

NEW RULES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA IN INDIA

WhatsApp sues govt

REUTERS

WhatsApp has filed a lawsuit in Delhi against the Indian government seeking to block regulations coming into force yesterday that experts say would compel Facebook's messaging app to break privacy protections, sources said.

The case asks the Delhi High Court to declare that one of the new IT rules is a violation of privacy rights in India's constitution since it requires social media companies to identify the "first originator of information" when authorities demand it, people familiar with the lawsuit told Reuters.

The WhatsApp lawsuit escalates a growing struggle between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government and tech giants including Facebook, Google's parent Alphabet and Twitter in one of their key global growth markets.

Tensions rose after police visited Twitter's offices this week. The micro-blogging service had labelled posts by a spokesman for India's dominant party and others as containing "manipulated media", saying forged content was included.

New Delhi has also pressed tech companies to remove what it has described as misinformation on the Covid-19 pandemic ravaging India, and some criticism of the government's response to the crisis, which is claiming thousands of lives daily.

While the new law only requires

WhatsApp, which has half a billion users in India, to unmask people credibly accused of wrongdoing, it says it cannot in practice do that alone.

WhatsApp says that because messages are encrypted end-to-end it would have to break encryption for receivers of messages as well as the originators to comply with the new law.



A government official said WhatsApp could find a way to track originators of disinformation, a long-standing stance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration, and that the US company was not being asked to break encryption.

Among the new rules are requirements that big social media firms appoint Indian citizens to key compliance roles, remove content within 36 hours of a legal order, and set up a mechanism to respond to complaints. They must also use automated processes to take down pornography.

Facebook has said it agrees with most of the provisions but is still looking to negotiate some aspects.



Army soldiers evacuate people from a flooded area to safer places as Cyclone Yaas makes landfall at Ramnagar in Purba Medinipur district in the eastern state of West Bengal, India, yesterday. At least two people died yesterday as howling winds and waves the height of double-decker buses belted eastern India in the Covid-stricken country's second cyclone in as many weeks.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'DE FACTO ANNEXATION' OF PALESTINE

Ireland condemns Israel, sanctions on the cards

AGENCIES

The Irish government has supported a parliamentary motion condemning the "de facto annexation" of Palestinian land by Israeli authorities, in what it said was the first use of the phrase by a European Union country in relation to Israel.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney said on Tuesday that the motion, brought forward by opposition party Sinn Fein, "is a clear signal of the depth of feeling across Ireland".

"The scale, pace and strategic nature of Israel's actions on settlement expansion and the intent behind it have brought us to a point where we need to be honest about what is actually happening on the ground. ... It is de facto annexation," Coveney, of the centre-right Fine Gael party, told parliament.

"This is not something that I, or in my view this house, says lightly. We are the first EU state to do so. But it reflects the huge concern we have about the intent of the actions and of course, their impact," he said.

If passed, the amendment would require the government to expel the Israeli ambassador to Ireland and to impose economic, political and cultural sanctions against Israel.

Most countries view settlements Israel has built in territory captured in the 1967 war as illegal and as an obstacle to peace with the Palestinians.

Some of the Irish parliamentarians wore face masks bearing the Palestine flag or of the checkered keffiyeh pattern. The Irish parliament, or Dail, was set to debate the People Before Profit amendment of the Sinn Fein Private Members motion later yesterday, with a vote expected later.

UN rights body mulling probe

Blinken arrives in Egypt on mission to shore up ceasefire

AGENCIES

The UN Human Rights Council will consider launching a broad, international investigation into abuses in the latest Gaza conflict and also into "systematic" abuses, according to a proposal as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Cairo to strengthen efforts to shore up ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza.

The Rights Council will hold a special session on the latest conflict today, at the request of Pakistan, as coordinator of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the state of Palestine.

Those countries submitted a draft resolution late on Tuesday that would establish an independent international commission of inquiry to investigate all human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, since April 13. It would also examine all underlying root causes of tensions

GAZA CONFLICT



and instability, "including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity," the draft said.

The independent team would collect and analyse evidence of crimes perpetrated, including forensic material, "in order to maximise the possibility of its admissibility in legal proceedings".

