

High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri strengthens Pakistan-Australia ties through active diplomacy **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: In a reflection of Pakistan’s proactive and people-centered diplomacy, High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri continues to play a leading role in deepening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Australia across multiple sectors, including trade, education, and cultural exchange. Since

(Page-5)

UK High Commissioner Jane Marriott meets DPM Dar to discuss regional developments **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: In an important diplomatic engagement reflecting the United Kingdom’s continued interest in South Asian stability, British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, called on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar this

(Page-11)

Xi urges promoting healthy, orderly development of AI

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, this week urged efforts to promote the healthy and orderly development of artificial intelligence (AI) in a beneficial, safe and fair direction. Xi made the remarks while presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. Xi emphasized that in the face of rapidly evolving new-generation AI technologies, China shall give full play to the advantages of the new system for mobilizing resources nationwide, uphold self-reliance and self-strengthening, prioritize application-oriented development, and promote the healthy and orderly advancement of the country's AI sector toward a beneficial, safe and equitable direction. Zheng Nanning, a professor at Xi'an Jiaotong University in Northwest China's Shaanxi province, gave a lecture on this issue and put forward suggestions. Members of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee listened carefully to the lecture and held discussions. Speaking after these discussions, Xi pointed out that AI, as a strategic technology leading the new round



of technological revolution and industrial transformation, has profoundly changed the way humans produce and live. Xi noted that the Party Central Committee attaches great importance to the development of AI, and has improved top-level design and strengthened implementation efforts in recent years, thereby driving a holistic and systematic advancement of the country's comprehensive AI strength. Noting that there are still gaps and deficiencies in areas such as fundamental theories and key core technologies, Xi urged acknowledging these shortcomings and strengthening efforts to comprehensively advance sci-tech innovation, industrial development and applications of AI, to improve AI regulatory systems and mechanisms, and to firmly grasp the initiative in both AI development and governance. Xi stressed that breakthroughs must be achieved in fundamental theories, methodologies and tools to gain a first-mover advantage and secure a competitive edge in AI. He urged efforts to consistently strengthen basic research and focus on overcoming challenges regarding core technologies such as high-end chips and foundational software, thereby building an independent, controllable, and collaboratively-

functioning foundational software and hardware system for AI. He emphasized leveraging AI to drive paradigm transformation in scientific research and accelerate breakthroughs in technological innovation across all fields. Pointing out that China has rich data resources, a complete industrial system, a wide range of application scenarios and huge market space, Xi stressed that an industry-academia-research-application collaborative innovation system led by enterprises should be built to promote the in-depth integration of AI technological innovation and industrial innovation. He highlighted AI's roles in the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and opening up new tracks for strategic emerging industries and future industries. The construction of computing power infrastructure should be promoted in a coordinated manner, and the development, utilization and sharing of data resources should be deepened, Xi said. He stressed the importance of policy support for AI, including policies concerning intellectual property rights, fiscal and taxation matters, government



procurement and the opening of facilities, while he also called for advancing financial services for science and technology. He underlined the necessity to promote AI education across all phases of schooling and general education for the entire society, in order to continuously cultivate high-quality talents. The mechanisms for AI scientific research support, career development and talent evaluation should be enhanced, and platforms and conditions should be created for talents to showcase their abilities, Xi added. Xi noted that AI not only introduces unprecedented development opportunities, but also brings unprecedented risks and challenges. It is essential to grasp the trends and patterns of AI development, and to accelerate the formulation and improvement of

relevant laws, regulations, policy systems, application standards and ethical guidelines. It is also crucial to establish systems for technology monitoring, early risk warning and emergency response -- to ensure that AI is safe, reliable and controllable. He emphasized that AI can serve as a global public good that benefits humanity. It is important to widely carry out international cooperation in AI, help Global South countries strengthen their technological capacity building, and to make contributions to bridging the global AI divide. Efforts should be made to promote the alignment and coordination of development strategies, governance rules, and technical standards among all parties, and to form a global governance framework and standards with extensive consensus as early as possible, Xi said.

Greenland, Denmark affirm alliance amid Trump's interest in US control



Covert Report

Copenhagen: Greenland and Denmark agreed this week to strengthen their ties in response to US President Donald Trump's interest in taking control of the strategically located Arctic island, their leaders said after talks in Copenhagen. Greenland's new Prime Minister, Mr Jens-Frederik Nielsen, landed in the Danish capital on April 26 for a three-day visit, in a display of unity between the mineral-rich island, a semi-autonomous Danish territory, and Denmark. "We are in a foreign policy situation which means we have to move closer together," Mr Nielsen said, at a joint press conference with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen. Mr Nielsen's visit follows months of tension over Mr Trump's repeated declarations that Greenland should become part of the US. The leaders of Denmark and Greenland have said only Greenlanders can decide the territory's future. However, they have found themselves treading a delicate line between firmly dismissing US ambitions of annexing Greenland while also trying to maintain good ties with their traditional ally.

"We are ready for a strong partnership (with the US) and more development, but we want respect... We will never be a piece of property that can be bought by anyone," Mr Nielsen said. He said an ongoing expansion of the US consulate in Nuuk, Greenland's capital, which was agreed before Mr Trump took office, was causing anxiety among the people of Greenland. Mr Nielsen did not confirm or deny when asked if he had been in contact with the US administration since taking office earlier this month. The warmer relations between Nuuk and Copenhagen come after Greenland's previous prime minister in December blamed Denmark for a historical "genocide" in Greenland and in January stepped up a push for independence from Denmark. Ms Frederiksen said Denmark was ready to invest more in Greenland and to support Greenland financially as it takes over more responsibility of domestic affairs from Copenhagen as part of what she called a "modernisation" of their relationship. Denmark has called for increased Arctic defence collaboration with the US, and both Mr Nielsen and Ms Frederiksen said on April 27 they were committed to strengthening defence in the region. Denmark's King Frederik will travel to Greenland on April 28 in a further show of solidarity.

