

Royal Visit Highlights Aruba's Journey to Autonomy and National Identity



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The miracle on the charts: How a "terminal" diagnosis became a story of hope



Robert H. Vonderheide speaks onstage at the Breast Cancer Research Foundation New York Symposium & Awards Luncheon at New York Hilton Midtown on October 30, 2025 in New York City.

By Casey Miller
Health & Science Correspondent

HOUSTON, TX — For nearly three years, the folder labeled "Scan Results" in Sarah Jenkins' digital patient portal was a source of paralyzing dread. Since her 2023 diagnosis of Stage 4 metastatic breast cancer, the reports had been a repetitive litany of "progression," "lesions," and "persistence." But last Tuesday, at 10:14 a.m., the language changed. The latest radiologic report from her oncology team contained four words that Sarah, her family, and even some of her doctors thought they might never see: "No Evidence of Disease" (NED).

In the world of advanced oncology, "Stage 4" is a label often synonymous with "terminal." It means the cancer has traveled from its origin to distant organs—in Sarah's case, her lungs and bones. While modern medicine has made strides in extending life for patients with metastatic disease, a total clearance of detectable cancer is a rare and celebrated milestone.

The "unreachable" goal

Sarah's journey began with a persistent cough that she originally dismissed as a lingering seasonal allergy. By the time she sought a specialist, the cancer had already migrated. The initial prognosis was somber: the goal was management, not a cure.

"When you hear 'Stage 4,' the room goes quiet," Sarah recalled from her home, where she was recently celebrated by neighbors with a surprise 'Pink Ribbon' parade. "You stop planning for five years from now and start planning for next month. You learn to live in 21-day cycles of chemotherapy and prayer."

For 18 months, Sarah underwent a grueling regimen of traditional radiation and systemic infusions. While the treatments kept the disease from spreading further, they took a heavy toll on her physical strength. By early 2025, her medical team at the MD Anderson Cancer Center decided to pivot, enrolling her in a cutting-edge clinical trial involving targeted immunotherapy.

A breakthrough in biology

The treatment, a combination of a newly approved

"smart drug" and an experimental vaccine tailored to her tumor's specific genetic markers, was designed to "train" Sarah's own immune system to recognize and attack the cancer cells that traditional chemo had missed.

The results weren't immediate. For the first six months, the scans showed "stable disease"—medical shorthand for "it isn't getting worse, but it isn't getting better." However, by the nine-month mark, the shadows on her lung scans began to fade. By one year, the bone lesions showed signs of significant healing. "What we are seeing with Sarah is the pinnacle of personalized medicine," said Dr. Aris Thorne, an oncologist involved in the trial. "We aren't just carpet-bombing the body with chemicals anymore. We are providing the immune system with a high-definition map of the enemy. In Sarah's case, her body took that map and ran with it."

The weight of "NED"

The term "No Evidence of Disease" is distinct from "cured." In the medical community, it means that using current imaging technology—PET scans, MRIs, and blood markers—no active cancer can be found. For patients like Sarah, it is a hard-won truce that allows them to reclaim a life that was once on indefinite hold.

"It feels like I've been holding my breath for three years and I finally just exhaled," Sarah said, clutching a framed photo of her seven-year-old daughter. "I went from planning my legacy to planning a camping trip for this summer. The difference between those two things is everything." □

The first of its kind: How the Quapaw Nation reclaimed a toxic megasite



In June 2016, OU students seine for fish in an unnamed tributary to Tar Creek.

By Special Correspondent

QUAPAW, OK — For nearly a century, the horizon of the Quapaw Nation in northeastern Oklahoma was defined by "chat piles"—towering, jagged mountains of toxic mining waste that loomed over the landscape like monuments to an environmental disaster. Today, those grey peaks are vanishing, replaced by something many thought impossible: fields of wheat, corn, and soybeans growing from healthy, remediated soil.

In a historic shift, the Quapaw Nation has become the first and only Indigenous community in the United States to lead and manage its own Superfund cleanup. By taking direct control of the remediation of the Tar Creek "megasite"—once dubbed one of the most contaminated places in the country—the tribe is not just cleaning the land; they are reclaiming their heritage.

A Legacy of Lead

The Tar Creek Superfund site is the remains of a massive lead and zinc mining boom that fueled two World Wars but left behind 30 million tons of chemical-laced waste. For decades, the contamination poisoned local waterways and contributed to dangerously high lead levels in 34% of Quapaw children.

Frustrated by the slow pace of federal efforts, the Quapaw Nation took a bold step in 2013, signing a landmark agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to manage the cleanup themselves.

Restoring the "Catholic 40" and Beyond

The tribe's first major success came at a site known as the "Catholic 40," a historically significant area containing the ruins of a 19th-century boarding school. Under tribal leadership, workers excavated 108,000 tons of waste while carefully preserving cultural artifacts for the tribal museum.

Since then, the operation has scaled up significantly:

7 Million Tons Removed: Tribal environmental specialists have cleared over 7 million tons of mine waste from the landscape.

600+ Acres Remediated: Previously unusable land has been restored to productive use through soil amendments and native plantings. □

The \$1 million recess revolution: How Minnesota students rebuilt the playground for everyone

By Alex Sterling

Special Correspondent

HOPKINS, MN — At Glen Lake Elementary, the most important lesson of the year didn't happen in a textbook. It happened on the mulch of a playground where some students were playing, and others were forced to watch from the sidelines.

Last year, a group of fifth graders noticed something that felt fundamentally "un-fair". While most of the student body spent recess racing across monkey bars, their classmates who use wheelchairs were restricted to a small patch of pavement. Because the playground's woodchips were impossible for wheelchairs to navigate, several students were effectively sidelined from the best part of the school day. Most kids might have complained for a day and moved on. These students decided to go to work.

From spare change to a \$1 million milestone

What started as a modest classroom discussion with



teacher Betsy Julien blossomed into a massive, multi-year fundraising campaign that captured the heart of the community. While their initial goal was \$300,000 to cover basic adaptive equipment, the students' "dream big" attitude quickly pushed that figure much higher. The students didn't just ask for handouts; they became professional advocates. They spent months honing their pitches, organizing bake sales, and even cold-calling local businesses.

Their persistence paid off: in less than two years, the "Inclusive Playground Project" has raised nearly \$1 million. "I said, 'Do you know how much that costs?! It costs a lot of money,'" Julien recalled telling her students when they first proposed the idea. "The students were undeterred".

A legacy of inclusion

The funds have transformed the school's "upper playground" into a fully accessible space. The traditional

woodchips have been replaced with a poured-in-place rubber surface, allowing wheelchairs to glide easily across the entire park. The new equipment includes: Wheelchair-accessible swings and merry-go-rounds Adaptive ziplines for students with limited mobility Ramps providing access to every area of the playground Lowered basketball hoops and sun shades for light-sensitive students The project has been so suc-

cessful that the Glen Lake PTO is now aiming to help neighboring schools purchase their own adaptive equipment.

The heart of the project

For students like John Buettner, who uses a wheelchair, the effort is deeply personal. "First time I set foot on this playground I'm probably going to start crying from seeing the effort that all the school has made," Buettner said.

Many of the original student organizers have now moved on to middle school, meaning they won't get to spend much time on the new equipment themselves. For them, however, that was never the point.

"It felt amazing to just be able to say, I was a part of this all," Buettner told reporters. "I still got to contribute to something".

