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U.S. infiltrates big ransomware gang: 'We hacked the hackers'



Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco flanked by Attorney General Merrick Garland, left, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Christopher Wray speaks during a news conference to announce an international ransomware enforcement action, at the Department of Justice in Washington, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023.

Associated Press

By ERIC TUCKER and FRANK BAJAK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI and international partners have at least temporarily disrupted the network of a prolific ransomware gang they infiltrated last year, saving victims including hospitals and school districts a potential \$130 million in ransom payments, Attorney General Merrick Garland and other U.S. officials announced Thursday. "Simply put, using lawful means we hacked the hackers," Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said at a news conference. Officials said the targeted syndicate, known as Hive, is among the world's top five ransomware networks and has heavily targeted health care. The FBI quietly accessed its control panel in July and was able to obtain software keys it used with German and other partners to de-

crypt networks of some 1,300 victims globally, said FBI Director Christopher Wray. How the takedown will affect Hive's long-term operations is unclear. Officials announced no arrests but said, to pursue prosecutions, they were building a map of the administrators who manage the software and the affiliates who infect targets and negotiate with victims. "I think anyone involved with Hive should be concerned because this investigation is ongoing," Wray said. On Wednesday night, FBI agents seized computer servers in Los Angeles used to support the network. Two Hive dark web sites were seized: one used for leaking data of non-paying victims, the other for negotiating extortion payments.

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Lime to be tested on the monument of School 1888



Richard Jacobs: from footballer to international cameraman to multimedia lecturer in Aruba



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U.S. infiltrates big ransomware gang: 'We hacked the hackers'

Continued from Front

"Cybercrime is a constantly evolving threat, but as I have said before, the Justice Department will spare no resource to bring to justice anyone anywhere that targets the United States with a ransomware attack," Garland said.

He said the infiltration, led by the FBI's Tampa office, allowed agents in one instance to disrupt a Hive attack against a Texas school district, stopping it from making a \$5 million payment.

It's a big win for the Justice Department. Ransomware is the world's biggest cybercrime headache with everything from Britain's postal service and Ireland's national health network to Costa Rica's government crippled by Russian-speaking syndicates that enjoy Kremlin protection.

The criminals lock up, or encrypt, victims' networks, steal sensitive data and demand large sums. Their extortion has evolved to where data is pilfered before ransomware is activated, then effectively held hostage. Pay up in cryptocurrency or it is released publicly.

As an example of a Hive sting, Garland said it kept one Midwestern hospital in 2021 from accepting new



Attorney General Merrick Garland flanked by Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco, left, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Christopher Wray speaks during a news conference to announce an international ransomware enforcement action, at the Department of Justice in Washington, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023.

patients at the height of the COVID-19 epidemic.

The online takedown notice, alternating in English and Russian, mentions Europol and German law enforcement partners. The German news agency dpa quoted prosecutors in Stuttgart as saying cyber specialists in the southwestern town of Esslingen were decisive in penetrating Hive's criminal IT infrastructure after a local company was victimized.

In a statement, Europol said

companies in more than 80 countries, including oil multinationals, have been compromised by Hive and that law enforcement from 13 countries was in on the infiltration.

A U.S. government advisory last year said Hive ransomware actors victimized over 1,300 companies worldwide from June 2021 through November 2022, netting about \$100 million in payments. Criminals using Hive's ransomware-as-a-service tools targeted a

wide range of businesses and critical infrastructure, including government, manufacturing and especially health care.

Though the FBI offered decryption keys to some 1,300 victims globally, Wray said only about 20% reported potential issues to law enforcement.

"Here, fortunately, we were still able to identify and help many victims who didn't report. But that is not always the case," Wray said. "When victims report

attacks to us, we can help them and others, too."

Victims sometimes quietly pay ransoms without notifying authorities — even if they've quickly restored networks — because the data stolen from them could be extremely damaging to them if leaked online. Identity theft is among the risks.

John Hultquist, the head of threat intelligence at the cybersecurity firm Mandiant, said the Hive disruption won't cause a major drop in overall ransomware activity but is nonetheless "a blow to a dangerous group."

"Unfortunately, the criminal marketplace at the heart of the ransomware problem ensures a Hive competitor will be standing by to offer a similar service in their absence, but they may think twice before allowing their ransomware to be used to target hospitals," Hultquist said.

But analyst Brett Callow with the cybersecurity firm Emsisoft said the operation is apt to lessen ransomware crooks' confidence in what has been a very high reward-low risk business. "The information collected may point to affiliates, launderers and others involved in the ransomware supply chain." □

Associated Press

U.S. military kills senior Islamic State official in Somalia



Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin speaks during a meeting with Albanian Defense Minister Niko Peleshi at the Pentagon, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023, in Washington.

Associated Press

By **AAMER MADHANI** and **COLLEEN LONG**

Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S.

special operations forces have killed a senior Islamic State group official and 10 other terrorist operatives in remote northern Somalia, the Biden administration announced Thursday.

The operation carried out on Wednesday targeted Bilal al-Sudani, a key financial facilitator for the global terrorist organization, in a mountainous cave complex.

"This action leaves the United States and its partners safer and more secure, and it reflects our steadfast commitment to protecting Americans from the threat of terrorism at home and abroad," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a

statement.

President Joe Biden was briefed last week about the proposed mission, which came together after months of planning. He gave final approval to carry out the operation this week, according to two officials who briefed reporters on the operation on the condition of anonymity.

Sudani, who has been on the radar for U.S. intelligence officials for years, played a key role in helping to fund IS operations in Africa as well as the ISIS-K terrorist branch operating in Afghanistan, Austin said. He had originally been designated the Treasury Department in 2012 for his role

with al-Shabab, another terrorist organization, operating in Somalia.

No civilians were injured or killed in the operation, Pentagon officials said. One American involved in the operation was bitten by a military dog, but was not seriously injured, according to an administration official.

U.S. officials provided scant details about how the operation was carried out or the circumstances surrounding al-Sudani's killing. One official said that U.S. forces had intended to capture al-Sudani but that did not prove to be "feasible" as the operation was carried out. □

Past U.S. presidents, VPs asked to recheck for classified docs

By COLLEEN LONG and
ZEKE MILLER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The National Archives has asked former U.S. presidents and vice presidents to recheck their personal records for any classified documents following the news that President Joe Biden and former Vice President Mike Pence had such documents in their possession, two people familiar with the matter said Thursday.

The Archives sent a letter Thursday to representatives of former presidents and vice presidents extending back to Ronald Reagan to ensure compliance with the Presidential Records Act, according to the two people, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about investigations. The act states that any records created or received by the president are the property of the U.S. government and will be managed by the archives at the end of the administration.

The Archives sent the letter to representatives of former Presidents Donald Trump, Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H.W. Bush and Ronald Reagan, and former Vice Presidents Pence, Biden, Dick Cheney, Al Gore and Dan



The north face of the Archives of the United States is seen in this general view March 11, 2019, in Washington.

Associated Press

Quayle, they said.

The letter was first reported by CNN.

Spokespeople for former presidents Trump, Obama, George W. Bush and Clinton and former vice presidents Pence, Dick Cheney, Al Gore and Dan Quayle did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Biden's lawyers came across classified documents from his time as vice president in a locked cabinet as they were packing up an office he no longer

uses in November. Since then, subsequent searches by the FBI and Biden's lawyers have turned up more documents. Former Vice President Pence, too, this week, discovered documents and turned them in after saying previously he did not believe he had any. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment but the searches by Biden's attorneys and the FBI appear to fulfill the Archives' request. The Archives had no comment.

Handling of classified documents has been a problem off and on for decades, from presidents to Cabinet members and staff across multiple administrations stretching as far back as Jimmy Carter. But the issue has taken on greater significance since former President Donald Trump willfully retained classified material at his Florida estate, prompting the unprecedented FBI seizure of thousands of pages of records last year.

Attorney General Mer-

rick Garland appointed a special counsel to investigate Trump's handling of the documents, and also Biden's.

It turns out that officials from all levels of government discover they are in possession of classified material and turn it over to authorities at least several times a year, according to another person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of classified documents.

