

# More than half of city’s traffic signals damaged, spurring remedial measures

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A concerning revelation has emerged, shedding light on the deteriorating state of traffic signals in Karachi, where over half of the city’s signals are reportedly damaged. The revelation surfaced during a high-level meeting chaired by Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (ret’d) Maqbool Baqir, addressing the pressing issues of traffic management and the issuance of driving licenses.

In the meeting, it was disclosed that out of the 91 traffic signals across the city, only 30 were operational, leaving a staggering 61 signals in a state of disrepair. Taking cognizance of the gravity of the situation, the caretaker chief minister directed the traffic police to rectify the malfunctioning signals promptly. Additionally, he emphasized the need to crack down on vehicles operating with applied-for registration plates, instructing authorities to deactivate them.

According to the Chief Minister’s Spokesman, the briefing by DIG Traffic highlighted that the city currently faces a shortage of 2378 traffic police personnel, with a total capacity of 9077. Daily operations witness the issuance of 9700 tickets, resulting in an annual collection of fines amounting to 766 million rupees. The briefing underscored the intricate relationship between



traffic problems and encroachments in the city.

While the encroachments, notoriously contributing to congestion and hindrances in traffic flow, have been pinpointed as a significant challenge that demands immediate attention for effective traffic management. In response to these challenges, the caretaker chief minister has called for swift and comprehensive measures to boost the efficiency of traffic signals, reinforce the traffic police force, and alleviate congestion caused by encroachments. The pressing need for these measures arises from the adverse impact of encroachments on the city’s traffic landscape, leading to increased difficulties for commuters and exacerbating congestion issues. The con-

certed efforts seek to implement strategic interventions that will not only streamline traffic but also enhance the safety and convenience of Karachi’s residents.

The caretaker chief minister emphasized the urgency of addressing these challenges to create a more seamless and efficient traffic system. The proposed measures aim to create a positive impact on the overall traffic management scenario, ultimately contributing to a smoother and safer commuting experience for the city’s residents. As authorities work towards these goals, the residents of Karachi anticipate positive changes that will mitigate traffic-related challenges and enhance the overall urban mobility experience in the metropolitan area.

The harsh reality is that Karachi has no proper public transportation system. For that reason, everyone has to travel in their own cars. Thirty cars instead of one bus on the road will definitely lead to heavy traffic jams. We should learn from the Singapore government who discourage private vehicles and promote public transport.

They have successfully convinced 53% of the citizens to use public transport. Apart from this, dilapidated infrastructure is another reason why Karachi is facing traffic issues. But what makes the situation even worse is that big trucks and trailers are allowed to travel at any time of the day. Still, they work and operate during the time when traffic is at its peak.

## Aleem Khan pledges to lower petrol prices for motorcyclists

By our correspondent

ISLAMABD: In a recent gathering organized by the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) in Lahore, party president Abdul Aleem Khan made a noteworthy commitment, vowing to reduce the price of petrol specifically for motorcyclists if his party secures victory in the upcoming elections.

Speaking at the event, Aleem Khan asserted, “Firstly, I had imposed the party’s manifesto on myself. I have never left direct contact with the people.” He underlined the party’s dedication to its promises, emphasizing his personal connection with the principles outlined in the party manifesto. Highlighting the initiatives undertaken by the Abdul Aleem Khan Foundation, he stated, “The new programs are being started in connection with the Abdul Aleem Khan Foundation. It does not matter whether a voter exists or not; we never linked ourselves with the voter lists. We will continue to help the needy.”

Aleem Khan addressed a prevalent issue affecting the public, stating, “Today, the biggest of all the problems faced by the people is the inflated power bills.” In a bid to address this concern, he announced a bold proposal, saying, “If the masses show interest in our party in the elections, we will provide free electricity up to 300 units. We will provide ownership rights in slum areas.” The IPP president’s commitment to reducing the petrol price specifically for motorcyclists reflects an understanding of the challenges faced by a significant portion of the population reliant on two-wheelers for transportation.

# “International Migrant Workers’ Day” highlights plight of overseas Pakistani prisoners

58% incarcerated as 5,292 in UAE and 3,100 in Saudi Arabia

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In observance of International Migrant Workers’ Day, a non-governmental organization has launched an interactive data webpage shedding light on the challenges faced by overseas Pakistani prisoners. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of November 2023, a staggering 14,286 Pakistani nationals are languishing in prisons abroad, with 58 percent of them incarcerated in the United Arab Emirates (5,292) and Saudi Arabia (3,100).

The report, which aims to humanize the plight of overseas Pakistani prisoners, provides cutting-edge data that is disaggregated by country-specific and crime-wise statistics. This resource equips government officials and parliamentarians to formulate data-informed policies that safeguard the rights of Pakistani migrants. A significant revelation from the data is that between 2010 and 2023, at least 183 Pakistanis faced execution in foreign countries, with 171 individuals meeting this fate in Saudi Arabia—a substantial majority. The report highlights that a considerable number of migrants abroad are facing the death penalty for drug offenses, raising concerns about potential victims of trafficking. The platform also explores the complexities of Pakistan’s Prisoner Transfer Agreements with key countries, emphasizing the need for data transparency from relevant ministries.

Sarah Belal, a spokesperson for the organization, stated, “The launch of this webpage is a key step towards evidence-based policies that ensure overseas Pakistani prisoners are aware of their consular protection rights and legal options. By providing accessible information, we aim to contribute to a more transparent and just system, ensuring fair treatment for even the most vulnerable people imprisoned abroad.” The dataset includes a country-wise breakdown, crime-wise statistics, information on Prisoner Transfer Agreements, key legislations, consular rights and protection, and global advocacy for prisoners’ rights. The initiative seeks to bring attention to the challenges faced by overseas Pakistani prisoners and advocate for their fair treatment and protection of their rights.

Pakistan stands united with the international community in commemorating International Migrants Day, acknowledging the pivotal role migration plays as a source of opportunities for individuals, their families, and the countries involved. As a nation serving as a source, transit, and destination for migrants, Pakistan recognizes the positive impact of its diaspora abroad, not only contributing significantly to national development but also fostering progress in host countries across diverse fields.

The Pakistani diaspora, known for its achievements

worldwide, exemplifies the potential of migration to drive success and prosperity. Whether excelling in academia, industry, or other fields, Pakistanis living abroad showcase the positive outcomes of well-managed migration. As a host country, Pakistan continues to welcome millions of regular and irregular migrants from neighbouring and regional nations. The nation takes pride in its history of generosity and hospitality, extending a warm welcome to all migrants without discrimination.

The adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) by the United Nations two years ago marked a milestone in migration governance, initiating an era of dialogue and international cooperation. The GCM underscores the global recognition of the advantages of human mobility, while also emphasizing the need for careful management to mitigate challenges such as loss of life, human rights abuses, and social tensions. In the spirit of International Migrants Day, Pakistan calls for destination states to ensure fair and ethical treatment of migrants, providing access to healthcare and social protection without discrimination.

The nation advocates for the expansion of legal avenues for migration and a reduction in the transfer costs of remittances, aiming to create a more equitable and humane global migration landscape.

## Caretaker PM Kakar to visit Kuwait commiserating Emir’s demise

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar is scheduled to embark on a diplomatic mission as he journeys to Kuwait on Monday to express condolences over the passing of Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah.

As per the Foreign Office spokesperson, PM Kakar’s visit aims to convey the heartfelt sympathies and condolences of the Government and people of Pakistan to the Royal Family, government officials, and the citizens of Kuwait. The trip underscores Pakistan’s commitment to standing in solidarity with Kuwait during this period of mourning. Expressing his deep grief over the demise of Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar took to social media on Saturday to offer prayers for the departed soul. In his post, PM Kakar highlighted Pakistan’s unwavering support for the Kuwaiti Royal Family and the people of Kuwait, emphasizing the late Amir’s significant role in fortifying Pak-Kuwait relations.

# Ex PM optimistic about economic recovery as PML-N gears up for polls

By our correspondent

LAHORE: In a series of meetings with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders in Lahore, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif expressed optimism about the country’s economic recovery. According to Shehbaz, the nation stands on the verge of a positive turnaround, attributing it to the tough decisions made during the coalition government’s tenure.