As the new playground officially opens to all students this season, it stands as a permanent reminder: when it comes to making a difference, you're never too small to dream big. □

Beyond the braid: The pub where dads master the ponytail

Special Correspondent

MARCH 18, 2026 — Inside a dimly lit neighborhood pub, the air is usually thick with the sounds of clinking pint glasses and sports highlights. But on a recent Tuesday evening, the typical roar of the crowd was replaced by a quiet, furrowed-brow concentration. In front of nearly three dozen men sat not coasters, but mannequin heads sporting long, flowing locks. These fathers weren't there for a trivia night; they were there for "Pints & Ponytails," a viral workshop aimed at helping "girl dads" master the intimidating art of hair styling.

The event, which has recently exploded in popularity across social media, is part of a growing movement of fathers seeking to take a more active role in the morning "hair-admin". Guided by professional stylists from groups like

BraidMaidens, these dads are trading power tools for paddle brushes and hair elastics.

A Room Full of "Green Flags"

The scene has been described by online observers as "a room full of green flags"—a modern shorthand for positive, healthy behavior. While the juxtaposition of a rugged pub setting and delicate hair braiding might seem humorous at first glance, the intention behind the workshop is deeply serious.

"We've got a generation of dads now that are spending much more time with their children than previous generations," says Mathew Carter, host of The Secret Life of Dads podcast and a key organizer of these events. "It really came about because we wanted to shine a positive light on masculinity and inspire dads to be more involved in the

everyday rhythms of their daughters' lives".

For many of the attendees, the "morning rush" has long been a source of stress, with the responsibility of hair styling often falling solely on mothers. By learning the basics—how to detangle without tears, secure a high ponytail, and execute a standard three-strand braid—these fathers are finding they can lighten the load at home while building new connections with their children.

More Than Just a Braid

The curriculum at "Pints & Ponytails" covers the essentials: brushing techniques, securing elastics without snagging, and the "holy grail" of girl-dad skills: the braid. Stylists walk the fathers through step-by-step instructions, emphasizing patience over perfection. But as the evening progressed, it became clear



that the event wasn't really about the hair.

This sentiment is echoed by Strider Patton, a father who went viral in 2024 for sharing his morning hair routines. For Patton, and the quarter of a million dads following his lead, these moments are about presence. "It's saying that I care enough to try something new," Patton says. "It's hard, but it's fun, and it means something".

Changing the Face of Fatherhood

The success of these workshops—which often sell out in under an hour—points to a broader cultural shift in how fatherhood is perceived and practiced. Organizations like the Daddy Daughter Hair Factory, founded by single father Philippe Morgese, have been leading this charge for years, providing "no-judgment" zones for men to learn. □

In Hollywood, AI's no match for creativity, say top executives

Austin, United States

Artificial intelligence is transforming Hollywood at a pace that has sent shockwaves through creative industries, but human creativity will always prevail, a leading executive at the cutting edge of that change told AFP.

The disruption was a dominant theme at this week's South by Southwest conference in Austin, Texas where veteran director Steven Spielberg made clear he was drawing a line in the sand.

"I've never used AI on any of my films yet. We have a writer's room. All the seats are occupied," Spielberg said. "I am not for AI if it replaces a creative individual."

Joshua Davies, chief innovation officer of Artlist -- a Tel Aviv-based AI video platform that has most recently been positioning itself as a supplier of creative tools to filmmakers -- told AFP the technology would never eclipse the human creative.

If given the choice between something made using an AI tool by a techie and a creative, "I know which one I would rather watch at the end," said Davies, who founded video editing software company FXhome before it was acquired by Artlist in 2021.

Davies acknowledged the industry's anxiety was not unfounded, with new video



Steven Spielberg attends the 2026 Vanity Fair Oscar Party Hosted By Mark Guiducci at Los Angeles County Museum of Art on March 15, 2026 in Los Angeles, California.

models having "struck fear in the hearts of everybody" -- not just over copyright and personality infringement, but over the fundamental question of how film and television production will look in a matter of years. "If I was bringing out an Iron Man movie in 2027, 2028 -- would I be going to multiple visual effects houses, would I expect them to be utilizing AI? We're all kind of working out our way through that," he said.

Davies described the platform's AI video tools as a way to "fill in the bits that you can't shoot, or didn't shoot, or you don't have the budget to shoot," rather than a wholesale substitution for going out on loca-

tion. **- 'Holy grail' -** Yet the timing is charged. Editors, visual effects artists and other Hollywood professions have watched the rapid advance of generative AI with alarm, fearing that tools capable of producing broadcast-quality footage at a fraction of traditional costs could hollow out entire job categories. Major studios are actively evaluating how AI can be integrated into production pipelines, foreshadowing significant workforce changes across an industry that has already endured a bruising period following the covid pandemic and writers' and actors' strikes of

2023. Artlist made headlines in February when it produced a Super Bowl LX spot in under five days using its own products, at a fraction of the multi-million-dollar cost typical of Big Game advertising.

Davies was keen to push back on the narrative that the ad represented the future of production without human involvement. That wasn't what it was, he said. It was creatives "using the tool to get the very best out of it."

A self-described "techie guy," Davies said the platform's current obsession is on giving creators nuanced control over creating or editing footage -- something

he described as the company's "holy grail."

Existing models, he said, handle simple static shots reasonably well but struggle with complex camera movements and consistent performance across multiple takes.

You can prompt an elaborate shot, but for now "you'll get something random" that you can't work with.

On cost, Davies cautioned against unrealistic expectations, suggesting AI would reduce production expenses significantly but not eliminate them.

Davies said his long-term hope was that AI would serve as a leveling force for independent filmmakers and content creators who currently lack the budgets to realize their ambitions.

"There are definitely YouTubers who make some of the best action work out there on no budget," he said.

"AI will level that playing field completely -- the story will be what matters."

He struck a cautiously optimistic note on the creative industry's direction, dismissing the most dystopian predictions.

"The idea that no one works at the end of it is the bit that doesn't hold any water with me," he said.

"There's been more and more of everything, not less and less -- and the cream rises to the top anyway, because the human element is what we crave." □

BTS say they're 'just country kids' ahead of comeback mega-gig



A woman uses her smartphone in front of a billboard promoting a comeback concert of K-pop boy group BTS at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul on March 17, 2026.

Seoul, South Korea

K-pop megastars BTS still see themselves as "country kids from South Korea", according to a trailer for a new documentary released Tuesday ahead of their huge come-

back concert this weekend. More than a quarter of a million fans are expected to throng central Seoul on Saturday for BTS's open-air gig, the first performance in almost four years by the boy band seen as the biggest in the world.

A day before, the group's fifth studio album, "ARIRANG" -- named after a beloved folk song about longing and separation, something of an unofficial national anthem of South Korea -- will be released.

The documentary, "BTS: The RETURN", will be released on Netflix on March 27, chronicling the seven-member group's comeback after completing their military service, widely seen as a gruelling ex-

perience for young conscripts. "We are still just country kids from South Korea," the group's leader RM says in the trailer. "We are trying to find out what makes us BTS," the 31-year-old added.

At the height of their fame prior to their hiatus, BTS frequently ranked among the most popular artists on music streaming platform Spotify, mixing with the likes of Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber.

After visiting the White House, releasing hugely successful English-language albums and performing at famous venues around the world, the group has chosen a historic stage at home for the grand comeback this weekend.

The concert will be staged at Seoul's sweeping Gwanghwamun Square, near the historic Gyeongbokgung Palace.

The area is also where many of South Korea's political protests have taken place, including those following former president Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law in December 2024.

The trailer featured the melody from "Arirang" the folk song, which is associated by many with themes of resilience and enduring longing.

"Arirang is a song imbued with han," an unidentified BTS member says in the trailer, referring to the Korean term for an unresolved grief rooted in the country's history, including war, division and family separation. □

During Ramadan, Senegal's Baye Fall community lives to serve



Baye Fall followers perform repetitive recitation of prayers known as Zikr ahead of Iftar during the holy month of Ramadan in Touba, on March 1, 2026.

