

High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri invites attention towards climate issue

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri invited attention towards the climate issue. "Glacial melting poses a grave environmental threat. Pakistan is particularly concerned, as it

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Honouring cultural harmony: A melodic celebration of Portugal-Pakistan friendship Celina Ali

Islamabad: In a celebration of cultural harmony and enduring bilateral ties, Serena Hotels, in partnership with the Embassy of Portugal, hosted Soulful Strings: Portugal & Pakistan — a captivating musical

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International tourists drive shopping surge in China

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: Favourable policies such as visa-free transit and a nationwide instant tax refund system are helping to make China an increasingly popular destination for international travellers, alongside strong global demand for "Made in China" products.
At a DJI store in Beijing's SKP mall on April 23, an American tourist browsed drones on his second visit to China. The visitor said that he visited seven years ago, but the tax refund process wasn't nearly as convenient, adding that the instant tax refund system made shopping in China much easier, boosting his interest in buying more.
Experts say these policies are fueling increased interest in shopping among foreign visitors. They add that introducing more incentives,

upgrading tourism and cultural offerings, and improving consumer services could further attract international tourists.
China expanded its visa-free policy to include nine additional countries in November 2024. Last December, the country extended the permitted stay for foreign travelers eligible for visa-free transit from 72 or 144 hours to 240 hours and increased the number of designated exit-entry ports for visa-free transit travelers to 60. By the end of 2024, China had established comprehensive mutual visa exemptions with 25 countries and implemented unilateral visa-free policies for 38 countries.
According to China's National Immigration Administration, nearly 10.9 million inbound and outbound trips were made by Chinese and foreign nationals during this year's five-day May Day holiday, a peak period for travel. More than

1.1 million of these trips were made by foreign nationals, up 43.1 percent year on year. A total of 380,000 foreign national trips to China were made under visa-free travel policies, a year-on-year increase of 72.7 percent.
Interest in traveling to China continues to surge on social media, where hashtags like "China Travel" remain highly popular. The tourism boom is also driving a sharp rise in spending. During the first three days of the May Day holiday, Alipay, a major mobile payment platform in China, reported that spending by international tourists increased 180 percent year on year.
"Eased visa policies have significantly boosted international tourists' interest in visiting China," said Zhao Yonghua, a senior researcher at the School of Global and Area Studies at Renmin



University of China.
Since April 8, international travelers have been able to receive tax refunds directly at the point of purchase in China.
"A lot more international tourists are shopping here now, with drones and action cameras especially popular," said a staff member at the DJI store in Beijing's SKP mall. As one of the first retailers in Beijing to implement both refund-upon-departure and refund-upon-purchase models, the number of shoppers claiming tax refunds at the mall rose 104 percent in 2024 compared to 2023.
The high quality of Chinese-made products is a major reason international tourists enjoy shopping in China.

As Denmark raises its retirement age to 70, experts weigh in on whether US may follow its lead

Lorie Konish

Copenhagen: Denmark has moved to increase its retirement age to 70 — making it the highest retirement age in Europe. Yet it may be difficult for the U.S. to follow its lead.
The new change in Denmark will apply to public pension retirements starting in 2040. Since 2006, the country has been adjusting its retirement age to reflect changes in life expectancy.
The US does not technically have an official retirement age. At age 65, individuals become eligible for Medicare coverage. At age 66 to 67, depending on date of birth, an individual becomes eligible for full Social Security benefits based on their earnings record.
However, those individuals who wait until age 70 to claim Social Security retirement benefits stand to get the biggest payout — an increase of 8% for each year beyond full retirement age. (The full retirement age is when beneficiaries are eligible for 100% of the benefits they've earned based on their work records.)
Yet few people wait until age 70 to claim benefits. While more than 90% of individuals would benefit from delaying

Social Security until that age, only about 10% actually do, according to a 2023 paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research.
While age 70 is not the official US retirement age, it is the threshold based on economists' definition — the age at which you can't accrue any more benefits, according to Teresa Ghilarducci, a labor economist and professor at The New School for Social Research.
"In the United States, it's been 70 for decades, and we had the highest retirement age than any other country for years," Ghilarducci said.
The US does not have a true retirement age, said Andrew Biggs, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Private pensions, including defined benefit plans and 401(k)s, allow individuals who work longer to increase their nest eggs. Social Security benefits do not have one single retirement age, instead offering a "sliding scale between ages 62 and 70 in which benefits increase the older you choose to retire," he said.
In 1983, Congress passed legislation to gradually raise the full retirement age for Social Security from 65 to 67. That change is still getting phased in today, with people born in 1960 and later

subject to the higher 67 retirement age. In December, an amendment to raise the full retirement age to 70 was introduced by Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., during last-minute efforts to advance legislation that increased Social Security benefits for certain public pensioners.
The bill, the Social Security Fairness Act, was voted into law.
However, the proposal to raise the retirement age was struck down.
Paul called for raising the retirement age by three months per year until it reached age 70, to reflect current life expectancies. The change would have created nearly \$400 billion in savings for the program, while the Social Security Fairness Act added \$200 billion in costs to the program over 10 years.
Other Republican proposals have likewise called for raising the retirement age. The Social Security Administration faces looming depletion dates for the trust funds it relies on to help pay benefits. To help resolve that issue, lawmakers may consider raising taxes, cutting benefits or a combination of both. Raising the retirement age is effectively a benefit cut. Like the changes enacted in 1983, raising the retirement age could be on the menu.



Governor Faisal Karim Kundi greets Italy on National Day



Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi this week attended a ceremony to mark Italy's National Day on the invitation of the Italian Ambassador to Pakistan, Marilina Armellini.
During the event, Governor Kundi joined the Ambassador and other

distinguished guests in cutting a celebratory cake in honor of Italy's National Day.
Extending warm congratulations on behalf of himself and the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Governor Kundi conveyed best wishes to the Italian government and people. He said that both Italy and Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa are renowned for their rich cultural heritage and attractive tourist destinations, making them significant for global tourism.
The Governor also highlighted the long-standing diplomatic and political relations between Pakistan and Italy, which have spanned over 75 years and continue to grow stronger with each passing day.

Pakistan, China join hands to launch major digital skills initiative for youth

Gwadar Pro

Islamabad: In a landmark move aimed at equipping Pakistan’s youth with cutting-edge digital skills, the Prime Minister’s Youth Programme (PMYP) on Friday afternoon signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) with China’s ITMC, UNI International, and several leading Chinese vocational institutions.

The agreement marks a major step forward in Pakistan’s efforts to build a future-ready workforce and strengthen its digital economy.

The signing ceremony took place at the Prime Minister’s Office and was chaired by Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, Chairman of PMYP. The initiative falls under the government’s broader vision of economic empowerment through technology and international collaboration.

According to officials, the strategic partnership will roll out short-term, employment-oriented training programs in collaboration with NAVTTC, various TEVTAs,

and top Chinese technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions. The programs will focus on 40 to 50 specialized digital trades including e-commerce, digital marketing, artificial intelligence (AI), fintech, animation, tourism and hospitality, and creative entrepreneurship.

