globalization is an irreversible historical trend. Although it was initiated and long dominated by Western countries, the growing participation, both passive and proactive, of an increasing number of countries has made globalization more open and diverse.

This transformation offers late-developing countries greater opportunities and favorable conditions to independently choose their own paths to development.

The writer is a professor of political science at Tsinghua University

What signals does Spanish Prime Minister’s visit to China send?



Global Times

President Xi Jinping met with visiting Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in Beijing on Friday. This marks Sanchez's third visit to China within three years, highlighting Madrid's emphasis to deepening China-Spain relations and representing the continuation of the friendly policies toward China from many European countries. Sources from the Spanish government revealed that Sanchez's visit was supported by the European Commission. At a time when unilateralism and protectionism cast a shadow over the world, this visit carries greater significance, sending a positive and clear message: China, Spain, and other European countries are adopting a pragmatic approach to cooperation, safeguarding the consensus on economic globalization, and injecting stability into the world economy.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Spain, as well as the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and the EU. During the meeting, Xi emphasized that as the international situation gets more complex and volatile, it is increasingly important for China and Spain to develop sound and stable relations. Xi pointed out that China always sees in the EU an important pole in a multipolar world. China is a major country that explicitly supports the unity, development, and growth of the EU.

President Xi further stated that China and the EU should step up to their international responsibilities, jointly safeguard economic globalization and the international trade environment, and jointly reject unilateral and bullying actions. China and the EU

has even become a "shining showcase" of China's new quality productive forces in Europe.

People have noticed that on April 9, after the US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent threatened Spain by saying that getting closer to China would be like "cutting its own throat," Luis Planas, Spain's Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Food and Environment, countered, stating that the country intends to "not only continue having" excellent trade relations with China, but also "expanding" the relation. In the shared endeavor to fight against unfair tariff barriers and uphold multilateralism and economic globalization, China and Spain have become partners on the same path.

Sanchez's visit has pressed the "accelerator" on deepening China-EU cooperation. On April 8, China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and

European Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maros Sefcovic held a talk via video and reached a consensus that "the two sides agreed to immediately start negotiations." Foreign media reported that China and the EU have agreed to look into setting minimum prices of Chinese-made electric vehicles instead of tariffs imposed by the EU last year.

Behind this breakthrough lies a deep mutual understanding that "there are no winners in a trade war." It not only helps China and the EU effectively avoid an escalation of trade tensions, preserving market space for automakers and other enterprises along the production and supply chains, but also offers a real example of how negotiation and cooperation can resolve trade disputes and mitigate conflict between nations with sincerity and mutual respect.

The EU, like China, is a staunch supporter of economic globalization and free trade. China and the EU account for over one-third of the world's total economic output, having formed a close economic symbiotic relationship. Various signs indicate that recently, Brussels has shown a more constructive attitude toward developing relations with China. This shift is driven not only by economic interests but also by a pursuit of strategic autonomy.

At the 2025 China Development Forum, European companies made up about 40 percent of the total attendees. European business executives "voted with their feet" by coming to China, expressing optimism about China,

and increasing their investments there. This has rendered many deliberately politicized and weaponized trade issues ineffective. The vitality of China-EU relations is also attributed to the fact that it is not an "exclusive game," but rather an "open and win-win" situation that does not target, depend on, or be constrained by any third party.

China and EU have a high degree of alignment in their shared opposition to trade protectionism and commitment to multilateralism. Their cooperation in areas such as trade, global governance, and climate change demonstrates strong resilience.

The positive signals conveyed by Sanchez's visit to China call for more like-minded individuals to join in supporting multilateralism and open cooperation.

We look forward to a stronger resonance within Europe as well as the international community from the joint message of China and Spain, advocating for dialogue rather than confrontation, openness rather than closure, and rules rather than power.