Touba, Senegal

Thousands of followers of a unique Senegalese Muslim community, the Baye Fall, worked with electric fervour on a recent morning preparing iftar meals for breaking the Ramadan fast, even though they themselves were not fasting.

Unlike other Muslims, the Baye Fall for the most part neither pray nor fast, despite the two practices falling under the five pillars of Islam.

Distinguished by their striking appearance, members of the religious group wear dreadlocks, multi-coloured patchwork outfits and numerous accessories believed to have mystical powers.

In Senegal, which is about 95 percent Muslim, most followers of Islam belong to one of four Sufi brotherhoods: the Mouride, Tidi-ane, Layene or Khadre, all of which play a major role in society.

Every Ramadan the Baye Fall, who are Mourides, organise festivities in Touba, a city in central Senegal that is their capital, distributing iftar meals with thousands flocking from across the country to participate.

- Spiritual acts -

A vast courtyard and surrounding area teemed with people and motion on

a March morning, despite stifling dust and heat.

Organised into groups and adorned in their emblematic attire, the Baye Fall worked with devotion, as firewood smoke and the aroma of food drifted.

Men and women, old and young helped with slaughtering livestock, preparing food, chopping firewood, collecting garbage and washing dishes.

Bayefallism came about more than a century ago and is based on the practices and life of Mame Cheikh Ibrahima Fall (1855-1930), known as "Lamp Fall" ("Light Fall" in English), who was one of the first disciples of the founder of Mouridism, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

Hard work, selflessness and repeatedly invoking God's name, as well as serving iftar meals to the faithful, are the foundations of the faith, Abo Fall, one of Lamp Fall's descendants, told AFP.

Baye Fall literally means "disciple of Fall".

It is a "mystical Sufi Islam where every task, every duty performed represents a spiritual act", said Doudou Mane Diouf, who wrote a biography of Fall.

Since its inception, Bayefallism has attracted many people not just in Senegal but also abroad.

According to accounts

and contemporary testimonies, Fall dedicated his life to serving his marabout, or spiritual guide, and neglected his own well-being. His followers say he refused all forms of pleasure, never styled his hair and never changed his clothes, which he regularly mended with scraps of fabric, hence the dreadlocks and patchwork outfits of his followers.

His appearance was also a means of "asserting his African culture" in a context marked by colonisation, Diouf told AFP.

- 'Quite unique' -

Adam Khadim, born and raised in France in a Senegalese Baye Fall family, recently moved to Senegal in order to better live his faith. Bayefallism gives him a feeling of "well-being" he said, even though it is a "rather difficult path because there are many more moral obligations than rights".

As the time approached to transport the food to the home of the Mouride caliph general, where it would be distributed, the excitement intensified.

A group began chanting religious songs in unison, the volume growing louder and drowning out all surrounding noise. Their faces sweating, some people even seemed to be in a trance. □

First international aid convoy arrives in crisis-hit Cuba

Havana, Cuba

The first shipment of international aid for crisis-hit Cuba has arrived in the country in the shape of five tons of medical supplies, official sources said Wednesday.

A delegation of around 100 European activists arrived overnight at Havana airport with the aid, which will be distributed to hospitals, the sources said.

Cuba has been mired in an economic crisis exacerbated by the sudden suspension of oil supplies from Venezuela in January after the United States ousted president Nicolas Maduro, a Cuba ally.

The island nation of 9.6 million was already battling the effects of the US fuel blockade against the island.

The aid activists from several European and Latin American countries as well as Turkey belong to the Nuestra America ("Our America") flotilla who are out to show their solidarity with the Cuban people.

All told, humanitarian organizations and public figures plan to deliver 20 tons of aid to the island by air and sea to help Cuba through its worst economic crisis in three decades exacerbated by the US capture of Maduro and the cut-off in oil shipments from Venezuela.

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened retaliation against any

country sending oil to the Caribbean island.

Official Cuban media said another convoy was leaving Chile on Wednesday with "medicines, supplies and food to help Cuba cope with the tightening of the energy blockade imposed by the United States."

Additionally, a group of 140 people -- including doctors, lawyers, labor leaders and activists -- will be flying from Miami, Florida, to Havana on Friday to deliver 2.8 tons of medical supplies to clinics and hospitals, according to the pacifist group CODEPINK, one of the operation's organizers.

A flotilla from Mexico is also expected to reach Havana by the end of the week.

Separately, leftist activists are also planning to hold a solidarity event along the Havana waterfront.

Among expected attendees are Pablo Iglesias, a former Spanish politician and founder of the left-wing party Podemos, Irish punk-rap group Kneecap, Brazilian climate activist Thiago Avila and leftist British Parliamentarian Jeremy Corbyn, according to a statement by organizers.

In their statement, organizers quoted Corbyn as saying that the United States had blockaded Cuba for six decades and "now the Donald Trump administration is intensifying" it. □



Picture released by Agencia Cubana de Noticias (ACN) of members of a convoy pushing carts with boxes containing humanitarian aid from Europe, in Havana on March 17, 2026.

Greenland's teenage boxers throwing punches to survive

Nuuk, Denmark

When the bell rang, William let out a cry drowned out by the crowd: that night, the Greenlandic teen was boxing for his mother, who killed herself two years ago. Suicide is one of Greenland's leading causes of premature death and the autonomous Danish territory has one of the highest suicide rates in the world.

An "epidemic", some Greenlanders call it, striking above all teenagers and young adults.

"Come on, crush him!" the crowd shouted, the smell of sweat heavy beneath the Arctic island's flag hanging above the ring.

William, 15, ducked the blows of his Danish opponent before he was hit with a straight punch and collapsed in the arms of the referee.

"I was devastated," he told AFP a few days later from his home in the capital Nuuk. "The morning of the match, I woke up crying, thinking of her. I promised her I would win," he said.

William's gaze occasionally drifted to a photograph of his smiling mother, Mette, hung on the wall.

The former Danish colony faces numerous social challenges, including drug and alcohol addiction and social inequality.

When Denmark launched a



Kian, a member of the local Greenlandic club, lands a punch on his opponent, sending droplets of blood flying, during a boxing match in Nuuk, Greenland, on February 28, 2026.

major urbanisation drive in the 1970s, hundreds of the island's indigenous Inuit families were moved from their villages and pressed into apartment blocks in larger towns.

Inuit culture is deeply rooted in the land and tight-knit community life, so leaving behind traditional hunting and fishing livelihoods triggered a sense of dislocation and loss of identity, experts say.

According to medical journal *The Lancet*, the displacement left deep trauma and sent suicide rates soaring in the 1980s.

Young Greenlanders still feel

the effects of traumas experienced by previous generations, a concept known as intergenerational transmission, another study in the *International Journal of Circumpolar Health* showed. And access to mental health support remains limited.

- 'Relief' -

After his mother's suicide, William turned first to alcohol and drugs.

His brother Kian, now 19, chose a different form of adrenaline: he pulled on boxing gloves "to clear my head".

For the pair, boxing became an escape, where

they could meet "positive people".

It was also a way to honour their mother, a former Greenland martial arts champion.

Originally from northern Greenland, Mette had been placed in an orphanage in the capital Nuuk as her parents were unable to care for her.

A pile of her gold medals lay jumbled on the coffee table.

"When we were younger, we used to use her medals as trophies. We lost a couple of them," said William. "I feel like I owe her medals."

In 2023, suicide accounted

for 7.4 percent of deaths in Greenland, according to the same study in *The Lancet*. "We all know at least one or two family members or friends who have killed themselves," said Kian. "Or many more."

