

HOTTEST DAY EVER IN SHANGHAI AS HEAT WAVE BAKES CHINA

SHANGHAI: Shanghai sweltered under a new record high of 40.9 degrees Centigrade on Friday, authorities said as they issued a weather "red alert" over a stubborn heat wave that has plagued much of the country. Hospitals in the city have reported increased numbers of patients suffering from heat-related illnesses, according to state media, and the Shanghai zoo said it was putting large blocks of ice into some animal enclosures to help them beat the

heat, while providing frozen apples to its pandas. China's most populous city has baked under soaring summer temperatures for more than two weeks and Friday afternoon reached the hottest point since the establishment of its benchmark weather station in 1872, the municipal weather bureau said. Other areas of China also have seen records set in recent weeks, in what has been a torrid summer so far for much of the country, while large areas of south-central

China have endured raging floods from torrential rain. Shanghai's "red alert"—the first this year—is triggered when temperatures in excess of 40 degrees are forecast and comes with a warning to citizens to keep cool and avoid too much time outdoors, especially children, the elderly, or the sick. It also puts authorities on heightened alert against fires breaking out and advises special care with perishable foods to prevent

spoilage and bacteria. Shanghai is getting hotter—the previous record of 40.8 degrees was set only in 2013, and eight of the 12 highest temperatures reached over the past century were recorded in the last five years, according to the city weather bureau. People are losing their cool, said the state-run Shanghai Daily. Shanghai has "seen a spike in accidental injuries, triggered by fights or traffic accidents, as people are more easily irritated in

the extreme heat and failing to exercise proper judgment," it said Friday. Even dogs are on edge, according to a state media report this week that said the heat wave has coincided with a rise in dog bites. Shanghai's weather bureau said Thursday a stubborn subtropical high and hot southwesterly winds were to blame and that the city will continue to bake at least until early August when typhoon season begins and the weather begins to shift. — AFP



COFFEE BAY, South Africa: This file photo shows traditional Xhosa initiates Fezikhaya Tselane, 20 years old, and Khanyisile Mapope, left, 18 years old, sitting down covered with blankets during a traditional initiation process, in a rural hut in the Coffee Bay area in Umtata, South Africa. — AFP

S AFRICA CIRCUMCISION RITUAL: A DANGEROUS ROUTE TO MANHOOD

COFFEE BAY, South Africa: Naked, covered in white clay mud, and with his penis wrapped in leaves, Abongile Masegu, 20, sits in a hut in South Africa recovering from his circumcision—a traditional ritual that can prove fatal. For Masegu, it has been a grueling initiation test that marks his arrival as an adult, and the pain is an essential part of the experience. "You must go through that pain to show that you are a man," he said outside the coastal village of Coffee Bay about 100 kilometers from Umtata in Eastern Cape province.

"We don't even think of (getting) a medical circumcision because it is the easy way out. We laugh at those who go to hospitals." Masegu is one of thousands of youths from the Xhosa ethnic group attending this year's annual winter initiation schools across Eastern Cape province. After his foreskin is cut off by a tribal elder using a knife, he is kept in the small thatched rondavel hut with two other initiates for up to four weeks, with a "bush doctor" present at all times monitoring their wounds.

The initiates are allowed no contact with women, and spend their time playing cards, applying mud and stoking the smoky fire to try to keep warm. "If you go to hospital you are weak, you are not a man. Your wound must not be treated with Betadine (disinfectant)," Masegu said. "There is special traditional medicine for that and it heals fast."

Secretive ceremony

He revealed tree leaves tied like a bandage around his genitals, which are also covered in a traditional healing ointment and held to one side by string. The ritual is revered and guarded by the Xhosa people, but the unhygienic conditions—and abuse by some initiation schools—exact a heavy toll. At least 11 youths have already died during this southern hemisphere winter in Eastern Cape, according to provincial officials, while the

government says several hundred have died nationwide in initiation schools since 1995.

Often the cause is infection from a botched circumcision, which can lead to penis amputation surgery. Circumcision has also been demonstrated to be a powerful weapon in the fight against HIV, by helping to protect men from the AIDS virus. But specialists-meeting in Paris from Sunday for a four-day forum on HIV/AIDS—remain worried about botched operations and poor hygiene. Other risks include dehydration or maltreatment by initiation leaders, who conduct the secretive circumcision rituals deep in the mountains.

Recognized as a man

In another grass-thatched hut, 200 meters away, sitting on a reed mat, is 20-year-old Fezikhaya Tselane, who has just returned from his circumcision rites in the remote bush. As he nurses the sore wound, his bush doctor sits close by, surrounded by dirty pots, plates and empty beer bottles strewn over the floor. "I have been waiting for this day. All my brothers have gone through this process," Tselane said, entirely covered in white mud, which is meant to ward off evil spirits as well as preserve body warmth.

"In our Xhosa culture, if you don't go through traditional circumcision you are not recognized as a man. Now I can marry, have my own house and kids and not depend on my parents." Mxolisi Dimaza, chairman of the Eastern Cape provincial health committee, said authorities were determined to curb injuries and deaths in the initiation schools.

