Ambassador Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri calls for unity at Pakistan Independence Day celebration in Indonesia **Liaquat Ali**

Islamabad/Jakarta: Pakistan's Ambassador to Indonesia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week called for national unity and collective effort to steer the country towards greater peace, stability and prosperity, as the Pakistan Embassy in Jakarta celebrated Independence Day with a ceremony attended by (Page-5)

COVERT

TRUTH UNFOLD

August 30 - September 5 , 2026

UK-backed programme helps more than 200,000 children improve learning outcomes in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa **Celina Ali**

Islamabad: More than 200,000 children in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have benefited from a UK -supported education programme aimed at improving foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills, while more than 35,000 out-of-school children have been brought back into education.The British High Commission said this week (Page-11)

Track 1.5 talks: China, US explore paths to strategic stability in ties

Chen Guifang - CGTN

Beijing: Chinese and US representatives met this week in Beijing to discuss ways to boost political trust, expand economic and trade cooperation, and explore joint efforts in technology and artificial intelligence, with the aim of building a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump set the new paradigm for the constructive relationship of strategic stability at their historic meeting in May, said Liu Haixing, head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee (IDCPC), in a keynote speech at the third China-US Track 1.5 Dialogue.

"That has provided strategic guidance for China-US ties over the next three years and beyond," Liu told the semi-official meeting, a format that sits between Track 1 of formal diplomacy and Track 2 of non-governmental exchanges.

In his May talks with Trump, Xi said the constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability should be a positive stability with cooperation as the mainstay, a sound stability with moderate competition, a constant stability with manageable differences, and an enduring stability with promises of peace.

"President Xi put forward this idea of a constructive relationship of strategic stability and President Trump endorsed that idea. That would be the guiding framing for the relationship," said John L. Thornton, co-chair of the Asia Society Board of Trustees, who attended Tuesday's dialogue.

Thornton told China Media Group (CMG) that he is optimistic that there are a lot of possibilities for progress built upon that framework.

The new positioning of China-US relations lays the groundwork for both sides to find areas of alignment, and the Track?1.5 Dialogue serves as one positive signal, said Craig Mundie, the US co-chair of the China-US AI Track 2 Dialogue.

"If you listen to the conversations here, people are now hunting for activities that we can do that align with this slogan," Mundie told CMG on the sidelines of Tuesday's dialogue.

The third China-US Track 1.5 Dialogue is held in Beijing, China, August 25, 2026. /IDCPC

The third China-US Track 1.5 Dialogue is held in Beijing, China, August 25, 2026. /IDCPC

Launched in 2023, the China-US Track?1.5 Dialogue has yielded a raft of practical recommendations to boost bilateral engagement on politics, commerce and trade, technology and people-to-people ties.

The latest gathering comes at a critical moment for China-US ties, giving both sides space to address pressing bilateral issues and explore where the relationship may head next, with trade and artificial intelligence (AI) high on the agenda.

"Business has always been a central part of the US-China relationship," said Craig Allen, former president of the US-China Business Council.

The two sides have exchanged technologies and grown together, Allen said, adding that he is hopeful that both will make progress to deepen the business relationship, rather than to decouple.

"To decouple will make us both poorer and neither side can afford to decouple," he said.

In its June report, the US-China Business Council found that 80% of surveyed US companies view the Chinese market as important or very important to their global competitiveness.

Official figures from China's General Administration of Customs in July show that bilateral China-US goods trade expanded 13.7% year on year in the second quarter of 2026.

Attendees of Tuesday's dialogue also urged China and the US to work together to manage various risks posed by AI, and to open up more room for cooperation on the technology.

Such appeal comes amid recent reported US government actions, including stricter curbs on Chinese large-language models and pressure on third countries to pick sides between US and Chinese AI ecosystems.

Christopher Nixon Cox, grandson of former US president Richard Nixon and founder of the Nixon Dialogue, said AI is a critical issue on which the US should work together with China.

"We've seen a lot of things, of AI escaping sandboxes recently," Cox told CMG, referring to a series of incidents involving major US AI models. "This is very worrisome and is a critical issue for our time."

Both China and the United States need to take leadership for the protection of humanity, he urged. "If China and the United States are fighting each other on AI, then humanity will be in trouble potentially."

Chen Dongxiao, president of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, said Tuesday's dialogue featured a sincere and constructive atmosphere as participants laid out their concerns and expectations in a pragmatic manner with thorough information-sharing.

Chen expressed hope that useful proposals and consensus-oriented ideas from the talks could be translated into concrete policy actions, particularly to advance substantive cooperation on AI governance and youth programs between Beijing and Washington.

Liu, the IDCPC head, called on both China and the US to keep sending clear and consistent policy signals, and find solutions to each other's core concerns in the spirit of equality, respect and mutual benefit.

"The year 2026 is important for China-US relations. What we hope to see is both sides demonstrating strategic vision and actively exploring the right way for the two major countries to get along with one another."

Canada opens new intake for French-speaking int'l students

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Canada has opened a fresh intake of its Francophone Minority Community Student Pilot, offering eligible French-speaking international students a potential direct route to

permanent residence after completing their studies at participating institutions outside Quebec.

The latest intake began on August 26 and will remain open until August 25, 2027, or until the programme's limit of 2,970 study permit applications is reached.

The initiative is designed to attract French-speaking students from selected countries and encourage them to study and eventually settle in Canada's francophone communities outside Quebec.

For international students, one of the programme's most significant features is the opportunity to apply for Canadian permanent residence after graduation if they meet the required conditions.

The pathway distinguishes the pilot from many other options available to international graduates, who generally have to compete through immigration programmes with limited spaces or meet changing federal and provincial selection requirements.

Under the Francophone Minority Community Student Pilot, students must first obtain a study permit specifically associated with the programme and complete an eligible post-secondary programme at one of the participating institutions.

Once they graduate, eligible students can apply for permanent residence directly, provided they satisfy the programme's requirements.

The programme is open to French-speaking citizens of 33 countries, mainly across Africa, the Caribbean and other French-speaking regions.

Eligible countries include Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, the Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Seychelles, Togo and Tunisia.

Applicants must enrol in a full-time post-secondary programme lasting at least two years.

At least half of the programme's instruction must be delivered in French, and the course must lead to an eligible diploma or degree.

The language requirement is also relatively accessible compared with some other Canadian immigration routes. Applicants need a minimum French-language level equivalent to NCLC 5, while French-language Express Entry draws have generally required a higher threshold.

A key feature of the programme is its focus on French-speaking communities outside Quebec.

Students can choose from 17 participating post-secondary institutions located across provinces including Ontario, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

Participating institutions include the University of Ottawa, York University's Glendon campus, University of Alberta, University of Regina, Université Saint-Boniface, Université de Moncton, Université Sainte-Anne and several French-language colleges and universities.

The geographical focus reflects Canada's wider effort to strengthen francophone communities outside Quebec by attracting international students who can potentially become long-term residents.

Students must obtain an acceptance letter from a participating institution confirming that they are applying through the Francophone Minority Community Student Pilot.

Applications for the study permit generally have to be submitted from outside Canada.

Applicants must also demonstrate that they have sufficient funds to pay for their education and support themselves and any accompanying family members during their stay.

The amount required depends partly on the size of the community where the participating institution's main campus is located.

The Canadian government's programme gives successful students a structured pathway from education to permanent residence.

After completing an eligible programme, graduates can apply for permanent residence if they meet the relevant requirements and are living in Canada outside Quebec with valid temporary resident status.

The programme also provides a dedicated work-permit option for eligible applicants who are waiting for a decision on their permanent residence application.

This can allow graduates to work outside Quebec while their immigration application is being processed.

The combination of education, post-graduation work opportunities and a potential permanent-residence application makes the pilot particularly significant for French-speaking students seeking a longer-term future in Canada.

Canada launched the Francophone Minority Community Student Pilot in August 2024 as part of efforts to make the country's international student system more accessible to French-speaking applicants from regions where study permit approval rates have traditionally been lower.

The programme initially accepted up to 2,300 study permit applications during its first year.

The government subsequently increased the annual intake to 2,970 applications and extended the programme for another year.

The extension forms part of Canada's broader strategy to increase francophone immigration outside Quebec.

Ottawa has set an objective of raising the proportion of francophone immigrants settling outside Quebec to 12% by 2029.

International students are an important component of that strategy because those who study in Canada can develop language skills, local qualifications and Canadian work experience before potentially applying for permanent residence.

The pilot is therefore intended to address two objectives at the same time: attracting international students and supporting the long-term development of minority French-speaking communities across Canada.

The programme has already begun producing its first cohort of students.

By July 6, 2026, around 515 students and 150 accompanying family members had entered Canada through the pilot.

The first group of participants is expected to become eligible to graduate and potentially apply for permanent residence as early as 2027.

The new intake provides another opportunity for eligible French-speaking students to enter Canada through a programme specifically designed to connect international education with immigration.

However, obtaining a study permit does not automatically guarantee permanent residence.

Applicants must comply with the programme's conditions, successfully complete their eligible studies and meet the requirements for permanent residence at the time of application.

The latest intake nevertheless represents a significant opportunity for French-speaking students from the 33 eligible countries, particularly those seeking an alternative to highly competitive immigration pathways.

For Canada, the programme offers a way to attract young, French-speaking talent while strengthening communities where the French language plays an important cultural and social role.

For participating students, it provides a clearly defined education-to-immigration pathway and the possibility of building a long-term future in Canada outside Quebec.

Natasha Daultana says farmers bearing brunt of 'wrong' policies

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Natasha Daultana this week criticised the government's handling of the agriculture sector, accusing the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) administration of repeatedly adopting policies that have left farmers facing uncertainty and financial hardship.

Speaking about the situation confronting the farming community, Daultana said agriculture remained the backbone of Pakistan's economy and that farmers deserved consistent policies, fair returns and greater government support rather than decisions that created uncertainty in agricultural markets.

She alleged that farmers had repeatedly suffered because of what she described as inconsistent government decisions concerning essential commodities, particularly sugar and wheat.

Daultana questioned the government's approach to sugar, saying the authorities had first allowed or facilitated imports and were now moving towards exports, creating confusion over the country's actual supply requirements.

"Farmers are the backbone of the country, but under the PML-N government they have always remained worried," Daultana said.

She also raised concerns over the wheat situation, alleging that Pakistan was once again facing a wheat crisis and relying on imports to meet domestic requirements.

The PPP leader argued that the repeated need to import essential agricultural commodities pointed to shortcomings in the government's planning and agricultural policy.

She said farmers were being placed in a difficult position as they struggled with uncertainty over crop prices, government procurement decisions and the availability of key commodities in the domestic market.

Daultana's criticism comes amid wider political debate over the management of Pakistan's agriculture sector, with opposition parties increasingly focusing on the difficulties faced by farmers and the government's handling of food security.

She said farmers could no longer remain silent over policies that, in her view, were adversely affecting their livelihoods.

According to Daultana, the farming community was preparing to mobilise and raise its concerns more forcefully, with farmers likely to take to the streets to demand political accountability.

She said the farmers would eventually come out in protest and demand the resignation of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz.

The PPP leader framed the issue as one extending beyond the interests of farmers, arguing that weaknesses in agricultural policy could have direct consequences for Pakistan's food security, imports, prices and broader economy.

Agriculture remains a critical component of Pakistan's economic structure, supporting a large share of the population and contributing significantly to rural employment and national production.

Daultana argued that a government seeking sustainable economic growth could not afford to overlook the concerns of farmers or adopt policies that left producers uncertain about whether their crops would receive adequate returns.

She particularly criticised what she described as a lack of consistency in government decisions, saying the contrasting moves on sugar and wheat demonstrated the need for a more coherent approach to agricultural and food-security planning.

The PPP leader maintained that farmers needed policies that were predictable and designed around long-term domestic requirements rather than short-term responses to changing market conditions.

Her remarks also gave the issue a political dimension, with Daultana warning that continued dissatisfaction among farmers could develop into a wider movement against the Punjab government.

