

UN warns two-state solution at risk as Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad raises alarm over settlement expansion **Liaquat Ali**
Islamabad: The United Nations Security Council has cautioned this week that the prospects of a viable two-state solution are deteriorating rapidly amid escalating violence, accelerating settlement activity, and

(Page-5)

Princess of Wales completes Three Peaks Challenge in 24 hours, highlights cancer recovery and holistic care
London: The Princess of Wales, Catherine, Princess of Wales, this week successfully completed the National Three Peaks Challenge within 24 hours, using the physically demanding endurance feat to raise awareness about the long-term impact of

(Page-11)

Xi urges CPC to realize missions in new era



China Economic Net

Beijing: All members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) should stay firm in convictions, and forge ahead with continuous efforts to realize the Party's missions in the new era and on the new journey, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, said this week. Xi, also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks when addressing a gathering celebrating the 105th founding anniversary of the CPC in Beijing.

The whole Party must adhere to the basic theory, basic line, and basic policy of the Party, Xi said. The whole Party must always rely on the people to create great historical feat, Xi stressed. The whole Party



must actively respond to risks and challenges on the path forward, Xi noted. The whole Party must continuously promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity, Xi said. The whole Party must advance full and rigorous Party self-governance with sustained efforts, Xi emphasized.



Pakistan, Canada reaffirm commitment to strengthen bilateral ties across sectors



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and Canada have reaffirmed their shared commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations and expanding cooperation across a wide range of areas during a meeting this week between Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Canada's High Commissioner to Pakistan, Tarik Ali Khan, in Islamabad. The meeting provided an opportunity for both sides to review the current trajectory of Pakistan-Canada relations and exchange views on ways to further enhance engagement in areas of mutual interest. The discussions reflected the positive momentum in bilateral ties and underscored the importance both countries attach to maintaining close diplomatic contacts and fostering constructive cooperation. Deputy Prime Minister Dar and High Commissioner Khan reaffirmed their shared resolve to deepen collaboration through sustained dialogue and strengthened institutional engagement. They emphasized the value of broadening cooperation in sectors where both countries have common interests and

acknowledged the importance of maintaining regular high-level exchanges to further reinforce bilateral relations. The two sides also discussed avenues for expanding collaboration and building on the longstanding friendship between Pakistan and Canada. They agreed that continued engagement and mutual understanding would contribute to strengthening the partnership and creating new opportunities for cooperation in the years ahead. The meeting highlighted the shared commitment of Islamabad and Ottawa to promoting mutually beneficial relations based on respect, dialogue and cooperation. Both sides reiterated their determination to work closely to advance common objectives and further enhance bilateral engagement across multiple fields. Pakistan and Canada enjoy longstanding diplomatic relations encompassing political dialogue, trade, investment, education, development cooperation and strong people-to-people contacts, supported by a vibrant Pakistani diaspora in Canada. The latest meeting reflects the two countries' continued efforts to deepen engagement and explore new opportunities for cooperation while further consolidating their bilateral partnership.

Natasha Daultana says meeting with First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari reflected warmth & commitment

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Natasha Daultana this week described her meeting with First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari as a memorable interaction marked by warmth, positivity and light-hearted conversation. Sharing her reflections on the meeting, Daultana said some conversations leave a lasting impression long after they end, adding that her discussion with the First Lady was both pleasant and uplifting. "It was a lovely meeting with First Lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, during which we shared a few light-hearted moments," Daultana said, noting that the interaction reflected the cordial spirit and mutual respect that continue to define engagements within the party. The Member of the National Assembly (MNA) praised the First Lady's approachable personality and gracious demeanour, saying the meeting was filled with warmth and genuine camaraderie. Daultana added that such interactions strengthen personal and professional bonds while reinforcing a shared commitment to serving the people of Pakistan. The PPP lawmaker also expressed appreciation for Aseefa Bhutto Zardari's dedication to public service and her growing role in promoting social welfare and humanitarian initiatives, saying her efforts continue to inspire many,



particularly young women, to actively participate in national development. Daultana said she looked forward to continued engagement in advancing the party's vision of inclusive development, public welfare and service to the nation.

China-made electric buses expand across Murree and Peshawar

Gwadar Pro

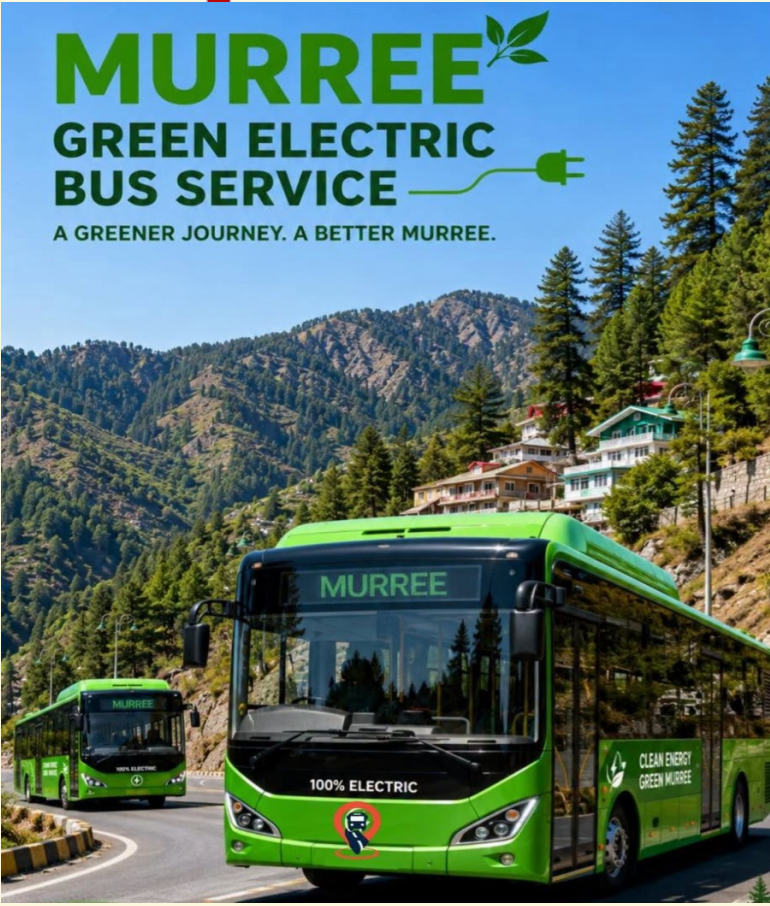
Islamabad: Pakistan’s drive towards environmentally sustainable public transport received another boost this week as Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa announced the expansion of fleets of China-made electric buses in Murree and Peshawar, reflecting its growing cooperation with China in the field of green mobility. In Murree, ten modern electric buses manufactured in China have reached the hill station under the special directives of Punjab Chief Minister Mar-

yam Nawaz Sharif.

