

Asia

Valls jokes with robots: Robots have already begun taking the place of workers in a host of industries but how long before they replace politicians?

That was the thorny philosophical question French Prime Minister encountered during a visit to Japan on Monday.

During one of his many meet-and-greets, **Manuel Valls** was introduced to Nao and Pepper, two chatty robots who



Valls

deftly welcomed him to the stage as "the minister of ministers".

"I very much admire the scope of their talent," Valls quipped in return.

"But I hope in any case, for the moment, that their innovation stops before they are able to become a Prime Minister, or minister of ministers," he added.

Valls' three day trip, which included a meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday, has been billed as a celebration of Japanese-French cooperation. (AFP)

China typhoon kills 6: A typhoon bringing heavy rain churned inland through southern China on Monday, a day after making landfall, killing at least six people, injuring hundreds, knocking out power and overturning cars.

The storm made landfall in the southern province of Guangdong on Sunday, triggering widespread blackouts, state media said. Winds knocked out power grids along the coast, leaving large areas without electricity, water or telecommunications.

TV footage showed trees snapped in two by a tornado spawned by the storm and a building at a construction raised from the ground like a toy. A crane toppled from a high-rise under construction.

The storm is expected to lose strength as it heads northwest. Authorities warned that flooding and mudslides were possible in the southwestern province of Yunnan.

Authorities have cancelled dozens of flights, evacuated thousands and returned nearly 64,000 fishing boats to harbour in the south, state television reported. (RTRS)

Ai finds studio bugged: Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei found several hidden listening devices in his Beijing studio after he returned from a trip to Germany, his friend Liu Xiaoyuan confirmed Monday.

Ai could not be reached, but he has posted photos of the bugs found in electric sockets on his Instagram account as well as a video clip in which someone set off firecrackers in a metal bucket next to a listening device. "Did you hear it," Ai wrote next to the video.

In another photo of a bug, Ai wrote: "There are always surprises."

The artist has in the past upset Chinese authorities with boldly critical remarks of the ruling Communist Party and its government. He was briefly detained in 2011 and released after 81 days in jail. The authorities withheld his passport but returned it to him four years later, in July. (AP)

Ex-HK leader charged: Hong Kong's former leader, Donald Tsang, was charged on Monday with two counts of misconduct in public office, the latest in a string of scandals that have ensnared senior business and former political figures in the Asian financial hub.

Tsang, 70, retired in 2012 after a high-flying career as a civil servant, serving as a senior official in the former British colonial administration and a former financial secretary.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption said the charges related to a rental deal for a penthouse flat in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen and the nomination of an architect doing design work on the flat for a government award.

Tsang appeared in court wearing a dark red bowtie and pocket handkerchief, a white collared shirt and black suit. He stood tightlipped at a microphone in the rear of the courtroom and answered "I understand" as each of the charges was read aloud. (RTRS)

Junta appoints committee:

Thailand's military government appointed a new committee Monday to write a post-coup constitution after an unpopular earlier draft was rejected last month in a move that has delayed elections until at least 2017.

The new 21-member committee will start work Tuesday and has six months to write its draft charter, which needs approval from the legislature before being submitted to a national referendum, said Meechai Ruchapan, a legal expert and former Senate speaker who also led a panel that drafted another post-coup constitution in 2007.

Meechai told reporters that one of the committee's first items of business will be to decide whether to start from scratch or work from the draft rejected last month. (AP)

Vietnam arrests ex-soldier: A former soldier turned democracy campaigner has been arrested in Vietnam for attempted subversion, sources said Monday, the same charge that previously saw him jailed for more than five years.

Tran Anh Kim, 66, was taken into police custody on Sept 21, a source close to the family told AFP, requesting anonymity for fear of reprisals by authorities.

"I was informed several days later that Kim would be jailed for four months for investigation under Article 79 of the criminal code," the source said.

Article 79 is one of several vaguely-worded clauses in the criminal code which rights groups say are used by the communist country's authoritarian rulers to persecute dissenters.

If found guilty of "activities to overthrow the People's administration", defendants can face the death sentence.

Police took Kim and his laptop, mobile



People enjoy the hot weather at the north end of Bondi Beach during the Labour Day holiday in Sydney on Oct 5. (AFP)

Australia

Canberra to spend \$1bn on 'world leader' armoured vehicles

Police probe motives of teen gunman

SYDNEY, Oct 5. (Agencies): Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said Monday it was still not clear if the teenager who shot and killed a man outside a police headquarters was a self-motivated "lone-wolf" attacker.

Police have not identified the black-clad assailant who shot 58-year-old finance worker Curtis Cheng in the back of the head outside New South Wales state police headquarters in suburban Sydney on Friday.