Current and former officials involved in the handling of classified information say that while there are clear policies for how such information should be reviewed and stored, those policies are sometimes pushed aside at the highest levels. Teams of national security officials, secretaries and military aides who share responsibility for keeping top-level executives informed — and the executives themselves — may bend the rules for convenience, expediency or sometimes simple carelessness.

While much of the attention has been on classified information, the Presidential Records Act actually requires that, from the Reagan administration onward, all records must be transferred to the Archives regardless of classification. □

New U.S. race, ethnicity standards proposed; first since '97

By MIKE SCHNEIDER

Associated Press

A Middle Eastern and North African category could be added to U.S. federal surveys and censuses, and changes could be made to how Hispanics are able to self-identify, under preliminary recommendations released Thursday by the Biden administration in what would be the first update to race and ethnicity standards in a quarter century. The federal government's standards haven't been changed since 1997, two decades after they were created as part of an

effort to collect consistent race and ethnicity data across federal agencies when handling censuses, federal surveys and application forms for government benefits.

Questions about race and Hispanic ethnicity are asked separately using the 1997 standards. They would be combined into a single question under the initial proposals, which were made by a working group of representatives from different federal agencies convened by the Office of Management and Budget. Some advocates have

been pushing for combining the race and Hispanic origin questions, saying the way race is categorized often confuses Hispanic respondents who are not sure how to answer. Tests by the Census Bureau in the 2010 census showed that combining the questions yielded higher response rates. Using the 1997 standards, U.S. residents from Middle Eastern and North African countries were encouraged to identify as "white." Under the new proposal, there would be a separate category for people often referred to by the "MENA"



Workers at ACCESS, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, help with meals for the Arab community in Dearborn, Mich., on May 1, 2020.

Associated Press

acronym. The Census Bureau recommended adding a MENA category to the 2020 census form, but the Trump administration dropped the idea.

Among the countries of origin that would get a check for the MENA category would be Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, Syria, Morocco and Israel, the notice said. □

Colorado baker loses appeal over transgender birthday cake

By COLLEEN SLEVIN

Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — The Colorado baker who won a partial U.S. Supreme Court victory after refusing to make a gay couple's wedding cake because of his Christian faith lost an appeal Thursday in his latest legal fight, involving his rejection of a request for a birthday cake celebrating a gender transition.

The Colorado Court of Appeals ruled that the cake Autumn Scardina requested from Jack Phillips and Masterpiece Cakeshop, which was to be pink with blue frosting, is not a form of speech.

It also found that the state law that makes it illegal to refuse to provide services to people based on protected characteristics like race, religion or sexual orientation does not violate business owners' right to practice or express their religion. Relying on the findings of a Denver judge in a 2021 trial in the dispute, the appeals court said Phillips' shop initially agreed to make the cake but then refused after Scardina explained that she was going to use it to celebrate her transition from male to female. "We conclude that creating a pink cake with blue frosting is not inherently expressive and any message



Jack Phillips, who's case was heard by the Supreme Court five years ago after he objected to designing a wedding cake for a gay couple, speaks to supporters outside the Supreme Court in Washington, Monday, Dec. 5, 2022.

or symbolism it provides to an observer would not be attributed to the baker," said the court, which also rejected procedural arguments from Phillips.

Phillips, who is represented by Alliance Defending Freedom, maintains that the cakes he creates are a form of speech and plans to appeal.

"One need not agree with Jack's views to agree that all Americans should be free to say what they believe, even if the government disagrees with those

beliefs," ADF senior counsel Jake Warner said in a statement. John McHugh, one of the lawyers who represent Scardina, said the court looked carefully at all the arguments and evidence from the trial.

"They just object to the idea of Ms. Scardina wanting a birthday cake that reflects her status as a transgender woman because they object to the existence of transgender people," he said of Phillips and his shop. In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Colo-

rado Civil Rights Commission had acted with anti-religious bias in enforcing the anti-discrimination law against Phillips after he refused to bake a cake celebrating the wedding of Charlie Craig and Dave Mullins in 2012. The justices called the commission unfairly dismissive of Phillips' religious beliefs.

The high court did not rule then on the larger issue of whether a business can invoke religious objections to refuse service to LGBTQ people, but it has another

chance to do so.

Last year it heard another case challenging Colorado's anti-discrimination law, brought by a Christian graphic artist who does not want to design wedding websites for same-sex couples. Lorie Smith, who is also represented by ADF, claims the law violates her freedom of speech.

Scardina, an attorney, attempted to order her cake on the same day in 2017 that the Supreme Court announced it would hear Phillips' appeal in the wedding cake case. During trial, she testified that she wanted to "challenge the veracity" of Phillips' statements that he would serve LGBTQ customers.

Before filing her lawsuit, Scardina first filed a complaint against Phillips with the state and the civil rights commission, which found probable cause that he had discriminated against her.

Phillips then filed a federal lawsuit against Colorado, accusing it of a "crusade to crush" him by pursuing the complaint.

In March 2019, lawyers for the state and Phillips agreed to drop both cases under a settlement Scardina was not involved in. She pursued the lawsuit against Phillips and Masterpiece on her own. □

Associated Press



Floodwaters cover a property along River Rd. in Monterey County, Calif., as the Salinas River overflows its banks on Jan. 13, 2023.

Associated Press

By ADAM BEAM

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Weeks of historic rainfall in California mean public agencies that supply

27 million people will get much more water from the state than they were scheduled to get a month ago — enough to supply an estimated 4.4 million

California storms boost water allocation for cities

households for a year. In December, state officials announced public water agencies would get just 5% of what they had asked for because of a severe drought that had depleted the state's reservoirs to dangerously low levels.

But starting on New Year's Eve, a weather phenomenon known as "atmospheric rivers" began pummeling California for weeks. Nine atmospheric rivers dumped an estimated 32 trillion gallons of water on the state in three weeks. It was enough to increase water storage in the state's two largest

reservoirs by a combined 66%. More water could be on the way. Thursday's allocation does not include water that will eventually come in the spring when the snow melts in the Sierra Nevada. As of Tuesday, California had more than twice as much snow in the mountains compared to hits historical average.

"We are pleased that we can increase the allocation now and provide more water to local water agencies," said Karla Nemeth, director of the state Department of Water Resources. "These storms made clear

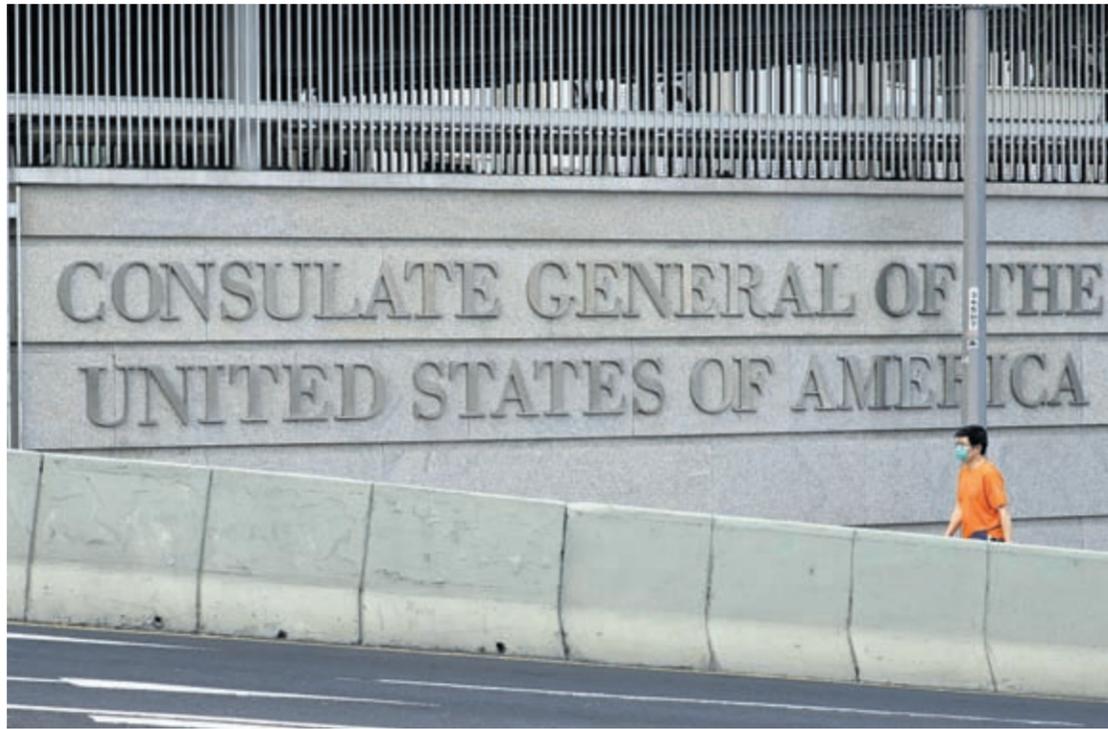
the importance of our efforts to modernize our existing water infrastructure for an era of intensified drought and flood. Given these dramatic swings, these storm flows are badly needed to refill groundwater basins and support recycled water plants."