Prominent PML-N leaders, including Rana Iqbal, Mian Saqib Khurshid, Javed Ali Shah, Munawar Khetran, Ayesha Arshad Lodhi, Naveed Aslam Lodhi, Sheikh Fayyaz, Abid Raza Kotla, Syed Mubeen, Qutub Koreja, Makhdoom Mubeen, and Mehmood Alam, partici-

pated in the meetings. Discussions centered around party matters and preparations for the upcoming general elections. During the meetings, PML-N leaders extended congratulations to Shehbaz Sharif on the acquittal of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif.

Shehbaz emphasized the party’s commitment to providing relief to the masses by addressing key issues such as inflation, unemployment, and economic challenges. Shehbaz Sharif remarked, “The country had to bear the brunt of the punishment delivered to Nawaz Sharif. Not only were the cases against Nawaz Sharif bogus, but the people, who launched cases against Nawaz Sharif, were also turned out to be liars.”

His statements reflected a strong stance against the legal proceedings faced by Nawaz Sharif.

Looking ahead, Shehbaz Sharif outlined the PML-N’s focus, stating, “The PML-N will completely focus on paving the way for the nation’s growth if voted into power.” This statement underscored the party’s commitment to fostering economic development and addressing the challenges faced by the country. As the PML-N gears up for the upcoming general elections, Shehbaz Sharif’s positive outlook on economic recovery serves as a key message to the electorate, highlighting the party’s vision for a prosperous and stable Pakistan.

## ECP sets date to hear PTI intra-party case amidst controversy

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is scheduled to hear the plea filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founding member Akbar S. Babar against the party’s intra-party elections on December 18 (Monday).

A five-member bench of the ECP will convene to address the challenges and concerns raised by several individuals, including Akbar S. Babar, Raja Tahir Nawaz, and Naureen Farooq, regarding the conduct of PTI’s intra-party elections. The ECP has also summoned PTI chairman Gohar Ali Khan, along with other party officials, including Chief Election Commissioner Niazullah Niazi, Umar Ayub, Haleem Adil Sheikh, Yasmin Rashid, Ali Amin Gaudapur, and Returning Officer Central Secretariat Sardar Masroof.

Notably, Akbar S. Babar has criticized the intra-party polls, labeling them as a “drama” and expressing concerns about the party’s future and its election symbol, the ‘bat.’ The elections took place on the orders of the ECP, with voters utilizing an online app to cast their votes. In the contested results, Barrister Gohar Ali Khan emerged as the new chairman of PTI, succeeding the incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan.

## Maulana Fazlur Rehman criticizes UNSC, advocates for political stability

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman delivered a scathing critique of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and various human rights organizations during a public gathering in Mardan on Sunday.

Expressing his concerns, Rehman questioned the absence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in addressing the perpetrators of heinous crimes. He accused the United States and Western nations of prioritizing power politics over democracy, emphasizing the urgent need for accountability in situations where innocent lives are lost. In particular, he highlighted the dire situation in Gaza, condemning the silence of human rights organizations on the matter.

“Our country’s economy is at stake, and our independence is also at stake,” warned Rehman, drawing attention to the challenges faced by Pakistan. He urged the global community to take decisive action to rectify the prevailing injustices. Importantly, Maulana Fazlur Rehman reiterated that the JUI-F does not endorse the politics of violence. He advocated for a diplomatic and democratic approach to address critical issues, emphasizing the importance of peaceful solutions.

In a separate statement, JUI-F spokesperson Hafiz Hamdullah affirmed the party’s readiness for the upcoming general elections scheduled for February 8. Dismissing doubts about the election process, Hamdullah criticized the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for allegedly attempting to delay the elections. He accused the PTI of engaging in hypocritical politics and stressed Maulana Fazlur Rehman’s commitment to parliamentary supremacy.

“Maulana Fazlur Rehman seeks the supremacy of the parliament even today. We are ready to uphold the constitution and democracy, leading the country towards political stability,” asserted Hamdullah. As political tensions rise in Pakistan, Maulana Fazlur Rehman and the JUI-F continue to position themselves as proponents of democratic values and advocates for a stable political landscape. The party remains steadfast in its commitment to participate in the upcoming elections and contribute to the democratic process.

## Cop, son killed foiling dacoity attempt

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: In a tragic incident in the jurisdiction of Ramana police station, Islamabad, a courageous policeman and his son lost their lives while thwarting a dacoity attempt.

The Islamabad Capital Police spokesperson reported that a head constable, who had just completed his duty, was returning home with his son when the incident occurred. The head constable bravely confronted armed men engaged in a dacoity within the limits of Ramana police station. Seeking assistance, he called upon his son to join him in foiling the crime.

Regrettably, during the courageous intervention, three dacoits opened fire, resulting in the martyrdom of the head constable and his son. The deceased policeman, identified as Ashraf, and his son Zeeshan, were immediately shifted to PIMS hospital for the necessary legal procedures, while the assailants managed to flee the scene. The Inspector-General of Islamabad Capital Territory Police (ICTP), Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, has taken notice of the tragic incident and directed the police party to make immediate efforts for the apprehension of the attackers.

## Kalash ‘Choisus’ festival attracts tourists

News Desk

CHITRAL: The picturesque valleys of Bamboret, Birir, and Rumbur in Lower Chitral have come alive with the vibrant spirit of the Kalash winter festival, Choisus. As efforts to foster peace in Chitral yield positive results, locals and visitors alike are immersed in the cultural richness of the historic Choisus festival.

Commencing on December 16 and extending until December 22, the festival features a tapestry of traditions, including animal sacrifice, the preparation of diverse flour-based foods, mesmerizing bonfires, and various other customs deeply rooted in the Kalash tribe’s heritage.

# Sirajul Haq firmly rejects alliance with PML-N, PPP in polls

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: In a recent announcement, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Emir Sirajul Haq categorically ruled out the possibility of forming an alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in the upcoming general elections, emphasizing that both parties had harmed the country.

Addressing the public in Islamabad, Haq expressed his strong stance against collaborating with the PML-N and PPP, stating, “The PML-N and PPP had harmed the country. We will not allow anybody to snatch the public mandate in the upcoming general elections.” His remarks underscored a commitment to distancing the JI from political entities that, in his view, have contributed to the country’s challenges.

Haq further articulated the JI’s position on the electoral process, asserting, “If transparent elections are not held in the country, then we will not accept the general elections. If the same environment is not provided to all political parties, then it might be difficult to run the next government.” Highlighting the JI’s electoral agenda, Haq outlined key priorities, stating, “The JI will take part in the upcoming elections on the manifesto of peace, development, and prosper-

ity. We will impose an emergency in the education and health sectors.” The emphasis on peace and development reflects the party’s commitment to addressing critical areas for the nation’s progress.

During a youth workers’ convention in Lower Dir, Haq reiterated the importance of timely elections as a solution to the country’s challenges. He warned, “If the timely polls are not held, then the country will be further dragged into the quagmire.” The statement emphasized the urgency of a well-organized and transparent electoral process. Taking a swipe at the major political players, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Haq stated, “The PML-N, PPP, and PTI are responsible for harming the country.” His criticism pointed towards a broader discontent with the performance of these political entities in addressing the nation’s issues.

Concluding his remarks, Haq asserted, “There is no room for upholding the remote-control democracy in the country. If there had been the rule of the JI in the country, none of the single Indian troop would have been allowed in Kashmir.” The statement reflected the JI’s vision for governance and its stance on national sovereignty, particularly in sensitive geopolitical regions like Kashmir.

## Nationwide disruption hits social media platforms

News Desk

KARACHI: In an anticipated turn of events, social media platforms experienced widespread disruption across Pakistan, affecting major services like X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, as reported by the internet monitoring service Netblocks.

Users in prominent cities such as Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad reported difficulties accessing social media platforms shortly after 8 pm. Additionally, users noted sluggish internet services during the disruption.



Netblocks swiftly reported the incident, categorizing it as a “nation-

scale disruption.” The cause behind this disruption remains unclear at this time.

This incident highlights a recurring trend, marking not the first time social media access has faced impediments in Pakistan. On May 9, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) confirmed the suspension of mobile broadband across the country following instructions from the interior ministry. Netblocks previously reported restrictions on access to Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube following the arrest of PTI chief Imran Khan in the Al-Qadir Trust case.



# Judicial Immunity from Airport Searches Sparks Controversy

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The recent order granting judges and their spouses immunity from airport searches across Pakistan has ignited a debate on the intersection of judicial privileges, public perceptions, and equitable treatment within the legal system. While such exemptions are not unprecedented globally, the timing and context of this directive have raised eyebrows and fueled discussions on the need for equal treatment under the law.

