

High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri felicitates national women’s blind cricket team on historic victory **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week extended heartfelt congratulations to the Pakistan Women’s Blind Cricket Team after their historic victory against **(Page-5)**

Pakistan mulls US oil imports to ease trade imbalance **Celina Ali**
Islamabad: Pakistan is considering importing crude oil from the United States for the first time to offset a trade imbalance that triggered higher U.S. tariffs, according to a government source directly involved with the proposal and a refinery executive. Countries are **(Page-9)**

China expected to achieve higher grain output in 2025

Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: China is poised to see a further increase in its grain output in 2025, building on last year's record-high of 706.5 million tonnes, while also strengthening its capacity to supply grain and other major agricul-

tural products, a report has shown. The country's 2025 grain output is projected to hit 709 million tonnes, pushed up by the increased efforts to boost per unit crop yield on a large scale and growing enthusiasm for grain planting and production, ac-

cording to the report released by the Chinese Agriculture Outlook Committee, under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, on Sunday. In 2025, soybean output is expected to grow 2.5 percent year on year to 21.17 million tonnes, the report notes.



As domestic production rises and consumption growth eases, the imports of bulk agricultural products are expected to decline, according to the report. The report projects that China, in the

next decade, is expected to experience a breakthrough in agricultural productivity. Improvements will be observed in comprehensive grain production capacity and the ability to mitigate and address major risks and challenges facing the sector.

Why Denmark plans to send troops to Ukraine



Covert Report

Copenhagen: NATO member Denmark has announced it will send soldiers to Ukraine. Despite the nonviolent nature of their deployment, Russia has indicated that they will still be “legitimate targets.” They won’t be armed and they won’t take part in any fighting, but instead are being deployed as observers to study real-world tactics, notably in drone warfare. Danish Army Chief and Major General Peter Boysen told Denmark’s TV 2 news that the soldiers’ goal is to learn from Ukraine’s more than three years of drone operations. The number of Danish personnel who will be sent as unarmed observers hasn’t been finalized, but the first troops could begin this summer. “We’re sending some teams down to see what experiences the Ukrainians have had—first-hand,” Boysen explained, but added, “They are not going there to participate in the war actively.” Instead, this is meant to be an opportunity for the NATO nations to learn drone tactics from soldiers who have been its pioneers. Boysen suggested, “We can learn a lot from the combat experience they have gained in Ukraine. We are relying on their experience to become better in combat.” Though the personnel will be stationed in Western Ukraine, far from the frontlines, Russia has indicated that they will still be “legitimate targets.” Russian Ambassador to Denmark Vladimir Bardin also told TV

2 that the deployment was seen by Moscow as a provocation and warned it could “drag Denmark deeper and deeper into the conflict,” while stressing that Ukrainian military facilities “including headquarters, training and education centers, as well as locations of military personnel and military equipment, both deep inside Ukrainian territory and on the front line, are a legitimate target.” Boysen acknowledged the threat that the Danish personnel could face. “They will be trained far from the front line, for example, in Lviv in Ukraine’s west. And if there is a missile attack, the Ukrainians have outstanding warning systems and good shelters. I spent time in one of them in Kyiv,” Boysen noted. This will be far from the first time a neutral nation has sent unarmed observers to study tactics on a modern battlefield. Multiple European nations sent military officers to examine the tactics and deployments during the American Civil War. These famously included Captain Justus Scheibert of the Prussian Army, who was sent to study the latest weapons and tactics. Over seven months traveling in the Confederate States, he observed the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg and later the Siege of Charleston Harbor. He paid special attention to the development of rifled cannons and the impact of ordnance fired from the guns on defensive positions. Scheibert’s observations were published and closely studied by military leaders in Prussia and later in the unified Germany. Colonel Arthur James Lyon Fremantle of the British Army also traveled to America during the Civil War, officially as a tourist, even though his daily attire initially consisted of a British military uniform! He was among the foreign observers at the Battle of Gettysburg, although, despite what the 1993 film suggests, he didn’t wear his uniform and instead sought to blend in. Following his return to the UK, Fremantle wrote of his time in the Confederate States, but unlike Scheibert, his findings weren’t as widely studied by the military. Yet, military attachés and observers were later sent to report to their governments on findings from the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the Russo-Japanese War. The role of observers changed during the Cold War. In 1948, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) was tasked with monitoring the armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbors rather than studying tactics.

Bilawal Bhutto threatens to quit coalition over canal project

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari this week strongly criticised the Pakistan government over the controversial canal project and threatened to withdraw support from the ruling coalition if the initiative is not scrapped, The Express Tribune reported. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari demanded that the Pakistan government withdraw the proposed canal initiatives or risk losing PPP’s support in the ruling coalition. PPP’s support is crucial for the Shabbaz Sharif-led coalition government, as the party holds 54 seats, while the PMLN has 79 seats in the 264-seat legislature. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), along with the PPP and four other smaller parties, hold a comfortable majority, while Prime Minister Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehri-e-Insaf (PTI) sits in opposition with 93 seats. Bilawal Bhutto criticised the Islamabad leadership, stating, “The people of Sindh have rejected the canal projects, yet those in Islamabad remain blind and deaf to our voices. Out of six canals, two were approved by Prisoner No 420,” a veiled reference to a political rival. “Let it be clear — we oppose your project,” he asserted. Bilawal threatened Shehbaz Sharif over the water distribution issue, suggesting that PPP’s support had made him the PM. “We made Shehbaz Sharif prime minister not once, but twice. And now you think you can intimidate us with threats?” he questioned.



Lashing out at the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), he claimed that their projects consistently harm the agricultural sector. “Every initiative backed by the ‘lion party’ is anti-farmer. The wheat scandal has economically devastated our farmers,” he said. “They only bleed the people dry without offering any real solutions,” The Express Tribune reported. “The government should not be under any illusion — I will not step back. I stand with the people,” Bilawal said. Bilawal concluded with a final warning that PPP will not remain part of the coalition if the federal government does not withdraw the controversial canal projects. The issue concerns the federal government’s plan to divert water from the Indus River by constructing six canals to irrigate the Cholistan Desert — a project opposed by its key ally, the PPP, and several Sindhi nationalist parties.