Global Times

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High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri strengthens Pakistan-Australia bilateral ties through strategic diplomacy



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan’s High Commissioner to Australia, Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri, continues to play a pivotal role in bolstering bilateral relations between Pakistan and Australia through proactive diplomacy, economic engagement, and people-to-people connectivity. Since assuming his post, High Commissioner Chaudhri has spearheaded multiple initiatives aimed at enhancing cooperation in trade, education, climate action, and technology. Under his leadership, diplomatic exchanges and high-level visits between the two nations have seen a notable increase, signalling a shared commit-

ment to deeper collaboration. In a recent statement, the envoy emphasized the importance of mutual respect, shared values, and economic interdependence in shaping the future of Pakistan-Australia ties. “Australia is not just a partner, but a friend in our journey towards inclusive growth, education, and regional peace,” he said. The High Commissioner has also been instrumental in promoting the contributions of the Pakistani diaspora in Australia, fostering cultural exchange, and encouraging academic partnerships between leading universities. The High Commission has launched initiatives to connect

Pakistani professionals and students with opportunities in Australia, building bridges that extend beyond traditional diplomacy. Notably, trade between the two countries has steadily increased, with Chaudhri advocating for diversification of exports and investment in key sectors such as agriculture, energy, and information technology. As the world grapples with global challenges, High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri’s diplomatic vision continues to strengthen Pakistan’s presence on the international stage, while paving the way for a resilient and dynamic Pakistan-Australia partnership.

Pakistan calls for end to Israeli airstrikes in Syria damaging civilian infrastructure, killing non-combatants Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad says Pakistan deeply alarmed by Israel's attacks on sovereign

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan this week urged the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to act “decisively” against Israeli airstrikes in Syria which were damaging civilian infrastructure and urban centers and causing civilian deaths, the country’s permanent mission to the UN said on Friday. Israel took advantage of the fall of former Syrian president Bashar Assad’s long-standing regime in December to expand its military presence in Syria. It now controls a 400-square-km demilitarized buffer zone, supports the Druze minority and opposes the current Syrian leadership. Israel has recently stepped up airstrikes on Syria, which it described as a warning to the newly formed government in Damascus. Israel says it is targeting military headquarters and sites containing weapons and ammunition. “Pakistan is deeply alarmed by Israel’s ongoing and escalating attacks on sovereign Syrian territory,” Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, told the 15-member UNSC during a briefing session on Syria. “The recent airstrikes targeting multiple locations in Syria, including civilian infrastructure and urban centers, have caused civilian casualties and pose a grave threat

to regional and international peace and security.” He said the world was witnessing a “deeply troubling pattern” of continued, unprovoked Israeli military aggression, repeated violations of the Disengagement Agreement, an illegal military presence in the Area of Separation, and open declarations of indefinite occupation. “This blatant disregard for Syria’s unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity must be unequivocally condemned,” Ahmad said. “The [UN] Council must demand Israel’s complete withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights.” The Agreement on Disengagement between Israel and Syria, signed on May 31, 1974, maintained the existing ceasefire and called for the separation of opposing parties by a UN Peacekeeping Force. After Assad’s fall, Ahmed Al-Sharaa, who led anti-regime forces, was declared president for a transitional period in late January. Israel said it will not tolerate an Islamist militant presence in southern Syria and has deployed troops into



Syria’s border zone. However, Syria’s leadership has indicated it does not intend to open a front against Israel. Ahmad said Israeli actions were under-

mining Syria’s efforts for “political stabilization” and “national reconciliation,” setting dangerous precedents in the region. Warning that continued Israeli escalations could ignite a wider conflict, Ahmad said diplomacy, de-escalation and reconstruc-

tion should be the world’s top priorities. He also demanded the UNSC condemn Israel’s blatant disregard for Syrian sovereignty and reiterated Pakistan’s support for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

Ambassador Mumtaz Zahra Baloch meets Pakistani media based in Paris



NewsWire

Paris: Ambassador of Pakistan to France Mumtaz Zahra Baloch this week interacted with the representatives of Pakistani media based in Paris at the Embassy of Pakistan. A wide range of discussions followed encompassing Pakistan-France relations and issues relating to the Pakistani community in France. The ambassador appreciated their role in promoting Pakistan’s perspective and culture in French society and expressed the full commitment of the Embassy of Pakistan to facilitating the Pakistani community in France.



