

NEWS IN BRIEF

Facebook News in UK to help 'sustain' local journalism

Facebook News launched in Britain yesterday, delivering users of the world's leading social network curated news content bought from traditional publishers that have struggled financially. The arrival of Facebook News comes after the news tab feature was rolled out in the United States in late 2019 and is part of plans to extend it worldwide. Facebook will pay publishers for their content, and the service will include input from Channel 4 News, Daily Mail Group, DC Thomson, Financial Times, Sky News and Telegraph Media Group, among others. The tech giant had already agreed deals with The Economist, The Guardian, The Independent and the Mirror.

Abe, SP Balasubrahmanyam awarded Padma Vibhushan

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and music legend SP Balasubrahmanyam have been honoured with the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award in India, the government announced yesterday. Celebrated singer SP Balasubrahmanyam was conferred the honour posthumously. He died in a Chennai hospital last year after almost two months of treatment. Former chief minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi and former union minister Ram Vilas Paswan have also been awarded the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award posthumously. Former Lok Sabha speaker Sumitra Mahajan has also been conferred the Padma Bhushan.

Italy PM tenders resignation



Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte handed in his resignation to the head of state yesterday, opening the way for formal consultations on how to overcome the political crisis, the president's office said. President Sergio Mattarella will start consultations with party leaders this afternoon, his office said in a statement, adding that Conte had been asked to stay on in a caretaker capacity as the talks continued. Conte lost his absolute majority in the upper house Senate last week when a junior partner, the Italia Viva party headed by former premier Matteo Renzi, quit in a row over the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis and economic recession. Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, one of the leaders of the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), the largest in parliament, earlier said it was time to rally around Conte. "The country is going through one of its worst ever periods due to the pandemic," he tweeted last Monday. "Now we need unity, we all have to gather around Giuseppe Conte."

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Protesters climb on a dome at the ramparts of the Red Fort as farmers continue to demonstrate against the central government's recent agricultural reforms in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Lift sanctions to save Iran nuclear deal

Russian FM urges Biden

AFP, Moscow

Russia said yesterday it was up to Washington to take the first steps if US President Joe Biden wants to salvage the landmark Iran nuclear deal.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov urged Washington to lift sanctions on Tehran and save the historic agreement during his first talks with his Iranian counterpart since Biden's election victory raised hopes for the fate of the deal.

Lavrov said that Russia and Iran "share the same position" on the preservation of the 2015 accord, urging the United States to lift sanctions as a condition for Iran's return to compliance.

"This in turn will provide the preconditions for the implementation of all requirements of the nuclear deal by the Islamic Republic of Iran," he told journalists.

The talks in Moscow came days after Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif urged the United States to make the "fundamental choice" to end its sanctions regime and reverse the "failed policies" of the previous White House administration, which took a hawkish position on Tehran.

He cautioned that any efforts by Washington to extract additional concessions would ultimately end in failure.

"Iran wants the nuclear deal it made," Zarif wrote in an op-ed in the US foreign policy magazine Foreign Affairs last week.

He reiterated Iran's position while in the Russian capital yesterday, saying that if Washington cancels its penalties on Tehran, then Iran will not restrict the work of inspectors and return to its obligations under the accord.

"We will resume their complete implementation," Zarif said.

'I think it has to happen'

Biden on Trump's impeachment trial as House delivers charge to Senate

CNN ONLINE

President Joe Biden on Monday offered his most extensive comments since taking office on former President Donald Trump's impeachment trial, telling CNN, "I think it has to happen." Biden made the comment during a brief one-on-one interview with CNN in the halls of the West Wing. He acknowledged the effect it could have on his legislative agenda and Cabinet nominees but said there would be "a worse effect if it didn't happen."

Biden told CNN he believed the outcome would be different if Trump had six months left in his term, but said he doesn't think 17 Republican senators will vote to convict Trump.

"The Senate has changed since I was there, but it hasn't changed that much," Biden said.

