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U.S. Senate candidate's implosion forces Democratic reckoning

Washington, United States

The collapse of Graham Platner's U.S. Senate campaign has forced Democrats into a painful reckoning over how a scandal-plagued political novice became the standard-bearer in one of the party's most important races of the midterm elections.

Platner, a Marine veteran whose blunt anti-establishment message thrilled the progressive grassroots, quit the Maine race after a rape allegation he denies drove major Democratic backers to abandon him.

The scandal hit a party already split between voters demanding insurgent populism, and leaders warning that, even in the era of Donald Trump, outsider movements still need professional vetting -- especially in races that could decide control of Congress.

Platner's exit leaves Democrats a narrow window to field a replacement against Republican Senator Susan Collins, one of their top targets in the November fight for the Senate.

But the deeper question reaches beyond Maine: how to find candidates who can channel anger at Washington without buckling under the scrutiny that high office demands.

Analysts say Platner's rise spoke to a real hunger for fighters who sound less polished, less cautious and less beholden to donors than the



This combination of pictures created on April 30, 2026 shows Maine Democratic Senate candidate Graham Platner October 22, 2025 in Ogunquit, Maine and Republican Senator Susan Collins in Washington DC, on February 23, 2021.

candidates national leaders tend to favor.

The hard-charging oysterman beat the party establishment by casting himself as a working-class outsider, attacking corporate power and vowing to break a system he said served billionaires over ordinary people. To supporters, his appeal was obvious: Democrats had spent too long elevating safe, familiar candidates who couldn't inspire voters furious over inequality, rising costs and party leaders in Washington too timid to fight Trump.

That argument now cuts to

the heart of Democratic anxiety about 2028, when the party must again find a presidential nominee who can excite voters without collapsing under pressure.

- 'Glaring red flags' -

The anti-establishment left sees the Maine disaster as proof the party must keep faith with the voters who backed Platner, not let Washington impose another cautious nominee. The party establishment sees a different lesson: that opposition research, debate scrutiny and general-election campaigning exist for

a reason.

Adam Jentleson, who quit as a senior aide to Democrat John Fetterman in 2024 over concerns about the Pennsylvania senator's mental health, posted on X that Platner's story had always demanded "several leaps of faith."

"Shading a narrative towards the positive is standard -- lying is not," he said. "As an aide you have to ask yourself when you veer from the former into the latter."

Jeff Robbins, a former senior federal prosecutor and counsel for Senate Democrats, called it "a vivid illustra-

tion" of a left that too often bends "inconvenient facts" for political expediency.

Even before the rape allegation, Platner's campaign had been dogged by incendiary old posts, sexually explicit messages to women early in his marriage, a Nazi-linked tattoo he later covered up, and claims that he had mistreated women.

Platner has acknowledged past struggles with undiagnosed PTSD and alcohol abuse, but has denied physically harming former partners.

His supporters cast those flaws as a redemption story; his critics say the left confused charisma with viability and dismissed questions about character as establishment sabotage.

Maine Democrats now face a more immediate problem: naming a nominee by late July through a compressed state party process.

But any nominee will have to unite Platner's wounded supporters with moderates, independents and women voters wary of a party that just watched its chosen candidate implode.

Cheyenne Hunt, whose group Reckoning Action works to confront misogyny in public life, said Platner's rise required "far too many people to ignore glaring red flags" because he looked like a "golden boy progressive candidate."

"Graham Platner was never the movement. He was just a mouthpiece," Hunt said. □



A general view of the Commerce Truck Stop in Commerce, California, on March 26, 2026.

Washington, United States

President Donald Trump's administration on Thursday moved to loosen truck pollution regulations put in place by his predecessor Joe

Biden, in its latest environmental rollback that benefits makers of fossil fuel burning vehicles.

Speaking to reporters at an event on the National Mall,

U.S. pushes for weaker truck pollution rules

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin said the changes would help both manufacturers and truck operators, who he said had warned the previous rules "would drive up costs" and "force companies to rush products to market before they were ready." The proposed changes pertain to a 2023 rule designed to tamp down NOx -- shorthand for nitric oxide and nitrogen dioxide -- from truck tailpipes, beginning with model year 2027. It still requires a public comment period before it is finalized.

