

News in brief

◆ **Meta announced yesterday** that Facebook and Instagram users in Europe will be able to buy subscriptions to use the social networks without any advertising from next month. "To comply with evolving European regulations, we are introducing a new subscription option in the EU, EEA (European Economic Area) and Switzerland," it said in a statement. The company has taken the decision after a series of tougher European Union rules intended to rein in big tech, including the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The EU's rules are a risk to Meta's lucrative revenue from advertising since they seek to curb its use of users' data without consent. Meta said European users can subscribe for a fee of 999 euros (\$10.50) a month on the web, or 12.99 euros on mobile phones using iOS and Android systems.



**Facebook, Instagram to offer paid ad-free Europe subscriptions**

◆ **Russia yesterday accused Ukraine** of playing a "key role" in an anti-Israel riot at an airport in the Muslim-majority region of Dagestan on Sunday. Dozens of protesters, many of them chanting "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest), broke through doors and barriers at Makhachkala airport on Sunday, charging onto the runway and seeking to attack Jewish passengers coming from Israel. "The criminal Kyiv regime played a direct and key role in carrying out the latest destructive act," Russia's foreign affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement. There was no immediate reaction from Kyiv to the allegations and Ukraine's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to an AFP request to comment.

◆ **Trade deal negotiations** between European Union and Australia have collapsed despite earlier optimism, with the two sides exchanging blame on Monday for their failure. Since 2018, the painstaking discussions have picked through everything from chemicals to cosmetics, but have repeatedly come unstuck over market access for Australian farm products such as beef and lamb. In July, the two parties failed to reach a deal during talks in Brussels, with Australia saying it had not been guaranteed "significant" access to the European market for its agricultural products. The talks' collapse will be a major disappointment to the EU, which is seeking to push through ambitious free trade agreements with major world markets, including India and the Latin American nations in the Mercosur bloc.

**Russia says Ukraine played 'key role' in anti-Israel airport riot**

**Free trade deal between EU and Australia collapses**

SPOTLIGHT

**India vows to free its ex-navy personnel on Qatar death row**  
New Delhi, India

India's foreign minister yesterday said the country would "make all efforts" to secure the release of eight ex-navy personnel sentenced to death by a court in Qatar, reportedly for spying for Israel. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said he had met the families of the detained Indians and told them the government "attaches the highest importance" to their case. Indian media report the eight -- among them former high-ranking and decorated officers, including captains who once commanded warships -- were arrested in Doha in August 2022. In a post on social media, Jaishankar said that he fully shared "the concerns and pain of the families", and that the "government will continue to make all efforts to secure their release".



Subrahmanyam Jaishankar site.

The Hindu newspaper reported the men were spying for a "third country", while the Times of India has said that "various reports claimed they were accused of spying for Israel". Meetu Bhargava, the sister of one of the men, dismissed the allegations. "My brother is 63 years old... Why would he spy for Israel? Why would he do anything like this at his age?" Bhargava was quoted as saying by the Indian Express daily. She said she would seek the "personal intervention" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Last week, the Indian foreign ministry had said it would take up the verdict with Qatari authorities and would continue to "extend all consular and legal assistance" to the prisoners. Qatar rarely carries out executions, and the Gulf state has previously said a death sentence is equivalent to a life sentence.

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**Deaths in India train collision rise to 13**

AFP | New Delhi, India

At least 13 people were killed and around 50 injured when two trains collided in southeast India, officials said yesterday, updating an earlier toll of eight. The accident occurred late Sunday after one of the passenger trains overshot a signal between the towns of Alamanda and Kantakapalle in Andhra Pradesh state.

A preliminary investigation found that "human error" had led to the collision, the railway ministry said in a statement. "Thirteen passengers have been killed and 50 others are injured. Rescue operations are going on," top local government official Nagalakshmi S. told reporters.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he had spoken with the country's railway minister about the "unfortunate" derailment. "Authorities are providing all possible assistance to those affected," Modi wrote on social media.