The buses will operate on key routes linking Jhika Gali, Patriata, Rawalpindi, Lari and Lawrence College, providing improved access to major tourist destinations. Officials said the buses are equipped with modern passenger facilities designed to offer comfortable and affordable travel. The service is expected to become operational shortly. Meanwhile, in Peshawar, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government announced it will add 52 China-made buses into the Bus

Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

According to Trans Peshawar, the new arrivals will increase the total BRT fleet to 296 buses. Twenty-five buses are expected to arrive in Pakistan during the first part of July, while the remaining vehicles will follow later. A dedicated pink bus service exclusively for women will also be launched alongside the new buses to enhance safe and comfortable public transport for female passengers.



Chinese buyers show interest in Pakistani snacks under CPEC trade push

Gwadar Pro

Lahore: Chinese buyers have shown interest in Pakistani snack products during a visit to China by a food-sector delegation from South Punjab. Shahid Imran, convener of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry’s regional food committee, said the delegation was exploring export opportunities, business partnerships and possible joint ventures in food manufacturing and processing. He said the response from Chinese buyers had been encouraging, particularly for Pakistani snacks that meet international food safety and quality standards. Imran said products made by Zia Snacks had attracted attention from Chinese importers because of their taste, quality and manufacturing standards. He said Pakistani manufacturers could target China with a wider range of processed food products, including potato chips, corn-based snacks, biscuits, confectionery and other value-added foods. Moving from raw agricultural exports towards processed food could help Pakistan increase export earnings, sup-

port value addition and improve the competitiveness of its food-manufacturing sector, he said. Imran said stronger government facilitation, improved logistics, better trade connectivity and compliance with international food safety standards would be needed to expand processed food exports. He also urged Pakistani food manufacturers to improve quality certification, production technology, packaging, branding and pricing to build a longer-term presence in the Chinese market. He said closer links with Chinese importers, distributors and retail chains, as well as more trade exhibitions and business-to-business meetings, would be important for sustaining growth. The visit comes as Pakistan and China seek to expand agriculture and food-sector cooperation under the second phase of the China -Pakistan Economic Corridor, with officials from both countries identifying value addition and export-led growth as priorities.



Pakistan rail minister says ML-1 project to begin in September

Gwadar Pro

Rawalpindi: Pakistan's railways minister said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is expected to lay the foundation stone for the Rohri-Karachi section of the Main Line-1 railway project in September. Muhammad Hanif Abbasi made the announcement this week after inaugurating new running rooms for railway guards and locomotive pilots at the Rawalpindi Railway Loco Shed. Abbasi said the Rohri-Karachi section would be the first major phase of Pakistan Railways' modernisation programme under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He said work was also progressing on the proposed Main Line-3 project from Rohri to Zahidan, adding that the Economic Coordination Committee had approved it. Pakistan Railways recorded annual revenue of Rs115

billion, which Abbasi described as its highest-ever figure. He said the department was on track to meet its fiscal revenue target by July 6. The minister said operating expenditure had been reduced by about Rs3.6 billion, five passenger trains had been outsourced, freight revenue had risen by 32 percent and income from railway land had increased by more than 50 percent. Abbasi said railway schools and hospitals were being outsourced under public-private partnerships, while digitalisation and right-sizing measures were being introduced across the department. He said bids for 16 new power plants for power vans would be opened on Tuesday, and all existing power vans would be overhauled by March 23 next year. The minister said all trains in the Pakistan Railways network would be upgraded by June 2027. He also announced plans to upgrade the exterior of Rawalpindi Railway Station by December. Abbasi said passenger and freight fares had not been increased on the prime minister's instructions.



Ambassador Ugo Ciarlatani pledges to deepen Italy-Pakistan strategic, economic ties

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Newly appointed Italian Ambassador to Pakistan, Ugo Ciarlatani, this week assumed charge of his diplomatic responsibilities, outlining an ambitious vision to further strengthen Italy's partnership with Pakistan through expanded cooperation in trade, investment, culture, education and innovation. In his first public statement after taking office, Ambassador Ciarlatani described Pakistan as a country of "significant importance" for Italy and the wider South Asian region. He noted that bilateral relations rest on a strong foundation built on political dialogue, economic engagement and enduring people-to-people connections. The ambassador said advancing Italy's footprint in Pakistan would be a central priority during his tenure. He emphasized close coordination with the Italian Consulate General in Karachi, the Italian Trade



Agency (ICE), the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, as well as public and private stakeholders in both countries to unlock fresh avenues of collaboration.

Highlighting Pakistan's economic potential, Ciarlatani pointed to its youthful population and expanding consumer market as key attractions for Italian businesses and investors. He identified energy, infrastructure, agribusiness, engineering, textiles, technology, vocational training and sustainable development as priority sectors for enhanced cooperation. He further stressed the importance of strengthening commercial diplomacy by fostering deeper linkages between Italian and Pakistani companies, universities, research institutions and cultural organizations. Beyond economic engagement, the envoy underscored cultural diplomacy as a cornerstone of bilateral relations. He highlighted Italy's strengths in language, archaeology, heritage, design, fashion, cinema, music, science and higher education as important tools for promoting mutual understanding between the two nations. Special focus, he said, would be placed on



H.E. Ugo Ciarlattanni
NEW AMBASSADOR OF ITALY TO PAKISTAN

expanding opportunities for youth through student exchanges, academic partnerships, scientific collaboration and professional mobility, reflecting a shared commitment to human capital development and innovation. Ambassador Ciarlatani also announced plans to enhance consular services for Italian citizens in Pakistan, as well as for Pakistani nationals seeking visas and related embassy assistance. Expressing confidence in the future trajec-

tory of bilateral ties, he said Italy and Pakistan could elevate their partnership through sustained engagement and practical cooperation, ultimately delivering tangible benefits for both peoples. Italy and Pakistan enjoy longstanding diplomatic relations and cooperate across multiple sectors, including trade, development, education and culture, with the Pakistani diaspora in Italy continuing to serve as a vital bridge between the two countries.



105 years on, the world comes to understand why ‘the CPC can succeed’



assessment of the CPC must be placed within a global framework. The international community's close attention to this important speech occurs against two broad backdrops. First, in global governance, the "four major deficits" are intertwined and steadily worsening. Global challenges continue to emerge, and the existing governance system struggles to respond effectively. Second, in domestic governance, the shortcomings of Western party systems have been starkly exposed. Problems such as interest groups hijacking public decision-making, deepening social divisions and widening wealth gaps remain unresolved. A recent CNN article noted that political decay is an endemic in the West. The world is asking: What kind of party can provide stability and hope in this turbulent era?