She said the farming community was increasingly prepared to make its grievances heard and demand changes in government policy.

Daultana's comments are likely to add to pressure on the provincial administration as opposition parties seek to highlight economic difficulties faced by rural communities and question the government's performance in managing essential commodities.

For the PPP leader, the central issue is the treatment of farmers, whom she described as the backbone of the country.

She argued that protecting their interests was essential not only for rural livelihoods but also for ensuring stable food supplies and reducing Pakistan's dependence on imports.

Daultana called for greater attention to agricultural planning and criticised the government for what she portrayed as a cycle of policy decisions that first created shortages and then required corrective measures.

She warned that unless the concerns of farmers were addressed, political pressure on the government would continue to grow.

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IRON BROTHER - 铁兄弟

Pakistan presents $4.85bn climate project pipeline to Chinese investors

Gwadar Pro

Islamabad: Pakistan has presented a $4.85 billion pipeline of climate-resilient projects to Chinese officials and investors as it seeks financing, technology and investment partnerships under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The pipeline comprises 69 projects across eight sectors and forms part of Pakistan's Climate Prosperity Plan, according to the Climate Vulnerable Forum and V20 Finance Ministers Secretariat (CVF-V20).

The projects were presented at a dialogue in Islamabad on Thursday organised by the CVF-V20 and the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), bringing together Pakistani officials, Chinese diplomats, business representatives and climate-finance specialists.

Jauhar Saleem, president of the IRS, said the focus should be on turning climate priorities into investable projects and moving cooperation from plans to financing and implementation.

Shi Yuanqiang, chargé d'affaires at the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, said the plan offered a clear pathway and broad market space for Chinese and other foreign companies to make green investments in Pakistan.

Romina Khurshid Alam, coordinator to the prime minister on climate change and environmental coordination, identified China as a natural partner because of its technology, manufacturing capacity and financial resources.

Participants discussed possible financing through the BRI and the Green Investment and Finance Partnership (GIFP), as well as joint ventures, local manufacturing, climate finance and carbon finance as possible ways of moving projects from planning to implementation.

The next round of investor engagement is expected at the China International Fair for Trade in Services (CIFTIS) in Beijing from Sept. 9 to 13, where the CVF-V20 is expected to showcase project pipelines and partnership models to Chinese companies and financial institutions.

Organisers said the aim would be to narrow the pipeline to a smaller number of projects with identified counterparties, clearer financing requirements and credible implementation plans.

45 CPEC projects worth $25.61bn completed as Pakistan-China economic partnership expands

Abida Shaheen

Islamabad: Pakistan has completed 45 development projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) at a combined investment of US $25.61 billion, marking substantial progress in the flagship economic partnership between Islamabad and Beijing, according to Pakistani government documents.

The completed portfolio spans energy, transport infrastructure and economic and social development, underscoring the broadening scope of China-Pakistan cooperation beyond individual infrastructure projects.

According to the documents, the 45 completed schemes include 17 energy projects, 15 infrastructure projects and 13 economic and social development initiatives.

Together, these projects have contributed to strengthening Pakistan's electricity generation capacity, improving road and urban transport networks and supporting development activities aimed at enhancing livelihoods and access to essential services.

The energy component represents one of the most significant achievements of the CPEC programme. Major projects such as the Sahiwal power plant, Port Qasim power project and Suki Kinari hydropower scheme have added to Pakistan's electricity generation capacity and formed an important part of efforts to address the country's longstanding energy shortages.

The completion of these projects also illustrates the role of Chinese investment and financing in expanding Pakistan's power infrastructure, particularly at a time when the country was facing persistent electricity supply constraints and growing demand from households and industry.

The CPEC portfolio has simultaneously transformed important parts of Pakistan's transport infrastructure.

Among the prominent completed schemes is the Multan-Sukkur Motorway (M-5), a major road link that has strengthened connectivity along the eastern corridor and facilitated movement between important economic centres. The motorway has also enhanced the broader road network connecting northern and southern parts of the country.

The Lahore Orange Line Metro is another high-profile project completed under the CPEC framework. The urban mass-transit system has provided a modern public transport option for residents of Lahore while demonstrating the application of Chinese technology and expertise in Pakistan's rapidly expanding urban centres.

The infrastructure component of CPEC has therefore extended beyond highways and power plants, contributing to a wider effort to improve mobility, connectivity and the physical foundations required for economic activity.

The government documents also highlight 13 economic and social development projects, reflecting a shift in the CPEC agenda towards people-centred development alongside large-scale infrastructure.

These initiatives have focused on improving livelihoods, access to services and development opportunities, complementing the corridor's larger objective of promoting economic growth and regional connectivity.

However, despite the completion of 45 projects, Pakistan continues to face challenges in advancing several major schemes included in the CPEC framework.

The Karachi Circular Railway, the Dera Ismail Khan-Zhob Highway and several projects associated with the development of Gwadar are among the projects facing delays.

The outstanding projects underline the financial and administrative complexities associated with major infrastructure schemes requiring substantial investment, long-term financing arrangements and coordination among federal and provincial authorities.

Financing remains a particularly important issue for projects involving large capital requirements, while regulatory approvals, land-related matters, institutional coordination and implementation capacity can also affect project timelines.

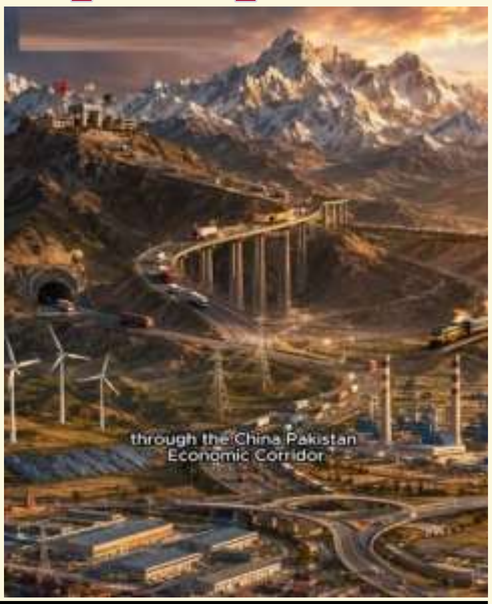
The government is continuing efforts to remove these bottlenecks and accelerate implementation of the remaining CPEC projects, with the objective of maintaining momentum in the Pakistan-China economic partnership.

For Beijing, CPEC remains a key component of its broader Belt and Road Initiative and an important platform for strengthening economic connectivity between China and Pakistan. For Islamabad, the corridor is viewed as a long-term framework for infrastructure development, industrialisation, energy security and enhanced regional connectivity.

The completion of 45 projects worth US $25.61 billion consequently represents a significant phase in the evolution of CPEC, even as both sides confront the challenge of translating the completed infrastructure into greater industrial production, trade, investment and employment.

The next phase of the corridor is therefore expected to place greater emphasis on making existing infrastructure economically productive while moving forward with strategically important projects that remain under implementation.

With major power, road, transport and social-development schemes already completed, CPEC has established a substantial physical foundation for Pakistan-China economic cooperation. The focus now is increasingly on ensuring that the infrastructure already created generates sustained economic activity and that delayed projects are brought to completion through improved financing and implementation mechanisms.



Chinese ambassador conveys Independence Day greetings to Pakistan

Gwadar Pro

Islamabad: Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Jiang Zaidong called on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar this week, conveying Independence Day greetings to Pakistan's leadership and people and reaffirming the longstanding ties between the two countries.

The two sides discussed regional developments and other matters of mutual interest, reiterating their commitment to close coordination.

Dar also expressed condolences over the death of a Chinese mountaineer in an avalanche at Broad Peak in Gilgit-Baltistan and assured Jiang of Pakistan's full assistance in repatriating the remains.

Jiang appreciated the support provided by Pakistani authorities and reaffirmed China's commitment to its "time-tested" relationship with Pakistan.

Pakistan and China maintain close political and economic ties, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor remaining a key pillar of bilateral cooperation.

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Italy-backed olive partnership offers Pakistan a path towards edible-oil self-reliance

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan has unveiled an ambitious national policy to transform its growing olive sector into a major agro-industrial engine, with Italy emerging as a key partner in the country's efforts to reduce a multibillion-dollar edible-oil import bill and build domestic capacity in cultivation, processing and value addition.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif launched the Pakistan National Olive Value Chain Policy this week, describing the development of Pakistan's olive industry as an important opportunity to strengthen the country's agricultural economy, create employment and gradually reduce its dependence on imported edible oil.

The initiative also highlighted the depth of Pakistan-Italy cooperation in agriculture, skills development and technology transfer, with Italian expertise playing an increasingly important role in efforts to develop the country's olive value chain.

Addressing the launching ceremony, Prime Minister Shehbaz said Pakistan currently spends around $4 billion annually on edible-oil imports, placing a substantial burden on the country's foreign-exchange resources.

Even a relatively modest increase in domestic production, he said, could generate significant economic benefits. Saving around $400 million in a single year through increased local production would represent a major achievement and demonstrate the potential of the sector.

The prime minister expressed confidence that Pakistan could move towards self-sufficiency in edible oil within the next few years if olive cultivation, processing and related industries were developed on a sufficiently large scale.

He particularly acknowledged Italy's contribution to Pakistan's olive sector, saying the country had benefited from Italian cooperation and expertise in developing olive cultivation and associated technical capabilities.

The government, he said, was now prepared to take the partnership a step further by sending 100 young agricultural graduates to Italy at state expense.

The graduates would receive specialised exposure to olive cultivation, production, processing and marketing, enabling them to bring modern techniques and international best practices back to Pakistan.

The initiative is significant because Pakistan's olive challenge is no longer simply about increasing the number of trees. The government is increasingly focusing on developing an integrated value chain that links nurseries and orchards with harvesting, oil extraction, quality control, packaging, branding and domestic and international marketing.

The prime minister emphasised that Pakistan must move beyond simply expanding cultivation and place greater attention on oil production, processing and value addition.

Such an approach could allow farmers to capture a greater share of the final value of olive products while helping create new opportunities for rural businesses, food-processing enterprises and skilled workers.

Italy's involvement gives the initiative an important international dimension.

Speaking at the ceremony, Italian Ambassador to Pakistan Ugo Ciarlatani said the two countries had maintained a partnership for more than seven decades, with bilateral cooperation expanding beyond traditional areas into agriculture, science, education, trade and security.

He described the new olive policy as the product of years of cooperation between Pakistan and Italy and pointed to several Italian-supported initiatives that have helped lay the foundations for the emerging olive industry.

Among them is the $100 million Pakistan-Italy Debt Swap Programme, under which resources were channelled into development initiatives, including the establishment of olive orchards in different parts of Pakistan.

The programme has contributed to expanding the country's olive plantation base and provided a foundation upon which the new national value-chain strategy can be built.

According to the Italian ambassador, Pakistan now has more than seven million olive plants, illustrating the rapid expansion of the crop and the growing importance attached to olives as an alternative source of edible oil.

Italy's contribution, however, has extended beyond plantation development.

Through its Olive Culture Project, Italy has supported laboratories, nurseries and business groups while providing training to more than 700 stakeholders associated with the sector.

The emphasis on laboratories and technical training is particularly important for an industry seeking to move from small-scale cultivation towards commercial production. Quality testing, improved planting material, modern harvesting techniques and efficient processing are essential if Pakistani olive oil is to compete in domestic and international markets.

The Italian partnership is also being linked to Pakistan's broader efforts to strengthen technical and vocational education.

Ciarlatani said Italy was supporting Pakistan's skills-development agenda through a €20 million capacity-building programme focused on high-value agriculture, including olive cultivation.

The programme reflects a wider shift in development cooperation from infrastructure and financial assistance towards technical expertise, skills and human-resource development.

For Pakistan, this could prove particularly valuable because the long-term success of the olive industry will depend not only on the number of trees planted but also on the availability of farmers, technicians, agronomists, processors and entrepreneurs capable of operating a modern value chain.