Over the next two years, the initiative will train 1,000 master trainers across Pakistan using Chinese curriculum standards. PMYP will select 100 educational institutions—comprising both universities and vocational centers—and nominate 10 master trainers from each. The rollout includes a goal of training 200 master trainers in 2025 and 800 in 2026.

The training will follow a hybrid model—combining online and offline instruction—supported by advanced software tools, hands-on platforms, and international certification provided by ITMC and Chinese TVET colleges. Upon completion, trainees will receive internationally recognized e-certificates, ensuring global

portability of their skills.

In its five-year roadmap, the program aims to train up to 100,000 Pakistani youth, with each institute training 100 students annually. To support this scale, 30 to 50 Centers of Excellence will be established across the country to serve as regional training hubs. These centers will be developed in collaboration with NAVTTC, TEVTAs, and Chinese institutions.

Highlighting the growing significance of the freelance economy, the initiative will also provide 100,000 free freelancer accounts to trained individuals, offering them a direct pathway to global digital employment.

Specialized training modules under the program will include Amazon store operations, business data analysis, cross-border e-commerce live streaming, short video



production, AI agent development, and AIGC (AI-generated content) applications.

A Joint Working Group will be formed between PMYP, ITMC, and UNI Interna-

tional to oversee implementation. The first batch of 200 master trainers will be onboarded soon, and a formal Training of Trainers (ToT) opening ceremony is scheduled to mark the launch of the initiative.

China's consumer goods trade-in program spurs 1.1 trillion yuan in sales

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: China's consumer goods trade-in program has generated 1.1 trillion yuan (about 153.1 billion U.S. dollars) in sales in the first five months this year, the Ministry of Commerce said this week.

As of Saturday, nationwide trade-ins had fueled a surge in transactions, including 4.12 million vehicles, 77.62 million units of household appliances and 56.63 million units of digital products -- such as mobile phones, among others, data from the ministry showed.

The program, part of China's broader efforts to spur domestic demand, has boosted a sustained recovery in the country's consumer spending, according to the ministry.

In the government work report released in March 2025, boosting consumption was listed as a top priority among this year's tasks.

Retail sales of consumer goods, a major indicator of the country's consumption strength, rose 4.7 percent year on year in the first four months of 2025, accelerating from the 4.6-percent growth recorded in the first quarter of the year, official data revealed.



Henan's female mountaineer makes history by summiting Everest 3 times

Henan Daily

Zhengzhou: At 9:29 a.m. on May 24, triumphant news came from the north slope of Mount Everest: Chinese female mountaineer Sun Ning, contemporary artist and Henan-born climber, stood on the “roof of the world”, reaching the world’s highest peak.

Sun Ning is not only the first mountaineer from Central China’s Henan province to summit Mount Everest from both its north and south sides, but has also set a new provincial mountaineering record by successful ascent three times. This trailblazing accomplishment highlights the growing mountaineering ambitions in Central China.

China’s mountaineering achievements reflect the nation’s sporting progress. Sixty-five years ago, Wang Fuzhou, also a Henan native, made history as the first Chinese to summit Everest, completing the first-ever north slope ascent with his team, which is a monumental feat to the nation. Sixty-five years later, Sun Ning, also a native of Zhoukou, Henan, repeated the feat and once again crossed the towering height of 8,848.86 meters. While marking her third successful summit of Everest, this first northern route climb prompted her deeper reflection.

Compared to the southern route, climbing Everest’s north side poses far greater challenges, from unpredictable and extreme weather to

severe oxygen depletion and extreme cold at high altitudes. The terrain features deep crevasses and steep cliffs. Most daunting of all is the notorious “Second Step” at 8,700 meters, often referred to as an insurmountable barrier, of which the most seasoned climbers turn pale at the mention.

According to the climbing plan provided by Sun Ning, it took her team six days to reach the summit after departing from Everest Base Camp. On the first day, they ascended from 5,200 meters to 5,800 meters. The second day took them to 6,500 meters, followed by a climb to 7,028 meters on the third day. On day four, they pushed to 7,790 meters, and on the fifth day, they reached Camp at 8,300 meters. In the early hours of the sixth day, around 2 a.m., they launched their final summit push, climbing from 8,300 meters to the top of the world.

“Compared to the south route, climbing from the north side is on a whole different level of difficulty,” Sun Ning told Henan Daily, “Many times, I had to find my own way clinging to the cliffs, with nothing but my crampons and bare hands to rely on.”

Born in Chinese philosopher Laozi’s birthplace of Luyi county, Zhoukou city, Henan province, Sun Ning first dreamed of climbing Mount Everest in her high school geography class, after seeing its image. In 2012, during her graduation

trip, she stood with Everest behind her and wrote on Weibo: “One day, I will reach the summit, no matter if it takes five years, ten, or even longer.” That moment marked the beginning of her 13-year mountaineering journey.

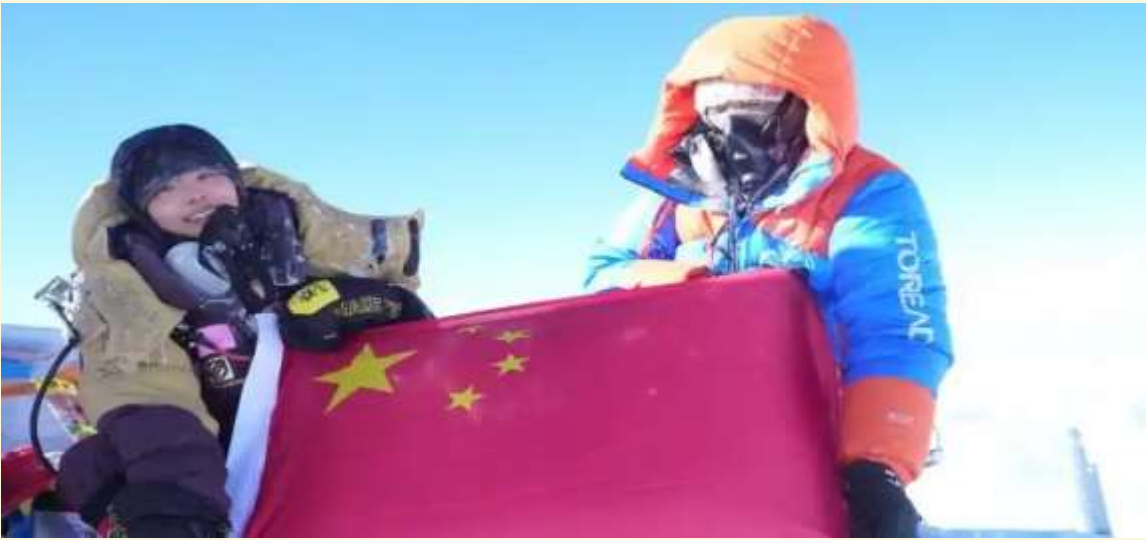
In May 2019, Sun Ning claimed a historic first,

summitting Everest from its south.

