

Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad urges UN Security Council to act as West Bank situation deteriorates Liaquat Ali
Islamabad: Pakistan has sounded the alarm over the rapidly deteriorating situation in the occupied West Bank, urging the international community and the United Nations Security Council to take immediate and concrete measures to protect Palestinians and prevent further escalation in the occupied

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Pakistan, EU reaffirm commitment to democratic values Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and the European Union this week reaffirmed their shared commitment to democratic values, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, while agreeing to further strengthen bilateral cooperation and parliamentary engagement. The understanding was reached during a meeting between Federal Minister

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Pakistan, China discuss global significance of Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: The Chinese Embassy in Pakistan and the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) this week organised a thematic briefing on 'Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building', bringing together senior diplomats, political representatives, Chinese experts, academics, journalists and members of Pakistan's policy community for an extensive discussion on China's governance experience and its broader international significance. A delegation of experts from the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) also participated in the event, which examined China's approach to party building, governance, poverty alleviation, anti-corruption efforts, grassroots mobilisation and international party-to-party exchanges. Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Ziding expressed appreciation for the opportunity to co-host the seminar with the Institute of Regional Studies and thanked President Asif Ali Zardari for his attention to the event and Senate Chairman Yousaf Raza Gilani for attending the gathering. He also expressed gratitude to the Chinese experts who travelled from Beijing to participate in the briefing, as well as representatives of Pakistani political parties, experts, journalists and people from different walks of life for their participation. Ambassador Jiang described the presentations by the Chinese experts as comprehensive and in-depth, saying they had provided valuable insights into Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building and its practical application. He also welcomed the remarks by IRS Chairman Juhar Saleem, saying the joint study and discussion between the Chinese and Pakistani sides was timely and necessary and would promote greater mutual learning and understanding. The ambassador said Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building was profound and wide-ranging and called for continuous efforts to study, understand and apply its principles. He stressed that the process should also involve reflection on individual responsibilities, institutional performance and the broader objectives of governance. Jiang said the experience of the Communist Party of China demonstrated the importance of placing people at the centre of development and ensuring that economic and social progress translated into tangible improvements in people's lives. He said Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building emphasised remaining true to the original aspiration and founding mission of the CPC, which he described as seeking happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation.

Referring to China's campaign to eliminate absolute poverty, the ambassador highlighted President Xi Jinping's extensive field research and engagement with poverty-stricken areas. He said Xi had undertaken more than 50 field research visits on poverty alleviation, covering all 14 contiguous poor regions of China, and had developed the concept of targeted poverty alleviation on the basis of extensive investigations. According to Jiang, the campaign ultimately enabled China to eliminate absolute poverty and build a moderately prosperous society in all respects, before embarking on a new phase of national rejuvenation and Chinese modernisation. He said more than three million first Party secretaries and resident cadres, nearly two million township officials and millions of village-level cadres had participated in the nation's effort. The ambassador described the campaign as an example of the CPC's ability to mobilise resources and institutions to accomplish major national objectives. He said the experience reflected what he termed two core principles of Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building: the leadership of the CPC as the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the importance of upholding the centralised and unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee. Jiang argued that the CPC's emphasis on people's well-being had contributed to its continuing popular support and its role as what he described as a reliable backbone of Chinese society. He added that China's development objectives extended beyond domestic prosperity, saying the CPC also sought progress for humanity and the common good of the international community. Turning to Pakistan-China relations, the ambassador said this approach was reflected in China's engagement with Pakistan and its emphasis on development and people's livelihoods. He said President Xi Jinping had consistently attached importance to Pakistan's national development and the welfare of its people and had worked with Pakistan leadership to define a new direction for the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership. Jiang said Xi had emphasised that China's friendly policy towards Pakistan was directed towards the entire Pakistani people and that the planning and implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) should take into account all regions of Pakistan so that development benefits could reach people across the country. According to the ambassador, CPEC has so far brought more than \$2.9 billion in direct investment, created over 260,000 jobs, added more than 8,000 megawatts of power-generation capacity, constructed 510 kilometres of highways and developed 866 kilometres of core national power transmission networks. He described CPEC as an important contributor to Pakistan's socio-economic development and a

significant example of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. Jiang said China remained ready to work with Pakistan to advance both major strategic projects and smaller livelihood-oriented initiatives aimed at improving public welfare and promoting common prosperity. The ambassador also highlighted the role of Chinese private enterprises in Pakistan, recalling a recent visit to an industrial park in Faisalabad. He said the delegation learned that 39 Chinese private companies were operating in the industrial park, with most of them running soundly and profitably in what he described as an enabling business environment. He said Chinese companies were also contributing to local communities, citing five ceramic enterprises that, according to him, collectively pay nearly 520 million in annual taxes and provide more than 5,000 jobs. Jiang described these activities as examples of how bilateral cooperation could generate tangible benefits for both countries and their peoples. The ambassador said economic cooperation should be complemented by greater mutual learning in party governance and state administration, particularly in the international system enter a period of profound change and political parties around the world face common governance challenges. He said Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building provided a global perspective by linking the CPC's efforts to strengthen itself with broader questions concerning human development and governance. Jiang argued that the experience could offer useful references for political parties, particularly in developing countries, seeking to strengthen their organisations and explore independent paths towards modernisation. He stressed that political parties should strengthen mutual trust, communication and cooperation while respecting differences and national circumstances. The ambassador also highlighted growing exchanges between the CPC and Pakistani political parties, noting that the two sides had signed a memorandum of understanding on inter-party exchanges and cooperation, established a political party consultation mechanism for CPEC and organised the China-Pakistan Political Parties Forum. He said China regularly invited representatives of Pakistani political parties to visit the country for study tours and conferences and continued to support small-scale livelihood projects in Pakistan through initiatives such as the Silk Road Workshop. Jiang noted that 2026 marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China, describing the milestone as an opportunity to further consolidate bilateral relations. He said a senior delegation of Pakistani political parties had visited China's Hubei Province in May, contributing to efforts to expand local cooperation between the two countries. He added that the second China-Pakistan Political Parties Forum and a meeting of the Political Party Consultation Mechanism for CPEC were also held in May, with leaders from 12 major Pakistani political parties participating. According to the ambassador, the two sides reached broad consensus on strengthening traditional friendship and advancing practical cooperation. Jiang said the Islamabad seminar represented another step towards deepening exchanges on party building and governance between China and Pakistan. He said China was ready to work with political parties across Pakistan to implement the important understandings reached by the leadership of the two countries and expand what he termed 'political party-plus' cooperation. He expressed confidence that stronger inter-party exchanges and mutual learning would provide additional momentum to the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and contribute to building a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era. During the seminar, Professor Zheng Huan of the Party Building Department of the Party School of



the CPC Central Committee delivered a presentation examining the development and international significance of Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building. He said the concept, developed following the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, provided guidance for comprehensive and rigorous Party self-governance, strengthening Party organisations and maintaining the long-term vitality of the CPC. Zheng outlined five major contributions that he said the concept offered to political parties confronting governance and development challenges. The first related to long-term national development strategies and stable development policies that extend beyond electoral cycles. He highlighted China's economic progress under the 14th Five-Year Plan and referred to major milestones in the country's GDP growth. He also highlighted China's targeted poverty alleviation campaign, under which nearly 100 million rural residents were lifted out of absolute poverty over an eight-year period. The second contribution concerned strengthening public confidence through citizen-centred governance. Zheng said the CPC sought to represent the broader public rather than special interest groups, privileged status or powerful cliques, while placing public welfare at the centre of governance. The third area concerned the CPC's extensive grassroots organisational structure. He said the CPC had more than 101 million members and approximately 543 million primary-level Party organisations across China. According to Zheng, this organisational network had facilitated large-scale mobilisation for local development, poverty alleviation, disaster relief and other national priorities. The fourth contribution highlighted China's approach to combating corruption through a comprehensive strategy aimed at making officials "not dare," "not able" and "not want" to engage in corrupt practices. Zheng said that between the 18th and 20th CPC National Congresses, anti-corruption authorities handled more than 4.64 million cases and disciplined around 4.57 million individuals, including

553 provincial- and ministerial-level officials. He said institutional oversight, stronger enforcement and ideological and moral education were being used to close loopholes, prevent rent-seeking and strengthen integrity in public administration. The fifth contribution was described as a new approach to international party-to-party relations based on non-interference, mutual respect and inclusive dialogue. Zheng said the CPC maintained regular exchanges with more than 700 political parties and organisations in over 170 countries, describing such engagement as an important mechanism for mutual learning and international cooperation. He also outlined a three-step approach to strengthening international understanding and academic research on Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building. The first step, he said, was to deepen theoretical research into its Marxist origins, cultural foundations and practical experience in comprehensive and rigorous Party self-governance. The second involved translating political concepts into accessible international language and connecting them with shared values to promote greater understanding. The third called for increased cooperation among governments, media organisations and think tanks to establish dialogue platforms and jointly address common global governance challenges. IRS Chairman Juhar Saleem, representatives of various Pakistani political parties, experts and members of the journalist community also participated in the event. Participants discussed China's development experience, governance model and party-building practices, while appreciating China's economic and social development and its efforts to promote cooperation with Pakistan. The seminar provided another platform for expanding institutional and political exchanges between Pakistan and China at a time when the two countries are celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations and seeking to further deepen their all-weather strategic cooperative partnership.

Pakistan briefs Canada on Makkah defence agreement, regional situation



Celina Ali

Islamabad: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar this week briefed Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand on the newly signed Makkah Joint Defence Agreement between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, while the two sides also exchanged views on the rapidly evolving regional situation, including developments linked to the ongoing US-Iran conflict. The telephone conversation formed part of Pakistan's diplomatic outreach to international partners following the signing of the landmark agreement, which has drawn attention amid heightened tensions across the Middle East. According to the Foreign Office, Dar shared with Anand the essence of the Makkah agreement and conveyed the joint resolve of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye to contribute to regional peace, stability and security. The agreement was signed in Saudi Arabia following a high-level meeting involving Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Under the arrangement, an attack against any one of the three participating countries would be considered an attack against all three, establishing a framework for collective defence and closer security cooperation. For Pakistan, the agreement represents a significant development in its strategic engagement with two key partners, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Islamabad has, however, repeatedly emphasised that the arrangement is defensive rather than confrontational in character. Dar has clarified that the Makkah agreement

is not directed against any country and is intended to strengthen collective efforts for peace, stability and prosperity in the wider region. He has also stressed that the agreement does not replace or invalidate existing bilateral or multilateral arrangements involving Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, nor does it affect their existing commitments with other countries or international organisations. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia already maintain a bilateral Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, while Türkiye remains a member of NATO. The Makkah framework also leaves room for other countries in the region to join, provided they adhere to its fundamental principles and commit themselves to resolving differences through mutual respect, cooperation and peaceful means. During his conversation with Anand, Dar and the Canadian foreign minister also discussed the evolving situation in the region, particularly the US-Iran conflict and its wider implications for peace and security. The conflict has heightened concerns over maritime security, energy supplies, regional stability and international trade, particularly because of disruptions affecting strategically important waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea. Pakistan has consistently called for restraint, dialogue and peaceful resolution of regional disputes, while maintaining close diplomatic engagement with countries affected by the rapidly changing security environment. The discussion with Anand also provided an opportunity for Islamabad to explain the objectives and scope of the Makkah agreement to Canada, an important Western partner with which Pakistan maintains longstanding diplomatic relations. Dar thanked Anand for her recent visit to Pakistan, which had provided an opportunity for the two countries to discuss ways of expanding bilateral engagement. Pakistan and Canada have been working to strengthen their economic relationship, particularly through greater cooperation in trade and investment, while maintaining dialogue on regional and international issues. The two foreign ministers agreed to remain closely engaged on matters of shared interest, underscoring the importance of continued diplomatic coordination amid growing geopolitical uncertainty.



Natasha Daultana warns of PPP movement over 'rigging' in AJK polls

Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) South Punjab Secretary General and Member National Assembly Natasha Daultana this week warned that the party could launch a political movement if its complaints regarding alleged rigging in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir elections are not properly heard and addressed by the Election Commission. Speaking in an interview, Daultana said the PPP had filed applications before the Election Commission against alleged irregularities in the AJK electoral process and was awaiting appropriate relief. She said the party had deliberately approached the Election Commission first because it believed in constitutional institutions and democratic procedures and wanted its grievances to be resolved through established legal and institutional mechanisms. However, Daultana cautioned that if the party's applications were not heard and addressed in accordance with the requirements of justice, the PPP would be compelled to consider launching a movement while exercising its constitutional and democratic rights. She said PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had directed the party to continue its struggle to safeguard the people's mandate and ensure that their votes were respected. According to Daultana, protecting the people's vote and electoral mandate remained a fundamental priority for the PPP, which would continue to pursue every available constitutional and democratic avenue.



She said the party expected the Election Commission to examine its applications on merit and provide appropriate relief if the allegations were substantiated. Daultana further said that if the applications were not dealt with fairly, the PPP would determine its future course of action after assessing the circumstances and developments. She reiterated that the party remained committed to constitutional institutions and democratic processes, but would not remain silent if its concerns over the electoral process continued to go unaddressed.

China-backed farm mechanisation under CPEC gathers pace as Pakistan receives 258 advanced agricultural machines

Newswire

Islamabad: Pakistan has taken another significant step in deepening agricultural cooperation with China under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), receiving 258 advanced agricultural machines and irrigation systems aimed at modernising farming practices, boosting productivity and accelerating the transition towards climate-resilient agriculture.

The latest shipment, provided under the CPEC agricultural cooperation framework, underscores the expanding scope of Pakistan-China collaboration beyond infrastructure into high-value sectors such as agriculture, biotechnology, digital farming and food security.

According to official documents on Friday afternoon, the machinery has been received and assembled by the Agricultural Engineering Institute of the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) at the National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC) in Islamabad before being formally inaugurated and distributed among PARC and provincial governments for demonstration, testing and large-scale adoption.

The equipment package consists of nine categories of modern agricultural machinery designed to address multiple stages of crop production and irrigation. It includes 40 tractors, 20 rotary tillers, 30 rotary tillage fertiliser drills, 40 crawler-type rice-wheat combine harvesters, eight corn harvesters, 40 inter-tillage weeders, 40 trimmers, 20 hose-reel irrigation systems and 20 photovoltaic water-pumping systems.

The machinery has been distributed across Pakistan to maximise its outreach and demonstration potential. Punjab has received 75 units, Sindh 45, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 38, Balochistan 36, while PARC has retained 64 units for research, technology validation and farmer

training.

