



Aruba's grand celebration for
Dia di Betico

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Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

Alabama prepares to carry out the first U.S. execution by nitrogen gas

By KIM CHANDLER

Associated Press

ATMORE, Ala. (AP) — Unless blocked by the U.S. Supreme Court, Alabama will attempt to put a man to death with nitrogen gas Thursday night, a never used execution method that the state claims will be humane but critics call cruel and experimental.

Kenneth Eugene Smith, a 58-year-old convicted killer whose 2022 lethal injection was called off at the last minute because authorities couldn't connect an IV line, is scheduled to be executed at a south Alabama prison.

Alabama plans to put a respirator mask over Smith's face and replace the air he is breathing with pure nitrogen gas, causing him to die from lack of oxygen. The execution will be the first attempt to use a new execution method since the 1982 introduction of lethal injection, now the most common execution method in the United States.



Anti-death penalty activists place signs along the road heading to Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, Ala., ahead of the scheduled execution of Kenneth Eugene Smith on Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024.

Associated Press

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Alabama prepares to carry out the first U.S. execution by nitrogen gas

"The eyes of the world are on this impending moral apocalypse. Our prayer is that people will not turn their heads. We simply cannot normalize the suffocation of each other," Smith and the Rev. Jeff Hood, Smith's spiritual adviser, said in a statement Thursday afternoon.

The state has predicted the nitrogen gas will cause unconsciousness within seconds and death within minutes. A state attorney told the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals that it will be "the most painless and humane method of execution known to man." But some doctors and organizations have raised alarm about the state's plan.

Smith's attorneys asked the U.S. Supreme Court to halt the execution to review claims that the new method violates the constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment and deserves more legal scrutiny before it is used on a person.

"There is little research regarding death by nitrogen hypoxia. When the State is



Nearly one hundred protestors gather at the state capitol building in Montgomery, Ala., on Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024, to ask Gov. Kay Ivey to stop the planned execution of Kenneth Eugene Smith.

Associated Press

considering using a novel form of execution that has never been attempted anywhere, the public has an interest in ensuring the State has researched the method adequately and established procedures to minimize the pain and suffering of the condemned person," Smith's

attorneys wrote. Smith ate a final meal of T-bone steak, hash browns, toast and eggs slathered in A1 steak sauce, Hood said by telephone. "He's terrified at the torture that could come. But he's also at peace. One of the things he told me is he is finally getting out," Hood said.

Smith is one of two men convicted in the 1988 murder-for-hire slaying of Elizabeth Sennett. Prosecutors said he and the other man were each paid \$1,000 to kill Sennett on behalf of her pastor husband, who was deeply in debt and wanted to collect on insurance. Alabama

Attorney General Steve Marshall said Wednesday night that he believes the courts will allow the execution to proceed. "My office stands ready to carry on the fight for Liz Sennett. Two courts have now rejected Smith's claims. I remain confident that the Supreme Court will come down on the side of justice, and that Smith's execution will be carried out," Marshall said.

Alabama plans to strap Smith to a gurney in the execution chamber — the same chamber where he was strapped down for several hours during the lethal injection attempt — and place a "full face-piece supplied air respirator" over his face. After he is given a chance to make a final statement, the warden, from another room, will activate the nitrogen gas. The nitrogen will be administered through the mask for at least 15 minutes or "five minutes following a flatline indication on the EKG, whichever is longer," according to the state protocol. □

Jill Biden is helping the White House promote a new gun safety initiative with school principals



First lady Jill Biden speaks before President Joe Biden appears at an event on the campus of George Mason University in Manassas, Va., Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024, to campaign for abortion rights, a top issue for Democrats in the upcoming presidential election.

Associated Press

By **CHRIS MEGERIAN**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is trying to enlist school leaders to help spread the word about the importance of safely storing firearms to protect children.

The new initiative is being announced Thursday at an event for school principals with first lady Jill Biden and Education Secretary Miguel Cardona. Also participating will be Stefanie Feldman, who runs the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention.

"We know safe storage of firearms can save lives,

especially by reducing suicide by firearms and school shootings," Feldman told reporters. Guns are the leading cause of death for American children, and most guns used in school shootings are taken from the shooter's home.

"I know that there are some parents who wake up every day, drop their kids off for school and while they're watching their kids walk through that door, there's just a little part of them that worries about gun violence during the school day," Feldman said.

As part of the announcement, the Justice Depart-

ment will release a guide to safe firearm storage, and the Education Department will distribute materials to schools that can be shared with families.

The administration has relied on initiatives like this one, which involves limited executive action and promoting voluntary measures, at a time when tougher gun control proposals are nonstarters in Congress.

There's no federal law requiring gun owners to lock up their firearms, although the White House has encouraged such rules to be implemented at the state level. □

U.S. sets plans to protect endangered whales near offshore wind farms; firms swap wind leases

By WAYNE PARRY

Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) —

Two federal environmental agencies issued plans Thursday to better protect endangered whales amid offshore wind farm development. That move came as two offshore wind developers announced they were swapping projects.

The U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration released final plans to protect endangered North American right whales, of which there are only about 360 left in the world.

The agencies said they are trying to find ways to better protect the whales amid a surge of offshore wind farm projects, particularly on the U.S. East Coast. They plan to look for ways to mitigate any potential adverse impacts of offshore wind projects on the whales and their habitat.

The strategy will use artificial intelligence and passive acoustic monitoring to determine where the whales are at a given time and to monitor the impacts of wind development on the animals. It also calls for



Land-based wind turbines spin in Atlantic City, N.J. on Nov. 3, 2023.

Associated Press

avoiding the granting of offshore wind leases in areas where major impacts to right whales may occur; establishing noise limits during construction; supporting research to develop new harm minimization technologies; and making it a priority to develop quieter technology and operating methods for offshore wind development. They also want to conduct "robust sound field verifica-

tion" of offshore wind operations to ensure that noise levels are not louder than expected. The deal calls for Equinor to take full ownership of the Empire Wind lease and projects, and for BP to take full ownership of the Beacon Wind lease and projects.

The companies said the swap will be a "cash neutral transaction," although Equinor said it would take a loss of about \$200 million.

"We now take full ownership of a mature, large-scale offshore wind project in a key energy market, where we have built a strong local organization," said Pal Eitheim, an executive vice president at Equinor.

Equinor won the Empire Wind lease in 2017 and the Beacon Wind lease in 2019. In 2020, BP bought a 50% share of both projects.

Although opponents of offshore wind projects blame

them for a spate of whale deaths over the past 13 months on the East Coast, the agencies said climate change is the biggest threat to the right whales. They and other scientific agencies say there is no evidence that offshore wind preparation work is harming or killing whales. Many of them have been struck by ships or become entangled in fishing gear.

Of the 360 right whales left in the ocean, only 70 are reproductively active females. "Climate change is affecting every aspect of right whales' survival, changing their ocean habitat, their migratory patterns, the location and availability of their prey, and even their risk of becoming entangled in fishing gear or being struck by vessels," the agencies said in a statement.