The Airport Security Force (ASF) implemented the order on October 12, following instructions from the Aviation Secretary, who, in turn, acted on the directives of the Supreme Court. The order extends the exemption from

searches to the Chief Justice, serving judges, and their wives during airport security checks. Internationally, some countries have similar provisions for high-ranking officials. In the United States, for instance, federal judges enjoy certain courtesies, including exemptions from airport pat-downs. However, these exemptions are often based on practical considerations and security assessments rather than a blanket immunity.

In the United Kingdom, judges and other high-ranking officials are not exempt from security screenings at airports. The UK emphasizes equal treatment and adherence to security protocols for all passengers, regardless of their status. The timing of the directive, coming just days after the

swearing-in of Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa, has added a layer of complexity to the situation. Analysts and legal experts have called for transparency in such decisions, urging Chief Justice Faiz Isa to seek clarification and address any concerns regarding the perceived preferential treatment.

Renowned analyst Oriya Maqbool Jan weighed in on the matter, bringing attention to the timing of the order in relation to Justice Qazi Faiz Isa's recent appointment. He urged further scrutiny of the situation, suggesting that if the information is accurate, Chief Justice Faiz Isa should address the issue and demand clarification from the concerned secretary. On the

other hand, if it proves to be false, he called for appropriate measures to halt its circulation, similar to restrictions imposed on certain discussions about elections.

This development underscores the intersection of legal, ethical, and public perception dimensions within the context of judicial privileges and their potential impact on societal trust. This development underscores the delicate balance between upholding the dignity of the judiciary and ensuring that legal provisions are perceived as fair and just by the public. The incident also highlights the need for clear guidelines and open communication to prevent any erosion of public trust in the judicial system.

## Petrol at Rs65 in 2017, recalls PML-N's Rana Sanaullah

By our correspondent

LAHORE: Rana Sanaullah, a senior leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), reminisced on Sunday about the era when petrol prices stood at Rs65 per litre in 2017. Addressing a public gathering in Faisalabad, the former interior minister highlighted the achievements of the PML-N's previous tenure, claiming credit for addressing power outages and quelling the menace of terrorism in 2017.

Sanaullah emphasized the significant role played by the Christian community in his victory during the 2018 general elections. "The Christian community has played a vital role in my victory in the 2018 general elections," he stated. Reflecting on the economic landscape, Sanaullah noted a positive shift in perceptions globally. He recalled a time in 2012-13 when notable businesspersons preferred traveling to Dubai over staying in the country. However, by 2017, the world began recognizing that Pakistan had successfully addressed various challenges.

PML-N senior leader Ahsan Iqbal, speaking in Narowal on Friday, distanced his party from the inflation issue, placing the blame on the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government. He asserted that the Ministry of Planning and Development, under his purview, had no role in the rising inflation. Iqbal expressed optimism about the country's gradual progress, highlighting the potential of the youth. He pledged to provide loans to the youth if the PML-N assumed power, declaring Narowal as the party's stronghold.

## Body of missing 10-year-old girl found in canal

By our correspondent

DADU: The police have confirmed the recovery of the body of a 10-year-old missing girl from Dadu Canal three days ago from her home at Radhan.

The deceased has been identified as Samiullah Brohi, hailing from the village of Radhan, as stated by the local police authorities. The grim discovery comes three days after the child mysteriously disappeared from her hometown of Radhan, sparking immediate concern among her family and the community. Authorities reported that the family of the deceased had expressed suspicions of possible kidnapping, prompting a swift response from the police to investigate the matter.

Expressing their anguish, the child's family had voiced concerns about the involvement of relatives in the disappearance, leading the police to delve deeper into the circumstances surrounding the tragic incident. A poignant turn of events transpired a day ago when the mother of the deceased, in a desperate plea for her child's safe return, raised a holy book during a heartfelt protest in Mehar. The emotional demonstration highlighted the gravity of the situation and the anguish felt by the family.

In light of this distressing situation, the recovered body has been shifted to Taluka Hospital Mehar for a thorough post-mortem examination. The police, committed to uncovering the truth behind this tragic incident, continue their investigation to determine the cause and circumstances leading to the untimely demise of Samiullah Brohi.



KARACHI: Picture shows the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) building. Inset: Mayor Karachi Murtaza Wahab can also be seen.

# Record Monthly Income of Karachi Water Corporation Sparks Controversy

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The Karachi Water Corporation has found itself in the midst of controversy as news of a staggering monthly income of 1 billion 80 crore rupees emerged, creating a buzz around the financial prowess of the water supply and drainage agency. The revelation has prompted discussions about financial transparency, with allegations of a scheme to conceal the record recovery by certain officers.

Following the record-breaking monthly income, Chairman and Mayor of Karachi, Murtaza Wahab, convened a closed-door meeting with key officers to strategize the organization's future steps. While the achievement was acknowledged, some officers involved in the record recovery were reportedly deprived of official praise. Chairman Murtaza Wahab publicly appreciated the performance of officers responsible for the remarkable recovery but did not spare retired officers and employees who have accumulated liabilities worth billions of rupees.

The decision to address these liabilities involves liquidating assets, including selling scrap. Water Board officials disclosed that the institution's income for November surpassed 1 billion 80 crore rupees, while the monthly expenses, including

salaries and other costs, were approximately 80 crores. Demand has arisen to allocate an additional 50 crore rupees for expenses, with the union officials suggesting that 20 crores be set aside monthly for dues payment, leaving 50 crores for the institution. However, the attempt to keep the income figures under wraps failed, leading to questions from officers and employees about the mysterious silence surrounding the success of Chairman and Mayor Karachi Murtaza Wahab's team.

MDCEO's patronage has also come under scrutiny, raising concerns about potential favoritism. Water Corporation officers credited the CEO's pivotal role in boosting the organization's revenue, emphasizing the need to address employee concerns and avoid external borrowing. They anticipate achieving the target set by the Executive Officer for a monthly recovery of three billion rupees within the next three months, establishing the institution's financial independence. The revelation sparked discussions about financial transparency and led to allegations of a scheme to conceal the record recovery by certain officers.

Chairman and Mayor of Karachi, Murtaza Wahab, acknowledged the achievement but reportedly held a closed-door meeting to

strategize the organization's future steps. Some officers involved in the record recovery were said to be deprived of official praise, and there were discussions about addressing liabilities accumulated by retired officers and employees. The controversy intensified as details emerged about the institution's income surpassing 1 billion 80 crore rupees in November, with monthly expenses totaling around 80 crores. The demand for additional funds raised questions about financial management, and the attempt to keep the income figures secret faced criticism.

The role of MDCEO and Chairman Murtaza Wahab's team came under scrutiny, with concerns about potential favoritism and the need for transparency. Water Corporation officers emphasized the CEO's importance in boosting the organization's revenue and suggested that addressing employee concerns and avoiding external borrowing would contribute to financial independence. Overall, the controversy reflects the challenges and debates within the Karachi Water Corporation regarding financial practices, transparency, and the recognition of officers' contributions.

The history of the institution's financial management and its response to such controversies would shed light on its evolution and governance.

## Swift measures against artificial urea hoarding, profiteering

By our correspondent

DADU: In response to reports of an artificial shortage of urea fertilizer causing concern across the district, stringent actions have been initiated under the directives of the caretaker Chief Minister, Syed Maqbool Baqir.

Assistant Commissioner Dadu, Ghulam Fatima Ghalu, leading a coordinated effort with the Agriculture Officer and local Police, took immediate action to counter the artificially induced scarcity and clamp down on profiteers. The operations were conducted on both regular working days and extended to Sunday, showcasing the administration's commitment to addressing the issue promptly.

A notable development from these actions was the imposition of fines totaling Rs 65,000 on dealers and shopkeepers found guilty of profiteering from the shortage of urea fertilizer. Assistant Commissioner Ghulam Fatima Ghalu emphasized the zero-tolerance stance against illegal profits in essential commodities like urea fertilizer.

During surprise visits to various fertilizer shops and depots, Assistant Commissioner Ghulam Fatima Ghalu reiterated the importance of maintaining fair pricing and warned against any attempts at price manipulation. She stated, "There is no scope for taking illegal profit on urea fertilizer," emphasizing the administration's dedication to ensuring fair practices.