The government's decision to send young agricultural graduates to Italy is therefore being positioned as an investment in human capital as much as in agriculture.

Exposure to Italy's established olive industry could help Pakistani professionals understand the complete production cycle, from orchard management and harvesting to extraction, packaging, marketing and export development.

The initiative comes as Pakistan confronts persistent pressure from its dependence on imported edible oil. A substantial portion of domestic consumption is met through imports, making the edible-oil sector vulnerable to international prices, foreign-exchange constraints and disruptions in global supply chains.

Developing olive production offers Pakistan an opportunity to diversify its sources of edible oil while simultaneously opening a new avenue for agricultural exports.

The potential benefits could extend well beyond the replacement of imported cooking oil. A mature olive industry can generate economic activity across nurseries, farming, machinery, irrigation, processing, packaging, logistics, marketing and tourism.

The government also sees the sector as a means of expanding economic opportunities in rural areas, particularly for young people and women.

The Italian ambassador expressed hope that the new policy would eventually transform Pakistan's olive sector into a dynamic agro-industry capable of generating benefits for farmers, women and youth. Such an outcome would also give a new economic dimension to the longstanding Pakistan-Italy relationship.

The partnership demonstrates how agricultural cooperation can evolve from individual development projects into a broader strategy involving technology transfer, professional training, investment and market development.

For Italy, Pakistan's emerging olive industry also offers an opportunity to share expertise from one of the world's established olive-producing economies. For Pakistan, Italian experience could help accelerate the transition from scattered orchards and experimental cultivation towards a commercially viable national industry.

The government's immediate challenge, however, will be to convert the policy into measurable production gains. Expanding plantations must be matched by reliable irrigation, quality planting material, modern harvesting systems, processing facilities, farmer training, access to finance and effective marketing networks.

If these elements develop together, Pakistan could gradually reduce its dependence on imported edible oil while creating a new agricultural export sector.

The launch of the National Olive Value Chain Policy therefore represents more than an agricultural initiative. It signals an attempt to use international cooperation — particularly Pakistan's longstanding partnership with Italy — to build domestic expertise, strengthen rural economies and turn an expanding crop base into a commercially sustainable industry.

For Italy-Pakistan relations, the olive initiative could become one of the most visible examples of how decades of development cooperation can evolve into a partnership focused on skills, technology, value addition and economic self-reliance.

Ambassador of Italyto Pakistan

Ugo Ciarlatani

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Has China 'squeezed' the industrialization paths of Asian countries?

Global Times

Currently, China's economy is steadily advancing along the path of high-quality development, even as domestic and international circumstances become increasingly complex. Some Western media, due to misunderstanding or bias, have repeatedly questioned or even distorted China's economic development. Accordingly, the Global Times launches the "Q&A on China's Economy" column to publish opinion pieces to present facts and clarify perceptions.

Recently, a Western scholar published a commentary in Singapore's The Straits Times arguing that China has broken the "flying geese model," under which advanced countries transfer labor-intensive industries to late-developing countries. By retaining lower- and middle-end industries while simultaneously pushing into high-end sectors, the scholar argues, China has closed other Asian countries' path to industrialization. The article invokes the "China squeeze" theory, portraying China as an "economic behemoth" that "monopolizes the benefits while leaving little room for others."

The "flying geese model" was proposed in 1932 by Japanese economist Kaname Akamatsu. The theory compares regional economic development to the V-shaped flight formation of geese: the lead goose, representing an advanced country, transfers mature industries and technologies to the less-developed countries that follow, driving a step-by-step division of labor and industrial upgrading across the region. The theory gained widespread recognition after World War II as Japan and the "Four Asian Tigers" continued to rise. Recently, however, some Western scholars have invoked the "flying geese model" to explain Asia's industrial landscape, characterizing China's failure to immediately and completely withdraw from mature, lower-end industries as having "broken the flying geese model," and then claiming that China is dominating both the lower and middle ends while monopolizing the high end.

In fact, a look at the growth of Asian economies in recent years is enough to debunk this argument. If China were truly "crowding out" the development of neighboring countries, the share of manufacturing in their economies and the growth of their exports should have been declining. The reality is precisely the opposite. Manufacturing exports from later-developing Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh have continued to grow, in many cases at a rapid pace. In 2025, Vietnam's GDP grew by 8.02 percent, with manufacturing value added accounting for 24.53 percent of GDP. Manufacturing was likewise a key driver of Indonesia's 5.11 percent GDP growth in 2025. Malaysia's manufacturing sector accounts for 22.1 percent of GDP, well above the global average. Cambodia's garment exports grew by 16.88 percent in 2025, the fastest growth rate among Asia's major garment exporters. Judging from the actual industrial performance of these countries, where exactly is the evidence that they have been "crowded out"?

There is another fact that many people overlook: China's manufacturing sector is becoming deeply interconnected with those of other countries in entirely new ways. As the world's largest producer of upstream textile materials, footwear materials and related inputs, China has long maintained a high share of exports of these components to lower- and middle-income countries. The fabrics used by garment factories in Vietnam come from East China's Zhejiang Province; the soles used by shoe factories in Bangladesh come from southeast China's Fujian Province; and the zippers used by backpack factories in Cambodia come from Yiwu, a city in Zhejiang. China's industrial upgrading has not "crowded" other countries out of the industrialization process. On the contrary, it has helped them integrate into a vast regional production network, giving them development opportunities to participate in the global division of labor that would have been difficult to imagine in the past.

Within this Asian supply and production network, China's role is not to crowd others out, but to enable them. In 2025, the total value of trade between China and ASEAN reached 7.55 trillion yuan ($1.12 trillion), up 8 percent, making them each other's largest trading partner for the fifth consecutive year. Intermediate goods accounted for more than 60 percent of bilateral trade. This means that as ASEAN countries develop their manufacturing sectors, large quantities of raw materials, components and semi-finished products are imported from China. The division of labor is clear: China supplies intermediate goods, ASEAN handles processing and assembly, and the finished products are shipped to global markets. At the same time, Chinese companies are setting up factories across ASEAN member states, bringing with them capital, technology, management expertise and supply-chain support - precisely what late-developing countries need most for economic growth and industrial upgrading.

Portraying China's development as an "obstacle" to its neighbors is itself a product of zero-sum thinking. This view assumes that the "pie" of global industrialization is fixed, so that every additional slice consumed by one economy leaves less for others. The reality is that China's industrial upgrading is continually making the entire pie bigger. China needs to import more resources, agricultural products and basic manufactured goods from ASEAN; Chinese companies expanding overseas need local suppliers and labor; and Chinese consumers need more goods and services from across Asia. The continued growth of ASEAN exports to China clearly demonstrates the enormous demand generated by China's industrial upgrading.

Conversely, if any Asian country were to fall for the "China squeeze" narrative and even voluntarily abandon China as its largest supplier of intermediate goods, source of investment and neighboring market, the result could only be higher manufacturing costs and weaker competitiveness. Asian countries understand this clearly. Rather than rejecting cooperation with China, they are actively engaging with RCEP and deepening their economic and trade ties with China. They know that becoming deeply integrated with China, the world's largest manufacturing system, is a shortcut to industrialization, not an obstacle.

Global Times

'Economic D-Day'? The US has picked wrong script for sanctioning Iran

Global Times

Comparing an illegal unilateral sanctions campaign with no basis in international law and no authorization from the UN Security Council to the allied landing in Normandy, one of the defining battles of the anti-fascist war, is an absurd analogy. Forcing a stalled military conflict into the arena of economic confrontation only underscores how few cards the US has left to play.

On Monday local time, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced a new round of sanctions against Iran under a plan dubbed "operation economic outcast." What is particularly bizarre is the name he gave the campaign: "economic D-Day." Comparing an illegal unilateral sanctions campaign with no basis in international law and no authorization from the UN Security Council to the allied landing in Normandy, one of the defining battles of the anti-fascist war, is an absurd analogy.

The substance of the campaign is to extend sanctions to the countries that do business with Iran, effectively seeking to "sever every economic lifeline" available to Tehran. International opinion generally sees this more as a US "remedial measure" after military means failed to deliver results. Bloomberg economics analysts described that it left "major questions outstanding." Forcing a stalled military conflict into the arena of economic confrontation only underscores how few cards the US has left to play.

The US has steadily tightened sanctions on Iran since 1979, yet has never managed to force Tehran to submit. Now Washington is serving up the same old recipe with a familiar taste, merely under the new label of an "operation economic outcast" campaign. Although Iran's average daily oil exports have plunged from around 2 million barrels before the war to approximately 287,000 barrels in August, Tehran still holds the key strategic leverage of the Strait of Hormuz and has accumulated extensive experience in coping with sanctions for a long time. If nearly 50 years of sanctions failed to achieve the goal, can simply giving them a "D-Day" label finally make them work?

Through secondary sanctions, the US is not merely deciding "who it will do business with," but attempting to dictate to other countries around the world "who they can do business with." In doing so, Washington is opening multiple fronts at once: waging an economic war against Iran while simultaneously fighting sanctions battles with China, India, Turkey and even its European allies. Bessent has even threatened that countries that fail to cooperate could be excluded from the dollar system.

It is a blatant weaponization of the dollar, turning the global financial system into a tool of unilateral punishment. When one country can arbitrarily cut off another country's economic lifelines at will, the foundations of the international economic and trade system are undermined, ultimately eroding confidence in the dollar's global credibility.

Economic sanctions often trigger unintended chain reactions. The international oil prices have risen by over 50 percent so far this year. Further tightening restrictions on Iran's oil exports would only push oil prices higher and intensify inflationary pressures, casting an even darker shadow over an already fragile global economic recovery. The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important energy chokepoints, and any disruption there could trigger sharp volatility in global energy markets. When economic measures are used as instruments of war, the risks won't remain within the boundaries envisioned by the US. They will spread and spill over, ultimately leaving everyone to foot the bill.

The most urgent task now is not to escalate confrontation, but to de-escalate the situation. Dialogue and negotiations are the only right path toward resolving the US-Iran War and the Iranian nuclear issue, and this is a broad consensus in the international community. Unilateral sanctions and threats of force will not help resolve the problem; instead, they will exacerbate tensions and narrow the space for diplomacy. The US should seriously reflect on the gains and losses of its policy toward Iran, rather than blindly pressing ahead down a path that has already been proven to be a dead end.

The so-called "operation economic outcast" is itself a reflection of the predicament facing US policy. Even Washington may have little confidence in how effective the new sanctions will be. More importantly, today's world is no longer one in which a single country can unilaterally determine the fate of other countries. Global multipolarity is an irreversible historical trend, and countries making independent choices based on their own national interests is simply a basic fact of international relations.

It should be noted that some US media outlets have deliberately sought to turn attention toward China, attempting to create a narrative that the success or failure of the campaign depends on whether China cooperates. The possibility that Washington could use the regional conflict to exert additional economic pressure on China warrants vigilance. China's cooperation with Iran has always been conducted within the framework of international law and should not be disrupted or undermined. China is not a party to US military actions against Iran or the Iranian nuclear issue, and should certainly not be held responsible for the failure of US policy. Some people in the US should focus on how to build "a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability," rather than constantly seeking to create turmoil in bilateral relations.

In May this year, China's Ministry of Commerce, for the first time, issued a blocking ban under the rules on countering foreign states' unlawful extraterritorial jurisdiction measures, explicitly prohibiting any recognition, enforcement or compliance with US sanctions imposed on five Chinese companies on the grounds of their alleged involvement in Iranian petroleum transactions. China has a comprehensive range of legal and policy tools at its disposal and will take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard its legitimate rights and interests. Any attempt to force China to submit through sanctions and pressure will not succeed.

Global Times

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Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad urges Russia, Ukraine to return to negotiations as attacks escalate

Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: Pakistan this week renewed its call for an immediate end to hostilities between Russia and Ukraine and urged both sides to return to diplomacy and direct dialogue, warning that the continued escalation of drone and missile attacks is inflicting mounting suffering on civilians and deepening wider global security concerns.