Umar Rehman Malik felicitates Bilawal Bhutto of re-election as PPP Chairman

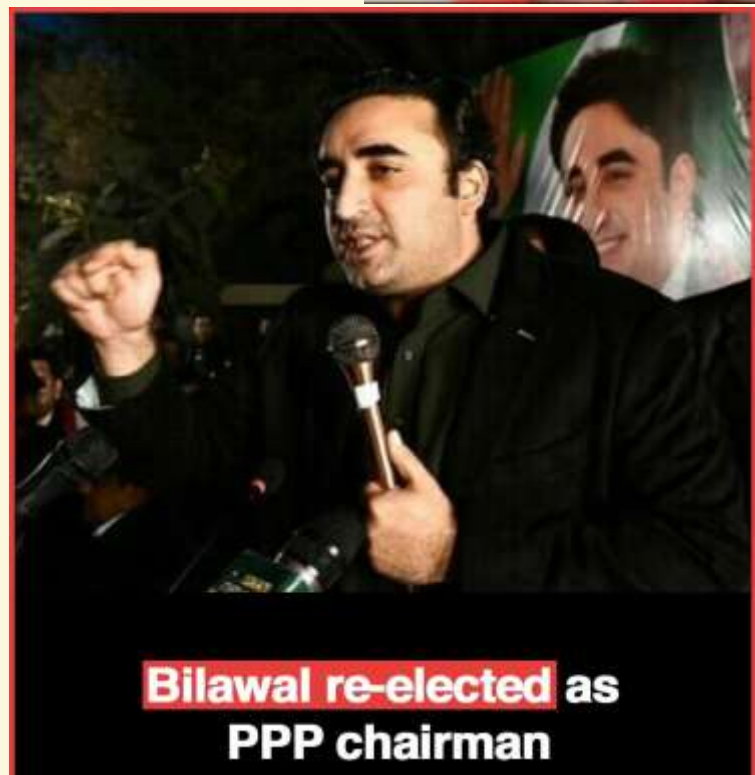


Abdullah Jan
Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week felicitated Bilawal Bhutto Zardari of re-election as the PPP Chairman. "Congratulations to Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on his re-election and to Humayun Khan, Nadeem Afzal Chan and Amna

Piracha on being elected as Secretary General, Secretary Information, and Secretary Finance," Umar Rehman Malik said in a statement. He added: "My best wishes and support to the new team. The successful intra-party elections reflect PPP's democratic spirit and enduring commitment to the

legacy of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto." Earlier, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari got elected as PPP Chairman in the intra-party elections held in Islamabad. The intra-party elections were held on April 12, 2025 at the cen-

tral secretariat. Humayun Khan got elected as party's Secretary General and Nadeem Afzal Chan as information secretary. Amna Paracha got elected as party's finance secretary. All the office-bearers have been elected for a term of four years in accordance with the PPP's constitution.



Germany eliminates fast-track citizenship program for Immigrants



Covert Report
Berlin: Germany is set to terminate its fast-track citizenship program, a policy that allowed eligible immigrants to obtain citizenship in just three years. The decision, reached in an agreement between the Christian

Democratic Union (CDU)/ Christian Social Union (CSU) alliance and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), marks a shift in the nation’s immigration landscape. The Fast-track citizenship program required immigrants to demonstrate

advanced German proficiency (C1-level) and strong integration indicators like community service or academic excellence. Launched by the SPD, Greens, and Free Democratic Party in June last year, the program had been praised by immigrant communities but criticized by right-wing groups, including CDU and CSU. The coalition also ruled out revoking

citizenship from naturalised dual nationals who support extremist ideologies. While this decision may disappoint many, immigrant citizenship Germany remains possible under the five-year citizenship track. This route requires intermediate German proficiency (B1-level) and continuous residency, providing a more achievable path for naturalization. Germany’s new coalition government, led

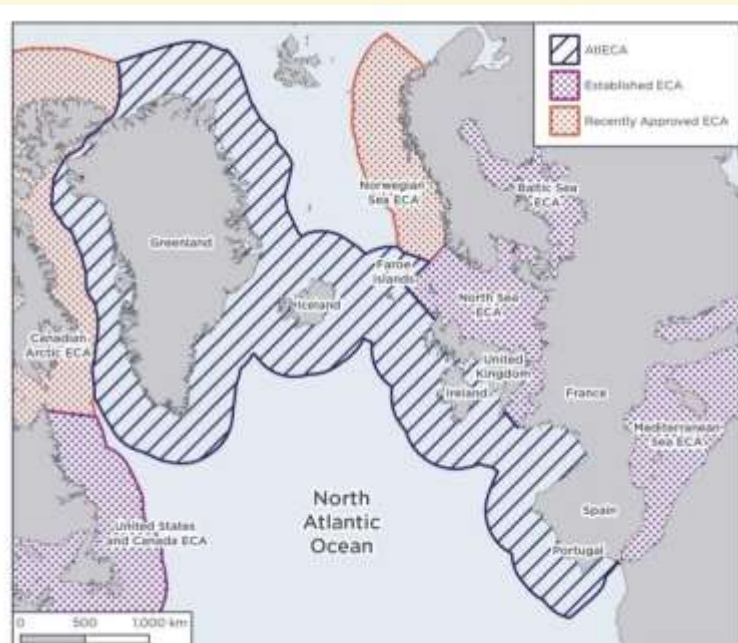
by Chancellor Friedrich Merz, has confirmed that dual nationality will continue to be permitted, along with measures to protect the citizenship of naturalized dual nationals. However, discussions for Fast-track citizenship program are underway on potential policies to expel individuals who oppose democratic principles, targeting non-citizens rather than dual nationals.