Reporting back in June 2022, it would identify those responsible to try and end impunity and ensure legal accountability.

Since being set up in 2006, the UN rights council, a 47-member forum, has held eight previous special

sessions that have condemned Israel and set up several probes into alleged war crimes.

Meanwhile, Blinken arrived in Cairo yesterday after meeting with Israeli and Palestinian leaders to throw Washington's support behind the Friday truce that ended 11 days of heavy Israeli bombing of Gaza and rocket fire from the enclave into Israel.

Israeli air strikes and artillery fire on Gaza killed 253 Palestinians, including 66 children, in 11 days of conflict from May 10. Rocket and other fire from Gaza claimed 12 lives in Israel.

After talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas at his headquarters in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Blinken vowed to rebuild US relations with the Palestinians by reopening a consulate in Jerusalem, as well as giving millions in aid for the war-battered Gaza Strip.

In Cairo, Blinken is to meet Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi before flying on to Jordan for talks with King Abdullah II.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Taliban warn neighbours against allowing US bases

The Taliban warned Afghanistan's neighbours yesterday against allowing the United States to operate military bases on their soil, the insurgents insisting they would thwart such a "historic mistake". Washington is in the final stages of withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, and a flurry of diplomatic calls between the United States and Pakistan in recent days has fuelled speculation the Pentagon is scouting for new bases to use against the Taliban. Several of Afghanistan's neighbours allowed the US military limited use of air bases in the early 2000s after the overthrow of the Taliban. Such overt physical support has largely ended, however, although some countries do allow their airspace to be used for military flights.

Myanmar excluded from WHO annual meeting

Faced with the dilemma of who to recognise as Myanmar's legitimate representative following February's coup, World Health Organization members yesterday opted to exclude the country from their annual assembly. The 74th World Health Assembly had received requests from both Myanmar's ousted civilian authorities and the military junta that seized power nearly four months ago to represent the country. This year's gathering of the WHO's main decision-making body, which began Monday and lasts through June 1, is considered one of the most important ever as the Covid-19 pandemic rages on. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the February 1 putsch, which has sparked near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement.

Rouhani urges greater 'competition' in Iran election



Iran's President Hassan Rouhani yesterday said he had asked the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to ensure greater "competition" in June elections after many prominent hopefuls were barred from running. "The heart of elections is competition. If you take that away it becomes a corpse," Rouhani said at a televised cabinet meeting. "I sent a letter to the supreme leader yesterday on what I had in mind and on whether he can help with this." Iran's candidate-vetting Guardian Council on Tuesday approved seven hopefuls to run in the June 18 poll to succeed Rouhani. The body disqualified moderate conservative Ali Larijani, the long-time parliament speaker and a Rouhani ally, as well as his first vice president, Eshaq Jhangiri, among other well-known names.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Electric and LED candles bearing the names of people killed by police illuminate the fist sculpture as people gather at the George Floyd Square to commemorate the first anniversary of Floyd's death, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US on Tuesday evening.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ANNIVERSARY OF GEORGE FLOYD'S DEATH

Family appeals to Biden to reform police

AFP, Washington

The family of George Floyd appealed Tuesday for sweeping police reform on the anniversary of the African American man's murder by a white officer, as they met President Joe Biden at the White House.

The president and Kamala Harris, America's first female and first Black vice president, hosted several of Floyd's relatives in the Oval Office after the family spoke to top lawmakers hoping for progress on reform.

"The Floyd family has shown extraordinary courage," Biden said after their meeting -- declaring himself "hopeful" that a deal could be struck after the Memorial Day holiday this weekend.

The legislation being considered to increase police accountability would be named after Floyd, who suffocated after being pinned down under the knee of Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020.

"If you can make federal laws to protect the bird, the bald eagle, you can make federal laws to protect people of color," Philonise Floyd, George's younger brother, said as he emerged from the private meeting.

The family later visited Black Lives Matter Plaza close to the White House, which became a focal point for demonstrations in the weeks after Floyd's death. Floyd's death sparked protests against racial injustice and police brutality across a country.

