

IN BRIEF


Google server trouble snarls YouTube, Snapchat

WASHINGTON
Congested Google servers in the eastern U.S. caused problems for users of Snapchat and YouTube on Sunday, with complaints on social media that the popular apps weren't accessible. Google acknowledged the issue affecting multiple services in Google Cloud, G Suite and YouTube. "Users may see slow performance or intermittent errors," it said.


Sephora to shut to train staff on racial profiling

LOS ANGELES
High street makeup powerhouse Sephora has announced it will close all its U.S. stores, distribution centres and corporate office for employee training after a racial profiling incident involving Grammy-nominated singer SZA. She had tweeted that security was called "to make sure I wasn't stealing", while she was at a store. AFP


Russia requires Tinder to provide data on its users

MOSCOW
Dating app Tinder is now required to provide user data to Russian intelligence agencies. The app was included on a new list of online services operating in Russia that are required to provide user data on demand to authorities, including FSB security agency. Russia has adopted a flurry of legislation in recent years to control online activity. AP

J.K. Rowling to release four Harry Potter e-book shorts

The series delves deeper into the history of magic and offers Hogwarts lessons

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

British author J.K. Rowling has revealed she is expanding her wizarding world of Harry Potter with four new eBook shorts.

The author said the digital short stories would be themed around the curriculum Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley follow at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

"Prepare to delve deeper into the rich history of magic with this new series of eBook shorts, inspired by the British Library exhibition and its companion books, *Harry Potter: A History of Magic*."

"The series features four



Set for charms: The series will be accompanied by line drawings from artist Rohan Daniel Eason. •WWW.POTTERMORE.COM

bitesize reads, each themed by Hogwarts lessons, and will take you back in time once again to learn about the traditional folklore and magic at the heart of the Harry

Potter stories, accompanied by some new, gorgeous line drawings from London-based artist Rohan Daniel Eason," the announcement on website Pottermore read.

The eBook shorts will also feature notes, manuscript pages and sketches as previously seen in *Harry Potter: A History of Magic*.

First pair on June 27

The four titles read – *Harry Potter: A Journey Through Charms and Defence Against the Dark Arts*; *Harry Potter: A Journey Through Potions and Herbology*; *Harry Potter: A Journey Through Divination and Astronomy*; and *Harry Potter: A Journey Through Care of Magical Creatures*.

The first two books will be published on June 27. The books will be published in English, French, Italian, and German languages initially.

Eminent actor-singer Ruma Guha Thakurta passes away

An icon of Bengal's glorious cultural past, she was 87

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Eminent Bengali musician, singer, dancer and actor Ruma Guha Thakurta passed away on Monday in her south Kolkata residence. She was 87.

In her career spanning more than six decades, Ms. Guha Thakurta worked with many eminent filmmakers, from Satyajit Ray to Tapan Sinha and Mira Nair. She was 87.

Tagore's influence

Named by Rabindranath Tagore, Ms. Guha Thakurta was one of the icons of Bengal's glorious cultural past. Groomed in an atmosphere deeply influenced by Tagore, Ms. Guha Thakurta's



Ruma Guha Thakurta

biggest achievement was setting up of the Calcutta Youth Choir, known for *Ganasangeet* or Bengal's version of protest songs and songs of social awareness.

Founded in consultation with Ray and music maestro Salil Chowdhury, she remained the central figure of the choir, which had performed nationally.

However to Bengalis, she will be remembered for her on-screen performance.

Ms. Guha Thakurta's acting career predates her career in music; she performed in her first film in 1944, guided by the legendary actress, Devika Rani. She started her film career from Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai in the early 1940s as a child artist – much before she stepped into her teens – and went on to act in more than 100 films. Ms. Guha Thakurta dominated the Bengali theatre and screen for six decades.

Married once to singer Kishore Kumar, Ms. Guha Thakurta mostly spent her last days with her son Amit Kumar in Mumbai.

Mutation that protects against HIV raises death rate

Study suggests that tinkering with gene may cause problems

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK

People with a DNA mutation that reduces their chance of HIV infection may die sooner, according to a study that suggests tinkering with a gene to try to fix one problem may cause others.

The study authors cited the case of the Chinese researcher who tried to produce this mutation in twin girls before their birth, to reduce their risk for HIV.

"You should consider all the effects of mutations you induce," said Rasmus Nielsen, senior author of the paper, published on Monday in *Nature Medicine*.

Mr. Nielsen acknowledged that his result cannot be applied directly to the two girls in China. For one

thing, his study focussed on a sample of people in the U.K. who may have different genetic backgrounds than the Chinese girls.