In a separate report issued Monday, NOAA said there were 67 confirmed entanglements of large whales nationwide in 2022, the most recent years for which statistics are available. That is down slightly from the previous year and below the annual average of 71, the agency said. □

Transgender veterans sue to have gender-affirming surgery covered by Department of Veteran Affairs

By PAT EATON-ROBB

Associated Press

A group of transgender veterans filed a lawsuit Thursday seeking to force the Department of Veteran Affairs to begin providing and paying for gender-affirming surgeries.

The lawsuit from the Transgender American Veterans Association seeks to compel the VA to codify in its regulations verbal assurances the department has made that it would begin providing those services, said Rebekka Eshler, the president of the association.

She said the surgeries are needed to reduce the risk of suicides, depression, and

psychological distress for transgender people who live with gender dysphoria. "It would also mean that those veterans do not have to seek this care through private doctors, which is often prohibitively expensive," the transgender veterans association said in its lawsuit, which it said was filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington.

A spokesperson for the Department of Veterans Affairs said it does not comment on ongoing litigation. But he pointed to 2021 statements from Veteran Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough, who said the VA

was beginning a years long rulemaking process that would result in providing gender-affirming surgeries. McDonough said the VA would use the time to "develop capacity to meet the surgical needs" of transgender veterans.

The veterans first petitioned for the rule change in May of 2016. Since then, has VA has held hearings and prepared multiple proposed rules for cost-benefit analysis, the association said. But while the VA currently provides hormone therapy and other services to transgender veterans at some locations, it has failed to change its rules in a timely manner and provide any

coverage for the surgeries, the group said.

"I get phone calls from veterans that are so in crisis that they are calling us because they can't handle it anymore and they are wanting to go kill themselves," Eshler said.

Natalie Kastner, a 39-year-old disabled veteran from Texas, said she went to the VA in 2022 seeking surgery. When doctors there denied her request, she said she took a knife and attempted self castration. She hit an artery and almost died, but doctors were able to save her life.

"I did not go into that bathroom looking to kill myself," she said.



This combination of self portraits, provided Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024, shows Natalie Kastner, a 39-year-old disabled veteran from Texas.

Associated Press

"I went into that bathroom looking to fix myself. I can only imagine how many others have done the same and have not been so lucky and have simply been listed as a suicide." □

Artist who performed nude in 2010 Marina Abramovic exhibition sues MoMA over sexual assault claims

By MAYSOON KHAN

Associated Press/Report for America

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — A performer who appeared naked in a show by world-renowned performance artist Marina Abramovic at New York City's Museum of Modern Art is suing the museum, saying it failed to take action after he was sexually assaulted multiple times by attendees during the performances nearly 14 years ago. The suit was filed in Manhattan on Monday under the New York Adult Survivors Act, a special state law that created a yearslong suspension of the usual time limit for accusers to sue. Although the law expired last year, the suit says the parties agreed to extend the window closing. John Bonafede alleges in the suit that he was sexually assaulted by five public onlookers who attended a show he was hired by the museum to perform in as part of Abramovic's retrospective "The Artist Is Present."

Email messages sent to the museum this week were not returned. Abramovic is not named as a defendant and did not immediately return a request for comment. The work, titled "Imponderabilia," saw Bonafede and



People walk by the entrance to the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, April 22, 2014.

Associated Press

another performer standing face-to-face with each other in a doorway about 18 inches (45.7 centimeters) apart, fully nude, silent, and still. The exhibition, which ran from March 14, 2010 through May 31, 2010, was curated by the museum in a way that encouraged visitors to pass in between the performers as they went from one gallery to the next, the suit alleges. The people who assaulted Bonafede were mostly older men, the suit says. One of

the perpetrators was a corporate member of the museum, who was ultimately kicked out and revoked of his membership, according to the suit.

During the final weeks of the exhibition, another attendee non-consensually groped Bonafede's private areas three times before they were finally stopped by security, the suit said.

Bonafede reported four of the individuals to the museum staff and security im-

mediately, according to the suit, while the fifth was witnessed personally by the museum security staff.

At one point, Bonafede also witnessed a public attendee sexually assault his female co-performer by kissing her on the mouth without her consent, the suit said.

Prior to the exhibition, the performers had voiced their concerns about nude performers being subject to harassment in a letter to the museum during contract ne-

gotiations, the suit said.

Once it began, several news outlets including the New York Times reported on the inappropriate behavior by visitors, and the sexual assaults on "Imponderabilia" were discussed within New York City's art and performance communities, the suit says. But despite the museum having knowledge of the issue, it failed to take action to protect the performers and prevent further sexual assaults, such as telling visitors ahead of time that touching was not allowed, the lawsuit said. Bonafede agreed to continue the performance after he was assaulted because of the "tough it out" culture of the exhibition, the suit says, but suffered for years from emotional distress, and his mental health, body image and career were damaged as a result.

The Associated Press generally does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly. Bonafede gave consent through his lawyer, Jordan Fletcher.

Fletcher declined to comment further on the suit, but said they will be seeking a jury trial and compensatory damages. □



A window display advertises low-cost "Brazilian butt lift" cosmetic surgery procedures outside a clinic in Miami on Friday, March 22, 2019.

By MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. health officials say 93 Americans have died after cosmetic surgery in the Dominican Republic since 2009, with many of the recent deaths

involving a procedure known as a Brazilian butt lift.

The operation has grown in popularity recently and has led to deaths in other countries as well, including the U.S. A report issued Thursday by the U.S. Centers for Disease

Associated Press

Report finds 93 U.S. deaths after cosmetic surgery in Dominican Republic since 2009

Control and Prevention could not say how common these deaths are or whether they are more common in the Dominican Republic. The report suggests steps that medical tourists should consider before traveling to get work done. "Be informed about who is doing your surgery, the qualifications of the person doing your surgery, and whether or not the facility is capable of doing the surgery and whether it is capable of providing adequate post-operative care — which is crucial," said Dr. Matthew Hudson, the study's first author.

A Brazilian butt lift involves

injecting fat. The report included details of about two dozen of the deaths, and most were the result of fat or blood clots getting into the lungs or bloodstream.

Complications from cosmetic surgery are not unique to the Dominican Republic. Reports of deaths after cosmetic surgeries have repeatedly surfaced in the United States, perhaps most often in Florida. The CDC on Thursday issued a separate report about 15 cases of bacterial infections in women who went to one Florida cosmetic surgery center in 2022.

Sporadic reports also have come out of Mexico, in-

cluding last year when U.S. patients were stricken with fungal meningitis after undergoing cosmetic procedures in the border city of Matamoros. Two clinics were closed and a dozen deaths reported.