"Not so long ago, two of my friends committed suicide," added William.

At a gym in Nuuk, a group of youths grunted through push-ups ordered by their coach, 27-year-old former boxer Philippe Andersen.

"Discipline is key," he told AFP. "A couple of months before the fight, no drinking, no smoking, nothing. Nothing fun."

Some may have been bullied, lost loved ones or face social problems "but we try not to think about it while we're boxing".

"They often have something they're angry about," he said, adding boxing offered them "relief from their daily lives".

When night falls and the gym empties, Nuuk's streets fill with teenagers. Along the coast, it's not unusual to see a lone teenager staring at the sea.

Behind them, rows of Soviet-style apartment blocks tower over the cliff, remnants of Denmark's urbanisation drive in the 1970s.

On the crumbling facade of Block T, a light installation paid tribute to the victims of suicide. □



A man takes pictures of a humanoid robotic head that mimics humans expressions from Shenzhen Xiaoquan Technology during the International AI Application and Robotics Innovation Exhibition in Beijing on March 18, 2026.

Hong Kong, China

A woman on an evening walk in Macau was briefly hospitalised after a humanoid robot startled her and left her feeling unwell, police told AFP on Wednesday.

Police said they had received a call for assistance for the woman, who "was startled when she suddenly noticed a robot behind her while using her mobile phone".

Macau woman hospitalised after being startled by humanoid robot

Video widely shared online showed a woman angrily confronting a robot as it waved its metallic arms at her, while a crowd of curious onlookers gathered around. "With so many other things to do, why bother me? Are you crazy?" the woman yelled at the unperturbed bot in Cantonese, as she gestured agitatedly towards it.

The woman did not suffer injuries and there had been no physical contact with the robot, but she required hospital treatment, police said in a statement.

"She has since been discharged and has not

pressed charges regarding the incident," which took place earlier this month, the statement said.

Social media videos showed officers leading a forlorn robot away, though police stressed they "did not seize" the bot.

The robot was operated by a Macanese man in his 50s, who said he was conducting a test and intended to use it for promoting his business.

Police said they reminded him to stay vigilant while operating the robot to "avoid causing danger or alarm" to passersby.

The robot in the images resembled a humanoid model made by Chinese startup Unitree.

Beijing has encouraged domestic firms to develop humanoids, in the hopes of leading the global robotics industry.

These increasingly dexterous robots have proven themselves capable of performing choreographed dances, participating in races, and even able to land backflips. But fully automated robots are still a rare sight, with most impressive displays pre-programmed or remotely operated. □

In celebration of 200 years of the Aruban gold rush: Get to know the history of the gold industry on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—This year we celebrate a few milestone anniversaries on Aruba, one of them being the 200th anniversary of when gold was first discovered on the island. We have talked about the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruin before and its brief history during the gold industry on Aruba, but get to know a little more about the history of the “Aruban Gold Rush.”

The first hint of gold on Aruba actually dates back to 1725, when rumors about gold being found in dug up treasure chests of the Spanish colonial era prompted the first official exploration for gold on the island, commissioned by the Dutch West India Company. Under the leadership of Mr. Paulus Printz, a three-year search was conducted on Aruba, to no avail. Though they found some specks of gold, it was not enough to motivate a further search, and the assignment was discontinued by Printz himself.

It wasn't until 100 years later, in 1824, when a young farmer boy named Willem Rasmijn found a lump of gold while out herding his father's sheep in the area of Rooi Fluit on the north coast. His father took it to a local merchant who then sold the lump for \$70. Unbeknownst to the boy and his father, they quite literally struck gold, and as word got out, a gold fever spread among the locals who started searching for more gold. When the colonial governor in Curacao, Governor Cantz'laar, heard about the news, he sent his adjutant, Capitan van Raders, to start harvesting gold. This was in July 1824. In August of that same year, the governor followed suit to the island, accompanied by high-ranking military officials. When citizens started swarming the area in search for gold, The Netherlands sent more troops to safe guard the gold.

Prominent places where gold was found was in Daimari, Wacobana, Arikok, Rooi Fluit, Hadicouradi and later West punt, where gold ore was found. Because of a lack in advanced technol-

ogy and materials to harvest the gold, the process took a more primitive approach: Clay rocks containing traces of gold were left to dry in the sun. Then, workers would start chipping the clay away on a large canvas to catch the gold particles that were left behind after the wind blew away the dust from the clay.

In the harvest period of 1824-1825, there was a total of 71,000 kilos collected through commissioned harvesting. Locals themselves reportedly found about 25 pounds worth of gold in the nearby rivers. The following years after that first big harvest, commission work fell off, and in 1828, the director of the goldmines, Johan Gravenhorst, decided to halt harvesting.

Almost 40 years later, the London-based Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. was granted concession. The firm built their gold mines on Bushiribana, and in the port of Oranjestad a long road that connected the gold mill to the port. The ores themselves came from Sero Plat en Sero Cristal.

By this point, workers were still using primitive methods to harvest the ores. For example, when someone had to go into the mines, there were no stairs or lifts; the person had to be brought down in a big bucket, with two or more workers holding the bucket by a thick rope above ground.

Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. reportedly operated until 1899, and right after the Aruba Gold Concession Ltd. was established, coincidentally also based in London. This time, the gold mill in Balashi was built, and more mines were dug up all around the island. The gold ores that were found were transported via track engine, locally called the “trekinchi”. Despite being more equipped for the job, the Aruba Gold Concession Ltd. could not produce any real profit, and so the concession was terminated just eight years later, in 1908. A local firm, the “Aruba Goud Maatschappij” (Aruba Gold Company) took over the concession, along with

all the materials and equipment. In the beginning, the company saw good profit, and for a while, the island's economy depended primarily on the mining and harvesting of gold. But just like its predecessors, the streak of luck for the Aruba Gold Company came to an end when WWI broke out. The main reason why production stopped this time was reportedly because of a lack in dynamite for extracting the ores from the mines, as well as a lack in raw materials like German cyanide for the refining process. By the time the war ended, the equipment that was left at Balashi were too old to use again. After the war, gold production on the Aruba



was left to a standstill. According to an issue in Aruba Esso News paper in 1953, Henny Eman wanted to start up digging again, this time using independent miners. He argued that there was proof of more gold to be discovered. Plus, hiring independent miners would boost the island's employment rate. When it was proven that gold was in fact still present, the executive board on the island promised to fund the project only if the gold dug up proved to be valuable. However, nothing else was reported after this, so it could be concluded that there was no real profitable

market on the island anymore.

The ruins of the Bushiribana and Balashi Gold Mills are still standing, and open for the public to visit. These structures offer a glance into the past, to a time where Aruba experienced one of its first wave of industrialization. Today, these structures are persevered as historical monuments. □

Source:

1. “De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over the geschiedenis van Aruba)” by Evert Bongers.
2. Aruba Esso News, 1953 issue.

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Royal Visit Highlights Aruba's Journey to Autonomy and National Identity

ORANJESTAD – His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands paid an official visit to Aruba on March 18 in connection with two significant national milestones: the 40th anniversary of Status Aparte and the 50th anniversary of Aruba's national flag and anthem. The visit formed part of the broader national commemoration of these historic moments, which are central to Aruba's constitutional development and identity.

The official program began at the Cabinet of the Governor of Aruba, where the King met with Governor Alfonso Boekhoudt, as well as the Governors of Curaçao and Sint Maarten. This was followed by a protocol meeting at Fort Zoutman with members of Aruba's Parliament and Council of Ministers, underscoring the institutional importance of the occasion.

