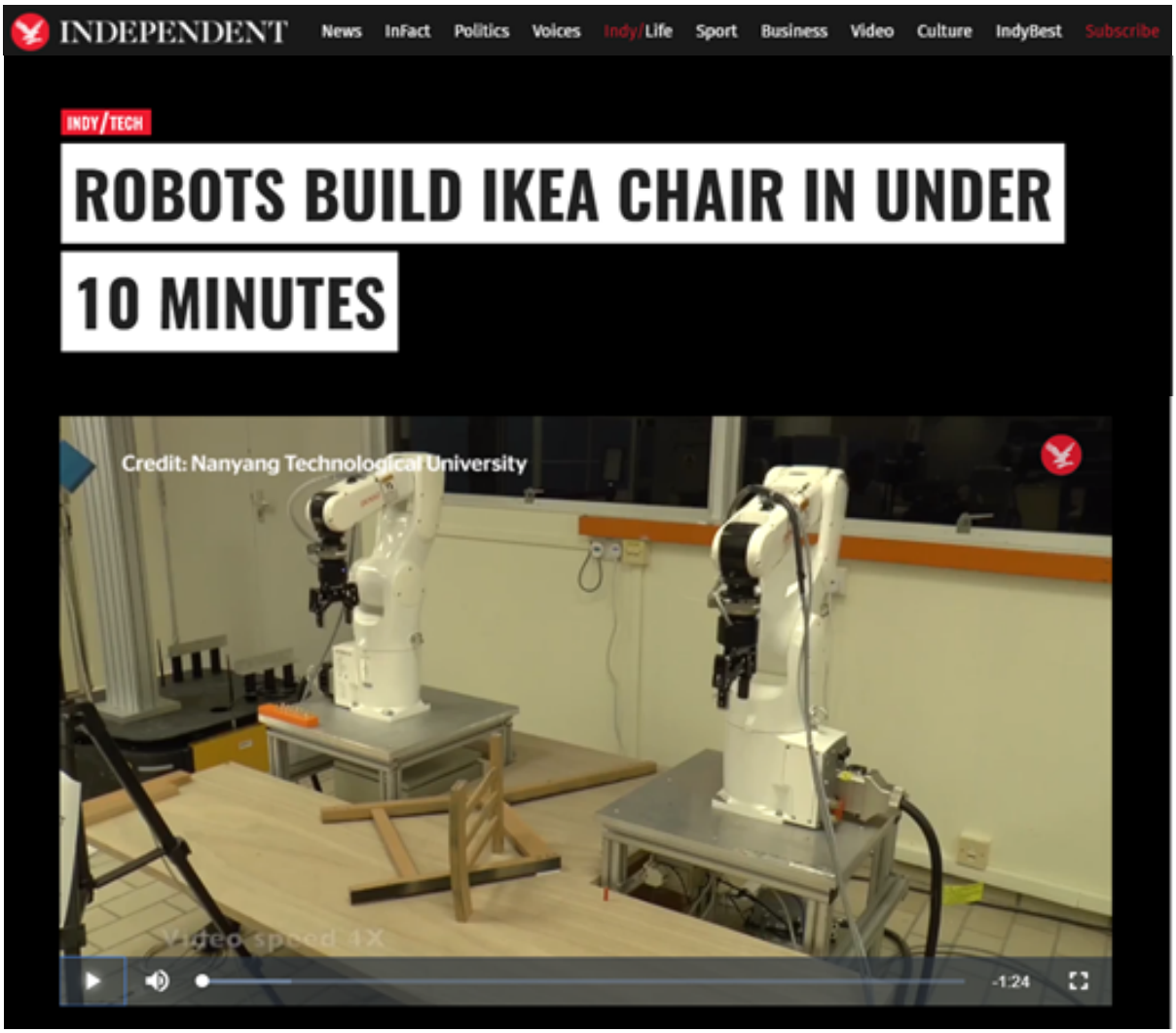
THE INDEPENDENT, THURSDAY, 19 APRIL 2018



A new robot has been taught to successfully put together a piece of Ikea furniture. It could one day leave the tough job of finding the right screws and putting them in the right place to the past – leaving humans never to have to struggle to put together their new chair again.

Doing so takes even longer than the time required to put together flat-pack furniture: the scientists spent three years programming the robot to make sure that its arms, grippers, sensors and 3D cameras could put together the chair. But it only took 20 minutes to do it once it was full trained up.

The researchers from Singapore's Nanyang Technological University say it may not be long before such robots can fully assemble a piece of furniture from a manual, verbal instruction or by just looking at an image of the finished item.

"We have achieved the low level capability to teach the robot 'how to do it' and then in the next five to 10 years, high level reasoning - the 'what to do' - could be done too," one of the researchers Quang-Cuong Pham told Reuters.

Pham said the team at NTU were looking to work with artificial intelligence experts to try and hone the process.

Cindy Andersen, global business area manager of kitchen and dining at IKEA, told Britain's Daily Mail newspaper:

"It's interesting to see an example of how robots could potentially contribute to our vision of creating a better everyday life for many people.

"We are very positive about embracing new technology."

Singapore has been pushing businesses to invest in automation and robotics to boost productivity as it keeps a tight leash on cheap foreign labour.

Some restaurants and hotels in the city-state use robots to deliver food to customers and collect used plates and cutlery.

Additional reporting by Reuters