China, Malaysia to strengthen air cargo cooperation between Zhengzhou and Kuala Lumpur

Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: On April 17, 2025, China and Malaysia issued a joint statement on building a high-level strategic China-Malaysia community with a shared future. Article 21 of the statement emphasizes the commitment of both countries to comprehensive aviation cooperation, including enhanced civil aviation technical exchanges and closer air cargo collaboration between Kuala Lumpur International Airport and

Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport. This initiative aims to realize the shared vision of a seamless "Air Silk Road" connecting China and ASEAN. Malaysia remains China's second-largest trading partner within ASEAN and its top source of imports. Strategically located at the heart of a high-growth, high-traffic region in ASEAN, Malaysia boasts a well-established air route network covering major global markets and the Regional

Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) area, offering favorable conditions for developing air cargo services. To promote air logistics cooperation between Zhengzhou and Kuala Lumpur, Zhongyu Aviation Group has maintained close relationships with relevant Malaysian aviation enterprises with many visits.



DPM Dar reaffirms Pakistan's strong commitment to SCO vision of regional cooperation

Gwadar Pro
Islamabad: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar this week reaffirmed Pakistan's firm commitment to deepening its constructive engagement within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),

stressing the importance of mutual cooperation in critical areas such as trade, transportation, and regional connectivity. Senator Dar made these remarks during a meeting with SCO Secretary General Nurlan Yermekbayev, who is currently visiting Pakistan

in his official capacity. The Deputy Prime Minister warmly congratulated Mr. Yermekbayev on the assumption of his new responsibilities and assured him of Pakistan's unwavering support for the SCO Secretariat in advancing the organization's objectives. Highlighting Pakistan's long-standing and cordial relations with SCO member states, Dar reiterated Islamabad's dedication to upholding the "Shanghai spirit"—a guiding principle of the organization centered on mutual trust, shared development, and collective regional progress. He praised the SCO as a vital platform for fostering regional peace and stability, while also unlocking new opportunities for economic development among member countries. The Deputy Prime Minister underscored Pakistan's proactive participation in SCO initiatives and expressed readiness to continue contributing meaningfully to SCO-led mechanisms, particularly in expanding bilateral trade, enhancing transport infrastructure, and improving cross-border connectivity. Secretary General Yermekbayev, in response, extended his gratitude to Pakistan for its warm hospitality and acknowledged the country's dynamic role in promoting SCO's agenda. He

especially lauded Pakistan's successful hosting of the Council of Heads of Government meeting in Islamabad in October 2024, describing it as a testament to Pakistan's commitment to the organization. The two leaders engaged in comprehensive discussions on the future direction of the SCO, identifying key areas for enhanced collaboration. These included transportation and logistics, energy and food security, public health, digital commerce, and the promotion of sustainable practices through green economic policies. The SCO, a ten-member intergovernmental alliance founded on June 15, 2001, serves

as a vital trans-regional organization dedicated to promoting security, economic cooperation, and political coordination. Pakistan joined the SCO as an observer in 2005 and attained full membership in 2017. Since then, Pakistan has consistently advocated for regional peace, stability, and inclusive economic development through the SCO's multidimensional platform.



Henan deepens its ties with ASEAN

Henan Daily
Zhengzhou: Henan has great potential for further collaboration with ASEAN. Trains bound for ASEAN depart regularly from Zhengzhou International Land Port every day. Over the years, Henan has embraced the Belt and Road Initiative, seized the opportunities presented by RCEP, and leveraged its transportation hub advantages to strengthen ties between China and its neighboring countries. On April 14, as dawn broke, a China-Laos freight train loaded with compound fertilizer departed from Putian Station in Zhengzhou,

marking the one-year anniversary of the route's 200th regular operation. Data shows that last year, Henan operated a total of 3,890 international freight trains, with a cargo volume of 289,000 TEUs. Among them, ASEAN-bound trains accounted for 406 trips, a 190% increase year-on-year. In the first quarter of this year, train departures have doubled compared to the same period last year. In August last year, fresh Malaysian durians arrived in Zhengzhou on a chartered flight, marking their first entry into China. One month later, Cambodian pepper and cashews imported

by Zhengzhou Agricultural Development Group made their debut in the Henan market. A few days ago, the China (Zhengzhou) – ASEAN (Malaysia) Brand Promotion Event was held in Zhengzhou, marking the first arrival of premium Malaysian pineapples. In the first quarter of this year, Zhengzhou Airport Customs supervised the import of 136 batches of Malaysian fruits, totaling 1,501 tons, with month-on-month increases of 178% and 156%, respectively. In recent years, Zhengzhou Airport has launched multiple routes to destinations including Thailand, Cambodia, Singapore, and Malaysia. Malaysia's Raya Airways became the first Southeast Asian cargo airline to operate at Zhengzhou Airport, and Cambodia Angkor Air established its China headquarters there. These changes have paved the way for the comprehensive establishment of the Henan-Cambodia-ASEAN "Air Silk Road", further strengthening "hub-to-hub" connectivity. In addition, CREG's tunnel boring machines are being exported to countries like Malaysia and Singapore, xFusion has established supply centers in both Malaysia and Singapore, and Mixue has over 4,000 stores across Southeast Asia. ASEAN is rapidly becoming a key market for more and more companies from Henan. Moreover, Henan is expanding its ties with



ASEAN beyond trade and commerce to include culture and tourism. Since last year, a series of cultural events, including "the China-Cambodia People-to-People Exchange Year" have been held. The ASEAN-Henan (Zhengzhou) Cooperation Conference on Food and Agriculture was successfully conducted, with 33 Chinese and foreign companies signing on-site agreements totaling over 10 billion yuan. Additionally, Air Cambo-

dia has reached a cooperation agreement with Yanlu Kungfu School and Zhengzhou Physical Education Vocational College for joint training of aviation professionals and cultural and sports exchanges. Leveraging its openness, Henan is developing the Pilot Free Trade Zone within the RCEP framework, turning its hub advantages into a driving force for cultural exchange.