Furthermore, all dealers in the district have been explicitly instructed to cease any illegal profiteering in fertilizer prices. Assistant Commissioner Ghulam Fatima Ghalu issued a stern warning, indicating that strict actions would be taken against those who fail to comply with the directives. The administration's decisive measures underscore the commitment to ensuring the availability of essential agricultural inputs at fair prices and cracking down on any attempts to exploit the situation for personal gain. Farmers and stakeholders in the agricultural sector have welcomed these actions as a safeguard against artificial shortages and unfair profiteering.

## Dare-devils rob complainants suggest complaining police again

By our correspondent

KARACHI: In a recent incident of robbery in Sarjani Town, the daring robbers displayed audacious behavior by targeting a complainant who had just left the police station after reporting a previous snatching incident with him.

According to the report, the victim, a father accompanied by his son, encountered a consecutive robbery on their way home, underscoring the challenges faced by the law enforcement in the metropolis. Following their initial report at the local police station, the father and son fell victim to another harrowing robbery when the armed criminals wrested the son's mobile phone as well as cash, suggesting them to return to the police station and file a fresh report on the second incident. Despite the audacity exhibited by the criminals, they managed to escape, leaving the local law enforcement grappling with the recurring challenge of ensuring public safety.

These incidents highlight the imperative need for heightened vigilance and robust preventive measures to safeguard citizens in Karachi. The audacious nature of the robberies poses a significant challenge for law enforcement, necessitating a proactive approach to ensure the safety and security of the public. Local residents in the Sarjani Town area have voiced their concerns and demanded a swift and thorough investigation into such cases.

The apprehension of perpetrators is crucial not only for justice but also to send a clear message that criminal activities will not go unpunished. As the incidents raise alarm in the community, it becomes paramount for authorities to address the root causes and deploy effective strategies to curb rising criminal activities in Karachi.

# Lebanese army rescues 51 migrants from sinking boat near Tripoli

News Desk

BEIRUT: In a swift and heroic operation, Lebanon's military successfully rescued over 50 people, primarily Syrians, from a sinking migrant boat off the country's north coast, as announced by the army on Sunday.

Acting on intelligence regarding a vessel in distress off the coast of Tripoli, suspected to be involved in illegal people smuggling, the naval forces promptly launched a rescue mission. The operation resulted in the safe retrieval of 51 individuals, including two Palestinians and 49 Syrians, according to an official statement from the Lebanese army. The Lebanese Red Cross played a crucial role in providing assistance to those

rescued, ensuring their well-being. The statement, however, did not disclose the intended destination of the distressed boat.

Migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees departing from Lebanon by sea typically seek better prospects in Europe, often targeting the nearby east Mediterranean island of Cyprus, located less than 200 kilometers (125 miles) away. Lebanon, grappling with economic challenges since late 2019, has become a departure point for migrants. The country hosts approximately two million Syrians, with around 800,000 officially registered with the United Nations, marking the highest number of refugees per capita globally.

Amid the economic col-

lapse, Lebanese authorities frequently announce efforts to thwart smuggling operations by sea, leading to arrests of both smugglers and would-be migrants. Notably, Lebanese nationals have also joined Syrians and Palestinian refugees in embarking on perilous journeys toward Europe, seeking refuge from conflict and economic hardships. On December 1, the Lebanese army reported the disruption of a smuggling operation involving 110 individuals, predominantly from Syria, attempting to depart the country by sea. The latest rescue underscores Lebanon's ongoing challenges in managing migration flows and ensuring the safety of those attempting risky sea journeys.



SUKKUR: Former president and PPP's leader Asif Ali Zardari snapped with former federal minister Hamid Saeed Kazmi, here on Sunday.

## Ex federal minister joins PPP, meets PPP's Asif Ali Zardari

By our correspondent

SUKKUR: In a pivotal political development, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) gains a prominent addition to its ranks as former federal minister and distinguished religious scholar, Hamid Saeed Kazmi, officially aligns himself with the party. The announcement follows a strategic meeting with President Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari.

Expressing his decision to join the PPP during the meeting, Hamid Saeed Kazmi brings a wealth of experience and influence from both religious and political spheres. The renowned religious scholar, Ahmed Saeed Kazmi, also joins the party,

contributing to the PPP's already diverse spectrum of members.

President Asif Ali Zardari extended a warm welcome to Hamid Saeed Kazmi, Ahmed Saeed Kazmi, and their associates, congratulating them on their strategic move to join the PPP. The occasion was characterized by a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect as the new members seamlessly integrated into the PPP family. Key party figures, including Secretary General Syed Nayer Hussain Bokhari, Mahmood, and Abdul Qadir Shaheen, were present during the announcement, highlighting the party's unity and solidarity amid ongoing efforts to expand its membership base.

The addition of Hamid Saeed Kazmi and Ahmed Saeed Kazmi is expected to infuse a diverse perspective into the PPP, given their background as respected religious scholars. This strategic move aligns with the PPP's commitment to inclusivity and representation from various segments of society. As these notable figures join the PPP in Sukkur, political dynamics are poised for change, reflecting the party's positioning and strategic foresight in the evolving landscape. The ripple effects of these significant inductions are likely to shape the political narrative not only in Sukkur but beyond as the PPP prepares for upcoming challenges.

# Dhaka takes innovative approach to address public urination challenge

News Desk

DHAKA: In an effort to tackle the longstanding challenge of public urination on the streets of Dhaka, local authorities have taken an innovative approach by incorporating religious messaging on city walls. Dhaka, known as the city of mosques with over two thousand places of worship, has faced difficulties stemming from individuals urinating in public spaces, creating inconvenience for pedestrians and commuters.

Despite repeated public messages and warnings from local governments, the issue persisted, prompting city officials to think creatively. The municipality of Dhaka decided to leverage the religious

significance of the mosques and introduced messages on city walls in both Bangla and Arabic explicitly forbidding urination in these areas. Dhaka, with a population that is 94% Muslim, witnessed a notable shift in public behavior following the implementation of this unique strategy.

The religiously framed messages, emphasizing the prohibition of urination, resonated with the majority of the population, resulting in a positive change. Pedestrians and commuters on Dhaka's main roads experienced a reduction in the challenges posed by public urination. This initiative highlights the potential impact of combining cultural and religious considerations with public messaging to address

civic challenges. The success of this approach in Dhaka could serve as a model for other cities grappling with similar issues, showcasing the effectiveness of innovative solutions in shaping public behavior.

Responding to the persistent



DHAKA: A man passes through a bilingual epigraph requesting not to urinate on the street.

challenge of public urination in Dhaka, Bangladesh, officials embraced an unconventional approach rooted in the country's religious demographics. With such high number of the population identifying as Muslim, the campaign leveraged the inherent reverence for Islam to discourage unhygienic practices.

Recognizing Arabic as a sacred language associated with the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, the "Language Matters" campaign opted to present the prohibition notice, traditionally written in Bangla, in Arabic. Grey Dhaka, the communication agency behind the initiative, aimed to test whether public urinators would respond differently to a message perceived as holy. In a campaign video released by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the strategy unfolds as an experiment on the city walls. The insight driving the campaign was the acknowledgment that Islam holds a significant place in the lives and identities of the ma-

jority of Bangladesh's population.

This innovative approach finds parallels with India, where religious symbols and images of gods have been employed to deter public urination. Bangladesh's Ministry of Religious Affairs demonstrated a willingness to explore creative solutions, effectively using the public's respect for Islamic elements to modify behavior. The success of such campaigns showcases the potential of culturally sensitive strategies in addressing civic challenges, providing a model for other regions dealing with similar issues. The openness to experimentation and innovation reflects a commitment to finding effective solutions for maintaining public hygiene and dignity.

erence for Islam to discourage unhygienic practices.

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## Independence under scrutiny

The ongoing Supreme Court proceedings involving former Islamabad High Court (IHC) judge Shaukat Azizi Siddiqui have unveiled a complex web of allegations, implicating intelligence agencies, judicial figures, and military influence in the political landscape of Pakistan. The case has far-reaching implications, questioning the integrity of the judiciary and the potential influence of intelligence agencies in the appointment and removal of judges. Justice Siddiqui has requested the apex court to cancel the dismissal notification issued against him as an IHC judge. A quick context here: Siddiqui was removed from his position in the IHC, for his speech targeting intelligence agencies when he was addressing the Rawalpindi Bar Association on July 21, 2018. He had accused the intelligence agencies of interfering with judicial matters. Subsequently, multiple references were filed against him and he was eventually dismissed from his post on October 11, 2018, after the Supreme Judicial Council decided to dismiss him.