The Dominican Republic is known as a friendly island vacation spot, and some doctors there advertise in the U.S., offering breast implants, liposuction and other operations at lower prices. After an increase in U.S. deaths in 2019 and 2020, the U.S. Embassy contacted the CDC, which investigated along with the Dominican Republic Ministry of Health. □

Danish report underscores 'systematic illegal behavior' in adoptions of children from South Korea

By JAN M. OLSEN

Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark

(AP) — A Danish report on Thursday said that adoptions of children from South Korea to Denmark in the 1970s and 1980s was "characterized by systematic illegal behavior" in the Asian country.

These violations, the report said, made it "possible to change information about a child's background and adopt a child without the knowledge of the biological parents."

The report was the latest in a dark chapter of international adoptions. In 2013, the government in Seoul started requiring foreign adoptions to go through family courts. The move ended the decadeslong policy of allowing private agencies to dictate child relinquishments, transfer of custodies and emigration. The Danish Appeals Board, which supervises international adoptions, said there was "an unfortunate incentive structure where large sums of money were transferred between the Danish and South Korean organizations" over the adoptions. The 129-page report, published by an agency under Denmark's ministry of social affairs, focused on the peri-



Peter Møller, attorney and co-founder of the Danish Korean Rights Group, speaks to the media at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2022.

Associated Press

od from Jan. 1, 1970 to Dec. 31, 1989.

A total of 7,220 adoptions were carried out from South Korea to Denmark during the two decades.

The report based its findings on 60 cases from the three privately run agencies in Denmark — DanAdopt, AC Boernehaelp and Terres des Hommes — that handled adoptions from South Korea. The first two merged to become Danish International Adoption while the third agency closed its

adoptions in 1999.

The agency wrote that two of the agencies — DanAdopt and AC Boernehaelp — "were aware of this practice" of changing information about the child's background.

The report was made after a number of issues raised by the organization Danish Korean Rights Group. In 2022, Peter Møller, the head of the rights group, also submitted documents at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Seoul.

"Danish organizations continuously expressed a desire to maintain a high number of adoptions of children with a specific age and health profile from South Korea," the report said. The South Korean agencies that sent kids to Denmark were Holt Children's Services and the Korea Social Service. Boonyoung Han of the Danish activist group, told The Associated Press that an independent investigation was still needed because with such a probe "we ex-

pect that those responsible will finally be held accountable for their actions."

In the late 1970s and mid-1980s, South Korean agencies aggressively solicited newborns or young children from hospitals and orphanages, often in exchange for payments, and operated maternity homes where single mothers were pressured to give away their babies. Adoption workers toured factory areas and low-income neighborhoods in search of struggling families who could be persuaded to give away their children.

On Jan. 16, Denmark's only overseas adoption agency DIA said that it was "winding down" its facilitation of international adoptions after a government agency raised concerns over fabricated documents and procedures that obscured children's biological origins abroad. In recent years, DIA had mediated adoptions in the Philippines, India, South Africa, Thailand, Taiwan and the Czech Republic. For years, adoptees in Europe, the United States and Australia have raised alarms about fraud, including babies who were falsely registered as abandoned orphans when they had living relatives in their native countries. □

China accuses U.S. of 'abusing' international law by sailing in Taiwan Strait and South China Sea

By KEN MORITSUGU

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China accused the U.S. of abusing international law with its military maneuvers in the western Pacific, one day after an American naval destroyer sailed through the politically sensitive Taiwan Strait.

While China welcomes military-to-military communication with the United States, Defense Ministry spokesperson Wu Qian said Thursday that U.S. warplane and warship activity

"on China's doorstep" is the root cause of the problems between the two military powers.

"The United States side should stop abusing international law, cease all dangerous and provocative behavior, and strictly restrain the activities of front-line troops, which is the fundamental way to avoid accidents at sea and in the air," he said at a monthly briefing.

The USS John Finn sailed Wednesday though the 160-kilometer (100-mile)-

wide waterway that separates China from Taiwan, a self-governing island that China claims as its own territory.

China agreed to resume military contacts with the U.S. at a meeting last November between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping in California. In part, the argument for doing so was to be able to manage an unintentional collision or other incident that could happen as both sides hold drills and patrol the waters in regional hotspots includ-



In this photo released by the U.S. Navy The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS John Finn (DDG 113) prepares to come alongside Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo ship Cesar Chavez (T-AKE-14) in the East China Sea, on Jan. 21, 2024.

Associated Press

ing the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. The U.S. defends its actions

as in line with international laws that guarantee freedom of navigation. □

Thousands in India flock to a recruitment center for jobs in Israel despite the Israel-Hamas war

By **RAJESH KUMAR SINGH** and **BISWAJEET BANERJEE**

Associated Press

LUCKNOW, India (AP) —

Thousands of Indians flocked to a recruitment center on Thursday for jobs that would take them to Israel despite the three-month Israeli-Hamas war that is devastating Gaza and threatening to ignite the wider Middle East. Many among the crowd of men, mostly skilled construction workers and laborers, said they would take their chances in a country embroiled in war as they are struggling to find jobs in India, where unemployment remains high despite a swelling economy.

Anoop Singh, a college graduate and construction worker, was told he would make about \$1,600 a month if he was selected to go to Israel — significantly more than the \$360 to \$420 he could get as a monthly wage for the same work in India.

"That's why I have applied to go to Israel," he said as he waited at the center in Lucknow, the capital of India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, for his job interview. The men said they had heard media reports that Israel is facing a labor shortage after barring tens of thousands of Palestinian workers following Hamas' deadly Oct. 7 attack on Israel that triggered the war.



Anup Singh, an Indian skilled worker aspiring to be hired for a job in Israel shows his passport and a form he filled during a recruitment drive in Lucknow, India, Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024.

Associated Press

India, where the gross domestic product is about \$2,400 per capital annually, seems willing to step in to fill some of that gap.

The states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have advertised for around 10,000 positions each for construction workers in Israel. Uttar Pradesh has finalized a list of 16,000 to send to Israel next month for a final selection, the state labor minister Anil Rajbhar said.

Rajbhar said the federal government's screening center in Lucknow was in response to Israel's request for laborers.

The week-long recruitment drive began on Tuesday, with a 15-member Israeli team overseeing the process and expecting to fill over 5,000 positions for masons, carpenters and other construction workers in Israel. The crowd at the Lucknow center on Thursday was both anxious and hopeful. Many see this as a once in a lifetime opportunity that could change their lives for the better — even if that means working in a war zone.

"I know there is a threat, but problems exist here too," said Singh, saying he was willing

to take the risks so he could provide more for his family. "I am going there for my children."

The recruitment drive for Israel has also cast a light on the chinks in India's growth story, championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has focused on investing in big-ticket infrastructure projects to woo businesses and foreign investors.

On one hand, India's large economy is one of the world's fastest growing and seen as a bright spot amid a recent global downturn.

But joblessness remains a

concern as India last year became the world's most populous. After a rise in salaried jobs in the last two decades, the pace of regular wage jobs has stagnated since 2019 because of the coronavirus pandemic and an overall growth slowdown, according to the State of Working India report by the Azim Premji University.

