

NEVADA LAWMAKER SEEKS BAN ON HUMAN MICROCHIPS

CARSON CITY: Computer chips that store personal information and could be used to pinpoint someone's location could not be implanted in humans without consent under a bill Nevada state lawmakers weighed yesterday. Lawmakers on a judicial panel considered whether Nevada should join at least four other states in banning mandatory identification markers in people as a precaution to keep the emerging technology from creeping into workplaces, prisons or hospitals. Republican Sen. Becky Harris of Las Vegas, sponsor of the legislation, said she's worried computer chips could pose serious risks to human rights and public health.

"This is a completely new issue," Harris said. "I just want a safety measure in place until we better understand the technology and the reasoning behind people's desire to require implanting chips." ACLU of Nevada Policy Director Holly Welborn said there's no impending need to protect people against mandatory micro chipping, but there's no question the technology would violate rights to personal autonomy and privacy. "There really aren't, under any circumstance, any justifications for that type of a tracking device on a human being," Welborn said. The chips are currently used to track goods, find lost pets and make no-swipe credit card purchases.

Sean Sullivan, Washoe County deputy public defender, said the bill may also prohibit radiologists from using tattoos as permanent identifiers of where on patients to aim treatment. Others voiced concerns that it would forbid families and legal guardians of Alzheimer's patients from deciding to put computer chips in those patients, who often wander in later stages of the disease. The Senate Committee on Judiciary did not vote Monday on Senate Bill 109. Radio frequency identification or RFID technology can be encapsulated in glass tubes roughly the size of two grains of rice and can be injected under skin. The US Food and Drug Administration

approved the chips for use in humans in 2004. Two employees at an Ohio-based surveillance company stirred public debate in 2006 when they embedded the chips in their forearms to access protected vaults and police images. Wisconsin, North Dakota, California and Oklahoma subsequently enacted legislation banning any required implantations, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Welborn said municipalities in Canada, Sweden and Australia have considered, but not enacted, laws mandating the chips for certain groups, such as criminals considered a potential threat to society. —AP

ATTACKS ON DRIVERS IN BRAZIL FORCE UBER TO RETHINK CASH STRATEGY

SAO PAULO: On a Thursday night last September, Uber driver Osvaldo Luis Modolo Filho accepted a ride request from a teenage couple on the eastern edge of Sao Paulo, to be paid in cash. A few blocks from their destination, the passengers - who hailed the ride on the Uber app with a false name - drew two blue-handled kitchen knives. They repeatedly stabbed the 52-year-old driver and drove away with his black SUV as he lay bleeding in the road. Two of his fatal wounds were so deep police would first mistake them for bullet holes.

Police later found the car, arrested the couple and accused them of murder in the service of car theft. They are awaiting sentencing and lawyers for both have vowed to appeal. Uber said Modolo Filho was its first driver to be murdered in Brazil. He would not be the last. Police have confirmed six murders since his death, with local press reporting more than a dozen.

A Reuters analysis of crime data obtained by public information request from Sao Paulo's state security secretariat showed a spike in robberies involving Uber drivers since July, when the company started accepting cash payments in the city, raising questions inside the company as to why it did not act faster to address the problem. Traditionally, Uber has charged rides to credit cards registered by users, offering an easy way to verify passengers and track them down if needed. It changed that policy across Brazil last year, allowing customers to pay with cash to turbo-charge growth in a crucial new market.

Demand took off, but so did crime. In Sao Paulo, robberies involving Uber drivers rose ten-fold, the data shows. Attacks rose from an average of 13 per month in the first seven months of 2016, reflecting some degree of danger even before the cash option took effect, to 141 per month in the rest of the year, the data shows. Assaults involving regular taxi drivers in the city rose by just a third in the same period, according to crime data obtained by a separate freedom of information request filed with same security officials, as a deep economic downturn lifted all robberies in the city about six percent.