"This year a considerable amount of resources were made available so that we do not experience many more deaths," he said after his recent field visit to several initiation sites. "However, there are still problem areas where we have illegal initiation schools. These are where the school itself is not registered and the initiates are often below 18 years old." — AFP

HEADWAY ON AIDS THREATENED BY SLOW FUNDING UNDER TRUMP

2018 TRUMP BUDGET COULD DEPRIVE 830,000 PEOPLE

PARIS: Progress in beating back the AIDS epidemic risks being eroded by a funding shortfall set to grow under Donald Trump's proposed cuts to global health projects, experts and campaigners warned ahead of a major HIV conference. If adopted by Congress, the 2018 Trump budget could deprive some 830,000 people, mostly in Africa, from life-saving anti-AIDS drugs, according to calculations by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), a California-based health policy NGO. "We will see lives needlessly being lost," said Linda-Gail Bekker, president of the International AIDS Society (IAS) hosting some 6,000 experts in Paris from Sunday to take stock of advances in HIV science.

"We're not talking about maybe a slowing down... if these (US) cuts come about we could very well see a real turnaround in terms of the progress that has been made," she said. A Trump budget could lead to nearly 200,000 new HIV infections, according to the KFF. It could also leave as many as 25 million couples without access to sponsored contraceptives, which not only prevent pregnancy but also virus spread. "I cannot tell you how anxious I feel... To have the funding carpet taken from under our feet just seems such an incredible travesty," said Bekker.

The United States has for years been the biggest contributor to the global fight against HIV infection, accounting for about two-thirds of funding by governments. Last year, it contributed \$4.9 billion (4.2 billion euros) to global HIV projects — 7.5 times the amount provided by second-placed donor Britain. Trump's proposed budget, submitted in May, would reduce this amount by about \$1 billion, according to Health Global Access Project, an activist group which crunched the numbers.

Others must do more

The US president put forward a blueprint which, in its own words, "reduces funding for several global health programs, including HIV/AIDS, with the expectation that other donors can and should increase their commitments." The draft spending plan proposes to "maintain current commitments and all current patient levels on HIV/AIDS treatment" under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, set up by George W. Bush in 2003. The program provides anti-retroviral treatment (ART) to over 12 million people.

The goal of PEPFAR, said Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), a US government research agency, "is to get more people who have been newly infected on therapy"—which means more money. "If you don't increase it, you... have more responsibilities that you are not able to meet." Trump also proposed a 17-percent cut of \$222 million to the government's 2017 contribution of \$1.13 billion to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB & Malaria, which provides about 10 million people with ART.

"The future outlook of donor funding for HIV remains uncertain, given recently proposed cuts to HIV funding by the US, amidst other competing demands on donor budgets more generally," said the KFF report. Since the epidemic erupted in the 1980s, 76.1 million people have been infected with



WASHINGTON: This file photo shows US President Donald Trump announcing his decision to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Accords in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Some 35 million have died. Last year, AIDS killed a million people and infected another 1.8 million, according to the UN. And while infections and deaths are on the decline, the number of people living with HIV—requiring lifelong treatment—continues to grow.

Coming up short

Last year, 19.5 million of the 36.7 million people who needed it, had access to ART. By 2020, the UN is aiming for 90 percent of HIV-infected people to be on medication. But to achieve this target, annual spending must reach \$26.2 billion (22.4 billion euros), according to UNAIDS. In 2016, public and private funders were able to muster \$19.1 billion for AIDS research, prevention and treatment programs in poor and middle-income countries. "We are maximizing the use of every dollar available, but we are still \$7 billion short," UNAIDS executive director Michel Sidibe said this week.

The IAS conference organisers warned in a statement that "all of the scientific challenges still before us are threatened by a weakening resolve to fund HIV science." The gap is set to grow larger. "It is... a difficult moment for all of us," said French HIV expert Jean-Francois Delraissy, who will co-chair the Paris meeting, citing a "modification in funding in the US" and a shift in "the political vision of the US government" on working with other countries.

Just over half of AIDS-related health spending came from domestic sources in 2016, but many of the poorest countries remain heavily reliant on foreign help. Globally, said the KFF, government donor funding for HIV dropped in 2016 to the lowest level since 2010 — from \$7.5 billion to \$7 billion. "We've seen two successive years of declines," said Jen Kates, the foundation's HIV policy director. "This raises concerns about the ability of the global community to successfully tackle the epidemic." — AFP

600,000 YEMENIS COULD CONTRACT CHOLERA IN 2017

ADEN, Yemen: More than 600,000 people are expected to contract cholera in Yemen this year, the International Committee of the Red Cross warned yesterday as the war-torn country's healthcare system faces collapse. One in every 45 Yemenis will have contracted the disease by December as "a direct consequence of a conflict that has devastated civilian infrastructure and brought the whole health system to its knees," the ICRC said in a statement.

More than 370,000 people have fallen ill and 1,800 have died since late April in Yemen's second cholera outbreak in less than a year. According to

the ICRC and the World Health Organization, a war between the Saudi-backed government and Iran-backed Huthi rebels has killed thousands of people and displaced millions.

Furthermore, a string of vital ports along the country's Red Sea coastline are blockaded, leaving millions of people with limited access to food and medicine. Less than half of the country's medical facilities are currently functional and the war in Yemen, one of the world's most impoverished countries, has killed more than 8,000 people and wounded a further 44,500 since Saudi Arabia and its allies joined the conflict in 2015. — AFP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

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