Chauvin, who knelt on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes as he passed out and died, is to be sentenced in June for murder and manslaughter.

The police reform bill would ban potentially fatal restraint techniques used on suspects, like chokeholds, and end so-called "no-knock warrants" that authorize police to burst into a suspect's house unannounced. The most far-reaching of the measures would be to end legal protections that block civil lawsuits against police accused of misconduct.

West waging 'hybrid war'

Defiant Belarus leader defends plane diversion, blasts critics, gets Russia's backing as West mulls sanctions

REUTERS, Moscow

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko yesterday said a journalist pulled off a plane that landed in Minsk had been plotting a bloody rebellion, and accused the West of waging a hybrid war against him.

In his defiant remarks, his first in public since he ordered a warplane to intercept a Ryanair flight between EU members Greece and Lithuania, he showed no hint of backing down from confrontation with countries that accuse him of air piracy.

"As we predicted, our ill-wishers from outside the country and from inside the country changed their methods of attack on the state," Lukashenko, 66, told parliament. "They have crossed many red lines and have abandoned common sense and human morals."

Belarus has already been subject to



EU and US sanctions since Lukashenko cracked down on pro-democracy protests after a disputed election last year. But his decision to intercept an international airliner flying through his country's air space and arrest a 26-year-old dissident journalist has brought a new level of condemnation and vows of far more serious action.

The journalist, Roman Protasevich, whose social media feed from exile had been one of the last remaining independent sources of news about Belarus, was shown on state TV on Monday confessing to organising

demonstrations. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called the footage "distressing" and Belarus opposition figures said it was proof he had been tortured.

Late on Tuesday, state TV broadcast a similar confession video of Sophia Sapega, a 23-year-old student arrested with Protasevich.

Europe's aviation regulator issued a bulletin yesterday urging all airlines to avoid Belarus airspace for safety reasons, saying the forced diversion of the Ryanair flight had put in question its ability to provide safe skies.

Lukashenko, in power since 1994, promised to respond harshly to any sanctions. In his remarks to parliament, Lukashenko said street protests were no longer possible in Belarus, perhaps signalling a further crackdown on opponents.

The Kremlin yesterday said that it had no reason to mistrust the Belarusian explanation of the events.

MIGRANT DEATHS IN THE MED

EU partly to blame: UN

REUTERS, Geneva

The European Union is partly to blame for deaths of migrants taking boats across the Mediterranean due to unanswered distress calls, obstruction of humanitarian rescue efforts, and so-called "pushbacks" to Libya, the United Nations said yesterday.

Thousands of refugees and migrants including many from Africa undertake long, dangerous journeys via Libya to Europe each year, often embarking on small, inflatable boats in search of a better life.

Death rates are rising and so far this year at least 632 people have died on that route, the UN rights office said in a 37-page report entitled "Lethal Disregard", calling this a "human tragedy on a massive scale".

The report found that the lack of migrant protection "is not a tragic anomaly, but rather a consequence of concrete policy decisions and practices by the Libyan authorities, European Union member states and institutions, and other actors."

PROBE ON TRUMP ORGANIZATION

New York prosecutors form grand jury: reports

AFP, New York

New York prosecutors have convened a grand jury that is expected to decide whether to indict former president Donald Trump, suggesting they may have found evidence of a crime, US media reported Tuesday.

The development is the latest step towards the 74-year-old Trump, who left the White House in January, possibly becoming the first ever ex-US leader to face criminal charges.

Investigators are examining whether the Trump Organization committed tax evasion, insurance and bank fraud.

Investigators suspect the Trump Organization may have artificially inflated and reduced the value of assets, particularly several properties in New York state, to either get bank loans or reduce their taxes.

Trump fired off a statement in response to the reports, rejecting the investigation as "purely political" and "a continuation of the greatest Witch Hunt in American history."

The grand jury was set up recently and will sit three days a week for six months, reported The Washington Post, citing two unnamed people familiar with the case.

The Washington Post said the move, also reported by ABC, suggests that Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance may have found evidence of a crime, if not by Trump then somebody close to him.