The U.S. Drought Monitor said Thursday that severe drought was reduced to moderate drought in most of the San Joaquin Valley and the lowest category — abnormal dryness — has replaced moderate drought on the entire central coast, including Monterey Bay. □

Consul: 20% of Americans in Hong Kong left in past 2 years

KANIS LEUNG

HONG KONG (AP) — About 20% of the Americans in Hong Kong have left for various reasons over the past two years, the U.S. consul general in the semi-autonomous Chinese city said, drawing harsh criticism from Beijing for allegedly interfering in its affairs. Hong Kong's strict anti-COVID-19 measures and "diminishing freedoms" have "clearly impacted the city and the people in it," Greg May said, citing the departure of roughly 15,000 Americans as one of the outcomes. He said about 70,000 Americans and 1,300 U.S. companies are currently present in Hong Kong. In a video address late Wednesday to the U.S. Center for Strategic & International Studies, May also said worries remain over Hong Kong's "reputation as a business center which depends on adherence to international standards and the rule of law." Among those concerns was an interpretation last month by the standing committee of National People's Congress, China's legislature, that could



A man walks past U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong Monday, March 15, 2021.

Associated Press

"further undermine the independence of Hong Kong's judiciary system by expanding the Hong Kong executive branch's authority to make decisions affecting cases without judicial oversight," May said. The standing committee ruled that Hong Kong's courts need the approval of the territory's chief executive or a separate committee to allow foreign law-

yers to take part in national security trials. That came after Hong Kong leader John Lee, who is under U.S. sanctions, asked Beijing to make a ruling that could effectively block jailed pro-democracy publisher Jimmy Lai from hiring a British lawyer to represent him. Lai was arrested in 2020 during a crackdown on the city's pro-democracy movement that led Bei-

jing to impose a sweeping National Security Law on the city. He is fighting collusion charges and faces up to life in prison if convicted. May said that in light of the standing committee's ruling and other developments, "companies should be aware that the risks faced in mainland China are now increasingly present here in Hong Kong." "The National Security Law

and actions taken by Beijing and Hong Kong authorities may negatively impact company staff, finances, legal compliance reputation and operations," he said.

Hong Kong's reputation as a free global financial center could be further harmed if more of the "best and brightest" leave the city, he said, referring to the decision by many Hong Kong citizens to move abroad after 2020.

The city's government should "cease its dismantlement of Hong Kong's democratic institutions, autonomy and rule of law," release those held unjustly and "respect human rights for all," May said.

In a response, the Chinese Foreign Ministry's office in Hong Kong said May "slandered the rule of law and freedom in Hong Kong" and "deliberately discredited Hong Kong's business environment." May "recklessly trampled on the basic principle of not interfering with a place's domestic affairs under international law and international relations," it said in a statement posted online. □

Haitian police rebels protest gang killings of officers

PIERRE RICHARD LUXAMA
and MEGAN JANETSKY

The Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)

— Disgruntled rebel police officers roared through the streets of Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince on Thursday, blocking roads and shooting guns into the air to protest a slew of killings of police officers by Haitian gangs.

Gangs have killed at least 10 officers in the past week; another is missing and one more has severe bullet wounds, according to the Haitian National Police.

A video obtained by The Associated Press and acknowledged by police on Thursday — likely recorded by gangs — shows the na-

ked and bloodied bodies of six officers stretched out on the dirt, their guns laying on their chests. The gang who killed them, known as Gan Grif, still has the bodies, police said.

The killings are just the latest example of escalating violence in the Caribbean nation, which has been gripped by gang wars and political chaos following the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise. His unelected successor has asked the United Nations to lead a military intervention, but no country has been willing to put boots on the ground.

The deaths enraged members of Fantom 509, an armed group of current

and former police officers that has violently demanded better conditions for officers.

Dozens of these men wove through city on Thursday, many wearing hoods along with police uniforms, flak jackets and rifles and automatic weapons. They seized buses to blockade roads and torched tires across the city, leaving smoke plummeting through the streets.

Many demanded tougher crackdowns on the gangs, and called for the end to the current government of Ariel Henry, which many Haitians view as illegitimate. At one point, demonstrators broke down one of the gates outside Henry's



National police control security on a street in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Saturday, Jan. 21, 2023.

Associated Press

home.

"If they are killing police officers, me as a citizen, what should I do?" one protester in a mask screamed into an Associated Press camera. "The police are second only to God and we're going to stand behind them." A video recorded by local Haitian media shows empty

streets and closed businesses on a key road of Port-au-Prince where the rebel group passed through.

In addition to the bodies displayed by the gang, a number of officers were killed last week in a firefight with gangs in a neighborhood that was once considered relatively safe. □

U.N. food agency: Afghan malnutrition rates at record high

By **EBRAHIM NOROOZI**

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)

— Malnutrition rates in Afghanistan are at record highs with half the country enduring severe hunger throughout the year, a spokesman for the World Food Program said Thursday.

The Taliban takeover in August 2021 drove millions into poverty and hunger after foreign aid stopped almost overnight. Sanctions on Taliban rulers, a halt on bank transfers and frozen billions in Afghanistan's currency reserves restricted access to global institutions and the outside money that supported the country's aid-dependent economy before the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces.

"Half of Afghanistan endures severe hunger throughout the year, regardless of the season, and malnutrition rates are at a record high for Afghanistan," said Phillippe Kropf, a spokesman for the U.N. food agency in Kabul.

"There are seven million children (under the age of 5) and mothers who are malnourished, in a country with a population of 40 million."

Afghans are not starving



Mothers along with babies who suffer from malnutrition wait to receive help and check-up at a clinic that run by the WFP, in Kabul, Afghanistan, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023.

Associated Press

to death, he said, but they have no resources left to stave off the humanitarian crisis.

Aid agencies have been providing food, education and healthcare support to Afghans, including heating, cash for fuel and warm clothes. But distribution has been severely impacted by a Taliban edict banning women from working at national and international nongovernmental groups. "The ban has come at the

worst possible moment," said Kropf. "Families and communities don't know where their next meal is coming from."

The WFP scaled up its delivery and distribution of aid in anticipation of a tough winter before the ban came in, planning to reach 15 million this month with emergency food assistance and nutrition support. While it is not directly affected by the ban, 19 of its NGO partners suspended operations in

Afghanistan following the Dec. 24 edict.

The NGO ban on women workers has seen the suspension of 115 of 437 mobile health clinics, affecting 82,000 children, and pregnant and lactating women. The suspension of a training project is hurting 39,300 people, mostly women, while the pause of a school snack program has hit 616,000 students.

At a nutrition clinic in Kabul, 32-year-old nurse Anisa

Samadi said most children and mothers will die without support from agencies like the WFP and World Health Organization. Their help is needed now more than ever, she told The Associated Press on Thursday. "In the last five months I have seen the number of patients increasing. Three months ago we had 48 patients. Last month, we had 76 and this month so far we have 69 or 70, mostly we have twins who are so weak, while their mothers are also weak."

Shortages of medicine alongside poverty and a lack of food means even a small illness can turn into a huge problem for many Afghans, she said.

Her colleague, 30-year-old nutrition adviser Sheba Husanzada, said children at the clinic receive therapeutic food. But the children return with pneumonia, causing unhealthy weight loss. "Mothers are saying that they don't have wood or any other way to keep their children warm at home. They don't have enough food to feed them," she said. First-time mother Fereshta, 24, visited the clinic because she doesn't have enough milk to feed her child. □

ICC judges reopen probe into Philippines' 'war on drugs'

By **MIKE CORDER**

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — International Criminal Court judges on Thursday cleared the way for the court's prosecution office to resume its investigation into the so-called war on drugs in the Philippines.

