

## IN BRIEF



**Prince Harry, Oprah to make mental health films**  
LONDON  
Britain's Prince Harry announced on Wednesday that he is teaming up with U.S. celebrity talk show host Oprah Winfrey on a documentary series for Apple about mental health. "Our hope is that this series will be positive, enlightening and inclusive – sharing... the opportunity for us to understand ourselves and those around us better," he said. **AFP**



### YouTube to show interactive content

**SAN FRANCISCO**  
Google-owned YouTube is working on interactive shows and live specials. The content YouTube is planning would allow viewers to make their own choices throughout the show and eventually conclude an ending of their choice, SlashGear reported on Tuesday. **IANIS**

## War of hashtags: how pro-Modi & anti-Modi bots went berserk

Small groups of accounts pushed out thousands of posts an hour, says study

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Two Twitter bots – one in support of and one in opposition to Prime Minister Narendra Modi – made a massive attempt to boost traffic on the platform in India in February as the world's largest democracy prepared for the general elections, a new report has found.

The U.S.-based Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFR Lab) revealed that the pro-Modi traffic was far more manipulated than the anti-Modi traffic or any large-scale traffic flow that the DFR Lab analysed.

The two hashtags were #GoBackModi and #TNwelcomesModi.

### Domestic accounts

"The accounts were deployed on a massive scale on February 9-10 and boosted hashtags both in support of and in opposition to incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with small groups of accounts pushing out thousands of posts an hour," said the DFR Lab report.



**Huge surge:** The pro-Modi traffic was far more manipulated than the anti-Modi one, said the report.

The accounts were domestic in origin and substance.

#TNwelcomesModi was mentioned over 7,77,000 times in two days. The hashtag referred to Mr. Modi's visit to Tamil Nadu.

The DFR Lab analysed the first 49,727 tweets in the flow to see whether the hashtag started to trend because of widespread interest or because it was pushed by a small group.

"Almost two-thirds of the posts that initiated #TNwelcomesModi and pushed it to

trend came from just 50 accounts. This was an attempt at manipulation on an industrial scale, using a small number of hyper-tweeting bots to give the hashtag a massive boost," the report explained.

### Once every 17 seconds

One such bot account, @priyamanaval6 tweeted around once every 17 seconds. This account, and the others amplifying the #TNwelcomesModi hashtag have been suspended.

On February 10, the hashtag #GoBackModi also trended.

This hashtag trended even faster, racking up 49,538 tweets in just over three hours in the early morning of February 10. It peaked at a lower rate, however, generating 4,47,000 posts on February 9-10.

Just like #TNwelcomesModi, #GoBackModi was heavily pushed by a small number of high-volume accounts that posted hundreds of times an hour.

"Unlike #TNwelcomesModi, these accounts were still not suspended at the time of the report."

The most active was @PhillyTdp, which posted on #GoBackModi 2,179 times as the hashtag took off staggering one tweet every 5.3 seconds for over three hours.

The analysis used the Coefficient of Traffic Manipulation (CTM) method, which allows researchers to compare a given Twitter flow with known organic traffic, and traffic that was heavily gamed by small groups.

## Smokers spent \$700 billion on cigarettes in 2017: WHO

'250 times more than what we need to protect human health'

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI

Global cigarette sales in 2017 stood at \$700 billion, the World Health Organisation (WHO) tweeted, highlighting the fact that the amount was 250 times more than what the international organisation needed to protect human health.

"This is what people spend every year on health-destroying products. It's like paying to die and is 250 times more than what World Health Organisation (WHO) needs to protect and promote the most precious commodity on earth – human health," it said in a Twitter post on tobacco abuse worldwide.

WHO noted that tobacco is the only legal drug that kills many of its users when used exactly as intended by manufacturers.

### 6 million deaths

It is estimated that tobacco use (smoking and smokeless) is currently responsible for the death of about six million people across the world each year with many

of these deaths occurring prematurely.

In India, where the mean age at initiation to daily smoking is 18.7 years, the total tax revenue collected from tobacco products is more than ₹34,000 crore annually. Doctors warn that the early age of starting tobacco abuse translates into an increased risk of heart disease in younger people.

"Worldwide, a total 6,00,000 people are also estimated to die from the effects of second-hand smoke," WHO said. "Although often associated with ill-health, disability and death from non-communicable chronic diseases, tobacco smoking is also associated with an increased risk of death from communicable diseases," it added.

### Reduces risk

According to information released by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), quitting tobacco abuse immediately reduces the risk of heart attack and/or stroke. This helps even if a person has already had a

heart attack and/or stroke, irrespective of his/her age.