The CPC has answered with its practice. China has risen from poverty and backwardness to become the world's second-largest economy, completing in just a few decades the industrialization process that took developed countries centuries. For many years, China's contribution to global economic growth has remained stable at around 30 percent. The CPC has also led the largest-scale poverty alleviation campaign in human history, lifting nearly 100 million rural residents out of poverty and contributing more than 70 percent to global poverty reduction. From a country once ravaged by war and economic ruin to a major nation steadily advancing Chinese modernization and helping shape global governance, the CPC has achieved a record of governance that is truly without parallel.

China is home to more than 1.4 billion people - roughly equivalent to the combined population of the Western world. Governing a country of this scale is exponentially more complex than governing one with tens of millions of people. Such a populous country has successfully blazed a path of Chinese modernization, which in itself constitutes a profound contribution to the governance of modern political parties and the evolution of human civilization. At the same time, China has rejected the old path of Western expansion and plunder, enshrining

peaceful development in the national constitution and the Party constitution. It advocates equality and mutual benefit, and harmony and coexistence, thereby achieving a powerful transcendence of zero-sum game thinking. The CPC has pioneered a new and outstanding form of human civilization.

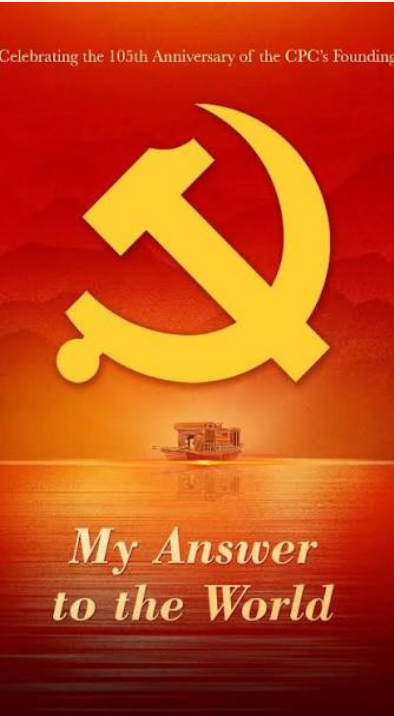
Chinese modernization has shattered the myth of "modernization = Westernization." It proves that developing countries with large populations and weak foundations can independently forge their own development path based on their national conditions. For Global South, China offered not only a new option but also renewed hope.

Meanwhile, as profound global changes accelerate, an increasing number of people in Western countries are paying closer attention to China's practices, including its rigorous Party self-governance, grassroots governance, and commitment to self-reform. Many have been drawn to the achievements of Chinese modernization. Even Francis Fukuyama, who famously advanced the "end of history" thesis, recently acknowledged that if China continues on its current development momentum, then the predictions he made about China four decades ago would prove to be wrong, and "the Chinese have created a pretty impressive system" and that it could become "a real alternative" to Western democracy.

To understand China today, one must understand the CPC. It is even more important to gain a deep understanding of Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building. This thought profoundly elucidates the fundamental questions of what the CPC is and what it aims to do. It radiates rational brilliance and personal charisma, and fully embodies the political character, value pursuits, and spiritual demeanor of contemporary Chinese communists.

The Party's 105-year history has demonstrated that both history and the Chinese people were right in choosing the CPC to lead the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The world today is far from tranquil. Yet the continued success of the CPC has brought a greater degree of certainty to an increasingly uncertain world and expanded the possibilities for humanity's future. This century-old party has infused China with vitality and resilience,



while offering the world a source of long-term stability and hope for peace. The CPC advances with an unstoppable momentum. Its vision of working with the world to build a community with a shared future for humanity is as vast as the ocean, and its path is filled with brilliant light.

Global Times

Global Times
A gathering in celebration of the 105th founding anniversary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was held at the Great Hall of the People on Wednesday morning in Beijing.
Addressing the gathering, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, called for continuously building a community with a shared future for humanity, holding high the banner of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefits, upholding common values of humanity, and implementing the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative and the Global Governance Initiative, so as to lend more positive energy to world peace and development. This important speech profoundly reveals the "key code" to "why the CPC can succeed," enabling the international community to gain a deeper understanding of the CPC's value and future direction. It has attracted wide attention from all sides.

Among political parties in the world, the CPC possesses unique qualities. Some Western parties have long histories, but have never been so closely bound to the destiny of their countries, nor have they possessed such a rigorous organizational system or such profound capacity for social mobilization. Unlike the loose "electoral parties" common in the West, the CPC embraces the lofty ideal of communism and is committed to the great cause of the Chinese nation across generations. It steadfastly shoulders the heavy responsibility entrusted to it by history and the people. It's a party of guiding character and is mission oriented.
As General Secretary Xi emphasized, the fundamental reason why the CPC has been able to continuously achieve successes throughout its 105-year struggle and why history and the people have chosen the CPC is that the CPC boasts fine qualities with no parallel among other political parties or political forces.
With 105 years of unrelenting struggle, the CPC has profoundly shaped the course of world history. Any

China-Russia educational co-op an indispensable investment

Andrey Kortunov

In May, when President Vladimir Putin was on his most recent regular official visit to Beijing, the two sides signed a diverse set of educational documents, and the two heads of state attended the opening ceremony of the China-Russia Years of Education. In a joint declaration, the two countries specifically emphasized their intention to deepen cooperation in higher education and in academic research, as well as to support building direct partnerships between universities.
During Putin's visit, at least six major agreements focused on promoting this dimension of bilateral ties were signed by top national universities, including the Peking University, the Harbin Institute of Technology,

the Sichuan University and the Beijing Foreign Studies University on China's side, and the Moscow State University, the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia and the Saint Petersburg State University on Russia's side.
These agreements highlighted an important shift in the geography of China-Russia university partnerships. Historically, such partnerships arose mostly in adjacent regions of the two countries, while the most prestigious and highly ranked educational institutions were engaged in this cooperation only to a very limited extent. From now on, one can observe a more active participation of universities from metropolitan areas in western Russia and in eastern and southern China.
The deliberate accent of the two presidents on higher

education is hardly surprising - without heavy investment into the younger generation of potential leaders in the public and private sectors, it would be next to impossible to raise or even to sustain the current level of bilateral interaction.
What is happening between China and Russia in this domain now? There are 21,000 Russian students in China's higher education institutions and about 66,000 Chinese students in Russian universities. The overall scale of bilateral trans-border student exchanges looks like a drop in a bucket. However, the dynamics are quite telling: In two decades, the scale has grown by more than an order of magnitude.
This rapid rise of trans-border educational exchanges is even more significant in the current challenging interna-