The report says that while unemployment is falling, it is still high — above 15% for university graduates of all ages and around 42% for graduates under 25.

New Delhi and Jerusalem last year inked an agreement that would allow 40,000 Indians to work in the fields of construction and nursing in Israel. According to 2022 data from India's Ministry of External Affairs, there are nearly 13,000 Indian workers there.

Last week, the ministry spokesperson said India's labor partnership with Israel started before the latest war. "We already have a large number of people, especially in the caregiving sector in Israel and through this agreement, we want to ensure that there is regulated migration and the rights of the people who go there are protected," said Randhir Jaiswal.

He added that India is committed to making sure its migrant workers are safe and protected. □



The sun rises during a forest fire on El Cable Hill in Bogota, Colombia, Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024.

Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) —

Colombia's government declared a disaster Thursday and asked for inter-

national help to combat raging wildfires that are expected to worsen in coming days due to warm, dry

Colombia declares a disaster because of wildfires and asks for international help

conditions associated with the El Niño weather phenomenon.

Officials raised the number of fires from 25 to 31, and said nine of them were under control. They did not order mandatory evacuations despite some fires burning in the mountains that surround some municipalities.

President Gustavo Petro said Chile, the United States, Peru and Canada have already responded to the call for help, without specifying when the

assistance will arrive to the South American country.

The government also asked for aid from the United Nations and European Union.

"To the extent that we know that in the coming days and weeks crisis events are going to increase, we want to make sure that we have the physical capacity to address and mitigate them," Petro said.

Colombia's Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies reported that roughly half of the country's municipalities

are on maximum alert due to fire risk. But about a third of all municipalities do not have a fire department, according to the National Fire Department of Colombia. The decreasing rainfall and increasing temperatures that are worsening the fire situation are attributed to El Niño, which is a temporary warming of parts of the central Pacific that changes weather worldwide.

The disaster declaration allows the government to reallocate funds to tackle the wildfires. □

Aruba to me

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Aruban snacks and where to find them



ORANJESTAD — Want to taste something different for a change? How about some Aruban snacks that you can find all around the island? Hop in your car, and go to these locations to find some of the most popular and tasty snacks that are beloved by our locals.

One of the staples of Aruban cuisine and snacks is the Pastechi. Pastechi is a Caribbean fried pastry that is filled with cheese, meat, chicken, veggies and sometimes even fish! Or perhaps you might want to try a croquette, locally called a "krokot," which is a crusty fried snack with typically a meat and dough mix filling. The Aruban krokot is based on its Dutch counterpart, the "bitterbal".

These two snacks are typically found in all local snack trucks, which can be found all over the island, including on the side of the main road that stretches from San Nicolas to the Hotel Area. You can also find pastechis and krokets at local bakeries and snack shops, like Bright Bakery in Piedra Plat, Huchada in Santa Cruz or Pastechi House in the city center. These places may also sell other snacks and sandwiches too, perfect for on-the-road lunch break.

While you're at it, why not accompany your snack with a refreshing "batido"? Bati-



dos are fruit shakes, typically made with added milk for some creaminess. However, you can also ask to hold the milk. Batidos are commonly found in snack shops too. You may find some batido shops next the flee markets downtown, or if you're on your way to San Nicolas, at Mauchi Smoothies and Juice Bar in Savaneta (located at the side of the main road).

If you are looking for something a bit more fresh and healthy, why not try some coconuts, or shaved ice from local vendors? These vendors carry their little shop at the back of their truck, so they are ever-moving around the island. However, there are a few spots where you can almost always find a coconut/shaved ice vendor:

1. Right next to the Red Anchor in San Nicolas, on the way to Baby Beach.
2. Along the main road next to the airport field.
3. At the California Light House.
4. At the Alto Vista Chapel.

These vendors may also sell other delights, like the beloved coconut-based dessert "cocada" or peanuts. All in all, in Aruba, you can always find some place to take a break and have a bite of something local, you maybe just might have to look for them!

Photo credit: wheninaruba.com



memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation. Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and

Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again. For today we received a lovely message from Eli, Tomy, Agus and Cata from Argentina.

They wrote to us saying:

"Aruba to me is the place in earth we want to be. We wait the whole year for this moment of the year. Sun,

fun, smiles, lovely people and beautiful sunsets. My wife told me when we arrived on Sunday about the face of our kids when we arrived. We have been visiting for more than 12 times and it's always better. We enjoy. We connect. We love Aruba!"

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! □

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Aruba's grand celebration for Dia di Betico

Yesterday, locals and visitors alike on Aruba celebrated the long awaited Dia di Betico, the birthdate of Gilberto Francois "Betico" Croes, a day that's marked by diverse activities around Aruba, where everyone on the happy island can celebrate this special day.

Celebrated as a National Holiday, Dia di Betico starts on the night of the 24th of January with the cultural show at Plaza Betico Croes, where locals and visitors could enjoy a night full of different cultural presentations as well as tents with local food, artisan art and more.

Dia di Betico continues on the 25th of January with a protocol ceremony at Plaza Betico Croes that is organized by Comision Celebracion Di-anan Nacional (Commission for National Holiday Celebra-

tions) along with the government of Aruba. For this occasion, the Prime Minister Evelyn Wever-Croes gives a speech, where she shares a little bit about the history of the late Betico Croes. "The love that he showed for his island was so big that this was visible through the diligent fight he led to achieve the dream of the people; an autonomous Aruba in the Dutch Kingdom. Betico transformed his love and happiness for his people through his own kids, always saying that 'the happiness I wish for my own kids, is the happiness I wish for all of the people of Aruba,'" the Prime Minister spoke.

She reminisced about the fight that Betico Croes lead to pull Aruba out of the Antillean constellations, which was not an easy fight and did not come without sacrifices that included protests, manifestations, his unjust



incarceration as well as the actions of Dark August in 1977. "But it was thanks to these actions that The Netherlands finally made the decision in 1981 to pay attention to the fight of the people, recognizing the right to autonomy. And how did this fight end? At the round table conference in 1983 at The Netherlands, where Aruba, under the leadership of Betico Croes, achieved it's 'Status Aparte', making it an autonomous country in the Dutch Kingdom with its own government, it's own parliament, own currency and own economic instruments to develop itself successfully."

To celebrate this special day there were different activities around the island for families to experience and completely new experiences as well. Like the artist sharelly Emanuelson who opened a new exhibition temporarily and made an interactive presentation, Natusha Croes who created 2 audiovisual productions, one titled 'Lama ta na Caminda' which tells the story of strong ties between firm land and the neighborhood Rancho, a neighborhood of fishermen, and the other titled "Awa ta



Bida".

During the activities, there was also 4 mini documentaries shown that were made specifically for the project "Manteniendo herencia na Bida" (Keeping our inheritance alive), which tells

the story of each of Aruba's era's.

