

## PAGES BLOCKED 'DELIBERATELY' Facebook blackout 'put lives in danger'

DAVID SWAN

Facebook deliberately took down the pages of emergency services, hospitals and charities as part of a negotiating tactic against the Australian government, despite claiming it was accidental, according to two company whistleblowers.

Facebook last year banned news in Australia as the government was considering legislation to force tech giants to pay for news. Hundreds of other pages were caught up in the ban, including health organisations and charities such as Oxfam, a move Facebook said was "inadvertent".

Facebook's five-day ban hit a seemingly random array of community groups, charities and government agencies.

The whistleblowers' disclosure, made to Australian and US authorities, shows how Facebook blocked access to services including the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Council on Homeless Persons, the Australian Medical Association, Suicide Prevention Australia, the Tasmanian government, SA Health, Fire and Rescue NSW, 1800Respect and First Nations Media Australia.

The documents, first reported by The Wall Street Journal, show that despite its protestations, Facebook knew its algorithm used to take down news pages would apply much more broadly. It also took steps to hide information about its plans from its own employees.

While Australia's parliament passed the News Media Bargaining Code days after Facebook's news ban – resulting in millions of dollars flowing through to news publishers – critics have described the legislation as watered down and Facebook and Google have not yet been designated by the code.

Leaked emails show Facebook's head of partnerships, Campbell Brown, congratulated her team minutes after a success-

ful Senate vote to pass the legislation. "We landed exactly where we wanted to," she wrote. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg also offered messages of congratulations.

Ms Sandberg lauded the "thoughtfulness of the strategy" and "precision of execution".

Rod Sims, a former chairman of the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission who helped steer the News Media Bargaining Code, said the whistleblowers' claims, if true, meant Facebook knowingly put lives at risk. "It's stunning," he said. "And they shot themselves in the foot. The negative reaction did not play well for Facebook at all, it didn't put pressure on the government. They clearly overplayed their hand."

"This is extraordinary and it reflects on Facebook's trustworthiness and the need for regulation of these platforms. Normal companies don't do this."

A spokeswoman for Facebook's parent company Meta said: "The documents in question clearly show that we intended to exempt Australian government pages from restrictions in an effort to minimise the impact of this misguided and harmful legislation."

"When we were unable to do so as intended due to a technical error, we apologised and worked to correct it. Any suggestion to the contrary is categorically and obviously false."

Libby Liu, CEO of Whistleblower Aid, said Facebook had abused its power. "They used that power in a way that threatened public safety during fire season and in the midst of a global pandemic in order to coerce the Australian parliament to pass friendly legislation," she said.

"This wasn't just an example of a corporate actor behaving recklessly. Facebook intentionally put lives at risk to protect its bottom line."

INQUIRER P18

## Property developer facing assault count

EXCLUSIVE

LIAM MENDES

A Sydney property developer who shot to fame after buying his wife a bright yellow Lamborghini on Valentine's Day has been charged with assaulting her.

Jean Nassif went viral on social media in 2019 after purchasing his wife "Nissy" the luxury vehicle – worth half a million dollars – and filming the delivery of the car.

The gift became a meme after Mr Nassif unveiled the car and famously said: "Congratulations, Mrs Nassif. You like?", with thousands mocking and ridiculing the phrase online with their own imitations.

On Tuesday night, the 54-year-old was arrested and charged with common assault following an alleged incident occurring at his multi-million-dollar waterfront Chiswick home.

Police have also applied for a provisional apprehended violence order protecting Mrs Nassif.

Court documents obtained by The Weekend Australian state Mr Nassif must not assault or threaten, stalk, harass or intimidate Mrs Nassif, or intentionally or recklessly destroy or damage any property or harm an animal she owns. In a statement, police said they were called to their three-storey mansion at 9.30pm on Tuesday "following reports of a domestic-related assault".

"Officers attached to Burwood Police Area Command attended and were told a 34-year-old woman had been assaulted by a 54-year-old man. The man and woman are known to each other," the statement said.

Mr Nassif was arrested and taken to Burwood police station where he was charged with common assault.

"There was just a police car that pulled up and then they went down, that's all we know," one neighbour said.

He was released on bail under the same conditions governing the provisional apprehended violence order.