Prosecutor Karim Khan asked judges for permission last year to reactivate his investigation into alleged crimes against humanity between Nov. 1, 2011, and March 16, 2019 that were linked to the deadly crackdown.

The probe was suspended in late 2021 after the Philippines said it already was investigating the crimes and

argued the ICC a court of last resort therefore did not have jurisdiction.

Khan argued last year he

should be allowed to reopen the ICC investigation, saying Manila's request for the case to be deferred

to authorities there "is not warranted."

In their ruling Thursday, a panel of judges agreed, saying that after examining information from the Philippines government and Khan and weighing comments from victims, they concluded "the various domestic initiatives and proceedings, assessed collectively, do not amount to tangible, concrete and progressive investigative steps in a way that would sufficiently mirror the court's investigation."

More than 6,000 drug suspects, most of them people who lived in poverty, have been killed, according to government pronounce-

ments. Human rights groups say the death toll is considerably higher and should include many unsolved killings by motorcycle-riding gunmen who may have been deployed by police. Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has defended the crackdown as "lawfully directed against drug lords and pushers who have for many years destroyed the present generation, especially the youth."

Duterte openly threatened drug suspects with death and ordered police to shoot suspects who dangerously resisted arrest, but he has denied condoning extrajudicial killings. □



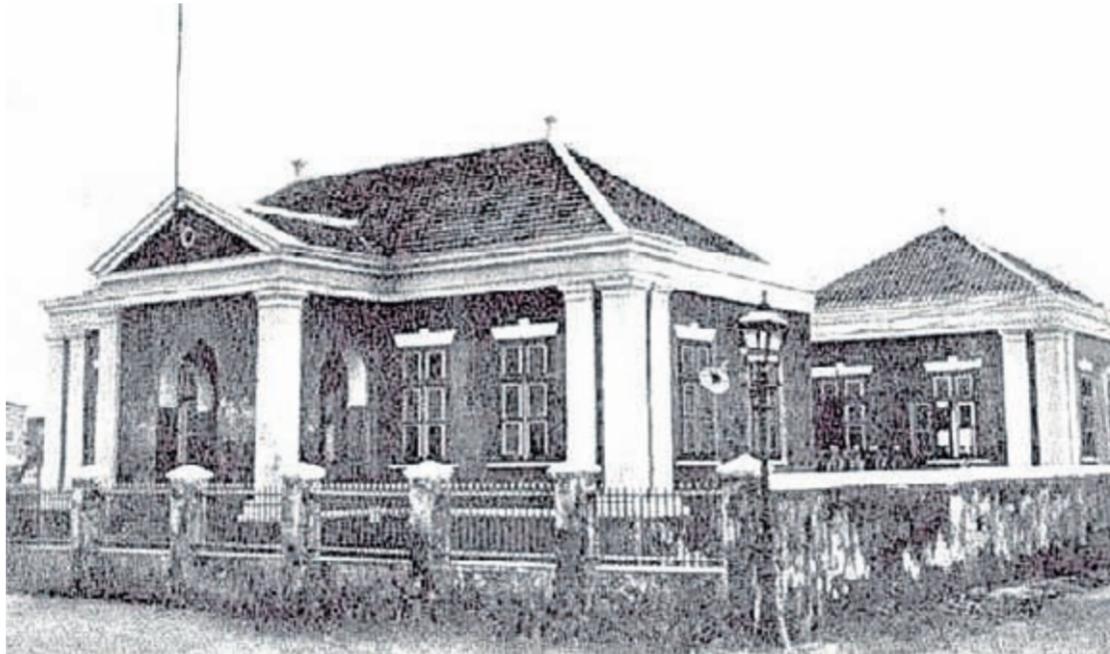
In this photo provided by the Malacanang Presidential Photographers Division, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte listens during a meeting with government officials at the Malacanang presidential palace in Manila, Philippines on Monday May 23, 2022.

Associated Press

Lime to be tested on the monument of School 1888

ORANJESTAD – At the beginning of January, Stichting Monumentenfonds Aruba (Aruba Monument Fund Foundation, SMFA) began big maintenance work on the exterior of the building that is now known as Algemene Rekenkamer Aruba, which is a monument known under the name of School 1888.

The building in Wilhelminastraat is part of the 16 monuments owned by SMFA, and the foundation is in charge of maintenance, and this building certainly is a big challenge for the foundation. In various occasions, investments were made in maintenance and in the short term deterioration was noticed on the building. This deterioration is probably caused by the change in material in the past, where it was switched over to plaster and cement which caused that the wall could not breathe and made the stones in the wall deteriorate little by little. Originally, the building was made using lime. For this reason, SMFA made the decision to test on the building, by substituting the existing plaster for a plaster based on lime. The paint that will be applied will also be based on lime, which will allow the wall to breathe.



In the last few years, SMFA carried out different research and courses regarding the technique of lime application together with experts from the United States as well as Trinidad and Tobago. In the projects for the Lime Kiln in Ran-

cho and at the California Lighthouse, lime was used in order to go back to the original material and this is giving good results. For this reason, the decision was made to apply this to the Monument School 1888 as well. Lime will be ap-

plied only on a portion of the façade, and the rest of the building will get regular maintenance as was done in the past, when blast furnace cement was used.

After different companies which participated in the courses for lime application in the past made an offer for the project, the maintenance work was entrusted to GPS Construction. Aside from this, an invitation was extended to other companies that want to observe the process so they can also experience the technique of plaster with lime.

School 1888

The Monument School 1888 was built between 1887 and 1888 and was designed by the chief of the construction department in Curaçao, Antoine Martis, in a neoclassic style. Originally it was the first public school of Aruba. In 1921, the school received the name of Julianaschool,

and after this it moved to Madurostraat, and the name was changed to Prinses Margrietschool in 1943. During World War II, the building served as defence barracks. The function of barracks brought a lot of change for the building, to which different new parts were constructed. Between 1953 and 1955 the old building was renovated and it became Public Reading Room and Library (Openbare Leeszaal en Boekerij) and after 1982 it served as government offices.

In 2005 the restoration and expansion of the building began, for which all non-original parts, that were not part of the protection of the monument, were removed and the building was expanded in a more modern style. For many years already it is the office of Algemene Rekenkamer Aruba (General Audit Chamber Aruba, ARA)

For the current maintenance project, ARA will remain in the building, and SMFA thanks the workers of ARA for the understanding and apologizes in advance for the inconvenience that may be caused by the maintenance work.

At the end of the project, they will have a beautiful monument once more to represent them. With this maintenance project, SMFA continues preserving the beautiful monument of School 1888 for the future. □



Paseo Herencia is always fun and exciting to visit



NOORD— Paseo Herencia offers a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment options in an outdoor center located in the heart of Palm Beach.

Shopping

The Paseo Herencia stores offer a great collection in beach wear, clothing, perfume, shoes, jewelry, souvenirs and much more. Pamper yourself by visiting Maggy's and enjoy their salon services and shop for your favorite beauty products. Aruba Aloe has that perfect gift to bring back home, all made with natural ingredients. Other brand favorites are Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Aldo, Carmen Steffens, Quiksilver, Pandora and many more.

Restaurants

Start with a breakfast meal at Chill Out Island Café for a fluffy soufflé pancake with your choice of toppings, breakfast sandwiches or acai bowls plus your favorite bubble tea. TGI Fridays offers breakfast options starting from \$8.57, available all day – every day. Go Argentinian style at Che Bar and try their delicious omelet with chorizo/ham, mozzarella, onions, peppers, and tomatoes served with skillet potatoes and toast.

These restaurants are also open for lunch and dinner and will delight you with unique tastes. Choices run from Argentinian dishes to, Asian/Caribbean, International and Mexican at amongst others Iguana Cantina. Sip and have a good time at the Bulldog Aruba located in the center of the Plaza. Open till 11pm.