The initiative forms part of the Prime Minister's Agriculture Modernisation Initiative, which seeks to transform Pakistan's agriculture into a technology-driven, climate-smart and export-oriented sector capable of improving food security while increasing farm incomes.

Officials believe the introduction of Chinese agricultural machinery will help farmers reduce production costs, improve operational efficiency, increase crop yields and promote sustainable farming practices amid growing climate challenges.

The mechanisation programme is complemented by broader policy reforms introduced this year, including the National Agricultural Biotechnology Policy 2026 and National Seed Policy 2026, both of which aim to strengthen biotechnology research, improve crop genetics, commercialise high-yield seed varieties and enhance farmers' access to climate-resilient technologies.

A major pillar of the Pakistan-China agricultural partnership is the growing institutional collaboration between PARC and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS), one of China's leading agricultural research organisations.

Earlier this year, the federal government granted in-principle approval to restructure PARC on the model of CAAS, signalling Islamabad's intention to adopt China's research-based approach towards agricultural development. A dedicated working group has already been constituted to oversee the institutional transformation.

Under the restructuring plan, five specialised Centres of Excellence will be established at NARC to focus on genome-based crop research, livestock genetics and disease management, climate-smart land and water management, artificial intelligence applications in

agriculture, and food processing and value addition.

Another flagship component of the collaboration is the proposed Centre of Excellence for Advanced Agricultural Mechanisation and Digital Agriculture, to be developed jointly by PARC and CAAS. The facility is expected to become Pakistan's premier research hub for precision agriculture, artificial intelligence, robotics, drones, Internet of Things (IoT)-based farming systems and climate-smart agricultural machinery, facilitating technology adaptation, testing, commercialisation and farmer outreach.

Officials say the broader mechanisation agenda also includes drafting Pakistan's first National Agricultural Mechanisation Policy, promoting domestic manufacturing of advanced farm equipment, establishing national machinery testing and certification systems, strengthening post-harvest mechanisation and expanding public-private Custom Hiring Centres to improve farmers' access to modern machinery.

The initiative is also being supported through extensive human resource development under another flagship Pakistan-China cooperation programme.

Under the government's plan to train 1,000 Pakistani agricultural graduates in China, 885 participants have already completed specialised training at leading Chinese institutions, while the remaining 115 are expected to depart shortly, completing the programme.

The graduates are receiving training in nine priority disciplines, including crop breeding and genomics, aquaculture, seed production, livestock breeding, disease surveillance, agricultural mechanisation, high-efficiency irrigation systems, artificial intelligence, drones and IoT-based farming technologies.



Upon returning to Pakistan, the graduates will serve as master trainers responsible for transferring Chinese expertise to farmers, researchers, extension departments and educational institutions, accelerating the adoption of hybrid seeds, precision agriculture, water-saving technologies and value-added agricultural production across the country.

Officials view the combined package of advanced machinery, institutional reforms and technology transfer as one of the most comprehensive China-supported agricultural modernisation efforts launched under CPEC, reflecting the growing strategic emphasis both countries are placing on food security, agricultural innovation and sustainable rural development.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governor calls for deeper China ties, greater Chinese investment in province

Newswire

Peshawar: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi this week called for further expansion of Pakistan-China cooperation, particularly in trade, investment, education, tourism, technology and youth exchanges, describing the bilateral relationship as a time-tested friendship that had remained steadfast for decades.

Addressing a ceremony at the Governor House in Peshawar to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations and unveil a new Urdu anthem celebrating the friendship, Kundi said Pakistan and China had consistently stood by each other and expressed confidence that the relationship would continue to deepen in the years ahead.

The event, organised in connection with the 75th anniversary celebrations, also featured the launch of a new Urdu anthem titled "China Pakistan", produced by China Window and PTV Peshawar. The initiative was presented as another effort to promote people-to-people contacts and strengthen cultural understanding between the two countries.

The ceremony was attended by China Window founder Amjad Aziz Malik, former world squash champion Qamar Zaman, senior journalist Arshad Aziz Malik, China Culture Centre Adviser Bai Jie, Chinese representative Chen Tiantian, officials of the Chinese Embassy, recipients of Presidential Awards, sports personalities, students and other distinguished guests.

Students of Peshawar Model School also presented a tableau based on the national anthem, adding a cultural dimension to the ceremony and highlighting the role of younger generations in carrying forward the Pakistan-China friendship.

Kundi said China had remained Pakistan's trusted partner through difficult periods and had consistently supported the country in times of need. He said the long-standing relationship had evolved beyond traditional diplomatic ties and now encompassed economic, technological, cultural, educational and people-to-people cooperation.

The governor particularly highlighted the economic potential of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, saying the province possessed vast mineral resources, significant tourism opportunities and a strategically

important geographical location that could provide new avenues for cooperation with Chinese businesses and institutions.

He called for intensified efforts to attract Chinese investment to the province, particularly in areas where KP possessed comparative advantages.

Kundi said greater Chinese participation in the province's mining, tourism, trade, technology and other productive sectors could contribute to local economic development while creating employment opportunities for the province's young population.

He also urged the relevant authorities to promote Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a destination for Chinese tourists, saying the province's mountains, valleys, cultural heritage and historical sites offered considerable potential for tourism cooperation.

The governor said Chinese tourists should be introduced to the province's natural beauty and rich cultural heritage through targeted initiatives designed to enhance tourism links between the two countries.

He appreciated the role being played by China Window in promoting cultural understanding and people-to-people contacts between Pakistan and China, assuring the organisation of the Governor House's full support for initiatives aimed at further strengthening the relationship.

Kundi said information technology, trade and cultural exchanges would become increasingly important pillars of Pakistan-China relations in the future. He also called for greater opportunities for young people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to benefit from Pakistan-China cooperation.

In this regard, he stressed the need to increase scholarships for KP students in Chinese universities and educational institutions and called for expanded opportunities in education, sports and employment.

He said closer interaction between Pakistani and Chinese youth could help create a stronger foundation for the bilateral relationship by enabling young people from both countries to understand each other's societies, cultures and aspirations.

The governor also highlighted the importance of sports diplomacy, saying sporting exchanges could help project a positive image of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while simultaneously creating opportunities



for greater interaction between Pakistani and Chinese communities.

He proposed holding Dragon Boat competitions at Khanpur Dam next year as a means of promoting sports and cultural cooperation between Pakistan and China.

The proposal, he said, could provide an opportunity to introduce a popular Chinese sporting tradition in Pakistan while encouraging greater interaction among athletes and sports organisations from the two countries.

Kundi also welcomed Chinese investors to explore investment opportunities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, assuring them of support and cooperation.

He said the province could offer investment opportunities in sectors ranging from minerals and tourism to technology and trade, and stressed that stronger economic engagement should complement the existing political and diplomatic relationship between

Pakistan and China.

The governor's remarks came as Pakistan and China mark seven and a half decades of diplomatic ties, with both countries seeking to broaden their longstanding relationship through economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, technological collaboration and greater people-to-people connectivity.

Pakistan-China cultural ties deepen through language, heritage, Silk Road cooperation

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and China are moving to deepen their longstanding all-weather strategic partnership through expanded cultural exchanges, language learning and cooperation in the preservation of shared Silk Road heritage, with officials from both countries stressing that people-to-people ties remain a key pillar of bilateral relations.

The emphasis on cultural diplomacy came as Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Aunangzeb Khan Khichi attended the opening ceremony of a Chinese Language and Chinese Culture Experience Course at the Department of Archaeology and Museums (DoAM) in Islamabad.

Held under the theme "The Language of the Eastern Silk Road – Bridging China and Pakistan, Celebrating Shared Cultural Splendor", the four-day programme is designed to bring young Pakistanis and Chinese participants closer through language, cultural learning and hands-on exposure to traditional Chinese arts and customs.

Addressing the ceremony, Khichi described Pakistan-China relations as an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, recalling the widely used description of the friendship as being "higher than the mountains, deeper than the oceans, and sweeter than honey."

He said the bilateral relationship had expanded significantly over the decades, encompassing political cooperation, economic engagement, infrastructure development and major initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). However, he stressed that the most enduring foundation of the relationship was the interaction between the peoples of the two countries.

The minister said cultural exchange could give greater depth to the strategic partnership by allowing younger generations to understand not only each other's languages but also their histories, traditions and ways of life.

"Language is a gateway to understanding the national character and culture of a country," he said, describing the Chinese language and culture course as an important long-term platform for strengthening contacts between Pakistani and Chinese youth.

The programme introduces participants to basic Chinese greetings, self-introductions, numbers and everyday expressions, enabling them to communicate more effectively with Chinese counterparts. Organisers said the initiative was intended to go beyond conventional classroom-based language instruction by incorporating practical cultural experiences.

Participants will also be introduced to Chinese calligraphy, traditional festivals, cuisine and other aspects of Chinese cultural life.

Khichi said such immersive activities could help young Pakistanis develop a more meaningful appreciation of China's history and cultural diversity while encouraging Chinese participants to learn more about Pakistan's own heritage.

"Culture unites hearts," he said, adding that cultural programmes could foster mutual respect, understanding and friendships that continued long after the completion of formal programmes.

The minister appreciated the Embassy of China in Pakistan, the Department of Archaeology and Museums and instructors involved in organising the course. He encouraged participating students and young people to take full advantage of the opportunity and contribute to strengthening the people-to-people dimension of Pakistan-China relations.

The ceremony also highlighted the growing role of heritage preservation in bilateral cultural cooperation.

Cultural Counsellor of the Embassy of China in Pakistan Chen Peng said the two countries possessed deep historical and cultural connections, with the ancient Silk Road having served as an important bridge between the civilisations of China and the region now comprising Pakistan.

He particularly drew attention to historical connections between Gandhara and Dunhuang, two important centres of cultural interaction along the ancient Silk Road. Chen said Gandhara art represented a remarkable convergence of Eastern and Western civilisations, while the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang demonstrated how artistic traditions from different cultures travelled, interacted and evolved along the Silk Road.

The Chinese diplomat said the historical links provided a strong foundation for contemporary cooperation in archaeology, museum management and cultural heritage conservation.

He pointed to the 2023 exhibition of 173 Pakistani cultural relics at the Forbidden City in Beijing, describing it as the largest Gandhara art exhibition held to date.

The exhibition provided Chinese audiences with an opportunity to explore the historical and artistic legacy of Gandhara and demonstrated the potential of cultural heritage to deepen mutual understanding between Pakistan and China.

Chen also highlighted cooperation between DoAM and Peking University, including plans to establish a joint laboratory focusing on the preservation of the cultural heritage of Taxila.

He said China was prepared to share its experience and technologies in cultural heritage protection with Pakistani institutions while respecting Pakistan's cultural

traditions and learning from Pakistan's own experience.

According to Chen, China had accumulated extensive expertise in conserving cave temples, earthen archaeological sites and stone cultural heritage. Chinese institutions were willing to work with Pakistani experts in areas such as three-dimensional scanning, digital modelling and the digital preservation of museum collections.

Such cooperation, he said, could help Pakistan apply modern technologies to document and safeguard its archaeological heritage for future generations.

Chen also referred to the "Gandhara Guardians" initiative, jointly launched by Chinese and Pakistani scholars, as an example of cooperation that combines education, academic engagement and community participation to promote the protection of historical sites.

He expressed hope that archaeological and cultural heritage institutions in the two countries would further expand cooperation in joint excavations, conservation and restoration, heritage digitisation, academic exchanges and the nomination and management of World Heritage sites.

Director General DoAM Syeda Tanzeela Sabhat said the department was committed to expanding cultural exchanges with China and regarded the language and culture programme as an opportunity to connect Pakistani and Chinese participants through shared learning.

She said initiatives of this nature could contribute to greater mutual understanding and stronger people-to-people relations, particularly among younger generations.

The course is being organised by the China Cultural Centre in Pakistan and DoAM, with the Pakistan-China Cultural and Economic Promotion Association serving as co-organiser.

Being held from August 10 to 13, the programme has brought together around 50 Chinese and Pakistani guests, students and officials and comprises six sessions covering Chinese language, calligraphy, traditional festivals, cuisine and other cultural dimensions.

The initiative reflects a broader effort to complement Pakistan-China economic and strategic cooperation with stronger educational and cultural links.

The organisers said the ultimate objective was to establish a sustained platform for interaction between Chinese and Pakistani youth rather than limiting cultural exchange to individual events.

The opening ceremony concluded with the formal launch of the course and an exchange of commemorative plaques between the Chinese and Pakistani sides, marking another step towards expanding the cultural and heritage dimension of the Pakistan-China partnership.



President Zardari receives Italy's new envoy, Ambassador Ugo Ciarlatani, calls for deeper trade and investment ties

Celina Ali

Islamabad: President Asif Ali Zardari this week received the credentials of Italy's Ambassador-designate Ugo Ciarlatani at Aiwan-e-Sadr, calling for further expansion of Pakistan-Italy relations with particular emphasis on trade, investment, diplomatic cooperation and stronger people-to-people links. Welcoming the Italian envoy, President Zardari expressed confidence that Ciarlatani's tenure would contribute to consolidating the longstanding friendship between Islamabad and Rome and opening new avenues of cooperation.

The meeting came at a time when Pakistan and Italy are seeking to build greater economic substance into their bilateral relationship. While the two countries have maintained cordial diplomatic relations for decades, trade, investment, migration and the large Pakistani community in Italy have increasingly emerged as important pillars of the partnership.

President Zardari specifically highlighted the steady growth in bilateral economic ties, noting that trade between Pakistan and Italy had crossed the \$1 billion mark. He stressed the importance of maintaining this momentum and identifying additional opportunities for businesses and investors on both sides.

Official Pakistani figures show that the economic relationship has in fact developed considerably in recent years. Bilateral trade reached about \$1.46 billion in fiscal year 2024-25, while Pakistan recorded a trade surplus of around \$816 million. Pakistani exports to Italy stood at approximately \$1.14 billion, making Italy one of Pakistan's significant export destinations. Textiles remain a major component of Pakistani exports to the Italian market.

The figures underline the considerable potential for further economic engagement. Pakistan has sought greater access to European markets while Italian companies have continued to show interest in opportunities in Pakistan, particularly in

The relationship between Pakistan and Italy is not confined to commerce. The two countries have maintained diplomatic relations for more than seven decades, with cooperation extending to political, economic, cultural, educational and international issues.

