

# NEWSBYTES

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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

## The nation where your 'faceprint' is already being tracked

By Jessica Mudditt June 23



Australia's unique use of facial recognition technology has caused controversy and stoked privacy fears, but there is a chance that it could become a world leader in regulating its use.

If a person in Western Australia contracts Covid-19, they must remain in home quarantine for the following seven days – as do their close contacts. The police check up on their whereabouts by sending periodic text messages and require a selfie to be sent back to them within 15 minutes. The police use facial recognition technology and GPS tracking to determine if the person who took the selfie is at home. If they are not, they quickly follow up with a knock on the door and a potentially hefty fine.

The G2G app by local tech start-up Genvis has been used by more than 150,000 people in the state since it was rolled out in September 2020. The same technology, albeit provided by different companies, has been piloted in the states of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. Australia stands out as the only democracy to use facial recognition technology to aid Covid-19 containment procedures while other countries were pushing back against the idea of such surveillance.

San Francisco was the first city in the US to introduce a moratorium against police using facial recognition in May 2019. It was quickly followed by Oakland, also in California, and Somerville in Massachusetts. Amazon, Microsoft, IBM and Google have declared they will not sell their facial recognition algorithms to law enforcements agencies until there is a federal law in place. In November 2021, Meta said that Facebook would delete one billion "faceprints" and cease using the technology for the purposes of tagging people in photos.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has called for a moratorium on the technology until Australia has a specific law to regulate its use. Human rights campaigners say there is potential for the personal data obtained to be used for secondary purposes, and that it is a slippery slope towards becoming a

surveillance state. Groups such as Amnesty warn that the use of facial recognition leads to racial discrimination.

"The pandemic created all these new justifications for using facial recognition technology," says Mark Andrejevic, a professor of media studies at Monash University in Melbourne and the author of a forthcoming book titled Facial Recognition. "Everything went online and organisations were trying to make things work very quickly. But the implications haven't been thought through. Do we want to live in a world where everything is rendered and there are no private spaces? It creates a whole new level of stress that does not lead to a healthy society."

Consent is needed for the G2G app to be used, and it was also needed in the aftermath of Australia's Black Summer bushfires of 2020, when those who had lost their identification papers used facial recognition to qualify for disaster relief payments. But there have been cases of facial recognition technology being used covertly.

In October, convenience store group 7-Eleven was found to have breached their customers' privacy by collecting faceprints from 1.6 million Australian customers when they completed satisfaction surveys. The faceprints were purportedly obtained in order to obtain demographic profiles and prevent staff from gaming the surveys by boosting their ratings. It did not receive a fine.

Australia's Department of Home Affairs began building a national facial recognition database in 2016, and it appears poised to roll it out. In January, it put out a tender for a company to "build and deploy" the data.

"Facial recognition is on the cusp of relatively widespread deployment," says Andrejevic. "Australia is gearing up to use facial recognition to allow access to government services. And among law enforcement agencies, there's definitely a desire to have access to these tools."

Most state governments have provided the central database with their residents' driver's licences, and the database also stores visa and passport photos.

A law to govern facial recognition technology was proposed back in 2019, but it was shelved after a parliamentary committee review found that it lacked adequate privacy protections. Among its strongest critics was the then Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Edward Santow.

"We're now in the worst of all situations where there's no dedicated law, so we're dealing with a few piecemeal protections that are not completely effective and are certainly not comprehensive," says Santow. "And yet the technology is continuing to be deployed."

Santow is working on ways to make the privacy provisions more robust, with his team at the University of Technology in Sydney.

A varied global response

Part of the project involves examining other countries' attempts to regulate facial recognition technologies. There are starkly different approaches around the world. The most common is to rely on a handful of limited privacy protections that Santow says fail to adequately address the issue; that's the case in Australia.

"No country in the world has got it right," says Santow. "If [the privacy protections were suitable], this project would be a really simple one."

Leila Nashashibi is a campaigner at US-based advocacy group Fight for the Future, which is striving to achieve a federal ban on facial recognition and other forms of biometric identifiers.

