

Lawsuit accuses Facebook ad targeting of abetting bias

AFP, San Francisco

A lawsuit filed on Thursday accuses Facebook of letting ad targeting tools be used to exclude women and older people from offers regarding loans, investments and other financial services.

Two law firms have filed a discrimination suit in San Francisco federal court on behalf of a 54-year-old woman living in Washington and will ask a judge to grant the case class-action status.

"Women and older persons are entitled to full and equal services of businesses such as Facebook, and the financial services companies that advertise on Facebook's platform," attorney Matthew Handley said in a statement.

"Purposeful targeting of advertisements away from these members of our community unlawfully denies them these guarantees."

The suit contends that women and older people were denied the benefits of ads for financial services because Facebook tools allow messages to be targeted at specific age ranges or genders.

Facebook said it is reviewing the complaint.

"We've made significant changes to how housing, employment and credit opportunities are run on Facebook and continue to work on ways to prevent potential misuse," a spokeswoman for the leading social network told AFP.

"Our policies have long prohibited discrimination and we're proud of the strides we're making in this area."

Facebook announced earlier this year that it was revamping how it uses targeted advertising in a settlement with activist groups alleging it discriminated in messages on jobs, housing, credit and other services.

Khoka

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unit of the hospital and could be placed on life support anytime.

"Doctors gave up hope on improving his health condition and stopped giving him all sorts of treatment," Ishraque said.

He also requested all to pray for his father's wellbeing.

Khoka, who is also a freedom fighter, stepped into politics through Moulana Bhasani's National Awami Party (NAP). Later, he joined BNP, and was made the party's Dhaka city unit president.

Khoka was first elected MP in 1991. Later, he contested Dhaka City Corporation election in 2002 and was elected mayor. He held the post for nearly nine years.

On May 14, 2014, Khoka went to the USA on travel visa for receiving cancer treatment. His wife also went there with him.

Health emergency

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taken of the children, aged and vulnerable population. "This is a grave situation and I am hoping for your personal intervention so that there is stringent enforcement and full compliance with the directions issued," EPCA chairperson Bhure Lal said.

The high level of hazardous, lung-damaging pollutants has prompted a large number of residents to wear masks for morning walks and to work.

Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar accused Kejriwal of playing blame-game over rising pollution levels in the city state and said blaming Punjab and Haryana will not solve the problem. "Instead of blaming Punjab and Haryana, he would think about (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi-ji's proposal to curb pollutants produced by industries in five states (near Delhi)."

Delhi is one of the world's most polluted cities and each winter, seasonal crop stubble burning, dense cloud cover and smoke from millions of Diwali firecrackers turn its skies a putrid yellow.

'RDX' found

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airport premises."

The recovery of suspected RDX triggered panic among passengers who were not allowed to exit the terminal for some time, sources at some airlines said.

Officials said the members of CISF and Delhi Police conducted a complete anti-sabotage check of the airport after which passenger movement was allowed only at around 4:00am.

Delhi airport has three terminals and certain domestic as well as all international flights operate from the Terminal-3.

Preliminary inputs suggest the content of the bag to be RDX. It was checked by an explosive detector and a dog.

However, the exact nature of the explosive is being ascertained, officials said.

The explosive has been put under observation for the next 24 hours, after which something certain about it could be said, they added.

It could be an explosive or an improvised explosive device (IED) but it is not clear at present, the officials said.



Algerians take part in an anti-government demonstration in the capital Algiers, yesterday. Demonstrators converged on Algiers in their thousands for a massive anti-government rally called to coincide with official celebrations of the anniversary of the war that won Algeria's independence from France.

PHOTO: AFP

Dhaka seeks effective role

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Faruk Khan said the parliamentary body was planning to visit Cambodia and Vietnam in January to discuss the issue.

Malaysia has been vocal on the issue since the beginning, but the other Asean nations need to be sensitised, he added.

The Asean traditionally doesn't interfere in the internal issues of its member countries. At the previous summits, the organisation did not speak strongly about the Rohingya crisis, said former foreign secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury.

"Asean countries, especially Singapore and Thailand, have very good trade relations with Myanmar. So, they don't tend to raise the issues that can affect their relations," he said.

The former diplomat said Myanmar seems not changing its attitude towards the Rohingya crisis although it faced global criticism for atrocities against the Rohingyas.