Bilateral consultations between the two countries have covered a broad range of areas, including trade and investment, development cooperation, culture, higher education and cooperation within the United Nations framework. Pakistan also values Italy's role in European institutions and international diplomacy. During his meeting with Ambassador Ciarlatani, President Zardari specifically appreciated Rome's support for Pakistan's candidature for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2025-26 term.

The reference to Italy's support at the UN underscores the political dimension of the relationship. For Pakistan, maintaining constructive relations with influential European countries remains important as Islamabad seeks greater diplomatic cooperation on multilateral issues.

President Zardari also welcomed the signing of an agreement between Pakistan and Italy abolishing visa requirements for holders of diplomatic passports.

The agreement was signed in Rome in June 2026 by Pakistan's Ambassador to Italy Ali Javed and Italian Secretary General of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Riccardo Guariglia. It removes a procedural hurdle for official travel by diplomatic passport holders and is intended to facilitate exchanges between senior officials of the two countries.

Although the arrangement applies specifically to diplomatic passport holders and does not constitute a general visa-free travel agreement, it carries diplomatic significance. Easier official travel can facilitate consultations, government-to-government contacts and high-level visits, particularly as both countries seek to broaden their bilateral agenda.

The agreement also fits into a wider effort to strengthen institutional links between Islamabad and Rome.

Another major component of Pakistan-Italy relations is the large Pakistani community residing in Italy.



sectors where Italian expertise, technology and investment can complement Pakistan's industrial and development needs. For Islamabad, Italy is also important within the broader European context. Italy is regarded by Pakistan as a key political and economic partner within the European Union, giving bilateral relations significance beyond the volume of direct trade.

President Zardari highlighted the community's role as a bridge between the two countries, recognising its contribution to strengthening people-to-people contacts and maintaining social and economic links between Pakistan and Italy. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry has described Italy as home to the country's largest Pakistani diaspora in the European



Union, with the community numbering around 300,000. The diaspora also makes a substantial contribution through remittances. Pakistani official figures show remittances from Italy reaching approximately \$1.121 billion in 2024.

The community gives the bilateral relationship a distinctive human dimension. Pakistanis living and working in Italy maintain close links with their families and communities in Pakistan while contributing to Italy's economy and society. Their presence has also created networks that facilitate business, cultural exchanges and educational links between the two countries.

For Islamabad, the diaspora is consequently more than a source of remittances. It is increasingly viewed as an important instrument of people-to-people diplomacy.

Despite the growth in bilateral trade, officials on both sides see considerable room for expansion.

Pakistan's exports to Italy have traditionally been dominated by textiles and other manufactured goods, but Islamabad has increasingly sought to diversify its export base and encourage Italian investment in sectors with higher value addition.

Italian expertise could potentially contribute to Pakistan's industrial development, machinery, engineering, renewable energy, agriculture, food processing, infrastructure, technology and other sectors.

The challenge, however, is to convert the existing goodwill into sustained investment and broader commercial partnerships. Trade figures show that a foundation already exists, but a deeper relationship would require stronger business-to-business contacts, improved market access, investment facilitation and greater awareness among companies on both sides.

The Pakistani government has therefore continued to emphasise trade and investment as central elements of its engagement with Italy.

For Ambassador Ciarlatani, the presentation of credentials marks the formal beginning of a new diplomatic assignment at a potentially important moment in Pakistan-Italy relations. His tenure will come against the backdrop of growing

bilateral trade, a sizeable Pakistani community in Italy, expanding official contacts and a recent agreement facilitating diplomatic travel.

President Zardari's message was therefore broader than a routine welcome to a newly appointed envoy. By placing trade, investment, the diaspora, multilateral cooperation and diplomatic facilitation at the centre of the discussion, he effectively outlined the areas in which Pakistan wants the relationship to advance.

The emphasis on economics is particularly significant. With bilateral trade already above the billion-dollar threshold and Pakistan enjoying a sizeable export surplus, the next objective is likely to be qualitative as well as quantitative — attracting greater Italian investment, diversifying exports and building partnerships that can generate technology transfer and industrial cooperation.

At the same time, the strong human connection provided by the Pakistani community offers an additional foundation for the relationship.

As Islamabad and Rome look towards the next phase of their partnership, the task will be to translate longstanding political goodwill into a broader and more commercially ambitious relationship.

The credentials ceremony at Aiwan-e-Sadr thus provided an opportunity to reaffirm a relationship that has evolved well beyond traditional diplomacy. For Pakistan, Italy represents an important European partner, a major destination for Pakistani exports and home to a substantial Pakistani community. For Italy, Pakistan offers a large market, a strategic South Asian partner and growing opportunities for economic engagement.



Germany's 'China Shock 2.0' blame counterproductive

Global Times

What Washington truly seeks is by no means "reducing miscalculations," but rather to keep China's nuclear forces firmly under its control. Some analysts believe this is an attempt to probe military secrets regarding China's nuclear weapons development by extending the "notification period." Guided by its own defensive nuclear strategy, China needs no one's "permission slip."

Yet another political farce of "a thief crying 'stop thief'" has taken the stage. On Tuesday local time, the US rallied 40 countries to concoct a so-called joint statement on "notifications of ballistic missile launches" targeting China as well as a separate statement. Pointing directly at China's lawful ballistic missile test conducted over the open waters of the Pacific Ocean last month, the statement claimed that China's actions were "incompatible with the responsibilities" and "undermined global stability and security." Meanwhile, in stark contrast, the document painted the US - the country with the highest military spending and the most wars waged in the world - as a "positive role model," touting its "military trans-

parency" to explain why "the US approach to its missile testing and space launch activity does not generate the concerns that China's approach has."

It seems those in Washington who drafted this "statement" were well aware that the US itself conducts intercontinental ballistic missile tests more frequently than any other country. Why else would they seize the opportunity of fabricating this bogus declaration to whitewash the US' own record? While the statement claims 41 signatories, it had only a single author: Washington. Furthermore, these 41 countries represent barely one-fifth of the UN's 193 member states and roughly 17 percent of the global population. Most of them neither test ballistic missiles nor are affected by China's launches; they were brought in simply to act as rubber-stamp extras. This is entirely a ragtag assembly staged by the US.

The statement relies heavily on the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOC), accusing China of failing to provide advance warnings according to "standard practices." Yet China is not a

party to the HCOC. Moreover, the HCOC is a voluntary political document, not a legally binding international treaty. In practice, even among its signatories, there are numerous instances of failing to fully implement its notification clauses. Acting out of a responsible attitude, China took prudent and reasonable measures by issuing advance diplomatic notifications to relevant parties, including the US. These were goodwill gestures aimed precisely at ensuring that the test would not harm the interests of any country.

When it comes to launch notification mechanisms, there is simply no "universal standard" observed by most nations. The "high-standard notifications" that Washington self-righteously boasts about are primarily bilateral arrangements between the US and Russia, designed solely to serve the two countries' strategic stability rather than universal notifications for all affected countries. In 2015, when the US Navy conducted a test launch of a Trident missile from a ballistic submarine off the coast of Southern California, vague advance notifications triggered widespread panic and speculation both domestically and internationally. We must not forget the South Pacific has long been viewed by the US as a dumping ground for nuclear tests. To this day, the Marshall Islands government continues to demand compensation and a comprehensive cleanup of nuclear contamination from the US government, yet Washington refuses to give them the time of day.

Whether through coercion or inducement, the US has gone to great lengths to rope in some 40 countries to play along with it, all for a single purpose: to do everything in its power to portray China's exercise of its legitimate sovereign rights as "illegitimate" and "irresponsible," in an attempt to disrupt the development of China's nuclear capabilities. Behind this lies not only the US' hegemonic mindset of self-proclaimed "security guarantor in the Western Pacific," but also anxiety over its relative military decline.

The US' own "nuclear triad" strategic force structure is aging. The Minuteman III missiles have been in service for over 50 years, beyond their intended lifespan. Its follow-on Sentinel program faces an 80 percent cost overrun, and its planned entry into service in 2029 has been delayed. At sea, the Ohio-class submarines are gradually being phased out, while the commissioning of the lead Columbia-class submarine has been pushed to

around 2031. In the air, the B-21 program is so costly that large-scale deployment is out of reach.

As China's ability to deter external interference and maintain regional peace and stability continues to grow and the US' industrial capacity steadily declines, it is hardly surprising that Washington is seeking to assert its presence by nitpicking over the "word count" of China's test launch notifications.

When a sovereign state conducts lawful military tests on its own territory or on the high seas, it is exercising its legitimate sovereign rights. Li Chijiang, China's Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs, has already made this point clear in Geneva: China has conducted only three intercontinental ballistic missile tests to date, the fewest among the five nuclear-weapon states; the US, which conducts the most frequent tests, is the most eager to renege on treaties and withdraw from international bodies, the most aggressive in promoting nuclear sharing and extended deterrence, and has no grounds to criticize China's voluntary advance notification.

The US refuses to heed this because what Washington truly seeks is by no means "reducing miscalculations," but rather to keep China's nuclear forces firmly under its control. Some analysts believe this "statement" is an attempt to probe military secrets regarding China's nuclear weapons development by extending the "notification period." Guided by its own defensive nuclear strategy, China needs no one's "permission slip."

This "statement" by 41 countries is nothing more than a



worthless piece of paper; double standards, hypocrisy and fear are its three core elements. If the US truly cares about strategic stability, it might as well start by laying out its own "Sentinel" missile development timeline, archiving years of original pre-launch notifications under its "norms," and disclosing records of test-launch notifications to Latin American and Pacific Island Countries.

It is not the majority of the international community that fears Chinese missiles, but rather the hegemonic powers bent on interfering in and dominating the region. For a long time, the US has been the world's greatest source of turmoil, and this "statement" serves no other purpose than to drive that point home once again.

Global Times



Gordon Chang's world has collapsed once again

Global Times

After a ban of more than three years, the US government has permitted the use of TikTok on federal devices, citing the fact that the social media app no longer poses a "national security threat" following the shift of its US operations to American investors. This development has drawn widespread attention. Some commented, "Suddenly there is no threat after ownership change," which highlighted that the previous ban was merely a political tool wielded by Washington.

On the surface, the latest lifting of restrictions on TikTok appears to be the natural outcome of having "gone through all the necessary procedures" - including restructuring and receiving a new security determination from the US Department of Justice. Fundamentally, however, the move stems from the fact that the cost of a total ban is simply too high. The fierce backlash such a forced shutdown would trigger within American society is something no politician wants to face. To a certain extent, a complete ban on TikTok is something the US is actually incapable of carrying out. US President Donald Trump himself is a "top influencer" on the platform, having repeatedly claimed to be "No.1" dominating its charts.

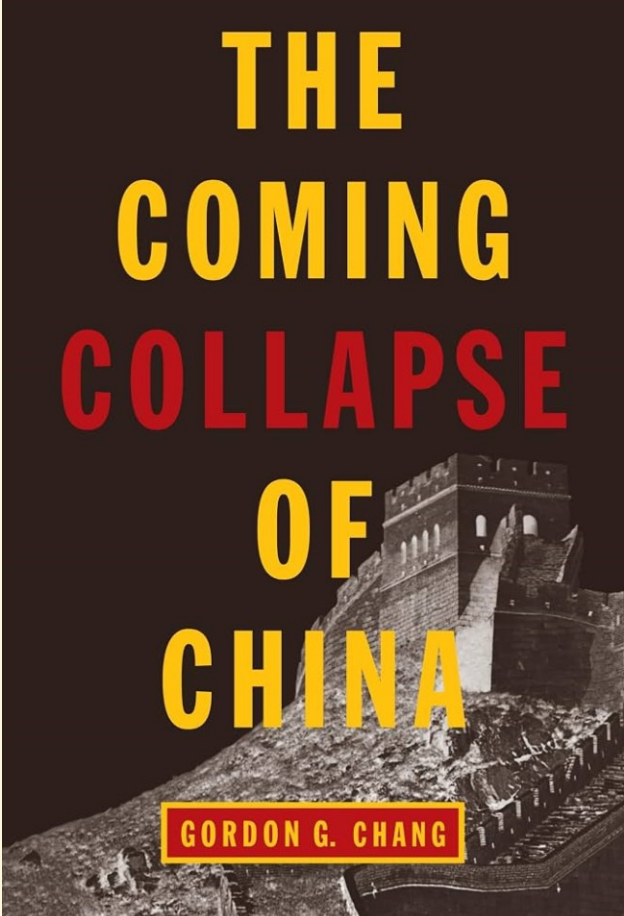
The saga surrounding the ban on TikTok achieved a "soft landing," a development that highlights at least two key points. First, the entry of Chinese enterprises into the US market is mutually beneficial. According to 2024 estimates by Oxford Economics, TikTok directly contributes over \$20 billion annually to US GDP and directly supports more than 200,000 jobs, with an even larger number of workers indirectly linked to the platform. Even when differences arise, they can be resolved through rational, compliant business negotiations, leading to solutions that align with market rules and Chinese law while balancing the interests of all parties.

On the other hand, those who once vociferously claimed that TikTok was "poisoning the minds of Americans" and who made a living by peddling narratives of "China's collapse" or the "China threat" narrative are bound to be increasingly cast aside by American society. Take, for instance, the anti-China "pundit" Gordon Chang. For years, he has built a career by clamoring that TikTok is a tool for Chinese infiltration of the US and loudly advocating for a ban on the platform. Yet, Trump has publicly criticized Chang by name twice this year. On one occasion, he directly addressed Chang's fallacious arguments regarding Tik-

Tok, criticizing his remarks on China as "always so negative," likening them to alarmist claims that "the world is falling down," which are "not true."

The latest lifting of restrictions on TikTok at the US federal government level marks another step toward normalized operations for the company, while simultaneously signaling that the world of the likes of Gordon Chang has once again collapsed. As the US and China continue to build a stable relationship, those who profit from fear-mongering and make a living by peddling anti-China sentiment will sooner or later lose their livelihoods entirely. This is because American society will eventually realize that the true threat to its security is not some foreign nation, but rather these troublemakers who thrive on chaos and wish for nothing but disorder.

Global Times



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Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad urges UN Security Council to act as West Bank situation deteriorates

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan has sounded the alarm over the rapidly deteriorating situation in the occupied West Bank, urging the international community and the United Nations Security Council to take immediate and concrete measures to protect Palestinians and prevent further escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Speaking at the United Nations, Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, expressed grave concern over the worsening security and humanitarian situation in the West Bank, warning that developments on the ground were creating further instability and posing an increasingly serious threat to the Palestinian population. He called on the Security Council to respond without delay and fulfil its responsibility towards maintaining international peace and security and protecting civilians caught in conflict and occupation. The Pakistani envoy said Israel’s actions in the occupied West Bank were aimed at consolidating and expanding its occupation, while the continued expansion of Israeli settlements had reached alarming proportions. According to Pakistan, the settlement expansion is not merely changing the demographic and physical landscape of the occupied territory but is also contributing to the fragmentation of Palestinian land. The envoy warned that the expansion of settlements in different parts of the West Bank was being used to create territorial discontinuity, making it increasingly difficult for Palestinians to maintain a contiguous territory.