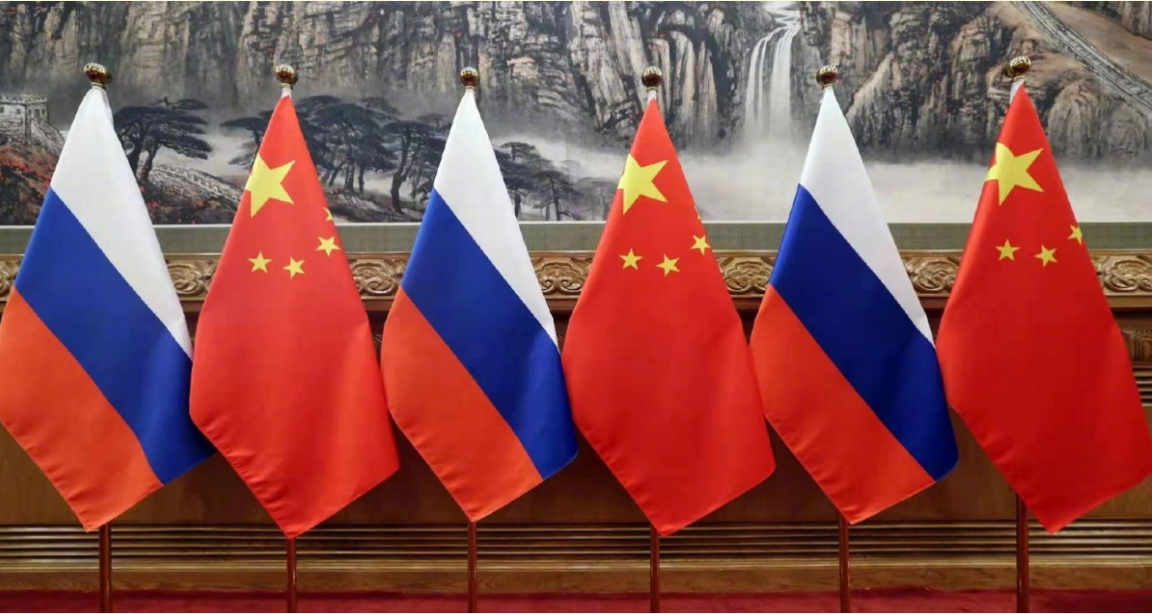
tional environment. After 2022, Russia has to a large degree been ostracized by the European and North American higher education communities. Though applicants from Russia are not formally banned from submitting their applications to schools in the West, these applicants had to reconsider such important issues as tuition costs, visa reliability, banking access and safety of travel.
Meanwhile, China has not been exposed to a similar scale of sanctions, but growing geopolitical tensions, security concerns and visa/screening policy changes in the West reduced Chinese student access to many high-end university programs and labs - especially in the US.
As a result of all these trends, China stands out these days as one of the top foreign educational destinations for many Russians. China-Russia cooperation in building university partnerships is accelerating: Today, the number of active partnership programs, including bachelor's, master's and joint institutions hosted by Chinese universities, has reached 260. Russia has become one of the few countries that have been able to establish a joint university in China. Recent dynamics have allowed Russia to join the top countries in terms of the total number of joint educational projects with China.

Nonetheless, the remaining problems are manifold. One of the most evident is the language barrier. Although more than a hundred thousand Chinese and Russians start learning the language of the other country each year and these numbers are growing by 7 percent annually in China and 12 to 15 percent in Russia, there is still no room for complacency - the two nations have to do much more. The substantive focus of joint programs has to be broadened: Alongside prioritizing STEM

education, more attention should be granted to studies of Chinese and Russian civilizations, culture, literature and history.
At the same time, this particular dimension of China-Russia interaction is one of the most complicated and highly delicate. In the case of China and Russia, it is particularly difficult to overcome the institutional inertia since both nations have long-lasting traditions in education and legitimately take pride in their respective educational systems.
International cooperation in higher education has always been a long-term undertaking that does not promise any fast returns on the initial investment. However, this is an indispensable precondition for securing truly friendly and mutually respectful relations between nations. No matter whether we address interpersonal or international communications, the basic rule is the same: There can be no lasting respect without a deep understanding of the other side. And understanding cannot derive from a sudden and spontaneous epiphany; it comes only through persistent learning.

The author is a member of the Russian International Affairs Council

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



UN warns two-state solution at risk as Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad raises alarm over settlement expansion



Liaquat Ali
Islamabad: The United Nations Security Council was cautioned this week that the prospects of a viable two-state solution are deteriorating rapidly amid escalating violence, accelerating settlement activity, and worsening humanitarian conditions across the occupied Palestinian territories. The Council session reviewed the latest report of the UN Secretary-General on Resolution 2334 and received a briefing from Deputy UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Ramiz Alakbarov, who highlighted a deepening humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza alongside rising tensions and instability in the West Bank. The report reiterated that Israeli settlements in territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, constitute a “flagrant violation” of international law

and have “no legal validity,” reaffirming a long-established position of the international community. Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, told the Council that the situation on the ground reflects a “systemic pattern” of expansion, displacement, and restriction rather than isolated or incidental developments. He warned that the West Bank is experiencing what he described as the “largest and deadliest wave” of settlement expansion in recent history, citing the approval and advancement of thousands of housing units as well as new policy measures that, in his view, risk accelerating dispossession of Palestinian communities. He specifically flagged concerns over administrative mechanisms such as digital land registration systems in Area C, which he said could further entrench land loss. Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad also raised alarm over the E-1 settlement project, warning that it could fragment the West Bank into disconnected enclaves and severely undermine the territorial continuity required for an independent Palestinian state. On Gaza, he noted that despite ongoing ceasefire

arrangements and international diplomatic efforts, the humanitarian situation remains catastrophic, with widespread shortages of food, clean water, and medical supplies affecting the vast majority of the population. Several European members of the Security Council, including France, the United Kingdom, Greece, Latvia, and Denmark, issued a joint statement ahead of the meeting condemning settlement expansion and calling for an immediate halt to all related activities. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in a quarterly report referenced during the session, similarly warned that the expansion of settlements is driving the most severe displacement crisis in the West Bank since 1967. He further cautioned that planned development in the E-1 area could have “existential consequences” for the two-state solution and undermine the territorial integrity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The meeting concluded with renewed appeals from multiple delegations for urgent international action to prevent further erosion of the two-state framework, amid what diplomats described as an increasingly constrained political and territorial environment.