About 750,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh since August 2017, escaping a military crackdown on them. The UN had termed it a "classic example of ethnic cleansing".

Despite two attempts of repatriation under a bilateral deal

between Bangladesh and Myanmar, no Rohingya returned home, arguing that the conditions in Rakhine were not conducive yet and that there was no safety either. They also demanded guarantee of citizenship.

Talking to journalists at his ministry office on Thursday, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said, "With the two failed attempts of repatriation, it is now clear that Myanmar could not build trust among the Rohingyas. That is Myanmar's failure."

Myanmar claims that the situation in Rakhine is fine, but that needs to be verified by independent observers and Rohingyas, he added.

"We had proposed Myanmar to take representatives of the Rohingya community from Cox's Bazar to Rakhine so they can see for themselves the situation and decide, but Myanmar didn't agree."

The minister said Bangladesh wants civilian observers from the Asean to monitor the situation in Rakhine, the repatriation process, and wellbeing of the Rohingyas after repatriation.

Noeleen Heyzer, member of the UN secretary-general's high-level advisory board on mediation, said it was a good initiative that Myanmar

sent a delegation from its foreign ministry, accompanied by ASEAN-Emergency Response and Assessment Team members, to hold a dialogue with the Bangladesh government and the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar in late July this year.

The dialogue showed goodwill on both sides to engage in much-needed discussions about the repatriation process, and there were requests from the Rohingyas to have a follow-up dialogue in three months, but that has not happened, she wrote in a column in The Jakarta Post on Thursday.

"Myanmar will certainly need time to address fundamental issues in Rakhine state. In the meantime, however, we cannot afford to lose more trust and hope."

She said the Asean should offer to facilitate a process of dialogue between Myanmar and Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar in order to build a foundation of trust needed for the voluntary repatriation of Rohingyas.

Noeleen also said, "Asean leaders must realise that its credibility was at stake in the way it handles the Rohingya crisis and that for all its efforts over the past year, the situation remains at an impasse."

Long-term plan needed

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government and stakeholders take a long-term initiative to bring stability in the market in future.

Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) President Ghulam Rahman said there is no quick fix to this problem within a week.

"I don't think there is a quick fix that can cut prices within a week. We should look for a long-term solution," he said.

Rahman said the onion prices have not increased for the first time this year. The prices rose many times in the past due to the absence of proper and long-term strategies, he added.

He said to maintain a long-term stability in the market, dependency on import will have to be reduced by increasing the domestic production of onion. But the country at present has to import a large quantity from India and other countries to meet the

demand for domestic consumption.

Rahman suggested that the domestic production can be increased in two ways -- increasing acreage by ensuring a fair price of farmers and mounting yield. An initiative needs to be taken to increase productivity by providing the farmers with high-yielding onion seeds, fertilizers, and loans.

"One more thing needs to be done. The onion prices in India are very low in its peak season because of the high productivity. As there is no duty on onion import, it can be imported from India at a lower price during that time," he said.

And, import duty will have to be imposed during the peak season in Bangladesh so that the county's farmers get a fair price of their onions.

Again, the import tariff has to be withdrawn at the end of the season so the traders can import the variety

at low costs to bring stability in the market, he explained.

The government should take an initiative to increase the preservation period of onion, the CAB chief said.

If it can be preserved for a longer period, the onion production can be increased. As a result, onion market will remain stable throughout the year, he added.

Lab grows

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controlled environment and we supply them with bespoke nutrients," said Lukacevic.

Strawberries are the next crop planned.

The main benefit of the growing method is that it uses 95 percent less water than normal plant cultivation and also saves space, which could boost agricultural yields in areas hit by urbanisation and climate change.

Trump to rally loyal base against 'sham'

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to be finding his feet with a strategy that relies on party loyalty and flat out denial that his pressure on Ukraine was illegal.

As long as the Republican majority in the Senate sticks by him, the lower house impeachment will fail to remove him from office. And Trump thinks he has that support locked up, thanks to backing from his powerful voter base.

Impeachment has "energized my base like I've never seen before," Trump told the Washington Examiner newspaper in an interview Thursday.

"My poll numbers are very good... they're very good," he said.

Trump also highlighted a talking point that Republicans might wish he stuck to more often, rather than his frequent diversions into more controversial territory: the strong economy.