A train from the UK to Italy?



Italian Ambassador to Pakistan, Marilina Armellin

Newsire
Rome: Between environmental breakdown, economic crisis and Donald Trump, it often feels like there's precious little reason to feel hopeful these days. So how's this for a reason to cheer up: Italian state railway company, Trenitalia, is planning to run trains through the Channel tunnel before the decade is out. It's studying the option of direct trains from the UK to Italy, too. Eagle-eyed readers may note that those are two separate propositions. Trenitalia is no stranger to the British rail network: it already operates the C2C franchise, which connects London Fenchurch Street via south Essex to Southend. Last week the company announced a €1bn

(£860m) plan to launch a new high-speed service connecting London and Paris by 2029, as a direct competitor to the long-established Eurostar. In addition, it's reported to be "studying the possibility" of extending the route, to Lyon, Marseille and Milan, which could be reached by train from London in eight hours. (Trenitalia already runs from Milan to Paris in just over seven hours.) If some of this sounds a little bit familiar, that's because we've heard it before. Train operators are increasingly vying for ownership of new, and potentially lucrative, routes across Europe. Last month, Richard Branson's Virgin group announced it was trying to raise £700m to fund a "high-

frequency" new cross-Channel route. Switzerland's SBB, a Dutch startup named Heuro, a British one named Gemini and Spain's Evolyn (which now seems to have teamed up with the Italians) have all expressed an interest, too. There have been days when I've considered having a go myself, just for the attention. All of this sounds like good news for consumers. And it still might be. But it's a lot easier to announce a new cross-Channel service than to actually start running any trains. In 2010, Germany's Deutsche Bahn announced plans to run trains from London to Brussels, where they'd split, one half going to Amsterdam, the other to Cologne and Frankfurt. It never happened. Neither did the proposed daily commuter stopping service from London to Lille – a pity, since it might have dealt with the absurd situation in which London's Stratford International station has never seen a train going further than Kent. If anything, route options through the tunnel have actually declined. For several years, you could get Eurostar trains direct from London to Lyon, Avignon and Marseille: it felt like the supreme achievement of civilisation to be able to board a train on a drizzly Euston Road and get off in sight of the Med. That route stopped running during the pandemic, apparently never to return. Why is it so hard? The problem is neither, as one might assume, platform capacity at St Pancras International, nor space in the tunnel: both could accommodate more trains. There are other practical difficulties – a UK shortage of depot space; a Europe-wide shortage of trains – but these would surely not be barriers to a really committed operator, either. The Office of Rail Regulation says there's space for more trains at the Temple Mills depot in Leyton, east London. (Eurostar says otherwise but, well, it would.) And while there is currently a lack of 400m trains meeting the stringent fire safety requirements required to operate through the tunnel, that's hardly insurmountable: just pair a couple of 200m ones together. Trenitalia, which has a large fleet of trains described as "almost tunnel-ready", says it sees no hurdle here. But the biggest issue facing these ambi-

tious operators is border policy. Even before Brexit, the UK was not in the Schengen area, meaning that travelling on Eurostar required passport checks, which the Home Office insists must be done

lems, and you can see why new services are announced a lot more frequently than they ever happen. Perhaps this time will be different. Access to rolling stock and money make the Tren-



before boarding, rather than on board the train or on arrival. Every station served by cross-Channel trains needs both passport control facilities and cordoned-off space beyond them; where these do not exist, entire trains' worth of passengers have been turfed off to do their paperwork at Lille. The need to scan luggage for security threats complicates things, too. All this also means a bottleneck at St Pancras. There may be space for more trains; there's rather less for more passengers, each of whom has to pass through airport-style security measures before boarding, and even more checks since Brexit reduced capacity by a third. Trenitalia says that plans to address this problem are at "an advanced stage", but it won't be easy – the station is a Grade I-listed building. Add in the expense and disruption posed by all those other prob-

italia/Evolyn tie-up the most plausible competitor so far, with the possible exception of SBB. (Switzerland has a lot of flights to London and limited airport capacity.) Eurostar itself is promising expansion, suggesting it doesn't think the capacity problems are insurmountable. And there's Europe-wide pressure to replace flights with trains. For now, though, the most likely outcome here is surely a bit more competition on the existing routes from London to Paris, Brussels and Lille. That might push standards up, or ticket prices down, both of which would be good. That, though, might be as far as things go. Trains to northern Italy – or even southern France – may be technically feasible, but that doesn't make them economically viable. Still, we can hope. After all, we all want a better future.



Europe's quest for 'strategic autonomy' needs refocusing



Andrey Kortunov

Lately the not-so-fresh idea of a "European strategic autonomy" has got back in circulation in many EU capitals. This should come as no surprise, given the condescending and even arrogant attitude displayed by the Donald Trump administration toward US' European allies. Politicians and state officials across the European continent can no longer take the transatlantic commonality of values or even the enduring US leadership for granted and they have to start thinking about Europe playing a more independent role in the turbulent and unstable world of today and tomorrow.

What is surprising, however, is that the ongoing discussions about the desired parameters of "strategic autonomy" almost exclusively focus

on its military dimension. This emphasis may be understandable, but arguably it is not very practical. Even if all the needed political, legal, administrative and financial decisions were already in place, it would still take many years, if not decades, for Brussels to become a significant global military actor comparable to already established great powers. Furthermore, the likely cost of such an epic rearmament effort by the EU would be exceptionally high, and for many European nations that are currently faced with significant economic and financial challenges, the cost would be prohibitively high.

