

## CHINA'S FAMOUS 'FACE-KINI' GETS PEKING OPERA-INSPIRED FACELIFT

**QINGDAO:** What do Chinese women do when they want to go swimming but maintain their pearly-white complexion? They put on a mask made for the beach, and fondly known as a face-kini. A pale complexion is highly prized as delicate and feminine in China while dark skin suggests tanning caused by farming the fields or other lowly, outdoor work.

The face-kini appeared in 2004 on the beaches of the coastal city of Qingdao, in response to demands for full protection from

both the sun and from jellyfish stings.

The inventor, former accountant Zhang Shifan, told Reuters she never imagined her mask would become so popular with about 30,000 of them sold over the past year.

But there's a hitch. The masks scare children, Zhang said. "In the past, I really wanted to do everything I could to avoid scaring people," said Zhang, who owns her own swimwear shop. She said she had considered a whole range of different colours but they all

looked scary, so she decided to borrow the colourful face-paint designs of traditional Peking Opera. "So little children might not be so scared," she explained. Zhang is hoping her new line will add to her business which has been so successful that counterfeits have cropped up across the country. For 64-year-old Wang Baoyu, one of Zhang's loyal customers of nearly 10 years, nothing beats the original.

"This store is authentic and I rode the bus

for more than an hour to come here. I wouldn't dare buy one from a street vendor as I'm afraid of buying a counterfeit," Wang said.

To be sure, the face-kini isn't for everyone. Zhang Xing, a 31-year-old beach-goer, said she would never wear one but nevertheless, she had praise for inventor Zhang and her new design. "She really is someone who is full of ideas," she said. "She's able to make something that can both protect people's skin and blend it with traditional Chinese culture." — Reuters



**MONROVIA:** In this Tuesday, June 30, 2015, file photo health workers wash their hands after taking a blood specimen from a child to test for the Ebola virus in an area where a 17-year old boy died from the virus on the outskirts of Monrovia, Liberia. — AP

## LIBERIA ANNOUNCES SECOND EBOLA DEATH AS NEW OUTBREAK SPREADS

### TWO NEW TRIALS OF VACCINES BEGIN IN EUROPE, AFRICA

**MONROVIA:** Liberia said yesterday a second patient had died in a resurgence of the Ebola virus and the outbreak had spread to its capital city.

The sixth confirmed case since the virus re-emerged at the end of June was a healthcare worker in Monrovia, chief medical officer Francis Karteh said on state radio.

"Now we have four cases in (treatment). We have six confirmed cases in Liberia—two are already dead," he said. The latest cluster of infections emerged in a village near the international airport in the coastal county of Margibi, when a 17-year-old boy tested positive for Ebola after his death. "Ebola is no longer confined to Margibi County. A case has been reported in Monrovia, but has been reported expired," Karteh said.

"The case was carried in a critical condition to the (Ebola treatment unit) and later died."

The man was being monitored as a known contact of one of the previous cases, but hid his illness from the authorities by taking medication to bring down his temperature, Karteh said. He warned that efforts to contain the outbreak were being hampered by people not admitting they'd had contact with Ebola patients.

"We need to be open. We need to be honest to ourselves. It is through honesty that we can stop this disease... If you are to go to a general clinic with a fever you need to tell the healthcare worker that you are a contact," he said. The world's worst Ebola outbreak has killed more than 11,250 people in west Africa, brought fragile health care systems to their knees, rolled back economic gains and sent investors fleeing.

The epidemic spread to Liberia from Guinea in March 2014, killing more than 4,800 Liberians before

the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the country free of transmission on May 9 this year.

Tests on the 17-year-old showed the variant which killed him was genetically similar to the 2014 outbreak.