Speaking at a United Nations Security Council debate on the deteriorating situation in Ukraine, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, expressed deep concern over the growing scale and intensity of attacks across multiple fronts of the conflict.

He called for an "immediate and complete" cessation of hostilities, followed by a return to diplomacy and the resumption of meaningful negotiations aimed at establishing lasting peace and stability.

"We deplore the escalation — the scale and intensity of attacks carried out by the parties on multiple fronts, upending lives and livelihoods in the affected regions," Ambassador Ahmad said.

His intervention came amid continuing reports of drone and missile strikes affecting civilian areas and critical infrastructure, underscoring Pakistan's longstanding position that the conflict cannot ultimately be resolved through military means.

The Pakistani envoy voiced particular concern over reported attacks on infrastructure associated with energy and food supplies.

Such attacks, he warned, could have consequences extending well beyond the immediate conflict zone by placing additional pressure on already fragile global food and energy security.

"Reports of attacks targeting critical infrastructure related to energy and food supply are also deeply concerning," he told the 15-member Council.

The war, which began with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, has evolved into one of the most consequential conflicts in Europe in decades, producing extensive civilian suffering, displacement and damage to infrastructure while generating repercussions for international food, energy and security systems.

Pakistan has consistently advocated a diplomatic resolution of the conflict, stressing the importance of dialogue, respect for international law and the protection of civilians.

At the Security Council, Ambassador Ahmad reiterated that the protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure constitutes a fundamental obligation under international humanitarian law.

He stressed that military operations and attacks must not undermine these basic protections, particularly as the conflict continues to affect densely populated areas and essential infrastructure.

The Pakistani position reflects Islamabad's broader emphasis on negotiated settlements to international disputes and its call for greater reliance on diplomacy rather than prolonged military confrontation.

The Security Council meeting was convened at the request of its five European Union members, Denmark, France, Greece, Latvia and the United Kingdom, amid renewed concern over the intensity of attacks and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ukraine.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen presided over the session.

Pakistan's intervention comes as international efforts to bring the conflict back towards a diplomatic track remain a major concern for the international community.

Islamabad has repeatedly maintained that a durable settlement requires engagement between the parties and a process capable of addressing the underlying issues through diplomacy.

The Pakistani envoy's appeal also highlighted the wider consequences of the war. Damage to energy infrastructure can disrupt electricity and heating supplies for civilians, while attacks affecting food-related facilities and supply chains can add to pressures on global commodity markets.

For developing countries, Pakistan has stressed, disruptions to global food and energy supplies can be particularly damaging because higher import costs can translate into increased inflation and greater pressure on national economies.

Against this backdrop, Islamabad views an end to hostilities not only as a humanitarian imperative but also as an important step towards restoring stability in the broader international economic system.

The appeal for renewed negotiations also comes as the war continues to place significant pressure on the international diplomatic system, with the UN Security Council remaining a key forum for discussions on civilian protection, humanitarian access and international peace and security.

Pakistan's call was therefore framed around a straightforward principle: an enduring peace cannot be achieved through continued escalation alone.

Ambassador Ahmad urged the parties to move away from further military confrontation and towards diplomacy, dialogue and negotiations.

He emphasised that protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure must remain a central priority while international efforts continue to seek a political pathway out of the conflict.

For Islamabad, the immediate objective is an end to the violence, followed by sustained diplomatic engagement capable of producing a peaceful and durable settlement.

Pakistan's latest intervention at the Security Council reinforces its position that the continuation of attacks risks further humanitarian suffering while also creating economic and security consequences that extend far beyond Russia and Ukraine.

The message from Islamabad was consequently a renewed appeal for both sides to step back from escalation and give diplomacy another chance before the conflict produces still deeper and more lasting regional and global consequences.

Ambassador Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri calls for unity at Pakistan Independence Day celebration in Indonesia

Liaquat Ali

Jakarta: Pakistan's Ambassador to Indonesia Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri this week called for national unity and collective effort to steer the country towards greater peace, stability and prosperity, as the Pakistan Embassy in Jakarta celebrated Independence Day with a ceremony attended by members of the Pakistani community, diplomats and Indonesian friends of Pakistan.

Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Chaudhri highlighted the significance of Independence Day as an occasion to remember the sacrifices and determination that led to the creation of Pakistan while reaffirming the values of unity, solidarity and service to the nation.

He said Pakistan's progress depended significantly on the ability of its people to remain united and work together in the larger national interest.

The ambassador emphasised that the spirit of independence should extend beyond ceremonial celebrations and inspire Pakistanis to contribute constructively to the country's development and strengthen national cohesion.

The ceremony brought together embassy officials, members of the Pakistani diaspora, Indonesian guests, diplomats and friends of Pakistan, providing an opportunity to commemorate the country's independence while showcasing its cultural heritage and national traditions.

Ambassador Chaudhri also underscored the longstanding friendship between Pakistan and Indonesia, noting the importance of strengthening bilateral relations and expanding cooperation between the two countries.

He highlighted the potential for deeper engagement in areas including trade, investment, education, culture and people-to-people contacts.

The ambassador said Pakistan and Indonesia shared longstanding bonds of friendship and mutual respect, providing a strong foundation for further expanding bilateral cooperation.

The celebration featured programmes reflecting Pakistan's national and cultural identity, while participants expressed their pride in the country and reaffirmed their commitment to contributing positively to Pakistan's image and interests abroad.

The gathering also provided an opportunity for members of the Pakistani community in Indonesia to interact with Indonesian friends and representatives of the diplomatic community, reinforcing people-to-people ties between the two countries.

In his message, Ambassador Chaudhri stressed that unity remained essential for Pakistan to navigate contemporary challenges and realise its development potential.

He called for a shared commitment to national progress, cohesion and the pursuit of a peaceful and prosperous future.

The Independence Day celebration concluded in a spirit of patriotism and solidarity, with participants reaffirming their attachment to Pakistan and their commitment to strengthening the enduring friendship between Pakistan and Indonesia.

Kazakhstan and Pakistan renew push to deepen strategic partnership

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Kazakhstan and Pakistan this week renewed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations, with both sides seeking to build on a recent increase in high-level diplomatic engagement and translate the growing political momentum into broader cooperation across areas of mutual interest.

The latest development came during a meeting between Kazakh Ambassador to Pakistan Yerzhan Kistafin and President Asif Ali Zardari, during which the two sides reviewed the current state of bilateral relations and discussed prospects for taking the partnership to a higher level.

President Zardari welcomed the progress achieved in relations with Kazakhstan and noted the growing momentum in cooperation between the two countries.

Particular emphasis was placed on the state visit of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to Islamabad in February 2026, which was seen as an important milestone in efforts to further strengthen the countries' strategic partnership.

The visit provided fresh political impetus to bilateral relations and opened further opportunities for cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

President Zardari appreciated Kazakhstan's efforts to develop closer relations with Pakistan and reaffirmed Islamabad's desire to expand engagement with the Central Asian country across a broad range of sectors.

The Pakistani leadership has increasingly attached importance to stronger relations with Central Asian states, viewing enhanced regional connectivity, trade and economic cooperation as important components of Pakistan's broader foreign-policy and economic objectives.

Kazakhstan, as Central Asia's largest economy and an important regional player, represents a significant partner for Pakistan in this regard.

The two countries have considerable potential to expand cooperation in trade, investment, transport, connectivity, energy and other sectors, while closer political engagement could provide additional momentum to economic ties.

The meeting between President Zardari and Ambassador Kistafin followed discussions between the Kazakh envoy and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif earlier this month.

Kistafin met Prime Minister Shehbaz on August 10, with the two sides also expressing satisfaction over the state of bilateral relations and emphasising the need to further expand mutually beneficial cooperation.

The sequence of high-level meetings reflects sustained diplomatic engagement between Islamabad and Astana and signals a shared interest in maintaining momentum following President Tokayev's visit.

For Pakistan, closer engagement with Kazakhstan fits into its wider effort to strengthen links with Central Asia and improve access to regional markets through enhanced transport and trade connectivity.

Pakistan's geographic position gives it potential importance as a gateway for Central Asian states towards the Arabian Sea, while Kazakhstan offers Pakistan opportunities to deepen its economic presence in the wider Eurasian region.

Improved connectivity, therefore, remains a potentially important pillar of the bilateral relationship, particularly as both countries explore ways to increase trade and facilitate the movement of goods and people.

The renewed diplomatic push also comes against the backdrop of Islamabad's broader efforts to diversify its economic partnerships and strengthen relations with countries beyond its traditional markets.

For Kazakhstan, stronger ties with Pakistan could provide greater access to South Asian markets and maritime trade routes while expanding opportunities for cooperation with a country that maintains close links with the wider Muslim world and South Asian region.

The two sides' repeated emphasis on mutually beneficial cooperation indicates that the relationship is increasingly being viewed through both strategic and economic lenses.

The February state visit by President Tokayev remains a key reference point in the current phase of bilateral relations, while the recent meetings between senior Pakistani officials and the Kazakh ambassador demonstrate an effort to maintain the momentum generated by that visit.

The latest diplomatic contacts suggest that Islamabad and Astana are seeking to move beyond political goodwill and identify practical avenues for expanding cooperation.

With both sides reaffirming their commitment to closer relations, the coming period could see greater attention to trade, investment, regional connectivity and other initiatives capable of giving tangible substance to the countries' strategic partnership.

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Ali Rehman Malik argues the crisis of truth is really a crisis of trust

Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: The modern crisis surrounding "truth" may be less about people abandoning objective reality and more about growing disagreement over how truth should be established, whose evidence should be trusted and which institutions should be considered credible, argues philanthropist Ali Rehman Malik.

In an article, Malik contends that contemporary debates over truth, expertise and misinformation are often misunderstood because the word "truth" itself carries a wide range of assumptions and experiences that people interpret differently.

Drawing on an earlier essay, A Symbol Is a Compression, Malik uses the example of a candelabra to explain how apparently simple objects and words can accumulate layers of meaning. A candelabra may simply be a metal object designed to hold candles, he writes, but it can simultaneously evoke ritual, romance, wealth, religious spaces, funerals, Gothic architecture, craftsmanship, history and shadow.

The same process, Malik argues, applies to language and particularly to the concept of truth.

According to him, the word "truth" can encompass observation, measurement, mathematical proof, scientific replication, institutional authority, professional expertise, personal testimony, historical memory, moral intuition, narrative coherence and lived experience.

Different people may assign different levels of importance to these elements while continuing to believe they are defending the same underlying principle.

"One person may place greatest trust in empirical method, reproducibility and established institutions," Malik writes, while another may rely more heavily on direct experience, historical patterns and memories of institutions that have previously distorted or restricted what was accepted as knowledge.

The resulting conflict, he argues, is not necessarily resolved simply by identifying the correct conclusion because disagreement can begin much earlier — with competing definitions of credible evidence and authority. Malik stresses that acknowledging different approaches to knowledge does not mean treating all claims as equally valid. One person can be wrong, he says, and both sides can also be wrong. The more fundamental problem, in his view, is that individuals can mistake their own standards for establishing credibility as the universal meaning of truth itself. This perspective also complicates the increasingly common description of contemporary society as living in a "post-truth" era.

Malik acknowledges the existence of misinformation, propaganda, deliberate distortion and manufactured confusion. But he argues that "post-truth" can become an overly compressed explanation for a much more complicated phenomenon involving political resentment, declining institutional trust, emotional reasoning, changes in media technology and institutional failures.

Rather than assuming that people have simply stopped caring about truth, Malik suggests that many may instead have stopped trusting the same pathways towards establishing it.

"That distinction matters," he argues.

A person who distrusts an institution, he notes, is not automatically rejecting objective reality. Such distrust may be irrational, but it may also emerge from remembered institutional failures, undisclosed incentives, exclusion from decision-making or historical cases in which official claims were subsequently shown to be false.

At the same time, Malik cautions that distrust itself cannot be treated as evidence that an alternative claim is correct.