In 2021, she made her first attempt from its north, but was forced to turn back at 7,300 meters due to unforeseen circumstances.

In 2023, she successfully summited again via the southern route.

On May 24, 2025, she completed the north-side ascent, becoming the first climber from Henan to conquer Everest from both the north and south routes. With a total of three successful ascents, she set a new record in Henan’s mountaineering history.



Italy National Day celebrated

Ambassador Marilina Armellini underscores deep-rooted friendship between Italy, Pakistan



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Italy's Ambassador to Pakistan, Marilina Armellini, this week underscored the deep-rooted friendship between Italy and Pakistan and reaffirmed Italy's unwavering commitment to global peace and multilateral cooperation during a heartfelt address at a ceremony marking Italy's Republic Day. Welcoming distinguished guests to the celebration, Ambassador Armellini said, "It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you on this festive occasion for our Republic. Your presence represents the most manifest testimony of the sound ties of friendship that unite Italy and Pakistan."

Reflecting on the historical significance of June 2 — the day Italy became a Republic in 1946 — Ambassador Armellini described it as a defining moment in the country's journey towards democracy, peace, and constitutional values following the tragic experiences of World War II. She highlighted that Italy's foundational charter firmly rejects war as a means of resolving conflict, a principle that continues to guide the nation's foreign policy and internal resilience. "In a world growing increasingly unstable, we feel a renewed urgency to actively engage for peace, democracy, development, and civil progress," she stated. "These values can no longer be taken for granted."

Ambassador Armellini acknowledged the growing complexity of international relations and expressed concern over the proliferation of global conflict. "We must admit that we are bequeathing a more conflictual world to our children than the one our parents entrusted to us," she remarked. "Italy, as a founding member of the European Union and an active participant in multilateral institutions like the UN and G7, will continue to advocate for peace, dialogue, and the protection of fundamental human rights."

Highlighting Italy's growing diplomatic and humanitarian role, she shared several key initiatives hosted in Rome this year, including: The Food for Gaza initiative, launched by Italy in collaboration with the WFP, FAO, and ICRC; A round of nuclear negotiations between Iran and the United States; The upcoming 2025 Conference on Water, Sanitation, Environment, and Public Health; The Conference on the Reconstruction of Ukraine, scheduled for July. "These milestones reaffirm Italy's commitment to fostering peace and shared prosperity in a fractured world," she said. Turning to bilateral relations, the Ambassador celebrated the 70 years of joint archaeological cooperation between Italy and Pakistan, calling it a symbol of unity through culture. She paid tribute to Professor Giuseppe Tucci, whose pioneering work unearthed the Gandhara heritage, and praised the continued efforts of Italian archaeologists like Professor Olivieri in Swat and Banbhore.

"Seventy years and not a wrinkle," she quipped, lauding the longevity of this cultural partnership. Guests were also invited to view a special exhibition curated for the occasion. Ambassador Armellini also acknowledged Italy's proud tradition of scientific exploration in Pakistan, noting the century-old legacy that began with Prince Luigi Amedeo and was crowned by the historic ascent of K2 by Italian climbers Lino Lacedelli and Achille Compagnoni in 1954 — a milestone of national pride. The evening also spotlighted Italy's contribution to sustainable agriculture and women's empowerment in Pakistan through the OliveCulture project, financed by the Italian Agency for Development



Cooperation. Through this initiative, 26 women- and youth-led olive business groups have been established across Pakistan, promoting entrepreneurship, especially among rural women. "To honor their work, each guest tonight will receive a moisturizing cream made from olive oil and perfumed with the sour orange — two

iconic scents of Italy," she added warmly. Ambassador Armellini urged all in attendance to look to the future with hope and shared purpose: "Let us celebrate June 2nd not just as a commemoration of the past, but as a commitment to building a more peaceful, prosperous world together."



In the computer age, China gives the world another option

Ding Gang

Those born in the 1950s are the first ferry-men of the computer civilization. We've witnessed the digital revolution unfold, upgrading our skills and capabilities alongside each new version of Windows. Through this journey, we've developed a profound understanding of what an "operating system" truly means to modern life. Without Windows, countless software applications would have remained inaccessible. One software application after another constantly expands the world of the Windows system. From Windows 3.1 to Windows 11, along with the rise of MacOS, each iteration carried humanity's evolving vision of the digital realm. These systems enhanced our professional capabilities and educational opportunities - and, admittedly, deepened our passion for computer games. When the US added Huawei's 5G technology, and later the Ascend AI chip, to its list of globally banned entities, the dominoes of our digital

world began to tremble. Suddenly, a troubling question emerged: What if the US operating systems were no longer available? What alternatives would we have? Yet, the resilience of our digital ecosystem became evident as we navigated these challenges, instilling a sense of reassurance in us all. Today, we no longer need to worry, thanks to HarmonyOS, and Kylin, operating systems with independent intellectual property rights developed by China. HarmonyOS, developed by Huawei through the collective genius of hundreds of scientists across dozens of research institutions, represents a fundamental paradigm shift in the Internet of Things. The birth of the system wasn't merely an emergency replacement strategy but a digital tectonic movement long in the making - one accelerated by the US' comprehensive technological containment of China. The emergence of China's own developed systems signals a profound transformation in the



computing age, offering everyone an alternative "system" choice worldwide. This new system is specially designed for Chinese manufacturing. Various devices, instruments, electrical appliances, automobiles, aircraft, and more manufactured in China could all be connected through this system, and equipped with artificial intelligence. To understand this, watch the autonomous mining trucks at Inner Mongolia's open-pit coal mines navigate precisely under HarmonyOS guidance. HarmonyOS is not just for China; it's a global innovation that everyone can participate in, making you a part of this transformative journey. This is just the beginning. China's own developed systems still have a long way to go, but they solve a fundamental global problem: In a diverse world, how do we connect

all our devices into a network so that they can serve our needs more intelligently? Human civilization ascends in a spiral through precisely these paradigm shifts. A world connected through diverse systems will only strengthen global bonds, while competition between different systems accelerates better development for all. The emergence of China's own developed systems challenges US ones but also motivates US operating systems to keep upgrading and opening up. Of course, it is also a warning to those who want to use hegemonic tactics to gain a technological monopoly. Standing at the threshold of a new era, my generation has witnessed the remarkable evolution from DOS monochrome com-

mand-line interface to the expansive internet, and now to HarmonyOS fully interconnected ecosystem - a technological journey that represents humanity's persistent effort to overcome digital monopolies. The greatness of our age lies precisely in this realization: The future should not be illuminated by a single, isolated lighthouse but by the interstellar light of a galaxy where countless stars shine together, offering us the ever-increasing power of "another choice."