However, there is another, no less important dimension of "strategic autonomy," which is often overlooked or suppressed in Europe, and where tangible practical results can be achieved

much faster and at a much lower cost. That is the vital economic dimensions of "strategic autonomy." These dimensions, above all, include the advancement of critical modern technologies (digital infrastructure, semiconductors, AI, green economy) and diversification of supply chains to limit the current overwhelming EU dependence on US trading partners.

To achieve both goals, the EU would need stronger economic ties with China. The convergence of interests between the two major economic powerhouses on the opposite sides of the vast Eurasian landmass is evident. In many ways, Brussels and Beijing face similar challenges coming from Washington. Both the EU and China have trade surpluses in trading with the US and it is by no accident that the Trump

administration intends to put more pressure on Brussels and Beijing to even out trade balances, assuming that they will ultimately have to accept the new rules of the game set for them in the White House.

At the same time, the EU-China trade remains one of the most significant economic partnerships in the modern world, amounting to \$762 billion. It is almost comparable with the EU-US trade or China's trade with ASEAN countries and it has a huge potential for further growth. However, after 2022, when the turnover reached a record \$847 billion, this trade was essentially stagnating. This is partially because of EU's concerns about China's rising economic and technological might and partially due to Washington pushing hard for

Brussels to align more closely with US trade and investment restrictions on China, particularly regarding the high-tech field. Today, the Trump administration apparently tries to have its cake and eat it: to keep the EU as an obedient junior partner in dealing with China, but to treat the EU as a self-serving and uncooperative adversary in US-EU trade matters.

The natural complementarity of Europe and China is not limited to trade or investment only. Brussels and Beijing have common or overlapping positions on many global issues ranging from the energy transition to the principles of AI governance to reforming WTO. On most of these crucial issues, the EU today is much closer to China than it is to the US. Furthermore, Europeans and Chinese largely share the fundamental commitment to the principle of multilateralism that has been explicitly dismissed by Washington.

This is not to say that there are no disagreements, contradictions or even direct conflicts of interest in China-EU relations. Still, in the rapidly changing international environment of today, the EU and China might find closer cooperation with each other instrumental in hedging numerous risks and uncertainties coming from deliberately unilateralist and often unpredictable US policies. It would also be a clear signal for Washington to demonstrate that the latter has no veto power over the rules of the game in the global economic system. Over time, a situational partnership between Brussels and Beijing might evolve into a more comprehensive strategic partnership.

The writer is the academic director of the Russian International Affairs Council

BRICS Asia enlargement boosts multipolarity, regional resilience

Warwick Powell

Despite the US' hyperbolic threats of 100 percent and 150 percent tariffs on BRICS, the group's enlargement in Asia highlights its resilience and the growing desire among countries to collaborate in building a prosperous and secure future.

In recent years, the BRICS countries have emerged as a significant force in the global economic and geopolitical landscape. The group has steadily expanded its influence.

At the beginning of 2025, Indonesia became the first

Southeast Asian nation to formally join BRICS. Three other ASEAN countries - Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, have become the group's partner countries.

This underscores BRICS' growing economic influence in Asia and highlights the increasing interconnectedness of the ASEAN region. This growth underscores the group's increasing relevance and its role in shaping a multipolar world order.

The continued enlargement of BRICS in Asia marks a significant milestone in the group's evolution. These countries bring substantial economic and demographic

heft to the group. Asia, already home to two of BRICS' founding members, China and India, has become a focal point for the group's enlargement due to its dynamic economies, rapidly growing populations and strategic geographic location.

Malaysia as a BRICS partner and Indonesia as a full member bring robust manufacturing, technology and resource-based economies into BRICS. These countries also serve as vital trade hubs, strategically positioned within global supply chains. Their integration into BRICS enables enhanced trade agreements, technological cooperation and increased financial independence

from Western institutions. The inclusion of Vietnam and Thailand as partner countries also further cements the ASEAN-BRICS nexus. These countries have demonstrated rapid industrialization and are pivotal players in global electronics and automotive supply chains. The continued expansion of BRICS in Asia is a testament to the shifting balance of economic power toward emerging markets.

One of the key drivers of BRICS' enlargement in Asia is the growing infrastructure connectivity across the region. High-speed railways, ports and digital infrastructure projects have facilitated the movement of goods, services and people, fostering economic integration.

The China-Laos railway, which extends into Thailand and Malaysia, has significantly reduced transportation costs and time, boosting trade and investment flows. Indonesia's participation in BRICS has been bolstered by infrastructure projects like the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, which was funded and constructed with Chinese assistance. These projects not only strengthen economic ties but also enhance political and cultural cooperation among member states.

BRICS' enlargement in Asia carries profound implications for the global order. It reinforces the group's role as a champion of multipolarity. By fostering economic interdependence, BRICS reduces the likelihood of conflict among member states.

And BRICS' enlargement in Asia underscores the group's commitment to sustainable development. Many of the infrastructure projects funded by the New Development Bank and supported by BRICS members focus on renewable energy and green technology. This aligns with the global shift toward

sustainability and positions BRICS in a growingly important role in addressing climate change and environmental challenges.

For Asian countries in particular, US tariff threats have highlighted the risks of over-reliance on the US market and the importance of diversifying economic partnerships. By moving closer to BRICS, countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have gained access to a broader network of trade and investment opportunities, reducing their vulnerability to US economic pressures.

The enlarging BRICS represents a transformative shift in the global economic and geopolitical landscape. By incorporating major Asian economies, BRICS has strengthened its position as a counterbalance to Western dominance and a champion of multipolarity. The growing trade and investment relations among Asian BRICS members, coupled with enhanced infrastructure connectivity, underscore the group's potential to drive sustainable development and regional stability.

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High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri felicitates national women's blind cricket team on historic victory



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week extended heartfelt congratulations to the Pakistan Women's Blind Cricket Team after their historic victory against Australia in the first T20 match of their maiden international tour.

In a message of pride and encouragement, the High Commissioner hailed the team's achievement as a landmark moment for both Pakistan and the global blind cricket community. "This remarkable win by our women's blind cricket team is not just a sporting milestone—it is a powerful story of resilience, courage, and empowerment. The entire nation stands behind these inspiring athletes," he said.