NOx is a smog-forming pollutant that aggravates respiratory illnesses, especially asthma, forms acid rain and contributes to nutrient pollution in coastal waters. Notably, the EPA wants to reduce the emissions-related warranty -- the amount of time makers guarantee their pollution controls will work -- from 450,000 miles back down to 100,000 miles.

At the same time, regulators argued they are keeping in place nearly 90 percent of NOx reductions from the Biden rule.

Together, it estimated the

amendments would save \$12 billion, up to \$6,000 in savings per new truck for Americans.

"We believe strongly at the Trump EPA that we can protect the environment and grow the economy," Zeldin said.

But the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) said the changes would harm Americans' health.

"This Trump EPA proposal to weaken vital clean air protections will mean more health harms and higher costs in communities across the country," said the EDF's Peter Zalzal in a statement. □

Kicking off: New York football enthusiasts defy pitch shortage

New York, United States

The World Cup has sparked a surge of interest in football -- or soccer as most New Yorkers call it -- but exposed a shortage of pitches in the city for both established players and converts to the beautiful game.

Responding to the demand, Mayor Zohran Mamdani -- a passionate Arsenal supporter -- has announced five free, illuminated pitches open overnight across the city for the duration of the tournament.

But once the FIFA cavalcade rolls out of town, New Yorkers will have to look elsewhere to flex their footballing muscles.

"Finding an available field at a good time can honestly be one of the hardest parts, we're usually trying to play either early or late to avoid leagues with permits," said avid player and website designer Scott Benson, 29.

"There are a lot of different leagues in NYC all competing for field permits."

While the city's iconic Central Park has several grass turf soccer fields, availability is patchy elsewhere in the city where astroturf and concrete surfaces are common.

Still, many require permits



New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani holds a soccer ball during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Final Watch Party in Central Park Announcement on June 08, 2026 in New York City, U.S.

that are snapped up by for-profit leagues.

Lacking space, some pitches have popped up inside warehouse buildings like one in Brooklyn, wedged between a trash-strewn highway and a pawnbroker.

Each week thousands of footballers, many Latin or Caribbean migrants, flock to the astroturf pitches that serve the Crown Heights area, which has few other options.

Lucas Matuszewski, manager of the Soccerroof site,

said it's crucial to have the playing space as these immigrants "are kind of like the heart that keeps things pumping around here."

"We're in a kind of a hot-spot for both of these backgrounds, which is really great, because we're able to provide indoor space for people come to New York, come to Crown Heights and they are looking for a slice of home."

"In the winter time, when the weather's bad, that's kind of when we thrive... We're open 365 days a year,"

said Matuszewski, who described how the World Cup had galvanized interest in soccer.

- 'A joy' -

Some purist footballers are particularly irritated by a lack of grass fields, as they offer a different playing experience to the artificial turf or concrete surfaces most common in New York.

"Some grass fields might be nice, the majority of the fields here are turf. However, the times I've played on grass it's usually pretty

bumpy and hard," said Benson.

"I think they'd be a great addition if well maintained, but more important is increasing the amount of playable field space overall."

Responding to demand, four restored astroturf soccer fields recently opened at a reported cost of \$5 million at Randall's Island Park nestled in the East River off Manhattan.

The New York City Soccer Initiative, a collaboration between the city, NYC FC, and corporate sponsors is also building 26 mini soccer pitches at local schools.

Football coach Kemar Darby said that excitement for the game had exploded among local youngsters on the back of the World Cup, fired in particular by star players like France's Mbappe and Desire Doue.

"Kids are very engaged, because of the World Cup," said Darby, 26, originally from Jamaica, noting the importance of providing space for them to have a kick about.

"It's just giving kids the opportunity to play and enjoy the game the right way. Some will get a scholarship. To see the improvements, week in, week out -- that's a joy." □

Florida airport renamed 'Trump' in latest push to expand his brand

West Palm Beach, United States

A Florida airport was renamed after Donald Trump on Thursday, accelerating a push by the US president and supporters to plaster his name and image on everything from national landmarks to banknotes.

The Republican leader's son Eric celebrated by landing in the private family Boeing 757 -- so-called "Trump Force One" -- at what had been known as Palm Beach International Airport for nearly half a century.

"A beautiful day," a grinning Eric Trump said on Fox News at the newly minted President Donald J. Trump International Airport, a short drive from the family's Mar-a-Lago golf resort and compound. The airport renaming was

signed into law by Florida's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis.

