

The World's First Death Sentence for Social Media Post

A Saudi court has sentenced a retired teacher to death for criticising the ruling family in messages to his nine social media followers. According to Human Rights Watch, 54-year-old Mohammed al-Ghamdi was sentenced to death on July 10 for various offences related to his activity on YouTube and X, formerly known as Twitter. The ruling may be the first death sentence for social media posts.

The charges reportedly levied against the retired teacher include “describing the King or the Crown Prince in a way that undermines religion or justice”, “supporting a terrorist ideology”, and disseminating fake news “with the intention of executing a terrorist crime”. Mohammed’s brother, Saeed al-Ghamdi, tweeted that his brother’s sentencing may be an attempt “to spite me personally after failed attempts to return me to the country”. Saeed, an Islamic scholar, lives in self-imposed exile in London and is wanted by the Saudi authorities.

Pakistan Suffers from the Fruits of IMF Loans

The public in Pakistan has taken to the streets in large numbers over exorbitant electricity bills on the back of a significant increase in the national average tariff. The outrage had prompted interim Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq to take notice and summon an “emergency” meeting for Sunday to discuss the issue. The caretaker Information Minister Murtaza Solangi told Dawn that the interim prime minister was considering several options to mitigate the sufferings of power consumers but he could not share details with the media till a final decision in this regard. Talking to a private TV channel he said the complete focus of the government was on providing relief to the masses in electricity bills. President of the traders’ union, Abdul Ghaffar Deshani, said the government was trying to save face and was “hiding its incompetency” by burdening consumers. Imran Khan’s government and the subsequent Shabaz Sharif government agreed to remove subsidies and price controls on energy in order to receive IMF loans, the removal of the subsidies has led to prices to shoot up.

Another Coup in West Africa

Senior military officers in Gabon seized power on Wednesday, August 30th, shortly after President Bongo's re-election was announced. Twelve soldiers appeared on national television, saying they were annulling the results of Saturday's poll. The electoral commission had given Bongo 64.27% of the vote with his main challenger Albert Ondo Ossa taking 30.77%. The officers said they were dissolving all state institutions, and that the country's borders were shut. Bongo's overthrow has brought to an end to his family's 56-year hold on power in Gabon. This is now the eighth coup in former French colonies in Africa in the past three years.