

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

UN, Red Cross step up call for international rules on 'killer robot' weapons systems

GENEVA, AUG 25: The United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross on Tuesday ratcheted up a joint call for countries to adopt bans and restrictions on use of autonomous weapons systems - often known as killer robots - warning that "the risks have intensified."

Building on an initial appeal three years ago and international talks on the issue for years, the appeal stops short of calling for a blanket ban but notes that such weapons systems are being developed, though the UN and Red Cross haven't confirmed use on the battlefield. But civilians need to be protected for when that day may come.

"We are now dangerously close to crossing a moral red line: The autonomous targeting of humans by machines," said UN Geneva spokesper-



son Alessandra Vellucci, reading a joint statement by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric.

"Today, we renew this call with even greater urgency," the statement said. "The fundamental concerns remain unchanged, but the risks have intensified."

The two international organisations say the development of weapons technology at "record speed" has strained the international

rules system and widened the gap between technological capacities and regulatory constraints.

"Autonomous weapons systems are not part of a distant future - a race toward greater autonomy in weapons systems is already well underway," the joint statement said.

call comes as negotiators are set to meet in Geneva in November on ways of strengthening the existing Convention on Conventional

Weapons, with the UN and ICRC saying the conference "offers the clearest path available" to move toward binding legal rules on the use of such autonomous systems.

The yearslong effort to rein in the use of autonomous weapons systems has struggled to produce limits on use of such lethal autonomous weapons systems. The new push comes against the backdrop of drones and other technologies used in conflicts as diverse as Ukraine, the Middle East, Sudan and others. "Scientists and engineers developing these systems have themselves raised the alarm," the organisations said. "When the architects of this technology are calling for limits, states cannot afford to remain passive."

"This year must mark a turning point," the statement added. (AP)

Not taking political 'sanyas', will not stop till I force BJP into obscurity: Mamata

KOLKATA, AUG 25: Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee on Monday asserted that she would not take political 'sanyas' (retirement) and won't stop till she forces the BJP into obscurity.

In a Facebook Live, the former chief minister also claimed that people of West Bengal had "understood the true face of the BJP within four months" of the change in the government, alleging "widespread intimidation" of citizens.

"The BJP does not allow me to hold meetings. Those who think I will take 'sanyas' from politics simply because I am denied permission are mistaken. Our fight will not stop until the BJP itself is forced into political retirement," Banerjee said.

Alleging that the police are telling people they cannot support the Mamata Banerjee faction of the TMC, she said, "Police are filing cases against TMC workers. The SP is acting like a district president, while the IC is acting like a block president (of the BJP)."

"Cases have been filed



against 12,000 to 14,000 people. With the help of some traitors and looters, people are being told to join the BJP," she said.

She hit out at the saffron dispensation, accusing it of orchestrating the recent unrest on the Jadavpur University campus on account of the clashes between ABVP and Left students.

"The BJP created mayhem at Jadavpur University. The JU emblem was trampled and destroyed. The university is among the toppers in national and international rankings. Even though I may have differences of opinion with Jadavpur students, I respect them," she said.

Banerjee alleged that the Census exercise was another backdoor attempt to enforce the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and that it was implemented without consulting political parties.

"The voices of democratic movements are being suppressed. The Census has begun. All information must be provided on the NRC form. Is there any guarantee that this information will not later be used elsewhere?" she said.

She added that people must exercise caution before signing Census forms and sharing personal data, warning that it may result in personal savings getting wiped off.

On the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, she alleged that the exercise illegally deleted lakhs of genuine voters and she would move the Supreme Court again, if required, for their inclusion in the voter list.

"The BJP won the election through looting. Many names were removed in the name of SIR. If necessary, I will approach the Supreme Court again. I am not someone who makes a living through law, but I am a small-time lawyer. There will be consequences for this," she said.

"Now, it is not the BJP's honeymoon period, it is their 'money-moon' phase," she said, without elaborating further. Banerjee also lashed out at the Suwendu Adhikari dispensation for its policy of forceful eviction of hawkers from roads and railway stations.

"You have started the politics of bulldozers. Are hawkers supposed to starve? You are serving everyone unilateral notices and ordering them to leave. What will you do when they ask you to leave?" she said. (PTI)

Imran Khan's party resubmits contempt plea after apex court raises objections

ISLAMABAD, AUG 25: Pakistan's jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party on Tuesday resubmitted a contempt petition in the Supreme Court over the violation of its August 18 order to transfer him to a private hospital.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) resubmitted the contempt petition hours after the court returned it with objections.