"I've got the strongest economy in the history of a presidential run by far. We've got a powerful military, the most powerful we've ever had, relatively speaking, and it's been rebuilt. The best job numbers that we've ever had," he told the Examiner.

Trump got a boost on that score with jobs figures yesterday that showed employment growing at a steady pace. The 128,000 new jobs reported by the Labor Department

exceeded predictions.

Unemployment rose slightly to 3.6 percent but is still near the lowest rate in decades.

The picture looks less rosy for Trump on impeachment, which he told the Examiner is a "sham."

Trump said he is confident that he did nothing wrong when he called the new Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, and asked him for a "favor."

Trump even said he might "sit down, perhaps as a fireside chat on live television, and I will read the transcript of the call" to the nation.

But House committees have heard from a stream of witnesses saying they were concerned by the way Trump dealt with Ukraine, bolstering the Democrats' case that he abused his office.

Trump did get some help Thursday when Tim Morrison, the National Security Council's just-resigned top advisor for Russian affairs, said he "was not concerned that anything illegal was discussed."

At the same time, Morrison confirmed that he had seen a link between the request for a probe against Biden's family and the granting of badly needed military aid.

A new Washington Post/ABC poll found that Americans remain almost evenly split on the crisis, with 49 percent saying he should be

impeached and removed from office while 47 percent say he should not.

Even more telling, Democrats are 82 percent in favor of Trump's removal and Republicans 82 percent opposed.

The key for Trump is whether he can keep Republicans in lockstep -- a big reason why he will maintain a steady pace of rallies like the one in Tupelo over the coming weeks.

According to the poll, the long sky-high approval within the Republican electorate for Trump's performance has slipped to 74 percent. This is down eight percent from September's findings by the same pollsters.

Double murder

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Around 6:10pm, Monir, along with Bachchu, went to a restaurant to buy soup for his daughter.

"A few minutes later, I heard the news of the double murder over the phone," said Monir, who is married to Afroza's only daughter Dilruba Sultana.

Nunuzzaman, a security staff of the building, said he saw the new domestic help getting out of the building.

While leaving, she told him that she would not join work as she was offered a low wage.

Dhanmondi OC said they were examining CCTV footage to identify the killers.

WHATSAPP HACKING

Indian lawyers, activists accuse govt of spying

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Several activists and lawyers, who were targeted with surveillance in India, have accused the government of spying on them.

On Thursday, WhatsApp said Indian journalists and human rights activists were among the 1,400 users globally whose phones were hacked using the spyware, Pegasus.

The messaging app, owned by social media giant Facebook, has sued NSO Group, an Israeli surveillance company, saying it was behind the sophisticated cyberattacks affecting users in 20 different countries between April and mid-May.

English daily Indian Express reported that nearly two dozen activists, lawyers and academics critical of India's Hindu nationalist government had been victims of WhatsApp hacking. Most of them were working with the most marginalised communities of Adivasis (tribals) and Dalits.

Nihalsing Rathod, a human rights lawyer based in the western state of Maharashtra, claimed he was being targeted by the government for his involvement in the Bhima Koregaon case, in which nine activists were arrested for alleged links with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist).

'SILENCE CRITICS'

Opposition and human rights groups have condemned the arrests, saying the government wanted to silence critics.

Rathod is representing advocate and activist Surendra Gadling, who has been in prison since June 2018.

He claimed to have been receiving video calls from anonymous numbers since 2017.

According to the findings by Citizen Lab, a research group at the University of Toronto investigating the snoopgate scandal for WhatsApp, shadowy agents can infect a user's device either by sending a clickable link, or by just calling the phone.

"In early 2019, the calls became a daily affair. I complained to WhatsApp in March 2019 but nothing came of it," Rathod told Al Jazeera.

Rathod received a message from WhatsApp on October 29, confirming that his phone number had been impacted.

John Scott-Railton, senior researcher at Citizen Lab, told Rathod that an earlier modus operandi of Pegasus involved sending emails with clickable attachments.

Rathod, who used to work with Gadling, alleged the activists may have been framed in this manner.

'ASSASSINATION PLAN'

The police had claimed to recover letters, in the form of emails, from the computers of one of the arrested activists, which allegedly contained references to banned organisations and an assassination attempt on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Lawyers have questioned the veracity of the unsigned letters, on the basis of which the arrests were made in June 2018 and August 2018.

