



**PACHYDERM PARTY.** A mahout paints elephants for Songkran, or the ancient Thai New Year celebration, in Ayutthaya province, in central Thailand. The three-day festival took place April 13 to 16. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

## Elephants soak passers-by ahead of boisterous Thai holiday

AYUTTHAYA, Thailand (AP) — Trained elephants sprayed motorists and passers-by with water in Thailand's old capital city of Ayutthaya to welcome the Buddhist New Year, known as *Songkran*.

The jumbos from an elephant camp in the old capital of Ayutthaya were brought out to rake passing traffic, soak passengers in open vehicles, and spray anyone foolish or brave enough to venture within range.

The holiday, the longest in the Thai

### Bike-sharing rivalry crowds Beijing's sidewalks

*Continued from page 3*

muters getting from subway stops to their workplaces, homes, or other destinations. On weekends, tourists use them to wander along traditional alleyways in the city's historic center, near the Forbidden City.

But as more and more bikes hit the streets, they add to the urban chaos, as

calendar, officially ran for three days. Cities emptied out as workers headed home to see family and celebrated by cleansing images of the Buddha, washing the hands and feet of elders, and throwing water on each other in what is sometimes called the world's biggest waterfight.

The festival — which is also celebrated in neighboring Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos — falls at the hottest time of the year, when temperatures often creep above 104 degrees Fahrenheit.

riders leave them basically anywhere.

Rush-hour users park them in public bus lanes, leaving them for street attendants to pick up and move aside. Rows of bikes, some of them toppled, crowd the sidewalks, leaving pedestrians little space to walk.

Vandalism has also become common and repairs can be costly.

## United passenger's removal sparks outrage in China

By Matthew Brown  
The Associated Press

**B**EIJING — Images of a bloodied man being forcibly removed from a United Airlines flight in Chicago drew widespread condemnation in China, where state media fuelled the public's anger with reports that noted the unidentified victim was an "Asian passenger."

Video of the violent incident posted on China's popular Twitter-like micro-blogging service Weibo was viewed more than 200 million times within days. Many responded with outrage over perceived bias against the passenger and some called for a boycott of the U.S.-based airline.

"Rubbish!" writer Su Danqing posted on Weibo. "When they were treating this Asian man, they never thought of human rights, otherwise they wouldn't have done it that way."

"Damn it! This airline must be boycotted!" said a posting from Liu Bing, a telecommunications company worker.

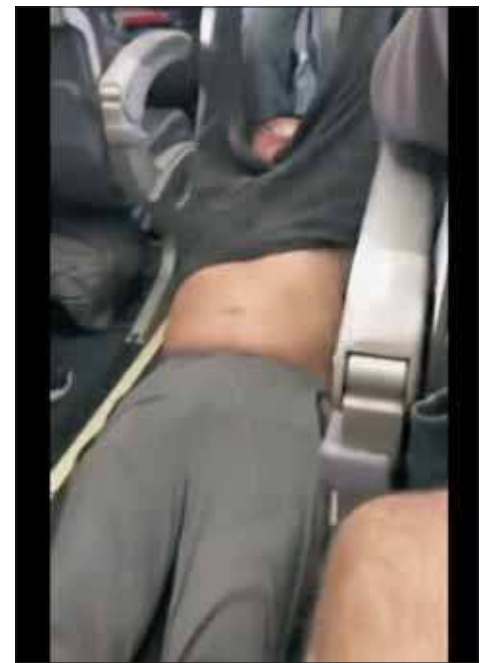
United does considerable business with Chinese passengers and a consumer boycott could cause it serious pain. United says it operates more nonstop U.S.-China flights to more cities in China than any other airline.

Rowdiness has long been associated with air travel in China, including passengers getting into fights with crew members and a vicious assault last year in which an enraged customer smashed an airline check-in clerk in the head with a brass plaque.

The United incident appeared to feed into such customer frustrations — only this time the tables were turned and the passenger was cast as the victim.

United executives struggled to control the public relations damage.

Airline CEO Oscar Munoz said the man



**UNFRIENDLY SKIES.** This image made from a video provided by Audra D. Bridges shows a passenger being removed from a United Airlines flight in Chicago. Video of police officers dragging the passenger from an overbooked United Airlines flight sparked an uproar on social media. (Audra D. Bridges via AP)

removed from the Chicago-to-Kentucky flight — later identified as Dr. David Dao, a Vietnamese American from Elizabethtown, Kentucky — had become "disruptive and belligerent" after he was asked to leave the plane to make room for several employees of a partner airline who wanted on the flight.

When the man refused, officers from the Chicago Aviation Department came in and first tried to reason with him before pulling him from his seat by force and dragging him away, according to a passenger, Tyler Bridges, whose wife later posted a video of the altercation on Facebook.

Associated Press news assistant Yu Bing contributed to this report.