The teen, who authorities said was born in Iran of Iraqi and Kurdish background and had no criminal history prior to the incident, was killed in an exchange of fire with police.

"In terms of these so-called lone wolves, it is too early to comment or really for me to say at any rate to what extent this individual who murdered Mr Cheng was self-motivated, self-activated," Turnbull told reporters.

"There is a lot of work being done to investigate this murder," said the leader, who on the weekend said the attack "appears to have been an act of terrorism".

Authorities have searched a mosque the shooter is believed to have attended, and Turnbull stressed that Australian Muslims were the country's "absolutely necessary partners in combating this type of extremist violence".

Radicalisation

"All of us need to be very aware of the way in which radicalisation can occur... communities at every level, from families all the way up, should be alert to what young people are doing, what influences are impacting on young people," he said.

Police have given no information on the shooter, who media reports said regularly skipped school to pray at a local mosque.

Australian officials have said they are concerned about the prospect of lone-wolf attacks by individuals inspired by groups such as the Islamic

State organisation, and have cracked down on Australians attempting to travel to conflict zones such as Syria.

Turnbull said the government must adapt to changing threats and "constantly calibrate our response and learn from what we're doing".

"The need to counter radicalisation is there, the government's commitment to countering it is absolutely undiminished," he said.

Robyn Torok, an expert in online radicalisation from Edith Cowan University, told the national broadcaster ABC that Islamic State militants are recruiting young Westerners to launch attacks in their home countries.

"They're giving them information... on how to hide their extremist identity, how to fly under the radar, how to deal with certain agencies, how to buy certain weapons and how to hid their true intent," she said.

Australia will spend Aus\$1.3 billion (US\$1 billion) on next-generation armoured land vehicles for its army, Prime Minister **Malcolm Turnbull** said Monday as he announced the latest update to modernise the nation's military.

Australian forces are part of the coalition fighting Islamic State group jihadists in Iraq and Syria, but Turnbull denied that the procurement of 1,100 blast-resistant Hawkei's from Thales Australia suggested a greater global engagement.

"I am not signalling that," Turnbull told reporters at a joint press conference with Defence Minister **Marise Payne** at a test facility for the Hawkei vehicles north of Melbourne.

"However, the reality is that IEDs (improvised explosive devices) for example are a feature of the modern battlefield and regardless of the context in which the Australian Defence Force is operating that type of threat is almost certainly going to be there. These vehicles are able to operate in every ter-

rain." Australia last year beefed up its air power with the \$12.4 billion purchase of 58 more F-35 Joint Strike Fighters to bring its total JSF force to 72 and this year said it would buy two long-distance C-17 Globemaster planes in an Aus\$1 billion procurement to boost military and disaster relief operations worldwide.

Canberra has not yet decided on its biggest ever defence procurement programme — an estimated Aus\$50 billion project to replace current diesel and electric-powered Collins Class submarines.

Turnbull said the government would purchase the 1,100 locally-built Hawkei protected vehicles, as well as more than 1,000 trailers, manufactured at Thales Australia's production line in Bendigo in the southern state of Victoria.

"It is an example of how the Australian Defence Force is investing in technology to meet the threats of the modern battleground," he said.

Turnbull said the program will provide 170 jobs directly and a further 60 in the supply chain as the vehicles, which are designed to be more mobile and have greater blast resistance, are manufactured in Bendigo.

Australia, where Uber is popular but mostly illegal, offers a microcosm of the company's global challenges.

Three years after launch, the service has failed to gain government approvals in most jurisdictions, and two criminal cases that are heading to court this week could bring even more legal troubles.

On the other hand, Uber has proved popular with the Australian public, notching more than one million registered users in a country of just 24 million even in the face of fierce pushback from the taxi industry and many local authorities.

There are signs Uber's intense lobbying of regulatory bodies and govern-

ments is paying off in some quarters, as Canberra this month became the first world capital to introduce ride-sharing laws before Uber and others enter the market.

"It's a message to every other state in Australia that they need to move forward," said Uber Australia spokesman **Brad Kitschke**.

The new regulations slash the price of taxi license fees and the cost of hire cars, while legalizing and regulating ride-sharing services like Uber and local rival goCatch. Uber has 15,000 driver "partners" across Australia with a goal of 20,000 by the end of the year, while goCatch, which uses licensed taxi drivers, counts 30,000 of the country's 68,000 drivers as members.

Still, Uber has a long way to go. A lawsuit filed by the taxi industry in New South Wales state, alleging the company is running an illegal service, is shaping up to be a critical test case as it returns to court this week.

Some state governments have launched sporadic crackdowns, arresting and fining individual drivers, though they have been loathe to make more concerted efforts against the popular service, fearing a voter backlash.

