

ADVERSE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

New US probe hits Instagram

AFP, Washington

A consortium of US states announced a joint probe Thursday of Instagram's parent company Meta for promoting the app to children despite allegedly knowing its potential for harm, in fresh regulatory trouble for the scandal-hit network.

The social media giant is battling one of its most serious reputational crises yet after a whistleblower leaked reams of internal documents showing executives knew of their sites' risks for teens' well-being, prompting a renewed US push for regulation.

"Facebook, now Meta, has failed to protect young people on its platforms and instead chose to ignore or, in some cases, double down on known manipulations that pose a real threat to physical and mental health -- exploiting children in the interest of profit," Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey said in a statement.

The consortium of attorneys general -- states' top law enforcers and legal advisors -- includes New York, Colorado, California, Florida, Kentucky, Nebraska, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Vermont.

The investigation targets, among other things, Meta's techniques for increasing the frequency and duration of engagement by young users and the resulting harms, said California Attorney General Rob Bonta.

It comes after "reports revealing that Meta's own internal research shows that using Instagram is associated with increased risks of physical and mental health harms on young people, including depression, eating disorders, and even suicide," Bonta's statement said.

Meta fired back at the probe, saying the allegations were untrue and that it has worked to protect youth online.

The recent leak of Facebook documents have underpinned a deluge of damning stories, including blaming CEO Mark Zuckerberg for his platform bending to state censors in Vietnam and highlighting how the site has stoked anger in the name of keeping users engaged.



Migrants gather at a transport and logistics centre near the Belarusian-Polish border in the Grodno region, Belarus, Belarus yesterday. Hundreds of migrants have again tried to cross the border from Belarus, Polish officials said yesterday, despite signs of an easing of the crisis after migrants left a makeshift encampment.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Quotes of the day



I want to be clear -- the United States doesn't want to limit your partnerships with other countries. We don't want to make you choose. We want to give you choices. Our approach will be sustainable, transparent and values-driven.

US TOP DIPLOMAT **ANTONY BLINKEN** LURES AFRICA AMID RISING CHINESE INFLUENCE



Of course the climate crisis isn't caused by private jets but it is a bit hypocritical ... that world leaders (who) live very close by, for instance Boris Johnson, arrived in Glasgow by private jet while trying to solve the climate crisis. That doesn't send the right message.

CLIMATE ACTIVIST **GRETA THUNBERG**



Generations to come will remember how the farmers of this country put their lives on the line and saved farming in this country.

INDIAN CONGRESS LEADER **RAHUL GANDHI**

MORE NEWS



Google to pay German media for online content

Google has said it had agreed a "milestone" deal with a number of German media outlets to pay for the use of their content online. The agreement is the first with publishers in Germany after the country legislated on so-called neighbouring rights, developed from an EU copyright directive and which have been at the heart of multiple disputes between internet giants and the media over payment for the use of online news and other content. German newspapers Zeit, Handelsblatt and Tagesspiegel, as well as weekly magazines are part to the deal with the tech company. Details as to the size of the deal were not given.

UK moves to ban Hamas as 'terrorist organisation'

Showing support for Hamas in Britain could be punished with 14 years in prison if the government succeeds in banning the group as a terrorist organisation, the Home Office said yesterday. Home Secretary Priti Patel will push for the change in parliament next week, seeking to bring Britain into line with the United States, which designated Hamas a terror group in 1995, and the European Union. Patel argued an outright ban under the Terrorism Act 2000 was necessary because it was not possible to distinguish between Hamas' political and military wing. The al-Qassam Brigades military wing of the Islamist movement that rules the Gaza Strip has been banned in Britain since March 2001.

Pakistan drops chemical castration for serial rapists

Pakistan has removed a clause from a new criminal law that had allowed chemical castration as a possible punishment for serial rapists, a government official said yesterday. "We have amended the criminal law, and decided that the chemical castration clause will be taken out," Maleeka Bukhari, parliamentary secretary on law, told a news conference. She said the decision was taken after the Islamic Ideology Council, a state-run body that interprets laws from an Islamic perspective, found chemical castration un-Islamic. Chemical castration, which is carried out by the use of drugs and is reversible, can be a punishment for some sex crimes in countries including Poland, South Korea and some US states.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Another Covid-19 wave grips Europe

Cases surge across continent; Austria imposes full lockdown, Germany may follow

REUTERS, Vienna/Berlin

Austria will become the first country in western Europe to reimpose a full Covid-19 lockdown, it said yesterday as neighbouring Germany warned it may follow suit, sending shivers through financial markets worried about the economic fallout.

A fourth wave of infections has plunged Germany, Europe's largest economy, into a national emergency, Health Minister Jens Spahn said. He urged people to reduce their social contacts, warning that vaccinations alone would not reduce case numbers.

Austria said it would require the whole population to be vaccinated as of February.

Roughly two-thirds of Austria's population is fully vaccinated against Covid-19, one of the lowest rates in western Europe. Its infections are among the highest on the continent, with a seven-day incidence of 991 per 100,000 people.

"We have not succeeded in

convincing enough people to get vaccinated," Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg told a news conference, saying the lockdown would start on Monday and the requirement to be vaccinated on Feb. 1.



"It hurts that such measures still have to be taken." Asked if Germany could rule out an Austrian-style full lockdown, Spahn said: "We are now in a situation - even if this produces a news alert - where we can't rule anything out. "We are in a national emergency," he told a news conference.

European stocks retreated from record highs, while government bond yields, oil prices and the euro tumbled as the spectre of a fresh Covid-linked lockdown in Germany and other parts of Europe cast a fresh shadow over the global economy.

