



Robot built for Japan's aging workforce finds virus role

TOKYO: Mira Robotics developed its "ugo" robot to reinforce greying Japan's shrinking workforce, but as the coronavirus threat persists, the Japanese startup is offering its machine as a tool in the fight against the outbreak, the company's CEO said.

"The coronavirus has created a need for robots because they can reduce direct contact between people," Ken Matsui told Reuters at his company's workshop in Kawasaki, near Tokyo. "We've had inquiries from overseas, including from Singapore and France."

The latest feature of the remote-controlled or so-called avatar robot is a hand attachment that uses ultraviolet light to kill viruses on door handles. An unprecedented population decline that is shrinking Japan's workforce by more than half a million people a year as well as a reluctance to bring in foreign labor to fill vacant positions has

spurred robot development in Japan. The emergence of coronavirus-related demand could further that work.

Mira Robotics' Ugo is a pair of height-adjustable robotic arms mounted on wheels, operated remotely through a wireless connection with a laptop and game controller. A range-measuring laser mounted on the base helps it navigate, while a panel at the top displays eyes to give it a friendlier appearance. It takes around 30 minutes to learn how to use the robot, with each operator able to control as many as four machines, said Matsui. Ugo which costs around \$1,000 a month to rent, can be deployed as a security guard, carry out equipment inspections and clean toilets and other areas in office buildings, he added. Matsui's two-year old startup so far has only one ugo operating at an office building in Tokyo. —Reuters

WhatsApp iOS is testing a search image on the web feature, a clear all messages except starred option and more

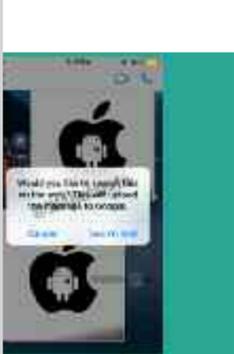
WhatsApp is experimenting with several updates for Android and iOS users that are in the testing phases. On Android, the Facebook-owned app is improving and redesigning Storage Usage, introducing some default filters that will help in sorting out messages according to their size and on the basis of them being the oldest or newest.

While on iOS, an important feature that WhatsApp is currently working on is to give the users the ability to search messages by date. Similarly, there is another interesting iOS feature that is in the working. According to WABetaInfo, WhatsApp iOS has enabled the Search Message on Google option in its 2.20.40.26 beta update. This option was announced to be available for WhatsApp for Android users, and now, this update is coming on WhatsApp for iOS. When an image is forwarded multiple times or at least more than four times, WhatsApp will replace the 'forward' button with the 'Search' icon. If a user chooses the Search on the web option, the image will be uploaded on Google.

Another good news by WhatsApp is about clearing all messages except the starred ones. WhatsApp already gives the option to delete all messages except starred.

But Storage Usage does not allow to save starred messages there. This forces the user to lose all starred messages if any option in the Storage Usage is used. So, to make this easier for the users, WhatsApp is now testing a 'Clear except starred' option. This way, users will be able to clear some particular messages but keeping the starred ones untouched and unharmed. This feature is also under developmental phases and is going through testing procedures. It is not known when it will eventually go live, and how many changes these features see before getting released as a final product. But the ideas are pretty neat and quite interesting. It seems that WhatsApp is on a testing spree these days, and somehow, all the ideas of features that its developers had, now suddenly seem to spring for testing! As per some WABI, WhatsApp is also testing on changing the color of the outgoing conversation bubble when the Dark Mode is enabled.

It is still not clear as to why WhatsApp is thinking to bring this change. Maybe when the user changes the contrast in the iPhone Accessibility Settings, that is when this feature will prove to be of some use. It is not known why and what color will be given to the outgoing bubble. Dark Mode users are not so happy to learn about this. Maybe when the feature comes out live, then they will be able to judge it better. For now, in the presence of so many other amazing updates, this does not sound so exciting. But it is too early to say anything about all these features, as they are all going through the alpha testing phase. As mentioned before, there are high chances that they will go through many changes before they eventually roll out, and even that is questionable. Many times, apps test features that they do not bring on the stable channels too. Let us wait and see what fate all these upcoming features will see. —Agencies



Amazon bans police use of its facial recognition tech

Amazon.com Inc on Wednesday said it was implementing a one-year moratorium on police use of its facial recognition software, halting a business it long defended as many protested law enforcement brutality against people of color. The decision culminates a two-year battle between Amazon and civil liberties activists, who have voiced concern that inaccurate matches could lead to unjust arrests.

The death of George Floyd, a black man who died under the knee of a white police officer last month, has fanned worries that facial recognition would be used unfairly against protesters. Critics have pointed to a past study showing Amazon's "Rekognition" service struggled to identify the gender of individuals with darker skin, research that Amazon has contested. The company, which sells cloud computing technology via its Amazon Web Services division, said in a statement it has pushed for regulations to ensure the software was used ethically.

"We hope this one-year moratorium might give Congress enough time to implement appropriate rules, and we stand ready to help if requested," Amazon said. Congress has been weighing possible regulation of the technology for months. On Monday, IBM wrote lawmakers to say it no longer is offering facial recognition generally, while rival Microsoft Corp has turned down some sales and backed regulations but not a moratorium.