Such developments, Pakistan argues, further undermine prospects for a negotiated political settlement and complicate international efforts aimed at achieving a durable solution to the Palestinian question. Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad called for an immediate end to violence and attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and stressed that those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. He underscored the need for the international community to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians and prevent further deterioration of the security environment in the occupied territories. Pakistan has consistently maintained that civilians must be protected in accordance with international law and that violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law cannot be allowed to continue without accountability. The envoy’s remarks reflected Islamabad’s broader position that the international community must move beyond expressions of concern and take practical measures to prevent further violence and protect the Palestinian population. The Pakistani representative also expressed serious concern over what he described as provocative actions at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, warning against developments that could further inflame tensions in the occupied Palestinian territories and across the wider region. Al-Aqsa Mosque holds profound religious and historical significance and remains one of the most sensitive flashpoints in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Pakistan stressed the importance of safeguarding the sanctity of the holy site and preventing actions that could aggravate an already volatile situation. The warning came against a backdrop of continuing tensions in the West Bank, where violence, settlement activity and restrictions affecting Palestinians have remained major sources of concern for the international community. Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad urged the UN Security Council

to respond to the deteriorating situation with urgency and take concrete measures rather than allowing the crisis to worsen further. He specifically called on the Council to act on recommendations made by UNICEF and address the increasingly serious humanitarian and security conditions confronting Palestinians in the occupied territories. The appeal placed particular emphasis on the protection of children and vulnerable civilians, amid concerns over the wider humanitarian consequences of prolonged violence and instability. Pakistan’s call for action also reflected its long-standing position that the UN system has a responsibility to ensure protection for civilians and uphold international law in situations of prolonged conflict and occupation. Pakistan has traditionally supported the establishment of an independent, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian state along pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Pakistan has consistently supported the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination and an independent state and has called for a just and lasting settlement based on international law and relevant UN resolutions. Islamabad has also repeatedly urged the international community to ensure accountability for violations against Palestinian civilians and to prevent further displacement and territorial fragmentation. The latest statement at the UN is therefore consistent with Pakistan’s longstanding diplomatic position on the Palestinian issue. By taking the matter to the Security Council, Pakistan sought to draw renewed attention to developments in the West Bank and press the international community to translate diplomatic concern into concrete action. The emphasis on UNICEF’s recommendations also underlined the humanitarian dimension of the crisis, particularly the need to protect children and other vulnerable groups from the consequences of continuing violence and instability.



Ambassador Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri

A veteran diplomat with wide regional experience



Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: A seasoned Pakistani diplomat with extensive experience in bilateral diplomacy, regional affairs, economic coordination and national security, Mr Chaudhri has held a wide range of senior assignments both at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at Pakistan’s diplomatic missions abroad. He joined the Foreign Service of Pakistan on September 30, 1993, marking the beginning of a diplomatic career spanning more than three decades. Over the course of his career, Chaudhri has served in several key positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Islamabad, dealing with some of the country’s most important foreign policy and regional portfolios. He has also represented Pakistan at major diplomatic missions in the United States, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates. Before his appointment as Pakistan’s Ambassador to Indonesia, Ambassador Chaudhri served as Pakistan’s High Commissioner to Australia, where he was responsible for advancing Islamabad’s diplomatic, political and economic engagement with Canberra. His previous senior assignments also include serving as Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Additional Secretary responsible for the Asia-Pacific region. These positions placed him at the centre of Pakistan’s foreign policy communication and its

engagement with countries across the wider Asia-Pacific region. At the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Chaudhri has held a series of important positions covering Pakistan’s relations with neighbouring and strategically significant countries. He previously served as Director General for Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey, a portfolio involving three countries of considerable importance to Pakistan’s regional diplomacy. He also served as Director General for South Asia and SAARC, dealing with Pakistan’s relations with South Asian countries and regional cooperation mechanisms. His experience in South Asia included an assignment as Director for India, giving him direct exposure to one of Pakistan’s most complex and consequential bilateral relationships. Ambassador Chaudhri has also worked on Pakistan’s engagement with Southeast Asia and the Pacific, having served as Deputy Director for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. His diplomatic responsibilities were not limited to political and regional affairs. He also served as Deputy Director for Economic Coordination, gaining experience in the economic dimension of Pakistan’s foreign policy and international engagement. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he additionally served as Assistant Director for Personnel, giving him experience in the administrative and human-resource side of the Foreign Service.



His career has also included assignments outside the Foreign Ministry. He served as Director General for Economic Coordination at the President’s Secretariat, where his responsibilities involved matters relating to economic coordination at the highest institutional level. He later served as Joint Secretary for National Security at the National Security Division, adding a significant national-security dimension to his professional experience. Ambassador Chaudhri has represented Pakistan at several important diplomatic missions abroad, serving in countries that remain central to Islamabad’s international relations. His overseas assignments have included the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington, D.C., where he gained experience dealing with Pakistan’s relationship with the United States and broader international diplomatic affairs. He also served at the High Commission for Pakistan in London, working in one of Pakistan’s most important diplomatic missions and in a country with which Pakistan shares deep historical, political, economic and people-to-people ties. Another significant overseas posting was at the Consulate General of Pakistan in Dubai, providing him with experience in the Gulf region and exposure to the extensive economic and community links between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

His varied overseas assignments have given him experience across North America, Europe and the Gulf, complementing his extensive work on regional diplomacy in Islamabad. Chaudhri’s professional experience is supported by an academic background combining international law, economic and trade affairs and business administration. He holds an LLM in International Economic and Trade Law from the University of London, United Kingdom. The specialised degree has provided an academic foundation relevant to international commerce, economic diplomacy and the legal frameworks governing global trade. He also holds an MBA from the University of the Punjab, Lahore, adding a business and management dimension to his professional qualifications.

In addition, he is an alumnus of the American University and the National Defence University in Washington, D.C., reflecting further exposure to international affairs, strategic studies and professional development. Ambassador Chaudhri’s career has covered a broad spectrum of Pakistan’s foreign-policy priorities, ranging from relations with neighbouring countries and South Asian regional cooperation to economic diplomacy, national security and engagement with major global powers. His assignments dealing with Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, India, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific have provided him with extensive experience in regional affairs, while his postings in Washington, London and Dubai have given him direct exposure to major diplomatic and economic centres.



Pakistan, Kazakhstan to deepen strategic partnership through trade and connectivity



Abida Shaheen

Islamabad: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif this week reaffirmed Pakistan’s commitment to further deepening its strategic partnership with Kazakhstan, with Islamabad placing particular emphasis on regional connectivity, expanded trade, energy cooperation, education and stronger people-to-people contacts. The prime minister expressed these views during a firewell meeting with Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan Yerzhan Kistafin, who called on him at the Prime Minister’s House upon completion of his diplomatic tenure in Pakistan. The meeting provided an opportunity to review the progress made in Pakistan-Kazakhstan relations during Kistafin’s tenure and to underscore Islamabad’s desire to maintain the positive momentum in bilateral ties. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Fatemi and Foreign Secretary Ambassador Anna Belsch were also present during the meeting. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif appreciated Ambassador Kistafin’s contribution to strengthening the historic friendship and cooperation between Pakistan and Kazakhstan, acknowledging his efforts to expand bilateral engagement across a range of areas. The prime minister particularly praised the Kazakh envoy’s role in facilitating the visit of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to Pakistan in February, describing the visit as an important milestone in the relationship between the two countries. President Tokayev’s visit resulted in Pakistan and Kazakhstan elevating their bilateral relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership, giving fresh political impetus to cooperation between the two countries. The development was seen as a significant step in Pakistan’s engagement with Central Asia, particularly as Islamabad seeks to strengthen economic and transport links with the region. For Pakistan, Kazakhstan occupies an important position in Central Asia because of its geographical size, economic potential and strategic location. As Central Asia’s largest economy and a major producer of energy and natural resources, Kazakhstan offers significant opportunities for Pakistan in trade, investment, energy and connectivity. Islamabad has increasingly sought to strengthen relations with Central Asian states as part of its broader strategy of improving regional connectivity and expanding economic engagement beyond traditional markets. Pakistan’s geographical location provides Kazakhstan with potential access to the Arabian Sea and international maritime trade routes, while stronger transport links could give Pakistani businesses greater access to Central Asian markets. The two countries have therefore placed increasing emphasis on connectivity as a foundation for expanding bilateral economic relations. During his meeting with the Kazakh ambassador, Prime Minister Shehbaz stressed

the importance of enhanced regional connectivity. Pakistan has been seeking stronger road, rail and trade links with Central Asia to establish itself as a bridge between the region and international markets. For Kazakhstan, improved connectivity with Pakistan could provide additional trade routes towards the Arabian Sea, helping connect Central Asian markets with ports and maritime routes. Such connectivity could also contribute to the development of broader regional trade corridors involving Pakistan, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states. The emphasis on connectivity reflects the growing recognition that stronger physical and commercial links are essential for unlocking the full potential of Pakistan-Central Asia trade. The prime minister also called for expanded trade linkages with Kazakhstan, highlighting the need to translate the political warmth between the two countries into greater economic activity. Pakistan and Kazakhstan have considerable potential to diversify bilateral trade, including through agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, textiles, information technology, machinery and other goods and services. Kazakhstan’s substantial energy and mineral resources also create opportunities for cooperation in energy and related sectors. For Pakistan, access to Central Asian markets is increasingly important as the country seeks to diversify its export destinations and expand its regional economic footprint. For Kazakhstan, Pakistan offers access to a large consumer market and potentially greater connectivity with South Asia and global maritime trade routes. Energy is another area with significant potential in the Pakistan-Kazakhstan relationship. Kazakhstan is an important energy producer, while Pakistan continues to face substantial energy requirements as it seeks to support industrialisation and economic growth. Greater cooperation could potentially include energy trade, investment, technical collaboration and exchanges in related technologies. The prime minister’s emphasis on energy cooperation reflects Islamabad’s interest in building a broader economic relationship with Kazakhstan that goes beyond conventional trade. Prime Minister Shehbaz also identified education and people-to-people exchanges as important areas for strengthening bilateral relations. Greater interaction between universities, students, researchers and professionals could help establish long-term institutional links between the two countries. Educational exchanges can also complement economic and diplomatic cooperation by creating a deeper understanding between the people of Pakistan and Kazakhstan.

The emphasis on people-to-people contacts is particularly relevant as both countries seek to ensure that their strategic partnership develops beyond government-to-government relations. The prime minister acknowledged Ambassador Yerzhan Kistafin’s efforts during his tenure, particularly his role in facilitating high-level engagement between Islamabad and Astana. His contribution to President Tokayev’s visit was singled out for special appreciation, reflecting the importance attached by Pakistan to the Kazakh president’s February visit. The visit elevated bilateral relations to the Strategic Partnership level and established a stronger political framework for future cooperation. Prime Minister Shehbaz conveyed his warm regards to President Tokayev and expressed the hope that Pakistan-Kazakhstan relations would continue to expand under the new strategic framework. For Islamabad, stronger relations with Kazakhstan fit into a wider strategy of engaging more closely with Central Asia through trade, connectivity, energy and investment. For Astana, closer ties with Pakistan can provide opportunities to expand economic links with South Asia and gain access to additional trade and transport routes. The success of the partnership will ultimately depend on how effectively the two sides convert political commitments into concrete projects, increased trade, improved connectivity and stronger institutional links. Prime Minister Shehbaz’s emphasis on connectivity, trade, energy, education and people-to-people exchanges indicates that Pakistan wants the relationship with Kazakhstan to develop across multiple dimensions. As the two countries move forward under the Strategic Partnership framework, the foundations laid during President Tokayev’s visit and Ambassador Kistafin’s tenure could provide important momentum for a new phase of Pakistan-Kazakhstan relations. Prime Minister Shehbaz wished Ambassador Kistafin success in his future assignment, while reaffirming Islamabad’s commitment to maintaining the upward trajectory of relations with Kazakhstan and building a more substantive partnership with the strategically important Central Asian state.

When the Score became the road Gen Z, entourage and the new lottery of attention

GEN Z, ENTOURAGE, AND THE NEW LOTTERY OF ATTENTION

When the Score Became the Road

Attention is not a destination.

Ali Rehman Malik

Ali Rehman Malik

“Attention is not a destination.”

In the early decades of the twenty first century, people were offered more ways to be seen than any generation before them and fewer shared ways to know where they were going.

The old gatekeepers had weakened. A person no longer needed the permission of a studio, record label, broadcaster, newspaper or wealthy patron before speaking to the public. Someone in a bedroom could reach an audience once available only to major institutions. The gate had opened.

But human attention had not become infinite. So the gate moved.

It moved into the score.

Years later, many young people became nostalgic for a television series called Entourage.

The show depicted a fantasy of Hollywood success. A young actor became famous, and the friends who had known him before fame travelled through the experience with him.

The world portrayed by the show was not fair, simple or especially virtuous. Hollywood was intensely gatekept. Its glamour depended upon forms of labour and exclusion the fantasy barely noticed. The dream was visible to millions and genuinely available to very few.

Yet nostalgia can misdescribe the past while accurately identifying an absence in the present.

What younger viewers found in Entourage was not necessarily a longing for 2005.

It was a longing for legible adulthood.

The fantasy contained a recognisable causal sequence. You wanted to become an actor. You became good at acting. The work produced recognition. Recognition produced success. The people you loved came along. A vocation could remain a complete sentence.

An actor did not also have to become a founder, podcaster, political commentator, investor, lifestyle authority and permanent publicist for the person doing the acting.

The work could precede visibility. The person did not first have to manufacture an audience so that the work might later become possible.

Young people were not nostalgic for one compulsory dream. They were nostalgic for the permission to let one dream be enough.

This does not mean the old monoculture was organic or innocent. It was constructed, selected and sold back to the public by a small number of powerful institutions. A few studios, labels, broadcasters and magazines supplied millions of people with the same stars, symbols and stories.

The old monoculture standardised the content.

The platform era appeared to dissolve that order. People received highly personalised feeds filled with different faces, interests, opinions and subcultures.