Bulgaria second European NATO nation to receive the modern F-16 block 70

Newswire
Sofia: Bulgaria continues its military modernization efforts, now surpassing NATO’s 2% defense spending target by dedicating 3% of its GDP to defense, writes Peter Suciú from the National Interest. The country’s latest acquisition, the F-16 Fighting Falcon, marks a significant step in replacing its outdated Soviet-era MiG-29 jets, which had been in service since the late 1980s. In 2019, Bulgaria signed a \$1.2 billion deal with Lockheed Martin for eight F-16s, later increasing the order by an additional eight aircraft in 2021. Due to delays caused by the global pandemic, the first F-16 was expected to be delivered in 2023 but arrived in April 2025. The delivery of the first F-16 Block 70 is a symbolic moment for Bulgaria, representing its strategic partnership with the United States. Bulgarian Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov described the F-16 as a symbol of this relationship and a new era for Bulgaria’s Air Force. The new fighter jets will provide Bulgaria with advanced capabilities, supporting its combat aviation for the next 30 to 40 years, according to Defence Minister Atanas Zapryanov. This modernization aims to boost morale and motivation among military personnel. During the flight from the US to Bulgaria, the new F-16s were accompanied by Slovakian fighter jets. A KC-135 Stratotanker from the Tennessee Air National Guard assisted with mid-air refueling. Bulgaria is now the second NATO member in Europe to receive the F-16 Block 70, following Slovakia, which received its first batch in July of the previous year. Both countries are set to increase their fleets of these advanced jets, with deliveries expected to continue

until 2027. Lockheed Martin currently has 117 outstanding orders for the Block 70/72 version of the F-16, with Taiwan recently receiving its first units and the Philippines approved for future deliveries. While the acquisition of the F-16 marks a major milestone, Bulgaria’s military modernization is far from complete. The country is committed to ongoing upgrades to its armed forces, although Prime Minister Zhelyazkov has dismissed calls for NATO members to increase defense spending to 5% of GDP, as proposed by US President Donald Trump. Instead, he highlighted that many NATO countries are still struggling to meet the 2% target, making further increases premature.

World's largest ECA to stretch from Portugal to Greenland



The North Atlantic Emission Control Area and other established and recently approved emission control areas

Newswire

London: At this week's Marine Environmental Protection Committee (MEPC) meeting held at the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the world's biggest emission control area (ECA) has been agreed upon. The new Northeast Atlantic ECA, due by 2027, stretches along coastlines from Portugal to Greenland (see map below), joining existing nearby ECAs in the North Sea, Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean. "Almost all European waters will be emission control areas soon. This harmonised regulation not only bene-

fits people and nature but also facilitates a level playing field for the maritime industry in Europe," said Sönke Diesener, a shipping expert at Naturschutzbund Deutschland, a German NGO. "Coming just days after the record lowest maximum Arctic sea ice extent maximum in the 47-year satellite record, creation of the Northeast Atlantic emission control area will significantly reduce ships' emissions, improve air quality, and contribute to improving public health and environmental protection in the northeast Atlantic region, including the Arctic waters around Greenland and Iceland," said Dr Sian Prior, lead advisor to the Clean Arctic Alliance.



Pakistan, Japan agree to deepen IT, Digital Cooperation

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja and Japanese Ambassador to Pakistan Akamatsu Shuitsi discussed enhancing bilateral cooperation in information technology, digital transformation, and innovation this week.

In a meeting held here, the minister said the government’s commitment to fostering digital growth and embracing emerging technologies is in line with the Prime Minister’s vision of a “Digital Pakistan.”