Indonesia, Pakistan reaffirm commitment to deepen bilateral partnership as FM Sugiono meets Ambassador Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri

Celina Ali
Islamabad: Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono received Pakistan’s Ambassador to Indonesia, Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri, in a

courtesy meeting this week aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation across political, economic, and defence domains. During the engagement, both sides re-

viewed the current state of Pakistan–Indonesia relations and reaffirmed their shared commitment to expanding collaboration in key strategic sectors. Discussions also touched on broader regional and global developments, with both parties underlining the importance of coordinated efforts to promote peace, stability, and sustainable development. Foreign Minister Sugiono described Pakistan as a key and trusted partner for Indonesia, reiterating Jakarta’s intention to further deepen ties grounded in mutual trust and shared interests. He expressed confidence that the relationship would continue to progress through sustained diplomatic engagement and practical cooperation. Ambassador Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri expressed appreciation for Indonesia’s warm hospitality and constructive engagement, and conveyed Pakistan’s strong commitment to strengthening its long-standing



friendship with Jakarta. He emphasized Islamabad’s desire to expand cooperation across a wide range of sectors, including trade, defence collaboration, and multilateral coordination.

Both sides agreed to maintain regular high-level exchanges and continue exploring new opportunities for cooperation, with a shared view that the partnership holds significant potential for further growth in the coming years.

Pakistan highlights commitment to chemical safety and disarmament at OPCW forum in Islamabad

Abida Shaheen
Islamabad: Pakistan this week reaffirmed its commitment to the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and to strengthening global cooperation on chemical safety and peaceful scientific use, during a high-level engagement with an Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) delegation in Islamabad. Foreign Secretary Ambassador Amna Baloch underscored Pakistan’s continued support for the objectives of the CWC during a meeting with the visiting delegation, reaffirming Islamabad’s dedication to disarmament and non-proliferation principles. Earlier, the delegation was briefed by

Additional Foreign Secretary and Spokesperson Ambassador Tahir Andrabi, who outlined Pakistan’s national implementation framework for the Convention, as well as its broader priorities in the fields of disarmament, non-proliferation, and constructive multilateral engagement within the OPCW system. The visiting delegation is part of a group of 19 experts and representatives from 16 countries participating in the Forum on the Peaceful Uses of Chemistry, being held in Islamabad from 30 June to 2 July 2026. The forum is jointly organised by Pakistan and the OPCW under Article XI of the Convention.

Officials said the forum brings together international experts and regional delegates to promote cooperation in chemical safety and security, integrated chemicals management, responsible scientific conduct, and the peaceful application of chemistry for development. The discussions in Islamabad highlighted Pakistan’s emphasis on multilateral cooperation and capacity-building in chemical governance, alongside its broader commitment to international arms control frameworks and scientific collaboration for peaceful purposes.



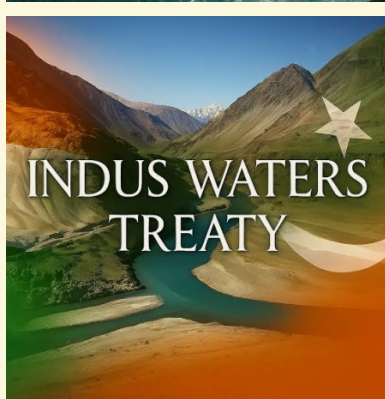
Indus Waters Treaty must be protected from political strain, warns Ali Rehman Malik



Abdullah Jan Islamabad: Philanthropist and Chair of the Institute of Research & Reforms (IRR), Ali Rehman Malik, has stressed the need to safeguard the Indus Waters Treaty



(IWT), describing it as a vital framework that keeps an existential resource outside the cycle of political escalation between states. In a social media statement, Malik said the treaty was designed to ensure that water, a fundamental lifeline for Pakistan, remains insulated from geopolitical tensions. He cautioned that any weakening of trust in such agreements could have long-term consequences for regional stability and resource security. “Water is not just another bargaining chip.



allocations, but the gradual erosion of confidence in long-standing international agreements. Once trust in core resource-sharing arrangements is undermined, he noted, rebuilding it becomes significantly more difficult than maintaining it. Pakistan’s economy remains deeply tied to the Indus river system, which supports a large portion of its agricultural output and rural livelihoods. The irrigation network fed by the Indus Basin is central to crops such as wheat, rice, cotton, and sugarcane, all critical to food security and export earnings. Given this dependence, water governance has long been considered a matter of national strategic importance in Pakistan. Experts and policymakers have repeatedly emphasized that stability in water-sharing arrangements is essential not only for agricultural productivity but also for broader economic resilience. The Indus Waters Treaty, brokered in 1960 between Pakistan and India under World Bank facilitation, has often been cited as one of the most durable water-sharing agreements

in the world, surviving multiple periods of conflict and diplomatic strain between the two neighbours. Malik noted that the treaty’s significance lies in its ability to prevent water from becoming a direct trigger for escalation, particularly during times of heightened political tension. He said maintaining the integrity of such frameworks is essential for preserving predictability in an otherwise volatile regional environment. The IRR chair further emphasized the importance of continuous diplomatic engagement, technical cooperation, and institutional respect for treaty mechanisms. He argued that water security challenges in South Asia require collaboration rather than confrontation, especially in the context of climate variability, glacier melt, and growing population pressures. He added that weakening confidence in established agreements could set a precedent that undermines other regional frameworks as well, making long-term cooperation increasingly difficult. Malik reiterated that the Indus Waters Treaty should be viewed not merely as a legal document, but as a stabilizing pillar for Pakistan’s survival and economic continuity.



Ambassador Irena Genadieva Gancheva bids farewell as Gilani reaffirms commitment to stronger Pakistan-Bulgaria ties

Liaquat Ali
Islamabad: Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani this week reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations with Bulgaria during a farewell meeting with outgoing Ambassador Irena Genadieva Gancheva at Parliament House. The meeting focused on the full spectrum of Pakistan-Bulgaria relations, including parliamentary cooperation, economic engagement, regional de-

velopments, and avenues to expand people-to-people contacts. Chairman Gilani congratulated Ambassador Gancheva on completing her diplomatic assignment in Pakistan and praised her efforts in advancing bilateral cooperation and deepening mutual understanding between the two countries. He described Bulgaria as an important partner of Pakistan in Europe and reiterated that relations are grounded in mutual respect, goodwill, and shared positions on regional and international issues. He said Pakistan remains committed to further expanding engagement with Sofia across

multiple sectors. The Chairman also welcomed Bulgaria's recent milestones, including its full membership of the Schengen Area and adoption of the Euro, and expressed confidence in its continued economic progress. He further reaffirmed Pakistan's support for Bulgaria's aspirations to join the OECD. Highlighting institutional mechanisms, Gilani called for the early convening of the third session of the Pakistan-Bulgaria Inter-Governmental Commission on Economic Cooperation, stressing the untapped potential in trade and investment ties. He noted that Bulgaria has supported



Pakistan's GSP Plus status and expressed optimism for continued cooperation under the European Union's evolving GSP+ framework. Emphasizing parliamentary diplomacy, the Chairman said Friendship Groups in both legislatures have played a valuable role in strengthening ties and called for increased exchanges between parliamentarians to further deepen cooperation. Briefing the envoy on the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC), Gilani highlighted its role in promoting dialogue on peace, security, and development, and reiterated Pakistan's commitment to constructive regional diplomacy.