"I remember Gadling receiving emails with suspicious attachments. When you clicked on it nothing would happen. I believe it was a way to plant letters and so-called evidence to frame Gadling and others," Rathod said.

Civil society groups have condemned the arrest of the activists and their continued incarceration. The case has witnessed endless delays during bail proceedings, while a copy of the evidence has still not been made available to the accused as per the law.

Of the 20 people who confirmed that they had been contacted by WhatsApp regarding a breach, 13 of them knew at least one of the arrested activists in the Bhima Koregaon case.

Shalini Gera, a member of the Jagdalpur Legal Aid group, was contacted by Citizen Lab in the first week of October. Gera is part of the legal team representing Sudha Bharadwaj, a trade union leader arrested in the Bhima Koregaon case.

"As human rights lawyers in Chhattisgarh, we know we're being watched. But in my case, the state had no reason to as I was not involved in any cases in the past few years. Except for Sudha Bharadwaj's," she told Al Jazeera from Chhattisgarh state.

Mourners in Pakistan town bury victims of train fire

AFP, Mirpurkhas

Distraught relatives gathered yesterday for the funerals of some of the 74 people killed when fire ripped through a crowded train in Pakistan, with many of the victims residents of a single town.

Sobbing family members crowded a government building in Mirpurkhas overnight as the first bodies covered in white cloth began arriving by ambulance from the scene of the disaster.

After morning prayers, with women watching from nearby rooftops, more than a hundred men attended the first funeral -- of a car mechanic named Mohammad Saleem, who was in his late 40s.

It was held at the Bismillah Mosque, from which at least 42 pilgrims had left to board the train one day earlier, bound for a religious festival near Lahore.

According to officials, as some of the passengers cooked breakfast around dawn on Thursday two of their gas cylinders exploded, sending flames racing through three carriages as the train passed near Rahim Yar Khan, in Punjab province.

At least 74 people died, some after jumping through windows on the still-moving train to escape the blaze.

Rescue officials found bodies and some injured passengers along a two-kilometre stretch of track, Dawn newspaper reported.

The train was a daily express service that runs between the southern port city of Karachi and Rawalpindi, adjacent to Islamabad.

Trains on that route can reportedly hit speeds of up to 110 kilometres (68 miles) per hour. Local media said that the speed may have helped fan the flames.

Journalists were allowed inside the interior of the carriages early Friday. The fire appeared to have burned them entirely, with virtually no space visible that was not blackened and charred.

One of them -- Wagon No.12 -- was carrying mainly people from Mirpurkhas, the town's deputy commissioner, Attaullah Shah, told AFP.

"There was never such a tragic incident to happen to Mirpurkhas," he said.

Mirpurkhas commissioner Abdul Waheed Sheikh said ten of the bodies had been confirmed as being residents of the town so far.

Twenty-four Mirpurkhas residents were among the injured.

But at least another 45 are still missing, he said.

Officials in Rahim Yar Khan have said many of the bodies are charred beyond recognition and will have to be identified through DNA testing -- a process that could take up to one month.

Shah said the government was arranging to send families of the missing from Mirpurkhas to the hospital in Rahim Yar Khan where the bodies have been taken.

Mirpurkhas, a town of some half a million people surrounded by farms and mango orchards, was largely shut down Friday as businesses closed in mourning.

"These were such people that we can not ever forget them," Mohammad Anwar, the 57-year-old headmaster of a government school, told AFP at the Bismillah Mosque.

He said that among the missing was his nephew, as well as the mosque's imam. Most of those who left from the mosque had known one another or lived nearby.

Mahmood Iqbal wept outside his home as he told AFP how his two sons were missing, one son-in-law was killed, and one brother-in-law was wounded.

When he looks at his grandsons, he said, he "can't hold my tears".

"I am praying to Allah, that they might come back from nowhere. I am waiting for a miracle," he said.

Yawar Hussain came to the deputy commissioner's office overnight in the hope of finding his brother Mohsin, 20.

Clutching a photograph of his brother posing in a starched beige shalwar kameez and sunglasses, the 23-year-old described rushing home after hearing of the accident.

"I consoled my father, and my mother and sisters were crying," he said.

Train accidents are common in Pakistan, where the railways have seen decades of decline due to corruption, mismanagement and lack of investment.