The game, played on April 18 as part of a pioneering series from April 18 to 26, marked a new chapter in Pakistan's sporting history. It was the first-ever international outing for Pakistan's women's blind cricket team, and they delivered a commanding performance to defeat the hosts on their own turf.

Batting first, the Australian Women's Blind Cricket Team set a competitive total of 158 runs for 4 wickets in 20 overs. In response, the Pakistani team rose to the occasion with confidence and poise, successfully chasing the target in 19.2 overs to register a memorable victory.

Leading the charge for Pakistan, Mehreen Ali top-scored with a brilliant 44 runs, while Nisha Butt added a crucial 36 runs, ensuring their side stayed in control throughout the chase.

The series continues with the second T20 match scheduled for tomorrow, and all eyes are now on the team to build on their momentum and further cement their place on the international stage.



Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad meets Elizabeth Spehar

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, met with Elizabeth Spehar, Assistant Secretary General for Peacebuilding Support Office at the United Nations this week. Among other matters of mutual interest, they also discussed Pakistan's priorities in

peacebuilding as well as the upcoming preparatory meeting of the Peacekeeping Ministerial in Islamabad. Elizabeth Spehar said that she looked forward to participating in the panel discussion on an integrated approach on peacekeeping, prevention, and peacebuilding during her stay in Islamabad.



Reception hosted at Pakistan Embassy, Dakar to mark 85th National day of Pakistan

Newswire

Dakar: A reception was hosted at the Pakistan Embassy, Dakar to celebrate 85th National Day of Pakistan. Members of the Diplomatic Corps, officials from the Senegalese government, businessmen, members of the civil society, friends of Pakistan and Pakistan Diaspora from Senegal attended the event. H.E. Ms. Khady Dienz Gueye Minister of Youth, Culture

and Sports was the chief guest at the reception. This year the reception was based on the theme of "Pakistan's Textile and Fashion: fusion of tradition, creativity and sustainability". Ambassador Saima Sayed highlighted Pakistan's strong textile sector and the contemporary fashion industry of Pakistan. A mini documentary was also



shown to the guests highlighting the history and growth of Pakistan's textile sector and Pakistan's fashion trends promoting tradition

with innovation. Mannequins wearing Pakistani clothes showcasing traditional craftsmanship

with a modern outlook greatly attracted the attention of the guests at the reception.

Bilawal Bhutto realising dreams of the poor: Umar Rehman Malik



Abdullah Jan
Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week said that PPP chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was realising the dreams of the poor. "People's Housing Initiative is a game changer; transforming climate tragedy into opportunity, dignity, and empowerment. Under Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's leadership, PPP is bringing the vision of 'Roti, Kapra aur Makan' to life," he said in a statement. Umar Rehman Malik said 2.1 million homes, a million jobs, and historic land ownership for women is a powerful stride toward a happier, more prosperous, and resilient Pakistan where women are truly empowered with homes of their

own. Earlier, Bilawal posted on X that he spent a day doing "what I love most, meeting the incredible beneficiaries of the People's Housing Initiative. This is the largest housing project in the world for victims of climate catastrophe, with 2.1 million homes under construction." He added: "The initiative will create up to a million jobs, fuelling economic recovery alongside humanitarian support. And by granting land ownership to women in each household, we've achieved the largest asset transfer in Pakistan's history since land reforms, empowering generations to

come." Bilawal Bhutto visited several villages in Hyderabad district to inspect the houses constructed by the provincial government under its Sindh People's Housing for Flood Affecteds (SPHF) initiative. Accompanied by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and others, Bilawal Bhutto reviewed the basic facilities available at the sites and distributed ownership certificates to the beneficiaries. Speaking on the occasion, he said that the PPP-led government had not only fulfilled its promise of rebuilding homes for flood survivors but taken a transformative step

by awarding ownership rights in the name of women from the affected families — ensuring that an entire generation is empowered to move forward. He said that a large number of houses had been completed, and these homes had now become valuable economic assets for the flood-affected families. "These homes will now be a great asset for you, an economic asset. You will be able to pass them on to your children in the future. These houses and this roof over your heads will remain yours forever — no one will be able to take them away from you," he said.



GERMANY AND BULGARIA

COVERT7

TRUTH UNLOCKED

April 27 - May 3, 2025

Germany's Merz plans Paris and Warsaw visits 'very soon'

Newswire Berlin: Germany's next chancellor, Friedrich Merz, says he will travel to Paris and Warsaw as soon as possible and coordinate closely with both capitals on confronting Donald Trump. In an interview with German tabloid Bild, Merz gave an insight into his foreign policy planning for his first days in office which is expected to start on 8 May. "I will ... immediately travel to Paris and very quickly travel to Warsaw," he said.

The incoming German leader said it was important for Berlin to "work together very well, very quickly" with the French government and to collaborate "on a par" with Poland. Merz, a Christian Democrat (CDU), broke his self-imposed silence after securing a deal to form a coalition government with the Social Democrats (SPD) and the CDU's own sister party the Bavarian Christian Democrats (CSU). Early visits to Germany's largest neighbours in both the east and west have tradi-

tionally been agenda priorities for new German chancellors. The incumbent, the SPD's Olaf Scholz, has been accused of neglecting close ties with his allies, however. Merz suggested that he will reverse that trend, specifically when dealing with America's controversial president, Donald Trump. "I will only travel to Washington once I have obtained a joint opinion and position from European partners on decisive topics," Merz told Bild.



He listed France, Poland, the EU Commission, and Britain as his main interlocutors before any Trump meeting takes place. That points to plans to return to informal coordination with Europe's heavyweights, including non-EU members, rather than working through the EU institutions. Merz also poured cold water on hopes of a swift EU and NATO accession for Ukraine in an interview with Handelsblatt, a German business publication, published on Sunday. Ukraine is "a European country at war,

and a country at war can neither become a member of NATO nor a member of the European Union", Merz said, while doubling down further on the cautious stance he had taken during the election campaign earlier this year. The CDU manifesto had remained notably ambiguous on Ukraine's future within NATO while explicitly advocating for its accession to the EU. "Ukraine has candidate status in the European Union and that opens the pathway to membership of the European Union ... but a country at war cannot become a member of NATO," Merz said.