Safety incidents

The crime data obtained by Reuters covers Jan 1 to Dec 31 2016 and shows all incidents of robberies involving taxi and Uber drivers. It contains some margin for error as it potentially includes attacks on passengers. Police told Reuters the number of attacks on Uber drivers could be much higher given it is a new service and many incidents were likely registered in the system without mentioning the app by name. Drivers and police told Reuters the cash policy has provided easy targets for criminals, allowing them to open accounts

under fake names, without credit cards to verify, and lure drivers into ambushes.

Presented with the findings, Uber declined to give monthly details of ride growth in Sao Paulo but acknowledged it has seen an increase in "safety incidents" without saying by how much. Uber said it was not clear if rising crime was due to the cash policy or the surge in business, which was boosted by the cash option. Uber added its Sao Paulo operations grew by 15 times over the course of 2016. The company said it is now taking steps to make cash rides safer, such as verifying users with a commonly used social security number.

Getting cash payments right in Brazil is a crucial test for Uber as it pushes beyond developed markets, seeking faster growth in poorer countries, where credit cards are less common and public safety more precarious. Drivers around the country have staged protests threatening to quit if Uber does not reduce the risk of crime, while taxi drivers and elected officials have pounced on isolated incidents as evidence of a need for more restrictive legislation.

So far, Uber's business in Brazil is booming. At least 30 percent of its rides in the country are now paid in cash and the rate is far higher in poor areas where credit cards are less common, according to two company sources. In Sao Paulo, cash accounts for most trips in outer boroughs, and the sources said it helped the city overtake New York and Tokyo in recent months to become Uber's biggest market by rides.

But a dozen current and former managers and drivers criticized how Uber introduced cash in Brazil, saying the San Francisco-based tech giant overlooked high levels of violent crime as it rushed to grow in an unfamiliar market. Senior executives now admit publicly that the company was slow to introduce simple fixes once the dangers in Brazil were clear.

Slow to respond

As recently as October, Uber denied there was a problem with cash payments in Brazil. Andrew Macdonald, general manager for the region, said that the company had studied if cash endangered drivers and found it did not. "If they're worried, it's a bit emotional," he said in an interview with Bloomberg at the time. One source involved in the cash roll out at Uber told Reuters the internal study was conducted too soon after cash was introduced, undermining its conclusions.

"With the numbers that cash was bringing in, no one wanted to see that there might be a problem," the person said, asking not to be named given the sensitivity of the matter. Macdonald acknowledged to Reuters on Friday his statement was "a mistake" and said Uber had been working on ways to improve safety around cash payments since fall last year. —Reuters



CAIRO: In this file photo, Egyptian activist Samira Ibrahim, left, and Mona Eltahawy, a prominent Egyptian-born US columnist, center, march in downtown Cairo, Egypt to mark International Women's Day. — AP

CYBER SPIES TARGET AMERICAN-EGYPTIAN WRITER HACKERS HAVE BYPASSED TWO-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION

PARIS: American-Egyptian author Mona Eltahawy is one of many activists and human rights advocates targeted in a sweeping cyberespionage campaign blamed on Egypt's government, The Associated Press has found. A booby-trapped email sent to Eltahawy and examined by the AP shows that she was targeted by the same password-stealing technique used to try to compromise staff at more than half a dozen Egyptian human rights organizations. Digital clues such as matching email addresses employed to send the malicious messages and the use of the same credential-harvesting website proved the same actor were involved.

Eltahawy, a fierce critic of Egypt's government who has frequently complained about state surveillance, said she felt violated but not surprised. "I'm used to this from the Egyptian regime," she said in a series of telephone conversations with the AP. "I'm not trying to belittle what they've done, but I'm used to this." Officials in Cairo have yet to speak publicly about the barrage of malicious messages, also known as phishing emails, sent to civil society figures in recent months. The campaign, exposed by internet watchdog group Citizen Lab earlier this month, prompted Eltahawy to

tweet that she was among its targets.

Eltahawy's partner later forwarded copies of the emails to the AP. The message itself was closely tailored to Eltahawy's concerns. An outspoken commentator on feminism, the Arab world and Egypt, Eltahawy was a constant media presence during the country's 2011 uprising. She also has a sizeable following on Twitter, where she regularly shares news about activists caught up in Egypt's grinding crackdown on dissent. Ever since Egypt's 2013 military takeover, local rights groups have had their assets frozen, their staff detained and their leaders banned from traveling abroad.