"I don't think there's anybody more synonymous with Palm Beach than Donald Trump and maybe all of Florida," Eric Trump said.

He pointed out that the main road leading out of the airport is already called "President Donald J. Trump Boulevard."

And now anyone flying into Palm Beach will have a ticket where "you're going to see 'DJT' in perpetuity." Travelers at the airport Thursday were divided on the name change.

Corporate pilot Chris Bailey welcomed the switch, telling AFP that Trump has "certainly done enough to warrant a name of an airport."

But some were hostile.

"Palm Beach is a better brand. People don't really like Donald Trump," John Manov, a doctor, said. "It seems in poor taste."

- Banknotes, buildings, bridge -

Breaking the long-held U.S. tradition against celebrating living figures -- and particularly serving presidents -- on currency and buildings, the Trump name and image are spreading rapidly.

Officials, including US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, unveiled the new Donald J. Trump Bridge in Tennessee on Thursday.

"The Tennessee license plate used to have a sign on it, or a little motto that said, 'Follow me to Tennessee,'" Bessent said. "Now, everyone



A new welcome sign reading "Donald J. Trump International Airport" is seen at the airport's main entrance ramp in West Palm Beach, Florida, on July 9, 2026.

who follows those cars is going to go across the Donald J. Trump Bridge on the I-40." Washington already features the renamed Donald J. Trump United States Institute of Peace and giant posters with his face have been

hung from the facades of major government buildings. Trump's name was also briefly imposed on the famous Kennedy Center performing arts venue in the capital, before a judge ruled this illegal. □

Stars pay tribute to 'Total Eclipse' singer Bonnie Tyler, who has died at 75

London, United Kingdom

Tributes flooded in Thursday to Welsh singer Bonnie Tyler, best known for her powerful, haunting love song "Total Eclipse of the Heart", after she died in hospital in Portugal. She was 75.

With her distinctive husky voice, tousled mane of blonde hair and black eyeliner, Tyler was instantly recognisable as the queen of the 1980s power ballad.

Tyler's family said on Facebook they were "heartbroken to announce that Bonnie unexpectedly passed away last night in hospital in Portugal as a result of the illness that she was being treated for".

Downing Street said British Prime Minister Keir Starmer was "saddened" to hear of Tyler's death, calling her "one of Britain's greatest recording artists", whose music "continues to touch lives".

Stars from music and film also paid tribute to Tyler.

Husky-voiced British rock star Rod Stewart wrote on Instagram that he and Tyler "shared similar styles of vocalising", calling her "a good pal, a true soul stirrer".

Hollywood actress Catherine Zeta-Jones, who is also Welsh, wrote on Instagram that Tyler, who sang at her wedding, was "an extraordinary woman with vocals to match".

British pop singer Cliff Richard recalled that Tyler's "infectious zest for life entertained



Britain's Bonnie Tyler performs during the finals of the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest in Malmo, Sweden on May 18, 2013.

so many around the world", while Canadian singer Bryan Adams wrote on X that Tyler "had such a great voice" and thanked her for her "beautiful" version of a song he co-wrote.

And classical singer Katherine Jenkins hailed "a true Welsh legend whose unmistakable voice inspired generations and put Wales on the world stage with such power, passion and authenticity". Born Gaynor Hopkins in the Welsh town of Neath in 1951 where she grew up with five siblings, Tyler little imagined the success she would have after leaving school at 16. "The best thing I did was 'To-

tal Eclipse of the Heart'. How can you ever possibly imagine it would still be so big today and people who weren't even born then would be singing it at karaoke?" she told the Daily Telegraph in 2025.

She came from a humble background. Her father worked in the coal mines, while her mother was a housewife.

- Ballad queen -

Initially, Tyler worked in a grocery shop and began singing in her spare time, changing her name to Sherene Davis to avoid any confusion with another Welsh singer Mary Hopkin.

In 1975, she was spotted by talent scout Roger Bell singing in a Swansea nightclub, and was signed a few months later by RCA records, changing her name again, this time to Bonnie Tyler. Shortly afterwards she had to have surgery to remove nodules on her vocal cords, and after not resting her voice enough following the operation developed her signature sultry sound. Tyler's first major smash hit was "It's a Heartache" in 1978, and entering the 1980s she turned more towards rock music. But it was "Total Eclipse", written by American composer Jim Steinman, which rocket-

ed her to international fame. It's one of rock music's most famous ballads and in 2026 -- 43 years after it was first released -- it hit more than a billion listens on streaming website Spotify.