When approached by The Australian, Mr Nassif, sporting a new beard, denied any knowledge of the assault charge, before saying "I don't know him (Mr Nassif)", and then claimed to instead be his cousin "Frank".

The Weekend Australian has confirmed the man is indeed Jean Nassif.

Mr Nassif is no stranger to the court system; he is currently undertaking defamation action against 2GB and shock jock Ray Hadley over a series of broadcasts in 2019 and 2020 where concerns were raised over an apartment complex in Sydney's northwest built by his company Toplace.

Mr Nassif says the broadcaster falsely inferred he was a "dishonest" and "shoddy" developer who would force buyers to settle on apartments in a building which is "dangerously unfit for habitation".

In 2021, the Building Commissioner issued an Occupation Certificate Prohibition Order on the Skyview apartments complex following an independent report into the building.

The order was removed after an enforceable undertaking was agreed upon for Toplace "to provide an ongoing inspection and maintenance program backed by financial guarantees".

Mr Nassif will face Burwood Local Court on May 12.



Anna Hui Tran's shortlisted manuscript, *The Red Thread*, tells of the Chinese-Australian immigrant experience

## Award hopefuls tell of home and family

NICHOLAS JENSEN

The Australian/Vogel's Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript by a young writer – which this newspaper, a bread maker and a publisher launched more than three decades ago – boasts an impressive list of former winners.

Four-time Miles Franklin winner Tim Winton won the prize for his book *An Open Swimmer*, while Kate Grenville received the top gong three years later for her debut novel, *Lilian's Story*. Among the list of past winners are Tom Flood, Brian Castro, Mandy Sayer, Gillian Mears, Andrew McGahan and, controversially, Helen Demidenko back in 1993.

This year three aspiring writers have been shortlisted and are in contention to win \$20,000 and the chance to have their book published by Allen & Unwin.

For the all-female shortlist – a literary agent, an accountant and a tech analyst – submitting their manuscripts was a leap of faith, a chance to take something private and show it to the world.

Rachel Caplin, who was born and raised in Perth and now lives in Israel, began writing her manuscript in 2018 shortly after the death of her grandmother.

Her book, *The Spoon and the Sea*, is about the life of a British Jew who lived through the upheavals



Nell Pierce, pictured with baby Mo, wrote about a young woman's complex relationship with her foster brother

of the Middle East after the Second World War during and the creation of the state of Israel.

"I've always enjoyed writing but never had any formal training," said Ms Caplin, 30, who works for a FinTech company in

Tel Aviv. "But when my grandmother passed away my husband encouraged me to write about it as a way of helping with the grief."

Anna Hui Tran, who was raised in Sydney and now lives with her husband in the US, first



Rachel Caplin

began writing as a 25-year-old, but did not have ambitions of becoming an author. Ms Tran started writing her novel, *The Red Thread*, as a memoir and a "love letter to family, friends and to Sydney" but later revised it into a novel, incorporating different aspects of the Chinese-Australian immigrant experience.

A decade ago, the 34-year-old accountant completed a creative writing diploma so she could pursue her passion for writing alongside her day job. She said the prospect of winning the Vogel's and getting her first book published would encourage her to keep on writing.

Nell Pierce, who recently returned to Melbourne after living



THE VOGEL'S SHORTLIST

in the US, started her manuscript in 2017 while she was working as a literary agent in New York.

Her manuscript, *A Place Near Eden*, is set in an Australian seaside town and concerns a young woman's complex relationship with her foster brother after the divorce of her parents. "It's a story of their relationship and coming to terms with the past. It also explores memory and different versions of the truth, often around shared events," Ms Pierce said.

The prize began life in 1980 when Niels Stevns, the owner of Vogel's Bread in Australia, approached The Australian about establishing a prize for young writers. This year's overall winner will be announced next weekend.

## DNA bid to solve murder mystery

DAVID MURRAY  
NATIONAL CRIME  
CORRESPONDENT

Queensland detectives are conducting DNA tests in New Zealand on a dog leash used to strangle a woman in her home four decades ago.

The tests were revealed as a \$500,000 reward was announced for information about the murder of 22-year-old Deborah Smykalla on Father's Day, September 6, 1981.