On Dec. 7, women's rights attorney Azza Soliman was arrested. In the following week, Eltahawy fielded social media messages about the lawyer's upcoming court date. So when she received an email labeled "an important document about Azza Soliman," she opened it right away. "I usually never go and click on documents that are sent to me by people I don't know," she said. "But because this was Azza and I was very upset about what had happened to her, I immediately went and clicked." Eltahawy said she realized she had been fooled, especially after she received additional suspicious emails the next day and realized there was activity on

her account she didn't recognize.

"Someone logged onto my computer from another neighborhood in Cairo!" she wrote to her partner via WhatsApp at the time. "Those (expletive) bastards!" Eltahawy and other activists blame the government for the break-in. An Egyptian Interior Ministry official insisted to AP - on condition of anonymity - that officials weren't involved. Circumstantial evidence such as bits of Arabic slang in the malicious sites' code isn't conclusive. The AP sent a message seeking comment to the email address used by Eltahawy's hacker earlier this month, but the message went unanswered. Hours later, the email account was deleted.

Eltahawy's experience demonstrates the power of phishing, which consists of deploying bogus emails to entice people to give up their passwords. It's the Swiss Army knife of electronic espionage - ubiquitous, cheap and, done well, it can break in almost anywhere. Eltahawy's hackers even appear to have bypassed an additional security measure known as two-factor authentication by sending out a second round of malicious messages. Eltahawy paid them a grudging compliment. "This is a testament to how good they are with these phishing things," Eltahawy said. "They know how to get you." —AP

US SENATORS TRY TO SPEED UP DEPLOYMENT OF SELF-DRIVING CARS

WASHINGTON: In the first major congressional attempt to address the advent of self-driving cars, two senators said yesterday they're launching a bipartisan effort to help to speed up the deployment of the vehicles on the nation's roads. Republican John Thune of South Dakota, the chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, and Democrat Gary Peters of Michigan, said they're exploring legislation that "clears hurdles and advances innovation in self-driving vehicle technology." The senators' counterparts in the House are also

gearing up to address the new technology, with a hearing scheduled for today.

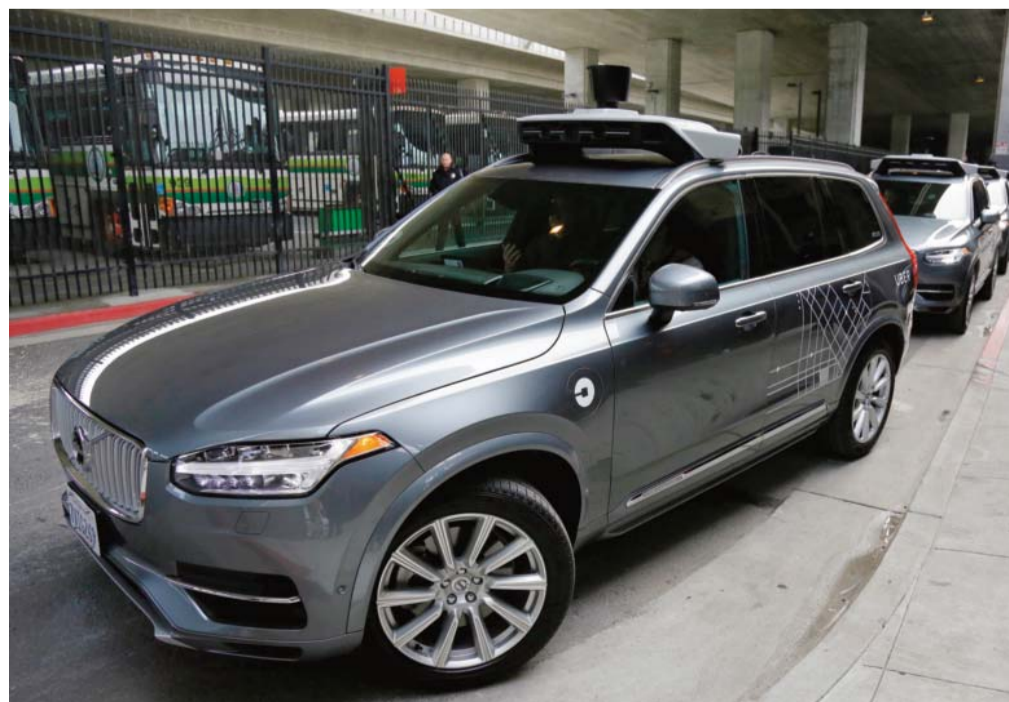
Automakers cite federal requirements that all vehicles must have steering wheels and brake pedals as examples of regulations that presume there will be a human driver and might inhibit the introduction of self-driving cars. Congressional action may be needed to make changes. "Without changes to those regulations, it may be years before the promise of today's technology can be realized and thousands of preventable deaths that could have