But beneath the variety, the machinery converged.

Short video. Trend. Follower count. Engagement. Verification.

Virality.

Personal brand.

A meme, face, scandal or sound could cross cultures within hours. The objects changed rapidly, but the grammar through which they travelled became increasingly shared.

We did not leave monoculture behind.

It moved from the story to the interface.

The old monoculture synchronised people around the same cultural objects. The new platform monoculture synchronised them around the same mechanics of visibility.

Different stories. Same scoreboard.

This also altered the relationship between work and celebrity.

Celebrity had once been understood primarily as an outcome of some preceding public work, however

artificially the entertainment industry manufactured the connection.

Increasingly, attention itself became productive capital. An audience could be converted into a clothing line, restaurant, political platform, wellness product, investment company, podcast or book. The origin of the attention mattered less than its portability.

The work once created the celebrity.

Celebrity could now create the work.

This changed what a credible future looked like.

In two earlier essays, I used the Urdu word aukat for the social estimate that tells a person where they stand, how much weight they carry and how far they are permitted to move. Its bluntest instruction is apni aukat mein raho. Know your place.

Traditional aukat accumulated through family, profession, wealth, accent, neighbourhood, office and the way a room received you.

Digital aukat recalculated the answer continuously.

Followers. Views. Likes. Replies. Who noticed. Who ignored.

The looking glass self became an analytics page.

A number beside a young person’s name did not merely describe how far one post had travelled. It could enter the person’s developing account of who they were.

This is how many people want me.

This is how socially real I am.

This is the kind of future available to someone with my present score.

Traditional aukat said:

People like you do not belong there.

Digital aukat said:

People with your present numbers do not belong there yet.

That final word made the system extraordinarily powerful.

Yet.

You could rise.

One video might change everything. One photograph might be discovered. One article might reach a million people.

The platform offered the mythology of a lottery.

Where ordinary paths to mobility were narrow, expensive or unreliable, the lottery could begin looking like the clearest road available.

In Pakistan, adults often mock young people who say they want to become TikTokers. But the aspiration is not difficult to understand.

The traditional road may require years of education, family resources, institutional access and social connections, then still fail to produce dignity, movement or a stable livelihood.

The platform offers another visible sequence.

Attention becomes status. Status becomes money. Money becomes access. Access promises another life.

The probability may be low.

The route is still visible.

When the credible road to adulthood becomes unclear, the scoreboard begins impersonating one.

This is not unique to Pakistan. Across the world, established routes into adulthood have become less reliable. Qualifications do not guarantee security. Professions no longer promise a stable identity. Housing, family formation and long term planning feel increasingly remote.

The score offers immediate movement.

It tells the person whether they rose today.

It does not need to explain where the ascent ultimately leads.

At first, virality functions like a lottery.

Once someone begins producing repeatedly for the platform, the lottery becomes something closer to a casino.

Post again. Refresh. Check the response. Nearly there.

The next one might escape. The next one might restore the previous high.

The lottery sells the miracle of sudden transport.

The casino monetises repeated hope.

The structure is powerful precisely because the miracle occasionally occurs.

Someone really does become visible overnight. Editors answer. Brands call. People seek proximity. Future speech receives a different prior before anyone has considered whether the person has become wiser, more capable or more truthful.

Virality changes the room before it changes the person.

The person may remain substantially the same, but the surrounding field has been reweighted. Greater confidence, access, pressure and entitlement may follow. So may the fear that the attention will disappear.

Altered rooms provide altered inputs.

Those inputs can gradually alter the person.

Virality can open a world.

It can also create an enclosure.

A narrow expression of the person receives extraordinary reward. An audience gathers around it. The platform associates the person with it. Opportunities arrive because of it. Deviation becomes expensive.

The creator begins repeating the successful form.

The first performance may have been spontaneous.

The tenth can become an imitation of the evidence created by the first.

The public says:

We liked this version of you.

The algorithm says:

More of this version is more likely to travel.

The livelihood says:

Departing from this version now carries a cost.

One viral moment can transport a person from obscurity into consequence.

It can also trap them inside the version of themselves that made the journey.

The creator gradually becomes a pastiche of the person who first escaped.

Virality does not merely increase reach.

It can quietly write a future job description.

This matters especially when public attention arrives before someone has developed enough private identity, craft, routine and relationship to metabolise it.

If attention becomes the principal mirror through which a person knows they exist, the loss of attention may feel like more than professional decline.

It can feel like disappearance.

This is one reason follower counts matter more than adults sometimes admit.

Children have always worried about being liked, included and wanted. But there is a difference between the uncertain fear that one has few friends and a public number sitting beside one’s name.

The metric may mean only:

This account has limited distribution.

But it can be felt as:

This person has limited social reality.

Young people may therefore encounter public ranking during the formation of the very self being ranked.

They are asked two questions at once.

Who am I?

Which version of me survives contact with the score?

None of this means social media is simply destructive. Platforms have opened real paths into creativity, income, knowledge, community and public speech. People once excluded by geography, class, disability or institutional prejudice can find one another and reach the world directly.

The old gatekeepers were not guardians of some lost natural order.

But opening the gate did not supply a destination.

Access is not orientation.

A society that wants young people to value craft must make craft causally relevant.

If patience, skill, honesty and contribution do not

reliably produce dignity or a credible future, while visibility sometimes does, then the platform is not corrupting young people in isolation.

It is teaching the lesson the surrounding society has already prepared them to learn.

Do not mock the child for following the clearest road visible from where they stand.

Build a better road.

This requires distinguishing attention from worth and movement from direction.

A score can tell us that something travelled.

It cannot tell us whether that thing deserves to organise a life.

It can show that people watched.

It cannot tell us whether anyone was nourished.

It can measure the present distribution of attention.

It cannot determine the full scale of the person receiving it.

Future historians may say that the first platform generations confused access with direction.

They opened the gate, multiplied the doors and left young people to infer the destination from applause.

Gen Z was not really nostalgic for 2005.

It was nostalgic for a world in which work could come before visibility, a vocation could remain a complete sentence, and the people you loved could come along without becoming part of your content strategy.

When the road disappeared, the scoreboard began impersonating one.

The task is not to smash the scoreboard.

It is to build roads worth leaving it for.



GERMANY AND BULGARIA

LCCI seeks stronger Pakistan-Germany business ties during Europe trade mission

Covert Report

Lahore: The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has stepped up efforts to expand Pakistan's commercial engagement with Germany, with a high-level business delegation visiting the Bergische Chamber of Industry and Commerce Wuppertal-Solingen-Remscheid during its ongoing trade mission to Europe. Led by LCCI President Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol, the delegation held detailed discussions with Arft Jasper Rust, Officer of the International Division at the Bergische Chamber of Industry and Commerce Wuppertal-Solingen-Remscheid, focusing on opportunities to expand bilateral trade, strengthen business-to-business contacts and create new avenues for investment and industrial cooperation.

The engagement reflects the LCCI's efforts to develop stronger institutional links with European chambers of commerce and establish direct connections between Pakistani and German businesses.

Germany, as Europe's largest economy and one of the world's leading industrial and technological powers, offers significant opportunities for Pakistani companies seeking to expand their presence in European markets. The country has a highly developed manufacturing base, advanced technology sector and strong network of small and medium-sized enterprises, creating potential avenues for cooperation with Pakistani businesses.

During the meeting, Saigol highlighted the importance of strengthening institutional and private-sector cooperation between Pakistan and Germany, stressing that closer engagement between chambers of commerce could help identify commercially viable opportunities and translate them into long-term partnerships.

He said German businesses could find opportunities in Pakistan across a wide range of sectors, while Pakistani exporters could benefit from stronger connections with German buyers, distributors and industrial partners. The LCCI president particularly pointed to the potential for cooperation in exports, industrial development, technology, investment and joint ventures, describing Germany as an important market and potential partner for Pakistan's business community.

He stressed that the relationship should move beyond conventional trade and develop towards deeper forms of economic cooperation involving technology transfer, manufacturing partnerships, investment and value-added production.

Saigol said Pakistan possessed a diverse range of products and services with potential for international markets and emphasised the need to improve access to European buyers and strengthen direct business contacts. He highlighted the importance of introducing Pakistani companies and products to German businesses and creating platforms through which exporters from both

countries could explore commercial opportunities.

For Pakistan, Germany represents not only an important European market but also a potential source of technology, expertise, investment and industrial partnerships. Greater interaction with German companies could help Pakistani businesses gain exposure to advanced production techniques, quality standards and international supply chains. At the same time, German companies could benefit from Pakistan's large domestic market, growing entrepreneurial base and opportunities in sectors requiring investment and technological expertise. The LCCI believes that closer engagement between business organisations can play an important role in bringing these opportunities together.

Arft Jasper Rust shared his perspective on foreign trade and business opportunities during the meeting and discussed the prospects for greater interaction between companies in Pakistan and businesses operating in the Bergische region of Germany.

The discussions provided an opportunity for both sides to exchange views on the business environment, international trade, market opportunities and potential areas of mutual cooperation.

The Bergische region, encompassing Wuppertal, Solingen and Remscheid, has a strong industrial and manufacturing tradition. Its business community includes companies with expertise in engineering, manufacturing, tools, machinery and other industrial sectors, making the region potentially relevant to Pakistan's efforts to expand industrial and technology partnerships with Germany.

The meeting therefore provided a platform for the Pakistani delegation to gain a better understanding of the regional German business environment while introducing German counterparts to the capabilities and commercial interests of Pakistani companies.

Members of the LCCI delegation actively participated in the discussions and presented the potential of their respective sectors.

They expressed interest in establishing direct contacts with German companies and exploring opportunities for trade, investment, technology cooperation and joint ventures.

Such business-to-business engagement can be particularly important for expanding bilateral commerce because it allows companies to identify specific products, services and projects rather than relying solely on broader government-level agreements.

The LCCI delegation emphasised the need for sustained interaction between private-sector representatives, chambers of commerce and business institutions in both countries.

Regular exchanges, business meetings and sector-specific cooperation could help identify reliable part-



ners, develop commercial relationships and eventually lead to concrete investment and trade agreements. Germany occupies a strategically important position in Pakistan's European economic engagement.

As a major industrial economy, Germany has global strengths in engineering, automobiles, machinery, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, digital technologies and advanced manufacturing.

For Pakistan, closer economic interaction with German companies could contribute to industrial modernisation and technology transfer while helping Pakistani businesses integrate into European and international value chains.

At the same time, Pakistani companies have opportunities to supply European markets with textiles, garments, leather products, sporting goods, surgical instruments, agricultural products, information technology services and other goods and services.

The challenge is to expand the range of Pakistani exports and move towards greater value addition. The LCCI's emphasis on business-to-business engagement reflects an understanding that developing long-term commercial partnerships requires more than simply

increasing the volume of traditional exports.

The visit to the Bergische Chamber forms part of the LCCI's broader Europe trade mission, aimed at expanding Pakistan's international trade and investment connections.

Through direct engagement with European chambers, institutions and companies, the delegation is seeking to create new opportunities for Pakistani businesses and strengthen their access to international markets.

The mission also provides an opportunity to showcase Pakistan's private sector, identify potential investors and explore partnerships that can generate employment, technology transfer and export growth.

For the LCCI, expanding international linkages is particularly important as Pakistani businesses seek to diversify markets and become more competitive in an increasingly demanding global trading environment.

The discussions in Germany highlighted the potential for Pakistan-Germany relations to evolve from a predominantly trade-oriented relationship into a broader economic partnership.

Investment, technology cooperation and joint ventures

could provide a more sustainable foundation for bilateral economic relations, particularly in areas where German expertise and Pakistani market opportunities complement each other.

Closer cooperation between chambers of commerce could serve as an institutional bridge connecting businesses from both sides.

The LCCI delegation's engagement with the Bergische Chamber is therefore part of a wider effort to create those connections and ensure that Pakistani businesses have greater access to German partners and European markets.

As the Europe trade mission continues, the LCCI hopes that direct engagement with European business institutions will translate into concrete opportunities for Pakistani exporters, investors and industrialists.

The German visit has reinforced a central message of the mission: Pakistan's economic relationship with Germany has significant untapped potential, and stronger business-to-business engagement could help convert that potential into trade, investment, technology partnerships and long-term industrial cooperation.

Pakistan, Bulgaria explore cooperation on skilled workers, trade and tourism

Covert Report

Sofia: Pakistan and Bulgaria have agreed to explore new avenues of bilateral cooperation in skilled labour mobility, trade, tourism, business and student exchanges, as Islamabad seeks to expand opportunities for its young and increasingly skilled workforce in European markets.

The understanding was reached during a meeting between Director General at Pakistan's Ministry of Labour Dr Syed Shahbaz Hussain Shamsi and President of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) Tsvetan Simeonov in Sofia this week.

The meeting focused primarily on the potential for greater movement of skilled Pakistani professionals and workers to Bulgaria, while also examining broader opportunities to strengthen economic and people-to-people links between the two countries.

Shamsi told the Bulgarian business leader that Pakistan possessed significant potential in skilled human resources and had a large pool of young professionals who were prepared to seek employment opportunities abroad.

He highlighted Pakistan's exceptionally young demographic profile, noting that around 70 per cent of the country's population of approximately 240 million is under the age of 30.

This large youth population, he said, represented a substantial reservoir of human capital that could contribute to the labour requirements of countries facing shortages of skilled workers.

The Pakistani delegation is visiting Bulgaria with the objective of strengthening bilateral cooperation in the exchange of specialists and workers across different sectors, with the support of the Pakistani government and based on its extensive experience in overseas employment.

The visit comes at a time when labour mobility has become an increasingly important component of economic relations between countries, particularly as European economies seek qualified workers to address shortages in several industries.

During the meeting, Simeonov outlined the more than 130-year history of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in supporting the country's business community and promoting commercial activity.

He said the Chamber continued to cooperate with the Bulgarian government in facilitating the issuance of work visas for qualified workers and specialists from third countries.

The development could create an important avenue for Pakistani

professionals and skilled workers seeking employment opportunities in Bulgaria, particularly if appropriate mechanisms are established to match the requirements of Bulgarian employers with Pakistan's available workforce.

For Pakistan, expanding legal and regulated labour mobility can provide employment opportunities for its young population while strengthening the skills and experience of workers exposed to international markets.

For Bulgaria, access to a larger pool of qualified foreign workers could help address labour shortages and support businesses in sectors where employers face difficulties in finding suitable personnel.

While the exchange of workers was a central focus of the discussions, both sides agreed that the relationship should not be limited to labour cooperation.