### Smokeless tobacco

"Despite accounting for 17% of the world population, tobacco consumption in the form of cigarettes in India is less than 2% of global consumption," notes the Tobacco Institute of India (TII), a representative body of farmers, manufacturers, exporters, etc. "However, India accounts for 84% of the world's consumption of smokeless tobacco while accounting for low per capita consumption of cigarettes," it adds.

Among young people, the short-term health consequences of smoking include respiratory and non-respiratory effects, addiction to nicotine and the associated risk of other drug use. Long-term health consequences of youth smoking are reinforced by the fact that most young people who smoke regularly continue to smoke through adulthood. Also cigarette smokers have a lower level of lung function than those persons who have never smoked, noted WHO.

## Report reveals growing risk to cloud platform

6.7 lakh attacks on Mumbai honeypot

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
MUMBAI

Cybercriminals attempted attacks on a Mumbai cloud server honeypot more than 6,78,000 times in a month, which was second to Ohio in the U.S. that recorded more than 9,50,000 login attempts, among a total of 10 honeypots placed globally, global cybersecurity major Sophos said on Wednesday.

The honeypots were set up in 10 of the most popular Amazon Web Services (AWS) data centres in the world, including California, Frankfurt, Ireland, London, Ohio, Paris, Sao Paulo, Singapore and Sydney over a 30-day-period from mid-January to mid-February.

A honeypot is a system intended to mimic likely targets of cyberattackers for security researchers to monitor cybercriminal behaviour.

According to the report, 'Exposed: Cyberattacks on Cloud Honeypots', over five million attacks were attempted on the global network of honeypots, thus, demonstrating how cybercriminals are automatically scanning for weak open cloud buckets.

Cloud servers were subjected to 13 attempted attacks per minute, per honeypot, on an average.

With businesses across the globe increasingly adopting cloud technology, the report revealed the extent to which businesses migrating to hybrid and all-cloud platforms are at risk.

"The aggressive speed and scale of attacks on devices demonstrates the use of botnets to target an organisation's cloud platform," Sunil Sharma, managing director, Sales, India and SAARC, Sophos, said in a statement.

## In full bloom



**Riot of colours:** An aerial view of the flower fields of Keukenhof, known as the Garden of Europe, in Lisse, Netherlands, on Wednesday. **AFP**

## Four bees living in her eye, feeding on her tears

Taiwan doctor extracts sweat bees

TIFFANY MAY  
HONG KONG

First came their fuzzy feet. From the left eye of his patient, a doctor would eventually remove four tiny bees.

"Under the microscope, I slowly pulled them out, one after another," Dr. Hung Ching, an ophthalmologist at Fooyin University Hospital in Taiwan, said at a news conference broadcast by local media last week.

The patient, identified by her last name, He, said that her ordeal began when she felt a sharp pain in her left eye while taking part in an annual tradition of tomb-sweeping. Plucking weeds from a gravestone, she rinsed what she thought was sand from her eyes with some clean water. By the time she returned home hours later, her eye was heavily swollen. Tears and other secretions streamed out.

She sought medical help. And under her left eyelid, Dr. Hung found what are colloquially known as sweat bees.

### Halictid family

The bees, from the halictid family, subsist primarily on pollen and nectar but also need salt produced by human and animal glands, so they feed on sweat and tears. They rarely sting, do



The bees need salt produced by human & animal glands. **GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO**

ing so only when attacked. Many sweat bees are about a quarter of an inch in length, about half the size of a yellowjacket.

The tiny pollinator can be found in gardens and grassy areas around the world, but it is very rare for them to fly into eyes.

### 'First in the world'

Fooyin University Hospital called the operation to remove the bees from Ms. He's eye "the first in the world."

When Dr. Hung extracted the bees, they were still alive. Had they ruptured inside Ms. He's eye, she could have faced serious infection, even losing her vision, he said.

The bees had remained intact partly because she had refrained from rubbing her eyes throughout the ordeal. **NY TIMES**

## Blue, a human-friendly robot, could lend a hand with your household chores

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LOS ANGELES

Scientists have developed a robot that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to master intricate human tasks, and could one day help you fold laundry or make a cup of coffee at home.

Robots may have a knack

for super-human strength and precision, but they still struggle with some basic human tasks.

Blue, the human-friendly robot conceived and built by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley in the U.S., can learn human tasks, while being safe enough for

every home to have one.

"AI has done a lot for existing robots, but we wanted to design a robot that is right for AI," said Pieter Abbeel, Professor at UC Berkeley.

