

EU okays 1-hour law to wipe terrorist content

European Union wants social networks to remove propaganda within an hour of receiving the order

● Failing to adhere will attract hefty fines

● Legislation proposed by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker

AFP | Strasbourg, France

The European Union yesterday proposed steps to force social networks and websites to remove terrorist propaganda within an hour of receiving the order from authorities, or companies like Facebook and Twitter could face massive fines.

The legislation proposed by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker marks a toughening approach after Brussels had relied on internet firms to voluntarily remove such content.

The internet has become a major tool for extremists carrying out attacks that have killed hundreds of people in European cities in recent years.

"Europeans rightly expect their Union to keep them safe," Juncker told the European Parliament in his annual state of the



Member of the European Parliament Nigel Farage presents a gift to European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker prior to his State of the Union speech at the European Parliament

union speech.

"This is why the Commission is today proposing new rules to get terrorist content off the web within one hour -- the critical window in which the greatest damage is done."

The EU's executive arm said

that in January alone, nearly 7,000 new pieces of propaganda disseminated online from the Islamic State group, even as it has been driven out of most of its strongholds in Iraq and Syria.

The commission propos-

al calls for a "legally binding one-hour deadline" for firms to remove terrorist content once national authorities order them to do so.

Voluntary efforts 'not enough'

It defines the content as that which incites or advocates com-

mitting terror offences, promotes a terror group's activities or offers instructions for attacks.

But it also provides for means of judicial redress in the event a content provider disagrees with an order.

"Member States will have to put in place effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties for not complying with orders to remove online terrorist content," the commission said.

"In the event of systematic failures to remove such content following removal orders, a service provider could face financial penalties of up to four percent of its global turnover for the last business year."

The EU joined forces with US-based tech firms in 2016 to combat online extremism.

Until now, Brussels had pushed for the industry to regulate itself, but EU officials have for more than a year given mixed reviews to firms like Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and Google's YouTube.

"While we have made progress on removing terrorist content online through voluntary efforts, it has not been enough," EU Security Commissioner Julian King said in a statement.

Sri Lanka to ban animal sacrifices

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Animal sacrifices at Hindu temples could be banned in Sri Lanka under new plans announced yesterday, after growing protests over the rituals from the country's Buddhist majority as well as moderate Hindus.

The cabinet approved a proposal put forward by the Hindu Religious Affairs minister to outlaw the ancient practice that is still observed at several temples across the country.

"The legal draughtsman was asked to prepare a bill to ban animal and bird sacrifices at Hindu temples," the government said in a statement.

Philippines braces for Typhoon Mangkhut

Manila, Philippines

Millions of people are at risk from a strong typhoon set to smash into the northern Philippines this weekend which could bring floods, landslides and huge waves to the disaster-prone nation, rescue workers said Wednesday.

Emergency workers have been deployed in the northern tip of the main Philippine island of Luzon, where Typhoon Mangkhut is expected to make landfall on Saturday.

It is currently barreling across the Pacific with gusts of 255 kilometres (160 miles) per hour.

Serial killer who slaughtered 33 arrested

New Delhi

Police have arrested a 48-year-old man who they say has confessed to killing 33 truck drivers and their helpers over the past decade, then selling the vehicles and the goods they were carrying.

The man was arrested two weeks ago near Bhopal, police officer Rahul Kumar Lodha said Wednesday.

Police stumbled across the man's name as they investigated a string of recent murders of truck drivers in Madhya Pradesh. While the man was

apparently not connected to those killings, some of the seven men arrested told police they had helped him in similar robberies.

The man told police he would befriend drivers in roadside eateries and slip drugs into their food so they would fall asleep, Lodha said. He would then drive their trucks to isolated areas, strangle them and their helpers, and dump the bodies in forests.

He and his accomplices would then sell the trucks and their goods, Lodha said.

Putin says poisoning suspects are 'civilians'

AFP | Vladivostok, Russia

Russia's Vladimir Putin said yesterday that two men Britain suspects of poisoning former spy Sergei Skripal with military-grade nerve agent had been identified as "civilians" and were not criminals.

Putin urged the men to address the media and said there was "nothing criminal" about them, as he spoke at an economic forum in the far eastern city of Vladivostok. "We know

who they are, we have found them," Putin said during an event with Japan's Shinzo Abe and China's Xi Jinping.

"They are civilians, of course," he said, apparently responding to a claim by the British authorities that the two suspects are members of Russia's military intelligence agency.

"I hope they will turn up themselves and tell about themselves," he said in comments that hinted they will make a public statement shortly.

"There is nothing special there, nothing criminal, I assure you. We'll see in the near future."

British authorities have issued European arrest warrants for Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov, two suspected members of Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU.

They are accused of trying to kill Skripal and his daughter Yulia with the Novichok nerve agent in the English city of Salisbury on March 4.

Egypt freezes assets of Brotherhood charities

Cairo, Egypt

An Egyptian judicial committee on Tuesday announced an asset freeze of more than 1,000 charities tied to the banned Muslim Brotherhood, as well as those of hospitals and individuals.

The funds of 1,133 charities were to be frozen, the committee said in a statement, as well as numerous other entities it said were owned by the Brotherhood.

The decision came after a law was passed earlier this year to oversee the freezing of assets of "terrorists" and "terrorist groups".

The Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed and designated a terrorist organisation in Egypt in December 2013, months after the military ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi following mass protests against his rule.

The judicial committee additionally announced the assets of 1,589 Brotherhood members would be frozen, including some of the movement's leaders.

Some 118 companies, 104 schools, 69 hospitals and 33 websites and satellite channels were also hit with an asset freeze.

Man spared 50 year jail term after discovery of dog

Los Angeles, United States

The discovery of a Labrador led to the unraveling of a case against a US man jailed for 50 years for molesting his daughter, who claimed he had killed the animal to frighten her into silence.

Joshua Horner, 42, a plumber from the western state of Oregon, was convicted in April last year of sexually assaulting a minor by a jury that had failed to reach a unanimous verdict.

Horner's daughter had testified during the trial that her father threatened to harm her animals if she told the police, and that he had shot her dog Lucy in front of her to drive



Joshua Horner and his wife Kelli walk from the Deschutes County Jail in Bend, Oregon

home his point.

The animal was found alive and living with new owners, however, by the Oregon Innocence Project, a non-profit legal organization that had agreed to review the case on Horner's behalf.

Horner had insisted he did not harm Lucy and that finding the dog would prove he was innocent and that his daughter had lied under oath.

Officials from the Innocence Project said the Labrador was tracked down to the town of Gearhart, northwest of Portland, and was identified because of distinctive features.

In its motion filed on Monday to dismiss the case, the district attorney's office noted that

Horner's daughter had refused to talk to investigators about her trial testimony after the dog was found alive.

"While I cannot say with certainty that Mr Horner did not sexually abuse the named victim, I can say I am not convinced by a preponderance of the evidence that is now available that he did, and I am certainly not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt," district attorney John Hummel said in a statement on Monday.

Horner was freed from prison in August and was awaiting a new trial after an appeals court had overturned his conviction on grounds his defense had not been allowed to introduce evidence unrelated to the dog.