

WORLD

Haunting question over Sydney mall stabbings: Why?

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What drove Joel Cauchi to murder six people in a busy Sydney shopping center on Saturday?

It is a question investigators are asking as they piece together the events leading up to Cauchi's killing rampage inside the Westfield shopping mall.

As night fell on Sunday, a group of about 40 people from a local Muslim association placed flowers on the ever-growing pile outside the shopping center in the city's Bondi Junction neighborhood, which is usually humming with shoppers.

Australians, largely unaccustomed to violent crime, are still coming to terms with the attack that shattered Sydney as detectives continue to process the crime scene and make sense of the horrific event.

Five women and one male security guard were killed in the attack as Cauchi roved through the packed mall with a large knife. Pictures on social media showed frightened shoppers fleeing the mall or hiding behind shuttered stores.

The Chinese Consulate-General in Sydney said on Sunday that one Chinese national was killed during the attack, and another is among the injured. It said it was deeply saddened by the tragedy and offered condolences to the families of the victims.

Cauchi was tracked down and shot dead by solo senior police officer Amy Scott, who was hailed by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese as a "hero" who had saved countless lives.

One of the dead women was osteopath Ashlee Good, 38, who died at St. Vincent's Hospital on Saturday night from wounds she received trying to protect her 9-month-old baby, who was in a serious but stable condition.

Faraz Tahir, a 30-year-old security guard at the mall who was the sole man killed, arrived in the country last year as a refugee from Pakistan, according to a statement from the



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (third from left) and other officials stand before a pile of floral tributes outside the Westfield shopping mall in Sydney on Sunday. DAVID GRAY / AFP

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Australia, to which he belonged.

Police have described Cauchi, 40, as an itinerant who moved to Sydney, the capital of New South Wales, from neighboring Queensland a month ago.

Queensland Police Assistant Commissioner Roger Lowe told a news briefing on Sunday that Cauchi had never been arrested or charged with any crimes in Queensland, but had been "street-checked" on Queensland's Gold Coast in December, describing the process as "intelligence gathering".

Cauchi had never been found in possession of knives, he said.

Cauchi's family recognized him and contacted police on Saturday after seeing news reports of the killings.

"The family, when they viewed footage of the event on TV, thought

that may well have been their son and they reached out to authorities," Lowe said.

Mental health issues

Cauchi had been diagnosed with mental health issues when he was 17 and had been in contact with police frequently in the past four to five years, Lowe said, but police had no indication about why he may have become violent.

His parents issued a statement through police, offering condolences to their son's victims and their families. They also sent a message of "support" to the officer who shot him dead, "expressing their concerns for her welfare".

They said their son had been living in a vehicle and hostels of late, and was only in sporadic contact via text messages.

New South Wales police Assistant Commissioner Anthony Cooke said there was no evidence to suggest Cauchi was "driven by any particular motivation, ideology or otherwise".

"We are continuing to work through the profiling of the offender, but very clearly to us at this stage it would appear that this is related to the mental health of the individual involved," Cooke said.

Britain's King Charles, who is Australia's head of state, posted on the royal family's X account: "Our hearts go out to the families and loved ones of those who have been so brutally killed during such a senseless attack."

Albanese said he had received condolence messages from all over the world, adding the attack highlighted the bravery of ordinary citizens.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Fast-fashion brand opens up to others

Move aims to capitalize on company's slick operation, fend off competition

By **BELINDA ROBINSON**
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The popular online fast-fashion retailer Shein will open up and market its unique supply chain operation to other brands, which will be able to learn from its slick operations to design, make and deliver fashionable clothes at top speed.

The company, with headquarters in Singapore, built its hugely successful store by using goods made in China and local suppliers and manufacturers, which created a lightning-fast supply chain.

However, in its next phase it will change gears and give outside designers and brands the chance to use its design teams, which create in small batches to test a product's popularity with consumers while creating less wasted inventory.

Shein's executive chairman, Donald Tang, told investors in a letter last month that the new initiative would be dubbed "supply chain as a service". The Wall Street Journal reported. The aim is to keep the company one step ahead of the competition.

George Yip, emeritus professor at Imperial College London and distinguished visiting professor at Northeastern University in Boston, said: "Today with everything online, the Chinese just spot whatever trends there are. And, of course, they're able to send out hundreds of stocks, keeping units of hundreds of designs and see what sticks, and then respond very quickly. They have low-cost manufacturing capability."