The challenge, therefore, is to rebuild the relationship between institutions and the public rather than assuming that institutional titles or positions of authority are sufficient to restore credibility.

Malik argues that expertise should not be understood simply as a status attached to an individual or institution. Instead, it is a relationship involving competence, methodology, evidence, transparency, correction and public trust.

An expert can possess genuine knowledge without being infallible, while an institution can deserve considerable authority without becoming immune to scrutiny.

Likewise, members of the public may have legitimate reasons for distrust while simultaneously becoming vulnerable to false information deliberately designed to exploit that distrust.

The tension becomes particularly visible in the opposing demands frequently heard in public debate: "Trust the experts" on one side and "Do your own research" on the other.

Malik argues that both phrases can conceal assumptions that prevent meaningful dialogue.

Those urging people to trust experts may be heard as demanding submission to institutions that have demonstrated their fallibility. Those encouraging people to conduct their own research may, in turn, be understood as suggesting that personal intuition or isolated information should carry the same weight as accumulated evidence.

The dispute, therefore, is often not simply about competing conclusions but about the routes through which conclusions are granted authority.

Malik believes modern media environments intensify this problem because they reward short, emotionally powerful expressions capable of carrying large amounts of meaning.

Labels such as "extremist", "elitist", "traitor", "victim", "expert" or "propagandist" can become miniature verdicts, he argues, allowing a single word to perform work that would otherwise require evidence, context and explanation.

The faster such labels circulate, the less opportunity there is to unpack the assumptions and experiences contained within them.

This produces what Malik describes as a form of "symbolic collision", in which people respond not only to the literal meaning of a word but also to the history, loyalties, grievances and expectations they associate with it.

He extends the argument beyond truth to other politically and socially charged concepts, including freedom, nation, family and justice.

Each, he suggests, contains multiple histories and relationships, allowing people to hear radically different meanings in the same word.

For Malik, the answer is not to abandon compressed language. Such compression is indispensable to human communication and civilisation. Nor does he advocate treating every interpretation of a shared term as equally legitimate. Instead, he calls for a willingness to reopen compressed concepts when they begin generating more conflict than understanding.

That process, he argues, requires asking difficult questions about how knowledge is being established: which forms of evidence are being given the greatest weight, which authorities are being relied upon, what historical experiences produced distrust, what institutional incentives have been disclosed, and whose experiences are being included or excluded.

It also requires examining whether parts of a symbol still accurately describe the world or have instead become expressions of memory, aspiration, fear or institutional habit.

Malik ultimately argues for a balance in which competing sources of knowledge can be recognised without abandoning standards of evidence. Personal testimony can be important without automatically overriding other forms of evidence, he maintains. Institutional expertise can deserve substantial weight without becoming immune to correction. Historical distrust can be understandable without making every opposing claim true.

The objective, he suggests, is not to destroy the concept of truth but to restore a functioning relationship between language, institutions, evidence and reality.

Truth, in this framework, becomes more reliable rather than weaker when its methods and assumptions are examined.

Similarly, expertise can become more deserving of public confidence when its limitations are openly acknowledged, while distrust becomes useful only when it remains accountable to evidence rather than turning past injury into an unquestionable explanation of present reality.

Malik concludes that symbols are essentially maps folded small enough to carry — and truth is no exception.

But a folded map remains useful only when people remember that the terrain itself has not disappeared inside it.

The task, he argues, is therefore not necessarily to force everyone onto a single intellectual road, but to ensure that every road remains answerable to the same underlying reality.

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Germany welcomes Pakistan's economic progress as Islamabad seeks stronger investment ties

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Germany this week welcomed the progress made by Pakistan in stabilising its economy, with German Ambassador Ina Lepel describing the recent improvement in the country's sovereign credit standing as a sign of growing confidence in Islamabad's reform agenda and economic outlook.

Ambassador Lepel conveyed the assessment during a meeting with Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, where the two sides discussed Pakistan's economic recovery, structural reforms, investment climate and prospects for expanding business relations between Pakistan and Germany.

The German envoy congratulated the finance minister on Pakistan's recent sovereign credit rating upgrade by Moody's, saying the improvement reflected greater international confidence in the direction of Pakistan's economy and the government's efforts to implement reforms.

She also acknowledged the progress achieved despite the difficult regional and geopolitical environment, which continues to pose challenges for economies across South Asia.

The German ambassador's remarks provide an important vote of confidence for Islamabad as the government attempts to consolidate the macroeconomic stability achieved after a period of severe external financing pressures, currency volatility and high inflation.

During the meeting, Aurangzeb briefed the German envoy on recent developments in Pakistan's economy, highlighting improvements in the country's foreign-exchange buffers and the government's continued efforts to maintain fiscal discipline.

He said Islamabad's immediate priority was to preserve macroeconomic stability while simultaneously pursuing structural reforms capable of creating the foundations for sustainable and long-term economic growth.

The finance minister also outlined government measures aimed at creating a more predictable and investment-friendly environment for domestic and international businesses.

He stressed that policy continuity, improved facilitation for investors and institutional reforms would be essential for Pakistan to attract greater foreign investment and deepen economic engagement with international partners such as Germany.

The discussions also focused on German multinational companies already operating in Pakistan and the opportunities available to expand their commercial activities.

German companies have traditionally maintained interests in a range of sectors in Pakistan, and Islamabad sees stronger engagement with European industrial economies as an important avenue for attracting investment, technology and expertise.

The government is seeking to position Pakistan not merely as a consumer market but as a potential production, services and export base for international companies.

For Germany, greater economic engagement with Pakistan could provide opportunities in sectors where the country is seeking technology, capital and technical expertise, particularly as Islamabad pursues reforms designed to improve its investment climate.

Aurangzeb emphasised that creating a more conducive business environment would require sustained improvements in regulatory processes and institutional capacity. He also highlighted the importance of reducing obstacles faced by companies and ensuring greater predictability in government policies.

A major part of the discussion centred on Pakistan's ongoing digital transformation of tax administration.

The finance minister briefed the German ambassador on the government's efforts to digitalise the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), describing technology-driven reforms as an important component of efforts to improve tax collection, transparency and administrative efficiency.

The reforms are aimed at modernising Pakistan's tax system and reducing opportunities for leakages and discretionary practices while making compliance easier for taxpayers and businesses.

For international investors, improvements in tax administration and greater transparency are particularly important because the predictability of the regulatory and taxation environment can influence decisions on long-term investment.

Pakistan has been attempting to broaden its tax base and strengthen revenue mobilisation as part of its wider programme of fiscal consolidation.

The government's reform agenda is consequently focused not only on increasing revenue but also on improving the efficiency and transparency of the institutions responsible for collecting taxes.

The meeting with the German ambassador comes at a significant stage in Pakistan's economic reform process. Islamabad is attempting to use recent improvements in macroeconomic indicators and external-sector stability to restore investor confidence and move towards a more sustainable growth model.

The recent Moody's upgrade has provided an important boost to that effort, although Pakistan's sovereign rating remains in the speculative category and the country continues to face structural economic challenges.

The government therefore faces the task of converting improved macroeconomic stability into stronger investment, industrial activity and export growth.

Germany could play an important role in that process given its industrial strength, technological expertise and extensive network of multinational businesses.

For Pakistan, stronger German investment could bring benefits beyond the immediate inflow of foreign capital. Greater participation by German companies could support technology transfer, workforce development, integration into international supply chains and the expansion of Pakistan's export capacity.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of maintaining momentum on reforms. While improved foreign-exchange reserves and fiscal discipline have helped reduce immediate economic pressures, officials recognise that sustained progress will depend on addressing deeper structural weaknesses.

Policy continuity is therefore emerging as a central component of Pakistan's efforts to reassure international investors.

The government wants businesses to have greater certainty about taxation, regulation, investment rules and economic policies, particularly when making long-term investment decisions.

The German side's positive assessment of Pakistan's recent economic progress could consequently provide useful momentum to Islamabad's efforts to strengthen ties with European investors.

The meeting also reflects a broader shift in Pakistan's economic diplomacy, with the government seeking to complement traditional financial assistance with investment, trade, technology and private-sector partnerships.

For Germany, Pakistan's large domestic market, young workforce and strategic position in South Asia offer potential opportunities, provided the country can continue improving its business environment and maintaining economic stability.

The message emerging from the meeting was therefore twofold: Pakistan's recent stabilisation has begun to attract greater international recognition, but sustaining that confidence will require continued reforms and credible improvements in the business environment.

As Islamabad seeks to build on the latest improvement in its sovereign credit standing, deeper engagement with Germany and other European economic powers could become an important part of its strategy to attract investment, modernise institutions and place the economy on a more durable growth path.

Bulgaria approves acquisition of seven NATO-standard minehunters from Belgium and the Netherlands

Newswire

Sofia: Bulgaria has approved a major expansion of its naval mine-countermeasures capability, with Parliament ratifying agreements that will allow the country's Navy to acquire seven minehunters from Belgium and the Netherlands as Sofia continues efforts to strengthen its defence capabilities and meet NATO operational requirements.

The Bulgarian National Assembly voted this week to ratify the sale and transfer arrangements covering the seven vessels, marking an important step in the modernisation of the Bulgarian Navy.

At the second-reading stage, 168 lawmakers took part in the vote, with 162 voting in favour and six against, while no MP abstained.

Support for the agreements came from Progressive Bulgaria, GERB-UDF, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, Democratic Bulgaria and We Continue the Change. The only opposition came from the pro-Russian Vuzrazhdane party, which has consistently challenged a number of Bulgaria's defence-related decisions involving NATO allies and Western military equipment.

Under the agreement with the Netherlands, Bulgaria will acquire three Dutch minehunters — Zierikzee, Willemstad and Schiedam.

A separate transfer agreement involving Belgium, the Netherlands and Bulgaria provides for four additional vessels, Crocus, Lobelia and Primula, to be transferred to the Bulgarian Navy.

The combined acquisition will give Bulgaria seven specialised vessels designed to locate and neutralise naval mines and other mine-like objects, strengthening the country's ability to protect its maritime approaches and support mine-clearance operations.

The vessels are capable of operating according to NATO standards, an important consideration for Bulgaria as a NATO member seeking greater interoperability with allied naval forces.

The Dutch arrangement includes a commitment to restore the technical condition of the vessels and enhance their operational capabilities before ownership is transferred to Bulgaria.

The broader memorandum of understanding covers not only the ships themselves but also a package of associated support measures, including crew training, spare parts and additional equipment.

The arrangement is therefore intended to provide Bulgaria with an operational capability rather than simply a fleet of second-hand vessels. For the Bulgarian Navy, mine-countermeasure capability has particular strategic importance because naval mines can restrict access to ports, shipping routes and coastal waters while posing a threat to military and commercial vessels.

The acquisition will consequently strengthen Bulgaria's ability to conduct mine detection and clearance operations and contribute to broader maritime security in the Black Sea and surrounding waters.

Under the terms of the memorandum, Bulgaria has undertaken to finance repair and restoration work on the seven minehunters to bring them to a level consistent with NATO operational readiness standards.

The Bulgarian side has also been responsible for training Ukrainian minehunter crews, a requirement that has already been fulfilled.

The Ukrainian component adds a wider regional dimension to the agreement, reflecting the increasing importance attached to mine-countermeasure capabilities in the Black Sea amid the continuing security challenges affecting the region.

Earlier, Defence Minister Dimitar Stoyanov told Parliament's defence committee that restoration and repair work on each vessel could cost as much as €6 million.

The first Belgian minehunter is expected to arrive in Bulgaria during September or October 2026, according to the defence minister.

The arrival will mark the beginning of a phased process through which Bulgaria will integrate the vessels into its naval structure and bring their capabilities up to the required operational standards.

The parliamentary approval comes as Bulgaria continues to strengthen its armed forces and modernise ageing military equipment in line with its NATO commitments.

The minehunter programme is part of a broader effort to improve the country's maritime capabilities and ensure that Bulgarian forces can operate effectively alongside allied navies.