All around the island, the pride and love felt for Betico Croes could be felt and seen from flags, to pictures, to activities dedicated to him and his love for Aruba. □



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Aruba's underwater wonderland

ORANJESTAD - Exploring the underwater wonders is something you should definitely do during your stay in Aruba. The underwater world has everything to offer that makes a snorkel trip so exceptional; an impressive, colorful sea life with exotic fishes, turtles and beautiful coral reef. The historic shipwrecks, located on the Aruban seabed are also worth a visit. Aruba is known for its white beaches and blue oceans, which means there are many fascinating under water spots, where you can take your snorkeling gear and we selected the top spots for you.

Tres Trapi

Tres Trapi means tree steps in Papiamentu, Papiamentu is together with Dutch the official language spoken on Aruba. The beach is called Tres Trapi because it is accessible by the tree steps carved into the rocks. Tres Trapi is a small rocky beach, located on the north-western side of the island, approximately 5 to 10 minute drive from Palm

Beach. From the unique steps you can easily walk over the beach into the clear and turquoise blue ocean. While snorkeling you will encounter all kind of tropical fishes and sea stars. The kind of starfish you will find in the Aruban waters is the red cushion sea star. This is a starfish that is commonly found in the shallow waters of the Caribbean sea and if you are lucky during your snorkeling visit to Tres Trapi, you may come across one of the green sea turtles. Respect the animal, keep your distance and enjoy the view. Also remember; it is a once in a life time experience.

Antilla shipwreck

Antilla is a 400-foot-long long ship, built in 1939 in Hamburg, Germany. Antilla came to Aruba, because it had to find a neutral port. When Germany invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940, the crew decided to let their own ship sink, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Dutch Navy. Antilla lies on its port-

side in Malmok bay, and the sunken world war two ship is now one of Aruba's most popular snorkeling and dive spots. However, the ship wreck can only be reached by boat. The ship is visible from the surface and during your snorkeling trip you be surrounded by hundreds of tropical fishes, but the ship wreck alone is already impressive enough.

Baby Beach

Baby beach; a white beach, with a crystal blue ocean. The beach is located on the southern part of the island. On the way to the famous beach, you will drive through the old capital of Aruba, San Nicolas. The old Aruban culture can be still felt and experienced here, so do not hesitate to get out of your car and walk around for a while. Baby beach is a child friendly beach, since it is shallow and the water has a pleasant temperature. The name therefore fits well with the beach. Baby beach is an excellent beach for snorkeling, espe-



cially if you want to go with small children, because the water remains shallow and there are still many underwater wonders to see. In the ocean there is an area marked until where it is recommended to snorkel and on the beach you will find different facilities. It is a perfect beach to spend your day snorkeling and relaxing.

Mangel Halto

Mangel Halto beach is located in Savaneta, on the southern-west part of the island. The beach is different from the other beaches in Aruba; it is beach full of

mangroves. You reach the beach by a bridge through the mangroves and then you will have several entrances to the sea. There are diverse spots where you can enjoy a perfect beach day, wooden stairs made to enter the water and a dock to sit on and enjoy the view. Mangel Halto is also worth a visit for the snorkeling experience. Inside the bay, the water is clear and you find many colorful fish. Outside the bay is a bit more challenging for beginners because of the wind and the waves, but the coral is alive and it is just like snorkel heaven. □



Episode 96 Aruba in 1951

It is often said that “Men make history in conditions they didn’t choose. “ This is why the strikes were also present in Aruba’s history.

70 years ago, the new island administration, the Council, had only held the reins for a few weeks, when a serious labor conflict arose on Aruba. On August 1951 an outlaw strike broke out at Lago Oil & Transport Company which assumed impressive proportions, about 3.500 people took part in it, and imposed drastic measures on both; the part of the Insular Government and on that of the Federal Government. The Council had an emergency meeting. Matters even came to such a pass that units of the Royal Dutch Marines had to be dispatched against rioting groups, which, as it turned out, were mainly composed of imported hands. Certain

wage demands formed the incitement to this strike.

After some days the parties reached an agreement, but the events of August 1951 caused the right to strike to be restricted. In 1952, the Federal Ordinance Concerning Labor Disputes and the Penal Code of 1946 were modified accordingly. In 1950 relations between management and laborers at Lago had been canalized by an agreement to be renewed every year between the management and the Lago Employee Council. In 1955, 800 members of the Petroleum Workers' Federation of Aruba demanded a referendum as to the desirability of dissolving this Employee Council. This referendum was taken and its results were in favor of a continuance of the Council, which accordingly remained the laborers' representative body. At the



request of the Petroleum Workers Federation of Aruba another referendum about the same matter was held in May 1957, again showing a preference for the continuation of the Employee Coun-

cil. The Federal Government in February 1961 invited the legal expert J.A. Berger, to come over to our island in order to reconcile the disputing parties.

Before the end of 1951, the Island Council had come together many times in order to deliberate upon matters coming within their jurisdiction under the new administrative system: the organization of an efficient administration for independent Aruba; the drawing up of standing orders for the Council; the election of deputies, the delineation of the tasks of the island departments, etc. At first the Island Council did not conceive its duties to be of a political nature.

In January 1954, when the so-called Small Committee of the Round Table Conference were having discussions at Willemstad, the Aruba Island Council passed a motion tending toward the recognition of Aruba as a completely independent territory within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This motion caused the central government to institute a committee, presided over by N. Debrot, regarding the wishes of the

Aruban population. Law expert Prof. R. Kranenburg gave his advice in the matter, which turned out to be unfavorable. The Netherlands constitution recognized only three parts of the realm and the Dutch government did not want a modification of the constitution.

Reasons and intentions to change the Aruban political mindset through division were executed by a successive Executive Councils, diverting the course of things. Aruba's economic prosperity continued growing. In 1985, a Status Aparte deal was signed with the new partners of The Dutch Kingdom. Knowing that reforms are imminent in what concerns transparency and islands sustainability; Arubans again are confronted with hard decisions and tough challenges of existence. By now they must know that the best way to overcome storms is the way they know best: one Nation and one Culture.

To get to know more about Aruba and its origins, its animals and culture, we highly recommend you to book your visit for our renowned cultural encounter session has been entertaining curious participants for decades. Mail us at etnianativa03@gmail.com to confirm your participation. Our facilities and activities take place close to high rise hotels. □



Article by: Etnia Nativa

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Etnia Nativa is close to the high rise hotels



Today is going to be a good day

(Oranjestad)—Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Nature Calls



The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.arubanationalpark.org

Philip's Animal Garden



To stay with the animals, let's hop to an amazing place. Something different to do, an experience that is to be enjoyed by people of all ages. Welcome to Philip's Animal Garden. We are not talking about a zoo here, this is actually a sanctuary for all types of creatures, from

horses to peacocks, kangaroos to turtles, monkeys, goats, and many, many more different species. The place was founded in 2009 and it is the only organization rescuing and rehabilitating exotic animals in Aruba, which has resulted in an amazing collection of these animals. They provide a suitable living environment for all the rescued animals. Up until now the owner, Philip, has built this shelter with his own efforts; building all the cages from scratch, designing all structures and welding them with his own bare hands. His goal is to upgrade the facilities to a world-class animal shelter with veterinary care and round-the-clock staffs. With the input from the Aruban community and visitors they provide the best care for these animals. Please check out their website for more information: www.philipsanimalgarden.com.