The Pakistani and Bulgarian sides agreed to organise an online meeting in the near future to introduce Bulgarian businesses to investment and commercial opportunities in Pakistan.

The proposed interaction is expected to provide Bulgarian companies with greater insight into Pakistan's market, business environment and potential investment opportunities.

Potential areas of cooperation identified during the meeting include trade, tourism, business exchanges and student exchanges.

The broader agenda reflects an effort to develop a more comprehensive Pakistan-Bulgaria partnership, combining economic engagement with greater people-to-people interaction.

The Pakistani delegation also drew attention to the country's considerable export capacity.

Pakistan is a major producer and exporter of agricultural and textile commodities, including mangoes, rice and cotton, among a wide range of other products.

Greater commercial engagement with Bulgarian businesses could provide opportunities for Pakistani exporters to access new markets in Bulgaria and potentially use the country as a gateway for wider engagement with European markets.

At the same time, stronger business ties could open opportunities for Bulgarian companies to explore Pakistan's large domestic market and investment potential.

The proposed online business meeting could therefore become an important follow-up to the Sofia discussions by allowing companies from both sides to identify specific commercial opportunities and

potential partners.

The Pakistani side also briefed the Bulgarian representatives on the country's visa arrangements, highlighting that applications submitted from Sofia are processed entirely online, with approved visas issued electronically.

The digital process could facilitate travel for Bulgarian businesspeople, investors, students and tourists seeking to visit Pakistan, while also supporting greater people-to-people contact.

Ease of travel is particularly important for expanding commercial relations. Regular movement of business representatives, students and professionals can help create the personal networks often required to develop sustainable bilateral partnerships.

Pakistan's young population was one of the most significant themes emerging from the discussions.

With around seven out of every 10 Pakistanis under the age of 30, the country possesses a large potential workforce that could contribute to international labour markets if equipped with appropriate technical skills and qualifications.

The Pakistani government has increasingly focused on skills development and overseas employment as part of efforts to provide young people with opportunities in international markets.

The participation of Farooq Ali Khalid, coordinator of the Pakistani Prime Minister's Youth Programme, in the delegation further highlighted the importance attached to youth development and international employment opportunities.

The delegation also includes Wajih Khan, Deputy Head of the Office of the Pakistani Embassy in Sofia, reflecting the diplomatic mission's involvement in strengthening bilateral cooperation.

The Pakistani experts are also scheduled to visit the Bulgarian Employment Agency, where they are expected to gain further insight into Bulgaria's labour market requirements and employment mechanisms.

Such institutional engagement could help identify sectors facing shortages and determine how Pakistani workers and specialists could potentially meet those needs through legal and regulated channels.

The Sofia meeting demonstrated that labour cooperation could provide a new dimension to Pakistan-Bulgaria relations while also serving as a catalyst for broader economic engagement.

For Pakistan, Bulgaria represents an additional European destination where skilled workers and professionals could potentially find



employment opportunities.

For Bulgaria, Pakistan offers access to a large and youthful labour force, as well as a growing market and a diverse export base.

The two sides' decision to pursue a follow-up online meeting on business opportunities indicates a desire to transform the discussions into practical cooperation.

Trade, tourism, education and business exchanges could complement labour mobility and create stronger links between the two societies.

The emerging Pakistan-Bulgaria engagement reflects a broader trend in international economic relations, where labour mobility, skills development and private-sector cooperation are increasingly becoming important components of bilateral partnerships.

The Sofia discussions brought these elements together, with both sides recognising the potential benefits of closer cooperation.

For Pakistan, the priority will be to ensure that its young workforce

is equipped with internationally recognised skills and can access overseas employment through transparent, regulated and sustainable mechanisms.

For Bulgaria, the opportunity lies in tapping into international pools of qualified workers while strengthening its business and economic links with Pakistan.

The proposed online business forum could provide the next practical step in this process.

If followed by sustained institutional and business-level engagement, the latest discussions could pave the way for a broader Pakistan-Bulgaria partnership encompassing skilled labour, trade, investment, tourism and education.

At the heart of the engagement is a simple but potentially powerful proposition: Pakistan's youthful workforce and Bulgaria's demand for qualified workers can complement each other, while stronger commercial and people-to-people links can give the bilateral relationship a broader economic foundation.

Cristiano Ronaldo, Georgina Rodríguez marry in intimate Portugal ceremony



milestone in their relationship. Their wedding also represents a celebration of the family they have built together.

Ronaldo and Rodríguez are parents to two daughters, Alana and Bella. Their wider family includes Ronaldo's eldest son, Cristiano Jr., who is now 16, as well as twins Eva Maria and Mateo. The children have frequently appeared in family photographs shared by Ronaldo and Rodríguez, giving followers glimpses into the life they have created away from the intense spotlight surrounding the football icon.

For Ronaldo, who has spent much of his adult life under unprecedented public scrutiny, the decision to keep the wedding private was notable. His career has made him one of the most recognisable athletes on the planet, while his relationship with Rodríguez has consistently attracted enormous international attention.

Yet the couple's wedding announcement was remarkably simple. There was no elaborate statement, no lengthy explanation and no immediate release of a large collection of wedding photographs. Instead, a picture of two hands and a short message were enough to confirm what millions of fans had been waiting years to hear.

The announcement quickly became a global social media moment, with fans, fellow sports personalities and celebrities flooding the couple with messages of congratulations.

Among those to publicly celebrate the occasion was renowned British broadcaster Piers Morgan, a long-time acquaintance of Ronaldo. Taking to X, Morgan congratulated the newlyweds and described them as a great couple.

"Congrats to my friends Cristiano & Georgina on their wedding today in Portugal! They're a great couple, and I wish them a long and happy marriage together. Parabéns!" he wrote.

The reaction reflected the extraordinary public interest surrounding Ronaldo and Rodríguez's relationship. While Ronaldo's achievements on the football field have made him a sporting phenomenon, his personal life has also developed into a global story of its own.

From their first meeting in a Madrid Gucci store to



engagement, parenthood and now marriage in Portugal, their journey has unfolded over almost 10 years in front of an enormous international audience.

For Ronaldo, the wedding comes as another landmark moment in a career and personal life already filled with extraordinary milestones. For Rodríguez, it formalises a partnership that has grown alongside Ronaldo's continuing status as one of football's most influential figures.

And for their millions of followers, the understated Instagram photograph has provided the long-awaited confirmation of a relationship that has endured the

Covert Report

Lisbon: After a decade-long relationship that has captivated football fans and celebrity followers around the world, Cristiano Ronaldo and his long-time partner Georgina Rodríguez have finally tied the knot in an intimate ceremony in Portugal.

The much-anticipated news broke in characteristically understated fashion, with Ronaldo himself appearing to confirm the marriage through a simple but powerful post on Instagram. The Portuguese football superstar shared a photograph showing two hands adorned with wedding rings, accompanied by the brief caption, "C ?? G."

The seemingly simple announcement immediately sent social media into a frenzy. The post rapidly attracted millions of reactions, with the image surpassing 20 million likes and views as fans and admirers rushed to congratulate the couple on the beginning of a new chapter in their lives.

According to reports in the Portuguese media, Ronaldo and Rodríguez exchanged vows on August 11 in the coastal town of Cascais, near Lisbon. Rather than opting for a lavish, high-profile celebration befitting one of the world's most recognisable sporting couples, the pair reportedly chose a private and intimate ceremony, surrounded by their children and a select circle of loved ones.

The wedding marks the culmination of a relationship that began nearly a decade ago and has evolved from a chance encounter in Madrid into one of football's most closely followed romances.

Ronaldo and Rodríguez first met at a Gucci store in Madrid, where Rodríguez was working at the time. Ronaldo was then playing for Spanish giants Real Madrid, where he had established himself as one of the world's biggest football stars. What began as an ordinary encounter at a fashion store eventually developed into a relationship that would become a significant part of the Portuguese forward's life away from the pitch.

Over the years, Rodríguez has become a constant presence alongside Ronaldo, accompanying him through different stages of his extraordinary football career while also building her own profile as a model, businesswoman and social media personality.

The couple made their engagement public in 2025, when Rodríguez shared a photograph of her engagement ring on social media. Alongside the image, she posted an emotional message in Spanish: "Yes I do. In

this and in all my lives." The declaration was widely interpreted as a deeply personal expression of her commitment to Ronaldo and became another major



Natalie Baker signals continued US interest in Pakistan's economic potential

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb this week held detailed talks with US Chargé d’Affaires to Pakistan Natalie Baker, with the two sides exploring ways to deepen Pakistan-US economic relations, expand bilateral trade and attract greater American investment into key sectors of Pakistan’s economy.

The meeting at the Finance Division came as Islamabad seeks to strengthen its economic engagement with Washington and broaden the range of financing, investment and trade opportunities available to Pakistan.

Baker’s participation in the discussions assumed particular significance as the United States remains an important economic and strategic partner for Pakistan. The talks focused not only on immediate trade and financing priorities but also on creating conditions for greater long-term participation by US companies and financial institutions in Pakistan’s economy.

During the meeting, Aurangzeb briefed Baker on his recent visit to Washington, where he held a series of high-level meetings with senior US economic and financial officials and institutions.

The finance minister outlined his discussions with the US Secretary of the Treasury, senior management of the International Monetary Fund, the US International Development Finance Corporation and the US Export-Import Bank.

He described the engagement with American institutions as constructive and said the discussions had opened opportunities for further cooperation in financial matters, investment and project financing.

Particular attention was given to commercially viable projects in Pakistan that could attract international capital and generate sustainable economic returns. The finance minister emphasised that Islamabad wanted to move beyond conventional financial assistance and develop investment partnerships capable of supporting long-term economic growth.

Baker appreciated Pakistan’s efforts to navigate the economic consequences of the recent regional conflict, particularly the pressures created by rising energy prices.

Her assessment comes at a sensitive time for Pakistan, where external shocks, energy costs, foreign exchange pressures and global economic uncertainty continue to influence domestic economic policymaking.

The US envoy acknowledged the steps taken by Islamabad to preserve economic and financial stability despite the difficult environment and reaffirmed Washington’s interest in supporting Pakistan’s reform efforts.

Baker also expressed continued US interest in strengthening bilateral trade, investment and wider economic

cooperation, particularly by encouraging greater participation of American companies in important sectors of Pakistan’s economy.

Her remarks provided a strong indication that Washington sees opportunities for deeper commercial engagement with Pakistan at a time when Islamabad is actively seeking to diversify its investment and financing sources.

A major component of the discussion was the Pakistan-US reciprocal trade framework.

Aurangzeb briefed Baker on recent engagement with the Office of the US Trade Representative and said considerable progress had been achieved in discussions between the two sides.

Pakistan, he said, remained interested in taking the framework forward on a mutually beneficial basis, with greater market access and expanded export opportunities forming key elements of the proposed arrangement.

The finance minister stressed that enhanced access to each other’s markets could help increase bilateral trade and provide Pakistani exporters with opportunities to expand their presence in the US market.

For Islamabad, greater access to the American market is particularly important because the United States is among Pakistan’s largest export destinations. Expanding exports is also central to the government’s broader strategy of strengthening foreign exchange earnings and reducing external vulnerabilities.

The meeting also focused on the potential for increased involvement of US financial institutions, particularly the US International Development Finance Corporation, in Pakistan’s investment landscape.

Aurangzeb emphasised the need to identify specific projects that are ready for investment and develop appropriate financing structures capable of attracting American capital.

The approach reflects the government’s broader effort to shift towards investment-led economic growth. Rather than relying primarily on traditional borrowing or emergency financing, Islamabad wants to develop commercially viable projects that can attract private investors and international development finance institutions.

The finance minister stressed that Pakistan remained open to American investment and was working to create an environment conducive to private-sector participation.

The discussions extended beyond conventional finance and trade, covering several sectors with significant potential for future cooperation.

The two sides exchanged views on ports and logistics, energy, telecommunications, digital technology and artificial intelligence, along with other emerging areas. The inclusion of these sectors highlights the changing nature of Pakistan-US economic relations. While traditional trade remains important, Islamabad increasingly wants foreign investment to contribute to infrastructure development, technological advancement, digital transformation and industrial growth.

Ports and logistics have particular significance for Pakistan because of the country’s geographical position and its potential to serve as a regional trade and transit hub.

Energy, meanwhile, remains a critical component of Pakistan’s economic stability, while telecommunications

tions, artificial intelligence and digital technologies represent areas in which international investment and expertise could accelerate the country’s transition towards a more technology-driven economy.

Aurangzeb told the US envoy that the government was working to establish an enabling environment for private-sector investment and welcomed growing interest among American businesses and investors.

The finance minister also briefed Baker on Pakistan’s response to the economic impact of recent regional tensions.

Rising international energy prices have historically placed considerable pressure on Pakistan’s import bill, foreign exchange reserves and inflation outlook. Managing these pressures has therefore become an important component of the government’s economic strategy.

Aurangzeb highlighted the recent move towards a daily price revision mechanism for petroleum products, aimed at bringing domestic prices more closely in line with international market conditions. The mechanism is intended to improve the responsiveness of domestic petroleum prices to fluctuations in global markets while reducing the risk of prolonged distortions between international costs and local prices.

The finance minister reiterated that the government remained focused on fiscal discipline, strengthening foreign exchange reserves, increasing exports and maintaining economic growth despite external pressures.

Aurangzeb also updated Baker on Pakistan’s engagement with international capital markets and its efforts to diversify sources of financing.

The government is seeking to strengthen the country’s sovereign credit profile and improve access to longer-term financing instruments as part of a broader strategy to reduce vulnerability to short-term external financing pressures.

The finance minister highlighted the importance of strengthening foreign exchange reserves and building investor confidence, both of which are considered essential for improving Pakistan’s external economic position.

He also emphasised structural reforms and the need to strengthen institutional frameworks to create a more predictable environment for investors.

The discussions reflected a broader shift in Pakistan’s economic priorities from immediate stabilization towards sustainable and export-led growth.

Following years of economic pressures, Islamabad has increasingly emphasised fiscal discipline, stronger reserves, improved revenue collection, structural reforms and expansion of the country’s export base.

Aurangzeb told the US envoy that the government remained committed to reforms aimed at strengthening the foundations of the economy and improving the overall business environment.

He also acknowledged the constructive role played by US partners in supporting Pakistan’s economic objectives and reiterated Islamabad’s willingness to facilitate American investment.

For Washington, greater commercial engagement with



Pakistan could create opportunities for US companies in a large and strategically located market. For Islamabad, increased American investment could bring not only capital but also technology, expertise and access to international business networks.

