

Head of China CDC gets injected with experimental vaccine

By Dake Kang
The Associated Press

BEIJING — The head of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention says he has been injected with an experimental coronavirus vaccine in an attempt to persuade the public to follow suit when one is approved.

“I’m going to reveal something undercover: I am injected with one of the vaccines,” Gao Fu said in a recent webinar hosted by Alibaba Health, an arm of the Chinese e-commerce giant, and Cell Press, an American publisher of scientific journals. “I hope it will work.”

The Associated Press reported earlier in July that a state-owned Chinese company injected employees with experimental shots in March, even before the government-approved testing in people — a move that raised ethical concerns among some experts.

Gao did not say when or how he took the vaccine candidate, leaving it unclear whether he was injected as part of a government-approved human trial. He did not respond to requests for comment.

The claim underscores the enormous stakes as China competes with U.S. and British companies to be the first with a vaccine to help end the pandemic — a feat that would be both a scientific and political triumph.

China has positioned itself to be a strong contender. Eight of the nearly two dozen potential vaccines in various stages of human testing worldwide are from China, the most of any country.

Gao declined to say which of the vaccines he was injected with, saying he didn’t want to be seen as “doing some kind of propaganda” for a particular company.

Last month, Gao was a co-author on a paper introducing one candidate, an “inactivated” vaccine made by growing the whole virus in a lab and then killing it. That candidate is being developed by an affiliate of state-owned SinoPharm.

The company previously said in an online post that 30 employees, including top executives, helped “pre-test” its vaccine in March, before it was approved for its initial human study. Scientists vehemently debate such self-experimentation, because what happens to one or a few people outside a well-designed study is not usable evidence of safety or effectiveness.

Chinese state media have also reported that employees of state-owned companies going abroad are being offered injections of the vaccine.

Gao said he took the injection to instill public confidence in vaccines, especially amid a tide of rising mistrust that has fuelled conspiracy theories and attacks on scientists.

“Everybody has suspicions about the new coronavirus vaccine,” Gao said. “As a scientist, you’ve got to be brave. ... If even we didn’t do it, how can we persuade the whole world — all the people, the public — to be vaccinated?”

Andrew Rennekamp, an editor at Cell and one of the moderators of Gao’s webinar, said, “This is a brave thing to do, and it shows his faith in what he believes is the safety of the vaccine and his commitment to the science and to public health.”

British royals share anguish over Indian rhino park’s floods

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International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, or IFRC.

More than 550 people have been killed in the floods, IFRC said.

The organization warned of a humanitarian crisis, saying that close to one third of Bangladesh has already been flooded, with more flooding expected in the coming weeks. It said 2.8 million people have been affected, and more than 1 million are isolated.

In India, more than 6.8 million people have been affected by the flooding, mainly in the northern states of Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, and Meghalaya bordering Bangladesh, IFRC said, citing official figures.

In Bihar, at least 10 people have been killed, the state’s disaster management authority said.

Though officials have opened relief centers in affected districts, people have instead chosen to shelter in tarpaulin tents set up along highways and embankments.



RHINOS RAVAGED. A one-horned rhino wades through flooded Kaziranga National Park in Kaziranga, 156 miles east of Gauhati, India, in this July 8, 2017 file photo. More than 100 animals, including 10 one-horned rhinoceroses, have died due to massive flooding at the famed Kaziranga game reserve in northeastern India. (AP Photo/Anupam Nath, File)

The Bihar government has requested help from India’s air force to airdrop relief materials, including food packets, the disaster management authority said.

In Assam, home to Kaziranga, 96 people have been killed in floods and another 26 have been killed in mudslides. Some 50,000 people have sought shelter in government-run

relief camps. The floodwaters are making protecting wildlife within the park more difficult, too.

“More than a hundred of the 223 security camps inside the sprawling park are still submerged, making day-to-day work of our 1,600 guards really challenging,” Sivakumar said.

Singh reported from Patna, India.



HAIRY SITUATION. This combination of photos shows U.S. ambassador to South Korea Harry Harris, left, in a March 4, 2020 photo, and, right, on July 27, 2020, both taken in Seoul, South Korea. Harris has shaved his mildly controversial mustache, saying it was too uncomfortable to keep it while wearing a coronavirus mask amid South Korea’s notoriously hot summer. (Newsis, Yonhap via AP)

U.S. ambassador shaves mustache under Seoul’s summer heat

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The U.S. ambassador to South Korea has shaved his mildly controversial mustache, saying it was too uncomfortable to keep while wearing a coronavirus mask during South Korea’s notoriously hot summer.

Harry Harris’ facial hair had drawn criticism from the media and a small number of online commentators, who compared his mustache to those worn by colonial Japanese governors during the country’s brutal rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945.

Harris, a retired Navy admiral who became ambassador in July 2018, acknowledged in January that his mustache had become “a point of some fascination here.” He also said he was being criticized for his ethnic background as a Japanese American.

“Glad I did this,” Harris tweeted after his visit to a barbershop in Seoul, South Korea’s capital. “For me it was either keep the ‘stache or lose the mask. Summer in Seoul is way too hot & humid for both. #COVID guidelines matter & I’m a masked man!”

His embassy tweeted a video that showed Harris bumping elbows with a masked barber and gesturing for a shave. He playfully rolled his eyes as he lay back on a leather chair as the barber shaved his mustache and trimmed his eyebrows.

“Wow, I haven’t seen this face in years!” Harris exclaimed after washing his face and applying lotion.

In an interview last year with *The Korea Times*, an English-language daily, Harris said he would keep his mustache unless someone convinces him that it is “viewed in a way that hurts” the relationship between Washington and Seoul.

The newspaper said Harris’ mustache “has become associated with the latest U.S. image of being disrespectful and even coercive toward Korea.”

Relations between South Korea and Japan sank to their lowest point in decades last year as they feuded over trade issues, wartime history, and military cooperation.

South Korea’s own alliance with the United States has also become shaky under the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has openly complained about the costs of maintaining the 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea to protect against North Korean threats. The allies have failed to sign a new cost-sharing agreement after the last one expired at the end of 2019.

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