India has one of the world's largest rail networks and has seen several disasters over the years, the worst in 1981 when a train derailed while crossing a bridge in Bihar state, killing an estimated 800 people. In June, a three-train collision killed nearly 300 people in Odisha state.

In August, at least nine people were killed when a coach parked in southern India caught fire as a passenger tried to make tea. And earlier this month, four people were killed after an express train derailed in Bihar.

Rescuers at the scene of the accident



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**Deadly strike on journalists**

● The initial findings of the investigation show that the reporters were not collateral victims of the shooting: RSF

● Two strikes 37 to 38 seconds apart hit a spot where a group of seven journalists had been for more than an hour

● The first strike killed Abdallah, the second, more powerful, ignited the vehicle used by Al-Jazeera



A Palestinian journalist is assisted after inhaling tear gas fired by Israeli soldiers during a protest near the border fence east of Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip

AFP | Paris, France

A Reuters journalist killed in southern Lebanon two weeks ago and others wounded in the same incident were deliberately targeted, a Reporters Without Borders investigation released on Sunday said. Video journalist Issam Abdallah died and six other journalists were wounded -- including two from AFP, one of them seriously -- in strikes the village of Alma al-Shaab in southern Lebanon on October 13.

"The initial findings of the investigation show that the reporters were not collateral victims of the shooting," the media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said.

"One of their vehicles, marked 'press', was targeted, and it was also clear that the group stationed next to it was journalists."

The journalists believe they were hit by fire coming from the Israeli side of the border.

The RSF initial findings did not explicitly blame Israeli forces, but said that according to ballistic analysis, the shots came from the east, the direction of the Israeli

**Israel army says female soldier hostage freed**



AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

A female Israeli soldier was released from captivity in the Gaza Strip, the army said Monday, following an operation in the Hamas-run Palestinian territory.

"Last night, soldier Ori Megidish was released during a ground operation after being kidnapped by Hamas on October 7," the army said in a statement.

"The soldier was medically checked, is doing well, and has met with her family."

The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a photograph of Megidish in which she is seen surrounded with her family members.

**Ground battles rage in Gaza**

● Columns of Israeli tanks and armoured bulldozers were seen churning through the sand, and Israeli snipers took positions inside emptied residential buildings, in footage released by the army.

AFP | Jerusalem

Israeli ground forces fought deadly battles with Hamas militants inside Gaza on Monday and sent tanks to the outskirts of the biggest city while air strikes kept raining down on the besieged Palestinian territory.

In heavy clashes overnight, the Israeli army said it had killed dozens hiding "inside buildings and tunnels", and a fighter jet struck a building "with over 20 Hamas operatives inside".

Columns of Israeli tanks and armoured bulldozers were seen churning through the sand, and Israeli snipers took positions inside emptied residential buildings, in footage released by the



A Palestinian man cradles an injured child at

army. Dozens of Israeli tanks advanced for more than an hour into the southern fringes of Gaza City and blocked the main north-south highway, "firing at any vehicle that tries to go along it", an eyewitness told AFP by phone.

Air strikes also cratered the road and brought down buildings, residents said, before the tanks pulled back from the area.

The Israeli land forces were supported by heavy fire from fighter jets, drones and artillery

**WHO chief recalls own war**

AFP | Geneva, Switzerland

The World Health Organization's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus yesterday recalled the pain of his own wartime upbringing in Ethiopia as he pleaded with global leaders to unite for peace.

The WHO has called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas for the safe delivery of food, medical supplies and other



aid into the Gaza Strip.

Tedros said on X, formerly Twitter, that he was making "a humble plea for ceasefire and peace".

**As a child trapped in the shadows of war, I intimately knew its smell, sounds and sights. I empathise deeply with those now caught in the middle of conflict, feeling their pain as if it were my own**

"As a child trapped in the shadows of war, I intimately knew its smell, sounds and sights. I empathise deeply with those now caught in the middle of conflict,

feeling their pain as if it were my own," he said.

"War brings only devastation, horror, and destruction. Nothing else.