been avoided will happen," Michael Ableson, General Motors' vice president of global strategy, plans to tell the House Energy and Commerce Committee, according to prepared testimony.

Proponents of self-driving cars say they hold the potential to dramatically reduce traffic deaths by eliminating human error, which the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says is a factor in 94 percent of all fatal crashes. More than 35,000 people were killed on the nation's roads in 2015, up over 7 percent from the previous year. Traffic deaths surged an additional 8 percent in the first nine months of last year. Automakers also complain that states are moving ahead with their own regulations, creating the potential for a confusing "patchwork" of laws.

"Our effort will also include a discussion on the existing patchwork of laws and regulations and the traditional roles of federal and state regulators," Thune and Peters said in a joint statement. Safety advocates have urged the government to set standards that specifically address the safety of self-driving cars. The Obama administration last year issued a voluntary set of safety goals for makers of self-driving cars to meet with the understanding that enforceable regulations could follow.

The Trump administration hasn't yet indicated what approach it will take to the technology. Some people may first experience riding in a self-driving car by hailing an on-demand, ride-sharing service like Uber or Lyft. Uber began offering passengers rides in autonomous cars with a human as a backup driver last year in Pittsburgh. Joseph Okpaku, Lyft's vice president of government relations, says in prepared testimony for the House hearing that the company's goal is "to operate a pilot in a major city this year that will permit consumers to enjoy, for the first time, a Lyft in an autonomous vehicle." —AP



SAN FRANCISCO: In this file photo, an Uber driverless car heads out for a test drive in San Francisco. — AP



MASSACHUSETTS: This file photo shows signage in a Verizon store in North Andover, Massachusetts. — AP

VERIZON PULLED BACK INTO UNLIMITED DATA GAME

NEW YORK: Verizon, in a major reversal, has joined other carriers in offering an unlimited data plan. As recently as Jan, Verizon's chief financial officer said unlimited plans were "not something we feel the need to do" even though rivals had made inroads against Verizon by offering them. Verizon stopped offering such plans to new customers in 2012 and has been trying to push long-time customers off those old plans through rate hikes. The arrival of the iPhone and other smartphones made unlimited plans more of a rarity as carriers saw opportunities to make money by charging customers based on how much data they use.

But Sprint and T-Mobile recognized in unlimited data an opportunity to snare customers from heavyweights Verizon and AT&T. Because carriers must poach each other's customers to grow, the competition has intensified. AT&T also

started offering unlimited plans after discontinuing them, but they are available only to customers who also subscribe to DirecTV, which AT&T owns. Its prices are similar to Verizon's for a family; Verizon is cheaper for an individual.

Verizon's new unlimited plan replaces several higher-data plans and starts at \$80 for one person, not counting fees and taxes. (Existing customers can keep their plans.) For a family of four, unlimited costs \$180 at Verizon. To compare, Sprint just launched a new promotion for new customers that costs \$90 a month for four lines, and T-Mobile, which includes taxes and fees in its total price, is \$160. AT&T costs \$180 for four but also requires a TV subscription. Verizon is trying to differentiate itself by letting customers watch high-definition video with the unlimited plan, while competitors run streaming video at DVD-level quality. —AP