Nearly 40% of Bulgarians unable to save, indebtedness rising

Newswire Sofia: According to recent data from the Trend Research Center, shared during the "Personal Finance" event by Money.bg, 38% of Bulgarians are unable to set aside any savings. Among those who do manage to

save, only a small number allocate over 10% of their income, and just 1% save more than 30%. Interestingly, residents of smaller towns tend to save more than those in the capital, likely due to the lower cost of living outside Sofia.



Debt is also becoming a growing concern. About 23% of Bulgarians have consumer loans, 13% have borrowed money from family or friends, 7% have taken out fast loans, and 6% have home loans. At the same time, over half of the population – 52% – do not carry any debt. The situation is particularly alarming among young people under 30, with 120,000 already referred to the enforcement agency due to unpaid debts. This group includes 4,000 individuals aged between 18 and 20, many of whom are still in school. Another 36,000 are aged 20–25, and a further 80,000 fall in the 25–30 age bracket. Despite limited experience, many young people expect salaries typically earned only after years in the workforce. Starting pay in data processing roles in Bulgaria ranges between BGN 2,000 and 3,000, while experienced professionals can earn significantly more, with some reach-



ing five-figure incomes in either leva or euros. When asked about desired income, 26% of respondents said they would like a net salary between BGN 2,000 and 3,000, while 19% hoped for between BGN 3,000 and 4,000. These income expectations often outpace current employment realities, contributing to rising debt and low savings. Nevertheless, experts emphasize that financial stability is possible with increased awareness and proactive management of personal finances.

Why Portugal is still the smartest European trip you can book



Newswire Lisbon: In a world where luxury often comes with a hefty price tag, Portugal stands out as an exception. Here, visitors can indulge in opulent experiences without the fear of over-spending.

Imagine staying in a plush hotel in Lisbon or Porto, enjoying gourmet meals, and partaking in exclusive activities—all at a fraction of the cost found in other European capitals. This affordability extends beyond accommodations; even high-end

shopping and entertainment options are reasonably priced, allowing you to enjoy a lavish lifestyle without the guilt. Portugal’s commitment to affordable luxury makes it a haven for those seeking quality experiences on a budget.



Japan provides assistance to Afghan refugees, host communities in Pakistan



Japan is one of UNHCR’s largest donors, ranked as its 7th donor globally in 2024.

Since 2020, Japan has generously contributed more than USD 14.5M to the refugee response in Pakistan, bolstering and improving education,

protection, livelihoods, water and sanitation services and infrastructure, as well as emergency support to the flood recovery activities.



Celina Ali

Islamabad: The Government of Japan this week announced USD 3 million to support UNHCR’s programmes for Afghan refugees and host communities in Pakistan. The Government of Japan has decided to provide USD 3 million to UNHCR to support Afghan refugees and host communities in Pakistan. This significant contribution, which comes from Japan’s supplementary budget, will enhance UNHCR’s ef-

forts to provide critical assistance to both refugees and their host communities, addressing urgent needs in protection and documentation, gender-based violence, health, and livelihoods, across Pakistan. The initiative will also deliver primary healthcare to individuals, including women, and offer certified skills development training to refugees and members of the host communities to support them in building their livelihoods and resilience.

Pakistan mulls US oil imports to ease trade imbalance

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan is considering importing crude oil from the United States for the first time to offset a trade imbalance that triggered higher U.S. tariffs, according to a government source directly involved with the proposal and a refinery executive. Countries are scrambling to find ways to lower their U.S. tariff burdens, including buying more U.S. oil and gas, as President Donald Trump’s sweeping import duties rattle economies and markets. "It is one of the products being reviewed ahead of a delegation leaving for the U.S. to talk about tariffs," said a government source directly involved with the proposal to the prime minister to buy more U.S.

crude. "It is under active consideration. We are exploring opportunities and the structure to do it, but the PM has to approve it," he said. Trump has imposed a 10% baseline tariff on all imports to the U.S. and higher duties on dozens of other countries. Pakistan faces a 29% tariff due to a trade surplus with the U.S. of about \$3 billion, although that is subject to the 90-day pause Trump announced last week. The refinery executive said that the idea is to buy U.S. crude equivalent to Pakistan’s current imports of oil and refined products, or about \$1 billion of oil. The sources declined to be named as the proposal is in its preliminary stage.



Pakistan’s petroleum ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Pakistan imported 137,000 barrels per day of crude in 2024, mostly light grades from the Middle East, with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates among its top suppliers, data from analytics firm Kpler showed. Oil imports amounted to \$5.1 billion in 2024, data from Pakistan’s central bank showed.

In February, Saudi Arabia, through the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD), extended a \$1.2 billion financing facility to Pakistan for the import of oil products for a year. The SFD has provided approximately \$6.7 billion to Islamabad for oil products since 2019. Before Trump’s partial tariff pause last week, Pakistan said that it would send a delegation to the U.S. in the coming

weeks to negotiate new tariffs. Several big energy importers are looking to buy more from the U.S. to ease trade surpluses. Last Friday, Indian state gas firm GAIL India Ltd issued a tender to buy a 26% stake in a U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) project and import LNG, while Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have discussed participating in an LNG project in the U.S. state of Alaska.



CM assures EU rights standards compliance



European Union ambassador to Pakistan Dr Riina Kionka



NewsWire

Lahore: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif this week invited companies from the European Union states to invest in the education, information technology, green energy and health sectors in the province. Welcoming the EU Parliamentary Delegation for South Asia to discuss matters related to mutual interests, bilateral relations, trade, education and investment, she agreed to strengthen the relations for peace, development and common goals. The chief minister said on the occasion, “Pakistan values its reliable friendship with the European Union. The EU is not only Pakistan’s trading partner but also a voice of stability in the world.” She said the GSP Plus preferential

trade scheme has greatly improved Pakistan’s exports to the EU, especially in the textile sector.” She highlighted, “We are taking steps to fulfill all EU requirements, including human rights and labour reforms.” Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz said, “Punjab is the heart of Pakistan’s economy, providing a conducive business environment for investment. We want to increase cooperation with the European Union in agriculture, energy, digital infrastructure and environmental projects.” She said, “Pakistan’s youth are talented and dynamic, training courses are being conducted to connect them to the global job market. I am happy that Pakistani students are among the top recipients of the Erasmus Mundus scholarships for the third year in a row.” She underscored, “Pakistan is committed to regional and global peace.”



British High Commissioner Jane Marriott joins emotional tribute to Sir Anwar Pervez in Islamabad



borders and generations. The gathering drew an impressive array of distinguished guests, including prominent figures from both Pakistan and the United Kingdom. Among the high-profile attendees were Jane Marriott, the British High Commissioner to Pakistan, and Lord Wajid Khan of Burnley, a UK government minister. Both dignitaries spoke warmly of Sir Anwar's extraordinary business triumphs in the UK and highlighted the pivotal role he and the Bestway Group have played in strengthening the bilateral relationship between the two nations. Esteemed personalities such as Dr Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's former Ambassador to the United Nations,

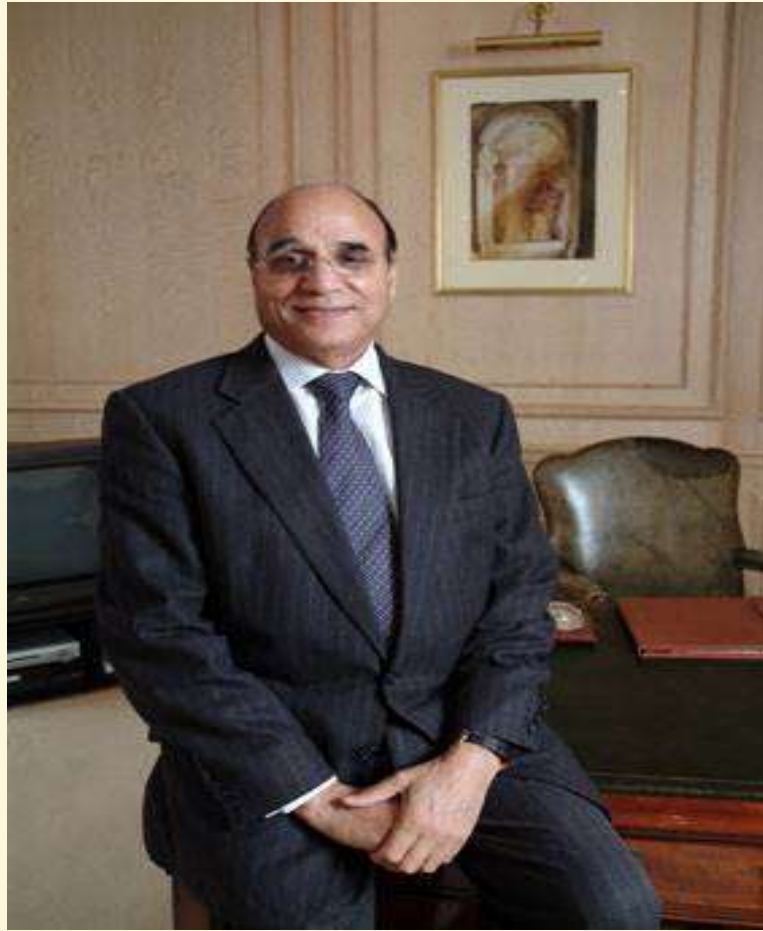


Celina Ali
Islamabad: A grand and emotionally charged evening in Islamabad this week paid tribute to the extraordinary journey and monumental accomplishments of Sir Anwar Pervez, the celebrated British Pakistani billionaire and founder of the Bestway Group. The event, held at a prestigious local hotel, was hosted by Lord Zameer Choudrey CBE in honour of his uncle, Sir Anwar Pervez, to commemorate his inspiring life, enduring values, and transformative achievements. It was a night dedicated to celebrating a legacy that continues to resonate across



nings in the village of Thathi, Pakistan, to becoming one of the most respected and successful business figures in the United Kingdom. The biography stands not only as a record of his life's milestones but also as a timeless source of inspiration for generations to come. Sir Anwar's journey is one of grit, foresight, and an enduring commitment to giving back. Having migrated to the UK in 1956, he worked relentlessly to build a future for himself and his loved ones. His entrepreneurial spirit eventually led to the establishment of Bestway Group, which has evolved into a global conglomerate valued at £5 billion, employ-

ing more than 47,000 people world-wide, and ranking among Pakistan's largest foreign investors. Beyond his business empire, Sir Anwar is widely celebrated for his deep-rooted dedication to philanthropy, particularly in Pakistan. Through the Bestway Group, he has contributed extensively to initiatives in education, healthcare, and community development — efforts that have earned him some of the highest national and international honours, including a Knighthood from the British Crown and the Hilal-i-Pakistan from the Government of Pakistan.



the United States, and the United Kingdom, and Dr Ishrat Hussain, an acclaimed economist and former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, also graced the occasion. They offered heartfelt reflections on Sir Anwar's character, applauding not only his unparalleled achievements in the UK but also his lasting impact on Pakistan through his generous philanthropic and business ventures. The event was further elevated by the presence of Jameel Ahmad, the current Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, alongside senior government officials, influential members of the business fraternity, and leaders from civil society — all united in their admiration for a man whose story continues to inspire with its depth and purpose. In a deeply personal tribute, Lord Zameer Choudrey spoke with affection and reverence about Sir Anwar, crediting him as a guiding influence and a beacon of resilience and leadership whose values shaped his own life and many others. One of the most memorable moments of the evening was the unveiling of a touching biography chronicling the remarkable life of Sir Anwar Pervez. The book traces his incredible transformation from his humble begin-



"You define your own life. Don't let other people write your script." - Oprah Winfrey

"Keep your face always toward the sunshine and shadows will fall behind you." - Walt Whitman

Italy PM Meloni draws Trump's praise

Covert Report

Washington: Giorgia Meloni's charm offensive to the White House went off without a hitch, with US President Donald Trump using the moment to assert that he "fully expects" to clinch a trade deal with the European Union. The Italian Prime Minister claimed that Mr Trump accepted an invitation to Rome in the near future and that he would consider meeting other leaders while there – raising the possibility that he would sit down with the president of the European Commission, which handles trade matters for the EU.

