

ROW OVER NEWS CONTENT PAYMENT

Facebook 'friended' us again: Australia

REUTERS, Canberra

Facebook Inc is back at the negotiating table, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said yesterday after the tech giant this week blocked news on its site in the country.

Facebook's abrupt decision to stop Australians from sharing news on the site and strip the pages of domestic and foreign news outlets also erased several state government and emergency department accounts, causing widespread anger.

The company has "tentatively friended us again," Morrison told a news conference in Sydney. "What I'm pleased about is that Facebook is back at the table again."

Facebook has publicly indicated no change in its opposition to a proposed law requiring social media platforms to pay for links to news content. Morrison was not asked about that.

Australia's Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said on Friday he had spoken with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and further talks were expected over the weekend. It was not clear whether those talks have happened.

The stand-off comes as Australia's vows to press ahead with the landmark legislation, which could set a global precedent as countries like Canada express interest in taking similar action.

The Australian law, which would force Facebook and Alphabet Inc's Google to reach commercial deals with Australian publishers or face compulsory arbitration, has cleared the lower house of parliament and is expected to be passed by the Senate within the next week.

Australia's legislation is being widely watched overseas. Canadian Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault said on Thursday his country would adopt the Australian approach as it crafts its own legislation in coming months.



A person shows bullet shells during a protest against the military coup, in Mandalay; and a rescue worker checks an injured man after clashes with cops there.

PHOTO: REUTERS



NEWS IN BRIEF

'Bengal wants its own daughter'

"Bangla Nijer Meyekei Chaye" (Bengal wants its own daughter) -- is the new slogan unveiled yesterday by West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress portraying Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as the daughter of Bengal for the upcoming assembly elections due in March-April. The slogan has added to the raging "insider vs outsider" debate provoked by Trinamool Congress. "We don't want outsiders to call the shots in Bengal," said TMC Secretary General Partha Chatterjee. TMC is engaged in a bitter political fight with the BJP, pitching the opposition party's leaders as "outsiders" who are on "election tourism" to the state.

Navalny remains in jail

A Moscow court yesterday upheld a ruling to jail the Kremlin's most prominent opponent Alexei Navalny, sealing his first lengthy prison sentence in a decade of legal battles with Russian authorities. Judge Dmitry Balashov dismissed Navalny's appeal against a recent decision to imprison him for violating the terms of a suspended sentence on embezzlement charges. The anti-corruption campaigner was ordered on February 2 to serve the time in a penal colony for breaching parole terms while in Germany recovering from a nerve agent poisoning he blames on the Kremlin. Russia has come under increasing Western pressure to release Navalny since he was detained on arrival at a Moscow airport in January.

Floods cripple Jakarta

Whole neighbourhoods of Indonesia's capital Jakarta and dozens of major roads were flooded yesterday after torrential rains pounded the Southeast Asian city overnight. More than 1,300 residents have been evacuated to temporary shelters, with parts of the capital under four to nine feet (1.2 to 2.7 metres) of water. No casualties have been reported so far. Jakarta, a megalopolis that is home to around 30 million people, is frequently hit by floods in the rainy season.

Argentina health minister out over vaccine line-jumping

Argentina's health minister resigned late Friday after it emerged that friends of his had been able to skip the line for a Covid-19 vaccination. Health Minister Gines Gonzalez Garci stepped down after President Alberto Fernandez called on him to quit in the wake of the scandal. The scandal broke after a 71-year-old journalist, Horacio Verbitsky, announced on the radio that, owing to his longstanding friendship with the minister, he had been able to get vaccinated in his office ahead of the general population. So far only health workers have been vaccinated in Argentina and vaccinations for people aged over 70 only began on Wednesday in the province of Buenos Aires. Local media reported that other people close to the government were also vaccinated at the health ministry.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE IN THAILAND

Protests as PM survives

REUTERS, Bangkok

Hundreds of protesters gathered outside Thailand's parliament after Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and nine ministers survived a parliamentary no-confidence motion yesterday after a four-day censure debate.

"It was a disappointment, but expected," protest leader Attapon Buapat said.

Over 1,000 protesters rallied outside the parliament gates. Organisers gave assurances the protest would not turn violent.

Earlier, lawmakers voted in favour of Prayuth and other ministers.