The meeting between Aurangzeb and Baker points towards an effort by both countries to give greater economic substance to their bilateral relationship. Pakistan is seeking expanded access to international markets, diversified sources of investment and financing, while the United States has indicated continued interest in supporting economic reforms and increasing commercial engagement.

Baker’s reaffirmation of US support for Pakistan’s economic reform agenda and her appreciation of the government’s efforts to maintain stability suggest that Washington remains closely interested in Pakistan’s economic trajectory.

For Islamabad, however, the challenge now is to translate diplomatic goodwill into concrete investment and trade outcomes.

That will require a steady pipeline of investment-ready projects, regulatory reforms, greater transparency, improved ease of doing business and stronger protection for investors.

The sectors discussed during the meeting — from ports and energy to telecommunications, artificial intelligence and digital technology — offer a potentially broad platform for such cooperation.

The engagement also highlighted the importance of the Pakistan-US reciprocal trade framework, which could become an important element of the economic relationship if negotiations continue to produce mutually acceptable arrangements.

As Pakistan works to move from economic stabilization towards sustained growth, stronger engagement with American financial institutions and private companies could become increasingly important.

For Baker, the meeting provided an opportunity to convey Washington’s continued interest in Pakistan’s economic potential. For Islamabad, it offered a platform to present its reform agenda and make a case for greater American participation in the country’s next phase of economic development.

The message emerging from the talks was clear: both sides see room for a deeper economic partnership, but the next stage will depend on converting policy discussions into investment, trade, financing and commercially viable projects that can deliver tangible benefits to both economies.

Pakistan, Japan sign JPY 350 million grant agreement to strengthen civil service capacity

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and Japan have further deepened their longstanding development partnership with the signing of a landmark grant agreement worth JPY 350 million (\$2.2 million) to support the Human Resource Development Scholarship Programme (JDS) for 2026.

The agreement, signed at the Ministry of Economic Affairs on August 11, reflects Japan’s continued commitment to strengthening Pakistan’s human resource capacity and improving the skills of young government officials through advanced education and professional training at leading Japanese universities.

The formal ceremony brought together senior officials from the governments of Pakistan and Japan, as well as representatives of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), underscoring the institutional depth of the bilateral development partnership.

Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs Muhammad Humair Karim and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Pakistan Akamatsu Shuichi signed the Record of Discussions and Exchange of Notes.

The grant agreement was separately signed by Miran Mohiyuddin Soomro, Senior Joint Secretary representing the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and Yusuke Shinozaki, Chief Representative of JICA Pakistan.

Senior officials from the Embassy of Japan, JICA and the Ministry

of Economic Affairs also attended the ceremony.

The latest grant represents the ninth installment of the JDS project since its launch in Pakistan in 2018, highlighting Japan’s sustained focus on developing the professional capabilities of Pakistan’s public sector.

Under the 2026 programme, 16 scholarships will be awarded for master’s-level studies and one scholarship for a PhD/doctoral programme at prestigious Japanese universities.

The beneficiaries will be young officers of Pakistan’s Federal Civil Service and Ex-Cadre services, who will receive an opportunity to pursue advanced academic programmes in Japan and acquire specialised knowledge and professional expertise that can subsequently be applied within Pakistan’s public institutions.

The programme is designed not merely as an educational opportunity but as a long-term investment in Pakistan’s institutional capacity. By enabling government officials to study at Japanese universities, the JDS initiative exposes Pakistani civil servants to advanced academic research, modern public-sector practices and international experiences. The skills and knowledge acquired during their studies can contribute to improved policymaking, administration and public service delivery after their return to Pakistan.

Japan’s support through the JDS programme has already produced eight batches of Pakistani beneficiaries since the initiative began in 2018.

Each batch has generally comprised around 17 to 18 participants, giving a substantial number of young Pakistani officials the opportunity to study in Japan and develop expertise relevant to their professional responsibilities.

The programme has consequently emerged as an important component of Pakistan-Japan cooperation in human resource development.

The initiative also complements Japan’s broader practice of inviting Pakistani government officials to Japan for short-term specialised training programmes. These courses provide opportunities for officials to gain exposure to Japanese expertise, institutional practices and technical approaches in a range

of areas.

Together, the long-term scholarships and short-term training programmes form part of Japan’s wider effort to support capacity-building within Pakistan’s public sector.

Japan has remained an important development partner of Pakistan for decades, with cooperation extending across infrastructure, energy, health, education, human resource development, disaster management and institutional capacity-building.

The JDS programme represents a particularly people-centred dimension of that relationship.

Rather than focusing solely on physical infrastructure or financial assistance, the programme places Pakistan’s human capital at the centre of development cooperation. Its underlying objective is to strengthen the capabilities of officials who are directly involved in planning, policymaking and implementation.

For Pakistan, developing a highly skilled and professionally equipped civil service remains essential to addressing complex economic and social challenges.

Government officials increasingly require expertise in areas such as economic management, digital transformation, climate resilience, public administration, infrastructure planning and sustainable development. Exposure to international best practices can help strengthen their ability to design and implement effective public policies.

Japan’s scholarship programme provides a platform for precisely this type of professional development.

The JDS initiative also carries an important diplomatic dimension. Pakistani scholars studying in Japan develop academic and professional relationships with Japanese universities, institutions and fellow students. These networks can continue long after the completion of their studies, contributing to stronger people-to-people contacts and deeper institutional understanding between the two countries.

Many beneficiaries eventually return to Pakistan to serve in government institutions, where their Japanese educational and professional experience can contribute to policymaking and public administration.

The programme therefore creates a cycle in which educational cooperation strengthens institutional capacity while simultaneously building long-term links between Pakistan and Japan.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Federal Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs Muhammad Humair Karim expressed gratitude to the government and people of Japan for their continued support to Pakistan.

He assured that the relevant authorities would provide all necessary

facilitation to ensure the effective implementation of the programme and further advance meaningful cooperation between the two countries.

His remarks reflected Islamabad’s appreciation of Japan’s consistent engagement in Pakistan’s development, particularly in the field of human resource development.

For Pakistan, the continuation of JDS for another year demonstrates the enduring value of the programme and the confidence placed by Japan in the country’s young public-sector professionals.

The latest JPY 350 million grant comes at a time when Pakistan is seeking to strengthen the capacity of its institutions and improve the quality of public-sector decision-making.

Human resource development is increasingly viewed as a critical component of sustainable economic and social progress. Well-trained public officials can play a central role in translating government policies into effective programmes, improving service delivery and implementing reforms.

Japan’s approach through JDS focuses on developing precisely this institutional capacity.

The scholarships will allow selected Pakistani officials to pursue advanced degrees in Japan, where they will have access to established academic institutions and specialised research environments.

The beneficiaries are expected to return with enhanced professional capabilities and contribute to Pakistan’s public administration and socio-economic development.

The signing of the 2026 JDS grant agreement reinforces the depth and continuity of the Pakistan-Japan partnership.

For Japan, the programme represents a sustained investment in Pakistan’s human capital and institutional development. For Pakistan, it provides young government officials with access to world-class academic and professional opportunities while strengthening the capabilities of its public institutions.

The ninth installment of the programme also demonstrates that the partnership has developed beyond individual projects into a sustained framework of cooperation.



As Pakistan confronts increasingly complex development challenges, the importance of skilled policymakers and capable public institutions will continue to grow. Programmes such as JDS can help equip the next generation of civil servants with the knowledge, expertise and international exposure required to meet those challenges.

The latest agreement therefore carries significance beyond its financial value. The JPY 350 million Japanese grant is an investment in people, institutions and the future of Pakistan-Japan relations — one that could continue to generate benefits long after the 2026 scholarship recipients complete their studies and return to serve their country.

Pakistan, EU reaffirm commitment to democratic values

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan and the European Union this week reaffirmed their shared commitment to democratic values, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, while agreeing to further strengthen bilateral cooperation and parliamentary engagement.

The understanding was reached during a meeting between Federal Minister for Law, Justice and Human Rights Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar and Member of the European Parliament Ondrej Dostál, during which the two sides discussed the importance of maintaining positive and constructive Pakistan-EU relations and expanding parliamentary interaction.

The meeting assumed significance against the backdrop of Pakistan's longstanding engagement with the European Union, a relationship that extends beyond conventional diplomatic ties to encompass trade, development cooperation, governance, human rights, migration, climate change and regional stability.

During the meeting, both sides emphasised the importance of democratic principles and effective institutions as essential foundations for sustainable political and economic cooperation. They agreed that continued engagement could help strengthen mutual understanding and create greater space for cooperation on issues of common interest.

Senator Tarar highlighted Pakistan's commitment to democratic values, constitutional governance and the rule of law, while stressing the importance of effective institutions in ensuring political stability and protecting citizens' rights.

The discussions also placed particular emphasis on parliamentary engagement. The two sides agreed that closer interaction between Pakistan's Parliament and the European Parliament could provide an important platform for exchanging views on legislation, democratic governance, constitutional matters, human rights and institutional development.

Parliamentary diplomacy has increasingly become an important component of international relations. Unlike traditional government-to-government engagement, parliamentary interaction allows elected representatives to establish direct relationships, exchange legislative experiences and discuss issues that may not always feature prominently in formal diplomatic negotiations.

For Pakistan, stronger engagement with European lawmakers also offers an opportunity to explain its political, constitutional and legal perspectives directly to European policymakers. At the same time, European parliamentarians can gain a better understanding of Pakistan's institutional environment and the challenges confronting its democratic and legal systems.

Pakistan and the EU have maintained diplomatic relations for decades, with their partnership gradually expanding into a broad-based relationship.

Trade remains one of its most important pillars. The European Union is among Pakistan's largest trading partners and a major destination for Pakistani exports, particularly textiles and garments.

The EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus, commonly known as GSP+, has played an important role in facilitating Pakistani exports to European markets. The preferential trade arrangement has helped strengthen Pakistan's export capacity and contributed to the expansion of commercial relations between the two sides.

The importance of the European market means that Pakistan has a strong economic interest in maintaining stable and constructive relations with the EU. At the same time, European engagement with Pakistan extends beyond trade and includes development, humanitarian assistance, education, climate cooperation and institutional strengthening.

The political relationship has consequently acquired greater complexity, with economic interests existing alongside discussions on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The reaffirmation of democratic values during the latest meeting is particularly significant because these issues remain an important part of the EU's engagement with Pakistan.

The European Union places considerable emphasis on democratic governance, human rights, labour standards and the rule of law in its external partnerships. Pakistan, meanwhile, has repeatedly stressed its commitment to constitutional democracy and the protection of fundamental rights.

The two sides therefore have both shared principles and areas where continued dialogue remains necessary. Rather than allowing differences to overshadow the broader relationship, sustained institutional engagement can provide a mechanism for addressing concerns while preserving cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

The emphasis on dialogue is particularly important in a relationship in which economic and political considerations are closely interconnected.

The EU's preferential trade framework has become one of the most important economic dimensions of Pakistan-



EU relations.

For Pakistan, access to European markets is critical for its export-oriented industries, particularly the textile and apparel sectors. The arrangement has helped Pakistani businesses compete more effectively in one of the world's largest consumer markets.

However, the trade relationship also carries wider obligations. The GSP+ framework is linked to Pakistan's implementation of a range of international conventions covering human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and good governance.

This has made the EU's economic relationship with Pakistan closely connected to discussions about institutional reforms, legal protections and human rights.

For Islamabad, maintaining constructive engagement with Brussels is therefore important not only from a diplomatic perspective but also because of the economic benefits associated with access to European markets.

The latest discussions also highlighted the potential for parliamentary diplomacy to become a stronger component of Pakistan-EU relations.

Parliamentarians can play a valuable role in creating sustained channels of communication, particularly when relations encounter difficult or sensitive issues. Regular exchanges can help lawmakers compare legislative practices, discuss democratic institutions and explore ways of strengthening governance.

Such interaction can also complement formal diplomatic channels by creating relationships that extend beyond changes in governments or political circumstances.

For Pakistan, closer engagement with the European Parliament could help convey the country's perspective on legislation, constitutional development, human rights and democratic institutions.

For European lawmakers, dialogue with Pakistani counterparts can provide first-hand insight into the country's political and legal environment and help promote a more informed understanding of developments in Pakistan.

While trade remains central to the relationship, there is considerable potential to broaden economic cooperation. Pakistan has sought to attract greater European investment in areas including renewable energy, information technology, agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure and other emerging sectors.

European companies, meanwhile, can potentially benefit from Pakistan's large domestic market, strategic location and expanding pool of young workers and entrepreneurs.

Greater investment could also contribute to technology

transfer, skills development and integration into international value chains.

For this potential to be fully realised, however, sustained attention to regulatory predictability, institutional capacity, ease of doing business and investor confidence will remain important.

The meeting between Tarar and Dostál demonstrated that Pakistan-EU relations are increasingly shaped by a combination of economic interests and shared discussions on governance and democratic values.

Both sides have a clear interest in maintaining constructive engagement. Pakistan benefits from access to European markets, investment, development cooperation and political engagement, while the EU has an interest

in maintaining strong relations with an important South Asian country with a significant role in regional stability.

The reaffirmation of democratic values, the rule of law and human rights provides an important framework for that engagement.

At the same time, the agreement to strengthen parliamentary interaction offers a practical mechanism for deepening mutual understanding.

As Pakistan and the European Union look towards the future, the challenge will be to ensure that their relationship continues to expand despite differences on individual issues. Regular political dialogue, stronger parliamentary contacts and greater economic cooperation can

help create a more resilient partnership.

The latest meeting therefore represents more than a routine diplomatic interaction. It reflects a broader effort to strengthen the institutional foundations of Pakistan-EU relations and ensure that economic cooperation is accompanied by meaningful political and parliamentary engagement.

With trade, democratic governance, human rights and parliamentary diplomacy increasingly intertwined, the future of the Pakistan-EU partnership will depend on the ability of both sides to maintain dialogue, manage differences constructively and identify new areas of common interest.