Bilawal Bhutto urges dialogue with India amid escalating tensions

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari this week called for dialogue between Pakistan and India to resolve ongoing disputes, as tensions between the two countries continue to rise. In an interview, Bilawal criticised India's rejection of Pakistan's offer for talks following the deadly April 22 attack on tourists in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), which left 26 people dead. Islamabad has denied India's allegations of supporting "cross-border terrorism" linked to the incident. In response to the fallout, India downgraded diplomatic ties, suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, and closed visa services, while Pakistan reciprocated with airspace restrictions and diplomatic expulsions. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has offered to participate in a neutral investigation into the attack. Bilawal voiced full support for the government's response and warned that if India terminates the Indus Waters Treaty, Pakistan would respond appropriately. He noted that international law forbids obstructing water even during wartime and said India had weakened its own position by



taking such an aggressive step. The PPP chairman also stressed the importance of maintaining agreements like the Shimla Accord and the Indus Waters Treaty, adding that India's case on both Kashmir and water disputes is weak. He highlighted that as nuclear powers, both countries face international pressure to avoid escalation, pointing out that India's All Parties Conference had acknowledged internal security failures.

Explainer: What's the proper English equivalent for the Chinese New Year

China Economic Net

Beijing: As the Lantern Festival falls on Wednesday, the traditional celebrations for the Chinese New Year (pronounced "Chunjie") or Spring Festival, in 2025 draw to a close. This year's Spring Festival is the first one since its inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. With the Spring Festival gradually gaining global recognition and popularity,



opinions vary on whether the festival should be called "Spring Festival" or "Chinese New Year," with some also advocating for the term "Lunar New Year." So, how should the festival be accurately referred to in English? The term "Spring Festival" is a literal translation of the Chinese word "Chunjie." The character "Chun" means "spring," symbolizing renewal and new beginnings, while "Jie" means "festival."

When applying for UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the Chinese working group used the direct translation

"Spring Festival," and the term was also officially adopted in the published document. On UNESCO's website, it states: "In China, the spring festival marks the beginning of the new year. It falls on the first day of the first month of the Chinese calendar and involves a variety of social practices to usher in the new year, pray for good fortune, celebrate family reunions and promote community harmony. This process of celebration is known as 'guonian' (crossing the year)."

Therefore, using "Spring Festival" in various contexts is appropriate, as it accurately reflects the festival's cultural significance and aligns with its official recognition. For example, an annual TV program broadcast live and watched by billions worldwide on Chinese New Year's Eve is titled "The Spring Festival Gala." However, some argue that "Spring Festival" may lack the cultural depth and significance conveyed by "Chinese New Year." Unlike "Spring Festival," the term "Chinese New Year" better captures the essence of "guonian," which symbolizes bidding farewell to the old year and welcoming the new. Meanwhile, the celebrations are deeply rooted in Chinese traditions, such as the reunion dinner, probably the most important meal of the year, where the whole family gathers, as well as the giving of "hongbao" (red envelopes) and the lighting of firecrackers, all of which symbolize good fortune, happiness and prosperity. Advocates of "Chinese New Year" also argue that the festival has been celebrated in China for millennia, reflecting its profound historical and cultural heritage. Zhang Wenzhou, a senior researcher on public relations at the Communication University of China, said that the term "Chinese New Year" has been widely used for a long time in the English-speaking world and aligns more closely with the festival's historical and cultural reality. In sum, "Chinese New Year" resonates more strongly with the festival's cultural and historical significance, making it a more meaningful choice for many. For people unfamiliar with the festival, "Chinese New Year" provides an easy and direct way to identify the celebration. Regardless of the cultural and linguistic nuances of



"Spring Festival" and "Chinese New Year," both terms are acceptable and can be used interchangeably in most contexts. Some claim that "Lunar New Year" is a more inclusive expression, recognizing the shared celebrations across cultures and fostering cross-cultural understanding,

especially among countries in East and Southeast Asia, while "Chinese New Year" may be seen as too narrow. "Lunar New Year" can broadly refer to the traditional New Year celebrations observed in various Asian cultures, such as Korea's "Seollal," Vietnam's "Tet" and Mongolia's "Tsagaan Sar."

China to launch Shenzhou-20 crewed spaceship on April 24

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: The Shenzhou-20 crewed spaceship is scheduled to be launched



at 5:17 p.m. Thursday (Beijing Time) from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China, according to the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) this week.

The spaceship will carry three astronauts — Chen Dong, Chen Zhongrui and Wang Jie — to carry out the Shenzhou-20 spaceflight mission, with Chen Dong serving as the commander, said CMSA spokesman Lin Xiqiang at a news conference. He noted that the launch day coincides with China's 10th

Space Day. China designated April 24 as its Space Day in 2016 to mark the successful launch of its first satellite, Dongfanghong-1, on April 24, 1970. Thursday's launch will use a Long March-2F carrier rocket, which will be filled with propellant soon, Lin said, adding that all preparation work is progressing smoothly. Shenzhou-20 is the 35th flight mission of China's manned space program, and the fifth crewed mission during the application and development stage of China's space station. The crew is scheduled to return to the Dongfeng landing site in north China in late October this year.



Amid tariff pressures, Chinese exporters adapt and expand

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: As the US ratchets up tariffs on Chinese imports, exporters in central China's Henan province are feeling the strain, but they are not standing still. In Xinxiang, a manufacturing hub in the province's north, firms accustomed to shipping goods across the globe are now navigating a more turbulent trade environment. Yet, rather than retreat, many are pushing outward, chasing new markets and doubling down on innovation. "Business with the U.S. has definitely gotten tougher," many company heads said. For instance, Xinke Protective, a typical export-driven enterprise specializing in protective workwear, exports over 90 percent of its products to Europe and North America. In the first quarter of this year, the company saw revenues fall 30 percent compared to the same period in 2024. Frestec, a Henan-based maker of refrigerators and freezers, has shipped its products to more than 70 countries and regions in recent years. But 2025 has brought a sharp rise in external uncertainty, according to Yang Qinhe, the company's deputy general manager, adding new layers of complexity to the company's overseas market. Despite growing uncertainty abroad, none of these entrepreneurs showed signs of panic.