It has sold over six million records, and the stirring video has been viewed more than a billion times on YouTube. At the peak of her fame in 1984, Tyler released "Holding Out for a Hero" from the hit film "Footloose".

- 'Audience sings with me' -

She released 17 studio albums and was nominated for three Grammy Awards during her career.

In 2013 she carried UK hopes in the Eurovision song contest with "Believe In Me" only to finish 19th.

A fan of Tina Turner and French rocker Johnny Hallyday, Tyler was known for her down to earth nature and for keeping her Welsh accent. Since the 1970s, she and her husband, former judo athlete Robert Sullivan, divided their time between Wales and the Algarve in Portugal.

She was also awarded a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to music by Queen Elizabeth II in 2022.

"I live a very normal life and don't go around with bodyguards; I'm not Mariah Carey, darling. I'm always happy to take a selfie in front of the salad counter," she told The Times in 2025. □

Taylor Swift fans pay \$25 for garbage from outside wedding



New York City police officers stand guard outside Madison Square Garden in Manhattan, New York on July 2, 2026.

New York, United States \$25 for pieces of trash -- including cigarette butts and

an ovulation test kit -- collected near the US pop queen's wedding to NFL star Travis Kelce.

A New York artist picked up the garbage last Friday from city streets around Madison Square Garden, where the couple staged a glamorous event for hundreds of celebrity guests amid a global frenzy.

All of items, sold individually, were snatched up by Wednesday within 24 hours of sales starting: water bottle caps, ring pop candy, police caution tape, straws, utensils -- as well as a single left AirPods.

"It's getting a lot of Swifties who just want a tangential piece of the wedding," said Justin Gignac, who is selling the trash on his website New York City Garbage.

Each item -- described online as a "sculpture" -- is sealed inside a tiny plastic cube to avoid leaking or smells.

Gignac told AFP he has made \$1,250 from selling 50 items so far, and he may put more on the market.

"I try to commemorate cultural moments in New York City, and this seemed to be a big one, so just capturing a

little time capsule from that moment in time," he said.

Gignac, who sells other city trash on his website, said he tied some of the items into knots to "hammer home the wedding theme."

He pointed out the garbage was from outside the barriers that surrounded Madison Square Garden for Swift's wedding, not from inside the venue.

The lavish ceremony last week was closely watched by Swift's fans, who have followed the 14-time Grammy winner's love life largely through songs based on her relationships. □

Deep-sea mining menaces mollusks, conservationists warn

Geneva, Switzerland

Deep-sea mining threatens more than half of the mollusks reliant on hydrothermal vents on the seabed, the International Union for Conservation of Nature said Thursday.

IUCN said 62 percent of endemic hydrothermal vent mollusks -- 125 out of 201 species known worldwide -- "are at risk of extinction due to deep-sea mining for valuable minerals", in an update to its Red List of Threatened Species.

The Red List -- which assigns threat levels ranging from "least concern" to "extinct" -- includes 175,909 species, up from 172,620 in the previous edition.

It has 49,505 listed as threatened with extinction, up from 48,646 last time.

Found only at depths down to 5,000 meters below sea level, around vents spewing water that can exceed 450C, the threatened mollusks include snails, limpets, mussels, clams and chitons.

Many of them have only been discovered in the past 10 years, "and already face extinction due to human dis-



Japan's deep-sea drilling vessel Chikyu returns to Shimizu port in Shimizu, Shizuoka prefecture on February 14, 2026.

turbance of their habitat", said IUCN.

The Swiss-based organization said exploration of the seabed created sediment plumes that smothered the animals, affected their ability to absorb nutrients.

These mollusks "are one of the most highly threatened of all animal groups, at a critical moment for their future", said Julia Sigwart from

the IUCN mollusk specialist group.

She underlined that IUCN voted in 2021 for a moratorium on deep-sea mining unless the marine environment is effectively protected.

"Life on Earth has adapted to survive in the most hostile and unusual habitats, such as deep-sea mollusks that live around extremely hot vents," warned IUCN chief

Grethel Aguilar.