On Friday, the Supreme Court issued notices to former ISI chief Lt-Gen (r) Faiz Hameed, former IHC chief justice Anwar Khan Kasi, former registrar of the Supreme Court Arbab Muhammad Arif and retired brigadier Irfan Ramay after Siddiqui made references to their role in his removal and the court asked him to nominate them since such serious accusations were being levelled against them. These proceedings are being telecast live and the revelations by Justice Siddiqui's lawyer Hamid Khan on what transpired may not be new for many but the implications that the intelligence agencies could get a bench of their choice in a high court or get a judge dismissed is an issue that needs to be addressed. According to a sourced story in this newspaper, the former ISI chief may have a different point of view on what transpired. This is why it may be in the fitness of things – and for a much-needed closure of this chapter – for Gen Faiz to appear before the court. There are still speculations over whether he will appear himself, submit a response or just rely on his sources to give his version in the media rather than responding officially to these allegations at all. As asked by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, it is also important to understand who exactly was benefiting from all this alleged facilitation. These questions and more need to be answered for sure. For most political observers, the ultimate beneficiary was Imran Khan. However, others point out that Imran was brought into power but he was not the ultimate beneficiary as he was ousted through a vote of no-confidence after three and a half years in power and that the real beneficiary in this case was former army chief Gen Bajwa who got an extension as well. While the answer remains elusive, what is evident is that the democratic process suffered, resulting in an enduring hybrid system.

Whatever the fine print may be, at the heart of this case is the delicate balance between the branches of government and the imperative of a judiciary that operates independently, free from external pressures. The judiciary is the cornerstone of any vibrant democracy, and its integrity is paramount to ensure citizens' trust in the legal system. The Justice Shaukat Siddiqui case brings to the forefront the need to safeguard judicial independence against undue interference and raises crucial questions about the democratic process in Pakistan. The Supreme Court's decision to issue notices to key figures, including former ISI chief Lt-Gen Faiz Hameed, is a commendable step toward transparency. The live telecast of the proceedings, though not without controversy, underscores the importance of public scrutiny in matters of national interest. The allegations made by Siddiqui against intelligence agencies and judicial figures demand a thorough and impartial investigation. As the proceedings continue, it is imperative for the judiciary to maintain its commitment to justice, transparency, and the rule of law. Ultimately, the Shaukat Siddiqui case is not just about one judge; it is about the integrity of the entire judicial system and its ability to withstand external pressures. Pakistan's democracy hinges on a robust and independent judiciary. It is for this reason that there is so much hope for the judicial system to rise to the occasion to ensure that justice prevails and public confidence in the judiciary is reaffirmed.

By **SINEM CENGIZ**

Turkiye and Saudi Arabia, both active members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, have been working on the diplomatic front for Gaza. Their strategy involves internationalizing the war as much as possible, while seeking the deeper involvement of non-Western powers such as China and Russia. As OIC member states, they cooperate on a number of issues, ranging from Palestine to Kashmir and from Myanmar to the plight of the Uighurs. The Palestine issue was not only instrumental in their cooperation, but it was also an important issue in Türkiye's membership of the OIC, which came in response to a 1969 arson attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

The process that resulted in Türkiye joining the OIC, which is based in Saudi Arabia, was very controversial. Türkiye began as a preliminary member, as it did not approve the OIC Charter because it was found to be incompatible with the secularist principle of the Turkish constitution. The leftist Republican People's Party op-

posed Türkiye's participation in Islamic forums and organizations. However, the Turkish government under the leadership of Suleyman Demirel, who had a conservative worldview, tried to use the country's participation in the OIC to erase the misunderstandings of the past between Türkiye and the Middle Eastern states. Both domestic and external political developments pushed Demirel to send Türkiye's foreign minister to the first meeting of the OIC in Rabat in 1969. However, while keen to approach the Arab world, Türkiye was also trying to keep its relations with Israel on track.

Türkiye had remained neutral during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. After its conclusion, Ankara became one of the first countries to recognize Israel. From 1949 until the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Türkiye remained the only Muslim-majority country to have diplomatic ties with Israel. However, this approach was not welcomed by the OIC's member states. At the second summit held in 1974, Türkiye was asked to break its ties with Israel. Although Ankara approved some of the decisions taken at the summit, it did

not agree to sever its relations with Tel Aviv and so was denied funding from the Islamic Development Bank. Türkiye reacted to this move by increasing its level of representation at the organization.

Ankara also asked Rauf Denktaş, the president of Northern Cyprus, to make a speech at the summit and for a representative from the community to attend all OIC meetings. Türkiye's requests were accepted, and it was also allowed to host an OIC meeting in Istanbul. Denktas delivered his speech at the seventh Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in the Atatürk Cultural Center in Istanbul in May 1976. It was agreed that representatives of the Turkish Muslim community of Cyprus be invited to attend future meetings of the OIC. It was at this conference that Türkiye agreed to allow the Palestine Liberation Organization to open an office in Ankara without any conditions. Thus, the Palestinian cause played a key role in Türkiye's membership of the OIC and in mending its ties with Middle Eastern states. This is also the case at present.

Over the last three weeks, the

Turkish and Saudi foreign ministers, along with their counterparts from other OIC states, have undertaken a globetrotting mission seeking international action to stop the war in Gaza and to push for humanitarian aid to be allowed into the Strip. The delegation has held meetings in Beijing, Moscow, London, Paris, Barcelona, the US and Canada. In a photo taken on the last leg of their trip, the Saudi, Turkish and Palestinian foreign ministers were all present. For decades, the question of Palestine has maintained a prominent place in the official Saudi and Turkish positions. In particular, Gaza has remained central due to the unjust blockade imposed by Israel. Palestinian self-determination still holds importance in the minds of their populations.

The OIC serves as a significant platform for these states to showcase their involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the OIC has the potential to play a pivotal role in advocating for peace and justice in the conflict, it is imperative that its members should take more steps to get involved in the process to ensure that the suffering of the

Palestinian people comes to an end. The divisions among the OIC's members on forging a cohesive and robust response to the Gaza crisis showcase the complex geopolitical realities of the region. Whether they can overcome their differences and play an effective role in the shaping of the war's trajectory remains to be seen. Türkiye and Saudi Arabia can act as two heavyweights in overcoming these differences. Member states' future actions will not only influence the conflict's resolution but also define the broader Middle Eastern order.

As key OIC members, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia are deeply concerned about the potential for regional destabilization, if not a Middle East war. The cooperation that Ankara and Riyadh are pursuing during the Gaza war — even at just the level of a diplomatic front — is likely to consolidate and deepen the normalization of relations between these two states and strengthen the future role and status of the OIC.

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## Gaza: What are the scenarios for ‘the day after’?

By **FAISAL J. ABBAS**

As the atrocities continue to unfold in Gaza, we hear so much talk now about “the day after” scenarios. This is paired with interesting statements recently made by the likes of US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan indicating the start of a deviation from the hard-line earlier position of his administration, when President Joe Biden said there were no red lines for Israel. Clearly, such a position by President Biden was not surprising ahead of an election year. However, that, accompanied by the much-criticized veto of a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the UN Security Council, has now resulted in more than 18,500 killed by Israel, including babies, women, the elderly and at least 56 journalists.

So, what do Sullivan's statements mean? Firstly, that despite the carefully selected public phrases, it is clear that the global outrage of what is happening in Gaza has caused serious concerns behind closed doors in the US and Israel. This is why it is somewhat reassuring to hear someone as senior and experienced as Sullivan say that his recent talks with Israeli officials were about transitioning to a new phase of the war targeting Hamas in particular. He reiterated that Hamas is not the Palestinian people and that more needs to be done to ensure Israel's declared intention not to target civilians reflects the reality on the ground. More significantly, he said that Israel cannot occupy Gaza in the long run. This brings us back to the ongoing debate about “the day after” scenarios.

First, it is important to remember what Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said a few days ago about the matter: Any future discussions cannot occur while the bombing continues. So, the attention has to remain on obtaining an immediate ceasefire. And what should be clear is that the — again highly condemnable — US veto should not be seen as the end of the road, but a reminder that more efforts should be made to convince the administration and the international community to put more pressure on Israel. This includes a reworded draft resolution if that is what it takes to resolve the matter. The bottom line is that the aim should remain focused on an immediate ceasefire and a permanent solution to the conflict by finally reestablishing a Palestinian state living side by side and in peace with Israel.