"A ruling against Uber [in the New South Wales case] would encourage every other state to institute the law," said **Oliver Talbot**, a partner at Brisbane law firm Talbot Sayer, who is not involved in the case. Uber Australia spokesman **Brad Kitschke** said the company is confident of its position.

A criminal case in Melbourne, where 12 Uber X drivers were arrested in a sting operation and charged with operating a commercial passenger vehicle without a license, is also heading to trial this week.

Kitschke declined to comment on reports the company is funding that drivers' defense, saying only that Uber believes the case would be unnecessary if the federal government changed outdated laws.



This Oct 3, NASA satellite photo shows Typhoon Mujigae approaching China. Four people were killed Sunday as Typhoon Mujigae ploughed into southern China with forecasters warning it was packing winds of up to 180 km/h (112 mph), state news agency Xinhua reported. (AFP)



Aquino



Robredo

Robredo to run

The widow of a popular Philippine politician has accepted a ruling party offer to run as vice-president in an election in May which should boost the chances of victory for President Benigno Aquino's successor.

More than 54 million Filipinos will vote for a new president, vice president, and about 18,000 lawmakers and local government officials in elections that happen every six years. "After deep soul searching, broad consultation and fervent prayers, I am accepting the challenge to run as vice-president of Secretary Mar Roxas," Leni Robredo told a cheering crowd of supporters in Manila, referring to former Interior Minister Manuel Roxas.

Investors are closely watching the elections, fearing the political succession in one of Asia's fastest growing economies could derail gains made during Aquino's rule.

Aquino has endorsed Roxas, the grandson of the country's first post-war president, to lead the ruling party into the polls and Robredo, a 51-year-old lawyer who won a seat in Congress in 2013, should boost the credibility of the ticket, analysts said.

While Roxas' popularity ratings has jumped, according to the latest surveys, he is still in third place, trailing a novice senator, Grace Poe, and the incumbent vice-president, Jejomar Binay.

Analysts say Robredo brings a feeling of warmth and accessibility to Roxas' image as a straightforward, technocrat.

Robredo has earned a reputation as a lawyer who helps poor farmers and fishermen and for being a steadfast opponent of corruption. Her late husband, Jesse Robredo, was interior minister when he was killed in a plane crash in 2012. (RTRS)

phone and some papers containing "pro-democracy statements and writings", the source said.

Le Cong Dinh, a human rights blogger who was jailed alongside Kim in 2009 and remains under house arrest, said he had also been informed of the dissident's detention.

"They arrested him due to his participation in the Democratic Party," he told AFP. Kim, who served in the army for more than 30 years, was jailed in December 2009 for his role in two "reactionary and illegal" political organisations

— the Democratic Party of Vietnam and the pro-democracy bloc known as "8406".

The banned Democratic Party was dissolved in the 1980s but revived in 2006 by the late Hoang Minh Chinh, a former communist official turned dissident.



A follower listens to a Buddhist monk chanting at a Buddhist pagoda during celebrations of Pchum Ben, or Ancestors' Day, on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, Cambodia on Oct 5. Cambodians celebrate the traditional 15-day religious festival, which commemorates the spirits of the dead. (AP)

Woman sits dead for hours in HK McDonald's

HONG KONG, Oct 5. (AFP): A homeless woman lay dead at a Hong Kong McDonald's restaurant for hours surrounded by diners who failed to notice her, sparking concern over the city's "McRefugees".

The woman, who police say was between 50 and 60, was found dead Saturday morning and has been held up as an example of the growing number of homeless people who seek shelter in 24-hour restaurants. "Officers arrived upon a report from a female customer (that a person was found to have fainted)," police said in a statement.

"The subject was certified dead at the scene."

Local media said the woman was slumped at a table, 24 hours after she first entered the restaurant in the working class district of Ping Shek.

and was serving an additional three years under house arrest.

Vietnam's one-party state is regularly denounced by rights groups and Western governments for its headline stance on press freedom and human rights.

But Hanoi is seeking closer ties with Washington in the face of regional maritime disputes with Beijing, and has released a series of high-profile dissidents into exile in the United States. (AFP)

Nauru throws gates open:

Nauru unexpectedly said on Monday all 600 asylum seekers held at a controversial Australian detention centre will be allowed to move freely around the tiny South Pacific island and all their asylum applications will be processed this week.

Asylum seekers have long been a contentious political issue in Australia, although it has never received anywhere near the number of refugees currently flooding into Europe as they flee instability in the Middle East and North Africa.

Successive Australian governments have vowed to stop asylum seekers reaching the mainland, turning boats back to Indonesia when it can and sending those it cannot for detention in camps on Manus island in impoverished Papua New Guinea and on Nauru. The harsh conditions at the camps, including reports of systemic child abuse, have been strongly criticised by the United Nations and human rights groups. (RTRS)