As cases rises again across Europe, a number of governments have started to reimpose limits on activity, ranging from Austria's full lockdown, to a partial lockdown in the Netherlands, to restrictions on the unvaccinated in parts of Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Hungary reported 11,289 new Covid-19 cases yesterday, its highest daily tally, and will make booster shots mandatory for all healthcare workers and require mask wearing in most indoor places from Saturday.

While the new measures across Europe are not seen hitting the economy as much as the all-out lockdowns of last year, analysts say they could weigh on the recovery in the last quarter of the

year, especially if they hit the retail and hospitality sectors.

A full lockdown in Germany would be more serious, however.

"A total lockdown for Germany would be extremely bad news for the economic recovery," said Ludovic Colin, a senior portfolio manager at Swiss asset manager Vontobel.

"It's exactly what we saw in July, August of this year in parts of the world where the delta (variant) was big, it (Covid-19) came back and it slows down the recovery again," he added.

The pressure on intensive care units in Germany had not yet reached its peak, Spahn said, urging people to reduce contacts to help break the wave.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Thursday Germany will limit large parts of public life in areas where hospitals are becoming dangerously full of Covid-19 patients to those who have either been vaccinated or have recovered from the illness.



Palestinian protesters carry an injured man during clashes with Israeli security forces following a demonstration against settlements in the village of Beita in the occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

50 migrant workers died in Qatar in 2020: report

AFP, Doha

Fifty migrant workers died in Qatar last year and over 500 were seriously injured, the UN's International Labour Organization said Friday, as the Gulf nation readies for the 2022 World Cup.

The report comes amid criticism of working conditions for hundreds of thousands of migrant labourers -- including those who built the stadiums for the World Cup.

The ILO report, entitled "One is too many", said that the top cause of fatalities were falls -- with most happening at the workplace.

Qatar, which has made a series of labour reforms since being selected to host the football tournament, welcomed the report saying it "highly values" its collaboration with the ILO.

"Severe occupational injuries were most commonly caused by falls, followed by road traffic injuries, falling objects and machinery," the report read.

"Thirty (deaths) occurred pre-hospital and 20 occurred in hospital," it added, which ILO says is the most comprehensive picture ever of work-related deaths in the country.

The ILO said that there were 506 recorded severe injuries -- an average of 42 a month -- with 37,600 people suffering mild to moderate injuries. Most of those injured came from Bangladesh, India and Nepal, and worked mainly in the construction industry.

The report said it also identified gaps in data collection.

Qatar has issued a string of reforms to its employment regulations since being selected to host the World Cup, including introducing a \$275 monthly minimum wage and simplifying the process for changing employers.

More than two million foreigners work in Qatar, many employed directly or indirectly on vast infrastructure projects for the World Cup.

UN WANTS PROOF OF MISSING CHINESE TENNIS STAR'S WELL-BEING

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations said yesterday it wants proof of the whereabouts of Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai, missing ever since she made sexual assault allegations against a former vice-premier.

The UN Human Rights Office called for a fully-transparent investigation into the former Grand Slam doubles champion's claims against Zhang Gaoli.

"It would be important to have proof of her whereabouts and well-being and we would urge that there be an investigation with full transparency into her allegations of sexual assault," Liz Throssell, a spokeswoman for UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet's office, told reporters in Geneva.

"According to available information, Peng, a former world doubles number one, hasn't been heard from publicly since she alleged on social media that



she had been sexually assaulted.

Peng, 35, a former Wimbledon and French Open doubles champion, alleged on the Chinese social media site Weibo earlier this month that former vice-premier Zhang had "forced" her into sex during a long-term on-off relationship.

The claims were quickly scrubbed from the Twitter-like platform and she has not been seen since, drawing mounting concern over her wellbeing.

9-HR RANT TO FOIL BIDEN'S AGENDA!

AFP, Washington

House Democrats postponed to Friday a vote on US President Joe Biden's historic package of social welfare reforms as the leader of the minority Republicans' gave a nine-hour speech.

Kevin McCarthy was supposed to talk for one minute ahead of a Thursday evening vote in the lower chamber of Congress to advance the \$1.8 trillion Build Back Better Act as he took the floor just after 8:30 pm. But he stopped speaking at about 05:10 am after tackling everything from criticising Biden to foreign affairs and artwork hanging in his office.

DIET-RELATED ILLNESS INCREASES WITH AVAILABILITY OF RED MEAT

AFP, Paris

As global trade in red and processed meats has increased, so have chronic diseases associated with meat consumption, a study looking at data from 154 countries found on Thursday.

Researchers focused on illness and death rates from three diseases strongly linked to red and processed meat consumption: colorectal cancer, type-2 diabetes and coronary heart disease.

They drew on meat import and export figures from the FAO to find out where in the world red and processed meats had become more available.

They then checked these findings against health data from the Global Burden of Disease project.

"The increased intake of red and processed meat products via trade caused the abrupt increase of diet-related non-communicable diseases," the study

published in the British Medical Journal concluded.

The adverse effects of a diet high in red and processed meats is well known.

But the international trade of these products also has far-reaching impacts on the climate, through greenhouse gas emissions, and biodiversity loss, through shrinking habitat, the study noted.

They calculated a worldwide increase in related deaths of nearly 75 percent between 1993 and 2018, with major variations by geographical region. While they estimated a 55 percent rise in related deaths in developed countries, the rate of increase in developing countries was more than double: 157 percent.

"These higher rates are because many developing countries around the world exponentially relied on red and processed meat imports to meet their increased meat demands under rapid urbanisation and income growth," the study says.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



OCTOBER 20

1815 - Second Treaty of Paris: France and her allies agree France will pay indemnities after Battle of Waterloo, ending the Napoleonic Wars.

1945 - Twenty-four German World War Two leaders went on trial for war crimes in Nuremberg.

SOURCE: REUTERS