The vessels are expected to provide Bulgaria with additional flexibility in dealing with underwater threats while also improving its contribution to NATO maritime security missions.

Bulgaria also modifies US defence contracts

In a separate defence-related vote on August 26, Bulgaria's Parliament also approved amendments to three agreements with the United States covering the acquisition of Stryker combat vehicles, ammunition and Javelin anti-tank missiles.

Once again, lawmakers from Vuzrazhdane were the only MPs to vote against the changes.

The amendments adjust the financial and delivery terms of the existing US defence contracts.

The contract for Stryker combat vehicles will increase by approximately $44.79 million following the postponement of the planned acquisition of 17 SkyRaider unmanned aircraft systems and associated equipment.

The Javelin contract will rise by approximately $4.73 million, primarily because of provisions related to earlier delivery and spare parts.

At the same time, the contract covering ammunition will be reduced by approximately $12.58 million.

The separate parliamentary approvals underline Bulgaria's broader drive to modernise its military capabilities through closer cooperation with NATO partners. The naval minehunter programme, in particular, gives the country an enhanced ability to address a specialised but increasingly important maritime security challenge.

By acquiring vessels from established NATO naval partners and investing in their restoration, equipment and crew training, Bulgaria is seeking to develop a more capable and interoperable mine-countermeasure force.

The combination of the European naval acquisitions and expanded US defence cooperation reflects Sofia's continuing effort to align its military modernisation with NATO requirements while strengthening its ability to respond to security challenges in the Black Sea region.

For Bulgaria, the arrival of the seven minehunters will represent a significant addition to its naval inventory, while the associated training, repairs and equipment are intended to ensure that the vessels can become fully operational assets rather than merely additions to the fleet.

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Portugal's quiet rise as a second home for the rich and famous

Covert Report

Lisbon: From royals and Hollywood stars to sporting icons and the ultra-wealthy, Portugal is emerging as one of Europe's most coveted addresses, offering sunshine, privacy, luxury and, above all, discretion.

Portugal has steadily transformed itself into one of Europe's most desirable destinations for the global wealthy, celebrities and members of royal families

seeking something increasingly difficult to find in the world's traditional luxury hotspots: privacy without sacrificing comfort, sophistication or access.

From the golden beaches of the Alentejo coast to the elegant neighbourhoods of Lisbon and the exclusive communities around Cascais and Comporta, Portugal has become a magnet for people whose names regularly

Ambassador of Portugal in Pakistan H.E. Paulo Miguel Guedes Domingues

dominate headlines.

Princess Eugenie, Formula One champion Max Verstappen, football superstar Cristiano Ronaldo, Hollywood actors Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander, singer Madonna and designer Christian Louboutin are among the international names associated with the country's luxury property market. Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, have also reportedly acquired a holiday property in Portugal.

Yet Portugal's attraction goes well beyond celebrity ownership and expensive villas. For many of its affluent newcomers, the real luxury is the ability to live relatively normal lives away from relentless public attention.

That combination of natural beauty, relaxed living and discretion has helped Portugal distinguish itself from more established celebrity destinations such as the French Riviera.

Princess Eugenie's connection with Portugal illustrates the country's growing appeal among the British royal circle.

Eugenie and her husband, Jack Brooksbank, reportedly bought a villa valued at about Dh18 million in the CostaTerra Golf and Ocean Club near Melides, on Portugal's Alentejo coast. The exclusive development is part of a luxury residential community between Comporta and Melides, roughly an hour south of Lisbon, and has been described as the "Hamptons of Europe".

Spread across hundreds of hectares, CostaTerra combines private residences with a golf course, wellness facilities, equestrian amenities and access to the Atlantic coastline.

Brooksbank's professional association with the development has also strengthened the couple's ties to the area.

For Eugenie, however, Portugal appears to offer something more valuable than a luxury retreat: anonymity.

Speaking about the country in 2023, she highlighted the freedom she felt there to dress casually, go shopping and move around without attracting attention.

That sense of normality is increasingly becoming one of Portugal's most powerful selling points for high-profile residents.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have similarly drawn attention to Portugal. Meghan has shared glimpses of the family spending time there, including visits to beaches, shops and restaurants. The couple reportedly purchased a property at CostaTerra in 2024.

Even as the Sussexes have considered spending an extended period in Britain, reports have indicated that their Portugal property is expected to remain part of their international portfolio.

Portugal's growing appeal among the ultra-rich is reflected in the numbers.

The country has recorded a sharp increase in its population of ultra-high-net-worth individuals. The number of people with net assets exceeding €25 million is estimated to have risen from about 1,462 in 2021 to 2,187 in 2026 — an increase of almost 50 per cent.

Several factors have contributed to the transformation. Portugal offers a combination of warm weather, an attractive coastline, relatively relaxed living, strong infrastructure and access to the wider European market.

For international investors, residency and tax policies have also historically played an important role.

The country's Golden Visa programme helped attract foreign capital, while the Non-Habitual Resident regime introduced in 2009 provided tax incentives aimed at attracting skilled professionals and international residents.

Although Portugal has subsequently changed its tax and residency policies, the legacy of those measures remains visible in the country's international property market.

For wealthy buyers, however, financial considerations are only part of the equation.

The broader attraction is lifestyle.

Portugal allows residents to combine high-end property and services with an environment that, in many places, still feels distinctly local. Its historic towns, traditional villages, uncrowded beaches and slower pace offer an alternative to the conspicuous luxury associated with some Mediterranean resorts.

Perhaps no Portuguese celebrity embodies the country's luxury-property boom more than Cristiano Ronaldo.

The Portuguese football icon and his wife, Georgina Rodríguez, have been linked to some of the country's most expensive real estate.

Spanish media have reported that Ronaldo spent around €25 million on a huge residence in the exclusive Quinta da Marinha development on the Cascais coast.

If the reported figure is accurate, the property would rank among the most expensive private residential purchases in Portugal.

The location itself helps explain the appeal. Cascais, located west of Lisbon, combines beaches, upscale restaurants, golf courses, international schools and easy access to the capital while retaining an exclusive residential character. For someone of Ronaldo's global profile, the area also provides another crucial commodity: relative privacy. Portugal's appeal extends well beyond football and royalty.

Formula One world champion Max Verstappen and his partner, Kelly Piquet, have reportedly acquired a plot at the Pinheirinho Comporta luxury development with plans to build a private residence.

The development lies along the coastal region south of Lisbon and promotes a combination of golf, wellness, nature and low-density living.

Its appeal reflects precisely what affluent buyers increasingly seek — open spaces, proximity to nature, privacy and an environment where luxury is integrated into the landscape rather than displayed ostentatiously.

That distinction is important.

Portugal's most desirable communities are not necessarily built around the flashy spectacle associated with some Mediterranean resorts. Instead, they emphasise architecture, nature, wellness and exclusivity. The Portuguese property story also has a distinctly Hollywood dimension.

Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander moved to Lisbon in 2017 and have since established a strong connection with the Portuguese capital, where they have raised their family.

Vikander has compared Lisbon to New York's Williamsburg, pointing to the city's combination of historic character, creative energy and transformation.

Madonna, meanwhile, became one of Portugal's most prominent celebrity residents after moving there with her family when her son David Banda joined Benfica's youth football academy.

She bought Quinta do Relógio, an historic estate in Sintra, in 2017 for about €7.5 million. The expansive property reportedly features four bedrooms and seven bathrooms and became the singer's Portuguese base before she eventually moved away from the country. Madonna is understood to have retained ownership of the estate.

Other internationally recognised names, including George Clooney, Nicole Kidman and Scarlett Johansson, have also been linked in reports to Portuguese property or investment interests.

Among those who understood Portugal's appeal long

before the current celebrity rush was French footwear designer Christian Louboutin.

Louboutin has been visiting Comporta since the 1990s and developed a particularly strong relationship with the region.

In 2023, he opened Vermelho, a 13-room boutique hotel in Melides. The name, meaning "red" in Portuguese, is an unmistakable reference to the trademark red soles of his famous shoes.

For Louboutin, the attraction of the region lies partly in

what it has not become.

Melides remains markedly different from the heavily commercialised resorts of the Mediterranean. Its appeal rests on beaches, pine forests, traditional architecture, local culture and a sense of quiet.

That authenticity is now itself a luxury.

Portugal's rise raises an interesting question: why are the world's wealthiest people increasingly choosing places where they can disappear rather than be seen?

The answer may lie in how luxury itself has changed.

For decades, celebrity property was associated with grand villas in Saint-Tropez, sprawling estates in Los Angeles or glamorous apartments in London, Paris and New York.

Today, privacy, space, security and authenticity can be more valuable than conspicuous displays of wealth.

Portugal offers all four.

A celebrity can spend a morning on a relatively quiet Atlantic beach, have lunch in a local restaurant and return to a highly secure luxury residence without necessarily becoming the centre of attention.

For public figures accustomed to paparazzi, social media scrutiny and constant exposure, that can be an extraordinary privilege.

Portugal's popularity also brings a challenge.

As international wealth flows into Lisbon, Cascais, Comporta and the Alentejo coast, concerns about property prices, development and the preservation of local communities are likely to remain part of the conversation.

The very qualities attracting wealthy international buyers — authenticity, tranquillity and relatively undeveloped landscapes — could be threatened if development becomes excessive.

That is why Portugal's emerging luxury market is different from the traditional celebrity playgrounds.

The country's greatest selling point may be its refusal to become one.

Louboutin captured that sentiment when he warned that Melides should not be expected to become another Saint-Tropez.

For Portugal, that may ultimately be the most important lesson of its celebrity boom.

The world's richest people are arriving because the country still feels real.

And as long as Portugal can preserve that sense of authenticity, its quiet corners of the Atlantic coast may remain among the most coveted second-home addresses in Europe.

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Pakistan expects US response soon on proposed $10 billion stabilisation facility

Celina Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan expects Washington to respond within the next couple of months to its request for a proposed $10 billion bilateral exchange stabilisation facility, as Islamabad seeks to deepen its economic and diplomatic engagement with the United States and strengthen confidence in its external financial position.

The proposed arrangement, which Pakistan has described as a stabilisation mechanism rather than a conventional loan or credit line, is currently under consideration by the US Treasury. Pakistani officials have indicated that discussions with Washington have been constructive and that a response could emerge as early as September.

Adviser to the Finance Minister Khurram Schehzad said the talks with the US had been "constructive", stressing that the proposed facility could play an important role in strengthening market confidence and improving Pakistan's ability to access international capital.

According to Schehzad, the facility would potentially act as a financial backstop while sending a positive signal to international investors about the stability of Pakistan's currency and external accounts. Such a signal, he said, could help Pakistan regain stronger access to international markets and attract additional private investment.

The proposal was formally taken up with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent during Pakistan's recent economic engagement with Washington. Islamabad is seeking a Bilateral Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility of up to $10 billion, with a maturity period of as long as five years.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb subsequently confirmed that Pakistan had made the request, while emphasising that the proposed arrangement should not be interpreted as another conventional borrowing facility.

"This is not about a credit line or a loan," Aurangzeb said, explaining that the principal objective was to provide greater confidence in the stability of Pakistan's currency and foreign-exchange market.

The finance minister said stronger confidence in exchange-rate stability would, in turn, improve Pakistan's ability to approach international debt markets and raise financing on more favourable terms.

For Islamabad, the proposed US facility comes at a critical juncture. Pakistan has made progress in stabilising several areas of its economy after years of severe external financing pressures, but its foreign-exchange reserves, debt obligations and need for continued external financing remain significant challenges.

If approved, the US-backed mechanism could provide an additional layer of confidence for Pakistan's reserves and currency market. It could also reduce some of the pressure on the country to rely exclusively on multilateral and bilateral financing arrangements at a time when the government is attempting to restore macroeconomic stability.

The proposal also comes against the backdrop of Pakistan's continuing engagement with the International Monetary Fund. Islamabad remains committed to a $7 billion IMF programme that requires a range of politically difficult measures, including higher tax collection, spending restraint, structural reforms and tighter fiscal management.

