

PAYMENT FOR NEWS CONTENT

Tech giants 'close' to deals with Aussie media

AFP, Sydney

Google and Facebook are "very close" to deals with major Australian media to pay for news, a top government official said yesterday, as the tech giants scramble to avoid landmark regulation.

Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said talks with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Google CEO Sundar Pichai had made "great progress" in resolving a standoff being closely watched around the world.

Australia is poised to adopt legislation that would force digital companies to pay for news content, something that would create a global precedent and, according to Facebook and Google, wreck the way the internet works.

The companies have threatened to partially withdraw services from the country if the rules become law, sparking a war of words with Canberra.

But that disagreement appeared to ease yesterday, with Frydenberg telling public broadcaster ABC talks with the companies "made great progress over the course of the weekend".

The agreements could be enough to see Facebook and Google avoid the most severe parts of the legislation -- including binding arbitration to ensure they are not using their online advertising duopoly to dictate terms in deals with media companies.

Following Frydenberg's remarks, SevenWest Media, owner of broadcaster 7NEWS and The West Australian newspaper, announced yesterday a new agreement for its content to be hosted on Google's News Showcase product.



Police arrest a protester demonstrating against the military coup in Mandalay, Myanmar yesterday. Story on Page 12

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

BJP to go global!

TOI, Agartala

Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb sparked a fresh controversy on Saturday evening when he revealed BJP's alleged ambition to form a government in neighbouring Nepal and Sri Lanka. He was addressing a gathering during a thanksgiving to the Centre for the Budget at Rabindra Shatabarshiki Bhawan. "Amit Shah, who was then the BJP national president, had told us that the party was planning to expand its footprint and establish its rule in Nepal and Sri Lanka..." Biplab claimed.

Harry, Meghan expecting 2nd child

REUTERS, London

Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, are expecting their second child, a spokesperson for the couple said on Sunday. Harry, 36, and Meghan, 39, stepped back from royal duties in January 2020 and moved with their first son Archie to Southern California to live a more independent life and escape the British media.

Peru FM resigns over vaccination scandal

AFP, Lima

Peru's foreign minister resigned Sunday, the second top official to step down amid a growing scandal over politicians receiving Covid-19 vaccinations well before the general public. The South American nation has been badly hit by the pandemic, with its hospitals overwhelmed and a targeted vaccination program for health workers rolling out only from February 8.

US supports Kurdish militants

Says Erdogan after execution of 13 Turks in northern Iraq

AFP, Ankara

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday accused the United States of siding with "terrorists" after blaming outlawed Kurdish militants of executing 13 Turks in northern Iraq.

Erdogan's comments came a day after Ankara said Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels had killed 13 captives -- most of them Turkish soldiers and police officers -- they had allegedly abducted in southeast Turkey and kept in an Iraqi cave.

The PKK has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 that is believed to have left tens of thousands dead.

The United States and Turkey's other Western allies recognise the PKK as a terror group.

But Washington has supported another Kurdish militia in Syria that Turkey sees as an offshoot of the PKK.

Turkey this month launched a military operation against rear PKK bases in northern Iraq that Erdogan



said was designed in part to free the 13 hostages.

"The statement made by the United States is a farce," Erdogan said in his first public comments on the incident.

"You said you did not support terrorists, when in fact you are on their side and behind them," Erdogan said in televised remarks.

The US State Department on Sunday it "deplores the death of Turkish citizens" but was waiting for further confirmation that Ankara's

account of the 13 men's death was true.

The PKK said the 13 died when Turkish forces bombed the cave where the men were being kept.

"If reports of the death of Turkish civilians at the hands of the PKK, a designated terrorist organisation, are confirmed, we condemn this action in the strongest possible terms," the State Department said in a statement.

Erdogan said Turkey's Nato allies had to pick sides.

"After this, there are two options. Either act with Turkey with no ifs or buts, without questioning, or they will be a partner to every murder and bloodshed," he said.

"The terrorist organisation on our doorstep, on our borders, is killing innocents."

Turkey yesterday announced the detention of 718 people it accuses of being part of a Kurdish militant group it says executed the 13 Turks in northern Iraq.

UK tightens virus controls as NZ hunts source of outbreak

AFP, London

Britain yesterday began mandatory hotel quarantine for arrivals from high-risk countries as New Zealand identified its first cases of the UK strain from the outbreak that forced its largest city into lockdown.

British officials introduced mandatory hotel quarantine rules for arrivals from dozens of countries deemed "high risk" for coronavirus variants, in a bid to stop new strains spreading.

All UK citizens and permanent residents entering England from 33 countries on a wider travel ban list must self-isolate for 10 days and take several Covid-19 tests.

Arriving travellers caught lying about being in one of those countries 10 days before their journey could receive up to 10 years in prison -- a penalty already criticised as excessive.

"It can't be easy for them to be in a bedroom for 10 days," Charlie Islam-Harry, manager of the St Giles Heathrow hotel, told AFP. Her staff will carry out regular welfare checks on guests during

their enforced stays, she promised.

