### Key tech giants 'putting world at risk of killer AI'

AFP, Washington

Amazon, Microsoft and Intel are among leading tech companies putting the world at risk through killer robot development, according to a report that surveyed major players from the sector about their stance on lethal autonomous weapons.

Dutch NGO Pax ranked 50 companies by three criteria: whether they were developing technology that could be relevant to deadly AI, whether they were working on related military projects, and if they had committed to abstaining from contributing in the future.

"Why are companies like Microsoft and Amazon not denying that they're currently developing these highly controversial weapons, which could decide to kill people without direct human involvement?" said Frank Slijper, lead author of the report published this week.

The use of AI to allow weapon systems to autonomously select and attack targets has sparked ethical debates in recent years, with critics warning they would jeopardize international security and herald a third revolution in warfare after gunpowder and the atomic bomb.

A panel of government experts debated policy options regarding lethal autonomous weapons at a meeting of the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in Geneva on Wednesday.

Google, which last year published guiding principles eschewing AI for use in weapons systems, was among seven companies found to be engaging in "best practice" in the analysis that spanned 12 countries, as was Japan's Softbank, best known for its humanoid Pepper robot.



Secondary school students raise their phone torches as they sing 'Do You Hear the People Sing' from 'Les Miserables' while attending a rally at Edinburgh Place in Hong Kong, yesterday. Hong Kong student leaders yesterday announced a two-week boycott of lectures from the upcoming start of term, as they seek to keep protesters on the streets and pressure on the government.

PHOTO: **AFP** 

# US now can detain migrant families indefinitely

REUTERS, Washington

The Trump administration on Wednesday unveiled a rule that allows officials to detain migrant families indefinitely while judges consider whether to grant them asylum in the United States, abolishing a previous 20-day limit.

The rule, which is certain to draw a legal challenge, would replace a 1997 court settlement that limits

the amount of time U.S. immigration authorities detain migrant children. That agreement is generally interpreted as meaning families must be released within 20 days. It was the Republican

administration's third major regulation restricting immigration in little more than a month, all during an unsettled period when senior immigration officials hold "acting" titles lacking U.S. Senate confirmation.

Trump has made cracking down on legal and illegal immigration a hallmark of his presidency after campaigning in

2016 on a promise, so far unfulfilled, that Mexico would pay for a border wall to keep migrants from entering the United States.

In what would be another attempt to dismantle established immigration law, Trump told reporters on Wednesday his administration was seriously looking at ending the right of citizenship for children born to non-citizens within the United States. Immigration officials are looking for any

> kind of deterrent to reverse a record surge in families violence poverty in Central America. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials say they have caught or rejected 475,000 family

members in the past 10 months, more than three times any previous full year.

On July 15 the administration unveiled a rule to bar almost all immigrants from applying for asylum at the southern border, and on Aug 12 it announced regulation denying visas and permanent residency for those who fail to make enough money.

### **OFFER TO BUY GREENLAND**

# Trump slams Danish PM's <sup>7</sup>nasty' rejection

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump snapped back Wednesday at the Danish prime minister's "nasty" dismissal of his attempts to purchase Greenland, heightening a row which has already prompted the US president to scrap a state visit.

Hours after announcing he would not visit Copenhagen next month as planned, Trump accused Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen of insulting the United States as a whole by rejecting talk of buying Greenland as "absurd."

Trump -- who made his name as a New York property mogul -- has characterized his idea of buying Greenland as essentially "a large real estate" deal, arguing it is a burden on Denmark as the autonomous territory's economy depends heavily on subsidies from Copenhagen.

Speaking to reporters at the White House, Trump said he was not the first US president to have raised the idea of buying the vast Arctic island which has housed an American air base since even before it became formally a part of Denmark.

"Greenland was just an idea, just a thought. But I think when they say it was 'absurd' -- and it was said in a very nasty, very sarcastic way -- I said, 'We'll make it some other time," Trump said.

Greenland was a Danish colony until 1953, when it became part of the Danish Realm, and it gained "autonomous territory" status in 1979. The government of Greenland has insisted that the island is "not for sale" and Frederiksen told reporters on Wednesday that she fully endorsed

#### **Ecuador city recycling plastic** bottles for bus tickets

Looking after the environment is paying off in Ecuador, at least for public transport users in the business hub of Guayaguil. A new scheme aimed at combatting garbage and pollution allows people to exchange recyclable plastic bottles for money to buy bus tickets. The port city, in Ecuador's southwest, is the second most populous city in the country with 2.7 million inhabitants, but it generates the most waste. Passengers who use the city's bus transit system, Metrovia, are now queueing at a newly installed machine, waiting to unload their plastic bottles for two cents each, which they can spend on public transport. "Imagine: Two cents (a bottle) for 15 bottles you get 30 cents, that's already a Metrovia ticket," said bus passenger Cristian Cardenas. It's proving more profitable than selling the bottles to a recycling center, Washington Bravo told AFP. Guayaguil produces 4,200 tons of waste a day, only 14 percent of which is recyclable.