He also underscored Senate initiatives on women's empowerment, minority rights, and youth engagement, reaffirming that inclusive development remains central to Pakistan's democratic agenda. He paid tribute to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. Ambassador Gancheva appreciated Pakistan's efforts for peace and stability and thanked the Senate leadership for its support during her tenure. Gilani expressed gratitude for the ambassador's services and reaffirmed Pakistan's desire to further strengthen cooperation with Bulgaria and the European Union in education, youth development, women's empowerment, and economic collaboration..

Germany vows to further strengthen cooperation with Pakistan in education, sustainable development

Abdullah Jan
Islamabad: Germany this week reaffirmed its commitment to deepening cooperation with Pakistan across key sectors including education, sustainable development, cultural exchange, and economic engagement. The assurance was conveyed by German Ambassador to Pakistan Ina Lepel during a meeting with Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal in Islamabad. During the meeting, Minister Ahsan Iqbal underscored Pakistan's strong interest in expanding collaboration with Germany in higher education, faculty development, research partnerships, scholarships, and academic exchange programmes aimed at strengthening human capital. He also invited German cooperation in promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan, welcoming Germany's expertise in tourism planning and institutional development. Ambassador Ina Lepel appreciated Pakistan's ongoing reform agenda and development priorities, and reiterated Germany's commitment to further strengthening bilateral cooperation in education, sustainable development, cultural exchanges, and economic cooperation.



Pakistan becomes permanent IOC member as Portugal hosts historic session



global olive industry. He highlighted Pakistan’s rapid progress in olive cultivation, noting that more than seven million olive trees have been planted across 55,669 acres, with production clusters steadily expanding across different regions of the country. The minister also outlined the development of a comprehensive “farm-to-fork” olive value chain, including 51 olive oil extraction units, modern processing facilities, nurseries, weather stations and four IOC-aligned quality laboratories. He added that Pakistan has achieved self-sufficiency in certified olive sapling production. Referring to international recognition,

Rana Tanveer Hussain said Pakistan’s olive oil industry had secured the Silver Award at the New York International Olive Oil Competition last year, reflecting improving quality standards and growing global competitiveness. He expressed the government’s resolve to contribute to sustainable and climate-resilient growth of the global olive sector through strengthened collaboration under the IOC framework. Officials said Pakistan’s permanent membership is expected to enhance technical cooperation, improve export potential, and accelerate the development of the country’s emerging olive industry.



Portugal ambassador to Pakistan H.E. Paulo Miguel Guedes Domingues

Celina Ali
Islamabad: Pakistan this week formally assumed its seat as a permanent member of the International Olive Council (IOC) for the first time during the council’s 123rd session held in Lisbon, Portugal, marking a major milestone for the country’s expanding olive sector. The development follows Pakistan’s accession to the IOC in May 2026, after which it was invited to participate in the Lisbon session alongside 27 other olive-producing member states. Leading the Pakistani delegation, Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain reaffirmed Islamabad’s commitment to the IOC’s objectives and pledged active engagement in advancing the



Pakistan eyes \$1.5 trillion US public procurement market to accelerate tech export growth



Abida Shaheen

Islamabad: Pakistan is intensifying efforts to expand its technology export footprint by enabling local IT companies to compete in the vast United States State, Local and Education (SLED) procurement market, estimated at around \$1.5 trillion, Information Technology and Telecommunication Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja said this week.

The initiative is part of Islamabad’s broader strategy to strengthen foreign exchange earnings by tapping into high-value international public sector contracts, particularly in the United States, which already serves as Pakistan’s largest destination for technology exports.

Addressing the closing ceremony of a government-supported training programme for IT firms in Islamabad, the minister said Pakistani technology companies were being prepared to bid for contracts offered by US state governments, municipalities, public school districts, and higher education institutions. She noted that while Pakistani software firms have already established a presence in global private markets, the government is now focused on unlocking access to public procurement channels in the United States, which collectively comprise tens of thousands of independent purchasing bodies.

“The United States already is our largest export partner. Sixty-two percent of our exports in the tech sector go to the US,” Shaza Fatima Khawaja said, underscoring the scale of existing trade ties and the potential for further expansion. She described the SLED market as a major untapped opportunity, highlighting that it connects Pakistani firms to nearly 90,000 public-sector buyers across the United States, spanning spending on software development, cybersecurity, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and other digital services.

“The opening of this market to about 90,000 buyers, with a value exceeding \$1.5 trillion, represents a significant opportunity for our IT industry to scale up exports,” she added.

According to the minister, 74 Pakistani technology companies have already been trained under a pilot programme aimed at improving their capacity to compete for international public contracts. The government’s investment in the initiative stood at approximately Rs6–7 million (around \$25,000), with early signs of commercial engagement already emerging. She further stated that future public-sector training initiatives would be assessed on outcome-based metrics, including contract wins, revenue generation, and employment creation, rather than participation numbers alone.

Khawaja also announced reforms in evaluation mechanisms for government-

supported tech training programmes, including independent tracer studies conducted six months after completion to track whether participants secured jobs, started businesses, or obtained international work opportunities.

Pakistan’s IT sector has recorded steady

growth in recent years, driven by software development, business process outsourcing, and freelancing. Authorities continue to identify the digital economy as a key pillar for export diversification, aiming to increase earnings by expanding global market access for domestic firms.



‘My dream is broken’: Japan’s tighter visa rules force foreign residents into uncertainty

Covert Report

Tokyo: Stricter immigration and visa regulations in Japan are leaving many foreign entrepreneurs and long-term residents facing uncertainty, as revised rules on business manager visas and rising public concern over immigration reshape the country’s approach to foreign settlement.

The changes come amid growing domestic debate over overtourism, housing costs, and foreign investment pressures, alongside political calls for tighter controls on immigration policy.

One of those affected is Nepalese national Budhathoki Samjhana, a restaurant owner in Tokyo’s Okubo district, who fears she may be forced to leave the country despite building her life and business there over the past decade.

