

## 'POLLS DISINFO' EU probes Facebook, Instagram

AFP, Brussels

The EU yesterday launched an investigation into Meta's Facebook and Instagram over concerns the platforms are failing to counter disinformation ahead of EU elections in June.

The probe is under the EU's new Digital Services Act, a landmark law that cracks down on illegal content online and forces the world's biggest tech companies to do more to protect users online.

The European Commission said it suspected Meta's moderation of adverts was "insufficient" and that an increase in paid spots in those conditions could harm "electoral processes".

Facebook and Instagram are among 23 "very large" online platforms that must comply with the DSA or risk fines up running up to six percent of a platform's global turnover, or even a ban for egregious cases.

## 7 Maoist rebels killed in India

AFP, Raipur

At least seven Maoist insurgents were shot dead by Indian security forces yesterday, police told AFP, the latest clash in a decades-long conflict waged in the country's wild central forests.

The guerrillas were killed in a remote part of the central state of Chhattisgarh.

Security deployments in the state have been bolstered in the past month with India currently in the middle of a six-week general election.

"Bodies of seven Maoists have been recovered," a police official told AFP.

Two of the cadres killed were women, he said, adding that a large quantity of weapons including automatic firearms had been recovered.



US Capitol Police remove a pro-Palestinian protester as US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin testifies on the Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request during a US House Armed Services Committee hearing, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## G7 to phase out coal power plants by mid-2030s

AFP, Turin

G7 energy and climate ministers yesterday agreed a timeframe for phasing out coal-fired power plants, setting a goal in the mid-2030s, in a move hailed as significant by some environmentalists but described as "too late" by others.

The Group of Seven two-day meeting in Turin is the first big political session since the world pledged at the UN's COP28 annual climate summit in Dubai in December to transition away from coal, oil and gas.

The G7 commits to "phase out existing unabated coal power generation in our energy systems during the first half of 2030s," the final statement read.

However, it left some wiggle room, saying nations could follow "a timeline consistent with keeping a limit of 1.5-degrees Celsius temperature rise within reach,

in line with countries' net zero pathways".

It also preserves a place for coal power if it is "abated", meaning its emissions are captured or limited by technology -- something planned by



many as unproven and a distraction from cutting fossil fuel use.

The G7 members are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Negotiations over a fixed date were reportedly tricky. Some countries, and many environmentalists, had been pushing for a 2030 limit, but

Japan -- which relies heavily on coal -- was reluctant to set a date at all.

The leaders of the G7 countries will produce their own statement after a summit in southern Italy in June.

The 2015 Paris Agreement saw countries agree to cap global warming at "well below" 2C above preindustrial times -- with a safer limit of 1.5C if possible.

To keep the 1.5C limit in play, the UN's climate expert panel has said emissions need to be slashed almost in half this decade, but they continue to rise.

The G7 ministers also tackled the thorny issue of plastic pollution amid a heated debate over how to best design a treaty addressing the scourge.

The ministers said they "aspired" to reduce and if necessary restrain the global production of plastic, and renewed their commitments to end plastic pollution by 2040.

## AFGHANISTAN 6 killed in mosque attack

AFP, Herat

A gunman stormed a mosque in western Afghanistan and killed six people, a government spokesman said yesterday, with local residents claiming the minority Shia community had been targeted.

An official said that "an unknown armed person shot at civilian worshippers in a mosque" in Herat province's Guzara district on Monday at around 9:00pm.

While no group has claimed the attack, the regional chapter of the Islamic State (IS) group frequently targeted Shia communities in the past.

## King Charles III resumes public duties

AFP, London

King Charles III yesterday reportedly told fellow cancer patients "I'm well", as he carried out his first official public engagement since being diagnosed with the condition. The British head of state appeared relaxed as he and his wife Queen Camilla met patients and staff at the University College Hospital Macmillan Cancer Centre in central London. Charles, 75, suspended most of his duties in February after cancer was found while he was being treated for an enlarged prostate the previous month. The exact nature of his cancer has not been disclosed but doctors said last week they were "very encouraged" by the progress of his treatment as an out-patient and "positive" about his recovery.

## HEAVY APRIL RAINS

## 143 killed in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

At least 143 people died in Pakistan from lightning strikes and other storm-related incidents in April, with the country receiving more than twice as much rain as usual for the month, officials said yesterday. April brought flash floods, landslides and inclement weather that caused houses to collapse in some areas and destroyed crops in others. The largest death toll for April was in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where 83 people died. In Punjab, a total of 21 people were killed in different rain-related incidents. Another 21 deaths were reported in Balochistan province. In parts of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, 14 people were killed, and at least four were killed in road accidents linked to floods in Sindh province.

## HUSH MONEY TRIAL

## Trump fined for violating court order

AFP, New York

The New York judge presiding over Donald Trump's hush money trial yesterday fined the former president for defying a gag order and warned that further violations could result in jail time. Judge Juan Merchan held the 77-year-old Trump in contempt of court for breaching an order that he not publicly attack witnesses, jurors or court staff and their relatives. Merchan fined Trump \$1,000 each for nine specific violations of the gag order, and instructed him to remove seven "offending posts" from his Truth Social account and two from a campaign website by yesterday afternoon.