"We remain optimistic about orders picking up in the second half of this year," said Xie Li, chairman assistant of Xinke Protective. "It's not the first time we've weathered something like this." When the U.S. slapped tariffs on Chinese goods in 2018, Xinke's orders dipped, only to recover months later as American clients, after weighing their options, returned. "Our quality and pricing still made sense, even with the added costs," Xie explained. To retain those clients, the company's chairman recently traveled to the U.S. for in-person talks, while other teams are fanning out across the Middle East, South America, and Russia in search of new buyers. A similar story is unfolding at Weihua Group, a crane manufacturer in Xinxiang. The company has hired more than 300 new salespeople overseas since last October — triple the number it initially targeted. "We can't control the global situation, but we can be proactive," said Vice President Ding Haiyang. "Many of our executives are now abroad, negotiating deals." The changing trade landscape has only deepened companies' resolve to broaden their global reach. Textile firm Xinxiang Chemical Fiber has sent teams to trade fairs in Indonesia and Bulgaria,

tailoring its offerings to meet local tastes. "Buyers there have high expectations for fabrics texture, so we developed a customized flat yarn," said Zhang Jiaqi, deputy general manager of the company. "It's been very well received." Auto parts maker Yubei Steering System (Xinxiang) Co., Ltd is scouting factory sites overseas. "Going global is no longer optional — it's necessary," said deputy general manager Zhong Lijie. Such moves suggest that Henan's exporters, far from being blindsided, have been bracing for volatility, and preparing alternatives. "The U.S. isn't our only market," one entrepreneur said. "Europe, Southeast Asia, and South America are full of potential. We just didn't prioritize them before." Still, not every solution lies overseas. China's government work report this year emphasized the need to address inadequate domestic demand, particularly insufficient consumption, and make domestic demand the main engine and anchor of economic growth. At Henan Winner Vibrating Equipment Co., Ltd., domestic demand has emerged as a surprising growth engine. The company's in-house welding robots — once built solely for internal use — caught the attention of local customers after staff began posting videos online. Since hitting the market in 2021, robot sales have



jumped nearly 30-fold. Food manufacturer Henan Aokun is also targeting the Chinese consumer, betting on healthier eating habits. "We're developing products that are low in sugar and fat but high in fiber," said general manager Tang Lei. "That's where the demand is going."

Yet even as companies innovate and adapt, concerns remain. Several business leaders called for curbing rat-race competition, marked by low quality and low prices. "We need to stop fighting over pennies," said Xie Li. "Only by working together — and focusing on R&D — can we keep our industries sustainable."

Italy: The first monument for Satoshi Nakamoto arrives in the Molise region in Fornelli



Newswire Rome: The first monument dedicated to Satoshi Nakamoto, the creator of Bitcoin (BTC), has arrived in Italy. In the small Molise municipality of Fornelli, with 1,800 inhabitants, the inauguration of the statue created by the young local crypto artist, Mattia Pannoni, took place on May 1.

Italy will also host its first monument dedicated to Satoshi Nakamoto, the creator of Bitcoin (BTC). This monument was conceived and created by Mattia Pannoni, a young crypto artist from the area, and aims to represent an anthem to freedom and everything that Bitcoin represents.

While the project was conceived and created by the crypto artist Pannoni, the funding for the concrete realization of the monument to Satoshi Nakamoto came entirely from the Administration of the Municipality of Fornelli. In practice, the small Molise municipality that hosts 1800 inhabitants, seems to be the Italian village with the highest density of Bitcoin adoption. In fact, there are already 24 businesses in the country that accept cryptocurrency as a payment method, thanks to an infrastructure dedicated to facilitating these transactions. The ecosystem of Fornelli surpasses other famous Bitcoin-friendly cities such as Playa El Zonte in El Salvador, Zug in Switzerland, Ljubiana in Slovenia, and many others. In this regard, the mayor of Fornelli, Giovanni Tedeschi, commented: "It is important, indeed fundamental, as an administration, to take into consideration all the new ideas that come from our young people." The exposure of the monument of

Satoshi Nakamoto is a concrete example of the lifestyle led in Fornelli, involving Bitcoin (BTC). In fact, the small municipality aims to become a stop for travelers and digital nomads who want to live and pay in Bitcoin. Last October 2024, the statue dedicated to Satoshi Nakamoto was unveiled also at Parco Ciani in Lugano, Switzerland. This presentation coincided with the Plan ? Forum, one of the most important global events dedicated to BTC and blockchain. In any case, the sculpture displayed in Lugano of Nakamoto does not have a specific face, respecting the mystery surrounding the identity of the founder of Bitcoin.



Italy's ambassador to Pakistan Marilina Armenin



Beyond the Himalayas lies desire for shared prosperity

Ding Gang

For centuries, the Himalayan Mountain range had stood like a towering backbone, separating China from South Asia and impeding the flow of civilizations and information. However, as the world evolves, these mountains no longer serve as barriers to development. During my recent travels through Bhutan and Nepal, I witnessed firsthand how China's growth is increasingly transcending these snow-capped peaks, attracting countries along the southern slopes of the Himalayas.

At its core, this phenomenon is not about geopolitical competition but about each individual's pursuit of a better life.

Throughout my journey in Bhutan, I was surprised to discover how knowledgeable some Bhutanese people are about China, including the

transformations in the Xizang Autonomous Region over the past decade. My guide explained that he follows China's development through news and documentaries and has personally visited China to experience the renewed landscapes of its cities and rural areas. Many Bhutanese families now own smartphones and televisions, allowing them to stay informed about global news. This flow of information has created an unprecedented desire for closer economic and trade relations with China, as well as a curiosity to witness firsthand how Chinese society has achieved stability and progress. As the perspectives of ordinary Bhutanese citizens extend beyond the mountains to the broader world, their primary concerns revolve around employment, income, healthcare conditions and opportunities for their children to receive quality education.



However, Bhutan's foreign policy has long been constrained within India's "sphere of influence," lacking formal diplomatic relations with China and the other four permanent members of the UN Security Council. Border negotiations between China and Bhutan have often been affected by Indian interference. India has attempted to secure Bhutan in its "backyard" through various means, including economic dependency and security provisions. These limitations severely restrict Bhutan's international opportunities and directly constrain cooperation and development with China in trade, technology, healthcare and other sectors.

While border demarcation issues exist between China and Bhutan, these can be addressed through consultation, equality and approaches that balance historical and current interests. Multiple rounds of negotiations between China and Bhutan have demonstrated a pragmatic attitude, with China consistently emphasizing peaceful development and mutual benefit.

Border negotiations between China and Bhutan require not only the surveyor's scale but also the economist's calculator. If both parties remain committed to improving citizens' welfare, borders can become bridges rather than obstacles - platforms that bring hope. As the Bhutanese people experience modernization and an improved standard of living, they increasingly anticipate sharing in China's development dividends and enhanced cooperation.

Furthermore, Chinese agricultural technology, modern tourism management, investment attraction, hydropower expertise and communication infrastructure will boost employment and increase fiscal revenue. Sooner or later, these elements will naturally align with Bhutan's path toward modernization and a more inclusive,



confident society.