The petition was filed by Uzma Khan, a sister of the 73-year-old politician, accusing the government of failing to shift the PTI founder to Shifa International Hospital in Islamabad for treatment.

The Apex Court had returned Uzma's petition on technical grounds, but the PTI lawyers immediately addressed the concerns and objections raised by the court and resubmitted it.

PTI chairman Gohar Khan said one of the objections was that the petitioner had not provided a list of charges levelled against the government. "We will file the petition again," he had said.

On August 22, Uzma approached the top court after Khan was taken to the state-run Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) on the night of August 20-21 for an eye procedure and other diagnostic examinations instead of the private-run Shifa



hospital.

was subsequently transported back to Adiala Jail -- which the petition argues violated the court's order directing that Khan would remain admitted at the Islamabad hospital until the next hearing on September 16.

In her petition, Uzma urged the top court to initiate contempt proceedings against the respondents for their "wilful, deliberate and contumacious disobedience and violation" of its order.

The respondents include Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, and several senior government officials, including Adiala Jail Superintendent Sajid Baig.

The petition contended that the court was being ap-

proached in light of the "non-compliance and brazen violations" of the Supreme Court's order by the respondents.

"It is clear from the respondents' own admissions that the court directions contained in the August 18 order were violated," it said.

It said the failure to shift Khan to Shifa International Hospital "leaves no manner of doubt" that the respondents had consciously chosen to disregard and violate the top court's order.

It also said the respondents' conduct undermined the authority of the Supreme Court and warranted cognisance by the court.

The Government, however, defended its decision to take Khan to PIMS rather than Shifa, citing security concerns.

Two specialists from Shifa International Hospital also participated in Khan's eye examination at PIMS, according to the hospital administration.

Meanwhile, the Government has petitioned the Supreme Court seeking a review and recall of its order to shift the former cricketer-turned-politician to a private hospital, arguing that the order was discriminatory because it applied only to Khan and could set a precedent for other prisoners to seek treatment at private hospitals.

The Supreme Court's order followed months of concern raised by Khan's family and supporters over his health, particularly an eye condition diagnosed earlier this year.

His supporters have continued to protest against his incarceration. His relatives and party colleagues have repeatedly alleged human rights violations and accused authorities of restricting his access to adequate medical care, family visits and legal counsel.

The government has rejected such allegations.

Khan was arrested on August 5, 2023, in a corruption case and has remained in custody since then. He has been lodged in Adiala Jail, a detention facility on the outskirts of Rawalpindi. (PTI)

Australia's music industry bans AI-generated tracks from official charts

MELBOURNE, AUG 25: Australia's recorded music industry will bar tracks wholly generated by artificial intelligence from official charts as burgeoning generative technologies threaten artists' livelihoods, a representative said on Tuesday.

The crackdown comes as a variation of Madonna's pop hit "Like a Prayer" created by an Australian producer using AI-generated vocals and drums has spent 16 weeks in the Australian top 20, stoking debate about generative AI's place in music. It peaked at number two on the Australian Record Industry Association's top 20 Australian singles chart in May and remained in fourth place on Tuesday.

Wholly AI-generated tracks will be banned from the ARIA charts from Monday next week, but some AI-assisted music will remain eligible, an ARIA statement said.

Tracks can be eligible only if "humans wrote the song and performed the lead vocal and the primary instru-



ments," among other requirements, the statement said.

AI-generated music would also be ineligible for the Australian industry's prestigious ARIA awards.

ARIA chief executive Annabelle Herd said: "These changes reflect our intent to remain dynamic and promote the human nature of artistry in what is - to say the least - a rapidly developing space."

The ARIA Charts will al-

ways remain a transparent measurement of the music Australia consumes, but a chart that rewards unlicensed AI output would undercut the very basis of the recorded music we exist to represent," Herd added.

Eligible music must also be produced using legal AI services. Music was appearing on streaming services that had apparently been developed with AI tools trained on artists' music without authorisation.

The Australian rules are in step with new principles released in July by the London-based International Federation of the Phonographic Industry. The federation represents the recording industry worldwide.

The international guidelines state that to qualify for official music charts, a track must be "substantially human made."

Sydney Conservatorium of Music composer and lecturer Alexis Weaver told Australian Broadcasting Corp. the debate around AI in music was "exceptionally fraught and very emotional for a lot of musicians and so everyone will have a different opinion."

Weaver applauded ARIA's move as a "wonderful step forward" that sent a message ARIA wanted to "prioritize and value human creativity."