The Lighthouse



No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light. www.arubalighthouse.com will give you more information.

Kayak in the Mangroves



Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you

are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some work-out -as it might get a little windy and rough-, you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. Its fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. There are several companies that offer kayak tours, we had good experience with The Shack Kayak Tours Aruba, find them on Facebook.

Take an "off-road" sightseeing tour



A must-do activity on the island is for sure taking an off-road sightseeing tour. If you have a rented car, you can drive through the north-eastern side of Aruba and explore the natural pools, caves, rock formations and gorgeous view of the Atlantic Ocean. To access most of these sights, like the natural pool (Conchi) and the Guadirikiri and Fontein caves, you must enter through the Arikok National Park and buy a day pass. Then you drive up the rugged road that leads you through the white dunes, caves and along the wind turbines. Other locations, like the Ayo and Casibari Rock formation are situated more in the center of the island, and are free for guests, 24 hours a day.

Go for a shopping spree in the city center



Need a new bathing suit? Head to the city center of Oranjestad, where there is countless of different stores—both high end and more affordable—that can offer you the service you deserve! Local shopping stores often offer a more affordable price, and have a variety of clothes, shoes, bathing suites, purses and more. Along the Royal Plaza strip, there are numerous jewelry stores with great quality jewelry. In the Renaissance mall, you can shop high-end luxury brands, like Dolce & Gabbana, Kate Spade, Louis Vuitton and more.

Around the high-rise hotel area near Palm Beach, the Paseo Herencia Mall contain a variety of shopping stores, restaurants, small food stands and even a movie theater! □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 43 Bay
1 Mentioned 44 Bygone car
6 Make broader 45 Assurance

11 Detest
12 Dancer Castle
13 Designer Geoffrey
14 Depart setting

15 "Death-trap" writer Levin
16 Dogfight winner
18 Pulled off
19 Pen point
20 Parties
21 Slugger Ott
22 Holy
24 Infield corner
25 Jefferson's successor

27 Took turns
29 Glides
32 Sticky stuff
33 Kipling book
34 Opponent
35 Free (of)
36 Imitating
37 Refiner's supply
38 Cager Shaquille
40 Buoyant tunes
42 Brink

C	A	G	E	D	S	H	R	E	D
A	D	O	R	E	Q	U	O	T	E
B	O	O	S	T	U	R	B	A	N
E	S	C	O	L	D	G	A	T	
G	E	H	R	I	G	L	O	R	I
G	R	E	A	T	E	R	G	O	O
O	V	E	N	R	E	A	D	M	E
N	O	R	B	I	T	G	A	S	
G	A	T	O	R	I	L	I	A	D
A	M	A	Z	E	A	M	E	N	D
P	I	N	O	T	L	O	F	T	S

Yesterday's answer

9 Wishes one could be
10 Compass part
17 Will add-on
23 Sought a seat
24 Frilly wrap
26 Moga-dishu people
27 Tried hard
28 Grim-acing, perhaps
30 Rich cakes
31 Handles
33 Super-man's real name
39 Candle count
41 One — million

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11					12				
13					14				
15				16	17			18	
19				20				21	
22			23				24		
		25			26				
27	28			29				30	31
32				33				34	
35				36				37	
38			39			40	41		
42						43			
44						45			

1-26

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.

1-26 CRYPTOQUOTE

EUIHYHGFD YV QRH RQCX

HND EUDIHDVH RJ OYUHGDV,

LGH HND SIUDQH RJ ICC HND

RHNDUV. — ZYZDUR

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: LOVE WON'T BE TAMPERED WITH, LOVE WON'T GO AWAY. PUSH IT TO ONE SIDE AND IT CREEPS TO THE OTHER. — LOUISE ERDRICH

How To Tech: Why it's important to turn on Apple's new Stolen Device Protection



The iPhone 15 Pro is shown after its introduction on the Apple campus, Sept. 12, 2023, in Cupertino, Calif.

Associated Press

By **KELVIN CHAN**
AP Business Writer
LONDON (AP) — You're in a crowded bar when a thief watches you unlock your iPhone with your passcode, then swipes it. That sinking feeling hits when you realize it's gone, along with priceless photos, important files, passwords on banking apps and other vital parts of your digital life. Apple rolled out an update to its iOS operating system this week with a feature called Stolen Device Protection that makes it a lot harder for phone thieves to

access key functions and settings. Users are being urged to turn it on immediately.

Here's how to activate the new security option and why it's so important:

SHOULD I TURN ON STOLEN DEVICE PROTECTION?

The software update for iPhones and iPads includes the essential new feature designed to foil thieves from wiping phones for resale or accessing Apple ID or other important accounts. Stolen Device Protection is a new setting that's included with

the latest iOS release, version 17.3.

Apple says the feature, buried in your iPhone's settings, adds an extra layer of security for users. It addresses a vulnerability that thieves have discovered and exploited: allowing them to lock victims out of their Apple accounts, delete their photos and other files from their iCloud accounts and empty their bank accounts by accessing passwords kept in the Keychain password manager.

Apple is introducing the feature as anecdotal evidence suggests phone thefts are surging. Stories of stolen phones abound on Reddit groups and in news articles in places from Los Angeles to London, where police say pickpocketing, "table surfing" and moped snatching are common tactics.

The Wall Street Journal reported last year how criminals watched people use their passcodes to gain access to their personal information after stealing their phones.

HOW DOES STOLEN DEVICE PROTECTION WORK?

Stolen Device Protection keeps track of a user's "familiar locations," such as their home or workplace, and adds extra biometric security hoops to jump through if someone tries to use the device to do certain things when it's away from those places. □

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In 'Expats,' directed by Lulu Wang, Nicole Kidman is happy to share the limelight

By ALICIA RANCILIO
Associated Press

Nicole Kidman captivated TV viewers in 2020 in "The Undoing," as a woman whose husband was accused of murder. In "Big Little Lies," she was a woman in an abusive marriage. And let's not forget she won an Oscar for playing 20th century writer Virginia Woolf, who battled mental illness, in the 2002 movie "The Hours."

In her new series "Expats," premiering Friday on Amazon Prime Video, Kidman once again emotionally jumps off a cliff. At the center of "Expats" are three women, played by Kidman, Ji-young Yoo and Sarayu Blue, who are each expatriates living in Hong Kong. Their lives are all altered when the young son of Kidman's character, Margaret, goes missing.

