

International

Facebook removes Brazil leader's video linking COVID shots to AIDS

'Facebook Papers' hit as platform reports billions in profit

News in brief

Zionists hold air force drill

OVDA: Zionists are holding their largest-ever air force exercise this week, joined by several Western countries and India, with the United Arab Emirates' air force chief set to inspect the drills. Amir Lazar, chief of air force operations, told reporters the drills "don't focus on Iran", but army officials have said the Islamic republic remains the top strategic threat and at the centre of much of its military planning. Zionist entity has held the "Blue Flag" exercises every two years since 2013 in the Negev desert. Some preliminary exercises began last week. Other nations taking part this year include France, the United States and Germany, as well as Britain, whose aircraft flew over Zionist territory for the first time since the Jewish state's creation in 1948. With more than 70 fighter jets-including Mirage 2000s, Rafales and F-16s-and about 1,500 personnel participating, the drills are the largest-ever held in Zionist entity, Lazar told reporters at the southern Ovda airbase. — AFP

Ethiopia hits 'training centre'

NAIROBI: Ethiopia's military yesterday launched another air strike in war-torn Tigray, hitting what a government official called a rebel training facility just outside the regional capital Mekele. Tigray was pounded by near-daily aerial bombardments last week in a sign the military was stepping up its use of air power in the year-long war against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The bombings in the northern and western parts of Tigray have drawn international censure, and disrupted UN access to the region where an estimated 400,000 people face famine-like conditions under a de-facto aid blockade. The latest strike was in Quiha, a town five kilometers east of Mekele, which the TPLF recaptured from government forces in June and has held ever since. — AFP

Gunmen kill 16 worshippers

KANO: Gunmen have killed 16 worshippers at a mosque in central Nigeria, a government official said yesterday, in the latest violence in the restive region. Scores of gunmen on motorcycles stormed Maza-Kuka village in Mashegu district of Niger state on Monday and opened fire during morning prayers, said Ahmed Ibrahim Matane, the secretary to the government. "The bandits shot dead 16 people inside the mosque while they were praying," Matane said. Three worshippers were injured in the attack, one of them critically, he added. Matane said one other person was killed in nearby Kaboji village as the gunmen fled the area. "We are still investigating the motive of the attack and we have dispatched military and police personnel to the area," he said. A police spokesman confirmed the attack but did not provide details. — AFP

Killing spree: Woman on trial

POTSDAM: The trial began yesterday of a woman accused of stabbing four residents to death and severely injuring another at a German care home for disabled people where she worked outside Berlin. Named as Ines Andrea R, the 52-year-old suspect is charged with four counts of murder and three counts of attempted murder following the bloodbath at the Thusnelda-von-Saldern-Haus facility in Potsdam in April. The victims, two women and two men aged between 31 and 56, were found dead in their rooms after being stabbed with a knife, with police saying they had been subjected to "intense, extreme violence". Ines Andrea R is also accused of trying to kill two further residents and of seriously injuring another, a woman aged 43. — AFP

UN 'alarmed' over Somalia

NAIROBI: The UN warned yesterday of severe humanitarian problems in central Somalia after 100,000 people were displaced by fighting between pro-government forces and Sufi militants. Fighters loyal to Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa (ASWJ) occupied the strategic town of Gurcel earlier this month, before being driven out last week by national forces and paramilitaries in operations that killed at least a dozen people, including civilians. "We are concerned, even alarmed, by the ongoing fighting in Gurcel which is now continuing for the past few days," the UN Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, told a press briefing. "First and foremost, we are concerned by its humanitarian consequences, which have been severe. Reports are still initial but they signal nearly 20,000 families displaced, representing some 100,000 people." — AFP

BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro found himself in social media time-out Monday after his video warning of a supposed link between COVID-19 vaccines and AIDS triggered action by Facebook and YouTube. Facebook removed the offending video, while YouTube went further, suspending the far-right leader for one week in addition to blocking the clip.

"We removed a video from Jair Bolsonaro's channel for violating our medical disinformation policies on COVID-19 by claiming that vaccines do not reduce the risk of contracting the disease and that they cause other infectious diseases," YouTube said in a statement sent to AFP. Bolsonaro's latest run-in with social media networks including Facebook, on which he heavily relies to rally his base, came after he cited purported "official reports" from the British government - since debunked-in his weekly live address on Facebook last Thursday.