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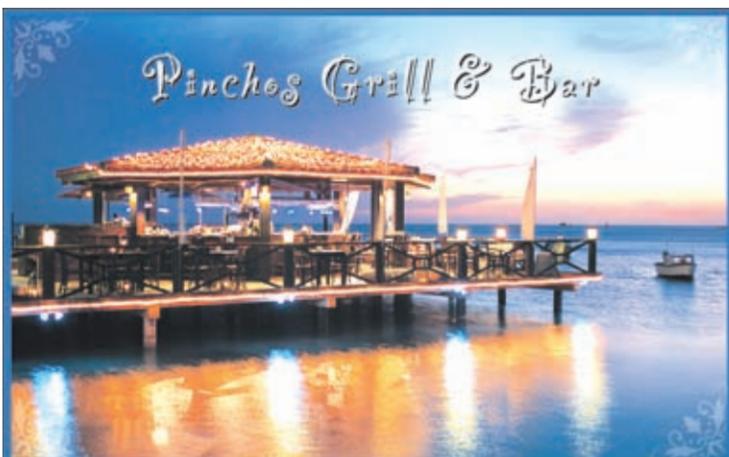
VIP Cinema

Visit the one-of-a-kind Caribbean Cinemas VIP on the second floor of Paseo Herencia and enjoy your favorite movies with the latest projection and 7.1 Dolby surround sound with a delicious bag of popcorn.

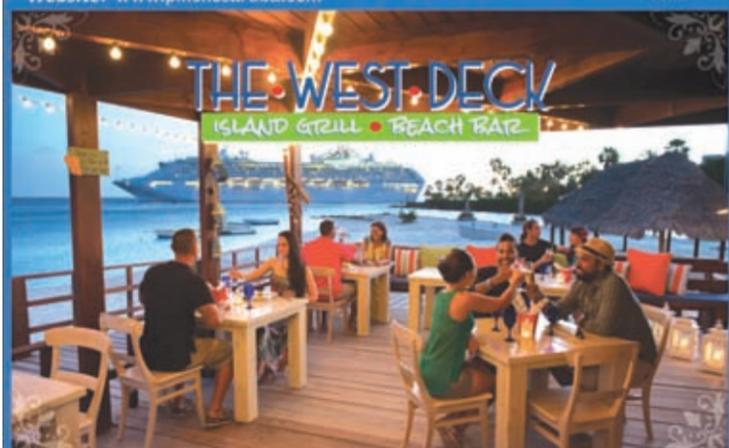
Entertainment

Kids can enjoy the Paseo kids' activities, carousel & kiddie train, every day from 6pm to 10pm and do not forget to catch the nightly water shows at 7:30pm, 8:30pm and 9:30pm. Another fun activity is the The Range Airsoft Experience located behind The Lazy Turtle. Snap Instagramable pictures at the Angel Wings located between Pandora and Quiksilver and another one in front of TGI Fridays. Catch a live Show on Friday by violinist Angela Flores and Saturday by the acrobatic group Ritmo Cubano at 8pm on the Plaza Padu.

Also with any purchase at Paseo Herencia you will receive FREE parking in the parking garage. Paseo Herencia has implemented all COVID protocols according to the Aruba Health & Happiness code. It is required to wear face masks when shopping or visiting the mall to ensure a safe environment.



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Camping season 2023 announced

Oranjestad - In connection with the upcoming camping season during spring break, the Chief of Police, Mr. Ramon Arnhem, urges all campers to be aware of the conditions set for the camping permit.

Camping starts on Sunday, April 2, 2023, from noon, and the last day is April 16, 2023. It is only permitted to set up tents and trailers on the beach during these days. The Police will remove any tents or trailers placed on the beach before the starting day and time, at the owner's expense.

After April 16, 2023, campers must remove all camping-related objects should be removed from the beach. Failing to remove these will also result in their removal at the permit holder's expense. The police urge everyone to keep all beaches clean. Dispose of all trash in trash containers or trash bags.

Deadline for a camping permit

The last day to apply for a camping permit is March 15, 2023, at 4:30 pm. You can submit permit applications during weekdays from 8:00 am to 11:30 am and from 1:00 pm to 04:30 pm.

Additional conditions are now applicable:

BBQ on the beach (sand) is not allowed under any circumstance. BBQ is only allowed in designated areas and when using a gas BBQ Pit. Charcoal is not permit-



ted at all. Tents and trailers used for camping should be in good condition and placed at least 10 meters from the water's edge and 5 meters from the road's side. Not complying with these guides will also result in the removal of these tents or trailers by the Police. Camping sites can under no circumstance be reserved.

You are allowed to only place a tent, trailer, and

objects in the location designated by Government officials. Tents/trailers should have proper first aid resources (First Aid kit) Obscene objects or posters are prohibited. Campers should always comply with all the conditions set in the camping permit. Motor vehicles, bicycles, horses, or any cart is prohibited on the beach. Campfires are prohibited



on the beach The sale of food, refreshments, cocktails, or any other item on the beach without the proper permit is prohibited. You can only play music in a tent or trailer during the weekdays until 10:00 pm and on the weekend until midnight as long as it does not cause nuisances to neighbor campers. It is not allowed to trim or chop any tree without a permit. Boating or setting anchors in designated swimming zones is not allowed. It is prohibited to tie boats to buoys meant for ships. It is not allowed to use pallets and cardboard on the beach. Failing to comply with this rule will result in the removal by the authorities. Camping seasonThe beach or palm trees are not allowed to be used as a toilet. Horses and dogs are not al-

lowed on the beach. Beach huts are not allowed to be used for camping and should remain available for beachgoers. All beaches should be kept clean. Glass bottles and or glass shrapnels must be removed immediately from the sand and not discarded in the ocean. It also applies to all trash. You cannot transfer the camping permit to a third party. The permit holder should have the permit visible to the police in the tent/trailer. The permit holder's right to use the camping site is exclusive during the camping period. Before the camping date, no area can be reserved/marked or cordoned off, etc. The permit holder is solely responsible for any harm caused to others by his/her trailer/tent or any other object. The permit holder must strictly follow police directives in the interest of public order, the safety of people, morality, and property. Failing to comply with any of these conditions is considered similar to camping without a permit. The camping permit will be immediately revoked and may result in a fine. The deadline for the camping permit application is March 15, 2023, at 4:30 pm. Comply with all the rules and regulations and have great camping. Be aware that the police will be actively checking all beaches and camping sites during the camping season. □

Sea turtle conservation by Turtugaruba Foundation

ORANJESTAD — Turtugaruba was founded on September 3rd, 2003 by a group of enthusiastic volunteers. Ten years earlier, in 1993, a Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan (STRAP) was introduced in Aruba and the rest of the Caribbean as an initiative of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Tom Barmes, who was working at DLVV (Department of Agriculture, Husbandry and Fishery) was one of the writers of the STRAP for Aruba, together with Karen Eckert, director of WIDECAST (Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network). This is how sea turtle conservation started on the island following a plan that is still complied with today.

Tom formed a group of volunteers around him, because nature does not know office hours, like an organization such as DLVV. This group of volunteers used the name Widecast Aruba and today there are still a few of them active. They first started protecting the Leatherback Sea Turtle nests on Palm Beach and Eagle Beach. This group also investigated which other species of sea turtles use Aruba as their nesting habitat and which beaches are used by them. For a period of 25 years a study has been conducted in which every early morning

the beach was being monitored in which now there is a good overview of sea turtle nesting activities.

There are 4 different sea turtle species that visit Aruba to lay their eggs, each with their own specific season:

- Leatherback Sea Turtle - Lederschildpad - Driekiël (March – September)
- Loggerhead Sea Turtle - Dikkopschildpad - Cawama (May – September)
- Hawksbill Sea Turtle - Karetschildpad - Caret (June – December)
- Green Turtle - Soepschildpad - Turtuga Blanco (July-November)

There also came a better understanding and overview of the biggest threats to the sea turtles existence in Aruba and how these problems should be tackled. Despite hard work, all those years, most problems have not really gone away, but luckily and thanks to the enormous efforts from the volunteers, the sea turtles are still here. On Aruba the sea turtles are threatened with extinction by pollution, driving on dunes and beaches with quads and 4x4's and the loss of nesting beaches due to coastal development on behalf of tourism. Because coastal



development comes with artificial light and artificial light is a mayor issue for sea turtles, mother turtle usually comes on shore at night looking for a dark beach to make her nest. However... a dark beach is hard to find here nowadays. Light causes stress and can result in her returning to the sea without laying her eggs. Artificial light causes disorientation for the baby sea turtles (hatchlings).