Lulu Wang ("The Farewell") directed and was the show-runner of the six-episode series, filmed on location in Hong Kong.

"When Nicole came to me, to make the series, I just felt like she was meeting me at the height of the success of 'The Farewell.' But people who know me from childhood know we were immigrants (from China)," Wang says.



Jack Huston, left, Lulu Wang, Brian Tee, Nicole Kidman and Sarayu Blue attend the premiere of "Expats" at the Museum of Modern Art on Sunday, Jan. 21, 2024, in New York.

"I felt like the series had to represent that aspect of my life, like, yes, I'm an American expat in certain contexts, but in another context, I'm a Chinese immigrant. I wanted to really challenge this idea of a bubble that expats have."

An idea that Wang had was to make the fifth episode some 90 minutes and focus on the domestic workers, expats themselves and tasked with keeping other women's

households running.

"Imagine you've just met Nicole Kidman and you're like, 'Hey, I've got this idea for an episode and you're in the background. What do you think about it?'" Wang laughs.

An executive producer, Kidman wasn't just receptive to Wang's thoughts and ideas — they spoke to a true career passion, championing others.

"What I want to do at this point in my life and career is support women like this and support the new visionaries and auteurs that are coming up and try to create paths for them," Kidman says.

"I had never worked with a writer's room before," Wang says. "It's a very sort of solitary task to write usually. Here it was a room of women, helping to develop the story." One of those writers on the

show was Janice Y. K. Lee, whose novel "The Expatriates" inspired the series.

"She was so not precious about the book. And the reason, honestly, I wanted her in the room was so that we couldn't mess things up and so that she would be involved in the process," Wang explains. "You can't get better research than having the person who experienced it and wrote it in the room. ... We would always reference the book and quote it back to her, and she was always quite embarrassed."

In addition to the women in front of and behind the camera, Kidman is happy to share her spotlight with Brian Tee, who plays her husband. "I'm so happy he's gotten the chance to do this and to act opposite him," she says, adding that, as on-screen spouses, they were bonded by trauma.

To go to those emotional places as Margaret "was harrowing at times," admits Kidman, who says she had to lose herself in the moment. "It's an exploration. ... It's like, put me in the place, put me in the scene, and let's go off to the objective and whatever comes through will come through." □



Melanie Safka opens the second day of the "A Day In The Garden" festival on Aug. 15, 1988, in Bethel, N.Y.

Associated Press

By ANDREW DALTON
AP Entertainment Writer

Melanie, singer-songwriter of 'Brand New Key' and other '70s hits, dies at 76

Melanie, the singer-songwriter who rose through the New York folk scene, performed at Woodstock and had a series of 1970s hits including the enduring cultural phenomenon "Brand New Key," has died. Her publicist Billy James told The Associated Press that Melanie died Tuesday. She was 76 and lived in central Tennessee. The cause was not immediately revealed.

"Our world is much dimmer, the colors of a dreary, rainy Tennessee pale with her absence today," her children Leilah, Jeordie and Beau Jarred, said in a post on her Facebook page announcing her death.

With a voice that could shift from high-pitched and coy to a deep soulful rasp, Melanie wrote and sang hits including "Look What They've Done to My Song Ma" and "Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)."

She was best known for "Brand New Key," a song from her 1971 album "Gather Me" that she wrote about about a girl who bikes and skates past the house of a boy she longs for. It became a

No. 1 hit in the U.S. and several other countries. With echoes of the popular songs of the '20s and '30s, it combines a youthful simplicity with a winking adult sophistication in its chorus:

"Well, I've got a brand-new pair of roller skates, you've got a brand-new key, I think that we should get together, and try them on to see."

She would say in later interviews that she didn't necessarily intend sexual innuendo in the song, but those who heard it weren't necessarily wrong.

"I probably have a quirky way of writing, and I think I was misunderstood," she told the Tennessee newspaper in 2014. "I had this smiling, cherubic thing, and I think that worked against me. Girls with guitars who were relevant were angst-filled and angular."

The song has had several revivals in the decades since. It had a key place in Paul Thomas Anderson's 1997 film "Boogie Nights" and was lip-synched by Jimmy Fallon on "The Tonight Show" in 2016. □



Former tennis players Martina Navratilova, left, and Chris Evert are introduced before the start of the women's championship match at the U.S. Open tennis tournament in New York, Saturday, Sept. 11, 2010.

Associated Press

Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova urge women's tennis to stay out of Saudi Arabia

By **HOWARD FENDRICH**
AP Tennis Writer

Hall of Famers Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova are calling on the women's tennis tour to stay out of Saudi Arabia, saying that holding the WTA Finals there "would represent not progress, but significant regression." "There should be a healthy debate over whether 'progress' and 'engagement' is really possible," the two star players, who were on-court rivals decades ago, wrote in an op-ed piece printed in The Washington Post on Thursday, "or whether staging a Saudi crown-jewel tournament would involve players in an act of sportswashing merely for the sake of a cash influx."

Tennis has been consumed lately by the debate over whether the sport should follow golf and others in making deals with the wealthy kingdom, where rights groups say women continue to face discrimination in most aspects of family life and homosexuality is a major taboo, as it is in much of the rest of the Middle East.

"Taking a tournament there would represent a significant step backward, to the detriment not just of women's sport, but women," said Evert and Navratilova, who each won 18 Grand Slam singles titles. "We hope this changes someday, hopefully within the next five years. If so, we would endorse engagement there."

Saudi Arabia began hosting the men's tour's Next Gen ATP Finals for top 21-and-under players in Jeddah last year in a deal that runs through 2027. Just this month, 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal announced that he would serve as an ambassador for the Saudi Tennis Federation, a role that involves plans for a Rafael Nadal Academy there.

The WTA has been in talks to place its season-ending WTA Finals in Saudi Arabia.

"We note the views of Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert as two legends of women's

tennis who have played a valued role in the development of our sport and the WTA. As we have said before, we are currently working through a process to select a host venue for the WTA Finals. There has been no final decision at this time and we will continue to engage with players through the ongoing process," the WTA said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press by a tour spokesperson. "Our approach will be led by what is right for the long-term growth and development of women's tennis along with the delivery of a world-class event for players and fans."

Another Hall of Fame player, Billie Jean King, has said she supports the idea of trying to encourage change by heading to Saudi Arabia now.

"I'm a huge believer in engagement," King, a founder of the WTA and an equal rights champion, said last year. "I don't think you really change unless you engage. ... How are we going to change things if we don't engage?"

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has worked to get himself out of international isolation since the 2018 killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. He also clearly wants to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy and reduce its reliance on oil. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has enacted wide-ranging social reforms, including granting women the right to drive and largely dismantling male guardianship laws that had allowed husbands and male relatives to control many aspects of women's lives. Men and women are still required to dress modestly, but the rules have been loosened and the once-feared religious police have been sidelined.