From Fort Zoutman, the King participated in a ceremonial walk to the Government Administration Building, where the central commemoration ceremony took place. Along the route, scouts, schoolchildren, and members of the public formed a guard of honour. Upon arrival, the King inspected the armed forces in a symbolic gesture of respect for the historic significance of the day.

The ceremony officially began with the raising of the flags of Aruba and the Netherlands, accompanied by the Vaandelmars, followed by performances of both national anthems. In their official remarks, King Willem-Alexander and Prime Minister Mike Eman reflected on the historical importance of Status Aparte and the role of the national flag and anthem as symbols of identity and unity for the Aruban people.

Status Aparte, achieved on January 1, 1986, marked Aruba's transition to an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, following decades of political and democratic struggle. Key figures such as Shon A. Eman

and Beticio Croes played a central role in this process, advocating for greater self-determination. The celebration also marked 50 years since the introduction of Aruba's flag and anthem in 1976, enduring symbols of national pride.

Following the official ceremony, a cultural program showcased Aruba's artistic talent and heritage, featuring musical performances, poetry, and choreography that highlighted the island's cultural diversity. The ceremony concluded with a ceremonial march and a fly-by of two helicopters, symbolizing honour and recognition of the historic occasion.

As part of his visit, the King also attended a groundbreaking ceremony at the Roly Bislik Olympic Pool in Savaneta, marking the start of construction of a new warm-up pool. The project represents an important investment in Aruba's sports infrastructure and aims to create additional opportunities for athletic development. During the visit, the King met with local athletes and sports representatives, emphasizing the importance of sports for youth and community development.

The program continued at the Royal Netherlands Navy base in Savaneta, where the King met with military leadership and Dutch ambassadors stationed in the region. Discussions with local and Kingdom officials focused on regional security, geopolitical developments, and the importance of continued cooperation within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Overall, the visit highlighted the strong ties between Aruba and the Netherlands, while serving as a moment of reflection on Aruba's historical journey toward autonomy. It also reaffirmed a shared commitment to cooperation, stability, and mutual support within the Kingdom, as Aruba continues to build on its national identity and future development. □



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Iconic anchor dressed for the occasion

ORANJESTAD – You might have noticed this iconic Aruban landmark looked a little different this time. Instead of its usual bright red color, the large anchor at the south east coast was flexing Aruba’s flag colors.

At the south east coast of the island, standing alone on a windswept and barren land stands a popular Aruba landmark – a large anchor. It overlooks the sea just beyond, watching over the shipping lanes. It stands there in memory and in honor of all seamen who have lost their life at sea.

And recently, it was repainted to show Aruba’s flag colors. This is because this year marks the 50th anniversary of Aruba’s flag and anthem!

Where to find the anchor?

The anchor is a “must see” landmark when you visit Aruba. It is among the most photographed historical landmarks for the island. You want to make sure you add this stop on your itinerary when you’re visiting the south coast of Aruba. The bright red anchor against the backdrop of the deep blue Caribbean Sea and the azure blue skies, make a great backdrop for your vacation pictures.

The anchor is located at the entrance to Gate 6 to the former Lago Colony. It



is on the outskirts of Seroe Colorado, on the south east point of the island at the “T” junction to Baby Beach.

Depending on where you are staying on the island, follow the signs that indicate the way to Baby Beach. Once you reach the T-junction, it will be right in front of you.

About the anchor

Size
It will be hard to miss the anchor, it’s huge! The anchor that weighs 21,772 kilos is approximately 10 feet 6 inches wide and 15 feet, 6 inches tall.

On the anchor there are some numbers. The 4112 and 4115, which are be-

lieved to be the serial numbers that refer to the “fluke” or horizontal and vertical parts of the anchor, respectively. The number 21772K refers to the weight of the anchor in kilos.

This type of anchor was manufactured by Hoesch Dortmund Horde, at a foundry located in Germany.

Where did the anchor come from?

There are a number of stories as to the origins of the anchor, which one do you think it was? (Unfortunately the mystery has never been solved, so your imagination can pick which one you think it might be!)

Story 1:

“According to Mr. Manuel M. Curiel, an ex-Lago Tug Captain, a fully laden VLCC (Very Large Crude Carrier) was seeking a mooring at the 15-mile anchorage, known as Bara, on the southern part of the island. This is the usual shallow mooring location for ships awaiting orders, etc. The weather was rough with strong current. The normal procedure is that they would walk out three shackles (about 90 feet) until the anchor touches the bottom while the chain must rest on the bottom. Subsequently, they will walk out some extra shackles and when the ship starts to swing or lean on one side, the anchor is properly

set. Because of the rough weather, unfortunately they did not get the time to walk out the extra tackles and because of the tension exerted on the winch, it broke, and they lost the anchor and its chain.”

Story 2:

“Mr. Curiel also said that at one time a small tanker with a Korean crew, while lifting their anchor also lifted another anchor near the inner harbor. When the ship asked for assistance, he went with his tugboat along with a barge, to help. But eventually they had to cut the chain and let the anchor go to the bottom because they could not untangle them.”

How did the anchor become a landmark?

Sometime between 1980 and 1985, three gentlemen (Mr. Wim Martinus – the Harbormaster of Aruba; Mr. August Genser – the ex-Division Superintendent of Lago’s Laboratory; and Mr. Willie Davis), were having a conversation with Mr. Charlie Brouns Jr., local businessman. Charlie, who was a visionary and had dreams for developing the San Nicolas area, told these gentlemen that he would like to come up with something innovative for the San Nicolas area to draw tourism to the area.

The “anchor”, which at that time was being stored at the Oranjestad harbor, was

suggested as an option. Charlie liked the idea! He then contacted the President of Lago for permission to acquire the anchor. He was granted permission and the anchor was then relocated to its present location and dedicated “To All Seamen” on the occasion of the closing of the Lago Oil Refinery on March 31, 1985.

Through the years

Through the years the Anchor was slowly weathering from the wind and salt. As time passed, sadly the origin and purpose of the anchor slowly faded away from people’s memories.

After Charles Brouns Jr. died on September 15, 2004, his friend Mr. Sam Speziale, requested assistance from the management of Valero Aruba Refinery to help maintain the monument. The Valero Aruba Refinery graciously sandblasted and painted the anchor and poured a concrete pad around it. On April 17, 2005, the anchor monument was rededicated “To All Seamen” in a formal ceremony in memory of Charles Brouns Jr.

Today, the anchor stands both as memorial to all seaman who have lost their lives at sea, but also as a silent reminder that Seroe Colorado is part of San Nicolas and that San Nicolas is still a vibrant and important part of the island of Aruba.

The best time to visit

When you’re planning your visit to the south end of the island, you will want to include in your itinerary the many things to see and do there. The anchor will be just one of these stops, (keep an eye out for our future editions, we publish our recommendations!).

With that being said, I have to say, if you enjoy catching a sunrise, the anchor is one of the best places on the island to catch the sunrise. But in reality, anytime is a good time to visit, depending on your personal schedule. □



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Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas

SAN NICOLAS— At Just 11 miles southeast from Oranjestad you will enter the city San Nicolas, also known as Sunrise City or Chocolate City. A city that is rich in authentic culture and island charm. San Nicolas is Aruba's second largest city and was once a bustling company town dominated by the oil industry since the early 1930's.

Over the course of four decades, its demographics had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day

traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing and population are clearly visible in San Nicolas – more than anywhere else on the island.

