Singapore has trialled patrol robots that blast warnings at people engaging in “undesirable social behaviour”, adding to an arsenal of surveillance technology in the tightly controlled city-state that is fuelling privacy concerns.

From vast numbers of CCTV cameras to trials of lampposts kitted out with facial recognition tech, Singapore is seeing an explosion of tools to track its inhabitants.

That includes a three-week trial in September, in which two robots were deployed to patrol a housing estate and a shopping centre.

Officials have long pushed a vision of a hyper-efficient, tech-driven “smart nation”, but activists say privacy is being sacrificed and people have little control over what happens to their data.

Singapore is frequently criticised for curbing civil liberties and people are accustomed to tight controls, but there is still growing unease at intrusive tech.

The government’s latest surveillance devices are robots on wheels, with seven cameras, that issue warnings to the public and detect “undesirable social behaviour”.

This includes smoking in prohibited areas, improperly parking bicycles, and breaching coronavirus social-distancing rules.

During a recent patrol, one of the “Xavier” robots wove its way through a housing estate and stopped in front of a group of elderly residents watching a chess match.

“Please keep one-metre distancing, please keep to five persons per group,” a robotic voice blared out, as a camera on top of the machine trained its gaze on them.

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