Detective Senior Sergeant Tara Kentwell from the homicide squad's cold-case team said on Friday that a review of the murder was launched in March 2019. That had followed coverage of the decades-old unsolved case in *The Australian*.

"We do believe that with public assistance, irrespective of the passage of time, this crime can be solved," Sergeant Kentwell said.

Smykalla's sisters, Diana Walton and Elke Hall, joined Sergeant Kentwell in launching an appeal for assistance.

The sisters described Smykalla as free-spirited, fun and "a bit naughty".

Ms Hall had pushed for the new investigation after being inspired by *The Australian's* focus on the 1982 disappearance and suspected murder of Sydney mother Lyn Dawson. "It's been a long hard road to get to this point," Ms Hall said on Friday.

Smykalla was found dead at her home in Howlett Rd in Capalaba, on Brisbane's bayside. She was lying with her head in an open gas oven and with a dog leash securely tightened around her neck.

Sergeant Kentwell said the oven was turned on and a fire had been lit on the kitchen floor. A bar heater was overturned on the carpet in the adjoining lounge room. It was an apparent attempt to burn down the house and make it look like a suicide.

"As part of the current review, new and enhanced forensic testing is being undertaken on the dog lead that was used to strangle Deborah," she said.

"The testing is occurring in New Zealand's Institute of Environmental Science and Research. Investigators are hopeful for a DNA breakthrough from this testing."

Police want to hear from a person who contacted Crime Stoppers anonymously in September 2014 with "valuable information", she said.

Detectives also want to speak to anyone who knows about a motorbike, possibly a 250cc or 500cc road/trail bike, seen at the address just hours before Smykalla's body was found.

## PRINCIPAL

Commencing Term 4 2022  
or later by negotiation



Aquinas College, located in Perth, is a K-12 day and boarding Catholic school for boys in the Edmund Rice tradition servicing in excess of 1,300 local, country and international boys. Aquinas College has a rich history within Western Australian education and a reputation for producing outstanding young men.

The Executive Director of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) invites expressions of interest from experienced and contemporary educators who will lead with vision and build on the College's tradition of excellence. This is an exciting opportunity to lead a team of professional staff dedicated to providing students with the best opportunities in a safe and inclusive environment.

The successful applicant will be an experienced educational leader with a passion for learning and the relevant leadership experience to satisfy the selection criteria for this key senior position.

For more detailed information, including the selection criteria and application instructions, please visit [www.erea.edu.au](http://www.erea.edu.au) or contact Bryan for a confidential discussion about the position, on (03) 9426 3205 or [recruitment@erea.edu.au](mailto:recruitment@erea.edu.au).

**EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST CLOSE 4.00pm (AEST)  
THURSDAY 19 MAY 2022**

All applicants will be subject to EREA and legislative screening procedures. These checks are consistent with EREA's commitment to child protection policies and procedures. Edmund Rice Education Australia is committed to ensuring the safety, wellbeing and dignity of all children and young people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are encouraged to apply. Edmund Rice Education Australia is an Equal Opportunity Employer.



REDLANDS  
LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

## Principal Sydney

The Board of Redlands is seeking an inspiring educational leader to succeed Mr Stephen Webber, who is stepping down after three years of exceptional contribution, to return to his family in Western Australia.

Founded in 1884, Redlands is a coeducational school on Sydney's Lower North Shore with 1,780 students from Preschool to Year 12. We aim to inspire students to achieve life-readiness and to let their light shine, through the provision of a world recognised, contemporary education.

High quality teaching underpins the academic success of our students. In the Secondary School, we offer both the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and the NSW Higher School Certificate. Our students are also encouraged to explore their individual interests and talents through an extensive range of cocurricular opportunities. We aim to nurture well-rounded, confident and compassionate young adults who are well prepared to become engaged global citizens.

This role requires a highly experienced educator, a leader in contemporary education who supports the Christian ethos of the School. Approachable and highly visible across the Redlands community, our next Principal will possess the gravitas, warmth and authenticity to inspire and engage students and stakeholders alike.

Odgers Berndtson is assisting the Board of Redlands with this appointment. More information on the role can be found at [www.Odgers.com/85638](http://www.Odgers.com/85638). For a confidential conversation, please contact Jane Harlen on +61 2 8905 3711.

Applications close: Sunday 29 May 2022.

AQUINAS COLLEGE