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



Expanding visa-free 'circle of friends' shows China's focus on openness, cooperation

Global Times

China's visa-free "circle of friends" has once again expanded. Effective June 1, China began implementing a trial policy that unilaterally grants visa-free entry to citizens of Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru and Uruguay. Beginning June 9, the policy will also apply to Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain. These initiatives vividly reflect China's diplomatic approach of promoting openness and win-win cooperation. More importantly, they serve as concrete steps toward building a new network of Global South cooperation. By including five representative Latin American countries in its visa-free "circle of friends," China has not only broadened the geographical reach of the policy, but also demonstrated its strategic emphasis on emerging markets and the development of China-Latin America relations. With this move, the number of countries eligible for China's unilateral visa-free entry has grown to 43 - a global "visa-free network" grounded in mutual benefit and win-win cooperation is steadily taking shape.

"From a broader diplomatic perspective, this move represents a concrete implementation of China's Global Civilization Initiative. It aims to promote dialogue and mutual learning among civilizations and foster a more open and inclusive international order," Pan Deng, director of the Latin American and Caribbean Region Law Center at the China University of Political Science and Law, told the Global Times. The introduction and implementation of the visa-free policy is a timely response to the growing closeness of China-Latin America ties and reflects China's proactive approach to advancing cooperation. As visa-free access continues to expand, China-Latin America relations are poised to expand. Sectors such as tourism, educational exchanges, youth interactions and small business cooperation may emerge as new growth points. The policy creates new opportunities for deeper cultural exchange between Latin American and Chinese societies. "With institutional facilitation, more frequent people-to-people exchanges will improve mutual under-



standing and strategic trust, making cooperation more stable, the network more interconnected, and the content more substantial," said Pan. At a time when some countries are building "small yards and high fences" and tightening visa restrictions, China continues to expand its visa-free circle - from Latin America to the Middle East - constructing a global network of humanistic connectivity based on mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. This expanding network is a concrete manifestation of China's commitment to multilateralism and to promoting Global South cooperation. "China's expanding visa-free circle of friends is more than just a facilitation measure - it is a key component of China's diplomatic approach of high-level opening-up and fostering Global South cooperation. It challenges the Western-dominated tradition of 'visa politics' and reflects China's strategic resolve to become more open

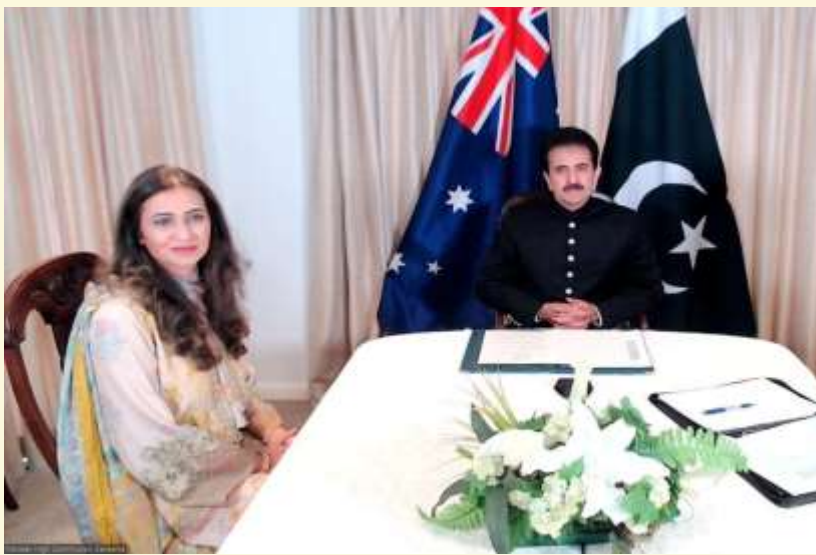
as it grows," said Pan. Against the backdrop of the "de-risking" rhetoric promoted by some Western politicians, China is advancing globalization through policies that emphasize connectivity and development. "Multilateralism is about concrete actions," and China's visa-free policy is a vivid embodiment of that principle. As the coverage of this "visa-free network" continues to expand, the cultural ties and strategic connections among Global South countries will become even stronger. This is not just a small step for facilitating international travel, but a big step toward building a more inclusive, interconnected, and multipolar world.



Global Times

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

High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri invites attention towards climate issue



Covert Report

Canberra: Pakistani High Commissioner to Australia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri invited attention towards the climate issue. “Glacial melting poses a grave environmental threat. Pakistan is particularly concerned, as it holds more glacial ice than any country outside the polar regions,” the envoy posted on X. More than three-quarters of the world’s glaciers are set to vanish if climate change con-

tinues unchecked, a major new study warned Thursday, fuelling sea-level rise and jeopardizing water supplies for billions. Published in Science, the international analysis provides the clearest picture yet of long-term glacier loss, revealing that every fraction of a degree in global temperature rise significantly worsens the outlook. It may sound grim, but co-lead author Harry Zekollari, a glaciologist at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and ETH Zurich, said the findings should be seen as a “message of hope.” Under existing climate policies, global temperatures are projected to reach 2.7 degrees Celsius (4.9F) above pre-

industrial levels by 2100—a pathway that would ultimately erase 76% of current glacier mass over the coming centuries. But if warming is held to the Paris Agreement’s 1.5C target, 54% of glacial mass could be preserved, according to the study, which combined outputs from eight glacier models to simulate ice loss across a range of future climate scenarios. “What is really special about this study is we can really show how every tenth of a degree of additional warming matters,” co-lead author Lilian Schuster of the University of Innsbruck said.

Pakistan urges UNSC to act, not to remain bystander, as Israel kills and starves Palestinians

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan this week urged the United Nations General Assembly not to remain a bystander while Palestinians were being slaughtered, maimed and starved. “The cries from Gaza cannot continue to be met with silence—the world cannot afford another day of inaction,” Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, told the 15-member Council. The UNGA will hold a Conference in June on the two-State Solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. “History will not absolve us of our responsibility,” he said during a debate in the situation in the Middle East, including the Plesinian question. The Conference in the 193-member Assembly will take place at the UN headquarters in New York from June 17 to 20, to be co-chaired by Saudi Arabia and France. “The sense around the table is clear. The urgent asks are so evident: Ceasefire, release of hostages, humanitarian action and protection of innocent civilians. This is doable,” the Pakistani envoy said in a moving presentation. “We call on all Council members to come

together, to act, through a resolution, to promote the objective – in the immediate term, and to help create an environment conducive for the June Conference, and towards a just and lasting settlement for the Palestinian question.” He added, “The time for equivocation is over. There is no justification whatsoever for the human suffering of the Palestinian people. Yes, enough is enough.” “How many more atrocities must be committed before this Council does what is right — morally, legally, and under the UN Charter. Words of concern are no longer enough. “The time to act, time to prevent genocide, is now.” Ambassador Asim said, “We must not allow the Israeli atrocities to be normalized – for that would be an affront to international law and human dignity. He said that the unfolding crisis was a man-made catastrophe driven by Israel’s prolonged blockade, indiscriminate bombardment, and attacks on civilians, noting that over 54,000 Palestinians—mostly women and children—have been killed, and more than 122,000 injured. The Pakistani envoy described the trauma inflicted on Gaza’s population as “beyond measure, beyond imagination.”