"Now as pressures on biodiversity mount across the planet, even the creatures with the most ingenious survival strategies are under threat."

- Desert rain frog -

The organization also shone a light on the desert rain frog, a species popular on social media, which burrows

itself into the sand.

It has been moved from the "near threatened" to "vulnerable" -- one step worse on the scale -- owing to diamond mining and energy infrastructure developments along the west coast of South Africa and Namibia. Without conservation action, the population is expected to decline by 20 percent in the next decade, it added.

Meanwhile the status of Australia's numbat -- a small marsupial also known as the banded anteater -- has improved from "endangered" to "near threatened".

There are now thought to be between 2,000 and 3,000 of the animals, up from just a few hundred in the 1970s, thanks to captive breeding and protection measures.

"Long-term, strategic and collaborative conservation effort works," insisted John Woinarski, the co-chair of IUCN's Australasian marsupial and Monotreme specialist group.

"Without it, invasive cats and foxes will continue to drive Australia's small marsupials and native rodents to extinction." □

One revolver, six bullets: Turkish president's 'unusual' gift to NATO leaders

Brussels, Belgium

What does a world leader do with a gun and six bullets? That was the conundrum NATO leaders faced after the Turkish president offered them each a revolver after the Ankara summit. Several leaders said they had only discovered the contents of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's gift package much later, or had not even seen it before it was seized by their security services.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney joked that his gift of maple syrup "kind of undermatched" Erdogan's offering.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer was the first to mention the highly unusual gift, telling journalists on the flight back from two days of talks in Ankara that he and others received a revolver engraved with their names.

Alongside the gun sitting in a red box lined in black were

six live rounds and a note exempting the weapons from export controls.

It was a surprising gift to say the least, several officials from the different alliance member states said, and gave rise to some "insane" scenes among the various delegations' security teams. "An unusual gift from President Erdogan at the NATO summit: a Magnum revolver with ammunition, engraved with my name," Hungarian Prime Minister Peter Magyar said on X.

- Headache -

Some leaders discovered their gift much later.

Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever only "learnt of the exact nature of the gift" after landing in Belgium.

"The prime minister was surprised and immediately handed it over to airport police so it could be placed in a secure safe and the matter was handled in accordance

with relevant procedures," an official told AFP Thursday. De Wever's security team also handled the revolvers given to EU chiefs based in Brussels, Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa, with all the security and protocol-related headaches such an effort brings.

Von der Leyen "expressed her thanks" to Erdogan for the gift, her spokesman said, adding it would be decommissioned and donated to a military museum.

Luxembourg Prime Minister Luc Frieden's office said the revolver would be stored with all other "diplomatic gifts", but would first be made "irreversibly unusable". The revolver presented to Polish President Karol Nawrocki also arrived safely, but with the necessary precautions and a previous incident still fresh in everyone's minds. In December 2022, Poland's police chief brought back an anti-tank grenade



This handout photo taken and obtained on July 9, 2026 from the office of the Lithuanian President shows a revolver offered by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda with the president's name engraved, including live rounds, and displayed during a press presentation in Vilnius, Lithuania.

launcher from Ukraine that he had received as a gift. The device exploded in his office, slightly injuring him and causing extensive damage to the police headquarters in Warsaw.

This time, "it is certain that no one is going to fire it," an aide to Nawrocki told a local radio station.

- Why such a gift? -

Several revolvers, including those belonging to Starmer, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten, have for now remained in the Turkish capital.

And for good reason: depending on the laws in force, transporting firearms is often far from straightforward, especially when they are fully functional. □

Sunken wrecks, hot seas threaten fishermen on Italian isle

Lampedusa, Italy

Once the beating heart of this Italian island community, fishermen on Lampedusa are under pressure on multiple fronts, from nets ripped by sunken migrant wrecks to a warming Mediterranean Sea.

The semi-arid outcrop, closer to North Africa than Italy, is a port of call for people attempting the perilous crossing to Europe, and their cap-sized or abandoned boats dot its emerald depths.

"The nets are continuously torn... there are days when you snag two, three (migrant) boats," 71-year-old fisherman Salvatore Mannino told AFP.

"We map the boats, but they move. They can snag one (fishing boat)" then later "another passes and gets caught too," he said, as he and a fellow fisherman mended a broken net while the sun beat down on the pier.