Both sides agreed to strengthen collaboration in the technology and digital economy sectors, focusing on benefiting from Japan’s expertise in digital transformation.

The discussion also centered on human resource development, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence (AI), education, skills training, and employment for Pakistani youth.

The two parties underscored the importance of launching joint initiatives aimed at building a skilled workforce and encouraging partnerships in education, research, and advanced technologies.

Shaza Fatima and Ambassador Akamatsu also explored the possibility of introducing training programs in ICT, AI, and digital governance.

The Japanese envoy assured full support for Pakistan’s efforts in technological and educational advancement.

The meeting concluded with a reaffirmation of the shared commitment to expanding cooperation and unlocking new opportunities for youth under the Digital Pakistan vision.



Pakistan, US vow to strengthen, diversify bilateral ties

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and the United States this week agreed to further strengthen and expand bilateral relations in areas of mutual interest.

The commitment was made during a meeting between Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch and a visiting US Congressional delegation in Islamabad.

The delegation included Congressmen Jack Bergman, Tom Suozzi, and Jonathan Jackson.

US diplomat terms Pakistan’s minerals ‘core interest,’ lauds ‘investment climate’ in Army Chief meeting

Earlier, a high-level US delegation, led by Eric Meyer, Senior Bureau Official for South and Central Asian Affairs, met with Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir at GHQ.

The delegation emphasized that mineral development collaboration with Pakistan is a ‘core area of mutual interest’ and praised the country’s ‘steadily improving investment landscape,’ according to a statement from the military’s media wing.

The meeting took place against the backdrop of Pakistan’s Mineral Investment Forum, with the US delegation appreciating the initiative as a “first-of-its-kind Forum” and expressing confidence in Pakistan’s policy to develop its “vast untapped mineral wealth through mutually beneficial partnerships,” the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

Meyer highlighted the US administration’s priorities, stating that “collaboration in mineral development with Pakistan is a core area of mutual interest.”

The delegation also expressed optimism about Pakistan’s mineral investment potential and discussed avenues to strengthen bilateral relations.

The discussions also covered global and regional security dynamics, with both sides exchanging perspectives on Pakistan’s security imperatives.



Exports to Europe grew by 9.4% during FY25: Pakistan



-military government body formed in 2023 to fast-track decisions related to international investment in Pakistan’s vital economic sectors. The SIFC aims to attract investment from Gulf countries, Central Asian states and regional allies in tourism, agriculture, mining and minerals, livestock and other priority sectors. The state media said Pakistan’s exports to Western Europe grew by 11.6 percent and while those to Northern Europe saw a “remarkable” 17.7 percent increase during the first eight months of the current fiscal year. “The primary reasons behind this growth are Pakistan’s GSP+ Status and the rising demand for Pakistani textiles and garments,” it added. The current GSP framework came to an end in December 2023 but Members of EU Parliament (MEPs) voted in October to extend the current rules on the scheme for another four years for developing countries, including Pakistan. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has repeatedly stressed the importance of shifting Pakistan’s economy from an import-dependent one toward an export-led one, saying that without it sustainable economic growth is difficult to achieve. In recent months, Pakistan has vigorously pursued economic and investment deals with Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and bilateral trade cooperation with Central Asian

Celina Ali
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s exports to Europe grew by 9.41 percent during the first eight months of the current fiscal year, state-run media reported this week, attributing the surge to rising demand for the country’s textile, garments and its GSP Plus status. The European Union (EU) is Pakistan’s

second most important trading partner, accounting for over 14 percent of the country’s total trade and absorbing 28 percent of Pakistan’s total exports as per official data. Pakistani exports to the EU are dominated mostly by textiles and clothes. Pakistan avails the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP)+ status, a special trade arrangement offered by the EU to devel-

oping economies in return for their commitment to implement 27 international conventions on human rights, environmental protection and governance. “The demand for Pakistani products in Europe has seen a significant rise, leading to a 9.4 percent increase in exports due to the efforts of the Special Investment Facilitation Council,” an official media report said.

