

Meta to restore Trump's accounts

AFP, San Francisco

Social networking giant Meta announced Tuesday that it would soon reinstate former US president Donald Trump's accounts on Facebook and Instagram with "new guardrails," two years after he was banned over the 2021 assault on the Capitol.

"We will be reinstating Mr. Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts in the coming weeks," said a statement by Nick Clegg, Meta's president of global affairs.

It was not clear when or if Trump, who has already announced a third White House bid, will return to the platforms, and his representatives did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Facebook banned Trump a day after the January 6, 2021 insurrection, when a mob of his supporters tried to halt the certification of his election defeat to Joe Biden by storming the US Capitol in Washington.

Myanmar opium cultivation surging: UN

REUTERS

Opium cultivation in military-ruled Myanmar jumped 33 percent last year, reversing a six-year downward trend in the strife-torn country, a United Nations report said yesterday.

The growth was "directly connected" to the political and economic turmoil in Myanmar since the military took power in a coup nearly two years ago, an official at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said.

Myanmar's economy has declined since the coup, with the kyat currency plummeting against the dollar and food and fuel prices spiralling upwards.

The cultivated area in 2022 expanded by a third to 40,100 hectares (99,000 acres), while the average estimated yield rose 41% to nearly 20 kg (44 lb) per hectare, the highest value since the UNODC started keeping records in 2002, the report said.

The eastern Shan State, which borders China, Thailand and Laos, saw the biggest increase in cultivation, at 39%.

The value of opium produced annually in Myanmar can reach up to \$2 billion, with much of the drug smuggled out to neighbouring countries, the report added.



People take shelter inside a metro station during massive Russian missile attacks in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

REPUBLIC DAY PARADE India showcases military might and diversity



REUTERS, New Delhi

India showcased its military and its cultural diversity in a colourful parade yesterday at the revamped colonial avenue in New Delhi to mark Republic Day, the anniversary of the day the country's secular Constitution came into effect in 1950.

Several thousand people watched the parade from seats around Kartavya Path - or path of duty - braving the cold on a foggy morning in New Delhi, while millions more watched on television. Known as Rajpath since independence, and as King's Way

during British colonial rule, the ceremonial central boulevard was renamed in September last year.

Accompanied by marching bands, troops from the country's military, border and police forces paced in perfect synchronisation towards the dais where President Droupadi Murmu took the salute.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was the chief guest for the event and 144 soldiers from the Arab nation's armed forces also participated.

India's PM Narendra Modi, chief of defence staff and the three service chiefs were also present at the parade, which featured more

women in the military contingents.

The country's rich and diverse heritage was showcased in vibrant tableaux from different states and ministries, highlighting the central theme of 'nari shakti' or women power.

The army's tableaux comprised only locally-made weapons, reflecting India's drive to become more self-reliant in the defence sector. The event climaxed with a flypast by 45 aircraft of the Indian Air Force, with French-made Rafales, Russian-made Su-30s and the Indian-made Tejas fighter jets putting on an impressive aeronautical display.

Protest as fate of Beirut blast probe hangs in balance

REUTERS, Beirut

More than 200 people protested outside Lebanon's justice palace yesterday over efforts to derail an investigation into the deadly 2020 Beirut port explosion, as top judges cancelled a meeting to discuss the fate of the inquiry.

Judge Tarek Bitar announced on Monday he was resuming his investigation into the blast that killed more than 220 people, after a 13-month suspension caused by legal wrangling and high-level political pressure.

But Lebanon's top public prosecutor Ghassan Oweidat objected, filed charges against Bitar for allegedly mishandling the inquiry, and released the remaining 17 detainees still held over the investigation.

Yesterday, Oweidat - himself charged by Bitar this week with unspecified offences - issued an additional decision telling the judiciary not to accept any orders, warrants or other documents issued by Bitar.

The explosion, one of the largest non-nuclear blasts on record, was caused by hundreds of tonnes of ammonium nitrate that had been unloaded at the port in 2013.

Egypt unveils golden mummy

AFP, Saqqara

Egypt yesterday unveiled a gold-laced mummy and four tombs, including of an ancient king's "secret keeper", discovered in the Saqqara necropolis south of Cairo.

The vast burial site at the ancient Egyptian capital Memphis, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to more than a dozen pyramids, animal graves and old Coptic Christian monasteries.

Archaeologist Zahi Hawass, Egypt's former antiquities minister, announced the latest discovery, dating from the fifth and sixth dynasties -- around the 25th to the 22nd centuries BC -- to reporters at the dig site.

Down a 15-metre shaft, the expedition also found a large limestone sarcophagus that had remained sealed "just as the ancient Egyptians left it 4,300 years ago", Hawass said.

Inside was a mummy featuring "gold-leaf covering" that belonged to a man named Hekashepes, according to Hawass, who described it as one of the oldest and most complete non-royal mummies ever found in the country.

Egypt has unveiled many major archaeological discoveries in recent years.

Critics say the flurry of excavations has prioritised finds shown to grab media attention over hard academic research.

But the discoveries have been a key component of Egypt's attempts to revive its vital tourism industry after years of political unrest, as well as after the Covid pandemic.

The government's plans -- the crowning jewel of which is the long-delayed inauguration of the Grand Egyptian Museum at the foot of the pyramids in Giza -- aim to draw in 30 million tourists a year by 2028, up from 13 million before the pandemic.



ASYLUM POLICY

EU wants to send more people back to 'home'

REUTERS, Stockholm

European Union migration ministers were set to meet yesterday to discuss visa restrictions and better coordination inside the bloc to be able to send more people with no right to asylum in Europe back to their home countries.

Three years after the 27-nation EU agreed to restrict visas for countries deemed failing to cooperate on taking their people back, only Gambia has been formally punished.

The EU's executive European Commission proposed similar steps vis-a-vis Iraq, Senegal and Bangladesh, though two EU officials said cooperation with Dhaka on returning people has since improved.

Still, the EU's overall rate of effective returns stood at 21% in 2021, according to Eurostat data, the latest available.

"That is a level that member states consider unacceptably low," said one of the EU officials.

Immigration is a highly politically sensitive topic in the bloc where member countries would much rather discuss stepping up returns, as well as reducing

irregular immigration in the first place, than revive their bitter feuds over how to share out the task of caring for those who make it to Europe and win the right to stay.

"Establishing an effective and common EU system for returns is a central pillar of well-functioning and credible migration and asylum systems," the Commission said in a discussion paper for the ministers, which was seen by Reuters.

Some 160,000 people made it across the Mediterranean in 2022, according to U.N. data, the main route to Europe for people fleeing wars and poverty in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia. On top of that, nearly 8 million Ukrainian refugees were also registered across Europe.

The ministers meet two weeks before the 27 EU national leaders gather in Brussels to discuss migration, and are also expected to call to send more people away.

"Swift action is needed to ensure effective returns from the European Union to countries of origin using as leverage all relevant EU policies," read a draft of their joint statement, which was also seen by Reuters.



Employees of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, take part in an anti-government demonstration to propose tax reforms against country's economic crisis, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP