

IN BRIEF


China's Qu Dongyu to head UN food agency

Qu Dongyu on Sunday became the first Chinese national to be elected to head the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Mr. Qu, 55, is a biologist by training. **AFP**


Swimming in oceans up infection risk: study

WASHINGTON According to a study, swimming in the ocean alters the skin microbiome and may increase the likelihood of gastrointestinal and respiratory illness and ear and skin infection. **PTI**

Australian watchdog prepares for clampdown on tech giants

Report slams 'lack of transparency' in their operations, handling of personal data

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

Australia's competition watchdog is poised to call for far-reaching new regulations on Facebook, Google and other tech giants, which could have global ramifications for how they make money and choose the content people consume.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's recommendations, if confirmed, would be among the strongest yet in a drive to rein in the power of digital behemoths amid a host of worldwide concerns ranging from anti-trust issues to privacy abuse, and their role in spreading disinformation and hateful content.

Following an 18-month inquiry into the power of digital platforms, the ACCC is



Report expected to flag use of 'opaque' algorithms for ranking search results, ads and content. **GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO**

due to issue its final report by June 30.

It is expected to include proposals for sweeping controls over tech companies' handling of personal data and their use of "opaque" algorithms to rank how they display advertisements, search results and content.

In a 328-page preliminary

report issued in December, the ACCC had raised alarm over the "substantial" market power wielded by the likes of Google and Facebook, and notably the "lack of transparency" in their operations.

"We are at a critical point in considering the impact of digital platforms on society,"

said the report, initiated by the conservative government at the behest of Australia's main media organisations.

Impact on news industry

The report focussed particular attention on the huge impact Google and Facebook have had on Australia's news industry, with the number of newspaper and online journalists falling more than 20% since 2014 as digital advertising revenues were overwhelmingly captured by the two tech titans.

"While the ACCC recognises their significant benefits to consumers and businesses, there are important questions about the role the digital platforms play in the supply of news and journalism in Australia," it said.

Climate activists end their blockade

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN

Hundreds of climate activists called an end to their protest on Sunday inside one of Germany's biggest open-pit mines after police repeatedly ordered them to leave, citing life-threatening danger, and authorities pulled some protesters out.

The Garzweiler lignite coal mine has been the focal point of environmental protests in Germany since Friday, when 40,000 students rallied for more government action against climate change.

"We wrote climate history this weekend," the activist group End of Story said. "Our movement has never been so diverse and never been so determined."

Earlier, some protesters blocked the railroad tracks used to transport coal.

Is your house cat ready for an adventurous trip?

'Felines are territorial and like routine'



Bagged fluffy: Malaya Fletcher carries her cat, Copurnicus, in a backpack in Philadelphia, U.S. **NYT**

WUDAN YAN

On a cool, partly cloudy day in October 2017, Malaya Fletcher was about to go hiking in Pennsylvania, U.S. The only thing left to do was to get her cat, Copurnicus, into his harness. When Ms. Fletcher secured the harness, the feline went immobile, and thudded on the ground. He seemed to have the perfect combination of traits for enjoying outdoor adventures.

He grew accustomed to the harness and leash indoors, but when Ms. Fletcher tested the waters in the wild for the first time, it seemed that Copurnicus forgot how to be a free-roaming cat.

Ms. Fletcher is among many cat owners recently inspired to train their cats to go on adventures, including hiking, canoeing or climbing.

More than 2,85,000 posts on Instagram carry the #adventurecat tag – another sign that many felines, accustomed to prowling indoors, are being led on leashed walks outside by their owners.

Re-wilding house cats into adventure cats is becoming a trend. People think that "cats are just at-home pets and perfectly thrilled with it." But, they aren't, said Frank McMillan, a cat behaviour researcher.

"Cats are more capable than you think," added Laura Moss, who wrote *Adventure Cats: Living Nine Lives to the Fullest*, a guide to

training felines for adventure that some owners of leashed cats say inspired them to bring their pets into the great outdoors.

Being independent

But is it a good idea to put a feline on a leash and harness when they are accustomed to moving around according to their own agenda? Can imposing our desires for a cat to take on a role similar to that of a dog possibly be harmful to the animal?

Each cat has its own interests and personality – all of which adds up to either wanting to be outside or not, Mr. McMillan said.