In this regard, he said over 800 medical facilities have been attacked, with hospitals operating without essential supplies and even targeting of ambulances and medical workers. With at least 57 children already dead from hunger, Ambassador Asim said that starvation is no longer a threat but a grim reality, with humanitarian convoys blocked or attacked. Over 80 percent of homes destroyed, with widespread damage to water, electricity, and communication networks. “This is deliberate,” he said. More than 28,000 women and girls have been killed, and 50,000 women are pregnant, with thousands expected to give birth in unsanitary and unsafe conditions. The Pakistani envoy also highlighted the deteriorating situation in the West Bank, with increasing violence, home demolitions, and restrictions on movement. Additionally, he condemned Israeli officials’



“provocative” visits to Al-Aqsa Mosque, warning of potential regional escalation. He urged the Security Council to take four immediate and decisive steps: Full implementation of Resolution 2735 and cessation of all attacks on civilians; Unhindered access for humanitarian teams and the immediate removal of all restrictions on aid delivery; Condemnation

of any attempts to forcibly displace Palestinians from their land, and, the international community must work towards a just and lasting peace based on a two-state solution, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the capital of a sovereign Palestinian state. “This is, without question, one of the gravest humanitarian crises of our time,” Ambassador Ahmad remarked.

Kazakhstan eager to improve academic ties with Pakistan



Covert Report

Lahore: The Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan, Mr. Yerzhan Kistafin, visited the University of Health Sciences (UHS) here this week, accompanied by Dr. Anar Turmukhambetova, Board Chairman and Rector of Astana Medical University, along with embassy officials Daniyar Altaev and Rana Irfan Haider. During the visit, the Kazakh delegation met with UHS Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Ahsan Waheed Rathore, Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Nadia Naseem, Registrar Ms. Kiran Fatima and senior faculty heads to discuss possibilities of academic cooperation between medical universities of both nations. Ambassador Kistafin highlighted that over 1,000 Pakistani students are currently enrolled in universities across Kazakhstan, a majority of whom are studying medicine. ‘Kazakhstan is eager to deepen its academic ties with

Pakistan in the field of medical sciences,’ he stated, proposing the establishment of a Kazakhstan-Pakistan Joint Medical Centre as a landmark initiative. He emphasised the importance of further strengthening bilateral relations, expressing optimism that several collaborative agreements will be signed during the upcoming visit of the President of Kazakhstan to Pakistan later this year. Dr. Anar Turmukhambetova commended the intellect and dedication of Pakistani students studying in Kazakhstan. ‘Our medical education system closely aligns with Pakistan’s, which opens up vast opportunities for academic exchange and joint research,’ she noted. She proposed launching joint degree programmes in medicine and applied sciences and suggested the formation of a joint working group to facilitate structured cooperation. Dr. Turmukhambetova also shared that Astana Medical University has recently introduced a military medicine programme, marking a new frontier in teach-

ing and research. Welcoming the delegation, Prof. Dr. Ahsan Waheed Rathore assured that Pakistani institutions are open to hosting Kazakh faculty and students. ‘International collaboration not only enhances academic quality but also provides our students and faculty with opportunities for advanced training and research improving overall ranking of our institutions,’ he said. Meanwhile, the delegation from Kazakhstan visited Punjab University and called on VC Prof. Dr. M. Ali on Thursday. The Kazakh team was led by its Ambassador in Pakistan Yerzhan Kistafin. Chairperson of Board/Rector of Astana Medical University, Kazakhstan Anar Akylbekovna also accompanied the delegation. During the visit, the both sides discussed potential collaborations in student and faculty exchange programmes and explored collaborative research opportunities. Mrs. Anar proposed to establish joint collaborations with leading universities in Kazakhstan in all fields, especially in the field of health sciences.

Umar Rehman Malik lauds President Asif Ali Zardari for signing law to stop child marriages



stan (HRCP) has strongly criticised the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) for raising objections to the recently passed Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill, calling the move a serious attempt to hinder vital child protection legislation. HRCP expressed deep concern over the CII’s stance, which challenges the bill that sets 18 years as the minimum legal age for marriage and criminalizes child marriage in the federal capital. “The bill establishes a long-overdue legal standard in Pakistan and aligns with both constitutional guarantees and international human rights commitments,” the HRCP stated. “Framing child protection as incompatible with religion not only undermines the rights of every child but also reflects a deeply lopsided interpretation of Islamic principles.” The CII, in its advisory response, objected to the bill by arguing that Islamic jurisprudence permits the marriage of girls once they attain puberty, regardless of age. The council maintains that setting a fixed minimum age of 18 for marriage contradicts certain religious interpretations and therefore should not be made legally binding. HRCP countered this view, asserting that the state has to legislate in the best interest of children, particularly to prevent early marriages that have been linked to serious health risks, denial of education, and systemic gender inequality. The rights body called on the federal government to resist pressures that seek to dilute the bill and to ensure its full and immediate implementation. “The state must not capitulate to regressive positions that endanger children’s lives and futures,” the statement said.



Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill, 2025, into law,” he said in a statement. Umar Rehman Malik said this was a “monumental stride in safeguarding children’s rights and ensuring a safer, more just Pakistan.” criminalises the solemnisation of marriages where either the boy or girl is underage. Under the law, no Nikah khuwan (marriage officiant) may conduct a marriage involving minors, with violations punishable by up to one year in prison and a fine of Rs100,000. Additionally, a man over 18 who marries an underage girl may face up to three years of rigorous imprisonment. The bill also empowers courts to intervene if informed of an underage marriage,

including protecting the identity of those reporting such cases. The bill was initially introduced in the National Assembly by PPP’s Sharmila Faruqi and later presented in the Senate by Senator Sherry Rehman. However, the legislation faced opposition from the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), which declared the bill contrary to Islamic principles. The Human Rights Commission of Paki-

Liaquat Ali
Islamabad: Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) leader Umar Rehman Malik this week lauded President Asif Ali Zardari for signing the bill into law to stop child marriages. “Historic Step Towards Protecting Our Children. President Asif Ali Zardari has officially signed the Islamabad Capital

President Zardari earlier signed the Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025 into law, setting the minimum age for marriage at 18 years in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). The new legislation



Bulgaria's Ambassador Irena Gancheva unveils cultural exhibition highlighting Ancient Treasures of Bulgaria



facts excavated from Thracian tombs, burial sites, royal hoards, and ceremonial sanctuaries, some of which date as far back as the 5th century BCE. Ambassador Gancheva underscored the exhibition's role in promoting cross-cultural appreciation and nurturing stronger bilateral ties. "This exhibition not only pays tribute to the depth and diversity of Bulgaria's ancient legacy but also acts as a cultural bridge, bringing the people of Bulgaria and Pakistan closer together through shared values and appreciation of historical heritage," she said. She further drew attention to the intriguing cultural parallels between the Thracians of the Balkans and the ancient civilizations of the Indus Valley, emphasizing the universality of humanity's creative spirit and spiritual traditions, reflected across continents in artifacts, rituals, and artistic expression. The exhibition represents a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts to enhance cultural collaboration between Bulgaria and Pakistan. It is expected to draw the interest of students, researchers, and history lovers from across the capital and beyond. Through the lens of the Thracian civilization - renowned for its warrior ethos, exquisite goldsmithing, and mystic beliefs - visitors are invited to journey through an ancient world that continues to captivate the imagination of historians and archaeologists to this day.



