

BRITON'S 1-MAN CAMPAIGN FOR A LITTER-FREE MARSEILLE

MARSEILLE: Most people are resigned to a little litter in their lives. Not Eddie Platt, a British expatriate who single-handedly took on the scourge in Marseille, the southern French city where he took up residence in 2010. The 38-year-old launched his quirky campaign last September with a Facebook page titled "1 Dechet par Jour/1 Piece of Rubbish". The idea is simple, if not particularly sexy: participants post selfies on a social network-Facebook, Instagram or Twitter-each time they pick up a piece of litter and put it in the rubbish bin.

Ten tones of rescued rubbish later, the effort has cyber fans around the world from Buenos Aires to New York, and TV and newspapers are hounding Platt for interviews. It was in Platt's hometown of Leeds, northern England, that the idea first came to him. "I went back to Leeds last summer and I realized that my hometown was dirty, that the filth wasn't just in Marseille," he said. "To think that for four years I was saying 'it's cleaner in England!'"

In fact Platt shot his founding litter-binning selfie in Leeds' sprawling Roundhay Park, one of Europe's biggest city parks. The Yorkshireman says he does not self-identify as green but simply as a concerned citizen. "Eddie is a guy with amazing energy. He talks about his idea all the time, and he's really into social networking," said his friend Georges-Edouard Legre. One Sunday Platt who has only an approximate mastery of French-led some 350 Marseillais on a climb up the city's tallest hill, topped by the imposing basilica Our Lady of the Guard, for a clean-up operation.

A few weeks later, the litter-pickers descended on the city's Old Port. Platt is hard to miss with his infectious smile, greying beard and backwards baseball cap, not to mention his towering height-he is six foot three (1.90 meters). Combine that with an irreverence worthy of Monty Python and Legre was quickly seduced. "I told him, 'If you succeed in changing the habits of the Marseillais, I will worship you.'" Legre, who

says he is "100 percent Marseillais", specializes in "viral marketing" and set Platt up with his social networking tools. And Romain Jouanaud, who uses the same coworking lounge as Platt, lent his artistic skills to the campaign: "I told him, 'Let me create symbols to get the idea across without words.'"

'Picking up litter got sexy'

Platt has had a varied career, working as a restaurant manager in England for "about 10 years, to make some money", then as a sales rep for a high-tech firm, before training to teach English abroad. "I left to teach in Poland and my income went down 90 percent. Money didn't motivate me anymore, I wanted to help people enrich their lives," Platt says. He had business cards printed with the tag line "An English teacher". Five years ago, a friend suggested he teach in Naples, southern Italy. But as he was hitchhiking in the general direction he blew in to Marseille, and it was love at first sight. — AFP



MARSEILLE: This file photo shows founder of "1 Piece of Rubbish" project British Edmund 'Eddie' Platt posing in front of an artwork made with plastic waste by Swiss designer Roman Aebersold as part of an exhibition entitled "La mer, destination finale" (The Sea, Final Destination). — AFP



CHINA: In this file photo a man lights a cigarette as a cook roasts dogs at a restaurant in Yulin in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. — AP

ANIMAL ACTIVISTS TARGET CHINA DOG MEAT FESTIVAL

BEIJING: Animal rights activists are seeking to shut down an annual summer dog meat festival in southern China blamed for blackening the country's international reputation as well as fueling extreme cruelty to canines and unhygienic food handling practices. Activists from a coalition of groups said Monday that they will continue press for the festival to be banned as well as legislation outlawing the slaughtering of dogs and cats and the consumption of their meat.

While an estimated 10-20 million dogs are killed for their meat each year in China, the June 20 event in the city of Yulin has come to symbolize the cruelty and lack of hygiene associated with the largely unregulated industry. Yu Hongmei, director of the VShine Animal Protection Association, said China needs to follow the exam-

ple of the vast majority of developed nations that have banned eating dog and cat.

"China needs to progress with the times," Yu said. "Preventing cruelty to animals is the sign of a mature, civilized society." Restaurant owners say eating dog meat is traditional during the summer, while opponents say the festival that began in 2010 has no cultural value and was merely invented to drum up business. Since 2014, the local government has sought to disassociate itself from the event, forbidding its employees from attending and limiting its size by shutting down some dog markets and slaughter houses.

Still, as many as 10,000 dogs, many of them stolen pets still wearing their collars, are slaughtered for the festival held deep inside the poor, largely rural

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Some are trucked in hundreds of kilometers (miles) stuffed six or seven to a crate or small metal cage without food or water. Slaughtering takes place in front of the animals, usually with a club to induce the pain and fear that restaurant owners claim makes their adrenaline-rich meat tastier.

