

ADVERTISING COOKIES

France slaps \$64m fine on Microsoft

AFP, Paris

France's privacy watchdog yesterday said it has fined US tech giant Microsoft 60 million euros (\$64 million) for foisting advertising cookies on users.

In the largest fine imposed in 2022, the National Commission for Technology and Freedoms (CNIL) said Microsoft's search engine Bing had not set up a system allowing users to refuse cookies as simply as accepting them.

The French regulator said that after investigations it found that "when users visited this site, cookies were deposited on their terminal without their consent, while these cookies were used, among others, for advertising purposes."

Bing offered a button for the user to immediately accept all cookies, but two clicks were need to refuse them, it said.

The CNIL said the fine was justified in part because of the profits the company made from advertising profits indirectly generated from the data collected via cookies - tiny data files that track online browsing.

The company has been given three months to rectify the issue, with a potential further penalty of 60,000 euros per day overdue. The fine was issued to Microsoft Ireland, where the company has its European base.



Afghan women chant slogans to protest against the ban on university education for women, in Kabul, yesterday. Some of the protesters were arrested, reports said.

PHOTO: AFP

Netanyahu forms new Israel govt

AFP, Jerusalem

Veteran leader Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he had formed a new Israeli government, returning to power as the head of the most right-wing coalition in Israel's history.

Following his November 1 election win, Netanyahu secured a mandate to form a government backed by ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties and an extreme-right bloc. That result left him poised to end Israel's unprecedented era of political gridlock that forced five elections in less than four years.

Netanyahu, who is fighting corruption allegations in court, has already served as premier longer than anyone in Israeli history, including a 1996 to 1999 stint and a record 12-year tenure from 2009 to 2021.

His mandate to conclude coalition talks had been set to expire at midnight Wednesday. Minutes before the deadline, he informed President Isaac Herzog by phone that he had "been able to establish a government," a statement from Netanyahu's office said.

Palestinian militant killed
Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian militant during an incursion into the West Bank city of Nablus early yesterday, Palestinian sources said. The Palestinian health ministry said Ahmed Atef Daraghme, 23, a footballer from the nearby town of Tulkarem, sustained bullet wounds to the back and foot. Islamist group Hamas said he was a member of its military wing.

Prepare for a 'tragic battle'

China hospital warns its staff as Covid cases expected to explode; India starts testing 2pc of int'l travellers

AGENCIES

A Shanghai hospital has told its staff to prepare for a "tragic battle" with Covid-19 as it expects half of the city's 25 million people will get infected by the end of next week, while the virus sweeps through China largely unchecked.

After widespread protests against strict mitigation measures, China this month began dismantling its "zero-Covid" regime, which had taken a great financial and psychological toll on its 1.4 billion people.

China's official death count since the pandemic began three years ago stands at 5,241 - a fraction of what most other countries faced - but now looks bound to rise sharply.

China reported no new Covid deaths for a second consecutive day on Wednesday, even as funeral parlour workers say demand for their services has increased sharply over the past week.

Authorities - who have narrowed the criteria for Covid deaths,

prompting criticism from many disease experts - confirmed 389,306 cases with symptoms.

Some experts say official case figures have become an unreliable guide as less testing is being done following the easing of restrictions.



Infections in China are likely to be more than a million a day with deaths at more than 5,000 a day, a "stark contrast" from official data, British-based health data firm Airfinity said this week.

The Shanghai Deji Hospital, posting on its WeChat account late on Wednesday, estimated there were about 5.43 million positives in the city and that 12.5 million in China's main commercial hub will

get infected by the end of the year.

"This year's Christmas Eve, New Year's Day, and the Lunar New Year are destined to be unsafe," said the private hospital, which employs some 400 staff.

"In this tragic battle, the entire Greater Shanghai will fall, ... and we cannot escape."

Experts say China could face more than a million COVID deaths next year, given relatively low full vaccination rates among its vulnerable elderly population.

China's vaccination rate is over 90% but the rate for adults who have received booster shots drops to 57.9%, and to 42.3% for people aged 80 and above, govt data shows.

Meanwhile, India yesterday began randomly testing 2 percent of international passengers arriving at its airports for Covid-19 but said there is no plan yet to stop flights from countries which reported new cases of the virus.

India's top medical body has advised people to avoid foreign travel, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Chile to open embassy 'in Palestine'

AFP, Santiago

President Gabriel Boric of Chile, whose country has the largest Palestinian population outside of the Middle East, said Wednesday that he planned to open an embassy "in Palestine". The announcement by the leftist president, who began his four-year term in March 2022, came at a Christmas ceremony for Chile's Palestinian community, estimated to be more than 300,000 strong. Chile in 1998 opened a representative office to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, and in 2011 recognized Palestine as a state and supported its entrance to UNESCO.

Winter storm threatens US holiday travel chaos

AFP, Washington

US forecasters yesterday warned of life-threatening weather as a "once-in-a-generation" winter storm threatened to wreak havoc on holiday travel plans for millions of Americans. Airlines told travellers to brace for delays and cancellations as an Arctic cold front gripped the central United States on Wednesday. It was expected to sweep through the Midwest and head towards the East Coast tomorrow, just before Christmas. The forecast also warned of wind chill temperatures as low as -40 degrees Celsius in some areas, urging people to take precautions.