Gender segregation in public places has also been eased, with men and women attending movie screenings, concerts and even raves — something unthinkable just a few years ago. □



Washington Wizards coach Wes Unseld Jr. talks to the team during a timeout in the first half of an NBA basketball game against the San Antonio Spurs on Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024, in Washington.

Associated Press

Wes Unseld Jr. out as Wizards coach, moving to front office

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wes Unseld Jr. is out as coach of the Washington Wizards midway through his third season with the team, which has the second-fewest wins in the NBA. President Michael Winger announced Thursday that Unseld would be transitioning to a front office advisory role. Washington at 7-36 is in 14th place out of 15 teams in the Eastern Conference. The Wizards have lost five in a row and 11 of their past 12 games and host the Utah Jazz on Thursday night.

Assistant Brian Keefe was promoted as the interim replacement.

Keefe joined the team in July after spending the past two seasons as an assistant with Brooklyn. He has also been on staffs with Oklahoma City and the New York Knicks. He started his career as a video coordinator with the San Antonio Spurs, who won a championship in 2007.

The Wizards said they will conduct a search for a full-time replacement in the offseason.

"After several thoughtful conversations with Wes, we determined together that a change was needed for the benefit of the team," Winger said. "Wes embodies the characteristics we value in our organization, and his vast basketball experience will be an asset to the front office as we progress toward our long-term goals. We are thankful that he will continue his contributions to our organization and community."

Unseld, 48, is the son of franchise legend and Hall of Famer Wes Unseld, who helped the then-Bullets win the 1978 NBA title. The Wizards went 77-130 with him as coach.

"I am grateful to have served as head coach of the Washington Wizards," Unseld Jr. said. "I look forward to this new opportunity to work toward our organization's continued progress."

Unseld is a longtime NBA assistant coach, spending six seasons with the Wizards from 2005-11, one with Golden State, three with Orlando and six with Denver before returning to Washington in 2021. □



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The NFL's final 4 QBs are often first-round picks. This time, 1 is not like the others

By **JOSH DUBOW** and **HOWARD FENDRICH**
AP Sports Writers

Joe Theismann won one Super Bowl and played in a second with Washington after entering the NFL as a fourth-round draft pick with another franchise.

He starred for a coach Joe Gibbs, whose path to the Hall of Fame featured three championships with three starting QBs — including one selected in the sixth round (Mark Rypien) and one who was chosen in the first round but wound up taking a detour to the USFL before reaching the sport's pinnacle (Doug Williams).

So perhaps Theismann's view is shaded by all of that personal experience. He does not consider it vital for a team to find its quarterback early in the draft, even if recent evidence shows that conference title game participants most often do employ first-rounders at the sport's most important position, a trend reflected in Sunday's matchups: Patrick Mahomes' Chiefs at Lamar Jackson's Ravens in the AFC, and Jared Goff's Lions at Brock Purdy's 49ers in the NFC. Three outta four ain't bad.

"I definitely don't believe that being a No. 1 pick is the key to getting to a championship game. It's still a team game," said Theismann, who made it to the Super Bowls after the 1982 and 1983 seasons, beating the Dolphins in the first and losing to the Raiders in the second. "I've always said this: The quarterback is the most dependent player on the field. So if you've got first-round talent at that position, good for you, but that's also no guarantee."

Of course not. Nothing is certain when it comes to talent evaluation, fulfilling potential



Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson, center, and Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, right, embrace after an NFL football game, Sept. 28, 2020, in Baltimore.

Associated Press

shown in college or blossoming in the pros. But it clearly can be a sign of things to come when a QB goes at, or near, the top of a draft, which is why USC's Caleb Williams, UNC's Drake Maye and LSU's Jayden Daniels are expected to hear their names called early in April. So, sure, Purdy famously earned the "Mr. Irrelevant" moniker by being the 262nd and last choice in the 2022 draft and is now set to appear in a second NFC championship game in two NFL seasons, but otherwise, a trio of high picks will help determine which two teams head to the Super Bowl in Las Vegas on Feb. 11.

"Super proud of him. I just hope he continues to blaze trails and just show people that draft status is what happens on draft day. What happens after that is up to you," Niners All-Pro left tackle Trent Williams said about Purdy. "You get a player like that with the last pick of the

draft? Literally like playing the lottery and winning the Powerball when it's at \$2 billion."

The only newcomer to this round among the quartet is Jackson, who becomes the 30th quarterback to start a conference title game in the last 15 seasons. He got there with a masterful performance in a 34-10 victory over the Houston Texans last weekend — throwing for two touchdowns and running for two more — after beginning his career 1-3 in the playoffs. Take a look at that group of 30 and the pattern is obvious: 20 were first-rounders (including Goff at No. 1 overall to the Los Angeles Rams in 2016, Mahomes at No. 10 in 2017 and Jackson at No. 32 in 2018); five went in the second round, two in the third, one in the sixth (Tom Brady) and one (Purdy) in the seventh. Only one of the 30 was undrafted: Case Keenum, whose Minnesota Vikings fell one game short of

Super Sunday after the 2017 season.

"Brock is sort of the exception to the rule, I guess you could say," Theismann said. "It's always good to have that one guy in there that might say: 'I don't fit that mold that everybody projects for us. But I still can get the job done.'" And how. Purdy compiled an NFL-best passer rating of 113 this season, accumulating 4,280 yards and 31 TDs while completing 69.4% of his throws. His 9.6 yards per attempt were the most for a qualifying QB since Kurt Warner's 9.9 back in 2000.

He was the only one of the eight quarterbacks who started in the divisional round last weekend to be drafted after the first round. But only one of those eight quarterbacks — Houston rookie C.J. Stroud — was picked in the top five by his current team.

Purdy is "putting up numbers that are impressive for first-rounders," said Christian McCaffrey, the San Francisco

running back who was a unanimous choice for The Associated Press 2023 NFL All-Pro Team.

"At some point it's not surprising. At some point, it's just who he is."

The other starting quarterbacks still around have impressive pedigrees, but the ways they arrived at their current clubs demonstrate that going through a season so bad that a team is in position to take a franchise QB with one of the top few picks isn't always the path to success. The Chiefs were coming off back-to-back playoff berths with Alex Smith at quarterback when they made the bold decision to package two first-round picks and a third-rounder to move up 17 spots to draft Mahomes.

After Mahomes sat for most of his rookie year, the Chiefs traded Smith and now have gone to six straight conference title games — the second-longest streak ever — and won two Super Bowls with the two-time MVP at the helm.

A year later, the Ravens jumped back into the first round via a trade to take Jackson so he could replace Super Bowl 47 MVP Joe Flacco.

Jackson became the starter midway through his first season, won the MVP award the following year and was a first-team All-Pro this season as the Ravens, like the Chiefs, benefited from going after a young quarterback even when they had a veteran starter in place.

"I think everybody in the world can now see that he's the MVP, he's probably, not probably, he is the best quarterback in football," Ravens kicker Justin Tucker said about the front office's decision to draft Jackson. □