History has moved toward an era of openness and cooperation. Experience shows that when smaller countries have more options, they strengthen more rapidly, and their relationships with larger powers become healthier and more equal, benefiting regional development overall.

Prioritizing citizens' interests and allowing the free flow of information, goods, technology and ideas across the Himalayas will invigorate development throughout Bhutan, Nepal, northern India, southwestern China as well as the entire South Asian region.

By setting aside the burden of great power rivalry and adopting win-win cooperation as a fundamental principle, China-India relations can also move beyond the

"sphere of influence" predicament toward mutual development. Throughout my years of work and travel around China's periphery, I've grown increasingly convinced that a healthy, stable regional order isn't based on zero-sum competition but on interconnected prosperity. If even the Himalayas no longer obstruct communication between peoples, what force could stand in the way of regional populations' pursuit of happiness and well-being?

The writer is a senior editor with the People's Daily, and currently a senior fellow with the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at the Renmin University of China

The 'Tariff Armageddon' will only isolate US

Martin Jacques

One of the defining characteristics of US foreign policy since the beginning of China's reform and opening-up has been its consistent underestimation of China. It never entertained the idea that China could become America's equal, let alone surpass it. In fact, we have already arrived at the latter scenario. It is this that persuaded the Trump administration that the only solution was to junk America's post-1945 foreign policy. America was losing and would continue to lose: a radical change of direction was needed. The first attempt was Trump 1.0. When Donald Trump won last November, a very different and far more extreme strategy was in place. It climaxed on April 9 when the Trump administration effectively called a halt on trade with China. It was policy in extremis, what Italians might call tariffissimo, if such a word existed. When

you can't win, build a sky-high wall around your enemy, cut yourself off from them, and try to get the rest of the world to do the same.

Far from all Trump administration's talk about "Making America Great Again," this is nothing less than the "Great American Retreat." It is an admission of defeat. It is a denial of the very wellsprings of human development, the constant interaction between societies and cultures that spreads learning, and the inevitable passing of the baton to rising civilizations that emerge and reshape the future. A remarkable example of this has been the last eight decades, the rise of the developing world, home to the great majority of humanity, the emergence of China and India on the global stage, and the spread of globalization. This is the world the Trump administration is revolting against. Its counter-revolution is anti-development (the huge tariffs against developing countries), anti-diversity at home and abroad, anti-globalization, anti-science (COVID-19 and climate change), and pro-white racism. It wants to

close the door on the last eight decades.

Normally a strategy is conceived of as a process. Instead, the Trump administration has started at the end, with a maximalist position, a huge rupture and a headstrong approach that has been ill-thought-out. There are three reasons why it will fail. First, the trade ban will harm the US far more than it will harm China. Even though Chinese exports to the US are much larger than US exports to China, the US is far more dependent on Chinese exports than China is on US imports, for which, for the most part, it can find substitutes relatively easily. The lack of proper preparation on the US side has also been exposed by the temporary suspension of tariffs on chips, routers and other electronic products.

Second, the reaction of the bond markets, where power really lies, fired a warning shot that the Trump administration was forced to heed: The abuse of tariffs posed a serious threat to US exceptionalism. The exorbitant privilege of the dollar as the world's reserve currency could not be taken for granted. The same warning was issued in 2008 and 2020; we can be sure that 2025 will not be the last time. The consequences of the next one could be far more drastic.

The third reason why the US "Tariff Armageddon" will fail is that China has been preparing for this scenario ever since the first Trump administration launched its anti-China crusade in 2017. If China was taken somewhat by surprise by Trump 1.0, it was extremely well-prepared for Trump 2.0, regardless of the eventualities. While the US accounted for 21 percent of China's exports in 2016, that figure had fallen to 13.4 percent by 2024. This was not an accident, it was by design. Similarly, China, aware that sooner or later it might face major obstacles to its exports, had built up ample resources that could be deployed if and when needed to give a huge boost to domestic consumption. The contrast between China's approach and that of the US could hardly be starker: while China is playing chess, the US is holding a fireworks display.

By starting at the end and going for broke with its maximalist position - ending virtually all trade with China - the Trump administration has taken a huge risk. It has jumped stages and catapulted the world into what, in economic terms, is more like an endgame. The consequences for the US are far-reaching. With its imposition of 10 percent tariffs, it has aroused the wrath



of many countries around the world, which deeply resent the arbitrary and dictatorial manner of their imposition. The US intent is clear: the coercive reconfiguration of the world on America's terms and at the expense of other countries. From previously embracing multilateralism, the US has chosen unilateralism. It can no longer expect the same kind of goodwill from these countries, their loyalty will increasingly be motivated by fear. The US is much less likely to command their support in the trade war against China. On the contrary, many will increasingly look to China for solidarity and their future. America will face growing isolation.

The writer is a visiting professor at the Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University and a senior fellow at the China Institute, Fudan University

Editor-in-Chief: S. Ali
Associate Editor: Afzal Butt
Email: editor@covert.com.pk
Phone/Fax : +92-51-2723419
690. Street 17 Block E Bahria Town phase 8, Islamabad, Pakistan



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

Celina Ali

Islamabad: In a reflection of Pakistan’s proactive and people-centered diplomacy, High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri continues to play a leading role in deepening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Australia across multiple sectors, including trade, education, and cultural exchange. Since assuming office in Canberra, Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri has been at the forefront of advancing Pakistan’s diplomatic outreach in Australia, with a special focus on strengthening economic cooperation, enhancing academic linkages, and promoting Pakistan’s rich cultural heritage. His ongoing tenure has been marked by a series of high-profile engagements with Australian government officials, business leaders, think



tanks, and the vibrant Pakistani diaspora. Demonstrating a strong commitment to Pakistan’s national interests, High Commissioner

Chaudhri has consistently worked to build bridges between the two countries, advocating for greater collaboration in areas such as renewable energy, agriculture, mining, and education. His efforts have been instrumental in positioning Pakistan as a promising trade and investment partner in Australia’s strategic Indo-Pacific framework. A seasoned diplomat with a distinguished career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri previously served as Pakistan’s official spokesperson and held key diplomatic postings in Washington, New Delhi, and London. His expertise in public diplomacy and international negotiations has added dynamism to Pakistan’s mission in Australia, earning appreciation from both local and Pakistani communities. Under his leadership, the High Commission has



expanded initiatives to strengthen people-to-people contacts, including organizing cultural festivals, academic seminars, and business networking events aimed at showcasing Pakistan’s diversity, economic potential, and youth-driven innovation. Recognizing the vital role of the Pakistani diaspora in Australia, High Commissioner Chaudhri has actively engaged the community, encouraging their greater participation in strengthening bilateral ties and serving as a

bridge between the two nations. His open-door policy and emphasis on public service have made him a popular figure among Pakistani Australians, fostering a strong sense of pride and belonging. Most recently, Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri has been engaged in advocating for stronger support for Pakistani students in Australia, seeking greater academic exchange programs and scholarships, while also highlighting Pakistan’s growing educational institutions as attractive destinations for Australian scholars and researchers.

Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad calls for revival of multilateralism

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan’s top diplomat to the United Nations, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, urged the international community to reaffirm its commitment to multilateralism and collective action during a Security Council meeting convened by China this week. An informal session, the meeting provided a platform to the member states to discuss the challenges posed by unilateral actions in the current global context. Ambassador Ahmad highlighted the unraveling of longstanding norms that underpin global peace and cooperation, emphasizing the need to revive faith in multilateralism. “History reminds us that enduring peace and sustainable solutions have never come from unilateral actions or coercive practices,” he said. “They emanate from inclu-

sion, respect, shared purpose and unified responses.” The Pakistani diplomat also called for reforms in the international trading system to better reflect the aspirations and needs of developing countries. “Trade should be a bridge, not a barrier — a vehicle for peace and shared prosperity, not domination or isolation,” he added. Ahmad underscored the importance of empowering the UN to lead global development cooperation and champion equitable systems of trade, finance and climate governance. He reaffirmed Pakistan’s unwavering belief in multilateralism and the central role of the world body in fostering a fairer, more peaceful and compassionate international order. The UN meeting was held at a time when the international community faces increasing polarization, with wars, inequality, economic instability and climate change threatening global peace and security.



Embassy in France hosts Pakistan Day reception

Celina Ali

Islamabad: The embassy of Pakistan to France this week hosted the Pakistan Day Reception in Paris, which was attended by a large number of French government officials, elected officials, military personnel, academics, businesspersons and the media. Senior officials of international organizations based in Paris, including UNESCO and OECD

and the diplomatic community based in France participated in large numbers. French Ambassador to Pakistan Nicolas Galey also attended the event. The event began with national anthems of Pakistan and France and a documentary showcasing Pakistan’s heritage, culture, cuisine, arts and crafts; etc. A special Pakistan Day Cake was cut by the ambassador and the guests of honour.

Senator Rachid Temal, Vice-president of Commission of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces at Senate and Member of France-Pakistan Friendship Group and Ambassador David Bertolotti, Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs addressed the guests. They congratulated the government and people of Pakistan on the occasion of Pakistan Day. Further, they underlined the importance of Pakistan-France relations and highlighted the tremendous potential especially in the economic domain. Welcoming the guests, ambassador of Pakistan to France Mumtaz Zahra Baloch spoke about Pakistan’s centuries old multiethnic, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic heritage and the commitment to preserve the ethos of a democratic, progressive, and pluralistic Pakistan. She shared that over the last several decades Pakistan has strengthened democratic institutions, empowered the judiciary and instituted landmark legislation to promote human rights and empower women. Ambassador Baloch expressed strong solidarity of Pakistan with peoples around the world, who continue to face oppression and colonialism. She outlined the main features of Pakistan’s foreign policy which is deeply rooted in international law, multilateralism, and peaceful settlement of disputes. She added that at a time of international upheavals, Pakistan prioritized dialogue and



diplomacy and the centrality of the UN Charter. These priorities also defined Pakistan’s role as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council as well. The ambassador spoke about the importance of Pakistan-France relations which is based on mutual respect and partnership. She emphasized that as two countries that value strategic autonomy, multilateralism and uphold international law, Pakistan and France work together for peace, development and climate action at the

United Nations and other international organizations. She added that the understandings reached between Prime Minister Mohammad Shehbaz Sharif and President Emmanuel Macron, have given a positive momentum to the bilateral relations between the two countries. A replica of the “Fasting Buddha” on display at the venue became a center of attraction for guests along with an exhibition of a range of books on Pakistan.



Ali Rehman Malik offers heartfelt condolences on passing of Pope Francis, visits Lady Fatima Church



the protection of human rights, and unity among faiths made him a towering figure in our times. “His message of love and brotherhood must continue to inspire humanity,” he added. Rev Fr Sylvester Joseph, Secretary General of the Diocese of Rawalpindi & Islamabad, thanked Malik for his visit and thoughtful sentiments. He also recalled the longstanding relationship between the Christian community of Pakistan and the late Senator A Rehman Malik. Fr Sylvester Joseph said that Senator A Rehman Malik always raised his voice for the rights and protection of minorities and always stood by us in difficult times and was present with us during Christmas and Easter. “He was not just a public figure, but a true friend of the



Abdullah Jan
Islamabad: Chairman of the Institute of Research and Reforms International (IRR International) Ali Rehman Malik accompanied by Riaz Ali Turi this week visited Lady Fatima Church in Islamabad to offer heartfelt condolences on the passing of Pope Francis, the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church. During the visit, a floral wreath was re-

spectfully placed at the condolence desk, and prayers were offered for the departed soul. Speaking on the occasion, Ali Rehman Malik paid tribute to Pope Francis’ enduring legacy of interfaith harmony and service to humanity. He said that Pope Francis was a beacon of hope, humility, and peace for millions across the world and his tireless efforts for global harmony,

Christian community in Pakistan,” he added. The visit underscored the Malik family’s enduring commitment to religious harmony and minority rights in Pakistan. Ali Rehman Malik reaffirmed that both IRR International and the Rehman Malik Foundation remain committed to promoting tolerance, unity, and justice across all communities in the country.



Germany bets on volunteers to fix a hollowed-out army — but will it work?