The government hopes that a stronger external position, combined with improved investor confidence, will allow Pakistan to gradually move away from repeated cycles of balance-of-payments pressure and emergency financing.

The proposed US facility is also being viewed through the wider lens of a renewed improvement in Pakistan-US relations. Islamabad's recent diplomatic engagement with Washington has increased expectations that closer political ties could eventually translate into greater economic cooperation.

Pakistan's diplomatic role in efforts surrounding the Iran conflict has further raised its profile in Washington and other international capitals. The development has fuelled speculation that Islamabad could leverage its enhanced diplomatic relevance to secure greater economic and strategic support from international partners.

However, any US stabilisation arrangement would come with expectations that Pakistan would continue pursuing economic reforms and maintaining policy discipline.

The proposal is particularly significant because of its potential psychological impact on international markets. Unlike a conventional loan that would simply add to Pakistan's external liabilities, the facility is being presented primarily as a confidence-building instrument designed to reassure investors and creditors about the country's ability to maintain currency and external-sector stability.

Such a mechanism could become particularly valuable when Pakistan seeks to raise funds through international capital markets. A credible US financial backstop could lower perceived risks and potentially improve investor appetite for Pakistani debt.

The proposal nevertheless remains subject to Washington's consideration, and Pakistani officials have stopped short of presenting approval as a certainty. The coming weeks are therefore expected to be important for determining whether the request progresses into a formal financial arrangement.

Meanwhile, Pakistan continues to face concerns over governance and institutional effectiveness despite signs of improvement in its macroeconomic outlook.

Moody's recently upgraded Pakistan's sovereign rating from Caa1 to B3, reflecting an improvement in its assessment of the country's credit profile. The upgrade remains within the highly speculative category, however, indicating that Pakistan continues to face substantial credit risks.

The rating agency has also highlighted persistent weaknesses in areas including the rule of law, control of corruption and government effectiveness. These structural concerns remain important considerations for international investors assessing Pakistan's longer-term economic prospects.

For Islamabad, securing the proposed US facility would therefore represent more than an injection of financial support. It would be an attempt to strengthen the credibility of Pakistan's economic stabilisation programme, reassure international markets and demonstrate that the country is building a more sustainable external financing position.

A favourable response from Washington could consequently provide Pakistan with both financial breathing space and a potentially valuable vote of confidence at a time when the government is seeking to consolidate recent economic gains and move towards greater reliance on market-based financing and private investment.

Japan's evolving Indo-Pacific strategy discussed at QAU

Abida Shaheen

Islamabad: Japan's evolving diplomatic strategy and its growing role in shaping the Indo-Pacific order came under discussion this week at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), where a leading Japanese scholar highlighted Tokyo's efforts to adapt its foreign policy to the changing regional and global environment.

Professor Endo Ken, Chair and Professor of International Politics at the Faculty of Law, University of Tokyo, delivered a lecture on Monday at QAU focusing on Japan's evolving Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision and the broader significance of middle-power diplomacy in the region.

The lecture, titled "Japan's FOIP 3.0 and the Future of Middle-Power Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific," was organised at the SPIR Seminar Hall and was attended by senior university officials, faculty members and students, providing a platform for discussion on contemporary international and regional affairs.

QAU Vice-Chancellor Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal and Dr Muhammad Nadeem Mirza, Director of the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), attended the seminar and delivered welcoming remarks.

Japanese Ambassador to Pakistan Akamatsu Shuichi was also present at the event and delivered the opening address. He underscored the importance of academic engagement and intellectual exchanges in developing a deeper understanding of the political and strategic changes taking place across the Indo-Pacific.

In his lecture, Professor Endo examined the evolution of Japan's foreign-policy thinking and its efforts to redefine its diplomatic role amid profound changes in the regional balance of power.

He discussed Japan's approach to the Indo-Pacific through the development of the FOIP concept, which has increasingly become an important element of Tokyo's diplomatic and strategic outlook.

The discussion also focused on the role of middle powers in addressing emerging regional challenges. Japan, as one of the region's major advanced economies but not a traditional military superpower, has increasingly sought to work through diplomacy, economic partnerships, institutional cooperation and strategic engagement with like-minded countries.

Professor Endo's presentation provided participants with an overview of how Japan's Indo-Pacific policy has evolved and how Tokyo is seeking to respond to emerging geopolitical, economic and security challenges.

The FOIP framework has become an important pillar of Japan's international engagement, reflecting Tokyo's emphasis on a regional order based on openness, stability, connectivity and respect for international rules.

The concept has also provided Japan with a platform to deepen relations with countries across the Indo-Pacific while promoting cooperation on a wide range of political, economic and strategic issues.

The QAU seminar provided an opportunity for Pakistani academics and students to examine these developments from a Japanese perspective and consider their implications for countries such as Pakistan, which occupies an important geographical position connecting South Asia with the wider Asian region.

The participation of the Japanese ambassador and a senior University of Tokyo scholar also highlighted the growing importance of educational and intellectual exchanges between Pakistan and Japan.

The event reflected QAU's continuing efforts to promote academic discussion on international politics and provide students and researchers with direct access to scholars and policymakers engaged with major global and regional issues.

The discussion on Japan's FOIP strategy comes at a time when the Indo-Pacific has emerged as one of the world's most consequential geopolitical regions, with developments in security, trade, technology, connectivity and maritime affairs increasingly shaping international relations.

Against this backdrop, Japan's evolving approach is expected to remain an important subject of academic and policy debate as Tokyo seeks to balance its national interests with its broader vision for a stable, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

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Pakistan seeks to deepen EU trade ties as new GSP+ framework approaches

Liaquat Ali

Islamabad: Pakistan is intensifying efforts to strengthen its economic and trade relationship with the European Union, with Islamabad placing renewed emphasis on preserving preferential market access, improving export performance and ensuring effective implementation of commitments under the EU's GSP+ framework.

The issue came under detailed review at a meeting this week chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, as the government seeks to extract greater economic value from Pakistan's longstanding trade relationship with the European bloc.

The meeting brought together senior officials responsible for foreign affairs, commerce, interior and economic coordination, reflecting the government's recognition that Pakistan's access to the European market requires coordinated action across several areas of policymaking.

Ishaq Dar stressed the need for effective follow-up on commitments and conventions linked to the GSP+ arrangement, calling for timely implementation of agreed measures and stronger coordination among relevant institutions.

The deputy prime minister directed the authorities concerned to prioritise initiatives aimed at increasing Pakistan's exports and strengthening its overall trade performance, while ensuring that commitments made under the preferential trading arrangement are properly followed through.

For Pakistan, the EU market represents one of the most important destinations for exports, making the continuity and effective utilisation of preferential access a significant economic priority.

The GSP+ framework has provided Pakistani exporters with preferential access to the European market and has been particularly important for sectors such as textiles and garments, alongside a range of other manufactured and agricultural products.

As Pakistan confronts persistent pressure on its external account and seeks to increase foreign-exchange earnings through exports, maintaining and expanding its presence in the European market has assumed greater importance.

The government's latest push comes ahead of the implementation of an updated GSP framework, which is scheduled to take effect from January 1, 2027.

The transition gives Islamabad a relatively narrow window to ensure that all relevant commitments are being addressed and that government institutions, exporters and other stakeholders are prepared for the requirements of the new framework.

The emphasis on follow-up reflects the fact that preferential market access is not simply a trade concession but is linked to a broader set of commitments and standards.

Pakistan's ability to maximise the commercial benefits of the arrangement will consequently depend on effective coordination between government departments, diplomatic missions, regulators and the private sector.

The meeting was attended by the Minister for Commerce, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Bajwa, Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch, federal secretaries for Commerce and Interior, Pakistan's ambassador to Brussels, Capital Development Authority Chairman and senior officials from federal and provincial institutions. The participation of such a broad range of officials underscored the government's intention to approach the EU relationship as a comprehensive economic and diplomatic priority rather than a matter confined to the commerce ministry.

For Islamabad, the challenge is increasingly twofold: preserving preferential access while simultaneously improving the competitiveness and diversification of Pakistani exports.

Greater access to the European market alone cannot guarantee higher exports unless Pakistani producers are able to meet European standards, maintain consistent quality, improve productivity and develop products capable of competing in a highly sophisticated market.

The government is therefore seeking stronger coordination to identify opportunities for expanding exports and addressing bottlenecks that limit Pakistan's ability to take full advantage of its existing market access.

The EU's revised framework is also significant because it introduces an automatic safeguard mechanism for rice imports, designed to protect European producers from potential market disruption.

The provision could have particular relevance for Pakistan, which is an important rice-producing and exporting country and has sought to expand its agricultural exports to international markets.

The safeguard mechanism adds another dimension to Pakistan's preparations for the new framework, requiring exporters and policymakers to closely monitor developments in the European rice market and understand how the new provisions could affect future shipments.

The broader EU-Pakistan trade relationship has considerable potential beyond traditional export categories. Islamabad is increasingly interested in moving towards greater value addition, diversifying its export base and developing products capable of generating higher foreign-exchange earnings.

For Pakistani policymakers, Europe offers not only a major consumer market but also access to advanced production standards, technology, investment and supply chains.

Closer economic engagement with the EU could therefore support Pakistan's wider objective of shifting from an import-dependent economy towards one driven more strongly by exports and productive investment.

The government's renewed focus also comes at a time when Pakistan is attempting to strengthen its macroeconomic position and reduce vulnerability to recurring external financing pressures. Higher and more diversified exports would provide a more sustainable source of foreign exchange, reducing the economy's dependence on borrowing and remittances to meet external financing requirements.


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

Against this backdrop, the effective implementation of GSP+ commitments is being treated as an economic imperative.

The coming months are expected to be particularly important as Pakistan prepares for the January 2027 transition. Islamabad will need to ensure that relevant institutions remain aligned, exporters understand the implications of the revised framework and diplomatic engagement with European partners remains active.

The government's approach suggests that Pakistan wants to move beyond simply retaining preferential access and instead use the relationship to secure a stronger foothold in the European market.

If supported by improvements in domestic competitiveness, compliance, product quality and export diversification, closer engagement with the EU could provide Pakistan with an important avenue for expanding foreign-exchange earnings and strengthening its long-term economic resilience.

The latest high-level meeting therefore signals a renewed effort by Islamabad to place the EU at the centre of its trade diplomacy — combining diplomatic engagement with domestic reforms in an attempt to turn preferential access into sustained export growth.

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UK-backed programme helps more than 200,000 children improve learning outcomes in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

High Commissioner of United Kingdom to Pakistan Jane Marriott

Abdullah Jan

Islamabad: More than 200,000 children in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have benefited from a UK-supported education programme aimed at improving foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills, while more than 35,000 out-of-school children have been brought back into education.

The British High Commission said this week that the UK partnership with the governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had helped expand children's access to schooling and deliver measurable improvements in basic learning.

The programme has produced significant gains in reading and numeracy. Urdu reading levels increased from 15 per cent to 78 per cent, while English reading improved from 15 per cent to 45 per cent. Subtraction skills also rose from 37 per cent to 67 per cent.

The initiative used learning-level assessments, targeted instruction, teacher coaching and regular progress tracking to identify learning gaps and help children catch up.

It has reached more than 500 public schools and enabled over 35,000 children who were previ-

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

ously out of school to return to education.

The programme has also provided remedial education to 48,000 learners and strengthened teaching capacity through the training of more than 5,500 educators and 250 Master Trainers. Facilities have also been improved at 400 schools.

British High Commissioner Jane Marriott said teachers were central to improving learning outcomes and that the most important measure of the programme's success was whether educators found the approaches effective enough to continue using them.

"The feedback so far has been extremely encouraging," she said, adding that bringing governments, schools and communities together had helped children who previously struggled with basic reading make significant progress.

"Children who previously could not read a simple sentence are now reading independently," Marriott said.