"Like nuclear energy and biological weapons, facial recognition poses a threat to human society and our basic liberties that far outweigh any potential benefits," she says. "Facial recognition is unlike any other form of surveillance because it enables automated and ubiquitous monitoring of entire populations, and it can be nearly impossible to avoid. As it spreads, people will be too afraid to participate in social movements and political demonstrations. Free speech will be chilled."

Scraping social media for faceprints

The most prominent facial recognition technology provider, US company Clearview AI, appears not to be deterred by the lawsuits and hefty fines it is amassing in a variety of jurisdictions. It first attracted media attention when a billionaire used it to identify his daughter's dinner date, and it is currently being used by the Ukrainian government to identify dead Russian soldiers. Their families are notified over social media, with the photos sometimes sent as an attachment.

"Facial recognition creates actionable information in real time in order to pre-empt crime" – Mark Andrejevic

It is also seeking for its technology to be used in schools in the United States as a "visitor management system", which they believe could be used to help prevent school shootings by recognising the faces of expelled students, for example. Facial recognition and object recognition technology has been trialled at various schools already by different providers, including object recognition that could identify a concealed weapon.

"Clearview AI is exploiting people's terror and trauma by saying that surveillance and policing is the answer," says Nashashibi. Clearview AI's Australian CEO and founder Hoan Ton-That disagrees. He says that facial recognition technology has great potential for crime prevention, because it can ensure that only authorised people have access to a building such as a school.

"We have seen our technology used with great success by law enforcement to stop gun trafficking, and we are hopeful that our technology can be used to help prevent tragic gun crimes in the future," he says.

In Australia, facial-recognition technology is being used at a number of stadiums to prevent terrorist suspects or banned football hooligans from entering. Andrejevic believes the use of facial recognition as a security measure is a significant step-up in surveillance and requires careful consideration.

"CCTV is often criticised for only allowing evidence after the fact, whereas facial recognition creates actionable information in real time in order to pre-empt crime," he says. "That's a very different conception of security."

Live facial recognition is already used by some police forces around the world. London's Metropolitan Police, for example, uses it to monitor specific areas for a "watchlist" of wanted offenders or people who might pose a risk to the public.

Clearview has created a searchable database of 20 billion facial images, largely by scraping photos from social media without consent. Ton-That has said the company will not work with authoritarian governments such as China, North Korea and Iran. However, it has encountered problems in some democracies. It has been banned in Canada and Australia and on 24 May, the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) fined it more than £7.5m (US\$9.1m), following a joint investigation with

the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. It was ordered to delete the data of British residents from its systems. In December 2021, France's privacy watchdog found that Clearview breached Europe's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Santow says that the aim in Australia is to develop a nuanced approach which encourages the use of positive applications and to impose guardrails to prevent harms. The worst-case scenario would be to replicate the "social credit" system in China, where individuals and organisations are tracked by the government to determine their "trustworthiness".

"In determining whether a use is beneficial or harmful, we refer to the basic international human rights framework that exists in almost every jurisdiction in the world," says Santow.

For example, the law would require free and informed consent for facial recognition to be used. However, if the technology was causing discrimination to occur through its inaccuracy in relation to certain groups, the consent would become irrelevant. As Santow says: "You cannot consent to being discriminated against."

Increasingly sophisticated and powerful

"In the next couple years, we're going to see a big shift away from people using passwords, which are totally insecure. Biometrics will become the default," says O'Hara.

Facial recognition works by dividing the face into a series of geometric shapes and mapping the distances between its "landmarks", such as the nose, eyes and mouth. These distances are compared with other faces and turned into a unique code called a biometric marker.

"When you use a facial recognition app to open your phone, it isn't a picture of your face that your phone stores," explains Garrett O'Hara, field chief technologist at security company Mimecast. "It stores an algorithmic derivation of what your face is mathematically. It looks like a long code of letters and numbers."

Facial recognition has come a long way since it was first developed in the 1960s, although the error rate varies significantly between different systems used today. At first it was unable to distinguish between siblings, or the changes in a person's face as they aged. It is now so sophisticated that it can identify someone wearing a facemask or sunglasses, and it can do so from more than a kilometre away.