Sitting inside her small Nepali restaurant, surrounded by the aroma of traditional dumplings, she reflected on the difficult reality of her situation.

“I always wanted to become a bridge between Japan and Nepal ... but my dream is broken,” the 38-year-old said. Budhathoki came to Japan in 2016 as a student and spent years saving to open her first restaurant in 2023. She later expanded to multiple outlets and was finally able to reunite with her daughter after a decade of separation, enrolling her in a Japanese school.

Now, however, she fears that new visa requirements could force her to shut down her business and leave the country.

“The biggest problem is the increase in capital requirement to 30 million yen (\$185,000) from 5 million yen (\$30,000),” she said, calling the threshold impossible for many small business owners to meet.

Under revised rules introduced by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in late 2025, holders of business manager visas are required to meet stricter financial and operational conditions, with a transition period of three years to comply.

Authorities say the reforms aim to ensure

that visas are granted to genuinely sustainable business operators, following concerns that the system had been misused by some applicants.

However, critics argue the changes are disproportionately affecting small entrepreneurs, particularly restaurant owners and family-run businesses concentrated in immigrant neighbourhoods such as Okubo, where South Asian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian communities have built vibrant local economies.

Indian restaurant owner Manish Kumar, who has lived in Japan for three decades, is among those reportedly affected. Despite long-term residence and established businesses, he has been informed his visa may not be renewed.

“My children only speak Japanese ... and we’re told to go back to India,” he said, describing growing anxiety within the community.

A petition opposing the reforms has already gathered more than 67,800 signatures, reflecting rising concern among



affected residents and supporters.

The policy shift follows broader government measures aimed at tightening immigration oversight, including a “zero illegal foreign residents” initiative and increased visa fees for certain categories of travellers.

At the same time, Japan continues to face a rapidly ageing population and chronic labour shortages, raising questions about the long-term balance between demographic needs and stricter immigration controls.

Officials have also pointed to a sharp rise in business manager visa holders in recent years, which increased by around 70 percent from 2020 to mid-2025, reaching approximately 46,000.

Government advisors argue that some applicants have used the scheme primarily

as a migration pathway rather than for genuine business purposes, prompting calls for stronger scrutiny and documentation requirements.

Yet experts caution that while tighter rules may curb misuse, they also risk undermining small-scale entrepreneurs and young business owners who contribute to local economies and cultural diversity.

For Budhathoki, the uncertainty is deeply personal. Beyond her business, she worries about her daughter’s future in Japan and the possibility of having to uproot her life once again.

“My heart pounds when I think about the next visa renewal,” she said, voicing fears shared by many in the community as Japan’s immigration landscape continues to shift.



Italy's steel buyers shocked as new EU import quotas upend coil market, reshape supply chains



hours of becoming available, particularly by large trading houses and major European steel processors, leaving smaller buyers with little opportunity to secure imported material from Asian suppliers. Market participants said the announcement has already triggered immediate pricing reactions. Several Asian producers reportedly increased their HRC offers to between €680 and €700 per tonne CFR shortly after the European Commission published the new quota framework, reflecting expectations of tighter market conditions. Trading companies described the revised mechanism as highly complex and said it effectively leaves buyers with few alternatives beyond sourcing steel from European mills. While domestic producers are expected to benefit from stronger pricing power, traders cautioned that downstream industries—including manufacturers of household appliances, automotive components and other steel-intensive products—are unlikely to absorb the anticipated increase in raw material costs without significant pressure on profitability. Industry representatives further warned that many downstream manufacturers have already been implementing production stoppages in response to weaker demand, making additional price increases particularly difficult to sustain.



Ambassador of the European Union to Pakistan H. E. Mr Raimundas Karoblis

Covert Report
Milan: Italian steel coil buyers, importers and industrial end-users this week reacted with alarm to the European Commission's newly unveiled import quota allocations, warning that the tougher trade regime will dramatically reshape supply chains, restrict access to imported steel and drive prices sharply higher across the European market. Industry participants described the revised quota allocations as a "bombshell," saying the measures are far stricter than anticipated and amount to a major shift in the European Union's steel trade policy. Market sources believe the new framework significantly strengthens the position of European steel producers while reducing purchasing flexibility for import-dependent manufacturers. According to buyers, the revised allocation

system is highly fragmented, with several exporting countries receiving sharply reduced quotas. Australia, for example, has been allocated only 11,000 tonnes of hot-rolled coil (HRC) for the quarter—an amount buyers say is insufficient even to fill a single cargo vessel. Meanwhile, Türkiye, historically one of the EU's largest steel suppliers, has seen its quarterly HRC quota cut dramatically from 390,000 tonnes to just 160,000 tonnes. Industry sources also pointed to severe restrictions on Japanese exports, noting that Japan's annual HRC allocation has been limited to 551,000 tonnes while remaining subject to anti-dumping duties of 30 percent. Buyers said the combined measures send a strong signal that the EU is tightening protection for its domestic steel industry. Italian importers warned that the reduced quotas are likely to be exhausted within

Despite concerns over the long-term impact, some large buyers indicated that immediate purchasing activity is likely to remain subdued because inventories remain relatively high. Existing stockpiles are expected to meet demand until around December, meaning planned price increases for September deliveries may struggle to translate into new contracts in the near term. However, market participants expect supply constraints to become more evident during the fourth quarter as inventories decline. European HRC prices are forecast to climb to around €750 per tonne delivered, compared with the current level of approximately €700 per tonne.

Under the European Commission's revised framework, half of the bloc's annual steel import quota of 18.3 million tonnes has been reserved for countries with Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), while the remaining half will remain accessible to all exporting countries, including FTA partners. As a result, FTA countries are expected to retain a comparatively larger share of access to the European market despite the overall average quota reduction of 47 percent.

The European Commission said a significant number of trading partners have provisionally accepted their allocated quotas following negotiations. It added, however, that discussions with trading partners will continue under ongoing Article XXVIII negotiations at the World Trade Organization. Adopted under the EU's urgency procedure, the revised regulation will remain in force until the end of 2026.



Princess of Wales completes 3 Peaks Challenge in 24 hours, highlights cancer recovery and holistic care



High Commissioner of United Kingdom to Pakistan Jane Marriott



Covert Report
London: The Princess of Wales, Catherine, Princess of Wales, this week successfully completed the National Three Peaks Challenge within 24 hours, using the physically demanding endurance feat to raise awareness about the long-term impact of cancer and the importance of holistic approaches to recovery and care. The challenge required summiting the highest peaks in England, Scotland, and Wales — Scafell Pike, Ben Nevis, and Snowdon — within a single day. The event is widely regarded as one of the UK's most demanding outdoor endurance tests, combining continuous trekking, steep ascents, and extensive travel between locations under strict time constraints.