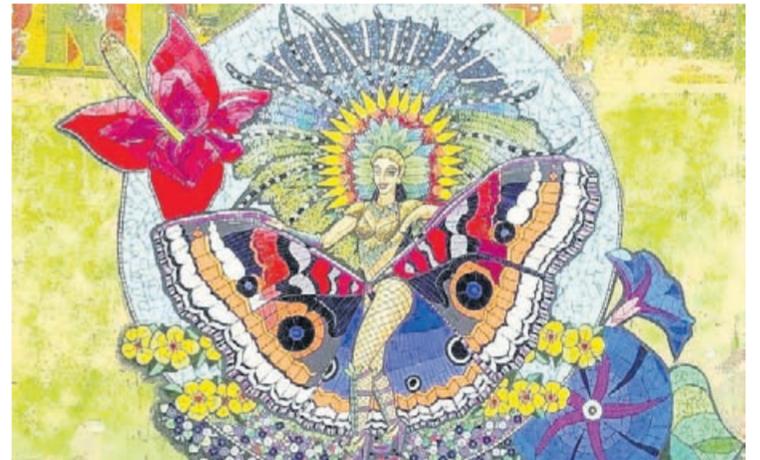
Flow of history

If you are looking for history San Nicolas has it.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industries which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experi-

ence the touching stories of those who were part of this history.

The Community Museum holds a remarkable collection that spans millennia. Ancient fossils stand next to tableaus of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barbershop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment.



The new San Nicolas

In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub

— varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. □

Best spots to view the sunset

(Oranjestad)—What can be more romantic than surprising your partner with a date watching the sunset? Aruba's sunset leave many speechless, and luckily, the best spots to view the sunset are entirely accessible and easy to find. Here are some of the best places to view the sunset on the island.

California Light House

Of course, being one of the highest points easily accessible to locals and tourists, the California Light House hill not only offers a tremendous view of the sunset, but also a breath taking scenery of most of the island. In the distance you can spot all the hotels, the western shoreline and the wild waves that crash on the northern side of the island.

Manchebo & Eagle Beach

Speaking of the western shoreline, the best spots for viewing the sunset on the beach has to be either Manchebo Beach or at Eagle Beach, which stretch



along the entire western coast of the island. The sunset on these beaches is truly breathtaking; the sky and ocean look so big and spacious, and paired with the orange/pink hue of the sunset, the white sandy beaches and the soft sounds of waves crashing—it can only be described as

an experience!

Arashi Beach

Another beach that has to be considered as another great spot to view the sunset. Arashi Beach is the last beach you will find along the western coast line, just before you drive up the hill to the California Light

House. A favorite for surfers and body boarders, the Arashi sky stretches out for miles, lending a spectacular canvas for the sun to create a masterpiece of orange, pink and purple

Hooiberg Hill

These last two options are for more active couples. If

you and your partner like to hike, the Hooiberg Hill may be a great place for you to get your daily workout in and enjoy a beautiful view of the sunset and the island as a little reward. Climb on top the 587-step stairs and reach the top to enjoy this incredible scenery.

Casibari Rock Formation

If you're a rock climber, you might enjoy watching the sunset on top of the Casibari Rock Formation. It's no Yosemite, but it does offer a fun little exercise to get to the top. But if you prefer not to get your hands a little dirty, you can always use the stairs in the back. □

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By THOMAS JOSEPH

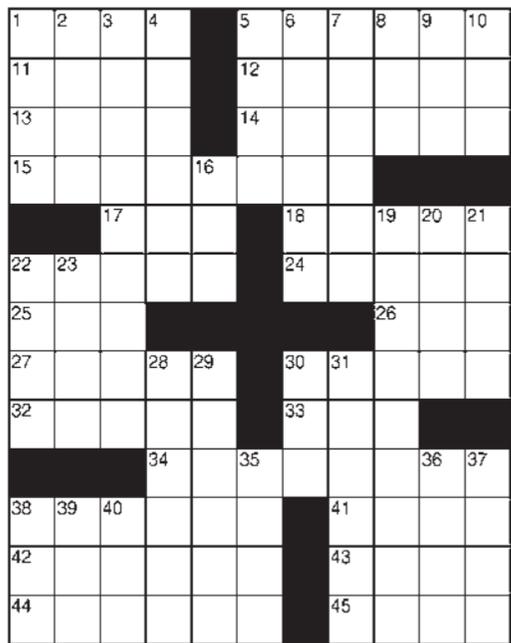


ACROSS

- 1 Ticked off
- 5 Fancy ties
- 11 Motor sound
- 12 Singer Twain
- 13 "Bus Stop" playwright
- 14 Galileo's crime
- 15 Night light
- 17 Singer Reed
- 18 Museum piece
- 22 Ship staffs
- 24 Sleep sound
- 25 Poker prize
- 26 Solo in space
- 27 "— luck!"
- 30 Fragrance
- 32 Toasting word
- 33 Coffee dispenser
- 34 Gambling spot
- 38 Ness nemesis
- 41 Jason's ship
- 42 Like some clocks
- 43 Even
- 44 Most original
- 45 Concludes

DOWN

- 1 Do some laps
- 2 "Dear me!"
- 3 Verdi opera
- 4 Before, poetically
- 5 Tennis great
- 6 Clipping need
- 7 Bizet opera
- 8 Early hour
- 9 Frank McCourt book
- 10 Utter
- 16 Tour carrier
- 19 Wagner opera
- 20 Persia, today
- 21 Minimal change
- 22 NCOs with two stripes
- 23 Corner piece
- 28 Strauss opera
- 29 Singer Morissette
- 30 Minivan alternative
- 31 Dream up
- 35 Splinter group
- 36 Mature with turf
- 37 Supplies with turf
- 38 Fire
- 39 Eroded
- 40 Punch sound



3-30

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.

3-30 CRYPTOQUOTE

HLMDW BLGRLJR IDRXBR ORA

ANKB CKO HXDVKJO ZXUIRA

LMA LE GF HXF? — IUKJZRBB

DRKX, "BAXU HXUB"

Cryptoquote: IF THERE EVER COMES A DAY WHEN WE CAN'T BE TOGETHER, KEEP ME IN YOUR HEART; I'LL STAY THERE FOREVER. — A.A. MILNE

Cruise ship Schedule: March 16 - 22 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
MON	16	VALIANT LADY	09.00	22.00	C	1
TUE	17	CARNIVAL HORIZON NORWEGIAN SKY	08.00 13.30	22.00 22.30	B C	1 1
WED	18	ROTTERDAM BRILLIANCE OF THE SEAS SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00 08.00 08.00	17.00 23.00 23.00	B C I	1 1 1
THU	19	MSC DIVINA AZAMARA QUEST	08.00 09.30	18.00 22.00	B C	1 1
FRI	20	CARIBBEAN PRINCESS NORWEGIAN STAR	09.00 11.00	22.00 20.00	B C	1 1
SUN	22	CELEBRITY ASCENT	09.00	23.00	C	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

		6			5	2	9	
	9				8	7		
					2			
3			2	8	4	5		
	8	5	6			2		
7						8		
	4		7	2			1	
	1			9			6	
				4		7		

Difficulty: ★★★

3/19

Answer to previous puzzle

2	1	9	4	3	8	7	5	6
5	6	8	1	9	7	4	3	2
7	3	4	6	5	2	1	8	9
1	8	6	5	4	9	2	7	3
9	7	3	8	2	1	5	6	4
4	5	2	3	7	6	9	1	8
6	4	5	9	1	3	8	2	7
8	2	1	7	6	4	3	9	5
3	9	7	2	8	5	6	4	1

Difficulty: ★★★

3/18

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The platypus is even weirder than thought, scientists discover



The world's first platypus twin puggles born in captivity are shown together for the first time during a full health check at Taronga Zoo's veterinary clinic in Sydney, 28 March 2003.

Paris, France

They already have the bill of a duck, the tail of a beaver, lay eggs like reptiles and have venom like snakes.

Yet the humble platypus, a small creature which quietly swims in the rivers of eastern Australia, has found yet another way to amaze scientists.

