

Technology

Belgian court orders Facebook to stop tracking web users

'Facebook must also destroy all personal data obtained illegally'

BRUSSELS: A Belgian court on Friday ordered Facebook to stop tracking internet users in Belgium who have no accounts with the social network, or face fines of 250,000 euros a day. The California-based firm vowed to appeal the ruling amid increased efforts in Europe to boost privacy protections in a digital economy dominated by US giants. Facebook must "stop following and recording internet use by people surfing in Belgium, until it complies with Belgian privacy laws", the Brussels court said.

It based its verdict on a probe by Belgium's privacy watchdog into Facebook's use of pixels and cookies, tracking devices that follow a user's internet activity. The court warned Facebook it could face fines of 250,000 euros per day or a maximum of 100 million euros (\$125 million) if it failed to heed the ruling. "Facebook must also destroy all personal data obtained illegally," the court ordered. Finally, it said, the social network must publish the complete 84-page verdict on its own website and excerpts in Belgium's Dutch-language and French-language newspapers.



Does not properly inform people

welcomed the court verdict. "This is a big win for internet users who don't want tech companies to monitor every step they make online," BEUC spokesman Johannes Kleis said in a statement. "What Facebook is doing is against Europe's data protection laws and should be stopped throughout the EU," Kleis added.

'Intend to appeal'

"We are disappointed with today's verdict and intend to appeal," Facebook said in a statement. "Over recent years we have worked hard to help people understand how we use cookies to keep Facebook secure and show them relevant content," it added. "We've built teams of people who focus on the protec-

50.1 percent of Fuji Xerox, compared with 49.9 percent for current Xerox shareholders, who also would receive a special cash dividend of \$2.5 billion. The Xerox board pushed for this deal even though, Deason said, it is not in the interest of the company or its shareholders. The 77-year-old billionaire also said Xerox made a secret deal in 2001, allowing Fujifilm to exit the Fuji Xerox joint venture if Xerox were taken over by any investor other than the Japanese firm.

Deason argues this clause prevented the Xerox board from seeking another buyer and this in turn harmed the company's shareholders. Xerox said the suit was groundless. "After having considered all strategic alternatives available to the company, Xerox's Board of Directors remains steadfast in its belief that the combination with Fuji Xerox is the best path to create value for the company and its shareholders," the company said in a statement. "It is unfortunate that Mr Deason is seeking to interfere with Xerox shareholders' right to decide and is relying on meritless legal claims. Xerox has fully disclosed the joint venture agreements, and the company will respond to Mr. Deason's legal claims through the appropriate legal channels in due course." — AFP

Major Xerox investor sues to block takeover by Fujifilm

NEW YORK: One of Xerox's biggest shareholders filed suit to challenge the US copier and printer maker's planned takeover by Japanese technology firm Fujifilm. Darwin Deason who along with Carl Icahn controls 15.2 percent of Xerox shares, filed suit against Xerox and Fujifilm on Tuesday, alleging fraud. Xerox said the allegations are "without merit" and that it will "vigorously defend itself." Under the planned deal, Xerox would be absorbed by an existing joint venture known as Fuji Xerox, falling under the control of Fujifilm, which until now held a 75 percent stake in the joint venture.

After the transaction is completed, Fujifilm would hold



TOKYO: In this file photo taken on January 14, 2016, a Fujifilm employee shows with the company's X-Pro2 premium mirrorless digital camera during the Fujifilm X Series fifth anniversary event. — AFP

Astronauts end spacewalk to fix robotic arm

WASHINGTON: A Japanese and an American astronaut floated for hours outside the International Space Station Friday on a spacewalk to repair the orbiting outpost's robotic arm and move some equipment into storage. The spacewalk, broadcast live on NASA TV, was the first for Japanese Aerospace Agency (JAXA) astronaut Norishige Kanai, and the fourth for his US counterpart Mark Vande Hei.

"You have been doing a great job today," a ground controller told Kanai before he returned to an airlock after more than five hours in the vacuum of space. His US colleague remained outside the space station for several minutes to finish some other tasks, but a NASA commentator said both astronauts "have completed all of their primary tasks," ahead of schedule. The astronauts were about 250 miles above Africa as the spacewalk neared its conclusion. The outing began at 1200 GMT when the duo switched their spacesuits to battery power before venturing into space. Kanai, 41, is a medical doctor and diver who goes by the nickname "Neemo."

The Tokyo-born lieutenant in the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force became an astronaut in 2009. He also spent 13 days in the Aquarius underwater lab off the coast of Florida as part of NASA's Extreme Environment Mission Operations (NEEMO) crew in 2015. Kanai is the fourth Japanese astronaut to walk in space. The goal of the spacewalk was to move some components related to the space station's Canadian-built robotic arm, known as Canadarm2, an aging but crucial piece of equipment which has undergone a series of repairs in recent months.

The robotic arm is used to move astronauts and heavy equipment around outside the research laboratory. The astronauts had to move a spare hand piece, called the Latching End Effector (LEE), from a storage spot outside the ISS into the Quest airlock so it can be returned to Earth on a future cargo mission for refurbishment and eventual re-launch.

"This LEE was replaced during an Expedition 53 spacewalk in October 2017," NASA said in a statement. "They also will move an aging, but functional, LEE that was detached from the arm during a January 23 spacewalk and move it from its temporary storage outside the airlock to a long-term storage location." That device will be kept at the station as a spare. Friday's spacewalk was the 208th in support of space station assembly and maintenance, and the third this year. — AFP



This file photo taken on November 20, 2017 shows logos of US online social media and social networking service Facebook. — AFP

tion of privacy—from engineers to designers—and tools that give people choice and control," it said.