Opposition lawmakers have taken aim at what they say is a slow government roll-out of the coronavirus vaccine and at its economic policies, vowing to continue investigating.

Prayuth, a former chief of the armed forces, overthrew an elected prime minister in 2014 and stayed in office after a 2019 election that his rivals said was badly flawed. The government has said the elections were free and fair.

The no-confidence motion came as pro-democracy protests returned after a lull brought on by a second outbreak of Covid-19. Youth-led protests last year reached across the country posing a major challenge to Prayuth.



Transatlantic alliance is 'back'

Declares Biden as he makes presidential debut on world stage

AGENCIES

President Joe Biden declared the "transatlantic alliance is back" in a powerful speech seeking to reestablish the United States as leader of the West against what he called a global assault on democracy.

The remarks to the annual Munich Security Conference -- held by video link because of the Covid-19 pandemic -- dovetailed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcoming of a return to "multilateralism" after the confrontational years of Biden's predecessor Donald Trump.

Making his first major international address on foreign policy since becoming president in January, Biden said traditional US allies should once again have confidence in Washington's leadership.

"I'm sending a clear message to the world: America is back. The transatlantic alliance is back," he said from the White

BIDEN AT MUNICH SECURITY MEET

Warns allies against threats from China, Russia

Says world can 'no longer do bare minimum on climate'

No sanctions relief for Iran before talks

House.

Biden said his administration was again stressing alliance building, in contrast to Trump's isolationist policies and abrasive treatment of US partners.

"Our partnerships have endured and grown through the years because they are rooted in the richness of our shared democratic values. They're not transactional," Biden said in clear reference to Trump's emphasis on redefining allies as economic rivals.

"We can no longer delay or do the bare minimum to address climate change," Biden said, calling this a

"global existential crisis."

But Biden delivered harsh warnings about the threats he said are posed by Russia and China.

The White House said Biden has ditched Trump's controversial efforts last year to reestablish the G8, which became the G7 after Russia was expelled in response to its seizing of the Ukrainian region of Crimea.

Similarly, said Biden, US partners should stand together against "the Chinese government's economic abuses and coercion that undercut the foundations of the international economic system."

On Iran, Biden reiterated his pledge to return to negotiations with Tehran over its nuclear program, but said "we must address Iran's destabilizing activities across the Middle East."

White House has said it has no intention to lift sanctions ahead of talks, the only demand set out by Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei.

Scientists now know how to break into people's dreams!

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A new study has suggested that it is possible to communicate people through their dreams, able to understand questions and reply with cogent answers.

"We found that individuals in REM sleep can interact with an experimenter and engage in real-time communication," senior author Ken Paller of Northwestern University said in a statement. "We also showed that dreamers are capable of comprehending questions, engaging in working-memory operations, and producing answers."

"Most people might predict that this would not be possible--that people would either wake up when asked a question or fail to answer, and certainly not comprehend a question without misconstruing it," he added.

The researchers attempted communications with 36 subjects who were lucid dreaming - during which the sleeping person is aware they are



having a dream - across the US, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Some participants were adept lucid dreamers, while others had never done it before.

They found that it was possible for people who were dreaming to follow instructions, do basic mathematics, answer yes-or-no questions, and tell various other sensory inputs apart.

In lieu of responding verbally, the subjects' answers could be gleaned from eye movements or facial muscles.

For everyday people, these methods could also be used to help those with sleep difficulties or suffering from nightmares.

FARMERS' PROTEST IN INDIA

Thunberg lends support for jailed activist Ravi

AFP, Stockholm

Greta Thunberg has tweeted her support for an Indian activist jailed over a guide for anti-government farmers protests, which the Swedish climate campaigner had earlier shared to social media.

In a post on Twitter, Thunberg wrote "freedom of speech and the right to peaceful protest and assembly are non-negotiable human rights."

"These must be a fundamental part of any democracy. #StandWithDishaRavi," the 18-year-old activist tweeted, referring to Indian climate campaigner Disha Ravi.

Ravi, 22, was arrested on last Saturday. Police alleged she helped edit a so-called toolkit, which offers basic advice including joining on-the-ground protests and showing support on social media.

Police said the main aim of the toolkit was to create misinformation. Ravi's arrest has been criticised by opposition politicians and activists within India.