In addition, the people he studied had inherited a specific mutation. The Chinese scientist tried to create the same mutation, but failed. The girls now carry different alterations in the same gene.

Heightens risk

The gene is called CCR5. When it is working normally, it lets certain cells of the immune system display a protein on their surfaces. HIV has co-opted that protein to use as a doorway to infect those cells. The mutation prevents that protein from appearing, and so reduces the risk of HIV infection.

Mr. Nielsen and Xinzhu Wei, also at UC Berkeley, studied data on about 4,00,000 people.

About 4,000 participants carried the mutation in both copies, of whom 151 were dead. Analysis focused on deaths between ages 41 and 76.

The study found that participants with the mutation in both copies had a death rate about 20% higher than that of the others. A second analysis showed that at the time participants signed up for the databank, when their average age was about 57, there were fewer people with the mutation in both copies of the gene than one would expect. That's another sign of a higher death rate.

Scientists edit chicken genes to make them resistant to bird flu

The development is a key step in preventing spread of the disease to humans

REUTERS
LONDON

Scientists in Britain have used gene-editing techniques to stop bird flu spreading in chicken cells grown in a lab – a key step towards making genetically altered chickens that could halt a human flu pandemic.

Bird flu viruses currently spread swiftly in wild birds and poultry, and can at times jump into humans. Global health and infectious disease specialists cite as one of their greatest concerns the threat of a human flu pandemic caused by a bird flu strain that makes such a jump and mutates into a deadly and airborne form that can pass easily between people.

In the latest study, by editing out a section of chicken

DNA inside the lab-grown cells, researchers from Imperial College London and the University of Edinburgh's Roslin Institute prevented the bird flu virus from taking hold in the cells and replicating.

The next step will be to try to produce chickens with the same genetic change, said Mike McGrew of the Roslin Institute, who co-led the research. The findings were due to be published in the scientific journal *eLife* on June 4.

"This is an important advance that suggests we may be able to use gene-editing techniques to produce chickens that are resistant to bird flu," Mr. McGrew said in a statement.

"We haven't produced



Viruses spread swiftly in wild birds and poultry.

•GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

any birds yet and we need to check if the DNA change has any other effects on the bird cells before we can take this next step."

In the further work, the gene editing technology, known as CRISPR, to remove a section of the birds' DNA responsible for producing a

protein called ANP32, on which all flu viruses depend to infect a host. Lab tests of cells engineered to lack the gene showed they resist the flu virus by blocking its entry and halting its replication and spread.

The death toll in the last flu pandemic in 2009/10 – caused by the H1N1 strain and considered to be relatively mild – was around half a million people worldwide. The historic 1918 Spanish flu killed around 50 million people.

Wendy Barclay, professor and chair in influenza virology at Imperial who worked with Mr. McGrew, said the idea behind developing flu-resistant chickens is to be able "to stop the next flu pandemic at its source".

Stalk and strike



Day's catch: A painted stork with its catch in Oussudu Lake near Puducherry. •S.S. KUMAR

Prankster in soup for offering cookie filled with toothpaste to homeless man

He shot a video of the incident and challenged followers to carry out the prank

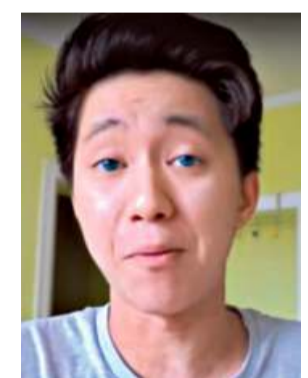
RAPHAEL MINDER
MADRID

It was a humiliating video that fuelled outrage on social media. A YouTube prankster filmed himself offering a homeless man in Barcelona an Oreo cookie filled with toothpaste rather than cream.

Now the prankster, known as ReSet to his followers on YouTube but whose real name is Kanghua Ren, has been handed a 15-month prison sentence and must pay €20,000 compensation to his victim.

First-time offender

Ren was found guilty of violating the moral integrity of the homeless man. He is unlikely to serve any time behind bars, however, as Span-



Kanghua Ren

ish law normally allows sentences of less than two years for first-time offenders in non-violent crimes to be suspended.

The court also ordered Ren's YouTube and other social media channels to be shut down for five years.

Ren, who was 19 at the time, filmed himself in early 2017 replacing the cream inside the cookies with toothpaste after being challenged by one of his 1.2 million followers to carry out the prank. He gave them to the homeless man outside a supermarket, along with a €20 bill. The homeless man was identified only as George L., a man in his early 50s who was born in Romania and who once worked as a shepherd before migrating to Barcelona, according to the newspaper *El País*. The homeless man vomited after eating the cookie.