#### Battling the outbreak

The WHO said this showed that the resurgence of the disease was unlikely to be due to the virus being re-introduced from Sierra Leone, which is also battling the outbreak, or Guinea. New infections in Sierra Leone and Guinea have fallen dramatically, although the two countries are still reporting more than 20 new cases each week between them. Meanwhile, two new Ebola vaccine trials began yesterday with volunteers in Britain, France and Senegal getting "prime-boost" immunisations developed by Bavarian Nordic, GlaxoSmithKline and Johnson & Johnson. The mid-stage, or Phase II, trials are designed primarily to test the vaccines' safety, but will also assess whether they provoke an immune response against the deadly virus.

The development of the prime-boost and other vaccines was accelerated in response to vast outbreaks of Ebola in West Africa, where at least 11,200 people have died so far in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

"The current Ebola outbreak has reinforced that speed of response is crucial," said Egeruan Babatunde Imoukhuede, who is coordinating one of the trials in Senegal. "Outbreak diseases spread quickly, so any vaccination approach must be able to keep up."

Data from the World Health Organization show there were 30 confirmed cases of Ebola in West Africa in the week to July 5.

In Liberia, which had been declared Ebola-free in May, a sixth new case was confirmed on Tuesday in what health officials fear is a new wave of the outbreak.

#### Preventing infection

While the number of Ebola cases has dropped sharply in recent months, researchers said the flare-up in Liberia underlines the need to push ahead with developing potential vaccines that may help control this and future outbreaks. The trial of the Bavarian Nordic and J&J prime-boost combination initially aims to recruit more than 600 healthy adult volunteers in Britain and France.

Bavarian said it hoped to launch another later phase of this trial in Africa later this year involving 1,200 volunteers, but other large clinical trials have recently been thwarted by the drop in case numbers.

Previously planned trials of GSK, Merck and J&J shots in West Africa have been struggling to recruit volunteers with enough exposure to Ebola to prove whether their vaccines are doing the job and preventing infection. The second trial will be conducted in Senegal and uses two vaccines tested first in people at Oxford University's Jenner Institute and being developed in a partnership with GSK. The first, based on a chimpanzee adenovirus, is designed to stimulate, or prime, an initial immune response, while the second is designed to boost that response. Each vaccine is based on genetically modifying safe viruses to carry just one part of the Ebola virus that will stimulate the body's immune system. Researchers stressed that none of the shots contains any live Ebola virus.— Agencies

## BIGGER MAY NOT BE BETTER FOR CHINA'S 'SUPER HOSPITALS'

**ZHENGZHOU:** Just before midnight, the pavement outside the glowing high-rise towers of the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhengzhou University is littered with slumbering bodies. Splayed on colourful mats or tucked into folding cots, these are patients' relatives. Inside, beds line hallways and crowd elevator lobbies, while relatives share hospital beds with patients and doze in brightly lit stairwells. The world's biggest hospital with about 7,000 beds, Zhengzhou First Affiliated, in central China, is still not big enough.

"My dad paid for a bed but still couldn't get one," said Ma Wenxiao, a university student from the central city of Wuhan, whose father waited two days for a bed after travelling to Zhengzhou for chemotherapy. Demand for healthcare is booming in China, driven by a growing middle class, improved health insurance coverage and an aging population. In response, some of the country's public hospitals are adding beds by the thousand.

China now has 16 public hospitals with more than 3,000 beds. NewYork-Presbyterian, the largest hospital in the United States according to Becker's Hospital Review, has 2,478 beds.

But unlike the rest of the economy, where China wants growth, this expansion has policymakers worried. Hospital build-outs testify to a lack of public confidence in rural healthcare. They add to local government debt and may not be providing cost-effective care.

Last summer, Beijing issued a directive restricting expansion of public hospitals, but hospital administrators appear to be finding ways around it.

Hospitals' building binge, and the government's response, highlights the dilemmas facing the country's healthcare system, experts say. In China today, says Liu Tingfang, a professor at Tsinghua University, "hospitals have to expand if they want to survive."

#### Bigger is better

Despite government efforts to encourage patients to use smaller local hospitals, most Chinese still feel safer being treated for everything from ear aches to emphysema in major university-affiliated hospitals in big cities.