Mannino comes from generations of fishermen, but has told his children they had no future in the sector.

The island's economy is based largely on fishing and tourism, though its fishing fleet has "shrunk by 50 percent" since the early 2000s, according to Salvatore Martello, head of Lampedusa's fishing co-operative.



A fisherman stands on the deck of his boat as he arrives to unload his catch from a fishing boat returning to the port of Lampedusa, after a day at sea on July 8, 2026.

- Island's identity -

Some from the younger generations have transformed their family boats into pleasure boats for holidaymakers.

But fishing "gives Lampedusa's tourism its identity," Martello said.

Failing to support the sector will have "an automatic repercussion on tourism, because people come to eat fresh fish," he said.

Fisherman Pietro Riso's sons did follow him into fishing -- catching red mullet, cala-

mari and rose shrimps -- but just last week clashed with a migrant boat.

"It hit under the stern... and could have perforated our vessel, it could even have sunk it," the 67-year-old told AFP.

The tin or iron boats are either shipwrecked, or abandoned after the migrants on board are rescued.

Run-ins happen between seven and 10 times a year, Riso said. The latest caused up to 4,000 euros worth of damage.

It is not the only cost weigh-

ing on the sector: fuel prices -- driven up by the Iran war -- are even higher on Italy's islands than the mainland.

The fishermen accuse competitors from Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt of illegally fishing in Italian waters, and say some restaurants on the island serve cheaper frozen fish from Spain instead of the local catch.

The Lampedusa fishermen also have to go further out to catch some species, due to the warming sea.

The Mediterranean is one of the fastest-warming seas

in the world, and marine heatwaves are getting longer and more intense due to man-made climate change. That can cause stocks to decline or move elsewhere, making some traditionally-fished species harder to find.

- Extreme temperatures -

"Extreme water temperatures are pushing species past their thermal limits," Giulia Bonino, research scientist at the Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change (CMCC), told AFP.

That is "hitting Mediterranean aquaculture and fisheries hard, with real economic consequences," she said.

Heatwaves can also affect fish reproduction and growth, according to the CMCC.

Martello said the warming sea has caused a "shift in the Mediterranean's entire fish production".

And it is an effect of climate change that needs to be acknowledged on a national and European Union level, he said.

Fishermen are banned from a certain area off Lampedusa in September because the eggs laid by red mullets traditionally hatch in that period, Martello said.

"But with the warming water, the red mullets are born earlier," he said. □

Mongolian wrestlers train 'bodies, minds' for annual showdown



This photo taken on June 24, 2026 shows Mongolian wrestlers sparring as others look on at a training camp ahead of the Naadam Festival on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar.

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

The whistle blows, sending dozens of hulking wrestlers chasing a football in the Mongolian grasslands -- a World Cup twist in their grueling training for one of the country's oldest sporting

traditions. "The World Cup is happening now, so we wanted to do something creative," said four-time national champion Batsuuri "Basu" Namsrajav, who has founded his own training camp where wrestlers spend

weeks preparing for the annual Naadam competition. The brief change of pace in the otherwise demanding programme "is still an intense workout", Basu told AFP.

The cohort training at his newly built Basu Sports Complex are among more than 1,000 wrestlers from across the East Asian country hoping to emerge victorious from the two-day Naadam tournament in mid-July, known colloquially as the "Three Manly Games" -- traditional wrestling, horse racing and archery.

The wrestlers "have to prepare every part of themselves -- their bodies, their food, their minds", Basu said. Access to the camp, located on the Mongolian steppe around 100 kilome-

tres (62 miles) from the capital Ulaanbaatar, is heavily restricted, with few visitors allowed.

Training begins at dawn, followed by two sparring sessions, and a calorie-rich lunch of beef or mutton, vegetables and bowls of milk tea.

Wrestlers spend around a month living in traditional gers and wooden cabins, and training at the camp's indoor arena and gym or outdoor practice field.

As Naadam competitions take place outdoors, Basu believes training in the grasslands helps wrestlers prepare. "It used to be much simpler," said 39-year-old Basu.

"Now we have a place where athletes can train properly while still staying close to nature."

- Young champions -

Naadam is "our national Olympics", Basu said, and victory brings honour to the winner's family and province. Unlike Olympic wrestling, Mongolia's traditional style has no weight classes or time limits, and sometimes a single bout can last close to an hour. A wrestler loses only when any body part other than the soles of his feet touches the ground.