It is the only mammal that has hollow structures of the pigment melanin, a trait normally found in birds, biologists said in a new study on Wednesday.

When the first taxidermied specimen of a platypus was brought back from Australia in 1799, European naturalists began looking for the seams -- they assumed it was a hoax.

The animal has been surprising scientists ever since. The platypus is one of only five mammal species that lay eggs, which are called monotremes. The other four are all types of echidna -- spiny creatures that waddle through the Australian bush.

It is also one of the few poisonous mammals -- males have a spur on their hind legs that releases venom at their enemies.

Now another oddity has been added to the unusual platypus characteristics, according to the study published in the Biology

in spherical melanosomes. And in mammals, these melanosomes are always solid. However in birds, sometimes the structures are hollow or flat, with only a thin layer of melanin. This helps birds have the dazzling and varied colours seen across the world.

Birds also have melanosomes that are organised into smaller "nanostructures" which create iridescent colours that interact with light, such as the feathers of a peacock.

- 'Surprising and exciting' - Jessica Leigh Dobson, a biologist at Ghent University in Belgium and the study's lead author, told AFP the team was compiling a database of mammal melanosomes when they made an "extremely surprising and exciting" discovery.

Platypus melanosomes were mostly spherical -- which should give it reddish-orange fur. But the animal is merely dark brown. Then the scientists discovered that some of its melanosomes are hollow -- like those of birds.

They checked their database for other mammals, including marsupials, rodents and primates.

"To the best of our knowledge, this is the only example of hollow melanosomes in mammals," Dobson said.

The melanosomes were "scattered randomly throughout the hair cortex" and do not create iridescence, she said.

"Further work is definitely needed to find out why they have them," Dobson added.

Why these animals evolved these unusual features in the first place is also unclear.

The ancestors of the platypus and echidna are thought to have been aquatic burrowing animals, so their hollow melanosomes could have helped them adapt to life in the water, giving them warmer insulation.

But this theory raises more questions.

If this was the case, why is this trait "not more widespread among aquatic mammals?" the study asked. □



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Letters journal of the UK's Royal Society.

In animals with spines, called vertebrates, the pigment called melanin protects against UV radiation, helps regulate body temperature and is responsible for the colour of skin, fur or feathers.

Melanin is contained in tiny, specialised structures inside cells called melanosomes, the shape of which is linked to their colour.

For example, eumelanin -- which produces black, grey and dark brown hues -- is usually found in elongated melanosomes.

Pheomelanin, which produces reds, reddish-browns and some shades of orange and yellow, is found

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OTHER

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EMERGENCY

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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

China tech giant Tencent bets on AI agents

Beijing, China

Tencent wants to bring artificial intelligence agents into its WeChat social media app, the Chinese tech firm's president said on Wednesday, a move that could change how hundreds of millions of users interact with the platform in the Asian nation and beyond.

Agents -- programmes that execute real-life tasks such as sending emails or booking flights -- are being touted as AI's next frontier after chatbots such as ChatGPT. Their incorporation into WeChat may alter how people in the world's second-largest economy use the so-called "super-app" that already boasts social messaging, digital payments and a long list of other features.

Tencent, also the world's largest video game publisher, reported a 16 percent jump in full-year net profit on Wednesday, with gaming still the main business driver even as it extends its AI push.

The company has sought in recent years to integrate AI into WeChat, known as Weixin in China.

"We hope to create AI agents in Weixin, which could leverage Weixin's close connection with users," company president Martin Lau told reporters.

"It will be a highly diverse ecosystem, encompassing



A picture taken on November 11, 2021 in Moscow shows the logo of mobile messaging service WeChat on a tablet screen.

mini-programs, content, commerce, social networking and payments," Lau added, without giving details such as when the service would become available.

On Wednesday, Tencent said net profit for 2025 came to 224.8 billion yuan (\$32.6 billion), beating estimates of 221.9 billion yuan in a Bloomberg survey of economists.

The company, which owns the developer of popular eSports including "League of Legends", has sizeable operations in other sectors from cloud computing to entertainment.

Despite being China's most valuable tech company by market capitalisation, so far Tencent has been seen as a cautious AI player, although founder Pony Ma has vowed to increase investment in the sector.

"Our highly resilient and cash generative core businesses provides us with the resources to fund our increasing investments in AI," Ma said in a statement Wednesday.

- Agent fever -

Like its rivals Alibaba, Baidu and ByteDance, Tencent has recently branched out into the world of AI agents

with its WorkBuddy app.

The Shenzhen-based company has also been among the Chinese tech giants racing to take advantage of a surge in interest in the country in OpenClaw -- an AI agent platform created by an Austrian programmer that has fascinated the tech world.

Tencent and others are offering simplified installation and affordable coding plans to help users host OpenClaw agents on cloud servers.

Earlier this month the company's cloud computing arm organised an OpenClaw setup event at its

headquarters, which drew more than 1,000 attendees, with similar events planned across China.

The increasing capabilities of Tencent's main large-language AI model, and AI agent tools such as WorkBuddy and new offering QClaw, "are encouraging early signs that these investments will unlock new opportunities", the company said.

The Financial Times reported this month that the White House was debating whether Tencent's investment in US and Finnish gaming groups pose a national security risk.

Discussions over its stakes in "Fortnite" creator Epic Games, Riot Games and Supercell revolve around the implications for US user data privacy, the British newspaper said, citing people familiar with the matter.

"We have been engaged in constructive discussions with the relevant U.S. regulators for quite some time now," said Tencent president Lau.

"Things are moving in a positive direction" with the overall risk "manageable", he said.

"While there are due processes to be followed in the US, other regions are actually very keen for us to invest in gaming companies." □

Nvidia says restarting production of China-bound chips



Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang is joined at the stage by a Disney animatronic robot during his keynote address at the company's annual GTC developers conference at the SAP Center in San Jose, California, on March 16, 2026.

San José, United States

Nvidia chief Jensen Huang on Tuesday said the AI technology powerhouse is restarting production of its

high-performance chips for clients in China.

"We have received purchase orders from many customers, and we're in the process of

restarting our manufacturing," Huang told journalists at Nvidia's annual developers conference in San Jose, California.

The situation has changed from two weeks ago, according to Huang.

A U.S. commerce official in late February said a high-end Nvidia chip that can train and run artificial intelligence systems has not yet been sold to Chinese companies despite softened export restrictions.

The H200 chip had until recently been barred from sale in China by Washington over national security concerns. President Donald Trump said in December he had reached an agreement with his Chinese counterpart Xi

Jinping to ease the restrictions, a move some lawmakers have warned could help China's military.

When asked by the US House Foreign Affairs Committee how many H200 chips had been sold to Chinese end-users, Commerce Department export enforcement official David Peters said: "My understanding is that so far none have been sold."

The H200 deal -- under which the US government gets a 25 percent cut of sales -- was confirmed by the Commerce Department in January. But conditions imposed on their sale have reportedly made it difficult for shipments to be approved.

"I think President Trump would like us to compete worldwide

and not concede those markets unnecessarily," Huang said. Beijing is ramping up domestic chip development and production in a bid to rival the industry-leading designs of California-based Nvidia, the world's most valuable company.

Nvidia's top-of-the-range chips, the Blackwell and forthcoming Rubin series, remain banned for sale in China and were not included in the H200 agreement. When asked about Nvidia's dependence on Taiwan-based chip producer TSMC and the potential for China to "act on" that country, Huang said "my only hope is that we can all work together, stay at peace and look at the big picture." □

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McIlroy happy with back injury recovery as Masters looms



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland looks on from the 12th tee during the final round of THE PLAYERS Championship 2026 at THE PLAYERS Stadium course at TPC Sawgrass on March 15, 2026 in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

Washington, United States

Rory McIlroy is pleased with his recovery from a back injury and excited to play the Masters in three weeks as defending champion after last year's emotional Augusta National triumph.