One cat owner in Portland, Oregon has tried for a year to walk her "bad boys." She's been able to take her cats out on leashes, but has hardly made it past her driveway without one of them running up a tree and the other heading back inside.

Cats have a reputation of being independent. They are believed to have domesticated themselves thousands of years ago, instead of being purposefully domesticated by humans. So putting them in harnesses for a walk can be especially challenging if it's something they don't want to do.

Felines are also territorial and like routine. So "the idea of taking cats to different territories at different times" "is counterintuitive to what we know about cats," said Mikel Delgado, a researcher. **NY TIMES**

New sports hub



Grand opening: Guests waiting outside the Olympic House, the International Olympic Committee's new headquarters, after its inauguration in Lausanne, Switzerland. It marks the 125th anniversary of the IOC, which was founded on June 23, 1894. **REUTERS**

Flying taxis to ease Olympic traffic

Vertical take-off & landing vehicles can cut travel time during the 2024 Games in Paris

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LE BOURGET

Paris aims to give visitors to the 2024 Paris Olympics a flying start by offering airborne taxis to tournament sites straight from the airport.

Arrivals in the City of Light currently face an hour-long haul by train or bus from Charles de Gaulle airport to the north of Paris.

But if Airbus and airport managers – Aéroports de Paris (ADP) and the RATP regional transport – have their way, passengers, right after their flight lands on the runway, will be able to take to the air once again with an urban taxi of the future.

At last week's Paris Air Show, the companies said that the Olympics offered



Urban mobility: Vahana, an experimental flying taxi by Airbus, on display at Le Bourget Airport near Paris. **REUTERS**

the perfect opportunity to bring into service futuristic Vertical Take-off and Landing machines, and that they would launch a feasibility study.

"In 2010, for the first time, more than half of humanity was living in urban zones

and we think we shall surpass 60% by 2030," said Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury.

The time had now come to vault up to "the third dimension" of local commutes – air, he said.

VTOL converts are already sprouting in number as

the world looks to move beyond today's saturated motorways.

Back on the ground, the view has been muddled by a delay beyond the Games, to 2025, of the express fast train designed to cut congestion and travel time between Charles de Gaulle airport and the city centre.

For aircraft manufacturer Airbus, ADP and RATP, which manages Parisian public transport services, the Games are a chance to showcase French *savoir-faire* in urban transport.

In order to make VTOL a reality by 2024, ADP is working alongside Airbus. The manufacturer has two prototype models – the single-seater "Vahana" and the four-seater variant "CityAirbus".

Plants may be spreading superbugs to humans

Spell threat to global public health

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LOS ANGELES

Plant-based foods can transmit antibiotic resistance to the microbes living in our gut, a study has found.

Antibiotic-resistant infections are a threat to global public health, food safety and an economic burden. To prevent these infections, it is critical to understand how these bacteria are transmitted.

"Our findings highlight the importance of tackling food-borne antibiotic-resistance from a food chain perspective, including plant-based foods and meat," said Marlene Maesli, a PhD candidate at the University of Southern California.

Spread of antibiotic-resistant superbugs from plants to humans is different from outbreaks of diarrheal ill-

nesses caused immediately after eating contaminated vegetables. Superbugs can asymptotically hide in (colonise) the intestines for months or even years, and while escaping, cause an infection.

The researchers developed a novel, lettuce-mouse model system that does not cause immediate illness to mimic consumption of superbugs with plant-based foods.

They grew lettuce, exposed it to antibiotic-resistant *E. coli*, and fed it to mice. Later, they analysed their faecal samples over a period of time.

"We found differences in the ability of bacteria to silently colonise the gut after ingestion, depending on a variety of host and bacterial factors," said Mr. Maesli.

TV show to inform youth about British colonialism

Beecham House, the six-part series, will air on ITV

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

British-Indian filmmaker, Gurinder Chadha, hopes her new Raj era television show about an East India Company officer, which hit the TV screens in the U.K. on Sunday, will help inform youth about the history of Britain's colonial past.

Beecham House, a six-part television series for the ITV channel, is filmed in Jaipur. It is the story of a former soldier, John Beecham, who arrives in India to settle down with his family in Delhi.