Celina Ali
Islamabad: As part of a growing commitment to cultural diplomacy and mutual understanding, Her Excellency Irena Gancheva, the Ambassador of Bulgaria to Pakistan, this week formally inaugurated an exhibition titled "The Ancient Treasures of Bulgaria" at a distinguished cultural venue in Islamabad. The exhibition, which opened to an enthusiastic audience of diplomats, historians, scholars, artists, and cultural enthusiasts, aims to spotlight Bulgaria's extraordinary archaeological heritage and millennia-old civilization. Spearheaded by the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in collaboration with

the Institute of Balkan Studies and Centre of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBSCT-BAS), the exhibition offered a unique window into Bulgaria's ancient history—particularly that of the Thracian civilization, one of Europe's earliest and most influential cultures. The content displayed in the exhibition was meticulously prepared under the prestigious "Bulgariana" Project, led by eminent scholar Prof. D.Sc. Valeria Fol and visualized through the lens of acclaimed photographer Nikolay Genov. Visitors were treated to a compelling presentation of vivid photographs, detailed explanatory panels, and interpretive artistic renderings of archaeological arti-

German court rules turning away asylum-seekers unlawful



Newswire
Berlin: A Berlin court said this week that Germany must adhere to the EU's Dublin procedure when turning back asylum-seekers at the border. The ruling challenges a new migration policy, and the government says pushbacks will continue. The Berlin Administrative Court ruled that the rejection of asylum-seekers at border controls is unlawful unless carried out under the EU's Dublin procedure. The urgent decision is a blow to Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who has pledged to crack down on migration. Shortly after taking office last month, Chancellor Merz's government advised police that they could turn back irregular migrants at the border, even if they applied for asylum. The ruling came in the case of three Somali nationals who were turned back to Poland on May 9 under the

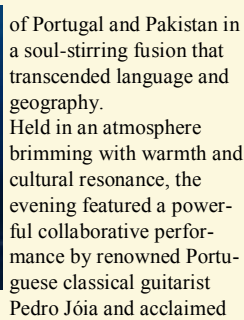
new German regulation. The court said such rejections bypass the necessary legal steps and violate asylum rights. "Persons who express the wish to seek asylum while at a border check on German territory may not be sent back" before it is known which country is responsible for processing the claim under the EU's so-called "Dublin" system, the court said. The three — two men and a woman — had arrived in Germany by train from Poland on May 9. The Federal Police stopped them at the railway station in Frankfurt an der Oder, in the eastern state of Brandenburg. The three said they wanted to apply for asylum in Germany. However, they were returned to Poland the same day. The police justified this by arguing that they had entered from a safe third country. However, the court also ruled that "the petitioners cannot demand to be allowed into" Germany, adding that the Dublin asylum procedures "can be carried out at or close to the border." Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt, who is responsible for implementing the migration policy, said Monday evening that the ruling only applied to the case in question, and that the government would stick to its migration policy. Shortly after taking office last month, Chancellor Merz's government advised police that they could turn back irregular migrants at the border, even if they applied for asylum.

"We will continue with the pushbacks," Dobrindt said in a statement, adding that "we think we have the legal justification for this." Dobrindt added that the interior ministry would provide more detailed justifications for the pushbacks, as requested by the court. The interior minister said that the migrants in question had attempted to cross the border three times, and only on the third attempt, did they invoke the right to asylum. A crackdown on irregular migration was a central pledge in Merz's campaign ahead of February's general election. That vote saw the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) achieve its best-ever result, winning just over 20% of the vote. Merz has since argued that decisive action on migration is essential to stopping the AfD's rise. After Monday's ruling, Germany's center-left Green Party, now in opposition, said that the court's decision backed up their stance that Merz's migration policy was bound to fail. "This is a severe defeat for the federal government and should serve as a warning to abide by the law in the future and not knowingly exceed its own powers for populist purposes," Greens lawmaker Irene Mihalic told the Rheinische Post newspaper. "The border blockades were a rejection of the European Dublin system and have offended our European neighbors." Karl Kopp, managing director of German pro-immigration advocacy group Pro Asyl, told the Rheinische Post that Interior Minister Dobrindt's "unlawful practice of national unilateral action in asylum policy has failed."

Last week, Dobrindt said he was hoping for a European Union (EU) agreement on a proposal to send failed asylum-seekers to "return hubs" in safe third countries. The European Commission has also proposed a scheme to allow member states to reject asylum applications from migrants who have passed through a "safe" third country before entering the EU. The proposals have yet to pass in the European Parliament or be adopted by national governments. The Dublin Regulation is an EU law that determines which EU country is responsible for the application. However, under the rules, police are not allowed to

simply turn asylum seekers back at the border. Instead, German authorities must initiate a complicated procedure to transfer them back to the country where they first entered the EU. The first EU country where an asylum seeker enters and where fingerprints are taken is usually responsible for the claim. The idea is that it ensures that a person doesn't apply for asylum in several EU countries simultaneously. The system has been criticized for putting too much burden on EU external border countries like Greece and Italy, which are often the first entry points.





Islamabad: In a celebration of cultural harmony and enduring bilateral ties, Serena Hotels, in partnership with the Embassy of Portugal, hosted Soulful Strings: Portugal & Pakistan — a captivating musical evening that served as a vibrant tribute to the shared human spirit expressed through music. The event, part of Serena Hotels' acclaimed Cultural Diplomacy initiative, brought together the rich musical heritages

Pakistani Sufi and folk artist Arieab Azhar. The duo mesmerized the audience with a transcendent blend of Portuguese guitar's melancholic elegance and the spiritual poetry of Sufi verse, creating a soundscape that was both meditative and deeply emotive. Their performance underscored the universality of music as a language of connection, weaving together distant traditions into a unified expression of shared values.



The event was attended by a distinguished gathering that included members of the diplomatic corps, senior representatives from the corporate world, prominent cultural figures, and media professionals. Their presence reflected the significance of the evening — a moment not only of musical appreciation but also of cross-cultural solidarity.

Speaking at the event, Mr. Aziz Boolani, CEO of Serena Hotels, emphasized the

role of art in building bridges between nations. "At Serena Hotels, we firmly

mutual respect, and artistic affinity
between our two nations.”



believe in the transformative power of cultural diplomacy. Soulful Strings embodies our vision of fostering meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding through the universal medium of art and music,” he stated. Echoing this sentiment, H.E Frederico Silva, the Ambassador of Portugal remarked, “This collaboration represents a heartfelt celebration of the shared cultural values between Portugal and Pakistan. Music has the extraordinary ability to transcend borders and speak directly to the soul. Tonight’s performance stands as a testament to the enduring friendship,

The Soulful Strings concert reaffirmed Serena Hotels' commitment to nurturing intercultural dialogue and creative expression. As part of its broader efforts to strengthen people-to-people connections across continents, the event served as a moving reminder of the harmony that can emerge when diverse artistic legacies meet in the spirit of collaboration. In celebrating the power of melody to unite, inspire, and uplift, Soulful Strings offered more than an evening of music — it offered a vision of a world brought closer together by empathy, understanding, and the timeless beauty of cultural exchange.

