

23 dead in karaoke bar fire

Authorities probing country's deadliest blaze since 2018

Vietnam A FIRE tore through a karaoke bar in southern Vietnam, killing 23 people and leaving 11 injured, a local official said.

The blaze engulfed the second and third floors of the building on Tuesday night, trapping customers and staff as dense smoke filled the staircase and blocked the emergency exit, state media reported.

Many crowded onto a balcony to escape the flames, which grew quickly as they caught the wooden interior, and others were forced to jump from the building.

Photos showed plumes of smoke billowing out of the bar – located in a crowded residential neighbourhood in Thuan An city, north of Ho Chi Minh City – as firefighters on cranes tried to extinguish the fire.

A local official confirmed that 23 people were dead and 11 injured.

"Rescue teams are still looking for



Fatal disaster: Firefighters at the scene of the fire at the karaoke bar in Binh Duong province, Thuan An city. — AFP

victims at the scene. The cause of the fire has not been determined and is being investigated," Nguyen Thanh Tam, a top official with the

trucks arrived, a receptionist said there were 40 people stuck inside.

"Many people ran outside through the main entrance, but many others could not stand the heat and they jumped down, breaking their hands and legs," Sang said.

Rescue workers searched through the night for anyone trapped in the 30-room bar, said state media.

Local police said the karaoke facility's fire prevention regulations had been checked prior to the blaze.

The fire was Vietnam's deadliest since 2018, when 13 people died in a blaze in an apartment complex in Ho Chi Minh City.

Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh yesterday ordered a further inspection of high-risk venues, especially karaoke bars.

Last month, three firefighters died after trying to extinguish a fire at another karaoke bar in Hanoi.

— AFP

Rescued dolphin calf dies despite weeks of treatment

Thailand AN Irrawaddy dolphin calf that was rescued and nursed day and night for weeks by veterinarians and volunteers after his rescue from a tidal pool on Thailand's shore has died despite all their efforts, officials who were providing emergency care for the animal said.

The baby was nicknamed Paradon, roughly translated as "brotherly burden", when it was found by fishermen on July 22, and dozens of veterinarians and volunteers helped care for it at the Marine and Coastal Resources Research and Development Centre in Rayong in the Gulf of Thailand.

"We were quite shocked because it happened so fast. Paradon had made much improvement since we found him," said Oranee Jongkolpath, a veterinarian at the centre, yesterday.

"He started to get sick again on Aug 31, having difficulty breathing and suffering from diarrhea. He deteriorated so quickly, and he died that night."

Oranee, together with her colleagues and volunteers, had been providing 24-hour watch over the injured calf.

The team looking after Paradon said an initial examination found infection in its lungs, but were waiting for full laboratory results to determine the exact cause of death.

"While we couldn't save Paradon's life, we have learnt a lot from it. Not many people have cared for Irrawaddy dolphins, let alone a calf. Everything we have done in a month of caring for him are all lessons learned for us, from its behaviour, food intake and even its sickness," said Oranee.

Irrawaddy dolphins, considered a vulnerable species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, are found in the shallow coastal waters of South and South-East Asia and in three rivers in Myanmar, Cambodia and Indonesia.

Their survival is threatened by habitat loss, pollution and fishing, when dolphins are caught unintentionally with other species.

Officials from the marine research centre believe around 400 Irrawaddy dolphins remain along the country's eastern coast bordering Cambodia. — AP

Lockdown anger grows amid quake aftermath



BEIJING: The death toll in this week's earthquake in western China has jumped to 74 with another 26 people still missing, the government reported, as frustration rises with uncompromising Covid-19 lockdown measures that prevented residents from leaving their buildings after the shaking.

The 6.8-magnitude quake that struck just after noon on Monday in Sichuan province caused extensive damage to homes in the Ganze Tibetan Autonomous Region and shook buildings in the provincial capital of Chengdu, whose 21 million citizens are under a strict Covid-19 lockdown.

Following the quake, police and health workers refused to allow anxious residents of apartment buildings out, adding to anger over the government's strict "zero-Covid policy" mandating lockdowns,



To safer ground: Rescue workers carrying an injured person after the earthquake in Luding county, Ganzi prefecture, in the southwestern Sichuan province. — AFP

quarantines and other restrictions, even while the rest of the world has largely reopened.

Footage circulating online showed residents of the central city of Wuhan, where the pandemic is believed to have originated in

late 2019, chanting "lift the lockdown, refuse to be tested" at police officers.

The restrictions have prompted protests online and in person.

In all, 65 million Chinese in 33 cities, including seven provincial

capitals, are currently under varying levels of lockdown.

The government is also discouraging domestic travel during the Mid-Autumn Festival on Saturday and the weeklong National Holiday at the start of October. — AP

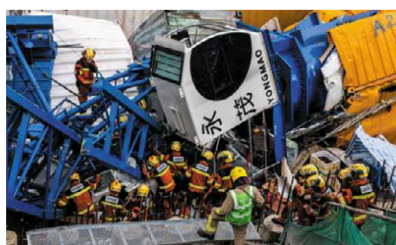
Two dead in HK crane collapse

HONG KONG: Two men were killed and at least six others injured after a Hong Kong tower crane collapsed at a construction site.

One man was certified dead at the site in eastern Kowloon and the other man died on the way to hospital, police said yesterday.

Six injured construction workers were taken to hospital, while another man was still trapped under the debris and awaiting rescue.

An AFP reporter at the scene saw over a dozen emergency workers from the city's Urban Search and Rescue Team surrounding the crum-



Urgent mission: Rescuers working to free people trapped under the collapsed crane at a construction site in Hong Kong. — AFP

pled crane, which had collapsed onto multiple cargo containers.

The accident took place when the crane fell onto a container, which then toppled onto construction workers, according to the South China Morning Post (SCMP).

Authorities said they were still probing the cause of the accident. Lawmaker Kwok Wai-keung,

who represents the labour sector in Hong Kong, said crane collapses were rare in the city and called the accident a "major blow" to the industry.

The scene of the accident was part of a massive construction site for a subsidised public housing project that aimed to create 19,000 homes, the SCMP reported. — AFP

Fall-preventing robot may reduce caregiver reliance

Singapore A WEARABLE assistive robot that can detect and prevent falls, especially among the elderly, has been developed by researchers at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

It can enable independent living among the elderly as it reduces a person's reliance on a caregiver, said TTSH, NTU and the National Robotics Programme yesterday.

Its inbuilt sensors can instantaneously detect loss of balance and stabilises the user by way of a harness worn around his hips, they said.

It can also help users who have

difficulty walking and balancing to stand up safely from a seated position, and to sit down safely from a standing position.

Called the Mobile Robotic Balance Assistant, the robot is about 1m tall and 70cm wide and weighs 100kg. It has a harness, which the user wears on their hips, that can counter falls and imbalances. The robot follows the user as they move around.

The robot uses a depth-sensing camera to observe the user's movements, while its machine-learning algorithms estimate the balance state of the user in real time to predict impending imbalances or falls.

— The Straits Times/ANN