After the posting of the video prompted widespread condemnation, Ren replaced it with one in which he visited the homeless man

again and offered him another €20 bill. According to police, he later offered €300 to the daughter of his victim in return for not filing a lawsuit.

In his defence, Ren said that the video was just a bad joke. "I do things to mount a show: People like what is morbid," he told the court.

But the judge noted that Ren had earned more than €2,000 from advertising revenues generated by the video, one of several he filmed in response to various challenges received from his followers.

"This was not an isolated act," Judge Rosa Aragonés concluded. In other videos, Ren also displayed "cruel behaviours" toward "easy or vulnerable victims," the ruling added. NY TIMES

By a thread: Thai Muslim family keeps silk weaving heritage alive

The craft boomed after Second World War thanks to "Silk King" Jim Thompson, who is credited with taking the country's silk global

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BANGKOK

Over the click-clack of the teak loom, Nipon Manutha's family laments the lack of apprentice weavers at his Bangkok silk shop, as modernity lures young Muslims away from a trade their community has dominated for generations.

They say they are the last of the Muslim weavers of Baan Krua, a storied neighbourhood of dilapidated wooden houses and a mosque in downtown Bangkok, nearly engulfed by the city creep of condos and skyscrapers. "This is Muslim heritage... Baan Krua silk is very famous," Nipon Manutha, 71, said.



Preserving a craft: Rampai Sripetch, 65, weaving silk fabric at a workshop in Bangkok. •AFP

A typed letter from Robert Kennedy on the wall of his shophouse attests to that lineage – a gift to Ms. Nipon's parents after the then-US attorney general visited in 1962.

The craft was passed

down through generations of ethnic Cham Muslim women who migrated from Cambodia centuries ago and perfected the art of turning the cocoons made by Thai silkworms into metres of soft cloth with a unique sheen co-

veted across the world.

Silk weaving boomed after Second World War thanks to American "Silk King" Jim Thompson, who is credited with taking Thai silk global.

Thompson's house is one of the most visited tourist sites in Bangkok today, but it was across the canal in Baan Krua where he first found his suppliers among the Muslim weavers. "He came here every morning," Ms. Nipon said, showing a photo of Thompson standing next to his mother at a loom.

At its peak Nipon's family employed 50 people, producing thousands of metres of silk a month.

But Thompson's mysterious disappearance in 1976

in Malaysia led partnerships to shrivel, while production gradually moved to the north of the country from Bangkok.

Ms. Nipon survived by switching to a custom-order model, relying on his daughter to run a website advertising bright-coloured scarves, bags and elegant napkins.

But with just a handful of older working weavers left in Baan Krua the expertise from his corner of Bangkok is fading.

Traders and courtiers

"It's a shame the young generation is not interested," said Ms. Nipon's sister Natcha Swanaphoom, fixing

her hijab in the mirror before going outside.

Though Thailand is overwhelmingly Buddhist, about seven million Muslims make up the country's largest religious minority, and like the faithful everywhere they are observing Ramadan this month.

Ms. Nipon's shop has no traditional silk weavers under 60. "Our staff are getting older and older," said Nipon's daughter Pattamas, 40, bemoaning the "disappearance" of hand-driven crafts to easier salaried jobs.

Thailand still exports around \$15 million-worth of silk, but Vietnam and China now provide fierce competition.

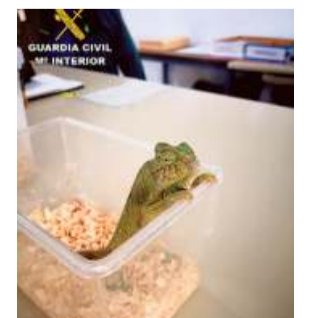
Thousands of reptiles rescued in global police op

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
THE HAGUE

Police have rescued thousands of live snakes, lizards and geckos and stopped some 20 crocodiles and alligators from becoming high-end fashion products, Euro-pol said on Monday, after a coordinated global police operation.

During "Operation Blizzard", police from 22 countries, including the European Union, Australia, South Africa and the U.S., targeted the illegal reptile trade between mid-April to May 22. Twelve suspects were arrested.

Globally, police seized 4,419 live animals including 2,703 turtles and tortoises,



Police from 22 countries targeted the illegal reptile trade. •REUTERS

1059 snakes, 512 lizards and geckos and 20 crocodiles and alligators.

Authorities also confiscated 152 handbags, wallets, watchstraps, medicines and taxidermies.