Trump paid no income tax in 2020

REUTERS, Washington

Donald Trump paid no income tax during the final full year of his presidency as he reported a loss from his sprawling business interests, according to tax figures released by a congressional panel. The records, released late on Tuesday by the Democratic-led House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee after a years-long fight, show that Trump's income, and his tax liability, fluctuated dramatically during his four years in the White House. The records cut against the Republican ex-president's long cultivated image as a successful businessman as he mounts another bid for the White

House. Trump and his wife, Melania, paid some form of tax during all four years, the documents showed, but were able to minimize their income taxes in several years as income from Trump's businesses was more than offset by deductions and losses.



"It is important that almost everything we do is climate resilient"

There is a sustainable way to provide waste management services through service-level agreements between corporations and municipal communities. We are using this approach to tackle the problem of plastic waste by organizing people to collect and process it in a way that creates a valuable product, such as fuel. This not only provides a source of revenue for the service, but also helps to reach many people who currently lack access to waste management systems.

Sarah Roberts, Chief Executive Officer of Practical Action, recently visited Bangladesh. During a conversation with The Daily Star's Tanjim Ferdous, she discussed the various development initiatives that Practical Action is currently working on in Bangladesh, as well as their future plans for the country.

The Daily Star (TDS): What are the areas of focus for Practical Action's work in Bangladesh?

Sarah Roberts (SR): Practical Action is an international development organization that has been operating for over 50 years in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. According to our founder, "development had to start from the realities and needs of people living in poverty."

In Bangladesh, we are working in four areas. Our goal is to make cities livable and enjoyable for everyone, including the urban poor, by working with municipal authorities to find long-term solutions for sanitation and waste management. We are providing these services to people living in difficult circumstances.

We are working to ensure that everyone has access to clean, safe, and affordable energy. We are also supporting smallholder farming communities, particularly those at risk of climate change, to have long-term sustainable livelihoods. In today's world, it is important that almost everything we do is climate resilient. Therefore, we are ensuring that the lives and livelihoods of the urban and rural poor can be adapted to face the future in a changing world.

TDS: In addition to these four priorities, what is Practical Action's next plan for Bangladesh? Will you be expanding to other sectors as well?

SR: We plan to continue working on these priority areas, as we have had success in these areas in the past. Our goal is to measure what works in different contexts and settings, based on where people live and how they can lift themselves out of poverty with the right support. We also have a range of partners, including local NGOs,



Sarah Roberts, Chief Executive Officer of Practical Action

working to support the rural and urban poor in Bangladesh. These partners are collaborating with municipal authorities and the private sector to ensure that meaningful changes can be delivered.

TDS: What are the achievements or impacts that Practical Action has created in poverty reduction in Bangladesh?

SR: One of the challenges of rapidly growing urbanization is providing affordable, effective waste management services to communities. However, I recently saw a waste treatment center in Faridpur that is capable of turning faecal sludge into bioenergy products, adding value to the waste stream. This suggests that the situation may be improving.

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approach to tackle the problem of plastic waste by organizing people to collect and process it in a way that creates a valuable product, such as fuel. This not only provides a source of revenue for the service, but also helps to reach many people who currently lack access to waste management systems.

We visited areas that are at high risk of flooding and saw a positive change: people are saving money for the future to use as a resource in times of crisis. We are also working with local authorities to implement early warning systems and ensure that the messages reach everyone in a way that is easily understandable. This is part of our national approach to addressing this issue.

TDS: We would like to know about climate credit or financing and how Bangladeshis can access the resilience fund. What role does Practical Action play in that regard?

SR: One of the things I have come to

learn since I have been here is that a lot of Bangladeshis do not have the access to clean cooking. And that is so important in terms of health, cost and fuel efficiency. The finance to roll out solutions, in terms of reaching everyone who needs modern energy in affordable ways, is not happening faster in Bangladesh.

We have been discussing how we can put together some really good proposals that can access that kind of finance. We are hoping to get some innovative carbon finance to see if we can develop insurance products that would work for the smallholders' farmers because there is going to be a risk from climate impacts and finding a type of insurance product affordable.

It is really important to have affordable clean energy. So, it is one of our objectives. In fact, we host an organisation called The Global Distributors Collective, which brings together all sorts of organisations that are trying to get clean cooking, home

systems, renewable energy, and other kinds of life-changing products to those who really need them.

TDS: Do you want to mention any innovation that has amazed you?

SR: In 2005, I visited char lands where there were no agricultural activities. Our team conducted an experiment where they grew pumpkins for six months during a period when the water level was high. The trial was successful, and over time it expanded to five regions. The productivity was very high, and the produce is now sold in 17 regions and six overseas markets, benefiting 100,000 people. This project doubled the income of those living in the area, and it was highly impactful. What amazed me was how the project spread, and this is exactly the kind of impact we strive for at Practical Action.

TDS: What changes would you recommend to improve the effectiveness of development interventions in Bangladesh?

SR: Bangladesh is a fascinating place for me, with its rich history and impressive development progress. In my discussions with various organizations here, I have been struck by the effective combination of different forms of governance at work. I have had the opportunity to attend meetings with union councils and see first-hand how local government is functioning. It is crucial to have strong disaster management systems in place at the local, regional, and national levels in order to reach those in need. Bangladesh also has a vibrant local NGO sector, and it is important for us to continue working with a variety of partners to sustain and build upon the development gains made in the country.

TDS: Any advice for the young people of Bangladesh on how they can contribute to development intervention?

SR: It is crucial that everyone is focused on the actions they can take to address the impacts of climate change. In my opinion, the agriculture sector in Bangladesh has the potential to drive innovations and take the industry to the next level through these efforts.