William and Kate

The partnership behind a modern royal marriage



pressures that accompany life at the centre of the British royal family. "The secret to the Prince and Princess of Wales' marriage is support for one another throughout their roles as working royals and as parents to their three young children," Myers said. Their relationship, he argued, is characterised by a sense of partnership rather than the two pursuing entirely separate paths. "Everything they do is in tandem," Myers said, pointing in particular to Kate's influence on William's environmental ambitions. One of the clearest examples of that partnership is the Earthshot Prize, an ambitious environmental initiative launched by William in 2020. The project was conceived as a 10-year mission aimed at encouraging and supporting innovative solutions to some of the world's most pressing environmental challenges. What began as a major royal initiative has since developed into an international platform bringing attention to environmental innovators from across the globe. According to figures associated with the initiative, more than 5,600 emerging environmental solutions from 156 countries have been identified during its first six years. Every year, five winners are selected across five categories, with each winner receiving a substantial financial award to help develop and expand their work. The prize



High Commissioner of United Kingdom to Pakistan Jane Marriott



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

Her return to major international royal duties alongside William would consequently represent more than another item on the royal calendar. It would signal another step in her gradual return to public life following a deeply challenging personal period. The couple's ability to balance professional responsibilities with family life has become particularly important as they raise their three children while preparing for increasingly significant roles within the monarchy. William, as the heir to the British throne, carries responsibilities that will eventually place him at the centre of the institution. Kate, meanwhile, has developed a prominent public role of her own, particularly around children, families, early development, mental health and other social causes.

Their public image has increasingly been shaped by the idea of William and Kate operating as a team. Whether appearing at major ceremonial occasions, travelling overseas, meeting members of the public or supporting charitable initiatives, they frequently present themselves as partners working towards common objectives. That partnership has been forged over a remarkably long period. When they first met at St Andrews, neither could have known that their university romance would eventually lead to marriage and place them at the centre of the British royal succession. Their relationship survived the transition from student life to intense media attention, a period of separation before their engagement, marriage in 2011 and the subsequent demands of royal life. They have since become parents to three children and taken on increasingly senior responsibilities within the monarchy.

Their story has therefore evolved far beyond the conventional narrative of a royal romance. It is now a story of two people who began their relationship as university students and have spent more than two decades growing into their public roles together.

As the 25th anniversary of their first meeting approaches, attention is likely to focus once again on the journey that took William and Kate from St Andrews to the heart of the British monarchy.

Their marriage has faced the extraordinary pressures that come with being constantly observed, while their family life has unfolded under an unprecedented level of public interest. Yet the picture presented by those close to their work is one of a couple who increasingly rely on each other as partners in both family life and royal service. The forthcoming Earthshot Prize ceremony in Mumbai could provide another visible illustration of that partnership.

For William, it will be another stage in his long-term environmental campaign. For Kate, it could mark an important return to the international royal spotlight. And for both, it would reinforce the image of a royal couple whose public roles have become closely intertwined. After 25 years since their story began and more than 15 years as a married couple, William and Kate's relationship has entered a new phase — one in which personal partnership, family responsibilities and preparation for the future of the monarchy are increasingly inseparable.



has therefore sought not simply to recognise environmental ideas but to provide practical support that can help turn promising solutions into projects with wider global impact.

Myers has credited Kate with playing an important role in encouraging William when he had doubts about whether the initiative could achieve the international prominence it ultimately attained.

The Earthshot Prize has also become an increasingly global event. Rather than remaining tied to Britain, its annual awards ceremony has travelled between continents, reflecting William's ambition to establish the project as an international movement.

The inaugural ceremony was held in the United Kingdom in 2021, followed by the United States in 2022, Singapore in 2023, South Africa in 2024 and Brazil in 2025.

The next chapter will take the awards to Mumbai, India, in November, where William is expected to be joined by Kate.

Her anticipated appearance would carry particular significance.

The event is expected to be Kate's first attendance at an Earthshot Prize awards ceremony since 2022 and would also mark her first joint international engagement with William since her cancer diagnosis two years ago.

Kate's health has been the subject of intense public attention since she revealed in 2024 that she was undergoing treatment for cancer. In January 2025, she announced that she was in remission, providing a major moment of relief for her family, supporters and the wider public.



©The Middleton Family, 2011

Covert Report

London: More than 15 years after Prince William and Kate Middleton exchanged wedding vows, their relationship continues to attract enormous public interest, not only because of their position at the heart of the British monarchy but also because of the partnership they have built through years of public duty, family life and personal challenges. This autumn will mark another significant milestone in their story: 25 years since the future Prince and Princess of Wales first crossed paths as university students at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. Their journey from first-year students to one of the

world's most recognisable royal couples has unfolded over a quarter of a century, encompassing courtship, marriage, parenthood, royal responsibilities and some of the most demanding periods of their lives. While there is no universal formula for a successful marriage, royal biographer Russell Myers believes the strength of William and Kate's relationship lies largely in the way they support one another, both in their private lives and in their demanding roles as senior working royals. Myers, author of *William and Catherine: The Monarchy's New Era: The Inside Story*, has described mutual support as a defining feature of their marriage. In his assessment, the couple's ability to work together while raising their three children has helped them navigate the



“It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for what you are not.”— Andre Gide

Making one person smile can change the world – maybe not the whole world, but their world.

CPEC and IMEC: Why one might work and the other might not

A geopolitical analysis of two major infrastructure initiatives

Ambassador Stefano Pontecorvo
I have been a diplomat and civil servant for the better part of 40 years. During that time, I have watched principled international initiatives and economically driven ones, political grand designs and practical infrastructure projects. I have sat across negotiating tables in capitals that no longer exist on maps, and I have seen what happens when political convenience collides with the hard economics of moving goods across difficult terrain. Most of what I have watched has gone nowhere. This is exactly why I am looking with great interest and considerable skepticism at one of the latest major international initiatives: the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). On the surface, it is politically convenient. India is a rising power that the West wishes to tie into its strategic architecture. The Middle East remains essential to global energy and trade. Europe needs alternatives to Chinese infrastructure. The geometry looks sound. But geometry is not economics, and political convenience is not sustainability. I believe IMEC, whatever its political utility today, is simply not sustainable. CPEC, the flagship BRI project, has, by contrast, proven itself economically resilient — a distinction that matters more than most analysts acknowledge. Before explaining why, it is worth recalling what these initiatives actually are and why one works while the other likely will not.



back to understand the Belt and Road Initiative itself. Launched by China in 2013 under the banner of reconnecting ancient Silk Road trade networks, the BRI is far more than infrastructure marketing. It represents a deliberate strategy to reshape global connectivity on terms favorable to Beijing: reducing China's dependence on Western-controlled shipping lanes, creating markets for Chinese capital and labour, establishing political influence across Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and building alternatives to institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. The initiative encompasses more than 150 countries and more than \$1 trillion in committed or planned investments across ports, railways, highways, energy infrastructure and digital networks. The track record is mixed. Some BRI projects — particularly in Southeast Asia and Central Asia — have generated genuine economic returns and trade growth. Others have become cautionary tales: ambitious ports in Africa sitting underutilised, railways carrying minimal cargo, and debts that cannot be serviced driving countries into dependency relationships with Beijing. The distinction is usually economic, not political. Projects rooted in genuine demand and built by and for exporters with real trade volumes have survived. Projects built primarily to advance Chinese geopolitical interests or to deploy Chinese capital without regard for local economic absorptive capacity have stalled. CPEC, launched in 2015, belongs to the first category.



This is why it merits close examination. It is the proof of concept that Chinese infrastructure investment can be economically self-sustaining. It is also the standard against which other initiatives — including IMEC — should be measured. CPEC: The baseline The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative in South Asia. Launched formally in 2015, it comprises roughly \$62 billion in committed investment across port development, road and rail networks, energy infrastructure and special economic zones. Its centerpiece is Gwadar Port on Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast, positioned to handle traffic that might otherwise move through the Strait of Malacca — a chokepoint through which roughly one-third of global maritime trade currently transits. The logic is straightforward: China gains a shorter shipping route to the Middle East and Europe, reduces its dependence on a single maritime chokepoint and gains a strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan receives infrastructure investment, port revenues, energy capacity and employment. Third parties move goods more efficiently across Asia and into Europe via rail and road networks that did not exist before. Has CPEC worked economically? The answer is qualified but real. Gwadar Port handled significant cargo volumes in 2024, up from negligible figures a decade ago. The Karakoram Highway upgrade has cut travel times between China and the port from weeks to days. Pakistani energy capacity increased substantially through Chinese-financed coal and hydro projects, although the electric grid remains weak. Chinese investment in special economic zones around the corridor has created manufacturing hubs, alongside tensions between the local population and Chinese citizens. These tensions have been exploited by the Balochistan Liberation Army, a militant group opposed to Islamabad. The critical metric is trade flow: Chinese goods, Pakistani goods and third-country goods all move through these networks. This is not simply a one-way extraction. More importantly, the network generates revenue

independent of Chinese capital inflows. Gwadar Port collects fees. Special economic zones generate tax revenue. The corridor has become, by most measures, economically self-reinforcing. Why? Because there is genuine demand. Goods move through Gwadar not because mandates dictate it, but because the routing is cheaper and faster than alternatives. The economics work. IMEC: The problem The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor is a more recent initiative, formally launched in 2023 with endorsements from India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Greece, Cyprus and the European Union. The vision is similarly ambitious: integrated rail, port and digital networks spanning three continents, cutting shipping times between Asia and Europe and positioning the Gulf as a crucial logistics hub. On paper, the ambition is not unfounded. The Middle East sits at the intersection of Europe, Africa and Asia. Port infrastructure in the Gulf is world-class. Rail and road corridors could theoretically compete with existing routes. The political coalition appears diverse and deep. Yet here we encounter the first serious problem, and it is not subtle: the corridor has no built-in economic driver comparable to CPEC's core logic. CPEC works because Chinese manufacturers produce goods that move efficiently through it. The corridor is built by and for economic actors who have an immediate incentive to use it. The shortest sea route to Europe matters to Chinese exporters because they are moving tens of millions of containers of consumer goods annually. The demand creates the justification for capital investment. IMEC does not have this anchor, or at the



very least not yet. Who are the primary exporters using an India-Middle East-Europe corridor? Indian manufacturing is growing, but India's export profile is fundamentally different from China's. India exports software services, pharmaceuticals, agricultural products and increasingly apparel and light manufacturing. With the exception of a few sectors, these do not move via container ships in the volumes that would justify the capital intensity of IMEC's proposed infrastructure. Consider the consumer goods test: How many "Made in India" goods have you bought in the last year, and how many "Made in China"? The answer for most consumers and businesses in Europe is telling. Chinese manufacturing dominance in consumer and intermediate goods is not ideological; it is structural. It drives physical trade volumes. IMEC's proponents assume that building corridors will generate trade. The reverse is more often true: trade drives corridor development. This is not a failure of ambition. It is a failure of foundation.

France shuts three nuclear reactors after massive jellyfish swarm

Newswire
Paris: A massive swarm of jellyfish has forced the temporary shutdown of three reactors at France's Gravelines nuclear power plant, prompting the operator to activate precautionary measures introduced after a similar incident brought the entire facility to a standstill last year. Electricity company EDF said reactors 2, 3 and 4 at the nuclear plant in northern France were taken offline late Monday after large numbers of jellyfish entered the plant's cooling-water system. Reactor 1 was also operating at only 50% of its capacity as a precaution, while reactor 5 was already offline for scheduled maintenance. Reactor 6 remained fully operational. The incident highlights an unusual but recurring challenge for nuclear power plants located near coastal waters: marine life can enter cooling-water intake systems and obstruct equipment, potentially forcing



operators to reduce or halt reactor operations. Gravelines is one of France's largest nuclear power facilities. Located in northern France and connected to the North Sea through a cooling canal, the plant has six reactors, each capable of generating around 900 megawatts of electricity, giving the facility a combined capacity of approximately 5.4 gigawatts. EDF stressed that the jellyfish-related disruption posed no threat to the safety of the plant, its personnel or the surrounding environment. The latest shutdown comes after the entire Gravelines facility was forced offline last year following a major jellyfish incursion. Following that incident, EDF introduced additional monitoring and response measures designed to identify large swarms earlier and reduce their impact on the plant's cooling systems. The operator has installed fixed cameras at the water-intake canals and around filter-drum screens to detect

incoming blockages as quickly as possible. EDF has also established cooperation with a French fishing organisation and a sea-rescue organisation to monitor coastal waters for jellyfish concentrations. When a large swarm is detected, fishing vessels can be deployed to carry out targeted trawling operations aimed at reducing the density of jellyfish before they reach the plant. According to EDF, fishing boats were deployed on Saturday after an initial warning about the approaching swarm. The early intervention helped limit the impact on the power station, although some jellyfish had already reached the plant and had to be removed from the cooling system. EDF said specialised vacuum trucks were being used to clear the jellyfish that had accumulated at the facility. The company said no new jellyfish were currently arriving, allowing cleanup operations to proceed and raising hopes that the affected reactors could be brought back online relatively quickly. The incident therefore appears to have been contained without affecting the overall safety of the facility. The unusual disruption has also drawn attention to broader environmental changes that could make similar incidents more frequent. Scientists have warned that jellyfish swarms may become increasingly common because of a combination of factors, including rising global temperatures, the spread of invasive species, the loss of natural predators and overfishing. Warmer marine environments can create conditions favourable to jellyfish populations, while changes in marine ecosystems can alter the balance between jellyfish and the species that normally prey on them. For nuclear power operators that rely on large volumes of seawater or river water for cooling, such ecological

changes can present an increasingly important operational challenge. The jellyfish incident comes as France's nuclear power industry is already dealing with weather-related constraints. A fifth heatwave is expected to intensify during the week, raising concerns about further restrictions on nuclear generation as temperatures increase and water availability becomes more challenging. French nuclear reactors can face operational limits during periods of extreme heat because their cooling systems depend on water temperatures and environmental conditions. In addition to the problems at Gravelines, one reactor in northern France has reportedly remained offline for much of the summer because of low river levels. Another reactor has experienced limited restarts and remained largely out of service during much of July. The combination of high temperatures, low water levels and unusual marine events demonstrates the growing range of environmental challenges confronting France's nuclear electricity system. For EDF, the immediate priority at Gravelines is to complete the cleanup and restore the affected reactors to service as quickly and safely as possible. The preventive measures introduced after last year's shutdown appear to have helped the operator respond earlier to the latest jellyfish swarm, with monitoring systems providing advance warning and fishing boats deployed before the swarm reached the plant in full



force. With no new jellyfish reportedly entering the facility, EDF expects the cleanup operation to progress rapidly. The incident nevertheless serves as a reminder that even highly controlled nuclear facilities can be vulnerable to environmental events far removed from conventional technical or mechanical failures. As France continues to rely heavily on nuclear power for electricity generation, maintaining reliable reactor operations amid increasingly unpredictable environmental conditions is likely to become an important challenge for operators and policymakers alike.