The best face identification algorithm has an error rate of just 0.08%, according to tests by the National Institute of Standards and Technology. However, this level of accuracy is only possible in ideal conditions, where the facial features are clear and unobscured, the lighting is good and the individual is facing the camera. The error rate for individuals captured "in the wild" can be as high as 9.3%.

"It's incredibly useful technology. But if somebody had asked us 20 years ago when the worldwide web was starting up if we wanted to live in a world where our interactions and activity were collected and tracked, the majority of us probably would have said that it sounded creepy," says O'Hara. "We're now replicating the tracking of online space to include physical space as well. And we're not asking the questions about it that we should be."

One of its most problematic aspects is its potential for racial discrimination and bias. Most facial recognition applications were initially trained using data sets that were not representative of the full breadth of the community.

"In the early days, the datasets being used were all taken from white males or white people in general," says O'Hara. "And clearly, it leads to problems when you've got people of colour or of different ethnicities or backgrounds that don't match the training models. At the end of the day, it's just mathematics. This is the problem."

## Biden Will Do Everything He Can To Prevent Return Of Netanyahu

The latest developments in Israeli politics provided President Joe Biden with a good excuse to postpone his visit to Israel next month. With the collapse of Israel's coalition government this week, the country is saddled with an interim government headed by an unelected prime minister in Yair Lapid who is about to launch his campaign to hold onto the office.

Scheduling a visit by the leader of Israel's sole superpower ally at the start of what promises to be a bitterly fought election campaign will make it clear that Washington is far from neutral when it comes to the outcome.

And that is exactly the impression that Biden is hoping to leave when he goes to the Jewish state in July.

Far from being an unwelcome development, the exit of Naftali Bennett from the prime minister's office is good news for the Biden administration. It viewed Bennett--the leader of a small party that was actually to the right of the Likud and former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu--as a necessary evil.

Since his decision to throw in with Lapid and the ragtag coalition of parties from the left, right, center and one Arab Islamist faction was the only reason that Netanyahu was ousted, Biden and his foreign-policy team treated him with kid gloves over the course of his year in Israel's top job.

The administration was itching to bash the Jewish state over every new home built in Jerusalem or Judea and Samaria, as well as for every ginned-up dispute about the Palestinians involving Israeli self-defense against terrorism. It was also less than enthused over Jerusalem's ongoing campaign to sabotage Iran's nuclear program that was being conducted even as the Americans were desperately trying to convince Tehran to cut a new and even weaker deal.

But they passed on every opportunity to do so, signaling that their preference was for the Bennett-Lapid coalition to somehow cling to power. Bennett repaid their courtesy by declining to push openly for Americans to speak up against the new push for appeasement of Iran, thereby undermining critics of Biden's feckless policy among both Democrats and Republicans.

According to the coalition agreement, Bennet's fall means that Lapid will become premier until a new one can be elected. That provides Biden with a far more accommodating Israeli counterpart. Not only can Lapid be counted on to back the administration when it comes to Iran, but his support for the intellectually bankrupt two-state solution approach to the Palestinians would allow the Biden team to revive the same delusional peace-process policies most of them pursued when serving under former President Barack Obama.

That is, if he can hang on to the prime minister's office.

While Lapid's Yesh Atid Party remains the second-largest in the Knesset and is likely to hold onto that distinction in the next election, it will still rank far behind Likud. The notion that Netanyahu's corruption trial, which drags on endlessly despite the weakening of the already flimsy case against him during the course of its first year, will hurt him has already exploded.

There doesn't seem to be any scenario in which Lapid can put together a 61-seat majority, even if parties like Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu, Gideon Sa'ar's New Hope or even Bennett's Yamina--all of which oppose the new prime minister's views on security and the Palestinians--stick with him.

Lapid's best chance to keep Netanyahu out of office is another stalemate, much like the results of the four elections that were held between 2019 and 2021. As the caretaker prime minister, Lapid can hold onto his new title, much as Netanyahu did during that period, as long as there is no duly constituted new governing majority.

And to achieve that goal, he can count on any help that Biden is able to give him.