They crawl towards artificial light sources (like streetlights, hotel lights, etc.) and then they don't find the sea. In the 90's it was still a common occurrence

to find a complete nest of about 70 hatchlings on the streets, dead, as cars drove over them. Thanks to their protection methods and a lot of time and effort, the volunteers of Turtugaruba have managed to get this under control. But for a sustainable solution there must be less light visible on the beaches and a strict regulation of it. Sea turtles simply need dark nesting beaches for their survival. It is clear that even more coastal development would not make the situation better for the sea turtles. Again, more hotel rooms? And even busier beaches? These are choices Aruba has to make. Do we want to leave a place for the sea turtles? Not only Aruba, but the entire world needs sea turtles! Sea turtles play a vital role in keeping our oceans healthy.

The Green Turtle, for example, keeps the sea grasses on the bottom of the sea short and therefore a healthy place for many fish to deposit their eggs. The Leatherback, the largest turtle of the world, eats mainly jellyfish and helps maintain the balance between jellyfish and plankton. Despite the threats that exist on Aruba, the turtles still keep coming. That's why today Turtugaruba is especially proud of the volunteers and the many people and organizations of our community

that carry a warm place in their hearts for the sea turtles. All four species are active now, which means all hands on deck in the field for us, the volunteers. We strive to keep the sea turtles, our oldest 'repeat guests', always coming back to Aruba and get the chance to reproduce here.

What you can do to protect the sea turtles

- Lights out for sea turtles.
- Do not drive on beaches.
- Do not litter. Do not leave any plastic cups, straws or bags on the beach.
- Remove obstacles from the beach.
- Do not disturb a nesting sea turtle. Do not attempt to touch the turtle but stay at a respectful distance (at least 10 meters).
- Do call Turtugaruba (24 hour Turtle Hotline: (297) 5929393).

For more information visit the facebook page Turtugaruba Foundation. □



Richard Jacobs: from footballer to international cameraman to multimedia lecturer in Aruba

ORANJESTAD – Richard E. Jacobs Jr. is currently a guest lecturer in multimedia at Ibero American High School. Jacobs has a long and successful trajectory in the world of television; but before entering television, his first love was soccer. In an interview with our reporter, Jacobs tells a bit about his career in soccer and multimedia.

From a young age, because his father played soccer, Jacobs followed in his father's footsteps and began playing soccer too. At a young age he moved to the Netherlands and from that moment continued developing in his sport. Half of his career was in the Netherlands where he played for big teams. Afterwards he came back to Aruba and played in various youth teams and represented Aruba in Santo Domingo, among others.

Jacobs says that during his soccer career he won different individual awards. Among others, he won goalgetter in a championship twice, and was MVP of a championship twice. He also won best striker.

During the 1990s, he was



part of Aruba's national team, representing our island in elimination games for the World Cup in 1994, 1998 and 2002. He was also part of the Aruba team for the Caribbean Championship Shell Cup, and in the year 2000 he was part of the Aruban team that beat the Puerto Rican team 4-2.

Jacobs studied in the electrical sector in Aruba and after finishing his studies in Aruba he moved to the Netherlands to continue studying electronica. During his studies in the Netherlands, Jacobs says, there was a department that would photograph and film here and there, but mostly photograph. He went to experience this, and loved it so much that

he started participating. "I started going deeper into it. For filming, I began when I was 14, filming various activities around Aruba with a big camera. I always liked filming. That's how I started, and as I grew up I gained more experience."

Jacobs worked in TeleAruba, and after that he got the opportunity to work in ATV and at this time he gained a lot of experience in the world of television.

Internationally, he worked at different TV stations and programs. He says that he worked with CNN, Fox, NBC, as cameraman for the Larry King show, and he worked as cameraman also for Nancy Grace at that time.

The transition from television to school happened because his two daughters attended Ibero American High School, and during the years they were enrolled, they realized that he was



doing multimedia work and the school approached him to start teaching in the MultiMedia department in order to introduce the subject to the students. "They found accreditation for this and after six years teaching, this is the only school that is currently giving complete multimedia lessons," Jacobs emphasized. "You learn everything regarding filming, editing, you learn video editing, and you learn to work with Photoshop, restore images, make posters, you learn everything regarding social media. We also teach the technical aspect a bit of the work of IT", he added.

Finalizing, Jacobs says that what he likes the most about teaching at the school is inspiring the kids, who have an open window to the world of multimedia. "Maybe you are a very creative person, you can do a lot with multimedia and what I like is that when I give an assignment, I want for them to do it the best that they can, better than me. The goal is to push these children to use their creativity and experience the world of multimedia, through which they can express themselves in different ways." □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

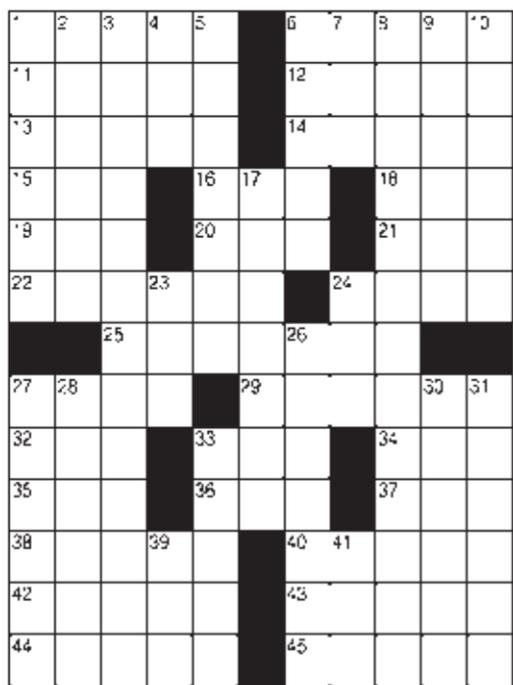
- ACROSS**
- 40 TV's Sawyer ones
 - 42 Wed in haste
 - 43 City on the Mohawk River
 - 44 Silver or gold
 - 45 Dev of "Slumdog Millionaire"
- DOWN**
- 1 New York tribe
 - 2 Arthurian island
 - 3 Firing
 - 4 Greek vowel
 - 5 Laced with more four-letter words



Yesterday's answer

- 6 Parcels out
- 7 Thurman of film
- 8 Falling for something
- 9 Sweet-heart, in Paris
- 10 Nuisance
- 17 Wrong
- 23 John, to Ringo
- 24 Leaf carrier
- 26 Abated
- 27 Apollo Theater setting
- 28 "Becket" actor
- 30 Show clearly
- 31 Bridge do-over
- 33 Girder material
- 39 Health retreat
- 41 "Give — rest!"

- 22 "Life of Pi" director
- 24 Screen-writer James
- 25 Deluge
- 27 Santa sound
- 29 Prefer to
- 32 Put away
- 33 Urgent call
- 34 Seth's mother
- 35 Hold up
- 36 Due follower
- 37 Bridge action
- 38 Unfettered



1.97

AXYDLBAAXR
IS LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-27

CRYPTOQUOTE

L K K J P Z F N H J M , L K K J A K K B M

X H J X M U N N T W O K H M O F N H O N :

E G F M F M E G N F J N X U U P P N .