This is why the obsession with talking about “the day after” must be paired with an equal obsession with talking about “the day before,” and that means the fact that Israel has been occupying Palestinian lands since 1967, as defined by the UN. A matter that must be resolved to ensure what happened on Oct. 7, and before, does not happen again. Despite the gloomy outlook, there are still glimmers of hope. To start with, the Hamas leadership has signaled its willingness to accept a two-state solution — as suggested by senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk in a recent interview with Al-Monitor. Of course it is fair for one to argue — or rather wish — that it had done so 16 years ago and supported the Palestinian Authority's efforts

to reach a peace deal instead of undermining it and calling for the eradication of the state of Israel. After all, history shows that more Arab land has been liberated and reclaimed via negotiations as opposed to warfare. Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon are clear and recent examples.

Another sign of hope is the recent successful release of the first group of hostages. This was a reassuring sign that regional diplomacy can work, and it goes without saying that more goodwill gestures like that will go a long way. This is why efforts by countries like Qatar and Egypt must continue to be supported on that front. However, the question remains: What does “the day after” look like? We must examine all possibilities on the ground. It is clear nobody will accept another Israeli occupation of Gaza when the efforts are on convincing them to dismantle settlements in the West Bank to enable a two-state solution. What is also clear is the Arab/Muslim/Palestinian position — an absolute rejection of any Israeli plan to displace or transfer the people of Gaza elsewhere. Palestinians must and will remain in their land and another Nakba must be avoided.

Similarly, the PA would never accept riding back into Gaza on the backs of Israeli tanks. A transition period with international peacekeeping troops — like the situation in Lebanon — might be possible, but that would require an acceptable formation, most probably with the involvement of neutral international armies and Arab states that have signed peace treaties with Israel. It

is also likely there will be a situation whereby the West Bank and Gaza are reunited under one authority, which essentially goes against the creed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has adopted for the past 16 years of widening intra-Palestinian divisions.

The last but probably unlikely possibility is a referendum, which includes all Palestinians, to see whether they want to live in one country alongside Israel. This is likely to be rejected by both sides, particularly as, while it would tick the box of Israel being a democracy, it would end its *raison d'être* as a “Jewish state.” And given that a one-state solution is unlikely, what really does not help at this stage are the statements by Israeli officials, most recently and notably the ones by Israeli ambassador to London, Tzipi Hotovely, categorically rejecting in a televised interview the concept of two states.

What also does not help is the Muslim community shooting the messenger and calling for the boycott of an influential television show like “Piers Morgan Uncensored.” In fact, what is needed is more appearances by rational guests who can present convincing arguments for justice. Just look at the results achieved by a fair and balanced reporter like CNN's Clarissa Ward when she was given access, via an Emirati field hospital, to report from Gaza. The truth is very powerful, so I cannot see how anything can be achieved by boycotting the debate, as opposed to owning it.

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## The ‘Brussels effect’ is key tool for EU in its global ambitions

By **Andrew Hammond**

Mark Eyskens, the former Belgian prime minister, famously said in 1991 that the EU is “an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm.” Fast forward more than three decades and a significant number of people still agree with his rather undiplomatic characterization. To be sure, the EU has achieved some significant progress toward its goal, under European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, to become a genuinely global geopolitical player on the world stage. This is especially so in regard to Ukraine, following Russia's invasion last year. However, the limits to its ambitions have been exposed more recently in the Middle East, following the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel. While the EU, and some individual member states such as Germany and France, have tried to influence events in that arena, so far only the US has been shown to have any substantive influence there.

For many traditional observers of global affairs, this shows that the EU's claims to be a world power are hollow. The argument often goes that the continent will continue to lack critical influence given its weak economic growth and political challenges, set in the context of the growing influence of revisionist powers such as Russia and China. Yet, for all the real problems the EU unquestionably faces, one area in which it does have disproportionate influence is that of being a regulatory superpower. This is what scholars such as Professor Anu Bradford, who is based in the US, call the “Brussels effect.”

By developing far-reaching regulations that have a significant bearing outside of Europe on the entire global business environment, the Brussels-based club helps ensure that European values play a role in shaping a wide spectrum of policy areas — including sustainability and the environment, antitrust issues, data privacy, consumer health and safety — as a growing number of global firms adopt EU standards as global standards. One of the standout examples of this, in practice, is environmental legislation. The EU's Green Deal is a far-reaching compendium of sustainability measures in which Brussels has gone further and faster than almost any other international power.

Most recently, however, the EU hit the headlines for being a “first mover” in another key policy area, through the development of the world's first comprehensive AI legislation following a breakthrough deal this month. It represents the strictest regulations agreed anywhere for governing this emerging technology. There will be a transitional period before the legislation kicks in but when it does, companies that fail to comply with the rules will face fines of &euro;35 million (\$38 million)

or 7 percent of their global revenue. The next steps, procedurally, will be for the European Parliament to ratify the AI Act proposals early next year, with the far-reaching legislation coming into force as soon as 2025.

The agreement is only the latest example of the EU becoming a potential world leader in terms of setting the regulatory rules for the global economy, a fact that European Commissioner for Internal Market Thierry Breton highlighted when the legislation was agreed. “The EU becomes the very first continent to set clear rules for the use of AI,” he said. “The AI Act is a rule book but it's also a launchpad for EU startups and researchers to lead the global AI race.” Certainly, many other powers might not copy every single provision of the EU legislation. However, a significant number will try to follow its broad framework.

Moreover, AI companies will have to follow the EU's rules and are likely to extend at least some of those obligations to markets beyond the continent. After all, it is simply not efficient to retrain separate AI models for different markets. Part of the huge significance of all this lies in the fact, as von der Leyen has said, that “the AI Act transposes European values to a new era.” The foundation for the new EU rules on AI is a risk-based, tiered system in which the highest level of regulation applies to application of the technology that pose the greatest risk to health, safety and human rights. However, even the lower tiers of regulation place major new obligations on AI services.

There will be strict restrictions, for example, on the use of facial-recognition technology, except for narrowly defined law enforcement exceptions. The legislation bans the use of AI for “social scoring” — using metrics to establish how virtuous a person is — and in systems that “manipulate human behavior to circumvent their free will.” The use of AI to exploit people who are vulnerable because of their age, disability or economic status is also banned. Moreover, consumers will have the right to file complaints if they fall victim to illegal use of AI and fines can be imposed for any violations.

Until the legislation is fully in force in 2025, or later, the EU will support businesses and developers in their efforts to prepare for the new rules. About 100 companies have already expressed an interest in joining a transitional AI Pact through which they will commit, on a voluntary basis, to implementing key obligations contained in the legislation ahead of the legal deadline. Therefore, these developments potentially give the EU “first-mover advantage” in efforts to regulate this new technology in a fast-moving global landscape.

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## India’s AI ethos - leading the world differently

By **Pankaj Mishra**

India's role in the global AI arms race is complex. Amidst the ethical dilemmas in OpenAI's boardroom, the rivalry between Google and Microsoft, and China's aggressive push, India stands at a crossroads. Choosing sides in this race could mean compromising the immense societal potential of AI in a nation as diverse and culturally rich as ours. But making all the available AI tools and platforms work for India's people is a worthy battle. In fact, India has already started taming AI for societal good, one complex project at a time. From the country's Supreme Court translating thousands of court judgments across different Indian languages to using AI to enhance the learning capabilities of government schools in Tamil Nadu's Kuthalam and so on, the journey has started. SUVAS (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software) can translate English judgments into 10 Indian languages using machine learning and AI.

This is where the open-source AI movement becomes crucial, as Nandan Nilekani aptly put it at the Carnegie India summit. With its vast population and societal complexity, India has the potential to be the use-case capital for AI, pioneering applications that prioritize societal benefit over global competition. India's approach to AI, focusing on societal good without aligning with global power players, is a strategic choice reflective of our historical non-alignment policy. It represents a distinct path that prioritizes India's unique societal

needs over global AI dominance. Much like our political past, this non-alignment in AI allows us to develop and utilize AI to benefit our diverse population, embracing technology as a tool for societal enhancement rather than a marker of geopolitical influence.