The 36-year-old from Northern Ireland captured his fifth major title by winning last year's Masters to complete a career Grand Slam.

"This is going to be the first time I drive down Magnolia Lane (as champion) and it's all going to be about enjoying my week and the perks that come along with being a Masters champion," McIlroy said on Wednesday in a conference call.

Those include a champion's parking spot, a place in the champions locker room and hosting the champions dinner two days before the event tees off April 9.

"I know I get to go back to the Masters for the rest of my life," McIlroy said. "That's quite a freeing feeling."

After a third-place showing at Dubai in January and a share of second last month at the PGA Tour Genesis Invitational, McIlroy raised concerns by pulling out of the Arnold Palmer Invitational two weeks ago at Bay Hill with a back injury.

World number two McIlroy, however, says those issues have been resolved as he makes final preparation to defend the green jacket.

"Prep has run pretty well," McIlroy said. "Had that little back issue at Bay Hill which threw a spanner in the works but I've recovered from that pretty quickly."

"I'm really pleased with how my body responded to that little setback."

After a share of 46th defending his title at The Players Championship, McIlroy will be off until he tees off at Augusta.

"I'm really excited to get to the week of the Masters and defend," McIlroy said. "I know defending is a pretty rare feat and I would like to do that for sure."

Only Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Nick Faldo have captured the Masters in consecutive years, with Woods the most recent in 2001-2002.

- Master McIlroy's menu -

McIlroy revealed his menu for the April 7 Masters Champions Dinner on Wednesday, stacking the lineup with personal favorites and some Georgia delights.

Appetizers will include bacon-wrapped dates with goat cheese (after his moth-

er's recipe), rock shrimp tempura, Georgia peach and ricotta flatbread and grilled elk sliders. "In the buildup to the Masters last year, I was eating a lot of elk," McIlroy said. His first course is a yellowfin tuna carpaccio after his favorite New York restaurant's offering.

"Every time we go to that restaurant that's the one thing I have to have," McIlroy said. Wagyu filet mignon and seared salmon were his main course picks with Irish champ, Brussels sprouts, carrots and onion rings from Vidalia, Georgia, and sticky toffee pudding for dessert.

"Then my favorite part of the menu is you get access to the wonderful wine cellar at Augusta National," McIlroy said. In addition to champagne, McIlroy will have a 2022 Domaine Leflaive Batard Montrachet.

"It's the first-ever white wine that I actually liked," he said. "To be able to serve that is something that's sort of important to me."

There's also a 1990 Chateau Lafite Rothschild -- "That's the wine that I drank the night that I won the Masters" -- and a 1989 Chateau D'Yquem dessert wine that he called "liquid gold."

"It would be pretty presumptuous to have a menu in your head before you actually win the tournament," McIlroy said. "But I always thought about: If I win the Masters one day, what would I want it to look like? What would I like to serve?"

"I tried to be pretty thoughtful with it, tried to incorporate some of the things that I like and some little personal touches along the way but at the same time trying to put together a good enough menu that everybody would enjoy as well." □

Kerr 'frustrated' at six-figure sum owed to him by Johnson's failed Grand Slam Track



Britain's athlete Josh Kerr reacts after competing in the men's 1500m semi-final during the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo on September 15, 2025.

London, United Kingdom

Britain's Josh Kerr is "frustrated" by the six-figure sum owed to him by US athletics great Michael Johnson's failed Grand Slam Track project, but still believes that those behind it are "good people" who got themselves in a "horrible situation". Grand Slam Track (GST) curtailed its inaugural 2025 season and then filed for bankruptcy in December, with millions collectively owed to athletes including Scottish two-time world champion Kerr — who has submitted a claim for \$218,750 (£164,150).

A court filing by creditors earlier this month also claimed that four-time Olympic champion Johnson was secretly paid \$500,000 when he was already aware that creditors would be left out of pocket.

"Of course I'm frustrated," said Kerr.

"I'm owed a lot of money, so in any business anyone's going to be frustrated. I don't particularly know right now where to push those frustrations and where they should sit.

"I've had conversations with

Michael, I've had information given to me by my agents on this stuff. I don't think these are bad people. I think this is a horrible situation."

Once a company files for bankruptcy in the United States, a committee of creditors called a UCC is often formed to represent their interests.

This UCC filed the allegations against Johnson.

"This claim is unfounded and false," said GST representative Alex Tourk.

"As was previously explained to the UCC, Mr Johnson advanced millions of dollars for GST's operating expenses, including athlete travel, accommodation and costs, only a portion of which was repaid through reimbursement.

"It is unfortunate that the UCC chose to ignore facts and is instead attempting to discredit the company and Mr Johnson through false statements."

Kerr, 28, has recovered from the calf tear he sustained during last year's 1,500m final at the World Athletics Championships in Japan. □

WNBA, players union agree 'transformative' labor deal: official

New York, United States

The WNBA and the league's players' union have reached a verbal agreement on a record-breaking labor deal, officials said Thursday, heading off the prospect of a strike.

ESPN reported the league and the Women's National Basketball Players Association (WNBPA) had hammered out a new collective bargaining agreement that would see huge increases in the salary cap, average wages and minimum wages.

The deal follows months of wrangling between the league and the WNBPA which prompted the union to vote overwhelmingly in favor of a strike if necessary.

Players had sought a greater share of league



WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert speaks to the media ahead of Game One of the 2025 WNBA Playoffs finals between the Las Vegas Aces and the Phoenix Mercury at Michelob ULTRA Arena on October 03, 2025 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

revenues and improved deal needed to reflect the benefits, arguing the new dramatic rise in popularity

of the WNBA which has followed the emergence of a new generation of stars such as Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese.

ESPN reported that under the new deal the league's salary cap would skyrocket from \$1.5 million in 2025 to \$7 million.

The supermax limit -- the maximum an elite player can be paid under salary rules -- will increase to \$1.4 million, compared to \$249,244 in 2025.

Average salaries under the deal would increase to \$600,000, compared to \$120,000 in 2025. Minimum salaries will be more than \$300,000, compared to \$66,000 last year, ESPN reported.

While the deal still needs to be formally ratified by

the union and the WNBA's board of governors, league commissioner Cathy Engelbert said the agreement "underscores a shared commitment to the continued growth" of women's basketball.

"We have aligned on key elements of a new collective bargaining agreement," Engelbert said in a statement.

"We still need to finalize a formal term sheet, but the progress made in these discussions marks a transformative step forward for players and the league," she added.

WNBPA executive director Terri Jackson said the deal represented a watershed moment for "player empowerment."

"I think this can be summed up in two words: player empowerment," Jackson said.

"Players coming to the table and standing on business and being reminded of the collective voice and of what it means to be in a union and the power of this union. They never forgot it, and they have taken it, like they always do, to the next level."

The deal means the 30th season of the WNBA will open on schedule on May 8.

The agreement draws a line under an increasingly acrimonious dispute between the WNBA and the WNBPA that had rumbled on for several months.

WNBA commissioner Engelbert had come under fire last year from senior players over her stewardship of the sport, with Minnesota Lynx star Napheesa Collier, accusing her of "negligent" governance.

Collier said Engelbert had been privately dismissive of criticism by Indiana Fever star Clark and other new stars of the league, saying they should be "on their knees" in gratitude for the commercial opportunities they had received.

Engelbert denied making those comments but acknowledged that "if the players don't feel appreciated and valued... then we have to do better." □



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