Two coronavirus infections that prompted a snap lockdown of Auckland in New Zealand were caused by the more contagious variant first detected in the UK, the country's health ministry said yesterday.

They had no link to any other positive cases detected so far in New Zealand.

"This result reinforces the decision to take swift and robust action around the latest cases to detect and stamp out the possibility of any further transmission," the ministry said.

The coronavirus has killed at least 2,400,543 people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP yesterday.

Nearly 172 million vaccine doses have been given in at least 96 countries or territories. But most of those doses have gone to the richer countries.

A shipment of 200,000 doses of China's Sinopharm vaccine arrived yesterday in Zimbabwe -- a donation from the Beijing government.



This aerial handout photo taken yesterday and released by Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB) shows the damages from a landslide in Nganjuk, East Java province, where at least nine people died and 10 others are missing.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli strikes on Syria kill 9 militia fighters

AFP, Beirut

Israeli missile strikes against several targets near Syria's capital Damascus killed at least nine pro-regime militia fighters early yesterday, a Britain-based war monitor said.

"Nine Iran-backed militia fighters were killed" in Israeli strikes targeting arms depots, including missile stores, around Damascus, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The Observatory said all the fighters killed were non-Arab "pro-government" forces but it said it could not determine if they were Afghan, Pakistani or Iranian.

"Syrian air defences intercepted a sizable number of the missiles but many hit their targets and caused material damage," it said.

DIPLOMATIC CABLE

France 'helped Rwanda genocide suspects escape'

AFP, Paris

Authorities in Paris helped suspects in the 1994 Rwanda genocide to escape while under French military protection, according to a diplomatic cable, rekindling Kigali's allegations France secretly supported Hutu forces behind the killings.

The document, written by France's envoy to Rwanda and obtained by AFP Sunday from a lawyer researching France's actions during the genocide, suggested that Paris knew suspects had sought refuge in a "humanitarian safe zone" controlled by French soldiers.

The soldiers had arrived in June 1994 as part of the UN-mandated Operation Turquoise to stop the massacres that left at least 800,000 people dead, mainly among the Tutsi ethnic minority.

French envoy to Rwanda Yannick Gerard wrote to his superiors to ask what to do with the genocide suspects, in a cable found in the archives of an adviser to Francois Mitterrand, the French president at the time.

"We have no other choice... but to arrest them or place them immediately under house arrest to wait for international



judicial authorities to decide their case," Gerard wrote, in excerpts of the cable first published by French investigative website Mediapart on Sunday.

The cable was discovered by Francois Graner, a lawyer who works with the victims' rights group "Survie" (Survival) and who won a years-long battle last June to finally get access to Mitterrand's archives.

In response, French foreign ministry officials told Gerard: "You can... use all indirect channels, especially your African contacts, without exposing yourself directly, to transmit to these authorities our wish that they leave the Humanitarian Safe Zone."

W Africa faces new Ebola epidemic

Guinea reports seven cases; Liberia, Sierra Leone on high alert

AFP, Conakry

West Africa faced its first known Ebola resurgence since the end of a devastating outbreak in 2016, with Guinea responding to what its health chief called an "epidemic" after seven cases were confirmed.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic stretching health resources across the world, Guinea and the World Health Organization (WHO) say they are better prepared to deal with Ebola now than they were five years ago because of good progress on vaccines.

The WHO said it would rush assistance to Guinea and seek to ensure it received adequate inoculations, as neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone went on high alert as a precaution.

"Very early this morning the Conakry laboratory confirmed the presence of the Ebola virus," Guinea health chief Sakoba Keita said on Sunday after an emergency meeting in the capital.

Health Minister Remy Lamah had earlier spoken of four deaths and it was not immediately clear why the new toll was lower.

The cases marked the first known resurgence



of Ebola in West Africa since a 2013-2016 epidemic that killed more than 11,300 people, the worst involving the virus on record.

That epidemic also began in Guinea in the same southeastern region where the new cases have been found.

The virus, believed to reside in bats, was first identified in 1976 in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Keita, head of the National Agency for Health Security, said one person had died in late January in Gouecké, southeastern Guinea, near the Liberian border.

The victim was buried on February 1 "and some people who took part in this funeral began to have symptoms of diarrhoea, vomiting, bleeding and fever a few days later", he said.

Some samples tested by a laboratory set up by the European Union in Cuedekou in the same region revealed Ebola on Friday, said Keita.

He added that Guinea was now in an "Ebola epidemic situation".

Patients have been isolated and an investigation was ordered to determine the home villages of all who took part in the burial to carry out contact tracing, said Keita.

Experts will also work to determine the outbreak's origin, which could be a previously cured patient whose disease relapsed or transmission by "wild animals, in particular bats", said Keita.

According to the health chief, diagnosis time has been reduced to less than two weeks compared with three-and-a-half months in 2014.

WHO representative Alfred George Ki-Zerbo told a press briefing: "We are going to rapidly deploy crucial assets to help Guinea."



Demonstrators shout slogans behind police barricades during a protest demanding the release of social activists who, according to them, were arrested by the police for supporting farmers' protest against farm laws, in New Delhi, India yesterday.