Shein made its US debut in 2015, and its sales soared amid the pandemic. The company had a revenue of about \$22.7 billion in 2022.

The e-commerce company's revolutionary approach to fashion manufacturing means that it has contracts with more than 5,400 third-party factories in China that make tens of thousands of items of clothing each day.

Even though its website features a lot of stock, it makes goods only in small batches.

When customers browse the site, Shein monitors what they look at, put in their cart, hover over, or click on, allowing the company immediately to see what is popular. It then creates new designs based on what customers like.

Once Shein places an order with a supplier it can be delivered in days. Managers rely on real-time data to determine what is in

demand and order more as needed. This approach cuts the cost for storage, a primary reason for its ultralow prices such as a \$10 dress and a \$2 T-shirt, which have proved popular with consumers in more than 150 countries.

As Shein enters the new phase, it has given some emerging designers access to its technology under its Shein X incubator program.

Under the partnership with independent designers more than 4,600 designers worldwide have displayed 41,000 original designs.

Shein's new approach comes as it faces growing pressure from Western regulators and politicians over its business practices.

Shein filed an application for a US stock listing in November, but the Securities and Exchange Commission has yet to make a ruling.

The basis of Shein's business has been remaking fashion from the runways by houses of high couture more cheaply and selling it to fashion-conscious consumers, especially young, social media-savvy young women.

Shein has outpaced well-known European fast-fashion companies such as H&M, Primark and Zara even though they have had a solid online presence, and brick-and-mortar stores for decades and are considered the pioneers of fast fashion.

Making inroads

Over the past few years Shein has also made inroads into the Western market by buying a stake in Sparc Group, operator of the US brand Forever 21. It also bought the online British fashion brand Missguided.

Shein's approach puts it in direct competition with Amazon of the US, which wants to fend off the new rival.

Amazon is reportedly trying to offer consumers a broader selection of goods and improve its delivery speed, especially for same-day items, to regain consumers lost to both Shein and Temu, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Temu has quickly become popular in the US and is the second-most popular shopping app in the country by monthly users.

Last year Shein launched a marketplace in the US, Brazil, Europe and Mexico. It gives third parties the ability to sell different types of goods such as fashion, home goods and electronics, much like Amazon.

Trilateral summit raising regional tension: Experts

By **PRIME SARMIENTO** in Hong Kong
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The first-ever trilateral summit among the Philippines, Japan and the United States has escalated, rather than defused, tensions over the South China Sea, and even "hardened" the stance of the parties involved in the disputed but otherwise calm waterway, analysts say.

Inside The Philippines' involvement in the "provocative" April 11 summit has also made the country an "outlier" in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as member states of the regional bloc prefer a "nuanced" approach in resolving the dispute over the South China Sea, they said.

US President Joe Biden hosted a summit in Washington, DC, where he met Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

In a joint statement issued at the conclusion of the summit, the three leaders committed to developing a partnership on inclusive growth, infrastructure and emerging technologies, clean energy and security.

However, a readout issued after the summit quoted Biden as saying the summit reinforced the ironclad US-led alliance's commitment to the Philippines under the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty and that this "extends to armed attacks

on Philippine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft — to include those of its Coast Guard — in the Pacific, including anywhere in the South China Sea."

Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, research fellow at the Manila-based Asia-Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, said the trilateral summit did not aid in de-escalating tensions but rather contributed to hardening the positions of the parties to the dispute. He cited the joint maritime exercise held on April 7 in the South China Sea by Australia, Japan, the Philippines and the US, and how China announced it would undertake similar drills.

Anna Rosario Malindog-Uy, vice-president for external affairs of the Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies Institute, said the trilateral alliance is "in many ways, provocative". She said it could exacerbate regional tensions, spur an arms race and threaten peace and stability in Asia-Pacific.

Bilveer Singh, associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, said that by joining the summit, the Philippines has "militarized" its position over the South China Sea.

Malindog-Uy said the Philippines is being viewed by other ASEAN countries as a "pawn of US interests in the region" owing to its "belligerent stance and approach" toward China and its involvement in the alliance.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held a summit on Wednesday and unveiled plans for military cooperation and projects with a primary focus on countering China.