"It can be quite hard to avoid AI tools in the current landscape," Weaver said. "There is a way to use it while you're still steering the ship and making the main creative choices." (AP)

97 crore voters, 1.8 crore election workers: CEC highlights scale of India's polls

LUCKNOW, AUG 25: Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar stated on Monday that India, with approximately 97 crore voters, represents "the biggest family in the world."

"In India, there are approximately 97 crore voters. This figure is not just a statistic; it's significant. Do you know what 97 crore equals in terms of voter population of various countries? If you add the voters of the US, Canada, South America, entire Europe, entire Africa, entire South-East Asia, even then 8 crore is left. You are a part of such a large democracy. This is the biggest family in the world," Kumar said.

Kumar made the remarks while participating in the regional conference of ELC 2.0 and ECINET at the Indira Gandhi Pratishthan in Lucknow, the office of the UP



chief electoral officer said in a statement.

Kumar elaborated on the scale of the operations carried out by the Election Commission of India (ECI) during Lok Sabha elections.

"The Government of India, the world's largest government, employs 65 lakh people. In contrast, Walmart, the largest private company,

employs 20 lakh. During Lok Sabha elections, the ECI becomes the largest organisation on Earth, with 1.8 crore people working alongside it," he emphasised, highlighting the enormity of the process.

He pointed out that there is no better example of transparency than this.

Posing a question to his audience, he asked how com-

BLOs are foundation of Indian democracy, says CEC Gyanesh Kumar

LUCKNOW, AUG 25: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar on Tuesday described Booth Level Officers (BLOs) as the "foundation of Indian democracy", saying their transparency and dedication at the grassroots level have earned them the trust of voters.

Addressing an interaction with BLOs in Lucknow, Kumar said the Election Commission of India conducts elections transparently and strictly in accordance with the Constitution, laws and directions of the poll panel.

"BLOs are the foundation of Indian democracy. They are known among voters at their respective booths for their transparency and dedi-

cation," he said.

Kumar said the interaction was aimed at hearing suggestions from BLOs and addressing their queries, noting that they perform their duties with commitment at the grassroots level.

He also shared his old family and educational connections with Lucknow, saying he felt a bond with the BLOs as members of a common family.

India has around 97 crore registered voters, a figure larger than the combined electorate of several countries, Kumar said.

Lok Sabha elections, around 1.80 crore people work on deputation, making the electoral exercise one of the world's largest adminis-

trative operations. There are around 12 lakh BLOs across the country, he said.

The CEC said BLOs play a crucial role in maintaining electoral rolls by identifying and removing entries relating to absent, shifted, dead, duplicate and foreign voters while ensuring every eligible citizen aged 18 and above is included in the rolls.

He also highlighted the three-tier concurrent audit mechanism in the electoral process.

At the draft electoral roll stage, lists prepared by BLOs are audited by Booth Level Agents of political parties. On polling day, procedures ranging from mock polling to filling Part 1 of Form 17C and sealing Electronic Voting

Machines are conducted in the presence of polling agents, he said.

Similarly, during counting, candidates' counting agents remain present to oversee the process, Kumar said.

The CEC urged election officials in Uttar Pradesh to work towards increasing voter turnout in the upcoming elections and ensure that every eligible voter is reached. He particularly called for greater outreach among young voters and married women.

Kumar said the efforts of BLOs were critical to keeping electoral rolls accurate and ensuring every eligible citizen gets an opportunity to exercise their franchise. (Agencies)

Over 2,300 H1N1 Cases Among 3,000 Influenza Infections ; CM Calls For Emergency Meeting

NEW DELHI, AUG 25: Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh on Tuesday said that Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has called for an emergency review meeting amid a rise in influenza cases in the national capital.

Asserting that the situation was under control with adequate doctors and medicines, Singh said Delhi has reported around 3,000 influenza cases this year, which included 2,308 H1N1 infections. Singh said this at a press con-

ference that followed a review meeting with senior officials of the Health Department, MCD, NDMC and Delhi Cantonment Board. "There is no problem of doctors, staff or medicines. The chief minister has called an emergency review meeting. I assure you there is no problem, everything is under control," Singh said. He said the meeting was held to review the arrangements and preparedness for H1N1, or seasonal influenza, as well as vector-borne diseases

in Delhi. "There is no need for panic. Patients are coming, but they are getting treated and then going back. Isolation wards have been created in every hospital. If any patient complains of not being provided a bed, action will be taken against the hospital," the minister said.

At 2,308 cases, H1N1 infections account for the vast majority of influenza cases reported in Delhi this year, while the remaining are of other strains of influenza.