He claimed the reports "suggest that people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are developing Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome much faster than expected." "I recommend you read the article," he added, without saying where the information came from. "I'm not going to read it here, because I don't want to lose my Facebook live video."

Facebook, which took down the comments late Sunday or early Monday, has removed Bolsonaro posts in the past. Earlier, it found he spread misinformation or incited people to violate social distancing policies. But this is the first time it has taken down one of his weekly live addresses, a cornerstone of his communications. Bolsonaro has violated YouTube

standards once before as well, and the company said the president will not be able to post new videos or do live broadcasts for seven days.

The rest of his videos on the channel, where he has 3.5 million subscribers, will remain accessible. The British government denied any such "reports" cited by Bolsonaro, in response to an AFP fact-checking team. The Brazilian Society of Infectious Disease Specialists said in a statement there was no evidence of any relationship between COVID-19 vaccines and AIDS.

'Facebook Papers' hit

In another development, Facebook announced over \$9 billion in quarterly profits on Monday, hours after a US news collective published a deluge of withering reports arguing the company prioritizes its growth over people's safety. The social media giant has been battling a fresh crisis since former employee Frances Haugen leaked reams of internal studies showing executives knew of their sites' potential for harm, prompting a renewed US push for regulation.

Facebook released results showing its profit in the recently-ended quarter grew to \$9.2 billion-a 17 percent increase-and its ranks of users increased to 2.91 billion. Facebook executives said on an earnings call that the tech titan would have brought in even more money if not for Apple updating its iPhone operating system to thwart advertisers tracking app users for ad targeting without permission.

"Overall, if it wasn't for Apple's iOS 14 changes, we would have seen positive quarter over quarter revenue growth," Facebook chief operating officer



Social media platform hit by crises

Iraq blames Iran for decline in river flow

DARBANDIKHAN: Iraqi officials warned yesterday of a drastic drop in the flow of water in a river from Iran due to low rainfall and dam-building in the neighboring Islamic republic. The Sirwan river begins in Iran, flowing to Darbandikhan Dam in northeastern Iraq before going through the rural province of Diyala and joining the Tigris.

"There has been an unprecedented decline," said Rahman Khani, the dam's director. "The water level has fallen by 7.5 meters in one year." The drop was attributed to low precipitation and "the building of more dams in Iran which retain water", he told AFP. Khani said the dam had this year received 900 million cubic meters of water-a fraction of the annual average of 4.7 billion cubic meters.

The decline had led to a 30 percent fall in electricity production from the dam, he added, warning against the impact on agriculture in Diyala province. Iraq-which relies on Iran for much of its electricity-has suffered extreme water shortages in many areas in recent years. This is showing in large part to upstream dam-building in Iran and Turkey, but also to factors relating to climate change and droughts, which have affected the wider region.

The situation has prompted Iraq's Water Resources Minister Mahdi al-Hamdani to call on his government to file a complaint against Iran at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. A for-



DARBANDIKHAN: Photo shows the Darbandikhan Dam after the water level has fallen by 7.5 meters in one year, in northeastern Iraq. — AFP

eign ministry spokesperson refused to comment on the matter. Aoun Thiab, a senior adviser at the water ministry, said Iran was "violating international law by diverting a river flow" based on the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention on the use of water that crosses international borders.

Thiab acknowledged however that seeking justice would be "a political decision and not a technical one". "The waters of the Sirwan river have been completely cut off," he told AFP. Iran has also its own decline in water levels due to drought, said a report from the country's space agency cited by Mehr news agency. Yesterday, an official said Tehran was facing its worst drought in 50 years as



MENLO PARK: Photo shows the Facebook 'like' sign at Facebook's corporate headquarters campus in Menlo Park, California. — AFP

Sheryl Sandberg said of the iPhone software tweak made in the name of protecting privacy. Hours earlier, new reports blamed CEO Mark Zuckerberg for his platform bending to state censors in Vietnam, noted Facebook allowed hate speech to flourish internationally due to linguistic shortcomings and said it knew its algorithm fueled toxic polarization online.