Farmers have been camping on the outskirts of the capital since late November, and calling for the repeal of new agriculture laws.

The tussle between the government and the farmers took an international turn in early February when Rihanna and Thunberg tweeted about the rallies to their millions of social media followers.

Princess 'being cared for at home'

Says Dubai after UN demands proof of her life

AFP, Geneva

Dubai's royal family insisted that Sheikha Latifa was being "cared for at home" after the United Nations demanded proof that she was still alive following "disturbing" footage aired this week.

The UN Human Rights Office said it had asked the United Arab Emirates for evidence after the BBC published video shot by the daughter of Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum saying she was being held captive and feared for her life.

His 35-year-old daughter has not been seen in public since a foiled attempt to

escape from the emirate in March 2018. The videos were shot nearly a year after the incident, BBC reported. Since then her friends have heard nothing from her.

In a statement issued by the UAE's embassy in London, the Dubai royal family said: "We want to thank those who have expressed concern for her wellbeing, despite the coverage which certainly is not reflective of the actual position."

"Her family has confirmed that her highness is being cared for at home, supported by her family and medical professionals. Sheikha Latifa continues to improve and we are hopeful she will return to public life at the appropriate time."

'Something we've never seen'

Nasa's Perseverance rover beams back spectacular new images

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Nasa scientists on Friday presented striking early images from the picture-perfect landing of the Mars rover Perseverance, including a selfie of the six-wheeled vehicle dangling just above the surface of the Red Planet moments before touchdown.

The color photograph, likely to become an instant classic among memorable images from the history of spaceflight, was snapped by a camera mounted on the rocket-powered "sky crane" descent-stage just above the rover as the car-sized space vehicle was being lowered on Thursday to Martian soil.

The image was unveiled by mission managers during an online news briefing webcast from Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) near Los Angeles less than 24 hours after the landing.

The picture, looking down on the rover, shows the entire vehicle suspended from three cables unspooled from the sky crane, along with an "umbilical" communications cord. Swirls of dust kicked up by the crane's rocket thrusters are also visible.

Seconds later, the rover was gently planted on its wheels, its tethers were severed, and the sky crane - its job completed - flew off to crash a safe distance away, though not before photos and other data collected during the descent were transmitted to the rover for safekeeping.

The image of the dangling science lab, striking for its clarity and sense of motion, marks the first such close-up photo of a spacecraft landing on



Mars, or any planet beyond Earth.

"This is something we've never seen before," Aaron Stehura, a deputy lead for the mission's descent and landing team, describing himself and colleagues as "awe-struck" when first viewing the image.

Adam Steltzner, chief engineer for the Perseverance project at JPL, said he found the image instantly iconic, comparable to the shot of Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin standing on the moon in 1969, or the Voyager 1 probe's images of Saturn in 1980.

Next week, Nasa hopes to present more photos and video - some possibly with audio - taken by all six cameras affixed to the descending spacecraft, showing more of the sky crane maneuvers, as well as the supersonic parachute deployment that preceded it.

The vehicle landed about two kilometers from tall cliffs at the base of an ancient river



delta carved into the corner of the crater billions of years ago, when Mars was warmer, wetter and presumably hospitable to life.

Scientists say the site is ideal for pursuing Perseverance's primary objective - searching for fossilized traces of microbial life preserved in sediments believed to have been deposited around the delta and the long-vanished lake it once fed.

Samples of rock drilled from the Martian soil are to be stored on the surface for eventual retrieval and delivery to Earth by two future robotic missions to the Red Planet, as early as 2031.

The mission's surface team will spend the coming days and weeks unfastening, unfurling and testing the vehicle's robot arm, communication antennae and other equipment, aligning instruments and upgrading the rover's software, Hwang said. She said it would be about nine "sols," or Martian days, before the rover is ready for its first test spin.

Advertisement for Premier Bank Ltd. featuring a large graphic of a hand holding a green envelope with a portrait of a woman. Text includes: 'একুশ মানে মাথা নত না করা একুশ মানে জামাত জন্য নতুন করে লড়া' and 'মহান আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবসে প্রিমিয়ার ব্যাংকের পক্ষ থেকে সকল ভাষা শহীদ ও ভাষা সৈনিকদের জানাই বিনম্র শ্রদ্ধা ও ভালোবাসা।'