## Toyota shows robotic leg brace to help paralyzed people walk

By Yuri Kageyama  
AP Business Writer

**T**OKYO — Toyota is introducing a wearable robotic leg brace designed to help partially paralyzed people walk.

The Welwalk WW-1000 system is made of a motorized mechanical frame that fits on a person's leg from the knee down. The patients can practice walking wearing the robotic device on a special treadmill that can support their weight.

Toyota Motor Corp. recently demonstrated the equipment for reporters at its Tokyo headquarters.

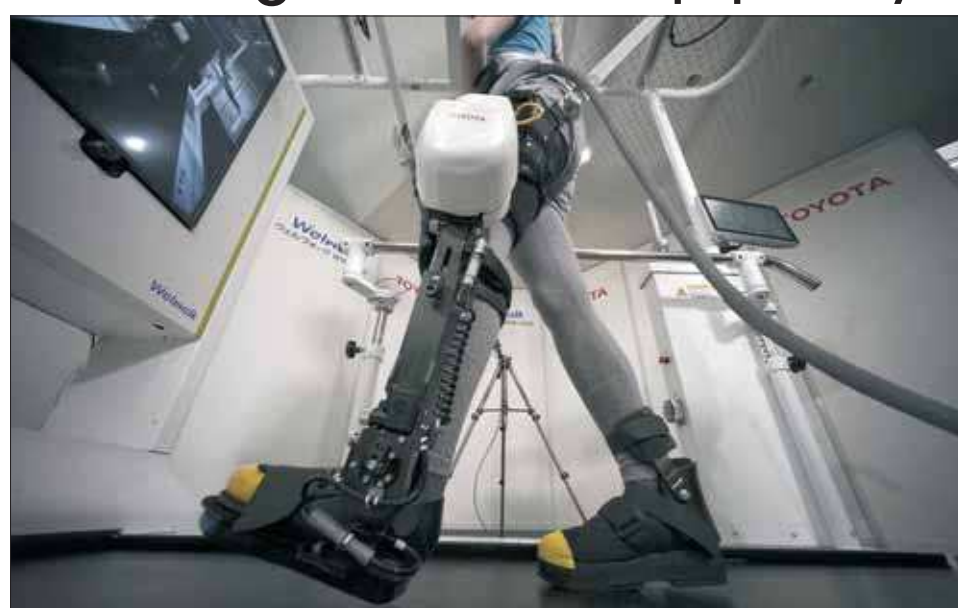
One hundred such systems will be rented to medical facilities in Japan later this year, Toyota said. The service entails a one-time initial charge of 1 million yen (\$9,000) and a 350,000 yen (\$3,200) monthly fee.

The gadget is designed to be worn on one leg at a time for patients severely paralyzed on one side of the body due to a stroke or other ailments, Eiichi Saito, a medical doctor and executive vice president at Fujita Health University, explained.

The university joined with Toyota in developing the device.

A person demonstrating it strapped the brace to her thigh, knee, ankle, and foot and then showed how it is used to practice walking on the treadmill. Her body was supported from above by a harness and the motor helped to bend and straighten her knee. Sensors in the device can monitor the walking and adjust quickly to help out. Medical staff control the system through a touch panel screen.

Japanese automakers have been developing robotics both for manufacturing and other uses. Honda Motor Co.'s Asimo humanoid can run and dance, pour a



drink, and carry on simple conversations, while Welwalk is more of a system that uses robotics than a stand-alone robot.

Given how common paralysis due to strokes is in fast-aging Japan, Toyota's device could be very helpful, Saito said. He said patients using it can recover more quickly as the sensitive robotic sensor in Welwalk fine-tunes the level of support better than a human therapist can.

"This helps just barely enough," said Saito, explaining that helping too much can slow progress in rehabilitation.

The field of robotic aids for walking and rehabilitation is growing quickly. A battery-powered wearable exoskeleton made by Israeli manufacturer ReWalk Robotics enables people relying on a wheelchair to stand upright and walk.

Such systems also can aid therapists in monitoring a patient's progress, Luke Hares, chief technology officer at Cambridge Medical Robotics in Britain, said in a phone interview.

"They can be so much more precise," he said.

Previously, Toyota has shown robots that play the violin and trumpet. It plans to start sales in Japan of a tiny boy-like

**A LEG UP.** A model demonstrates the Welwalk WW-1000, a wearable robotic leg brace designed to help partially paralyzed people walk, at Toyota Motor Corp.'s headquarters in Tokyo. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

robot for conversational companionship. It is also investing in artificial intelligence and developing self-driving vehicles.

Toshiyuki Isobe, Toyota's chief officer for research, said Welwalk reflects the company's desire to apply robotics in medicine and other social-welfare areas, not just entertainment. The company also has an R2-D2-like machine, called the Human Support Robot, whose mechanical arm can help bed-ridden people pick things up.

"Our vision is about trying to deliver mobility for everybody," said Isobe. "We have been developing industrial robotics for auto manufacturing, and we are trying to figure out how we can use that technology to fill social needs and help people more."

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