The moment is significant because it is the first indication from Mr Trump that he may be willing to de-escalate the tit-for-tat tariff escalation that has seen the US impose new levies on around €380 billion (\$566 billion) of EU goods. And gone were his hyperbolic condemnations of the bloc, which he has said was formed to "screw" the US.

For most of April 17's news conference, Ms Meloni blended into the background, speaking up to heap praise on the American President or repeating his political talking points, such as supporting his fight against woke and diversity, equity and inclusion "ideology".

The meeting could not have been more different than the experience of Mr Volodymyr Zelensky, who suffered a humiliating dressing down by the US President in the Oval Office, after the Ukrainian President explained the history of Russia occupying his country and breaking ceasefire agreements.

"Everyone loves and respects her, and I can't say that about many people," Mr Trump told reporters in the White House. "I would say that she has taken Europe by storm."

Asked whether he thought Italy could be the "best" ally of the US in Europe, he said: "Only if

the prime minister remains the prime minister can it be our best ally. She's doing a great job. She's a fantastic person and doing a great job and our relationship is great."

While Mr Trump was generous with the praise, he still offered very little of substance – and it remains to be seen if the congenial tone will translate into a mending of relations.

While he said he expected to get a trade deal with the EU, those negotiations have in fact broken down, Bloomberg reported earlier. The EU's chief trade negotiator left a meeting on April 14 with commerce secretary Howard Lutnick and trade representative Jamieson Greer with little clarity on the US stance and struggling to determine the American side's aims.

Mr Trump also said that he was in no rush to strike a deal with the Europeans. And the stakes could not be higher for Italy or the EU.

The US put 20 per cent tariffs – which were lowered to 10 per cent for 90 days – on nearly all EU imports, as well as 25 per cent duties on cars and metals. The Trump administration has also moved forward with plans to impose tariffs on semiconductor and pharmaceutical imports. Italy exports about €65 billion of goods to the US a year, which is about 10 per cent of its total exports. The Italian leader spent months organising her bilateral with Mr Trump, sustaining a complex and taxing balancing act that at times promised to undo her very own government coalition at home.

She and her team have repeatedly reacted with private dismay to Mr Trump's tirades spanning Ukraine, trade and much else besides, according to people familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, and they harboured anxiety about the meeting failing. Still, she opted for the path of least resistance and chose to avoid any direct criticism of the President.



In a joint statement on April 18, Mr Trump and Ms Meloni pledged to deepen defense ties and support Italy as a data hub for the Mediterranean and North Africa. They also said they would work together to develop the India-Middle East-Europe infrastructure corridor, without providing details.

Ms Meloni pledged to buy more US liquefied

natural gas and said Italian companies would invest around €10 billion in the US in the coming years. "You'll forgive me if I promote my country a bit, but you're a businessman and you understand me," she said, as Mr Trump nodded in agreement. "But we can do even better together."

At least for now, the complicated balancing act

Ms Meloni has engaged in seems to have paid off, consolidating her status as a capable diplomat. But it is too early to say whether it has borne tangible fruit.

"The goal for me is to make the West great again," Ms Meloni told Mr Trump. "And I think we can do it together." "We can," responded Mr Trump.

Macron invites scientists to work in France amid US funding cuts

Newswire

Paris: French President Emmanuel Macron this week invited scientists from all over the world to

come work in France or Europe, as US President Donald Trump's new administration has started slashing funding for universities and research bodies.

Macron did not mention the US, where hundreds of scientists have been dismissed in cutbacks to research that come amid a broader clash between Trump and Ivy League universities.



"Here in France, research is a priority, innovation a culture, science a limitless horizon. Researchers from all over the world, choose France, choose Europe!" Macron said in a post on X.

To display this content from X (Twitter), you must enable advertisement tracking and audience measurement.

Trump administration officials point to the wave of pro-Palestinian protests on campuses last year as a rationale for its demands of the universities. However, critics among faculty and student groups say the measures are designed to chill speech and that campuses should be a place for freedom of expression and academic thought.

The threat to academics' livelihoods at US universities has given Europe's political leaders hope they could reap an intellectual windfall.

France on Friday announced the "Choose France for Science" platform, operated by the French National Research Agency (ANR), which will enable universities, schools, and research organisations to apply for co-funding from the government to host researchers.

The initiative will on May 5 launch a dedicated platform for applications to host international researchers, the government said on a new website.

"France is committed to standing up to

attacks on academic freedom across the globe," ANR said in a statement.

It added that "the international context" was creating the conditions for an unprecedented wave of mobility among researchers worldwide, and that France intends to position itself as a welcoming place for those wishing to pursue their work in Europe.

ANR said the platform would allow universities to submit projects to host international researchers, especially in areas including health research, climate and biodiversity, artificial intelligence, space studies, agriculture, low-carbon energy and digital systems.

The announcement comes a day after officials said that the first researchers fleeing US spending cuts imposed by Trump will start work at a French university in June.

Aix Marseille University said its "Safe Place for Science" scheme received a flood of applicants after announcing in March it would open its doors to US scientists threatened by cuts.

University president Eric Berton said he wanted to see a new status of "refugee scientist" be created, and for more US researchers to be welcomed in France and Europe.