"These damning documents underscore that Facebook leadership chronically ignored serious internal alarms, choosing to put profits over people," US Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Big Tech critic, said in a statement. News organizations like The New York Times, The Washington Post and Wired were among those that have now received access to the set of internal Facebook documents that Haugen originally leaked to US authorities and which were the basis of a damning Wall Street Journal series. — AFP

UAE urged to probe detention, deportation of African workers

BEIRUT: Amnesty International yesterday called on the United Arab Emirates to investigate what it said were racially motivated detentions and deportations of African migrant workers and for appropriate restitution. Last month, the Gulf Arab state said it arrested 376 men and women on June 24-25 for various crimes, including human trafficking, prostitution, extortion and assault. "Those arrested were found to be involved in these crimes," the interior ministry said in a statement at the time. It added that many of them had been deported, with 50 remaining as they did not have proper travel documents.

But Amnesty said in a statement yesterday that those arrested were not given a chance to challenge their deportation and had been mistreated by the authorities. "In detaining and arbitrarily deporting hundreds of African nationals en masse, based on racial targeting and with no legal due process, the UAE violated international law," the London-based rights group said after interviewing 18 deportees. "All of them described a pattern of racial targeting in the apprehensions, noting that those rounded up were almost exclusively Black."

Lynn Maaouf, Amnesty's deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa, said the UAE authorities "must investigate this appalling incident in view of providing the victims prompt restitution of their belongings and redress for the shameful treatment they were subjected to prior to their deportation", according to the statement. — AFP

Desperate Algerians ready to die at sea to reach Spain

ALMERIA: Cutting through the black night waters of the Mediterranean, a boat carrying Algerian migrants is speeding towards Spain, all of them ready to risk death if it means escaping the despair of their homeland. "I'd rather die at sea than stay in Algeria," says Khaled Dih, his eyes dark, and his Nike trainers soaked and full of sand, after landing on a beach at Almeria following a six-hour crossing from Oran.

It was one of around 50 boats that day which made the dangerous crossing from the Algerian coastline which lies 200 kilometers to the south, officials and NGOs said. "There is nothing there, no work in the bled," Dih said, using a North African word meaning "the old country", dragging on a cigarette as he adjusted his ponytail. Dih chose his 21st birthday to leave, following in the footsteps of thousands of others prepared to risk everything, and then torched their identity papers on arrival to avoid being sent back.

In Arabic, they are known as "harraga" - or "those who burn". At least 309 migrants, 13 of them minors, have died in the western Mediterranean since the start of the year, according to the International Organization for Migration. Dih says the boat was travelling at high speed, bouncing off the water, leaving him stiff and bruised after a night crossing in the freezing cold. "You couldn't do anything... so I just thought about my parents and my friends," says the amateur boxer and fan of French rappers PNL.

Bruised, exhausted, but alive

Sat outside the bus station, he is shattered. He has not slept for three nights since leaving Annaba, his hometown on the Algerian coast near the Tunisian border. From there he travelled 900 kilometers west

he reported a 97 percent drop in monthly rainfall compared with last year.

The Iranian capital has had 0.4 millimeters of rain since September 23, compared with 14.3 mm over the same period in 2020, said Mohammad Shahriari, deputy director of the company that supplies the region. "Groundwater and surface water are at a critical state and there has not been a similar drought for the past 50 years," he was quoted as saying by Iran's ISNA news agency. In July, deadly protests broke out in the drought-hit southwestern province of Khuzestan after people took to the streets to vent their anger over water shortages. — AFP



ALMERIA: Small boats used by migrants to cross the Alboran Sea, are stored in an open-air warehouse in Almeria, southeast Spain. — AFP

to the port city of Oran and paid 4,500 euros (\$5,200) for passage to Spain - the equivalent of many months' salary. Now he's waiting for a bus to Barcelona from where he will try and enter France, like most of the harraga. "I don't speak Spanish... I have family and friends in France so I can't stay here all on my own," he explains. The number of Algerians arriving on Spain's southeastern coast or the Balearic Isles has soared in recent months.

A confidential document compiled by the Spanish authorities and seen by AFP, shows 9,664 Algerians have illegally entered Spain since the start of the year, or 20 percent more than last year. According to Frontex, the agency which protects the EU's external borders, Algerians are the largest group of foreigners entering Spain illegally - and the third-largest in Europe. On the Algerian side, 4,704 migrants have been stopped trying to leave in 2021, more than half of them in September, the Algerian Defence Ministry says. And in a new twist, more and more women and children are risking their lives to make the crossing. "Harraga families is a new phenomenon," says Said Salhi, deputy head of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights. — AFP