"A lot of young people don't even know that Britain



The series tells the story of a former soldier, who arrives in India to settle down with his family. **ITV PRESS CENTRE/TWITTER**

had an empire because it is not taught in schools and perhaps one of the reasons it's not, is actually because it's an uncomfortable period in British history," said Ms. Chadha, the co-creator, writer and director of the series.

The show has been widely dubbed as 'Downton in Delhi' after another popular period drama on ITV called *Downton Abbey* set in the early 1900s in England.

Device to trap ocean plastic relaunches

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SAN FRANCISCO

A floating device designed to catch plastic waste has been redeployed in a second attempt to clean up an island of trash swirling in the Pacific Ocean between California and Hawaii.

Boyan Slat, creator of The Ocean Cleanup project, said on Twitter that the 2,000-foot long floating boom that broke apart late last year was sent back to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch this week after four months of repair.

A ship towed the barrier from San Francisco to the patch in September to trap the plastic but it broke apart under constant waves and wind.

Behind the wheel: Saudi women savour new freedom

A year on, the reform has freed many women from their dependence on chauffeurs and male relatives

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
QATIF

Buckling up in a pearl-silver Lexus, Sabeeha al-Fakher takes the wheel and relegates her son to the passenger seat, a role reversal the 68-year-old Saudi widow never imagined would be possible in her lifetime.

Until June 24 last year, the act would have been considered a crime in Saudi Arabia, where hardliners have preached for decades that allowing women to drive would promote gender mixing and promiscuity.

Overtaking the world's only ban on female drivers has potentially put thousands of women behind the wheel in the most visible symbol of the conservative

kingdom's modernisation drive.

Among them is Fakher, a mother-of-five who never thought she would see the reform, which ushered in a new era of freedom and mobility for women.

"I still don't believe it," she said, zipping past younger drivers in her native eastern city of Qatif.

Her husband, who passed away a decade ago, secretly taught her how to drive during trips to neighbouring Bahrain in the 1990s, despite the risk of infuriating family patriarchs.

The reform has freed many Saudi women from their dependence on private chauffeurs and male relatives.

"We felt like (we were) in a cage before," said Munirah al-Sinani, a 72-year-old mother of four, driving in the nearby city of Dhahran with her husband in the passenger seat.

"Open the cage. We fly, we go wherever."

The move was part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's much-trumpeted reform drive aimed at overhauling the conservative petro-state, long criticised over its treatment of women.

But as authorities detained several veteran women's rights campaigners in the weeks before the ban was lifted, it became clear that the reform drive would not include greater political freedoms.



Way forward: Around three million women could receive licences by 2020, according to consultancy firm PwC. **AFP**

However, with the kingdom tightening its purse strings amid low oil prices, their new-found mobility allows the women to join a labour market chronically short of female workers.

Only a handful of driving schools for women have cropped up in the Saudi cities, where applicants have rushed to learn to drive cars and even Harley-Davidson motorbikes – scenes unima-

ginable until recently.

But in a society steeped in conservatism, many say that they have endured sexism and aggression.

Arson attacks

Social media is rife with memes of traffic pileups blamed on women drivers, along with condescending messages advising women to "avoid wearing make up" while driving.

More alarmingly, arsonists "opposed to female drivers" torched a woman's car near the holy city of Mecca last July, the Saudi media reported.

Since then the local media has reported at least five more arson attacks on women-driven cars in several cities.

Brain treats information, money the same way

A common neural code exists for both

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LOS ANGELES

New information acts on the brain's reward system in the same way as money or food, according to a study that explains why people can't stop checking their phones, even when they are not expecting any important messages.

The research published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* demonstrates that the brain converts information into same common scale as it does for money.

It also lays the groundwork for unravelling the neuroscience behind how we consume information – and perhaps even digital addiction.

"To the brain, information is its own reward, above and beyond whether it's useful," said Ming Hsu, from University of California, Berkeley in the U.S.

"We were able to demonstrate for the first time the existence of a common neural code for information and money, which opens the door to a number of exciting questions about how people consume, and sometimes over-consume, information," said Mr. Hsu.

"And just as our brains like empty calories from junk food, they can overvalue information that makes us feel good but may not be useful – what some may call idle curiosity," Mr. Hsu said.