



**Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki volcano creates huge ash plume**

LEMBATA, Indonesia (AP) — Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki volcano in south-central Indonesia erupted in mid-June, spewing towering columns of hot ash into the air. Authorities raised the eruption alert to the highest level and expanded the danger zone to about 5 miles from the crater. Indonesia’s Geology Agency said in a statement it recorded the volcano unleashing about 32,800 feet of thick grey clouds, following significant volcanic activities, including 50 in two hours, rather than the usual daily 8 to 10 activities. The mushroom-shaped ash cloud could be seen from cities located about 56 miles to nearly 93 miles from the mountain. There were no casualties reported. Residents were warned to be vigilant about heavy rainfall triggering lava flows in rivers originating from the volcano. An eruption of Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki in November killed nine people and injured dozens. It also erupted in March. The 5,197-foot mountain is a twin volcano with Mount Lewotobi Perempuan in the district of Flores Timur. Indonesia is an archipelago of 270 million people with frequent seismic activity. It has 120 active volcanoes and sits along the “Ring of Fire,” a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin.

**Hajj attendance falls to 30-year low excluding pandemic**

ISLAMABAD (AP) — This year’s Hajj in Saudi Arabia attracted the lowest number of pilgrims for 30 years, excluding the COVID-19 pandemic period, according to recent figures. The annual Islamic pilgrimage attracted just 1,673,230 Muslims, the majority of them from outside Saudi Arabia, according to a post from the country’s Hajj Ministry on the social platform X. Authorities did not immediately offer an explanation for the low turnout. It’s almost 160,000 fewer pilgrims than last year and a far cry from the pre-pandemic boom, when attendance would regularly push past 2 million. There was a record-breaking Hajj in 2012, when more than 3.16 million Muslims took part. The kingdom ran a pared-down pilgrimage during the COVID-19 pandemic, sharply reducing the scale of the Hajj between 2020 and 2022 while still allowing a small number of faithful to take part in the annual event. The Hajj in 2023 was the first to be held without restrictions since the start of the pandemic in 2020. At the Hajj, Muslims gather in Saudi Arabia to unite in religious rituals and acts of worship as they fulfill one of the Five Pillars of Islam, a religious obligation. It can be the spiritual experience of a lifetime for them and a chance to seek god’s forgiveness and the erasure of past sins. But inflation and economic crises around the world are putting the Hajj out of reach for some. Excess heat and tougher rules for entry may have also deterred potential pilgrims from heading to Saudi Arabia this year.

**Asian & other Catholic bishops demand climate justice**

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Catholic bishops from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are demanding climate justice for the parts of the world most affected by rising temperatures and rejecting what they said were the “false solutions” promoted by wealthy countries. As a heat wave hit much of Europe, including the Vatican, the continental bishops conferences of the Global South penned a first-ever joint ecological appeal ahead of the next U.N. climate conference in November in Belem, Brazil. In the document, they echoed the frequent environmental appeals by Pope Francis during his 12-year pontificate, but in a language that was far less diplomatic and far more urgent. They blasted the “openly denialist and apathetic stance” of “so-called elites of power” in the industrialized world who pressure their governments to back off sufficient mitigation and adaptation measures. The proposals merely perpetuate the exploitation of god’s creation and its most vulnerable people, when what is really needed is the complete abandonment of fossil fuels and a new economic model that values the common good, the bishops said. The document said it was “seriously contradictory” to use profits from oil extraction to finance green energy transition, saying carbon markets and mining for clean technologies were “false solutions.” This “green economy” really serves as an “ecological restructuring of capitalism” that just concentrates power again in corporations and regulatory systems, they said. Francis made caring for the environment a hallmark of his pontificate and penned a landmark encyclical that spawned global movements to care for the planet. Pope Leo XIV has indicated he is following in Francis’ footsteps, visiting the future site of a huge Vatican solar panel project and planning to spend the summer at the papal retreat outside Rome that Francis turned into an environmental center.