Chris Lunday

Berlin: Berlin's incoming government, formed by Friedrich Merz's conservative Christian Democrats and the center-left Social Democrats (SPD), has released a coalition agreement outlining plans for a new voluntary military service to rebuild the overstretched and steadily shrinking ranks of Germany's armed forces, the Bundeswehr. The plan involves sending a mandatory questionnaire to all 18-year-old men — voluntary for women — to assess willingness and fitness to serve. Those selected would be invited to enlist, but only if they choose to. Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, an SPD politician who is expected to stay in his post in the new government, defended the approach as a pragmatic step forward. "With a new military service, we will ensure both growth and staying power in the armed

forces," he said at a Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting in Brussels last week. "We are making the Bundeswehr more attractive. That is both a prerequisite and a result." But without clear evidence of how many people would sign up under the plan, a warning light is already flashing inside Germany's defense circles. "If basic military service doesn't manage to significantly motivate more young people to volunteer for the armed forces in the near future, the Bundeswehr will fall short of the necessary number of active soldiers and trained reservists," said Christian Richter, a reserve lieutenant colonel and legal expert at the German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies, the Bundeswehr's think tank. "That would put Germany's defense capability at risk — both in terms of national defense and collective defense within NATO. These two cannot be separated," he said.



The Bundeswehr is already running thin. Troop levels have flatlined at around 182,000. More soldiers left than joined last year, and nearly a third of new recruits dropped out during training, according to the government's yearly review on the state of the Bundeswehr. It's a challenge that's rooted not just in recruitment numbers, but in decades of political decisions that pushed the military to the margins of society. After a sweeping post-Cold War downsizing in 1994 under Chancellor Helmut Kohl, military bases were shut down — especially in cities. With that, according to Carlo Masala, a professor at the Bundeswehr University in Munich and an adviser to the military, the army faded from

public life. "Their bases today are out in the middle of nowhere," he said. "There's no direct contact for young people." That disconnect has only deepened in recent years. Conscription ended in 2011. In 2018, the Bundeswehr's recruitment campaign at the Gamescom gaming convention in Cologne drew backlash over a poster that read "Multiplayer at its best." Critics accused the military of trivializing war and targeting teenagers. "Disgusting," one user posted on X. "Trying to lure unaware gamers to the weapons." Earlier this year, the eastern city of Zwickau banned Bundeswehr ads from public spaces, calling itself a "city of peace" — although the

municipal supervisory authority later found that decision was illegal. It's against that backdrop — of fading visibility and political hesitation — that Germany is now placing its bet on a new, voluntary military service. "We need these 100,000 additional troops immediately — and as quickly as possible," General Carsten Breuer, Germany's top military commander, told an audience at the German Council on Foreign Relations last week. The broader, long-term goal is much higher. "The requirement on the table for Germany is 460,000 soldiers," Breuer said — a figure that includes active forces, reservists and former soldiers Germany must be able to call up in a major crisis.



Bulgaria finalises €600 million funding for nearly 10GWh of energy storage

Newswire

Sofia: The Ministry of Energy of Bulgaria has selected 82 winning energy storage projects for a share of BGN 1.15 billion (€588 million/US\$670 million) in financial support. The scheme will support the construction and commissioning of 82 standalone energy storage projects with a total of BGN1,149,013,428.49 spread across the projects, which will add up to 9,712.89MWh of usable energy storage capacity. The money will support up to 50% of construction and commissioning costs. The RESTORE programme (National Infrastructure for Storage of Electricity from Renewable Sources) is financed within the framework of the EU's Recovery and Resilience scheme, an initiative to help economies recover from the negative economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The final amounts were announced by the Ministry of Energy last week (17 April). The Ministry saw a change of leadership in January 2025, when Zhecho Stankov (pictured above) replaced Vladimir Malinov as Minister of Energy following the formation of a new coalition government after national elections in October 2024. The RESTORE programme aims to help Bulgaria increase its share of wind and solar in the

electricity mix while maintaining grid stability and security. Storage projects will be connected to either the transmission network of system operator ESO EAD or local distribution networks. A total of 151 proposals were received as reported by Energy-Storage.news in December, with 118 of them progressed to the final stage. 30 projects which did not make the final list are 'in reserve' for BGN415 million of funding. The scheme opened for bidding in August 2024. It appears to be separate from one targeting both renewables and storage, also with Recovery and Resilience funding, which concluded in Novem-

ber 2024 awarding funding to 3.1GW of renewables and 1.1GW of storage. The largest battery energy storage system (BESS) project online in Bulgaria is a 25MW/55MWh system commissioned by IPP Renalfa in June 2024 while a 5.1MW/18.7MWh was commissioned a few months later by China-based energy storage technology firm Sermatec (for an unnamed customer). In February, state-owned utility and power generation firm NEK announced plans to deploy BESS totalling nearly 300MWh at five of its hydropower sites across Bulgaria.



Portugal receives more from EU than it pays in



Newswire
Lisbon: The European Union (EU) sends more money to Portugal than the country has to transfer to Brussels, in the form of national contributions, which has helped external accounts. Between 1996 and 2024, the balance of flows with Brussels totalled, on average, 1.6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to data released by the Bank of Portugal (BdP) and reported by ECO. In 2024, the current and capital ac-

count balance was 9,344 million euros, corresponding to 3.3% of GDP, of which 3,702 million euros (1.3%) corresponded to the contribution of flows with the European Union. "During the pandemic period, particularly in 2020 and 2021, flows with the European Union were decisive for the positive balances of the current and capital accounts, since the other components of these balances presented negative balances", points out the institution led by Mário Centeno. The average has been decreasing,

having gone from 2.1% between 1996 and 2005 to 1.5% between 2006

between 0.5% and 1.2% of GDP. The Bank of Portugal also points out

of Portugal highlights that "there has been a downward trend in the alloca-



and 2015 and 1.1% between 2016 and 2024. In 2024, the total amount of subsidies allocated to Portugal amounted to 2,447 million euros, corresponding to 0.9% of GDP. The value is also the average between 1996 and 2024, a period during which it fluctuated

that the amount allocated to final beneficiaries residing in Portugal of European funds in the form of current international cooperation was 663 million euros, or 0.2% of GDP. The institution highlights that "the highest value, verified in 2021, of 2087 million euros (1.0% of GDP), occurred due to the allocation of community funds under the Apoiar program (financed by the ERDF), an instrument to support the treasury of companies in the sectors most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic". Allocations recorded in the secondary income account have represented, on average, 0.3% of GDP since 1996. The regulator highlights that the allocation of EU funds can also be recorded in the capital account, under the heading of investment aid, as is the case with the amounts allocated under the Cohesion Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), as well as the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programmes. In 2024, the funds allocated to final beneficiaries registered as investment aid totalled €2,990 million, corresponding to 1.1% of GDP. The Bank

tion of funds registered as investment aid since 1996", with these representing, on average, 1.9% of GDP between 1996 and 2005 and 1.4% between 2006 and 2015, but only 1.0% between 2016 and 2024. On the other hand, with regard to Portugal's payments to the EU, the country's financial contribution to the community budget stands out, as well as the customs duties and agricultural levies charged on imports of goods from non-EU countries, which are revenue for the EU, notes the Bank of Portugal. In 2024, Portugal transferred 2,428 million euros, or 0.9% of GDP, to the EU, of which 2,059 million euros corresponded to the financial contribution to the bloc's budget. "Portuguese transfers to the European Union have remained relatively constant since the beginning of the statistical series, in 1996, with an average of 1.0% of GDP and values ?? between 0.8% and 1.2% of GDP", says the entity led by Mário Centeno.