His comments came the same night the House impeachment managers formally triggered the start of Trump's second impeachment trial after they walked across the Capitol and began reading on the Senate floor the charge against Trump, the first president in history to be impeached twice.

The trial has loomed large over Biden's early

days in office as he's sought to strike an uneasy balance between supporting it and pushing a message of unity. CNN previously reported that Biden and his team were initially cold on starting his administration -- which Biden pledged would "turn the page" on Trump -- with a focus on the former President.

But as more alarming details came into focus about the Capitol attack, early discussions among Biden advisers of taking an active role in slowing or trying to somehow manage impeachment were abandoned, aides said, as they've become well aware that trying to do so could divide Democrats.

Biden's comments to CNN Monday evening build on a statement he released earlier this month that called the House impeachment vote "a bipartisan vote cast by members who followed the Constitution and their conscience."

"This nation also remains in the grip of a deadly virus and a reeling economy," Biden said at the time. "I hope that the Senate leadership will find a way to deal with their Constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation."

Putin denies owning 'palace' after Navalny expose

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday dismissed claims by opposition leader Alexei Navalny that he owns a luxury property on the Black Sea worth \$1.35 billion, as the opposition urged fresh nationwide demonstrations.

Courts around Russia started handing down short jail sentences to demonstrators arrested during nationwide opposition rallies last weekend, while the foreign ministry accused US diplomats of encouraging Russians to join the protests.

Navalny's aides urged his supporters to take to the streets again next Sunday ahead of a court case that could see Russia's most prominent Kremlin critic put behind bars for more than three years.

The 44-year-old campaigner was detained just over a week ago when he returned to Moscow from Germany, where he had been recuperating from exposure to a Soviet-designed toxin.

He called on his supporters in dozens of cities to rally last weekend and released a two-hour investigation into the palatial seaside property to spur allies to demonstrate.

The rallies saw a record number of arrests, and Putin on Monday denied having anything to do with the property in Navalny's video, which has now been watched 86 million times.

"Nothing that is listed there as my property belongs to me or my close relatives, and never did," Putin said during a video call with Russian students.

Navalny's report -- his most-watched anti-corruption probe by far -- claims the



property is worth \$1.35 billion and features everything from an underground ice rink to a casino.

Leonid Volkov, a key aide to the Kremlin critic, urged Russians to take to the streets again on January 31 "for Navalny's freedom, for freedom for all, and for justice."

Saturday's rallies saw clashes between police and protesters, 3,700 of whom were detained according to the OVD-Info monitoring group.

Putin said on Monday that Russian citizens have the right to express themselves but that they must do so "within the framework of the law."

According to OVD-Info, by Monday morning more than 80 people have been handed short-term jail sentences over the protests while at least 15 criminal probes have been launched.

Putin also said minors should not be encouraged to join the rallies, referring to a claim repeated by authorities that the opposition had encouraged young people to protest.



Protesters on Australia Day demand that the country's national day be changed, as the date marks the arrival of Britain's first fleet and subsequent colonisation of indigenous Australians, at a rally in Sydney, Australia yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

GLOBAL COVID FIGHT

UK to offer genomics resources

AFP, London

Britain will offer its genomics expertise to countries lacking resources to identify new variants of the virus that causes Covid-19, the government announced yesterday.

"This pandemic has shown that the foundations of so many of the exciting experiences that make life worth living are contingent not just on our health, or the health of our neighbours, but the health of people we've never met," said Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

"When one of us suffers, we all suffer. So we must work to promote health security in every single part of the world," he told a virtual meeting of the Chatham House international affairs think-tank.

Air pollution linked to irreversible sight loss

AFP, Paris

Air pollution is likely to increase the risk of irreversible sight loss, according to the results of a long-term study published yesterday.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness among over-50s in richer nations, with roughly 300 million people predicted to be affected by 2040.

Known risk factors include age, smoking and genetic make-up.