It said the cookies and pixels it uses are "industry standard technologies," allowing hundreds of thousands of businesses to grow and reach customers across the bloc. Facebook, it said, requires any business using its technologies to give "clear notice to end-users". People, it added, also have the right not to have data collected on sites and apps off Facebook being used for ads. Facebook said it was making preparations

for the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) — a new EU law designed to protect privacy online—to come into force on May 25.

"We'll comply with this new law, just as we've complied with existing data protection law in Europe," Facebook said. A consumer rights organization said Monday that a German court had found Facebook is breaching data protection rules with privacy settings that over-share by default and by requiring users to give real names. — AFP

US, Dutch officers swoop on dark web drug buyers

DRIEBERGEN: US and Dutch officers knocked on doors across the two countries this week in a massive combined operation to track down those buying illicit drugs on the dark web, officials said Thursday. Operation "Decrypt" in the United States and "Mirum" in the Netherlands saw agents including from the Drug Enforcement Agency, visiting almost 100 addresses in so-called "knock-and-talk" actions in the two countries.

The operations are the first follow-ups since authorities last year shut down the massive illicit Hansa Market on the dark web, seen as one of the most sophisticated actions against internet criminality to date. Together with AlphaBay—which was also closed down—the underground websites included tens of thousands of sellers of deadly drugs like fentanyl and other illicit goods, which served more than 200,000 customers worldwide. But unknown to users, Dutch police secretly took over Hansa Market's administration before taking down the site, allowing officials to gather a wealth of intelligence on the buyers of illicit drugs.

Dutch police visited 37 addresses over the past two days to inform suspected buyers about the dangers of their actions "and to show that they are not as anonymous as they thought," officials said in a statement Thursday. At least one 25-year-old man was arrested in the small central town of Wilp for ordering 150 ecstasy pills on the dark web, police said, adding that prosecutors were mulling further charges. Buyers were mainly targeted for procuring drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy, LSD and hashish, Dutch police said.

At the same time, US authorities including the DEA, the FBI and others said they visited addresses in the United States. Ahead of the operation, Kevin Scully, Europe's regional director of the US Drug Enforcement Agency, told AFP that "we'll be knocking on people's doors and talking with them, letting them know that what they are doing is wrong." — AFP

Tech startup gives tools to report supply chain slavery

LONDON: Giving staff the tools to report workplace abuses, including forced labor, should improve data for brands that are striving to ensure their products are slavery-free, a tech startup said. From texts and calls to messaging apps and social media, technology could encourage workers to share issues anonymously. That would give companies a better understanding of the risk of slavery in their global supply chains, said Antoine Heuty, chief executive of Uula, a software and analytics platform.

"Our platform can help build trust and enable workers to connect with companies in real-time, anywhere, any time and in any language," Heuty told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. With modern slavery increasingly making global headlines, companies are under growing pressure from governments and consumers to disclose what actions they are taking to ensure their operations and products are not tainted by forced labor. "By combining workers' responses with other data, we can help companies in the fight against

Social media giants not complying with consumer rules: EU

BRUSSELS: The European Commission said Thursday that US social media giants have made an effort to comply with EU consumer protection rules, but that Facebook and Twitter have not made all the required changes. "While Google's latest proposals appear to be in line with the requests made by consumer authorities, Facebook and, more significantly, Twitter, have only partially addressed important issues about their liability and about how users are informed of possible content removal or contract termination," the Commission, the EU's executive arm, said in a statement.

The three major internet companies had published on Thursday the changes they are making to comply with the demands of European regulators, which must be implemented in all languages by spring. Some of those changes include having the right to withdraw from an online purchase, being able to lodge complaints in Europe rather than in California where the companies are based, and the platforms being responsible towards EU consumers in the same way as offline services.

"I am pleased that the enforcement of EU rules to protect consumers by national authorities is bearing fruit, as some companies are now making their platforms safer for consumers; however, it is unacceptable that this is still not complete and it is taking so much time," said Vera Jourova, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. The European Union's demands to the US internet giants were made in November 2016 following numerous complaints by consumers in Europe about being hit with fraud and scams when using their websites. There were also concerns by consumer protection authorities about requesting the removal of illegal content. — AFP



slavery, by understanding their employees," said Heuty, whose social enterprise is one of a rising number of businesses seeking to tackle societal issues. While major companies from sportswear giant Adidas to budget fashion chain Primark have set up whistleblower hotlines for workers in recent years, Uula aims to go further, Heuty said. The platform will merge feedback from workers with other data, such as satellite imagery of palm oil plantations and building regulations for garment factories, to give companies real-time insight into risks in their supply chains, he said.

Uula also hopes its software could in the future be used to build industry benchmarks, allowing companies and suppliers to compare working conditions and regulations against their peers. "We want to motivate a race to the top," Heuty said. While technology can play an important role in protecting vulnerable workers and preventing abuses, it should not be seen as a "silver bullet," said the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). "Some software platforms may well improve traceability and transparency, and be a useful mechanism to flag risk," said Cindy Berman, head of modern slavery strategy at ETI, a group of trade unions, firms and charities promoting workers' rights. "But resolving workplace grievances or rights violations cannot lie with technology." About 25 million people globally were estimated to be trapped in forced labor in 2016, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) and rights group Walk Free Foundation. — Reuters