Muhammad Musa Ali Bokhari, CEO of the Punjab Education Curriculum Training and Assessment Authority (PECTAA), said every child in Punjab deserved the opportunity to develop confidence in reading, writing and numeracy before progressing beyond primary school.

He said UK support had helped shift the focus on foundational learning "from theory to demonstrated practice" in Punjab.

Masood Ahmed, Special Secretary, Elementary and Secondary Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said the results demonstrated that targeted investment in foundational learning could deliver meaningful improvements for children and communities.

He said the provincial government remained committed to building on the progress and ensuring that every child had the opportunity to develop literacy and numeracy skills essential for lifelong learning.

The programme's results underscore the importance of early intervention, teacher support and regular assessment in addressing learning gaps and improving educational outcomes among children in public schools.

I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions. **Stephen Covey**

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"Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future." **- John F. Kennedy**

Italy's Leonardo opens Ukraine unit to harness battlefield lessons and advance defence technology

Newswire

Rome: Italian defence giant Leonardo has established a new company in Ukraine as Italy seeks to tap into Kyiv's extensive wartime experience in drone warfare, artificial intelligence and battlefield technologies while positioning its defence industry for the next generation of European military systems.

The new entity, Leonardo Ukraine, is wholly owned by the Italian aerospace and defence group and is intended to provide the company with a direct presence in one of the world's most rapidly evolving defence environments.

The move reflects a growing recognition in Italy and across Europe that the war in Ukraine has created an unprecedented testing ground for unmanned systems, electronic warfare, battlefield intelligence and rapidly adaptable military technologies.

Leonardo's decision to establish a Ukrainian subsidiary comes as European countries accelerate efforts to strengthen their defence industries and learn from the operational experience accumulated during the conflict.

Leonardo chief executive Lorenzo Mariani said at the Farnborough Airshow in Britain in July that Ukraine had developed an exceptional level of operational experience during the war and that cooperation with the Ukrainian drone industry was therefore becoming increasingly important.

The company's move into Ukraine is expected to focus initially on research and development involving optical and navigation systems.

Leonardo Ukraine was registered in Ukraine in May, with share capital of just under €100,000, according to the information cited in reports about the company.

The initiative could ultimately give Leonardo access to Ukrainian expertise developed through continuous battlefield testing, particularly in areas where relatively inexpensive unmanned systems have evolved rapidly in response to changing conditions on the ground.

More than four years of war following Russia's full-scale invasion have transformed Ukraine into a unique environment for defence innovation.

The conflict has demonstrated how drones, electronic warfare, artificial intelligence and battlefield data can increasingly determine the effectiveness of military operations.

Ukrainian companies have developed and modified unmanned systems at remarkable speed, with technologies repeatedly tested in operational conditions and redesigned according to battlefield results.

Elio Calcagno, a senior fellow for defence and space at the Institute of International Affairs, said Ukraine had developed expertise that could prove extremely valuable for European defence manufacturers and governments.

One of the most important lessons, according to the analysis, has been the ability of Ukrainian companies and military personnel to establish a rapid flow of information between frontline users and engineers.

That feedback loop allows equipment to be modified quickly in response to actual battlefield requirements rather than relying primarily on conventional development cycles and laboratory testing.

Technologies developed or refined in Ukraine include systems capable of operating without conventional GPS navigation, improved resistance to electronic interference and automated target-recognition capabilities.

For European defence manufacturers, such developments offer an opportunity to understand how emerging technologies perform against sophisticated countermeasures in real combat conditions.

Leonardo's Ukrainian initiative also comes as the Italian company prepares to develop and test advanced air-defence capabilities.

Among the systems attracting attention is the Michelangelo Dome, an integrated air-defence architecture that is being positioned as a potential complement to systems such as the US Patriot and Europe's SAMP/T.

Leonardo has projected a potentially significant market for the system over the coming decade, and operational experience from Ukraine could provide valuable insights into the requirements of modern air defence.

The Ukrainian battlefield has demonstrated the complexity of defending against a combination of drones, cruise missiles and other airborne threats.

For defence companies, understanding how different air-defence systems respond to such threats is increasingly important, particularly as European governments reconsider their military requirements following the war.

The possibility of testing or refining advanced systems in cooperation with Ukraine therefore represents a potentially significant element of Italy's wider defence-industrial strategy.

One of the most valuable resources emerging from the Ukrainian conflict is not necessarily hardware but data.

Modern warfare increasingly generates enormous quantities of information through drones, sensors, cameras and other battlefield systems. When that information is systematically collected and analysed, it can be used to improve algorithms and refine the performance of military equipment.

Ukraine has established Brave1, a state-backed defence innovation platform bringing together thousands of companies working on drones, electronic warfare and artificial intelligence.

The ecosystem is designed to connect technology developers with military requirements and accelerate the development of systems capable of addressing battlefield needs.

The associated Brave1 Dataroom has also been used to collect visual and thermal information generated under real operational conditions. Such datasets can help train artificial-intelligence systems to identify and respond to airborne threats.

For companies such as Leonardo, access to this type of operational information could prove increasingly important as artificial intelligence becomes embedded in modern defence systems.

The value lies not simply in observing how a weapon performs, but in understanding precisely why it succeeds or fails under particular conditions.

Italy is not alone in seeking closer links with Ukraine's rapidly developing defence industry.

Germany and other European countries have increased cooperation with Ukrainian defence manufacturers as Europe seeks to rebuild and expand its military-industrial capacity.

The European Union has also sought to increase support for Ukraine's defence sector as part of its broader response to the war and its plans to strengthen European defence capabilities.

The Ukrainian defence industry, meanwhile, has increasingly expanded beyond conventional equipment into long-range drones, surveillance platforms, electronic warfare systems and autonomous technologies.

For European manufacturers, cooperation with Ukrainian companies offers access to a form of operational experience that would be difficult to reproduce in peacetime.

Leonardo's move also needs to be viewed within Italy's broader efforts to strengthen its position in Europe's defence sector.

The company is already deeply involved in multinational defence programmes, including through MBDA, the European missile manufacturer in which Leonardo holds a 25% stake alongside BAE Systems and Airbus.

The experience gained from the use of missiles and other weapons in Ukraine can provide manufacturers with valuable information about their performance against modern air-defence networks.

The central lesson for defence planners is that battlefield experience can increasingly influence the design of future weapons almost in real time.

A missile, drone or sensor deployed in combat produces information about its range, reliability, vulnerability to electronic warfare, ability to penetrate defences and effectiveness against specific targets.

That information can subsequently feed back into research and development.

For Italy, establishing Leonardo Ukraine provides a mechanism through which the company can participate more directly in this emerging ecosystem.

It could also help Italian defence manufacturers understand the rapidly changing requirements of warfare and incorporate Ukrainian innovations into future European systems.

The development comes as European governments reassess defence procurement after years in which many military systems were designed largely around assumptions derived from previous conflicts or peacetime planning.

The extensive use of inexpensive drones alongside sophisticated missiles and conventional military equipment has demonstrated that future wars are likely to involve increasingly complex combinations of low-cost and high-end technologies.

For Italy and its European partners, the challenge is now to absorb those lessons without simply replicating wartime systems designed for one particular conflict.

Leonardo's new presence in Ukraine signals an effort to do precisely that — combine Ukrainian battlefield experience with Italian and European industrial capabilities to develop technologies suited to the rapidly changing character of modern warfare. The partnership could ultimately benefit both sides: Ukraine could gain access to additional European industrial expertise and investment, while Italy's defence industry gains closer access to one of the most valuable sources of contemporary military experience.

As Europe accelerates its defence modernisation, the Ukrainian battlefield is likely to remain a major source of lessons for the continent's military planners and manufacturers.

For Leonardo, the establishment of its Ukrainian subsidiary marks a significant step into that emerging landscape and places Italy closer to the centre of Europe's effort to turn wartime innovation into the defence technologies of the future.

Ambassador H.E.Stefano Pontecorvo

Ambassador Nicolas Galey highlights Pakistan's rising diplomatic influence as he bids farewell

Abida Shaheen

Karachi: Outgoing French Ambassador to Pakistan Nicolas Galey this week highlighted Pakistan's growing diplomatic influence and its increasingly constructive role in addressing regional challenges, saying the country has demonstrated its ability to contribute to solutions in difficult international circumstances.

Speaking at a farewell reception in Karachi, Galey reflected on his nearly five-year tenure in Pakistan and praised the country's efforts to help ease regional tensions, particularly its recent role in seeking a ceasefire in the Gulf.

The farewell, organised by the Board of Management of the Quaid-e -Azam House Museum in collaboration with the Karachi Council of Foreign Relations, also marked the departure of French Consul General Alexis Chahtahtinsky.

Ambassador Galey said he was leaving Pakistan with mixed emotions after spending almost five years in the country, describing his departure as a moment of sadness but also an opportunity to reflect on his experiences and the evolution he had witnessed.

He said Pakistan had emerged as an influential country despite operating in difficult regional and geopolitical circumstances.

"I really appreciate Pakistan's efforts in at least getting a kind of ceasefire in the Gulf. Pakistan has emerged as a very influential country in difficult circumstances," Galey said.

His remarks offered a positive assessment of Pakistan's evolving diplomatic profile at a time when Islamabad has sought to play a more active role in regional diplomacy and conflict-resolution efforts.

Ambassador Galey also spoke warmly about Karachi, which he visited numerous times during his posting.

"I have visited Karachi many times and have seen the vitality of this city. I have seen it changing and improving," he said.

The ambassador praised Chahtahtinsky for his work in Karachi and acknowledged the significance of the French diplomatic presence in the city over the past five decades.

The French Consulate General in Karachi, established in 1976, is now being permanently closed, coinciding with the end of Ambassador Galey's tenure and Chahtahtinsky's departure.

While another ambassador will take over France's diplomatic representation in Islamabad, Galey noted that Karachi would no longer have a French consulate.

He nevertheless stressed that France's engagement with the city would continue through other institutions.

The Alliance Française, he said, would serve as France's flagship presence in Karachi, while the Pakistan-France Business Alliance would continue working to promote commercial ties.

The ambassador's comments suggested that although the diplomatic structure is changing, France intends to retain important cultural and economic connections with Pakistan's commercial capital.

For Consul General Alexis Chahtahtinsky, the departure carries an especially personal significance. He is scheduled to leave Karachi and Pakistan, but his relationship with the country dates back to 1983, when he first visited Pakistan as a student.

Recalling that visit, he said he had been fortunate to travel to Pakistan's northern areas and had developed a deep affection for the country. He later returned as a diplomat and spent four years as French consul general in Karachi.

Chahtahtinsky described Karachi as Pakistan's first capital and its continuing economic centre, emphasising its importance as the country's largest port and a gateway to the wider Pakistani market.

He said the city offered considerable opportunities for business while also having a vibrant social life.

"I will always have a special place in my heart for Karachi," he said.

He also pointed to what he regarded as a significant change in Pakistan's international image during recent years.

According to Chahtahtinsky, Pakistan had previously been associated internationally with crime and terrorism, creating concerns among foreign diplomats about travelling to or working in the country.

He argued that recent developments, particularly Pakistan's diplomatic efforts during the Gulf crisis, had contributed to a different perception.

"It is a very different Pakistan that we are leaving," he said, adding that Pakistan had increasingly repositioned itself from being viewed as part of a problem to becoming part of the solution.

During the ceremony, Ikram Sehgal, Vice Chairman of the Board of Management of the Karachi Council of Foreign Relations, highlighted the long history of Pakistan-France relations.

He recalled France's early recognition of Pakistan and noted that formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1951.

Sehgal particularly highlighted the defence dimension of bilateral ties, citing French-origin Daphne-class and Agosta-class submarines acquired by Pakistan at times when the country faced difficulties obtaining military equipment elsewhere.

He also referred to Pakistan's Mirage III and Mirage 5 fighter aircraft and the subsequent Retrofit of Strike Element programme, under which ageing Mirage jets were upgraded at Pakistan Aeronautical Complex in Kamra.

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