Most currently available Large Language Models (LLMs) don't adequately support Indic languages, spoken by millions of people in India and around the world. This means that many people can't benefit from AI technologies like chatbots or translation services in their native languages. The lack of high-quality data in these languages and the high costs associated with adapting these models for new languages make it even more daunting. By addressing these challenges and adding support for Indic languages, AI can become more inclusive and beneficial for a larger, more diverse group. The launch of OpenHathi from Sarvam AI addresses significant issues facing current LLMs in their support for Indic languages. It highlights the lack of Indic language support in open models, the limited availability of high-quality data for these languages, and the challenges of efficient tokenization. These factors together impede the innovation and adoption of LLMs for Indic languages.

Tokenization in AI, especially for Indic languages, can be compared to a puzzle. Imagine each sentence in a language as a puzzle, and tokenization is breaking this puzzle into smaller, manageable pieces (like words or phrases). Just as each puzzle piece is unique and fits only in a specific

place, each word or phrase in a language has its own meaning and context. Simplifying this process for Indic languages means ensuring the AI can understand and assemble these “puzzle pieces” accurately, enabling it to effectively comprehend and interact in these languages. This step is crucial because the way words are formed and used in Indic languages is quite different from English and other Western languages. Simplifying and optimizing this process is essential to make AI models more effective and efficient in understanding and working with Indic languages. Sarvam AI's focus on improving tokenization for Hindi is vital to making AI more valuable and relevant in the Indian context.

Sarvam AI's work with OpenHathi is crucial for India, as it tackles these issues by frugally adding Hindi capabilities to the Llama-2 7B model, demonstrating an approach that could be extended to other Indic languages. Verse, which operates DailyHunt, is also helping Sarvam enhance AI applications like translation and paraphrasing in Indic languages. “How could the man who saw so much be so blind?” This haunting question resonates in the story of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb, in Christopher Nolan's latest film. It's a question that captures the paradox of a visionary who peered into the atom's heart yet failed to foresee the shadow his creation would cast upon the world.

Today, in Artificial Intelligence, this question finds a new subject in Sam Altman, the head of OpenAI. Like Oppenheimer, Altman

and several others stand wielding a power that could redefine the very fabric of human existence. Are they fully aware of the potential consequences of his creation? Initially, OpenAI aimed to protect AI from commercial forces, influenced by a mix of fear and awe. However, the recent shift to a corporate-led approach marks the victory of capitalist interests over concerns about AI's potential risks. Unfortunately, this transition of a noble cause isn't something new. Google's initial commitment to “Don't Be Evil” was a bold declaration of ethical intent. However, as the company expanded, it faced dilemmas that tested this commitment.

Ali Farhadi of the nonprofit Allen Institute for AI describes big commercial AI models as “black box” technology, meaning they are complex and not transparent about how they work. He advocates for a “glass box” approach, suggesting that these AI models should be more open and understandable. This is where India can pursue an out-of-the-box approach to AI's societal agenda. In India's quest with AI it's not just about technological milestones but crafting a future where technology nurtures society. Our story in AI is less a race for global dominance and more a mission to weave technology into our society. India's true success in AI will be judged not by the complexity of its algorithms but by how deeply it touches and improves lives - a technology journey led by both intellect and empathy.

*Pankaj Mishra has been a journalist for over two decades and is the co-founder of FactorDaily.*



## Security breach at Indian parliament

PM Modi calls for investigation, not debate

### News Desk

MUMBAI, India: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged a comprehensive investigation into last week's significant security breach at the parliament, countering demands from opposition parties for a parliamentary debate on the incident.

In his first comments since the breach on Wednesday, Modi stated in an interview with Dainik Jagran published on Sunday, "What happened is very serious. There is no need to debate this; there should be a detailed investigation into this." Police took swift action by arresting six individuals, with terrorism charges filed against four, after a man leaped into the lower house chamber, shouting slogans, and triggering a smoke canister while members were in session.

A second individual attempted to follow suit but was apprehended by law-makers and security personnel. The incident unfolded on the 22nd anniversary of a previous attack on the parliament complex, during which over a dozen people were killed, including five gunmen. Lawmakers revealed that the two men involved in the breach chanted slogans, including "dictatorship won't be accepted." The families of some of the suspects expressed frustration over prolonged unemployment.

In response to the incident, fourteen lawmakers have been suspended for disrupting parliamentary proceedings, demanding a discussion and a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah. The speaker of the lower house of parliament has announced a comprehensive security review, em-

phasizing the government's stance that opposition parties are attempting to politicize the incident. Modi's call for a thorough investigation underscores the gravity of the breach and the need for swift and effective corrective measures to enhance parliamentary security.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized the gravity of the incident, deeming it "very serious." Modi urged a comprehensive investigation rather than a parliamentary debate on the matter. Speaking to Dainik Jagran newspaper in an interview, Modi stated, "The seriousness of this incident should not be downplayed. The (Lok Sabha) Speaker is taking all the necessary steps. Probe agencies are investigating the matter. It is important to find out which elements are behind this and what their objectives are. There is no need to

debate this; there should be a detailed investigation into this."

The shocking scenes unfolded in the Lok Sabha chamber last Wednesday when two intruders leaped from desk to desk, deploying colored smoke from canisters. Simultaneously, their co-accused staged a similar protest outside the Parliament. The arrested individuals revealed that their objective was to draw attention to issues such as Manipur violence, unemployment, and farmers' problems. A total of six people have been arrested in connection with the case, and Delhi Police have invoked the stringent anti-terrorism law, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, against the trespassers. An investigation is underway to ascertain the elements behind the breach and their motivations.



NEW DEHLY: Indian Lower House Parliamentarians protesting against recent remarks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Sunday.

## FIA arrests fugitive on Interpol intel

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: In a significant breakthrough, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) successfully apprehended a fugitive from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Sunday, with crucial assistance from the International Police (Interpol). The accused, facing charges related to murder and dacoity, was taken into custody at Islamabad Airport upon arrival, marking a collaborative effort between Interpol and Pakistani law enforcement.

The accused, sought by Rawalpindi police, was swiftly handed over to the concerned authorities by the FIA Immigration Wing. This operation was made possible due to the close coordination between Interpol Islamabad and Interpol UAE, reflecting the effectiveness of international cooperation in combating transnational crimes. Notably, Interpol Pakistan had issued 117 red notices last year, facilitating the arrest of suspects involved in various criminal activities. The success of such endeavors highlights the crucial role played by Interpol in fostering global security and justice.

In a parallel development, the FIA unveiled Pakistan's first Trafficking In Persons (TIP) Hotline, aimed at combating human trafficking. Citizens can now register complaints against human traffickers by dialing 111-247-786. This initiative, developed in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and funded by the Australian High Commission, introduces a national referral mechanism and a Management Information System (MIS) to streamline victim services.

Addressing a gathered audience, DG FIA Mohsin Hassan Butt emphasized the significance of the National TIP Hotline, considering its pivotal role in the ongoing fight against trafficking crimes.

The Australian deputy high commissioner commended the collaborative efforts of FIA and ILO, hailing the launch of the hotline as a revolutionary step in combating human trafficking across all its forms. This innovative approach aims to provide comprehensive support to victims and streamline the process of reporting and addressing human trafficking cases throughout Pakistan.

## Urea prices soar, need prompt action

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The cost of fertilizers has experienced a significant surge in Pakistan, with the price of a 50kg urea bag reaching Rs5,550, as reported by media, citing an official document released on Sunday.

Over the past week, the price of a fifty kg urea bag skyrocketed by Rs171, exacerbating concerns about the economic impact on farmers and the agriculture sector. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reveals alarming price hikes in various regions, including a Rs1,000 increase in Rawalpindi, Rs651 in Hyderabad, Rs598 in Quetta, Rs154 in Larkana, and Rs100 in Multan.

Recognizing the severity of the situation, Caretaker

Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar issued directives on December 11 for concerned departments to swiftly formulate and submit an action plan. The focus of the plan is to ensure an uninterrupted supply of urea fertilizer, particularly during the crucial crop-sowing period.

Prime Minister Kakar emphasized the need for a comprehensive framework, urging collaboration with provinces and relevant industries in the preparation of the action plan.

The urgency of addressing the issue was underscored during an emergency review meeting, where discussions centered on the demand, supply, and pricing of urea fertilizer in the country. In an effort to combat

hoarding and speculative practices contributing to the surge in prices, Prime Minister Kakar called on district administrations to take immediate action against those responsible.

Furthermore, he stressed the importance of ensuring that government subsidies on urea fertilizer reach deserving farmers.