Despite the righteous indignation that Americans feel about the thought of other nations intervening in their politics--such as the outrage that the hoax/conspiracy theory about the Russians colluding with former President Donald Trump to steal the 2016 election generated among Democrats--the United States has a long history of trying to influence democratic elections elsewhere, especially in Israel.

In the last 30 years, presidents from both American political parties have sought to prevent Likud governments from being formed. President George H.W. Bush did his best to help Yitzhak Rabin topple Yitzhak Shamir in 1992. President Bill Clinton did everything but canvas door-to-door in Tel Aviv in a vain quest to aid Shimon Peres's doomed effort to defeat Benjamin Netanyahu in the months after Rabin's assassination. He had better luck three years later when Ehud Barak knocked off Netanyahu in 1999.

A decade later, in his first months in office, Obama openly plotted to prevent Netanyahu from forming a coalition after the 2009 election and then spent the next years trying unsuccessfully to ensure that his government fell.

In fact, Obama never stopped scheming against Netanyahu as his opposition to efforts to pressure the Jewish state to make dangerous concessions to the Palestinians, coupled with his campaign against the Iran nuclear deal, made his defeat something of an obsession for that administration. Indeed, in one of the more brazen acts of intervention, the Obama State Department even helped funnel cash to efforts that helped Netanyahu's opponents under the guise of funding "pro-democracy" efforts in Israel.

By the same token, former President Donald Trump did all he could to help Netanyahu in the three elections held in 2019 and 2020 with both unprecedented pro-Israel policies and giving his ideological ally the benefit of stage-managed events that touted the Abraham Accords.

So, there will be nothing new in Biden seeking to put his finger on the Israeli electoral scale for Lapid. Still, the next prime minister needs to be wary of the American embrace. The more that Biden makes his distaste known for a Netanyahu comeback--and a snub of the opposition leader next month is a given--the more ammunition it will provide the Likud Party.

Netanyahu lost office because Israelis were no longer deeply divided on security issues since a consensus that stretches from the center-left to the right believes that there is no peace partner, as well as for the necessity of the country doing everything in its power to stop an Iranian nuclear weapon.

The more Biden makes obvious his preference and that a new right-wing/religious coalition will result in American disfavor, the more it will impress upon Israeli voters that another stalemate will mean that policies they regard as dangerous will be pursued--something not true of the Bennett-Lapid government that was too weak and divided to do anything important. That would make it clear to the electorate that allowing Lapid to stay in office means issues of war and peace--and not how tired they are of Netanyahu and his family--should be the decisive factor in the outcome.

All of this means that the Israeli section of Biden's tour will be even more closely watched than it might have been had Bennett hung on. Yet Biden and the rest of the Obama alumni that run U.S. foreign policy these days should remember that the more they bashed Netanyahu in the past, the stronger he became.

A repeat of that formula might be just the thing to enable the Democrats' bête noire to secure the 61 Knesset seats that he needs to win the election outright. If he does, that will undoubtedly mean a new period of tension and conflict between Washington and Jerusalem. But this wouldn't be the first time Israeli voters demonstrated that they don't like taking instructions from American politicians.

JNS News

## The Coming Shortage Of Diesel Fuel Could Cripple Our Economy

What I am about to share with you is a developing situation, and I hope to share more once the facts become clearer. It appears that a very serious diesel crisis is coming in the months ahead, and that will have a dramatic impact on our economy.

As you will see below, we are being warned that there will be shortages of diesel fuel, diesel exhaust fluid and diesel engine oil. Most diesel vehicles require all three in order to run, and so a serious shortage of any of them would be a major disaster.

Needless to say, simultaneous shortages of all three could potentially be catastrophic. Most Americans don't spend much time thinking about diesel, but without it our supply chains collapse and we don't have a functioning economy.

In a recent Time Magazine article discussing the coming diesel fuel shortage, we are told that "the U.S. economy runs on diesel". Though most consumers shake their heads at the cost of gasoline and complain about the cost of filling up their car tanks, what they really should be worried about is the price of diesel. The U.S. economy runs on diesel. It's what powers the container ships that bring goods from Asia and the trucks that collect goods from the ports and bring them to warehouses and then to your home. The farmers who grow the food you eat put diesel in their tractors to plow the fields, and the workers that bring construction equipment to build your home put diesel in their trucks.