"Existing robots are too expensive, not safe around humans and similarly not safe around themselves – if

they learn through trial and error, they will easily break themselves," Mr. Abbeel said in a statement.

"We wanted to create a new robot that is right for the AI age rather than for the high-precision, sub-millimeter, factory automation age," he added.

Blue's durable, plastic parts and high-performance motors total less than \$5,000 to manufacture and assemble. Its arms, each about the size of the average bodybuilder's, are sensitive to outside forces – like a hand pushing it away – and has rounded edges and minimal pinch

points to avoid catching stray fingers. Blue's arms can be very stiff, like a human flexing, or very flexible, like a human relaxing, or anything in between.

Currently, the team is building 10 arms in-house to distribute to select early adopters.

## In South Sudan, a radio station's struggle to stay independent, and on air

In a country wrecked by war, Eye Radio has to walk a fine line between delivering credible information and not running foul of the government

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
JUBA

South Sudan's Eye Radio journalists have been threatened, pulled off the air and forced to cower in hallways as bullets flew outside their studios.

The only independent radio station in the war-torn country has to walk a fine line between delivering credible information and not running foul of the government.

"We really struggle in making sure we remain independent," station manager Koang Pal Chang, 45, said.

"Media are censoring themselves so they avoid having problems with authority."

The radio station began broadcasting in the years leading up to South Sudan's independence in 2011. Then, in 2013, war erupted as President Salva Kiir and his former vice-president Riek Machar fell out.

In 2016, a peace deal fell apart, and Juba was hit by

three days of fighting, concentrated in the neighbourhood of Jebel, home to Mr. Machar's headquarters and the Eye Radio studios. "The bullets were flying all over and even our newsroom was hit. We could see a gunship hovering around, it was like being in a movie," said Mr. Chang.

According to the station manager, Eye Radio has about a million listeners out of an estimated population of 12 million in a country where few have access to a radio.

This makes it challenging to disseminate crucial information – about the signing of a fresh peace agreement in September 2018, for example.

"There are places where... people don't even know about the peace agreement. There is no kind of media," said Mr. Chang.

South Sudan has around 60 indigenous languages, no electrical grid, and less than



**Hoping for the best:** Station manager Koang Pal Chang sits at a mix table in the newly installed studios in Juba. **AFP**

4% of people have Internet access at home, according to the International Telecommunication Union.

### News via gunshot

A 2017 study by humanitarian organisation REACH, found language and illiteracy to be the greatest barriers to

news in the world's youngest country.

Radio is the main source of information, while in camps for the displaced, loudspeakers are also used.

In South Sudan, "one of the most frequently-cited emergency news sources was gunshot", to communi-

cate information, the study found.

"Some South Sudanese rely fully on traditional forms of communication... such as sending runners to the neighbouring communities, performing war songs, displaying smoke signals... to alert about a threat or an unfortunate event," it added.

Eye Radio is the only national broadcaster to provide a digest of the week's news in several local languages.

South Sudan also has the United Nation's Radio Miraya, Radio Tamazuj broadcast from outside the country, the Catholic Radio network, and dozens of small community-based radio stations.

In a country where 70% of the population is illiterate, newspapers are barely read outside the capital and face their own challenges. "You see blank pages (in the newspaper). Security (forces) are stationed at the printing press to go through the con-

tent before it is published," a local reporter told AFP on condition of anonymity.

### Dwindling funds

In 2016, Eye Radio was briefly pulled off the air after playing a 30-second clip of Mr. Machar speaking. "Other media were shut down completely," said Mr. Chang.

Nowadays, instead of playing voice recordings of Opposition leaders, Eye Radio simply paraphrases their statements. More difficult to get around is the insecurity. Journalists are unable to leave the capital or main towns to report.

"There are so many attacks on the road. Sometimes we send journalists but mostly on an organised trip" with the UN or aid agencies, said Mr. Chang.

Money is another challenge. A six-year grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is ending soon.

has reduced newsroom staff and installed 200 solar panels to reduce roughly by half the \$10,000 spent on fuelling generators every month.

"Without donor funding, the country's only independent radio station will have to go off air," said Charles Haskins of non-profit Internews, a partner of USAID.

According to Reporters Without Borders, at least 10 journalists were killed in South Sudan between 2014 and 2017.

Reporters face "harassment, arbitrary detention, torture or execution-style murder."

Add trauma to the list, journalist Gargan Abraham Malka, 25, said.

"You see dead bodies, violence, these things are very normal... What is bad is when you see someone that has got an injury from gunfire and is struggling with life, but you can't give him help."