

# 啼笑皆非

*ti2 xiao4 jie1 fei1*

The number of injuries at a recent marathon in Qingyuan (清遠), Guangdong, was nothing short of alarming.

Of the 20,000 runners, 12,000 had to receive medical help. Most of them suffered muscle spasms and sprains. There were some serious cases too, with 17 people being hospitalized, five in critical condition.

Many runners also ate a bar of soap given to them as a souvenir, thinking it was a piece of cake to help replenish their energy. Quite a few were taken ill after gobbling the “snack.” After the race, the streets were like a garbage dump.

The event has become a laughing stock, and media reports said it made people “啼笑皆非” (*ti2 xiao4 jie1 fei1*).

“啼” (*ti2*) is “to cry,” “to sob,” “笑” (*xiao4*) is “to laugh,” “皆” (*jie1*) “all,” “each and every,” and “非” (*fei1*) “wrong,” “improper.” “啼笑” (*ti2 xiao4*) is “tears and laughter.”

## Idiom by Lon Yan

Literally, “啼笑皆非” (*ti2 xiao4 jie1 fei1*) is “cry laugh all improper.” It means “not to know whether to laugh or cry,” “to choke someone up,” “to be caught in a ridiculously awkward position.”

You don't laugh when people are injured. Eating a piece of soap can have serious health consequences, so it is not a laughable matter either. But one can't help but wonder how anyone could have chewed and swallowed an entire piece of soap without knowing what it was.

Even more “啼笑皆非” (*ti2 xiao4 jie1 fei1*) was when health officials explained that the soap mishap was the result of the absence of a Chinese label on the bars.

### Terms containing the character “非” (*fei1*) include:

官非 (*guan1 fei1*) – a lawsuit

非法 (*fei1 fa3*) – illegal

非凡 (*fei1 fan2*) – extraordinary; outstanding

非洲 (*fei1 zhou1*) – Africa