Hospital heads, too, believe that bigger is better. Government funding provides less than 10 percent of state hospital operating budgets, and the state holds public hospital fees low to keep care affordable.

As China has chipped away at the drug mark-ups they once relied on, many hospitals see expansion as a way to raise revenues.

Big hospitals often have support from local governments, which approve and help fund hospital expansion in part because they are evaluated on their ability to drive growth.

China's big hospitals are now so large that some have their own police stations. One doctor at the First Affiliated Hospital of Wenzhou Medical

University even briefly wore roller skates to get around the wards faster after the hospital's expansion.

#### Patient-doctor conflicts

But even as patients flock to them, giant hospitals have become magnets for controversy.

Patients come expecting to see top doctors, says Li Huijuan, a Beijing-based lawyer who handles medical cases.

But rapidly expanding hospitals have to hire less experienced medics, says Li, creating a gap between patient expectations and reality that "can cause or exacerbate conflicts between doctors and patients". Rapid expansion can also increase pressure on medical personnel, as increases in bed numbers may outpace growth in staffing levels.

And as the recent MERS outbreak in South Korea showed, large and oversubscribed hospitals can be conduits for infection and disease. About half of the nearly 200 cases in the country were traced to the 1,900-bed Samsung Medical Center in Seoul, where long waits for a bed are common.

"When you have a lot of people packed in a small area, it increases the risk of transmission of infectious pathogens," says Neil Fishman, associate chief medical officer at the University of Pennsylvania Health System.

An official at Zhengzhou First Affiliated said the large volume of patients was a reflection of demand, and that the hospital did daily inspections to ensure patient safety. The hospital declined requests for an interview. According to its website, it plans to add 3,000 beds at another location.

#### Low returns on investment

The problems that giant hospitals create ripple through China's healthcare system. Some 60 to 80 percent of patients in big hospitals could be treated at community medical centres, says Ma Jingdong, associate professor at Huazhong University of Science & Technology in Wuhan.

Big hospitals may have high cost bases and be poorly suited to providing continuous care for chronic diseases. "We may be spending a lot but in reality, we may not be seeing the same level of returns in terms of public health," says Prof Ma.

Chen Xiaoming, president of the First Affiliated Hospital of Wenzhou Medical University, told Reuters that the number of beds at his hospital - currently 3,770 at two locations - may decline in coming years in line with government reforms.

But the public's faith in big hospitals may be hard to shake. Standing in a swirl of people at the Zhengzhou hospital, a man who would only give his name as Cai said he hadn't thought twice about rising at 5 a.m. and waiting for several hours so that his wife could see a gynaecologist, perhaps for a minute or less.

"This is normal," Cai said, surveying the crowd. "Chinese people are used to this." — Reuters

## AIR POLLUTION COSTS FRANCE 100 BILLION EUROS PER YEAR

**PARIS:** The effects of air pollution cost France some 100 billion euros (\$110.1 billion) each year, a French Senate committee report estimated yesterday, citing impact to health as the major expense. The study said air pollution is not merely a health threat, but also represents "an economic aberration" costing the French state and businesses billions annually in treating illness, and financing employee sick leave, lost productivity, reduced agricultural yields and cleaning up sooty buildings and other venues.

It estimated the financial impact of atmospheric pollution for health reasons at "between 68 and 97 billion euros" per year, ranging from treatment of aggravated conditions like asthma to battling forms of cancer caused by smog.

It pegged the direct cost to France's health care system at least three billion euros per year, with the remainder of the linked largely to time and productivity lost by businesses whose employees require sick leave during peak pollution periods.

Outlays for non-health reasons like lower crop production and the cleaning of black-

ened buildings were estimated at 4.3 billion euros.

Though the report noted past efforts to battle atmospheric pollution had lowered overall smog levels in France—especially around industrial sites—sources like ground transport and heating systems have made the problem more diffuse and present at higher levels in indoor air than before.