The government's proactive measures aim to stabilize the fertilizer market, safeguard agricultural interests, and foster an environment conducive to sustained and efficient crop cultivation. The evolving situation underscores the need for a coordinated approach to address economic challenges and ensure the well-being of the agricultural sector in Pakistan.

## Officials' leaves ban until elections

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: In preparation for the forthcoming general elections scheduled for February 8, a decisive directive has been issued in Islamabad, instituting a ban on leaves for all government officials until the culmination of the electoral process.

The leave restriction for government officials in the federal capital is a strategic measure aimed at ensuring seamless and efficient operations during the crucial period leading up to and throughout the general elections. Acting on the directives of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the Islamabad deputy commissioner has officially issued the order, delineating the temporary constraints.

The directive encompasses all government officials, with limited exceptions only for sick leave granted in maternity cases or with explicit permission from a medical officer. This rigorous approach seeks to maintain an unwavering focus on the electoral process, mitigating potential disruptions. Officials affiliated with the federal education system and subordinate institutions have received specific instructions not to leave the city during this critical period. Moreover, officers and officials are strongly advised against departing the capital, even during the winter vacation, aligning with the deputy commissioner's directive.

To streamline election preparations, officials are mandated to remain present at their assigned posting locations, particularly for training sessions related to polling staff.

The deputy commissioner underscored the paramount importance of adhering to the guidelines set forth by the Election Commission of Pakistan, emphasizing the need for strict compliance.

## Israel-Qatar meeting sparks hope for Gaza hostage talks

### News Desk

KARACHI: The recent developments suggest that Israel is engaged in fresh negotiations to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas, with Israel's intelligence chief reportedly meeting the Prime Minister of Qatar, a key mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a press conference on Saturday, acknowledged the ongoing conflict in Gaza, deeming it existential and asserting the need to continue the fight until victory. Netanyahu outlined a vision where Gaza would be demilitarized and placed under Israeli security control.

The Israeli offensive in Gaza played a pivotal role in achieving a partial hostage-release deal in November, according to Netanyahu. He pledged to sustain intense

military pressure on Hamas, expressing a determination to dismantle the militant Palestinian group that governs the densely populated strip.

Netanyahu emphasized the strategic importance of maintaining pressure in negotiations, stating, "The instruction I am giving the negotiating team is predicated on this pressure, without which we have nothing."

The situation in Gaza escalated on October 7 when Hamas carried out a surprise raid into Israel, resulting in the death of 1,200 people and the capture of 240 hostages. Israel's counteroffensive, with a toll of close to 19,000 lives, has left thousands buried in the rubble.

Amidst this humanitarian crisis, aid organizations have raised concerns about the widespread destruction of Gaza, displacing most of its 2.3 million residents, many

of whom now live in tents and makeshift shelters without adequate food or clean water.

In a notable development, David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, reportedly held a meeting with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in Europe late on Friday. This meeting signifies a significant diplomatic encounter, marking the first discussion between senior officials from Israel and Qatar since the collapse of a seven-day ceasefire in late November.

The talks have shifted attention towards the possibility of a Gaza truce and the potential for a broader agreement encompassing prisoners and hostages. The diplomatic engagements raise hopes for progress in resolving the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## Govt unveils ambitious plan to establish Quantum Valley

### News Desk

ABBOTABAD: Caretaker Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Arshad Hussain Shah has officially announced the establishment of a "Quantum Valley" in the districts of Abbottabad and Haripur. Drawing inspiration from the success of Silicon Valley in California, the initiative aims to become a hub for cutting-edge research, training, and education in Information & Communication Technology (ICT).

The announcement was made during grand inauguration ceremonies held at Haripur University and Abbottabad University, where the chief minister outlined the transformative potential of this visionary project. He urged higher education institutes to adapt their programs to meet the dynamic needs of the market, emphasizing the importance of staying at the forefront of technological advancements. Highlighting the significance of the venture, the chief minister declared it

as the nation's first-ever project of such magnitude. Driven by his passion for technology and innovation, he revealed that admissions to the Quantum Valley programs would commence within the current week.

The Quantum Valley project capitalizes on existing infrastructure, with schools in merged districts and other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa repurposed to provide market-oriented training to the youth. The chief minister expressed confidence that this initiative would not only meet domestic demands but also position Pakistani youth for employment opportunities in European countries, Korea, Japan, and the Middle East. Setting an ambitious target, the government aims to produce 500,000 skilled human resources through the Quantum Valley initiative. As the project progresses, the goal is to further enhance this number, fostering a new era of technological expertise and economic growth in the region.

## ECP enforces strict SOPs ahead of general elections

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has implemented a series of restrictions, including a ban on the registration and deletion of votes, as reported on Sunday. The electoral body has taken these measures in preparation for the upcoming general elections scheduled for February 8.

The ban encompasses the registration of new votes, deletion, change, and correction of votes in electoral rolls, aiming to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the electoral process. Additionally, sources reveal that the ECP has also imposed a ban on leaves for



its officers, other employees, and returning officers.

Regional offices of the election commission will remain open on Sunday, facilitating citizens with access to voter lists and other essential materials. The ECP has further extended its restrictions to include a prohibition on

transfers and postings of provincial and federal government employees.

This development follows the issuance of the election schedule by the election commission in compliance with a Supreme Court order on Friday. The apex court's intervention suspended a La-

hore High Court (LHC) order related to the appointment of returning officers (ROs) and district returning officers (DROs) from the bureaucracy, removing uncertainties surrounding the conduct of general elections.

Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, in response to media queries, assured a level-playing field for all political parties.

He emphasized that there were no plans to delay the elections in the country, urging the confirmation of such information before dissemination. The electoral process is now set on a robust course with reinforced measures to uphold fairness and transparency.

## Fatal altercation at Fishery leads to murder

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A tragic incident unfolded at a fishery in Karachi as a fish harvester allegedly stabbed and killed a fellow fisherman, leading to a temporary halt in fish unloading activities. The incident sparked unrest among agitated individuals who chased the fish harvesters out of the market, prompting the intervention of law enforcement.

Security sources indicated that an agreement was subsequently brokered between the fishermen and the fish harvesters in the Society.

Following the resolution, the protest was called off, and normal operations resumed at the Fish Harbor. According to the terms of the mutual agreement, fish harvesters will now conduct their activities outside the fish harbor and the fishermen society. The fatal incident occurred during a heated argument over a minor matter, resulting in the stabbing of the victim's hand. The disagreement escalated tragically, leading to the loss of a 25-year-old life identified as Saddam.

In swift action, the police apprehended the murder suspect, Ali Raza, and recovered

the knife allegedly used in the crime. A case has been registered at the docks police station, and investigations are underway. The police cited the incident as a consequence of heated verbal exchanges. The resolution of the dispute through a mutual agreement marks a return to normalcy at the Fish Harbor, emphasizing the significance of peaceful negotiations in resolving conflicts within the fishing community. Authorities continue to monitor the situation to ensure the maintenance of order and adherence to the terms of the agreement.

## Water tanker crashes into house, claiming one life and injuring three

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A devastating incident unfolded in Gulshan Ghazi municipality when a water tanker, returning after delivering water, lost control and crashed into a house. The impact resulted in the unfortunate death of a 40-year-old man, identified as Amir, and injuries to three individuals, including two young girls.

The incident occurred as the water tanker, positioned on a slope, suddenly went out of control. The driver, attempting to prevent the vehicle from moving, had placed a cement block under the tire. However, the block broke while water was being poured, causing the tanker to gain momentum downhill. The tanker overturned and collided with a house, causing significant damage.

Rescue efforts were swiftly initiated by police and local residents, who managed to extricate the victims from beneath the wreckage and the tanker. The injured, identified as Naseer Hussain (45), his two-year-old daughter Manahil, and 13-year-old Raheela Dokhtar Ali, were rushed to the Civil Hospital for medical treatment. The police have intensified efforts to apprehend the driver responsible for the tragic accident, who fled the scene, leaving the tanker behind.

In a separate incident in Landhi No. 1, an 8-month-old child named Wali Muhammad lost his life after being hit by a car while playing in the street with his grandmother. The driver, reportedly named Owais, took the child to the hospital after the accident and then absconded. The heartbreaking incidents serve as a stark reminder of the importance of road safety and the need for stringent measures to prevent accidents. Authorities are actively pursuing the responsible parties to ensure accountability and justice for the victims and their families.