Since January, supplies of diesel fuel have been steadily getting tighter.

As supplies have gotten tighter, prices have skyrocketed. The average price of a gallon of diesel fuel hit \$5.50 a gallon in early May, and it has remained above that level ever since.

One of the biggest reasons for the supply crunch is a serious lack of refining capacity. Back in 1980, the U.S. had twice as many refineries...

There are also fewer refineries, which process crude oil into diesel and other products, in the U.S. than were just a few years ago. There are just 124 now operating, down from twice as many in 1980, and down from 139 in 2016, according to the U.S. Energy Information Association. The northeast region is particularly sparse, with just seven refineries today, down from 27 in 1982.

There have already been some temporary outages of diesel fuel at a few locations around the country, and we are being warned that disruptions are likely to intensify during the summer months.

But the good news is that we aren't going to run out of diesel fuel. It may become a lot more expensive, and there may be painful temporary shortages, but we won't run out of it.

Unfortunately, the crisis that we are facing with diesel exhaust fluid is potentially much more serious.

If you have just been skimming this article, this is the part where you need to start really paying attention.

Newsweek is telling us that the United States "could soon experience a severe shortage of diesel exhaust fluid"...

The U.S. could soon experience a severe shortage of diesel exhaust fluid (DEF), impacting U.S. drivers already hit with soaring fuel prices.

DEF is a solution made up of urea and de-ionized water that is needed for almost everything that runs on diesel. It reduces harmful gases being released into the atmosphere and works by converting nitrogen oxide produced by diesel engines into nitrogen and steam.

If you have a diesel vehicle that was sold in the United States after 2010, your vehicle could technically run without DEF, but in most cases your vehicle will simply not let you start it if the DEF tank is dry...

Can we call it a DEF jam? Everything is in short supply as supply chains continue to unlink. The latest commodity reportedly hit is DEF, or the blue diesel exhaust fluid that every diesel sold in the U.S. after 2010 needs to cut emissions. This means that every diesel truck, diesel RV, SUV, and car owner will likely have to look harder, and pay more for, DEF. A diesel engine can technically run without DEF, but your diesel vehicle likely won't let you start it if the DEF tank is empty.

A lack of urea is the biggest reason for the growing shortage of DEF.

The United States is one of the largest importers of urea in the world, and Russia and China are two of the largest exporters. In previous years that wasn't a problem, but now the war in Ukraine has dramatically changed things...

A major portion of our urea comes from Europe, and because of the war in Ukraine we're seeing a shortage of it, according to Newsweek. Russia is one of the world's major exporters of it. China, too, is a major exporter of it, and it has suspended exports. Weather, too, has caused supply chain disruptions. Since it's also a major component in fertilizers, there's intense competition for urea.

Without enough DEF, our economy is going to be in for a world of hurt.

Retailers, customers and distributors are all reporting shortages in diesel engine oil. This is not an imaginary problem, it is a real problem that is so far entirely ignored by the corporate media.

Apparently there are some diesel engine oil additives that are in extremely short supply, and one industry insider is telling us that this problem isn't going to be resolved any time soon.

So what this means is that people are going to start running out of diesel engine oil.

In fact, it is already being reported that the trains in Sri Lanka will soon have to completely shut down because of a lack of diesel engine oil...

Sri Lanka Railways said that it will NOT be possible to operate trains in the future due to the lack of engine oil. A senior official at Sri Lanka Railways said that the current level of engine oil would only last for another two months.

That's in line with the warning we're hearing in the states: About 8 weeks of diesel engine oil remaining in the pipeline.

Just solving one of the shortages that I have described in this article will not be enough.

As I noted in the opening paragraph, a diesel vehicle requires diesel fuel, diesel exhaust fluid and diesel engine oil in order to operate.

You need all three.

Needless to say, there are enormous implications for our supply chains and for our economy as a whole if solutions cannot be found.

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