The study recommends a range of fiscal policies to encourage use of cleaner technologies, and measures to complement incomplete or inefficient regulations already in place. Pollution has become a major problem in Paris and several other French cities, whose air periodically becomes clogged with tiny floating particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs and the blood system and can cause cancer.

The World Health Organization says fine particle air pollution is responsible for about 42,000 premature deaths in France each year.

In March, French authorities briefly forced half the cars off the roads of Paris under an even-and-odd licence plate scheme used during dangerously high smog episodes. — AFP

## RECORD-BREAKING SOLAR IMPULSE 2 GROUNDED FOR 'SEVERAL MONTHS'

**GENEVA:** The sun-powered plane Solar Impulse 2 will be grounded for months in Hawaii to carry out battery repairs, after completing nearly half of an unprecedented round-the-world flight, the project said yesterday.

"Irreversible damage to certain parts of the batteries will require repairs which will take several months," it said in a statement. The team said last week that battery temperatures in the innovative craft had surged during a gruelling, five-day journey from Japan to Hawaii, and there was no way to cool the battery packs once the aircraft was in flight.

There had been hope that repairs could be completed

ed by next month, but the statement said fixes will take until "early spring 2016." A spokeswoman for the project separately told AFP that it was possible the battery packs needed to be replaced entirely if the existing system could not be repaired. "We don't know yet if we have to change everything or if we can repair (the existing material)," but any new parts would have to be produced by the project, she said. "It's not like you can order them," as the craft is unique, she added.

#### Not a 'technical failure'

The aircraft has been flown by Swiss businessman

and pilot Andre Borschberg, 62, who has already set a new record for the longest solo plane flight. His 118-hour journey across the Pacific smashed the previous record of 76 hours and 45 minutes set by US adventurer Steve Fossett in 2006. His partner, Swiss aviator Bertrand Piccard had been scheduled to pilot the next leg of the journey from Hawaii to Phoenix, Arizona.

The Solar Impulse 2 team said the battery overheating during the long flight across the Pacific Ocean was not caused by "a technical failure" or "a weakness in the technology." Instead, the problem was a failure to fully anticipate the quick rate at which battery temperatures can rise in tropical climates.

"The Solar Impulse engineering team will be studying various options for better cooling and heating processes for very long flights," the project said. The aircraft took off from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) earlier this year powered by 17,000 solar cells, with the project aimed at promoting the use of renewable energy. Its wingspan is longer than a jumbo jet but its weight is roughly the same as a car thanks to its light construction.

#### A series of setbacks

Once repairs are completed, the plane is expected to cross the United States, stopping in New York before a trans-Atlantic flight to Europe. From there, the pilots plan to make their back to the point of departure in Abu Dhabi.

The battery damage is the latest in a series of hitches. Borschberg experienced a problem with one of his eyes, which forced him to cut short his flight over Asia and return to Switzerland for several days. The plane was also not supposed to land in Japan, but bad weather en route from Nanjing in China to Hawaii forced a diversion at the start of June. Solar Impulse 2 was stranded in Japan for nearly a month, with the crew scouring long-range forecasts for a favourable weather window. "Setbacks are part of the challenges of a project which is pushing technological boundaries to the limits," the project said yesterday. — AFP



**KAPOLEI:** In this July 3, 2015, file photo, ground crew push the Solar Impulse 2, a solar powered airplane, towards the hangar after landing at the Kalaeloa Airport in Kapolei, Hawaii. The Solar Impulse team said in a news release early yesterday, that they are suspending the around-the-world journey in Hawaii, after the plane suffered battery damage during its flight to the islands. — AP



**PARIS:** A file picture taken on March 18, 2015 shows the Eiffel tower and Paris' roofs through a haze of pollution, as the city is experiencing a periodic pollution peak. The effects of air pollution cost France some 100 billion euros (\$110.1 billion) each year, a French Senate committee report estimated yesterday, citing impact to health as the major expense. — AFP