**North Korea says it has raised a capsized destroyer upright**

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea says it righted a capsized destroyer and moored it at a pier in the port of Chongjin as it continues to repair the new warship leader Kim Jong Un has described as a significant asset for his nuclear-armed military. The report by North Korean state media aligned with South Korean military assessments and recent commercial satellite images. North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency said experts would closely examine the ship’s hull before beginning the next phase of restoration, which will take place at a dry dock at the neighboring port of Rajin and is expected to last a week or more. Satellite images taken by Planet Labs PBC analyzed by The AP showed the stricken destroyer upright and floating. It wasn’t immediately clear from the image just how much damage was done to the vessel, which was in the water for days after a botched launch ceremony. However, the ship did not appear to be noticeably listing, meaning Pyongyang is likely able to send it onward to the other port to inspect the vessel’s electronics. Outside experts say it remains unclear how severely the 5,000-ton-class destroyer was damaged during the launch, which triggered a furious response from Kim, who called the failure a “criminal act caused by absolute carelessness, irresponsibility, and unscientific empiricism.”



**INJURY TIMEOUT.** Workers carry out a T1 robot from Booster Robotics during the inaugural RoBoLeague robot soccer competition in Beijing. Booster Robotics provided the hardware for the four university teams, while research teams from each school developed and embedded their own algorithms for perception, decision-making, player formations, and passing strategies — including variables such as speed, force, and direction, according to Cheng Hao, founder and CEO of Booster Robotics. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

**China’s humanoid robots generate more soccer excitement than their human counterparts**

BEIJING (AP) — While China’s men’s soccer team hasn’t generated much excitement in recent years, humanoid robot teams have won over fans in Beijing based more on the AI technology involved than any athletic prowess shown.

Four teams of humanoid robots faced off in fully autonomous 3v3 soccer matches powered entirely by artificial intelligence in China’s capital in what was touted as a first in China and a preview for the upcoming World Humanoid Robot Games, set to take place in Beijing August 15 to 17.

According to the organizers, a key aspect of the match was that all the participating robots operated fully autonomously using AI-driven strategies without any human intervention or supervision.

Equipped with advanced visual sensors, the robots were able to identify the ball and navigate the field with agility

They were also designed to stand up on their own after falling. However, during the match several still had to be carried off the field on stretchers by staff, adding to the realism of the experience.

China is stepping up efforts to develop AI-powered humanoid robots, using sports competitions like marathons, boxing, and football as a real-world proving ground.

Cheng Hao, founder and CEO of Booster Robotics, the company that supplied the robot players, said sports competitions offer the ideal testing ground for humanoid robots, helping to accelerate the development of both

algorithms and integrated hardware-software systems.

He also emphasized safety as a core concern in the application of humanoid robots.

“In the future, we may arrange for robots to play football with humans. That means we must ensure the robots are completely safe,” Cheng said. “For example, a robot and a human could play a match where winning doesn’t matter, but real offensive and defensive interactions take place. That would help audiences build trust and understand that robots are safe.”

Booster Robotics provided the hardware for all four university teams, while each school’s research team developed and embedded their own algorithms for perception, decision-making, player formations, and passing strategies — including variables such as speed, force, and direction, according to Cheng.

In the final match, Tsinghua University’s THU Robotics defeated China Agricultural University’s Mountain Sea team with a score of 5-3 to win the championship.

Mr. Wu, a supporter of Tsinghua, celebrated their victory while also praising the competition.

“They (THU) did really well,” he said. “But the Mountain Sea team (of Agricultural University) was also impressive. They brought a lot of surprises.”

China’s men have made only one World Cup appearance and have already been knocked out of next year’s competition in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

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**Asian Currency Exchange Rates**

Units per U.S. dollar as of 7/04

Bangladesh Taka	122.46
Cambodian Riel	4015.1
China Renminbi	7.1653
Fijian Dollar	2.239
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8492
Indian Rupee	85.717
Indonesian Rupiah	16187
Iranian Rial	42044
Japanese Yen	144.48
Laos New Kip	21510
Malaysian Ringgit	4.221
Nepal Rupee	136.72
Pakistani Rupee	283.79
Papua N.G. Kina	4.051
Philippine Peso	56.442
Russian Ruble	78.76
Saudi Riyal	3.7504
Singapore Dollar	1.2742
South Korean Won	1362.5
Sri Lankan Rupee	299.94
Taiwan Dollar	28.92
Thai Baht	32.39
Vietnam Dong	26180