Now researchers have drawn a link between AMD and air pollution, which is already known to carry a host of health risks including heart and lung disease.

Writing in the British Journal of Ophthalmology, researchers analysed data from more than 115,000 participants who reported no eye problems at the start of the study period in 2006.

Official data on traffic and levels of nitrous oxide and small particulate matter was used to calculate the annual average air pollution levels at the home addresses of the participants.

They were asked to report formal diagnosis of AMD by a doctor and were tested on their sight performance several years later.

In all, 1,286 participants were diagnosed with AMD at the end of the study period.

US to 'make good' on climate finance pledges: Kerry

REUTERS, Amsterdam

The United States will "make good" on financial commitments to developing countries struggling with climate change, top US climate envoy John Kerry told a summit of world leaders on Monday.

Kerry said the United States was "proud to be back" in the global climate discussion, just days after President Joe Biden signed an order to re-enter the 2015 Paris Agreement after the country quit the climate treaty under former President Donald Trump.

Biden's government "also intends to make significant investments in climate action" both domestically and abroad, Kerry told the virtual Climate Adaptation Summit, hosted by the Netherlands.

He did not give details about those investments, but promised Washington would soon announce a new target for reducing US greenhouse gas emissions that

"meets the urgency of the challenge."

"We intend to make good on our climate finance pledge," he said.

The United States has delivered only \$1 billion of the \$3 billion it pledged under former President Barack Obama to the UN Green Climate Fund, set up to help vulnerable countries transition to clean energy.

Kerry was joined at the summit by China's Deputy Prime Minister Han Zheng, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and others. Leaders at Monday's summit, which aims to help countries build resilience against climate change, stressed the importance of having Washington back at the table.

"To tackle this great challenge we need all hands on deck, and certainly the US is so critical for success," said IMF MD Kristalina Georgieva.



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SPECIAL CALL FOR PROPOSALS ON ENERGY AND POWER RELATED APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECTS (8th Program Solicitation)

To bring technological innovation in energy and power sectors as well as to ensure energy security through research and development, BEPRC is looking forward to funding applied research projects. The idea is to seek innovative solutions for efficient, cost-effective and environmentally sustainable development of Bangladesh's energy and power infrastructure.

The Program Solicitations mainly focus to fund applied research based projects that would unfold technologies, tools, and strategies for upgrading, repowering and revolutionizing the overall energy and power sector of Bangladesh.

Research Focus Areas

Proposers submitting applied research proposals should address one of the following key research areas.

1. Responsible Energy Conservation
2. Energy Efficiency and Demand Management
3. Renewable Energy
4. Conventional Energy
5. Transmission and Distribution Integration and Infrastructure
6. Energy, Environment and Socio-economic Impact Analysis
7. Energy storage.

For Details of each of the above mentioned research areas, please refer to program solicitations at the link: <http://researchgrant.eprc.gov.bd/>

Who May Submit a Solicited Proposal?

Individuals and organizations in the following categories may submit proposals:

1. Universities and Colleges
2. Non-profit, non-academic organizations
3. For-profit organizations
4. Government Organizations
5. Individuals
6. Foreign organizations

For details, please refer to the BEPRC grants proposal submission guideline at: <http://researchgrant.eprc.gov.bd/>

How to Submit Proposals?

Proposals to BEPRC shall be submitted via online portal of BEPRC. For proposal submission via online, the guideline specified in the BEPRC Grants Proposal Submission Guideline applies. Proposal submission link: <http://researchgrant.eprc.gov.bd/>

No hard Copy Submission is allowed. Only proposals submitted online will be considered.

BEPRC will ensure maintenance of strict confidentiality of the proposals.

Details of Program Solicitations including Award Information, Key Activities Schedules and Eligibility information are available at <http://researchgrant.eprc.gov.bd/>

For any queries, Please contact:
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Solicitation Release Date
26.01.2021

Last Date of Proposal Submission
22.02.2021