Pakistan invites Japan to join mineral sector drive through joint ventures, value addition



Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: Pakistan this week invited Japan to invest in its minerals sector through joint ventures focused on exploration, processing and value addition, with commerce minister, Jam Kamal, holding high-level meetings in Tokyo this week, the government said in a statement. The outreach is part of Pakistan's broader push to attract foreign investment and strengthen its struggling economy. Islamabad has prioritized mining and minerals as a key sector for economic diversification, and is seeking Japanese collaboration to unlock its untapped resource potential while aligning with Tokyo's in-

dustrial needs.

"Our mineral sector remains largely underexplored," Kamal said during meetings with officials from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and the Japan-Pakistan Business Cooperation Committee (JPBCC). "We are offering Japanese partners the opportunity to participate in high-value ventures that can help build sustainable supply chains for critical minerals," he added. The minister highlighted reserves of rare earth elements like copper, gold and other industrial minerals, positioning Pakistan as a strategic destination for resource-based cooperation. He emphasized Pakistan's openness to technology transfer, public-private

partnerships and long-term frameworks that support mutual gains. In his conversation with JICA's Senior Vice President HARA Shohei, Kamal underlined the importance of aligning future development cooperation with Pakistan's industrial modernization and export-oriented growth. He acknowledged Japan's long-standing contribution of over \$11 billion in areas such as energy, transport and vocational training, and called for expanded technical assistance in mineral logistics, industrial clusters and green technologies. Meeting JETRO President Susumu Kataoka and Executive Vice President Kazuya Nakajo, the minister urged greater Japanese investment in Pakistan's Special Economic Zones and export-oriented sectors. He called on JETRO to promote Pakistan's mineral sector to Japanese industry through seminars, business-

to-business (B2B) outreach, and participation in trade exhibitions. At a luncheon hosted by JPBCC, Kamal encouraged deeper B2B ties and sought active Japanese input for the upcoming Pakistan-Japan Business Dialogue. "Our doors are open," he said. "We see Japan not only as a partner but as a catalyst for transforming Pakistan's economic base. With your advanced technology and our resource potential, we can build future-proof industries together." Pakistan has in recent years stepped up its diplomatic engagement with key economic partners to promote sectors such as information technology, light engineering and mineral development. The Tokyo visit marks a fresh attempt to align its resource-led ambitions with Japan's technological strengths and global supply chain priorities.



Memorial Day in US: Last Monday in May

Nick Kranz

Washington: Memorial Day is a United States federal holiday, commemorating those who have died in military action for the United States. It is observed on the last Monday of May. It is traditional to fly the flag of the United States at half-staff from dawn until noon.

The history of Memorial Day dates back to the American Civil War. The original national celebration of Decoration Day took place on May 30, 1868. It was an event to honor Union soldiers who had died during the American Civil War. It is said to be inspired by the way people in the Southern states honored the dead, an occasion to decorate the graves of the war dead. After World War I, it was extended to include all men and women who died in any war or military action. In May 1966, President Lyndon Johnson declared Waterloo, New York, as the birthplace of Memo-

rial Day. Originally, the holiday was celebrated on May 30th, but in 1968, the Uniform Holidays Bill was passed as part of a move to use federal holidays to create three-day weekends. The wearing of poppies in honor of

America's dead is traditionally done on Memorial Day. The origin of the red poppy as a modern-day symbol of this day was the idea of an American woman, Miss Moina Michael. In war-torn battlefields, the red field poppy was one of the first plants to grow. Its seeds scattered in the wind

and sat dormant in the ground, only germinating when the ground is disturbed – as it was by the very brutal fighting during World War I. The practice of wearing poppies was further inspired by the poem "In Flanders Fields," written in 1915 by Canadian soldier John McCrae. He saw

the poppies in burials around his artillery position in Belgium. Today, poppies are both the symbol of loss of life and a symbol of recovery and new life, especially in support of those servicemen and women who were damaged physically or emotionally.



EU, Pakistan strengthen partnership on human rights and GSP+ monitoring



Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan, Dr Riina Kionka



Celina Ali

Islamabad: A European Union (EU) delegation, led by, this week visited the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) to discuss ongoing human rights collaboration and GSP+ monitoring. He was accompanied by Ms. Marta Szymczyk, Programme Manager for Human Rights and Democracy. The delegation met with Secretary MoHR, Ms. Humera Ahmad, along with senior ministry officials including Mr. Muhammad Arshad, Director General (IC), and Mr. Muhammad Arif Leghari, Director (IC). The Secretary welcomed the EU officials and praised the EU's long-standing support in promoting human rights in Pakistan.

Mr. Willems appreciated Pakistan's progress in key areas such as minority rights, child protection, and gender equality. He highlighted the importance of linking GSP+ trade benefits with improvements in human rights practices. He encouraged Pakistan to continue working on reforms, especially in protecting women, children, persons with disabilities, and minority communities.

Secretary Humera Ahmad reaffirmed the Government's strong commitment to an inclusive and rights-based agenda. She shared major developments, including the National Commission for Minorities Act and the ICT Child Marriage Restraint Act 2025. She also spoke about the Prime Minister's Women Empowerment Package 2024 and ongoing efforts to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. She emphasized the Government's plan to strengthen national commissions—NCHR, NCSW, and NCRC—in line with global human rights standards.

The two sides also discussed the Huqooq-e-Pakistan II (HeP-II) project and agreed on the need for better coordination among

all partners. They stressed that joint efforts and effective planning are essential for delivering on the 2025 human rights agenda. The meeting ended on a positive note. Both parties reaffirmed their shared commitment to protecting human rights and recognized the Ministry of Human Rights as a key partner in this mission. They agreed to continue regular engagement and cooperation in the future.