— I X Z B E V X F H

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: YOU CAN'T GET TOO MUCH WINTER IN THE WINTER. — ROBERT FROST

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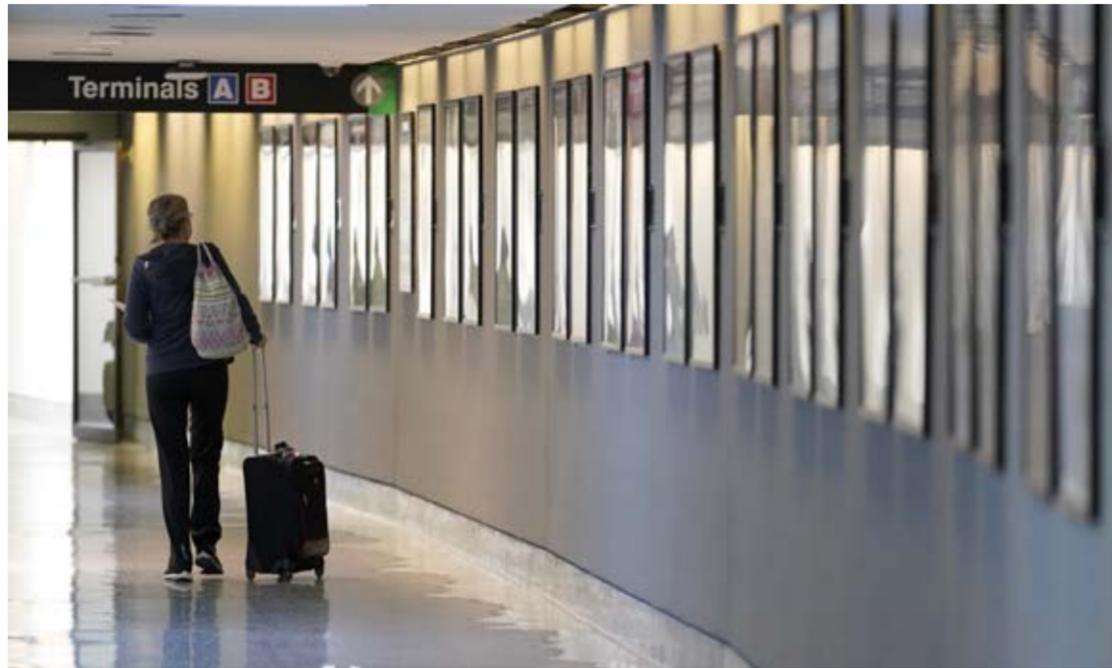
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Airline, hotel elite status: Harder to get (or keep) in 2023

By **SALLY FRENCH** of **Nerd-Wallet**

For the past couple of years, hotel and airline loyalty programs have extended elite status in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. But in 2023, that's coming to an end. A tsunami of downgrades will wipe out some travelers' elite status because pandemic-era offers are expiring and loyalty programs are upping the qualification requirements. On Jan. 1, 2023, United Airlines raised requirements for Premier status tiers. Come March 2023, it'll be tougher to earn American Airlines Gold elite status. Major hotels, including Marriott and IHG, promised to extend elite status through February 2023, meaning automatic extensions are at their end.

"The cliff is coming," says Phil Gunter, the co-founder of Status Match, an online service that helps people apply to match their existing elite status with status in other travel loyalty programs. "This is a major, unavoidable industry event." Status Match data predicts that approximately 1 million Americans will lose airline status in 2023. That's an estimated 30% to 50% of all people with airline status. But it's not all bad news. In fact, this year could bring



A traveler pulls their luggage between terminals at Logan International Airport, Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2023, in Boston. A traveler pulls their luggage between terminals at Logan International Airport, Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2023, in Boston.

more bonus point promotions and avenues to earn elite status than ever before.

WHY ARE LOYALTY PROGRAMS CUTTING OFF ELITE STATUS IN 2023?

Most of 2019's elites had their status extended over the past few years. Meanwhile, a natural flow of new elite status earners continuously has entered the pipeline. That combination has generated an unsustainably high number of elites. "Where traditionally, a percentage of people would naturally be downgraded

every year, that hasn't happened," says Mark Ross-Smith, CEO of Status Match. "Some earned status and others retained it, creating today's inflated database." That has led to issues for airlines, hotels and travelers. Airlines and hotels have to pay out promised benefits and clamp down on policies that might have extended the exclusivity. For example, Delta Air Lines had to implement new policies to reduce crowds at its Sky Club lounges, including raising membership dues for elites. A November 2022

statement from Delta cited "record number of visits" and "frustration for some customers who find themselves waiting in lines or searching for seating once inside" as the reasons behind the change.

Meanwhile, travelers face fiercer competition for seat or hotel room upgrades. And benefits that purportedly offer express service, like VIP check-in lanes, get bogged down if too many elites use them.

THE DOWNGRADES ARE GOOD FOR SOME

Loyalty programs are set to

break up with status free-riders, but they'll likely seek new, paying customers with enticing offers.

FOR INFREQUENT TRAVELERS: LOYALTY BENEFITS BEFORE REACHING ELITE STATUS

Travel programs are increasingly finding small ways to encourage loyalty, even before travelers have earned elite status.

For example, JetBlue now doles out "Perks You Pick" rewards, consisting of small goodies like early boarding once you've spent \$1,000. American Airlines rewards travelers with similar, nominal benefits after earning 15,000 Loyalty Points.

Those small goodies might inspire someone to try to earn elite status, or at least encourage less-frequent travelers to stick with that airline rather than go with a competitor on future flights, Ross-Smith says.

FOR EXISTING ELITE STATUS HOLDERS: EVEN MORE REWARDS

Elite status holders represent at least 30% of airline cabin revenue, according to Status Match data.

"If you take these people out of the equation, very fast an airline's financials become disastrous," Ross-Smith says. Thus, airlines are offering more benefits to its biggest spenders. □

Associated Press

Walmart's Sam's Club to add 30 stores in next few years

By **ANNE D'INNOCENZIO**
AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Walmart said Thursday it plans to open more than 30 Sam's Club locations in the next few years, marking the first expansion since 2017.

The nation's largest retailer, based in Bentonville, Arkansas, plans to open the first Sam's Club location as part of the expansion next year in Florida. Sam's Club is also modernizing its distribution network. Sam's Club will launch five new supply chain fulfillment and distribution centers, with the first location planned in Georgia later this year.

The last new Sam's Club

location opened in in Hanover, Pennsylvania.

The move comes as Walmart's Sam's Club division has enjoyed strong sales growth and a record rise in membership over the past two years. For the latest quarter ended Oct. 28, sales at stores opened at least a year rose 10% for Sam's Clubs. For the company's namesake stores, that figure was up 8.2%.

Warehouse clubs including Costco Wholesale Corp. and BJ's Wholesale Club have been a bright spot in the retail industry but resonated even more during the early part of the pandemic when shoppers

were loading up essentials as they stayed close to home. Given rising gas prices and surging inflation in food, shoppers have been turning to warehouse clubs in search of better deals.

Over the past several years, Sam's Club has redesigned the majority of its 600 clubs, making them brighter and easier to navigate. The brand has expanded its shopping technology like Scan & Go, a mobile app that allows shoppers to scan merchandise and check-out without going to the cashier line.

The new clubs will be approximately 160,000 square feet, larger than most ex-

isting locations which are roughly 140,000 square feet. Most of the new clubs will feature a sushi island, a

full-service floral area and dedicated hearing and optical centers. □



The price of gas is displayed on a sign at Sam's Club in Annapolis, Md., Monday, March 30, 2020.

Associated Press

Rybakina, Sabalenka to meet in Australian Open women's final

By HOWARD FENDRICH
AP Tennis Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)

— What all seemed so different, so daunting, even, about trying to win a Grand Slam title to Elena Rybakina a little more than six months ago is now coming rather naturally.

And if she can win one more match, she will add a championship at the Australian Open to the one she collected at Wimbledon.

Rybakina, a 23-year-old who represents Kazakhstan, reached her second final in a span of three major tournaments by beating Victoria Azarenka 7-6 (4), 6-3 at Melbourne Park on Thursday, signaling a rapid rise toward the top of tennis.

"Everything was new at Wimbledon," Rybakina said after hitting nine aces in the semifinals to raise her tournament-leading total to 44. "Now I more or less understand what to expect."

That could come in handy Saturday, when she will face No. 5 seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus. Sabalenka reached her first Grand Slam title match at age 24 by beating unseeded Magda Linette 7-6 (1), 6-2 in Thursday's second semifinal.

Sabalenka improved to



Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan waves after defeating Victoria Azarenka of Belarus in their semifinal match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023.

10-0 in 2023, winning all 20 sets she has contested this season.

More importantly, the victory over Linette gave Sabalenka her first taste of success in a Slam semi after going 0-3 at that stage until now, losing each previous attempt by a 6-4 score in the third set.