Nicole Ozer, technology and civil liberties director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, gave Amazon credit while calling for a more "blanket" moratorium. "Face recognition technology gives governments the unprecedented power to spy on us," Ozer said in a statement. "We urge Microsoft and other companies to join IBM, Google, and Amazon in moving towards the right side of history." IBM exits facial recognition business, calls for police reform Microsoft spokespeople



did not immediately answer a request for comment. Amazon, due to its prominence and defense of facial recognition, has faced the brunt of criticism, giving symbolic significance to its announcement. Still, firms such as Idenia and NEC Corp are known to have more facial recognition government business. Private-sector sales of Rekognition accounted for around \$3 million of Amazon's \$25.7 billion in cloud revenue in 2018, according to news site The Information. One law enforcement user of Rekognition

said Amazon was "throwing us under the bus." Agencies generally have said they use facial recognition for post-crime investigations, not real-time monitoring.

"After over and over again saying that they stand by us and how we use the tech, they are making it seem like all of a sudden they don't think we use it right," the person said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Amazon said it would continue to permit the technology's use by customers that help law en-

Google's summer internships go virtual

Google has announced that their summer internship program will go ahead despite the pandemic, albeit virtually. The program this summer is focused on WFH open source projects. Google's summer internship program dates back to 1999 and is already underway.

"This is the first year our summer internship program is virtual, but what it means to be an intern at Google hasn't changed—we want our interns to have fun and make an impact on products that people use every day. Although many aspects of the program remain the same with interns working from home, we had to make some adjustments. Interns won't have the benefit of working next to experienced Googlers in a traditional office environment, which in turn impacts the kinds of projects they can work on. Rather than cancel or postpone our program, we did what we've done many times before at Google—came up with a plan B", Google revealed in its blog.

Google Maps to alert users about Covid-19-related travel restrictions This year, many technical internships at Google will focus on open source projects.



Open source is a model that makes a product's underlying code available for anyone to work on, so even though interns didn't have access to certain technical resources in a Google office, they could still contribute to meaningful projects.

Google has long been a big contributor to open source, and projects like Android and Chromium are now widely adopted around the world. Interns will

contribute to Google-created projects like TensorFlow, Kubernetes, Istio, Chromium, Apache Beam, and OSS-Fuzz and also interns undertake projects to support Covid-19 response efforts, including integrating Covid-19 data into the Data Commons and contributing to the Covid Severity project. Google hopes this program will create an interest to become lifelong contributors to open source. —Agencies

China set to complete Beidou network rivalling GPS in global navigation



BEIJING: The Chinese Beidou navigation network will be complete this month when its final satellite goes into orbit, giving China greater independence from U.S.-owned GPS and heating up competition in a sector long dominated by the United States. The idea to develop Beidou, or the Big Dipper in Chinese, took shape in the 1990s as the military sought to reduce reliance on the Global Positioning System (GPS) run by the U.S. Air Force.

When the first Beidou satellites were launched in 2000, coverage was limited to China. As use of mobile devices expanded, China in 2003 tried to join the Galileo satellite navigation project proposed by the European Union but later pulled out to focus on Beidou. In the age of the iPhone, the second generation of Beidou satellites went operational in 2012, covering the Asia-Pacific.

China began deploying the third generation of satellites aimed at global coverage in 2015.

The 35th and final Beidou-3 satellite will be launched this month - the

day has yet to be announced - meaning Beidou has more satellites in its system than GPS's 31, and more than Galileo and Russia's GLONASS. With estimated investment of \$10 billion, Beidou keeps the communications network of the Chinese military secure, avoiding the risk of disruption to GPS in the extreme event of conflict.

Weapons targeting and guidance also improves. When complete, Beidou's location services are accurate down to 10 cm in the Asia-Pacific, compared with GPS's 30-cm range. "Beidou was obviously designed a few decades after GPS, so it has had the benefit of learning from the GPS experience," said Andrew Dempster, director of the Australian Centre for Space Engineering Research. "It has some signals that have higher bandwidth, giving better accuracy. It has fewer orbit planes for the satellites, making constellation maintenance easier."

SPACE SILK ROAD Beidou-related services such as port traffic monitoring and disaster mitigation

have been exported to about 120 countries, state media reported. Many of those countries are involved in the Belt and Road initiative, spearheaded by President Xi Jinping to create a modern-day Silk Road of trade and investment.

In a 2019 report, the U.S. congressional U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission warned that China promoted launch services, satellites and Beidou under its "Space Silk Road" to deepen reliance on China for space-based services, potentially at the expense of U.S. influence. Thailand and Pakistan were the first foreign countries to sign up for Beidou's services, in 2013.

Within China, more than 70% of mobile phones were Beidou-enabled as of 2019, state media reported, including models made by Huawei [HWT.UL], Oppo, Xiaomi, Vivo and Samsung. Millions of taxis, buses and trucks were also able to receive Beidou signals. China's satellite navigation sector may top 400 billion yuan (\$57 billion) in value this year, state media said. —Reuters