Japan promises help for safe water's supply



Celina Ali
 Islamabad: Ambassador of Japan Akamatsu Shuichi this week said the Japanese government and Japan International Cooperation Agency would continue to strive to ensure supply of safe water across Pakistan. He was speaking at the handover

ceremony for the 4.094 billion yen worth of the grant aid Project for the Improvement of Water Treatment Plant and Water Distribution System in Faisalabad. JICA Chief Representative Naoaki Miyata and Managing Director of Water and Sanitation Agency Faisal-

abad Aamer Aziz attended the ceremony. As Faisalabad, the third most populous city in Pakistan, doesn't have adequate water services, JICA provided technical cooperation from 2016 to 2019 and formulated the Water Supply, Sewerage and Drain-

age Master Plan with the target year of 2038. The grant aid project was selected as a priority project in the master plan, according to officials. They said the grant aid project upgraded and expanded the Old Jhal Khanuana water treatment plant and developed water

transmission and distribution facilities, including the pipe network, tripling the water supply. The officials said the increased water supply helped improve water services, ultimately enhancing public health and the living environment for citizens.

US envoy Natalie Baker discusses trade with GTEC chairman

Celina Ali
 Islamabad: Natalie A. Baker, Acting Ambassador and Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Islamabad, this week held

a trade meeting with Mazhar Hussain Thathal, Chairman/ CEO Global Trade Expo Centre Pakistan, alongside a delegation of Pakistani SMEs.

Liaquat Thathal, Director of International Trade & Relationship at GTEC, emphasized the organization's vision: "We are committed to bridging the gap between Pakistani and American SMEs business



communities. The future initiative will open new doors for SMEs on both sides, especially for women entrepreneurs and small industries from Pakistan."

The meeting, also attended by US Embassy Economic Officers, focused on enhancing bilateral SME cooperation, encouraging joint ventures, and promoting trade between Pakistan and the United States. A key highlight announcement of Pakistani's SMEs delegation participation in the Pakistan-USA SMEs Trade & Business Delegation 2025, set to attend the International Franchise Expo 2025 in New York. Organized by GTEC, the delegation will feature SMEs from sectors including surgical instruments, healthcare, textiles, IT, food, and beauty products—strengthening cross-border business ties and empowering women entrepreneurs.

EU may accept 12-month work visas for ‘youth experience’ scheme with UK



Newsire
London: The EU is prepared to make major concessions in negotiations to allow British and European 18- to 30-year-olds to travel and work freely, potentially paving the way for a long-awaited reset with Brussels. A scheme that would allow thousands of young Europeans to live and work in the UK has been seen as a key EU demand in reaching a post-Brexit pact incorporating defence, energy and migration. It is understood that EU member states could now be willing to limit work visas to as little as 12 months, with quotas on numbers and restrictions on the sectors EU citizens could work in. They are also open to a “one in, one out” style



plan being considered by the home secretary. EU sources said the scheme would be rebranded the “youth experience” programme in order to eliminate any suggestion that it was reopening immigration routes for EU citizens wanting to live and work in the UK. Asked about the prospect of a youth mobility scheme on Friday, a Downing Street spokesperson said: “Both sides are discussing a wide range of issues, which is entirely normal for a negotiation.” The EU first proposed a youth mobility scheme that would allow young people to work or study for up to four years in each other’s countries in April 2024, but it was rejected by Labour and the Conservatives. After a year of discussion, sources say it is such a priority for key EU member states including France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, that compromises need to be made. One source said a one-year visa with an option of a further one- or two-year extension could land better politically. The UK already takes part in a youth mobility scheme, which allows people from 12 non-EU nations to work in the country for a two- or three-year period. Home Office data shows just 23,000 young people came into the UK as part of the scheme in 2023, with 9,900 of them from Australia. Signalling a melting away of Eurosceptic resistance to any special youth visa deal with the EU, the Brexit campaigner and former government minister Steve Baker has given it his backing, saying it would be a “good thing” and “absolutely would not amount to a return to EU free movement”. But the former chair of the European Research Group called the controversy over the scheme a “red herring” designed to distract voter attention from a food and drink standards deal that is also being mooted, which he says would



put a US trade agreement in jeopardy. The environment secretary, Steve Reed, insisted the government was not going to “breach” its manifesto commitments on freedom of movement, telling Times Radio: “We’re very clear in our manifesto that there won’t be any return to the single market, the customs union or freedom of movement, and that remains our position.” Speaking in Washington before a meeting with the US Treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, the chancellor, Rachel Reeves, said the UK’s trading relationship with the EU was “arguably even more important” than its relationship with the US. The German ambassador to the UK has said he was “really optimistic” about the prospects of a youth mobility scheme deal being reached, after a meeting between Keir Starmer and the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, on Thursday. Ambassadors in Europe will be debriefed next Wednesday. Miguel Berger told the BBC Radio 4: “I am now pretty optimistic that we are moving in a good direction.” “It would make it possible for young people with parents with a lower income to experience the possibility to work abroad, to learn a language, and we would like to have this in both directions,” Berger said. “There is a very serious and dedicated preparatory work for the summit on May 19,” he said referring to the UK-EU summit to be held in London next month. Baker said: “To have a capped, time-limited scheme for European young people would be a good thing, and absolutely would not amount to a return to EU free movement, which is uncapped for unlimited duration and requires nations to treat European citizens as their own. Any confusion over this should be quickly cleared up.” But he urged that more attention be paid to the possibility of a sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) deal to eliminate checks on food and drink exports, saying anything that obliged the UK to follow EU rules again would compromise a US trade deal and economic growth to sustain pension payouts 10 years down the line. Baker said: “While we are arguing about this complete red herring, the UK looks set to take EU rules on food and products, which will put us in breach of our obligations under the Pacific Rim trade deal and rule out doing a trade deal with the USA. That matters, because that’s where the economic growth is going to come from. And without growth, we will default on pension obligations.” Labour and the EU are working on seven pillars that would then feed into a declaration known as a “common understanding”, which would be followed by detailed negotiations to hammer out the specifics.