"Psychologically and mentally, they have already died many times," said Peter J. Li, Humane Society International's China policy specialist. Dog meat also poses a risk to human health by spreading diseases such as trichinellosis, rabies and cholera, the Humane Society says. Guangxi is already one of China's five worst areas affected by human rabies, and Yulin ranks as one of the top 10 Chinese cities in terms of cases, the organization says.

Activists said rallies held around the country to oppose dog eating, as well as outrage on social media from the growing ranks of dog lovers, are already having an effect. Dog meat restaurants have been forced to take the festival indoors and large-scale open air dog meat consumption is no longer seen. However, a draft animal cruelty law remains mired in China's legislature and prosecution of dog thieves and those violating animal transport laws remains lax, activists complain. Yu Dezhi, secretary general of Animal Protection Power, said he was confident that shifting consumption habits will eventually help build the necessary groundswell against the Yulin festival and dog eating in general. "There is simply no market for dog meat among young people," Yu said. — AP

LESS-INVASIVE HEART VALVE IMPLANT OUTPERFORMS SURGERY, STUDY SAYS

CHICAGO: A minimally invasive procedure to replace the aortic heart valve is superior to open surgery for patients with an intermediate risk of complications, according to a study that could pave the way for wider use of the approach. Patients who received the less-invasive implant had fewer strokes and a lower mortality rate after one year than those whose valve was replaced through open heart surgery, the Sapien 3 study showed. The procedure, called transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), is currently available only for patients considered unlikely to survive open heart surgery or at high risk for complications.

The new data, presented Sunday at the American College of Cardiology meeting in Chicago, will be used to seek US regulatory approval for Edwards Lifesciences' Sapien 3 valve in patients deemed at intermediate risk for complications with open heart surgery. "It seems likely that TAVR will become the new benchmark for the treatment of severe aortic stenosis in intermediate-risk patients," Dr. Vinod Thourani, professor at Emory University School of Medicine and a lead investigator for the study, said in an interview.

TAVR involves threading the valve into place through blood vessels using a catheter. Medtronic Plc also sells TAVR systems in the United States. The Sapien 3 study found that 4.6

percent of patients who received Edwards' valve had a stroke and 7.4 percent died within a year of their procedure. Among surgery patients, 8.2 percent suffered a stroke and 13 percent died.

Surgery resulted in less valve leakage, or aortic regurgitation, than TAVR, but few people in either group experienced the complication, which affected 1.5 percent of the TAVR patients, Thourani said. The Sapien 3 study compared 1,078 TAVR patients with outcomes for 944 patients who had open heart surgery in a related trial called Partner II. The Partner II study, presented on Saturday, showed Edwards' older-model Sapien XT valve was as effective as surgery in intermediate-risk patients.

Edwards expects US regulators to review data from both studies to approve an expanded indication for the Sapien 3 valve before the end of the year, Chief Executive Michael Mussallem said in an interview. "The only option up until now has been open surgery, which is very effective, but many patients would not opt for that," he said. Approval would more than double the pool of patients eligible for the catheter-based approach, Mussallem said. "We expect the treatment paradigm for intermediate-risk patients to change almost overnight and for the TAVR market to accelerate dramatically," JP Morgan analyst Michael Weinstein said in a note to clients Saturday. — Reuters

SATELLITES KEY TO MONITORING HARMFUL EMISSIONS

NEW DELHI: Satellite technology plays a crucial role in measuring greenhouse gas emissions globally, the heads of several space agencies agreed Sunday as they vowed to work together to develop a coordinated monitoring system. The pledge comes after a landmark climate accord in Paris last year at which world leaders agreed to cap global warming by "well below" two degrees Celsius above pre-Industrial levels. Satellites will play a "major role" in ensuring that ambitious target is met by measuring harmful emissions that contribute to the planet's warming, said Jean-Yves Le Gall, president of France's National Space Studies Centre (CNES), at the meeting in the India capital.

"The idea is to bring together all these ideas about satellite projects from different agencies" to measure carbon and methane emissions in order to eventually achieve "global coordination," he told AFP. Some countries already have satellites measuring emissions, but efforts have not been linked between countries, and as such there is no comprehensive measurement system in place. Japan's GoSat and the US OCO-2

satellites are already at work measuring carbon emissions.

China is developing its own TanSat and France is working on the MicroCarb satellite to survey CO2 emissions. Meanwhile France and Germany are working together to develop a methane monitoring satellite that they have dubbed Merlin. Le Gall said heads of space agencies around the world, including from China, France, India, Japan and the United States, agreed to work together to "achieve maximum cross-collaboration of tools and cross-verification steps" to coordinate and fact-check measurements.

The goal is to be able to track global emissions and also to record emissions per country, CNES said. The meeting was organized by Le Gall and Kiran Kumar, president of the Indian Space Research Organization. It follows a similar conference last year in Mexico at which space agencies said satellite observation technology was a "key element of a global measurement system" and integral to reducing greenhouse gases around the world. — AFP

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