#### **Court sends Chidambaram** into police custody

An Indian court yesterday ordered a former finance minister into police custody for questioning for four days, in a case stemming from government approval of foreign investment in a local media company, a judge said. The rare action against P Chidambaram, a top leader of the main opposition Congress party and a trenchant critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, drew opposition accusations that the authorities are pursuing a political vendetta. Chidambaram was arrested at his New Delhi home on Wednesday after federal police agents jumped over the wall when they found the gates closed. Yesterday he appeared before a federal police court which said it needed to hold him until Aug 26 for further questioning. The allegations in the case centre around the role of Chidambaram, his son Karti Chidambaram, and several former government officials, in approving foreign direct investment in local media firm INX Media in 2007. The Central Bureau of Investigation says the approval was illegal and that it was a case of "abuse of power".

#### US energy secretary falls for Instagram hoax

US Energy Secretary Rick Perry -- who oversees the country's nuclear arsenal -- has fallen for an Instagram hoax. He reposted a message claiming there was a "new Instagram rule" that would allow the social media site to "use your photos," according to images of the since-deleted post on Perry's account. "Instagram DOES NOT HAVE MY PERMISSION TO SHARE PHOTOS OR MESSAGES," according to the post, which billed itself as offering protection against the new rule if it was displayed on a user's account. There was just one problem: there was no new rule. "There's no truth to this post," BuzzFeed News quoted a spokesperson for Instagram's parent company Facebook as saying. Perry came in for heavy criticism on social media, with various users wondering whether someone who couldn't identify an internet hoax should be in charge of nuclear arms.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

# Too late for new Brexit deal

Macron tells Johnson, leaves door open to alternative Irish border solution

REUTERS, Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday told Prime Minister Boris Johnson that there was not enough time to wholly rewrite Britain's Brexit divorce deal before an Oct 31 deadline.

Johnson met Macron at the Elysee Palace a day after talks in Berlin with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who challenged Britain to come up with alternatives to the agreed safety net provision for the UK-Irish land border.

More than three years after the United Kingdom voted to quit the European Union, it is still unclear on what terms - or indeed whether - the bloc's second largest economy will leave the club it joined in 1973.

Macron left the door open to Britain seeking a solution to the Irish "backstop", but said any alternative must respect both the integrity of the EU single market and stability on the divided island

"I want to be very clear: in the month ahead, we will not

find a new withdrawal agreement that deviates far from the original," Macron said after a warm handshake with the British premier. However, the British pound, sensitive to the prospect of

a 'no-deal' exit, jumped more than half a cent after Merkel said she had not set Johnson a 30-day deadline to propose

a solution to the border issue, and that it could be achieved

On his first trip abroad since entering 10 Downing Street a month ago, Johnson has warned Merkel and Macron that they face a potentially disorderly no-deal Brexit on Oct 31

unless the EU does a new deal. Johnson told Macron that he believed it was still possible to agree one in time for the Oct 31 deadline, and that he had been "powerfully encouraged" by what he had heard from Merkel on Wednesday.

"Let's get Brexit done, let's get it done sensibly and pragmatically and in the interests of both sides and let's not wait until October 31," Johnson said. "Let's get on now in deepening and intensifying the friendship partnership between

Johnson, an ardent Brexiteer, is betting that the

threat of 'no-deal' Brexit turmoil will convince Merkel and Macron that the EU should do a last-minute deal to suit his demands. He has repeated promises to leave on Oct. 31 - with or without a deal.

The backstop, negotiated by Johnson's predecessor Theresa May, provides for Britain to remain in a temporary customs union with the EU after Brexit, avoiding the need for any 'hard' border infrastructure, until a better solution is found.

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## Microplastics in drinking water not a health risk for now: WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) yesterday said the level of microplastics in drinking-water is not yet dangerous for humans but called for more research into potential future risk In its first report into the effects of

microplastics on human health, WHO looked into the specific impact of microplastics in tap

and bottled water. "The headline messages to reassure drinking water consumers around the world, that based on this assessment, our assessment of the risk is that it's low,"

said Bruce Gordon, WHO coordinator of water and sanitation. WHO said that data on the presence of microplastics in drinking water is currently

limited, with few reliable studies, making it difficult to analyse the results. WHO has called on researchers to conduct a more in-depth evaluation

into microplastics and the potential impact on human health.

The organisation has also urged a crackdown in plastic pollution to benefit the environment and reduce human exposure to microplastics.

WHO said that microplastics larger than 150 micrometres are not likely to be absorbed by the human body but said the chance of absorbing very small microplastic particles, including nano-sized

plastics, could be higher, although it said data is limited. The report warns of other dangers ahead:

if plastic emissions in the environment continue at the current rate, microplastics could present widespread risks for aquatic ecosystems in a century, which could in turn

increase human exposure. Experts recommend wastewater treatment, which can remove more than 90 percent of microplastics in water by using treatments such as filtration.

### India proposes ban on e-cigarettes REUTERS, New Delhi

India's health ministry has proposed a ban on the production and import of electronic cigarettes.

The ministry has proposed that the government issue an executive order banning the devices in the public interest, saying it was needed to ensure e-cigarettes don't become an "epidemic" among children and young adults.

Health officials are proposing jail terms of up to three years, with a penalty of up to 500,000 rupees (\$7,000), for repeat offenders against the new rules, according to a draft of the executive order. Firsttime offenders would face a prison term of up to one year and a fine of 100,000 rupees.