Rybakina and Sabalenka employ a somewhat similar brand of tennis, relying on big serves and big hitting at the baseline. Sabalenka

is far less cautious, though, and her penchant for high-risk, high-reward play was evident against Linette, who had never before been past the third round in 29 appearances at majors. Sabalenka finished with a whopping 33-9 edge in winners, but also compiled more unforced errors including a trio that led to a break at love by Linette in the opening game.

The key to both semifinals turned out to be a first-set

tiebreaker. Azarenka lost the mark on her strokes, for the most part, making things smoother for Rybakina, while Sabalenka raced to a 6-0 lead in hers. It wasn't the case that each and every shot Sabalenka hit landed right on a line, but it must have seemed that way to Linette.

"In the tiebreaker, I really found my rhythm," Sabalenka said. "Started trusting myself. Started going for my shots."

Rybakina's win over Azarenka, the champion at Melbourne Park in 2012 and 2013, added to what already was an impressive run through a string of top opponents.

She also beat No. 1 Iga Swiatek and No. 17 Jelena Ostapenko both owners of major titles and 2022 Australian Open runner-up Danielle Collins.

"For sure, they're very experienced players," said Rybakina, whose parents and sister have been in town throughout the Australian Open. "I knew that I have to focus on every point."

She delivered serves at up to 117 mph (189 kph) and stinging groundstrokes that she used to close points seemingly at will on Thursday. Her performance was particularly noteworthy against a returner and defender as established on hard courts as Azarenka, a former No. 1 and a three-time runner-up at the U.S. Open.

"Kind of hard to digest," Azarenka said.

"Obviously, I had quite a few chances that I gave myself."

Rybakina is just 23, 10 years younger than Azarenka, and the future sure looks bright at the moment. □

Associated Press

Cuba picks 5 MLB affiliated players for World Classic

HAVANA (AP) — Cubans signed with Major League Baseball organizations and other foreign clubs will for the first time join domestic stars on the national team that will play in the World Baseball Classic, officials announced Wednesday evening.

The Cuban Baseball Federation long defended the idea of amateurism and punished those who left the island to seek their fortunes in professional baseball.

But that changed when a program on state television announced the roster of 30

players for Cuba's national team that will play in the international tournament that begins March 8 in Taiwan.

The team will include third baseman Yoán Moncada and center fielder Luis Robert of the Chicago White Sox plus three players from Triple-A rosters: infielder Andy Ibáñez of the Detroit Tigers' Toledo Mud Hens, right-hander Miguel Romero of the Oakland Athletics' Las Vegas Aviators and right-hander Ronald Bolaños of the Kansas City Royals' Omaha Storm Chasers.

Also on the team will be former New York Mets outfielder Yoenis Céspedes, a 37-year-old two-time All-Star who last played in the major leagues in 2018.

Two Cubans who play in Japan were picked, outfielder Yurisbel Gracial of the Pacific League's Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks and catcher Ariel Martínez of the Central League's Chunichi Dragons.

To arrange participation of the MLB players, Cuba had to get special permission from the United States because Washington main-



Cuban national baseball team hopefuls begin training at Latinoamericano stadium as they prepare for the 2023 World Baseball Classic, in Havana, Cuba, Monday, Jan. 16, 2023.

Associated Press

tains sanctions on Cuba. Under the agreement, those players are barred from coming to Cuba to work with the team.

Baseball is the national sport in Cuba but econom-

ic difficulties, the philosophy of restricting the movement of athletes and the temptations of professional contracts abroad has decimated the game on the island. □

NFL playoffs: Mahomes shrugs off pain, plans to play

By **DAVID BRANDT**
AP Sports Writer

Patrick Mahomes has a very sore right ankle. Jalen Hurts has a bum right shoulder.

Even so, neither quarterback is complaining in the lead up to Sunday's NFL conference championship games.

Mahomes went through a normal morning walk-through Wednesday and then headed out for an afternoon practice with the rest of the Kansas City Chiefs, four days after a Jacksonville pass rusher landed on his ankle and forced him to hobble off the field in pain.

The Chiefs host the Cincinnati Bengals in the AFC title game Sunday.

"The last few days has been an all-day thing," Mahomes said, "where you're doing treatment and rehab and watching film. You're trying to make sure you're prepared for the Bengals, a great football team, mentally and physically."

Mahomes, a two-time All-Pro, was still pretty good on one ankle against the Jaguars. He left in the second quarter after the injury but returned for the second half and performed well enough to push the Chiefs to a 27-20 victory. They advanced to their fifth con-



Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15) passes against the Jacksonville Jaguars during the first half of an NFL divisional round playoff football game, Saturday, Jan. 21, 2023, in Kansas City, Mo.

secutive conference title game.

Philadelphia's Hurts who is a finalist for MVP along with Mahomes, Josh Allen, Justin Jefferson and Joe Burrow has a sore right shoulder and told Fox Sports before the team's 38-7 win over the Giants that he was "nowhere near 100%."

He looked fine against the Giants, completing 7 of 7 passes for 89 yards in the first quarter and eventually threw for two touchdowns and ran for another score

in Philadelphia's lopsided win.

Hurts said Wednesday his shoulder is still sore, though he didn't seem concerned. "I've felt better, but it doesn't really matter," Hurts said. "I've got to get it done."

The Eagles will host the San Francisco 49ers and rookie quarterback Brock Purdy in the NFC Championship on Sunday. The two winners from the conference championship games will advance to the Super Bowl

on Feb. 12 in Glendale, Arizona.

Purdy is set for perhaps his toughest test yet Sunday, when he faces an Eagles defense that led the NFL with 70 sacks and must deal with an imposing road environment.

Two of the four remaining teams are in the midst of long winning streaks. The 49ers have won 12 straight games while the Bengals have won 10 straight.

Here are some other things to know during the post-

season:

WHAT'S THE UPCOMING SCHEDULE?

SUNDAY

San Francisco 49ers at Philadelphia Eagles, 3 p.m. EST, Fox

Cincinnati Bengals at Kansas City Chiefs, 6:30 p.m. EST, CBS

NO NEED FOR NEUTRAL

The AFC title game would have been played in Atlanta next weekend if the Buffalo Bills had beaten the Bengals, under a rule adjustment approved by NFL owners.

The league decided on the first of its kind conference championship neutral site setting because the Bills (13-3) finished the season a half-game behind the Chiefs (14-3) after their game at Cincinnati was canceled on Jan. 2 when Bills safety Damar Hamlin went into cardiac arrest and had to be resuscitated on the field.

Hamlin has since been making a remarkable recovery and attended Sunday's game in Buffalo, waving to fans from a stadium suite.

In the end, all the Atlanta hypotheticals weren't needed. That's because the Bengals and Burrow are rolling. Cincinnati beat Buffalo 27-10 and is one win away from playing in a second straight Super Bowl. □

Associated Press



Helio Castroneves waits in his pit stall during a practice session for the Rolex 24 hour auto race at Daytona International Speedway, Thursday, Jan. 26, 2023, in Daytona Beach, Fla.

Associated Press

Helio Castroneves rules out Daytona 500 ride next month

By **JENNA FRYER**
AP Auto Racing Writer
DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP)

— Four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves has ruled out running next month's NASCAR season-opening Daytona 500. Castroneves has been chasing a seat since winning one of Tony Stewart's summer all-star races last season to win a bet with the SRX head that promised Castroneves help finding a NASCAR ride. He'd tried to put a deal together with Trackhouse Racing,

which said last week that it ultimately decided it did not want to run three cars. Castroneves then tried to talk to Floyd Mayweather's team, but said Thursday he couldn't get a deal done with The Money Team Racing in time for next month's Daytona 500. TMT last year raced itself into the Daytona 500 with driver Kaz Grala in the first NASCAR race for Mayweather's team.

"Unfortunately, for me, lack of experience, no testing, a lot of things. I believe it will be a little bit tough throw-

ing myself in on such short notice," Castroneves said. "To go to a place where you've got to race yourself into (the race), as of right now, it's not going to happen."

We need to have an opportunity, and we've just got to ... give me a little more experience."

Castroneves, who on Saturday will attempt to win the Rolex 24 at Daytona for a third consecutive year, said he's considering attending the Daytona 500 as a spectator. □