“No decisions are expected to be made during the summit itself. At most, there could be a mutual commitment to exploring possible avenues for an agreement on these issues,” said a EU source. The seven areas are: defence and security, carbon pricing, migration, youth experience, energy, and fishing, but some groups say the talks lack ambition. Some member states are also making a “strong

to Britain in the past compared to British studying in the EU. An official business consultation body set up under the Brexit trade and cooperation agreement has called on the government to go further in its negotiations and seek the removal of bans on the export of British seed potatoes to the EU, of barriers on batch testing of pharmaceuticals, and mutual recognition agreements on professional qualifications.



ask” for the UK to return to the Erasmus+ university and vocational exchange programme and a deal to allow citizens to study in each others universities paying home fees. This is something of a non-starter for the UK because of the imbalance of students coming

The Domestic Advisory Group is also asking for removal of barriers for touring musicians and artists and their support staff. In a submission to the UK government it also calls for an agreement to allow easier access to veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland and a return to joint regulation for chemicals.



UK High Commissioner Jane Marriott meets DPM Dar to discuss regional developments



High Commissioner Jane Marriott played an active role in the meeting, underlining the United Kingdom's emphasis on de-escalation, dialogue, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. She expressed London's deep interest in ensuring that both regional and international efforts remain focused on promoting stability and avoiding any further deterioration in South Asia's security environment. Jane Marriott acknowledged Pakistan's proactive diplomatic outreach and appreciated its commitment to transparency



Celina Ali Islamabad: In an important diplomatic engagement reflecting the United Kingdom's continued interest in South Asian stability, British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, called on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar this week. According to a statement issued by the Foreign Office, the meeting focused on exchanging views on the rapidly evolving regional situation, particularly in light of recent tensions between Paki-

stan and India following the tragic incident in Indian-administered Kashmir's Pahalgam. During the discussion, Deputy Prime Minister Dar reaffirmed Pakistan's firm commitment to defending its national interests while simultaneously striving to maintain regional peace and security. He reiterated Islamabad's dedication to a peaceful and rules-based approach in addressing emerging challenges, stressing that Pakistan's actions were rooted in international law and principles of sovereignty.



and engagement with international partners during a sensitive time. She assured that the United Kingdom would continue to support efforts aimed at easing tensions and fostering mutual understanding between South Asian neighbours. Both sides agreed on the need to maintain open channels of communication and strengthen bilateral consultations. They also discussed the broader context of Pakistan-UK relations, reaffirming the shared objective of deepening cooperation in multiple areas, including peace and security, trade, and people-to-people exchanges. The meeting between Jane Marriott and Deputy Prime Minister Dar highlighted the significance both countries attach to nurturing a strategic partnership built on mutual respect, cooperation, and a shared vision for regional and global peace.



"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." – George Bernard

"The most important trip you may take in life is meeting people halfway." – Henry Boye

Italy: PM Meloni hails Pope Francis' help in hard times

Covert Report
Milan: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni this week mourned Pope Francis on Monday as a friend who had given her comfort in tough times and done his duty to the end.
"The Pope and I had a more active relationship than was apparent. It went well beyond our respective institutional roles," she told Italian state broadcaster RAI.
"We've met many times, even just to exchange opinions. He was able to give comfort in very difficult moments, I have many memories of the Pope," she added in a broken voice.
The 88-year-old pontiff died a day after his first prolonged public appearance since being discharged on March 23 from a lengthy hospital stay for pneumonia.
"The fact he's leaving on Easter Monday, it's like he wanted to do his duty until the very end," Meloni added, saying he had appeared fatigued at their most recent meeting.
She said the Pope kept in a drawer some artwork her daughter had made for him. She was also proud of convincing him to become the first pontiff to address a Group of Seven summit in 2024.
"We say goodbye to the Holy Father with a heart full of sadness," she added in an official statement.



France says 'non' to loosening rules for arms exports in Europe



Newswire
Paris: Paris this week raised its voice against any revision of the current EU rules on export control for defence gear within the bloc, sources with knowledge of the plans told Euractiv.
To reduce administrative burdens and speed up weapons production, the Commission proposed facilitating the movement of defence components across EU countries, regulated by the intra-EU transfer directive, by easing national export control rules.
After a first unsuccessful attempt two years ago, the EU executive proposed a change to the rules once again as part of the European Defence Industry Programme. The EDIP's job is to subsidise arms production and procurement on the continent in a bid to ramp up the European military-industrial complex long term.

But one year into the negotiations on EDIP, and just a few weeks before closing the debates, Paris is still opposed to loosening the rules on export controls, sources told Euractiv.
According to the clause in the EDIP, Paris would relinquish its current national obligation to oversee the journey of the defence product it sells within the European Union.
At present, when a French company sells a product deemed "sensitive" to another EU country (for instance, Germany), the French government must approve the sale, as it does with any other defence product.
Then, if Germany wants to include the component into another product and re-sell it to Sweden, Germany is obliged to seek France's approval.
But the EDIP clause bypasses France's approval of the re-sale: Germany could re-sell sensitive products bought from France to Sweden, without Paris' approval first.
France argues this new provision goes beyond what's currently outlined in the Intra-EU transfers of defence-related products, which is silent on this specific matter. Plus, it effectively strips France of its right to know where critical components end up, the French contend.
Although Paris has argued against the clause, it is unclear for now whether they will win the battle.
Changing the text is an option. But with a bigger fight looming over whether non-EU countries can benefit from the EU's defence scheme, Paris might have to pick its battles and let this one go, an insider told Euractiv.
The country is already fighting a solo battle against opening EU funds to foreign companies manufacturing their equipment in Europe – especially missiles – or to companies that don't have the right to alter products according to specific needs, or whose products come with restrictions of use.
All other EU countries are in favour of keeping their options open, especially when it comes to highly critical products, such as ammunition and missiles.
Paris' campaign against a change to the rules on intra-EU defence exports doesn't end there.
The country wants to stop the Commission from launching a revision of the directive altogether. Any revision would lead either to stricter or looser rules, and doubtless hours of negotiations over many technical and highly political issues related to national prerogative over the sale of weapons. But the EU executive has already announced its intention to do so.