In a detailed Instagram post, the Princess explained that the challenge was not only a physical accomplishment but also a deeply personal reflection on life beyond cancer diagnosis. She described it as an opportunity to “explore life beyond diagnosis and to give something back,” highlighting her intention to use her platform to support broader awareness. The Princess revealed her cancer diagnosis in March 2024 and announced her remission in January 2025. Since then, she has gradually resumed public engagements, with a continued focus on health advocacy, patient wellbeing, and charitable initiatives linked to cancer care. In her message, the Princess emphasized that the impact of cancer extends far beyond physical illness, affecting emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing.



“Cancer doesn’t just affect the body. It changes how you think and feel and profoundly affects every aspect of life.” She noted that patients often face long-term challenges that persist well beyond treatment, including emotional strain, changes in relationships, and difficulties adjusting to normal routines. Her statement highlighted the need for sustained support systems that address not only medical recovery but also mental and emotional rehabilitation. A central theme of her message was support for holistic healthcare, which combines medical treatment with psychological, emotional, and social support. She stressed that recovery is most effective when patients receive care tailored to the full complexity of their experience. This advocacy is closely linked to The Royal Marsden Hospital, a leading cancer treatment and research institution where she has received care and now serves as joint patron of its charity.

She highlighted the importance of initiatives that promote wellbeing services such as counselling, rehabilitation programmes, and patient support networks, which help individuals maintain resilience during and after treatment. The Three Peaks Challenge also supports the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity, with proceeds aimed at enhancing patient care, advancing research, and expanding access to personalised support services. The Princess emphasized that every cancer journey is unique, and healthcare systems must adapt to individual needs. She called for a “whole-person approach” to treatment that supports both physical recovery and emotional healing. Beyond the physical achievement, the message carried a broader reflection on resilience and healing. The Princess de-



Deputy high commissioner of UK to Pakistan H.E. Matt Cannell

scribed recovery as a balance between effort and acceptance, control and trust, and action and reflection. She framed the challenge as a symbol of endurance and renewal, reinforcing the importance of staying grounded and present through difficult health journeys. The initiative has been widely viewed as part of her gradual return to public duties and a continuation of her long-term commitment to cancer awareness, patient wellbeing, and charitable health advocacy.



PRINCESS KATE'S TRIUMPH

NATIONAL THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE

AFTER CANCER RECOVERY: A JOURNEY OF STRENGTH

BEN NEVIS **SCAFELL PIKE** **SNOWDON**

Meloni’s leadership strengthens prospects as Italy advances electoral reform



Liaquat Ali

Rome: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has reinforced her political standing as her government moves forward with a major electoral reform aimed at ensuring stronger and more stable governments, a proposal supporters say could reshape Italy’s political landscape ahead of the next general election. The proposed legislation would award additional parliamentary seats to the coalition receiving the largest share of votes, guaranteeing it a workable governing majority. The Meloni government says the reform is designed to end years of political instability, strengthen governance and allow elected administrations to implement their mandates more effectively. The initiative has also fueled speculation about



Ambassador Ugo Ciarlatani
the new Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan

Meloni’s long-term political future, with analysts suggesting that continued electoral success could position her among the leading contenders for Italy’s presidency once President Sergio Mattarella completes his term in 2029. Meloni recently argued that it should no longer be considered unusual for a centre-right leader to occupy Italy’s highest constitutional office, saying the country’s political landscape has evolved significantly and that all democratic political forces should have an equal opportunity to compete for national leadership. Her remarks have been interpreted by supporters as reflecting the growing strength and mainstream acceptance of Italy’s conservative movement, which has expanded considerably since her party rose from a marginal political force to



lead the country’s governing coalition. Political observers note that, if the governing alliance secures another electoral victory, it would play a significant role in the parliamentary process that elects Italy’s next president. While Meloni has not indicated any intention to seek the presidency herself, analysts believe her growing political influence has naturally prompted discussion about her future role in Italian politics. The government maintains that the proposed electoral reform is not designed to favour any particular party but to ensure that whichever coalition wins the popular vote has the parliamentary strength needed to govern effectively. Officials argue that stronger majorities would

reduce political fragmentation and provide greater continuity in policymaking. The reform is currently under consideration in Parliament and forms part of the Meloni administration’s broader agenda to modernise Italy’s institutional framework and improve political

stability. Supporters argue that the changes could mark a significant step toward more decisive governance while reinforcing democratic accountability through clearer electoral outcomes.

France confirms April–May 2027 dates for presidential election

Newswire

Paris: France this week officially confirmed that its next presidential election will be held on April 18, 2027, with a second-round runoff scheduled for May 2, 2027, after the government formally approved the electoral timetable during a Cabinet meeting. The decision follows consultations between the Interior Ministry and political parties, with the

government opting for the later of two proposed schedules. Officials said the chosen dates were intended to minimise the impact of spring school holidays on voter participation, ensuring that fewer regions would still be on vacation during the decisive second round despite the proximity of the May 1 public holiday. The timetable was approved by President Emmanuel Macron, whose second and final constitutional term concludes on May 14, 2027. Under France’s Constitution, the first round of voting must take place between 20 and 35 days before the end of the incumbent president’s mandate, placing the election within the required legal timeframe. The announcement marks the formal beginning of the country’s presidential election cycle, with political parties already accelerating preparations for one of Europe’s most closely watched electoral contests. The Interior Ministry is expected to publish the official decree calling voters to the polls while also announcing deadlines for voter registration and candidate nominations. Presidential hopefuls must secure at least 500 endorsements from elected officials to qualify for the ballot, and the final list of candidates must be published no later than March 26, 2027, although it may be released earlier. Several prominent political figures have already entered the race. Bruno Retailleau has been selected as the presidential candidate of the conservative Republicans party, while Jean-Luc Mélenchon has confirmed he will represent the hard-left France Unbowed movement. Former prime minister Gabriel Attal is set to contest the election as the candidate of the centrist Renaissance party. Meanwhile, former prime minister Édouard Philippe is preparing to launch his presidential campaign with a major rally in Paris, as attention also focuses on Marine Le Pen, who is awaiting



a court ruling in a case linked to alleged misuse of European Parliament funds. A decision barring her from public office for more than two years could prevent her from contesting a fourth consecutive presidential election and potentially open the way for Jordan Bardella to become the

National Rally’s presidential nominee. With the election calendar now formally established, France’s political parties are expected to intensify campaigning over the coming months as the race to succeed Macron gathers momentum.

