

'Alexa, my head hurts'

UK health service signs up Amazon

London

“Alexa, what are the symptoms of flu?”

The UK government said yesterday that Britons will be able to get an answer to this and other simple medical questions from the National Health Service (NHS) using their Amazon smart speakers.

The state-run health system's tie-up with the California-based technology giant drew praise from overworked doctors and professionals weary of bad medical advice proliferating online.

But privacy campaigners expressed alarm over the possibility of Amazon storing medical data and then using it to sell targeted ads.

“Technology like this is a great example of how people can access reliable, world-leading NHS advice from the comfort of their home, reducing the pressure on our hardworking GPs and pharmacists,” Health Secretary Matt Hancock said in a statement.

Amazon said it began updating its Echo smart speakers to search NHS websites for medical answers at the start of the week.

The UK health department said it expected half of all symptom checks and other medical queries to be made through voice-assisted technology by next year.

It added that the new and more reliable service would be especially helpful to the elderly and the blind.

Health professionals also welcomed the government's



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HELEN STOKES-LAMPARD
ROYAL COLLEGE OF GPs CHAIRWOMAN

dependent research is done to ensure that the advice given is safe,” Royal College of GPs chairwoman Helen Stokes-Lampard said.

“Otherwise it could prevent people seeking proper medical help and create even more pressure on our overstretched GP service.”

Some privacy campaigners also pointed out that Amazon stores users' voice recordings in their own data centres.

“Encouraging the public to give their private health details to one of the most aggressive corporate data guzzlers is astonishingly misguided,” Britain's Big Brother Watch civil liberties

group director Silkie Carlo said. “Healthcare is made inaccessible when trust and privacy is stripped away, and that's what this terrible plan would do,” Carlo said.

“It's a data protection disaster waiting to happen.”

The new service is being billed by the UK government as a world-first.

The government also points out that Amazon will not be able to access Britons' medical records.

The NHS website offers basic advice on thousands of medical conditions and is one of the most popular symptom checkers in the world.

Gerard Pique handed \$2.36 million tax bill

Madrid, Spain

Barcelona's Gerard Pique will be forced to pay 2.1 million euros (\$2.36 million) to Spain's tax authorities after his conviction for rights-image fraud was confirmed, a legal source said yesterday.

According to a May 13 decision the country's National Court rejected Pique's appeal against the 2016 sentence which required the former Spain international to pay 1.5 million euros in tax arrears and a 600,000 euros fine.

The tribunal concluded Pique had faked the handover of his rights images to his Kerad Project company to pay less tax for 2008, 2009 and 2010.

Pique, a World Cup and European Championships winner retains the right to appeal to Spain's supreme court.

The verdict comes a month after his wife, Colombian musician Shakira, was questioned by a judge near the Catalan city over alleged evasion of 14.5 million euros in taxes.

Her press team released a statement in which they said the artist was innocent.

The centre-back's former teammate at the Camp Nou Neymar is under investigation by Spain's fiscal au-

thorities over a bonus he received at Barca as well as his world-record transfer to Paris Saint-Germain.

Another of Pique's fellow club squad members Lionel Messi, paid a two-million-euro fine in 2016 in his own tax wrangle and received a 21-month jail term.

The prison sentence was later reduced to a further fine of 252,000 euros, equivalent to 400 euros per day of the original term.

A Spanish court in January handed Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo a suspended two-year prison sentence for committing tax fraud when he was at Real Madrid.

The player, who joined Italian side Juventus last year, also agreed to pay 18.8 million euros in fines and back taxes to settle the case, according to judicial sources.

Newspaper *El Mundo* reported in April authorities had accused Atletico Madrid attacker Diego Costa of fraud totalling 1.1 million euros related to taxes related to his image rights in 2014.

Court rejected Pique's appeal against the 2016 sentence to pay 1.5 million euros in tax arrears



New Zealand PM's neighbour lets the cat out of the bag

Wellington

A guilt-ridden neighbour of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern revealed yesterday that he was responsible for accidentally killing the nation's “First Cat” Paddles while reversing out of his driveway.

Paddles died in November 2017, shortly after Ardern won office, but the full circumstances of the death were never publicly revealed, leading to curiosity about who killed the cat.

The much-loved feline was a popular member of the prime ministerial household, with a Twitter account set up in her name, @FirstCatofNZ, attracting more than 11,000 followers.

US magazine *Vanity Fair* praised the tech-savvy feline for “helping establish Ardern as the latest hip, cool world leader that America wishes it had”.

Paddles, who was “polydactyl”, with extra toes that looked like thumbs, also once interrupted a phone call between Ardern and US President Donald Trump by jumping on a table.

Ardern's neighbour, identified only as Chris, told the stuff.co.nz news website that he was rushing back to work from a lunch break in his Auckland home when the prime ministe-



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rial moggy ran into the path of his reversing car.

“It was kind of shocking at first, and I felt fairly bad because I knew a bit of the back story, I knew Paddles had some kind of social media presence and had an extra toe,” he said.

“I was also aware that to Jacinda and Clarke, Paddles was their fur baby at that point that they loved, so I was pretty gutted.”

He could have made a purrfect getaway, but Chris front-

ed up to the prime ministerial household and told them what he had done, saying Ardern was understanding.

He said his children even wrote a condolence card asking Ardern not to send their father to prison.

After Chris spoke publicly about the incident for the first time on Wednesday, the @FirstCatofNZ twitter account retweeted his story and made its first post in more than a year.

“I forgive you. #prpp.”

Merkel suffers new shaking spell

Berlin, Germany

German Chancellor Angela Merkel suffered a new trembling spell on Wednesday, the third time in less than a month, raising questions over her health.

Merkel began shaking involuntarily as national anthems were being played at the reception of Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne, an AFP photographer witnessed.

A government spokesman played down the trembling, telling AFP: “The chancellor is well and the talks with the Finnish prime minister will go on as planned.”

The shaking was visible although less severe than during



German Chancellor Angela Merkel

the first episode in June.

On that occasion she appeared unsteady and shook as she stood in the midday sun next to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, whom she was welcoming with military

honours.

The first bout of shaking was blamed on dehydration, but a second episode struck a week later at the end of June, just hours before she was due to board a plane for a G20 summit in Japan.

Officials had taken the same line then as on Wednesday, saying that she was fine and that she would not be cancelling any planned engagements.

Merkel, who turns 65 in a week, has always enjoyed relatively robust health.

Frequently called the European Union's most influential leader and the most powerful woman in the world, Merkel has said she will leave politics at the end of her term, in 2021.

Aircraft technician crushed by landing gear

Kolkata

A trainee technician in India was crushed to death yesterday by the landing gear flaps on an aircraft while conducting maintenance work, airline SpiceJet said.

“Inadvertently, the main landing gear hydraulic door closed and he got stuck in between the hydraulic door flaps,” SpiceJet said after the incident at Kolkata airport in eastern India.

“The hydraulic doors were broken to rescue (Rohit) Pandey but he was declared dead,”



SpiceJet said the accident occurred at Kolkata airport in eastern India

the airline said. “The entire SpiceJet family stands together in grief in this unfortunate incident.”

Airport director Kaushik Bhattacharya said that Pandey,

26, was “sucked into the lower end of the aircraft due to hydraulic pressure. His body had to be cut out of it”.

The aircraft was a Canadian Bombardier Q400.