

ITALY OPENS MANSLAUGHTER PROBE OVER 4-YEAR-OLD'S MALARIA DEATH

ROME: Italian prosecutors have opened a manslaughter inquiry into the death of a four-year-old girl who was killed by malaria in northern Italy in a medical mystery that has gripped the country. The girl, Sofia Zago, had not travelled to any at-risk countries but had spent her summer holiday with her family at the seaside in Italy's Veneto region, which like Europe as a whole is typically malaria-free. She had been admitted for diabetes treatment to the pediatric department of the Santa Chiara hospital, which was also treating a family that had contracted malaria during a trip to Burkina Faso.

Experts are exploring whether the disease was passed from the family to Sofia via a mosquito bite, while prosecutors in Trento are investigating whether the girl could have caught it from a re-used needle at the hospital. The hospital has said it uses only disposable, single-use needles. Both the family and Sofia were suffering from the same type of malaria-plasmodium falciparum-but experts were trying to determine whether they were affected by the same strain. Different strains would rule out contamination in the hospital. Sofia's autopsy was scheduled for yesterday. Only some types of mosquito, called anopheline, are able to transmit the disease from person to person.

'Suitcase' danger

"There are still anopheline mosquitoes in parts of Italy that can transmit malaria, but these would be unlikely to be found as far north as Trentino," Colin Sutherland, a professor of Parasitology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, told AFP. "There are also recorded cases of mosquitoes from malaria-endemic countries making it to Europe and transmitting the disease during a hot summer. This could reach Europe in either in the body of an aircraft, or items of luggage," he said.

But Massimo Galli, vice-president of the Italian Society of Infectious Diseases, said a so-called suitcase mosquito was unlikely in this case as the family did not travel directly from Africa to the hospital with their luggage. He admitted that the case was a mystery, saying "we need to consider the improbable, the almost-impossible". —AFP

SCIENTISTS FIND THAILAND'S FIRST EVER TRUFFLE SPECIES

BANGKOK: Gastronomes of the world delight. Two new types of truffle have been unearthed in Thailand's far north, scientists announced yesterday in what they called a first for Southeast Asia. Researchers at Chiang Mai university said they had identified two brand new species and confirmed that tuber magnatum-the same species as Italy's much sought after white truffle-had been found in a national park surrounding Mount Suthep in northwestern Thailand.

"We confirmed that they are truffles both from their DNA and their physical look," Jaturong Khamla, one of the researchers, told AFP following the publication of their paper. The first species, a white-colored truffle, was discovered in 2014 and has been given the name tuber thailandicum. The second one, brown on the outside but with a white interior, was found in 2015 and has been named tuber lannaense. Then in 2017 the team found another type of white truffle which DNA tests confirmed is the already known species tuber magnatum.

While foodies may be salivating at the new discovery, Jaturong said his team were more preoccupied with confirming whether the truffles were new species than whether they tasted delicious. "The white truffle (thailandicum) is similar to the Italian white truffle but they have a mild smell and are smaller," he said. Jaturong said his team specialized in fungi and had discovered around 60 types of new mushroom species in the last 18 years. But this was the first



This undated handout from the Chiang Mai University in Thailand released on September 7, 2017 shows truffles identified as tuber lannaense. — AFP

time they had identified truffles.

"These are first truffles found in a tropical climate," a press release announcing the discovery said. Thailand's mountainous north often

experiences cooler and wetter weather than the kind of year-round tropical heat experienced in the rest of the country-conditions more suitable for growing truffles. — AFP

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