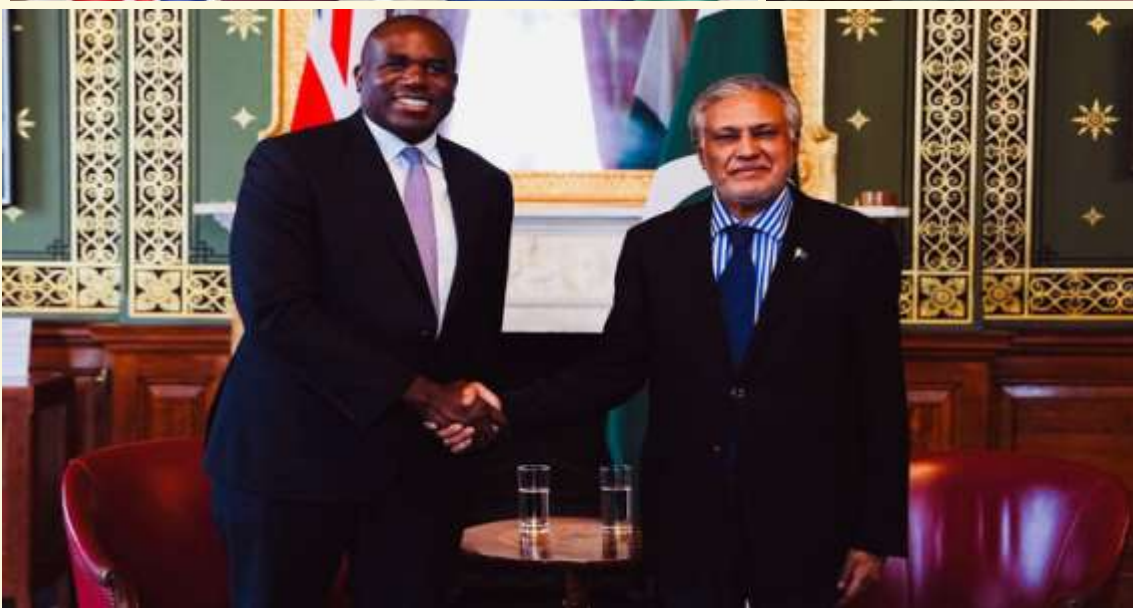
Pakistan, UK to increase cooperation at multilateral fora

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and his British counterpart David Lammy yesterday agreed to enhance cooperation in multilateral fora, particularly the UN Security Council, state-run media reported. Pakistan and the UK enjoy cordial relations. These ties have translated into the two nations harbouring cooperation in military, economic, and educational sectors, with the latter hosting a large Pakistani diaspora. The conversation between the two diplomats follows Lammy's first official visit to Pakistan last month, where he met the country's top officials following Pakistan's dangerous military standoff with nuclear-armed rival India. "They exchanged views on further enhancing bilateral cooperation in multilateral fora, particularly at the UN Security Council," state broadcaster Radio Pakistan reported. The state media said both leaders agreed to maintain contact. They also agreed to meet on the sidelines of the high-level events scheduled to be held later this month at the United Nations, New York, the state broadcaster said. The UK is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council along with China, US, Russia and France. The Security Council seeks to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles of the UN and investigates any dispute or situation which might lead to international friction. The UK was one of several countries



actively engaged in restoring calm between India and Pakistan after the two neighbors were engaged in conflict for four days last month. India blamed Pakistan for being involved in an April 22 attack on a tourist resort in the part of Kashmir administered



by Delhi. Islamabad denied involvement and called for an international probe into the incident. After India struck multiple Pakistani sites on May 6 with missiles, describing them as "terrorist camps," the two sides traded missiles, artillery and

drone strikes for four days before Washington brokered a ceasefire between the two on May 10. Tensions between both nations continue to persist, with Pakistan warning it would respond to any further violations of its sovereignty by India.



National Day: Italy can play role of ‘peace builder’ in ‘volatile’ global, regional scenario: Atta Tarar

Celina Ali
Islamabad: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar this week said Pakistan look to Italy as an important country which could play the role of peace builder in the volatile regional and global scenario. Addressing the celebration ceremony of Italy’s National Day, he said Pakistan and Italy share a rich history of diplomatic relations founded on mutual trust, cooperation and a commitment to global peace and development. “We greatly value our relationship with Italy and strive to establish a comprehensive, long-term partnership, in the areas of trade and investment, security, education, and migration and labour mobility,” he added. The minister, on behalf of the Government and

people of Pakistan, extended warm felicitations to the friendly people and government of Italy on their National Day. “Pakistan and Italy have completed 75 years of bilateral relations and our ties continue to develop in the positive direction,” Tarar noted. He said the Italian Interior Minister visited Pakistan last month to sign an important bilateral MoU on migration and labour mobility. His visit to Pakistan amid the regional tension “is a reflection of the strength of our bilateral relations.” “We have a robust dialogue architecture under the Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP) signed between the two countries in 2013,” he said, adding both countries are keen on maintaining



regular dialogue, including political and economic. The last session of the political dialogue was held in February this year, he said, adding Pakistan looks forward to hosting the next session of Pakistan-Italy Joint Economic Commission. He said Italy has remained an important partner of Pakistan in trade, and commercial spheres. “It

is satisfying to note that Pakistan-Italy bilateral trade has crossed the 1 billion dollar mark.” *It is a matter of satisfaction that a number of Italian companies are operating in Pakistan,* he added. The minister said Italy has become an attractive destination in European Union

for Pakistani students. An estimated 3500 students are studying in Italy, mostly in La Sapienza University in Rome. “On this happy occasion, we wish to commend the untiring efforts of Ambassador Armellini and her team for strengthening the mutually beneficial partnership between Pakistan and Italy” he remarked.

France to ban smoking on beaches, parks and bus stops from July 1

Newswire
Paris: France will ban smoking in all outdoor places that can be accessed by children, including beaches, parks and bus stops, the health and family minister announced this week. Famed as a country where smokers linger over cigarettes on cafe terraces or strolling down cobblestone streets, France has increasingly tightened restrictions on tobacco use in public spaces in recent years. The new ban, which will enter into force on July 1, will cover all spaces where children could be present, including “beaches, parks, public gardens, outside of

schools, bus stops and sports venues”, said the minister Catherine Vautrin. “Tobacco must disappear where there are children,” Vautrin said in an interview published by the regional Ouest-France daily on its website. The freedom to smoke “stops where children’s right to breathe clean air starts”, she said. The ban will also extend to schools, to stop students smoking in front of them. Offenders face a fine of up to €135 (\$154), Vautrin said. The ban will not extend to France’s iconic cafe terraces however, the minister said. Electronic cigarettes, which have boomed in France in recent years, are also not covered. France already forbids smoking in public spaces such as workplaces, airports and train stations, as well as playgrounds. Anti-smoking groups had been fighting for a broader ban. An estimated 35 percent of France’s population are smokers – higher than the averages for Europe (25 percent) and the world (21 percent), ac-



cording to the World Health Organization. Around 75,000 people are estimated to die from tobacco-related complications each year in France. According to a recent opinion survey, six out of 10 French people (62%) favour banning smoking in public places.

The government’s National Anti-Tobacco Programme for 2023 to 2027 proposed a smoking ban similar to the one announced by Vautrin, calling France to “rise to the challenge of a tobacco-free generation from 2032”. But anti-tobacco organisations had voiced concern the authorities were dragging their feet on implementing the measures.

More than 1,500 cities and villages had already imposed their own bans on smoking in public spaces such as parks, beaches and ski slopes. Vautrin said there were no plans to place additional taxes on cigarettes “at the moment”, citing the thriving black market that emerged after existing taxes were introduced in a bid to discourage smoking.