"We urge the US and Japan to meet the trend of the times, abandon the Cold War mentality, immediately stop interfering in China's internal affairs, stop forming anti-China cliques, and stop undermining regional peace and stability. China will resolutely defend its sovereignty, security and development interests," the spokesperson said.

YIFAN XU

New Year splash



A woman enjoys the Songkran water festival as a bucket of water is splashed over her in Prachinburi Province, central Thailand, on Saturday. Songkran is the traditional Thai New Year festival, celebrated from April 13 to 15. It marks the end of the dry season and the beginning of the rainy season. The festival is characterized by water splashing, which is believed to bring good luck and wash away sins. WASON WANICHAKORN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

A taste of Chinese, with or without the tricky sticks

By **MINGMEI LI** in New York
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From Wall Street to the Lincoln Center, whether it's in the Financial District or the heart of the arts scene, Chinese cuisine permeates almost every corner of New York.

However, the Dragon Fest, the largest outdoor Chinese food and culture festival, on until October, is bringing together all authentic local foods from many provinces of China to Manhattan.

"We hope that Chinese food and food culture can serve as a bridge connecting people from different countries," the founder of Dragon Fest, Xu Biubiu, said. "Food-tasting could be a good start."

Food has not only facilitated connections between people but also created a culinary diplomacy between China and the United States recently.

In a visit to China that concluded last week, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen did not limit herself to exchanging views on international

economics, current financial situations and cooperation in addressing global challenges with Chinese officials. While traveling from Guangzhou to Beijing she tried a wide range of Chinese dishes, including Sichuan dumplings, Peking duck, mouthwatering chicken and craft beer.

Internet users have been captivated by what Yellen ate, as well as her proficient use of chopsticks, seen in a video of her dining at Taotao Ju, a restaurant in Guangzhou with a 144-year history.

"Many cuisines are indeed more convenient to eat with chopsticks, which appears more Chinese," Xu said.

"I've noticed many foreigners at our Dragon Fest using chopsticks, and many are exceptionally skilled at it. "This creates a more relaxed dining atmosphere for everyone and facilitates cultural exchange through the shared experience of dining."

Many more vendors are offering chopsticks in addition to knives and forks to cater to preferences for eating certain types of food, Xu said.

"I love using chopsticks when I eat Chinese food or other Asian cuisines," Helen Pfeffer, 58, told China Daily. "Using chopsticks feels 100 percent more authentic to me."

"You know what they're really great for? ... You can enjoy snacks like buttered popcorn or Cheetos with chopsticks. It's very neat."

The practice of combining Chinese utensils with US snacks serves as a fun symbol of cultural exchanges, she said.

"Things like noodles are easier to eat with chopsticks than with anything else. I think it's generally one of those situations where if you're in a restaurant and everybody's using a certain utensil, you feel like you should be using it, too," she said, adding that it helps immerse her in the food experience.

Alexandria Pryce, 24, said: "I really hope more people come out and truly enjoy the culture and try different things that they might not be used to trying on a daily basis."

Pryce said she likes Asian food and enjoyed trying different dishes

at the Dragon Fest, appreciating not only the food but also the cultures.

Eating Chinese food from local vendors at the Dragon Fest is also a way of supporting small businesses, she said.

"I honestly don't know how I learned to use chopsticks; it took me a minute to pick things up, but now it's not that hard," she said.

"I don't want to settle for Americanized Chinese food because it's important to preserve the true culture."

Holding three boxes of *xiaolongbao* (steamed dumplings) and noodles and three pairs of chopsticks, Jackie Maragh, 28, said: "I think using chopsticks makes the experience more authentic, and it's better to eat the food the way that people traditionally eat it. It adds to the experience as well."

Her friend Alicia Forbes, 33, holding a freshly brewed fruit tea, said she liked it and was ready to try the food that they had just bought.

"I'm still practicing using chopsticks, though. And I'll be practicing more."

US, Japan 'Cold War mentality' slammed

The US and Japan, with their Cold War mentality and small group politics, have smeared China on the Taiwan question, maritime issues and policy on nuclear weapons, grossly interfered in China's domestic affairs and violated the basic norms in international relations, a spokesperson from the Chinese embassy in the US said on Friday.

The spokesperson said China deplores and opposes such moves and that the embassy has made serious demarches to the US.

The remarks came after US President Joe Biden and Japanese