It was referring to the SIFC, a hybrid civil



Pakistan, UK discuss energy collaboration, sustainable development



Celina Ali
Islamabad: Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik and Development Director of the British High Commission Joe Moir this week discussed exploring opportunities for enhanced bilat-

eral cooperation in Pakistan's petroleum and energy sectors. The discussions focused on strengthening UK-Pakistan collaboration in oil, gas, and broader energy initiatives, with both sides emphasizing sustainable development, technologi-

cal exchange, and British support for Pakistan's energy infrastructure. Ali Pervaiz Malik underscored the government's commitment to bolstering energy security and effi-



ciency, welcoming British expertise and investment in the field. "Pakistan values its longstanding relationship with the UK, and we look forward to deepening cooperation in the energy sector to ensure sustainable growth and mutual economic benefits," he said, adding the country's push to reform its liquid fuels sector in alignment with its sustainability goals. Joe Moir reaffirmed the UK's support for Pakistan's energy transition and capacity building. "The UK is keen to collaborate with Pakistan in addressing energy challenges through innovation and investment. We are committed to supporting projects that promote economic resilience and enhance institutional capacity," he stated. The meeting also covered potential joint ventures, regulatory improvements, and policy frameworks conducive to future investments. Both sides agreed to maintain close engagement and pursue further collaboration under the broader strategic partnership between Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

Difficulties strengthen the mind, as labor does the body.” - Seneca

An unexamined life is not worth living.” - Socrates

Italy sends 40 rejected asylum seekers to Albania



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

Covert Report
Rome: Italy this week transferred 40 migrants whose asylum applications had failed to Italian-run detention centers in Albania. An Italian navy ship carrying the migrants left from Brindisi in south-east Italy and arrived in the Albanian port of Shengjin. The migrants, who are all men, are due to remain in a camp in Albania until they are deported. It is unclear how long they will remain in Albania. Under Italian law, failed asylum seekers can be held for a maximum of 18 months awaiting deportation. It is the first time a European Union member state has sent migrants whose asylum applications have been rejected to a non-EU nation or to a country that they had not passed through on their journey. The Italian government, led by the far-right Giorgia Meloni, built the camps as part of a scheme to deter irregular migrants picked up in the Mediterranean from traveling to Italy. But those plans have faced opposition in Italian courts, forcing Meloni to shelve the controversial scheme. Last month, PM Meloni's right-wing governing coalition decided to instead use the camps in Albania to process asylum applications that have already been turned down. Irregular migrants would normally be held in detention centers on Italian soil before being deported. The Italian government has not abandoned hopes of enacting its "Albania model," as the European Court of Justice is actively reviewing the case. PM Meloni's scheme, while controversial, complies with a European Commission proposal which, if passed, would allow member states to open similar "return hubs" to process rejected asylum seekers abroad. Rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, have condemned the EU's proposal as "cruel and unrealistic."



France may recognise Palestinian state in June

NewsWire
Paris: France plans to recognise a Palestinian state within months and could make the move at a UN conference on settling the conflict in New York in June, President Emmanuel Macron said in an interview broadcast. "We must move towards recognition, and we will do so in the coming months," Macron, who this week visited Egypt, told the France 5 television channel. "Our aim is to chair this conference with Saudi Arabia in June, where we could finalise this movement of mutual recognition by several parties," he said. "I will do it as I believe at some point it will be right and because I also want to participate in a collective dynamic, which must also allow all those who defend Palestine to recognise Israel in turn, which many of them do not do," he added. Nearly 150 countries recognise a Palestinian state. In May 2024, Ireland, Norway and Spain announced recognition, followed by Slovenia next month, in moves partly fuelled by condemnation of Israel's brutal action in Gaza. Macron said such recognition would allow France "to be clear in our fight against those who deny Israel's right to exist — which is the case with Iran — and to commit ourselves to collective security in the

region." A formal recognition by Paris would be a major policy shift and risk antagonising Israel and US. France's recognition of Palestinian statehood "would be a step in the right direction in line with safeguarding the rights of Palestinians and the two-state solution," Palestinian state minister for foreign affairs Varsen Shahin said. In Egypt, Macron held summit talks with President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II and also made clear he was strongly opposed to any displacement or annexation in Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank. US President Donald Trump has suggested turning Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East" with the Palestinians moving elsewhere — a suggestion that has sparked bitter condemnation. Macron responded the Gaza Strip was "not a real estate project". "Simplistic thinking sometimes doesn't help," he added, and, in a message to Trump said "our responsibility is to save lives, restore peace, and negotiate a political framework. If all this doesn't exist, no one will invest. Today, no one will invest a cent in Gaza."