## 60pc DSA cases filed by agencies, govt or AL activists

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study period [October 2018 - August 2022].

This means more politicians were arrested last year, in the run-up to the January 7 national election.

"We have data regarding the professions of 1,534 individuals sued," said Prof Ali Riaz, distinguished professor of political science at Illinois State University, while presenting the findings at an online event yesterday.

At least 495 politicians were sued under the DSA, making them a third of all those prosecuted and at least a quarter of those arrested, according to the research. Addressing the seminar, Dr Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary general of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik, said, "The quiet now is uncanny. This law is to blame for it. We don't know who will be prosecuted at what point and for what frivolous reason. These laws have been used against political opponents."

Meanwhile, journalists constitute another third of those prosecuted.

At least 451 journalists were sued under the DSA since its inception, and 255 of them were sued for their journalistic reports.

At least 97 journalists, of them 50 working for outlets outside the capital, were arrested, said the research paper.

Of the accused, 209 journalists are associated with national-level media and 197 with regional media outlets.

Online media journalists from outside Dhaka form the largest group of journalists -- 113 -- sued under the DSA.

"Journalists outside Dhaka are the most vulnerable," said Prof Riaz.

Journalists have been accused under

the DSA by 202 people.

Of the accusers, 124 are "aggrieved parties", while 61 were individuals who had not been directly impacted by the news or any other actions of these journalists.

"When the law was rolled out, journalists internalised it. By punishing one, you teach a lesson to 10 others. Editors should be deciding what journalists should and should not write -- but journalists decide by themselves that they will stay quiet," said Prof Riaz.

At least 28 minors were sued under the DSA and 22 of them were arrested, found CGS, calling the situation deeply disconcerting.

It said, "The law allowed anyone to file a case, even if he/she is not an aggrieved party. Such provision of the law, especially in a very polarised socio-political environment and highly politicised law enforcement agencies, opened the door for vigilante justice."

According to CGS data, 190 cases have been filed alleging that the accused had defamed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Of them, 92 were lodged by activists of the ruling party, while law enforcers filed another 31.

A total of 80 cases were lodged for the alleged defamation of ministers, and the majority of them were filed by people who were not directly aggrieved, instead of the ministers concerned. This too mostly constituted of ruling party affiliates.

"Give bail to all arrested under DSA," urged Prof Riaz, adding that since the law itself has been replaced by the Cyber Security Act last year, the "offences" should not logically still be valid.

### OCT 2018 - SEPT 2023

DSA cases filed

1,436

People accused

4,520

## ACCUSERS

AL activists

263

Filed by other party activists

9

'Aggrieved parties'

124

Individuals not directly impacted

61

Law enforcers

31

## ACCUSED

Politicians

495

Journalists

451

Minors

28

## Relatives of AL MPs

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members of former minister and MP of Lalmonirhat 2 Nuruzzaman Ahmed, former minister and MP of Cumilla-10 AHM Mustafa Kamal, Habiganj-3 AL MP Abu Zahir, Pabna-3 AL MP Mokbul Hossain, among others, are participating the election.

In the first phase of the polls held on May 8, almost 50 relatives of AL lawmakers participated.

Prior to that election, the AL directed its lawmakers to make their family members and close

relatives withdraw from the race. Only Lutful Habib, brother-in-law of State Minister Zunaïd Ahmed Palak, withdrew from the race in Singra, Natore.

Although the BNP has shunned the election, around 40 local leaders of the party and its front organisations are participating in the second phase, up from around 30 in the first phase.

BNP yesterday expelled four leaders for ignoring the instruction, taking the number of expulsions over the polls to 80.

## Rafah offensive

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had raised cautious hopes for an end to the fighting.

The Palestinian militant group said it was considering a plan for a 40-day ceasefire and the exchange of scores of hostages for larger numbers of Palestinian prisoners.

The group, whose envoys returned from Cairo talks to their base in Qatar, would "discuss the ideas and the proposal", said a Hamas source, adding that "we are keen to respond as quickly as possible".

## Noab, Editors' Council slam restrictions

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increase the public's mistrust of the sector. At the same time, it will further encourage irregularities and corruption in the banking and financial sector," it continued.

The statement also said, "The central bank is one of the most important institutions of any country's economy and people's trust. It is necessary to ensure free flow of information to build a sustainable banking sector in the long term and strengthen people's confidence in this sector."

"For the last 53 years after independence, journalists have played a role in ensuring accountability in the banking and financial sector of the country, as well as meeting the public's information needs through free access

to the central bank and gathering information," it added.

On Thursday, Mezbahul Haque, spokesperson of Bangladesh Bank, said that henceforth, journalists will only be able to visit the spokesperson and other officials of the bank at its building through using a specific permit issued by the bank.

"If an officer gives passes to journalists, then only that officer can be met. However, journalists will not be able to enter any department of the central bank freely as before," he added.

The Noab and the Editors' Council also termed Mezbahul's speech as an expression of the undeclared ban on the entry of journalists.

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