It is not uncommon for light-weight or young competitors -- such as last year's champion Batmagnai Enkhtuvshin, born in 2001 -- to defeat much larger opponents.

The training camps, where older athletes pass on techniques to younger generations, remain one of the sport's defining features. □

Planning on visiting Aruba? Make sure you have your ED card!

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to any country, it's important to make sure you have the right documents with you. For Aruba, one document that always seems to confuse people is the ED card. Scammers have taken advantage of the confusion, with dozen of fake and identical website overcharging visitors. To avoid this happening to you, here's a brief guide on how to obtain the ED card the right way: What website to use and how much it actually costs.

The Embarkation/ Disembarkation (ED) card is a pre-registration form required to enter Aruba. The ED Card has been in a requirement for visitors for decades and in 2020 it was digitalized. In 2024, the government of Aruba implemented a sustainability fee for all visitors of the island, which include a \$20 contribution for the improvement, updating

Aruba Online ED Card

The Aruban Government welcomes you and your family to Aruba.

The online Embarkation/ Disembarkation (ED) card is a pre-registration form required to enter Aruba. As per the country's immigration policy, all incoming tourists must fully complete the online ED card application. It's an essential entry requirement that you can complete quickly and easily online. Simply enter your details into the relevant fields, and upon a successful submission you'll receive an affirmation by email. A passenger that claims to be exempted from completion of the ED Card application due to citizenship, must provide basic information to confirm his status. Pursuant to his status he will receive a confirmation by email.

What you'll need:

1. A valid passport
2. Personal details
3. Contact information
4. Travel information
5. A valid credit card (Visa, Mastercard or Discover) ⓘ

What you should note:

1. The online ED card is not a visa.
2. The successful submission of your online ED card does not guarantee entry into Aruba. On arrival to Aruba, your eligibility for entry will be assessed on its own merits. It is crucial that all information you provide, or on your behalf by a designated third party, must be true and correct, as this is a key factor in your entry assessment.

START

and maintenance of the local waste water plant. First things first, make sure you have the right website. The official website for the ED card is www.edcard-aruba.aw. It is important to note that there are NO alternatives for this website; this website is the ONLY way you can obtain an official

ED card. Other website that may look similar are not official and may possibly be a scam. Be careful not to fall for the trap! Next up, make sure you have the right information with you when you apply for an ED card. You should have on hand:

1. A valid passport

2. Personal details
3. Contact information
4. Travel information
5. A valid credit card (Visa, Mastercard or Discover)

We mentioned a \$20 contribution mandatory for every visitor. Keep in mind that this is a YEARLY fee; so if you

plan on visiting Aruba more than once this calendar year, you would only have to pay the first time around.

Other important info

We should clarify that the ED card is not a substitute for a visa. Visitors who need a visa for Aruba must apply for both a visa and an online ED card. You can also start applying for the ED card 6 days before your flight.

If you extend your trip, you don't have to reapply for or edit your ED card. However, you must reapply if you missed your flight and/or your flight got canceled and your traveling to the island on another flight.

For more info, visit the official website for ED card of contact the immigration office of Aruba at (+297) 523 7404 or email them at info@dga.aw

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 Ameri-

can 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. Experience 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 be-

come 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. □



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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.hue.□

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Surf's Up: Favorite places to catch waves in Aruba



ORANJESTAD – Whether you are a salt-seasoned surfer looking for a thrill, or just looking to wet your toes in a little ocean adventure, Aruba has amazing places to learn and practice surfing! Although more known for the calmer waters of Palm Beach, Eagle Beach and Mangel Halto, Aruba also has some special places to thrill your senses. Because of strong winds and breezes, Aruba is perfect for wind and kite surfing. You will surely notice kites in the air as you drive around the wilder, rougher areas on Aruba's east side.

There are plenty of surf shop rentals to help you with your gear, and there are also a lot of tutors if you're looking to try for the first time and need a little help. These can be found around the island,

and will surely come in hand if you want to try a new experience!

With that said, here are Aruba's favorite surf spots!

Andicuri

Andicuri is recognized as the best place for body boarding. Because of the rough waves, this beach is better suited for those with more experience in surfing. However, the beach with two bluffs – one on each side – is worth a visit, if only to watch the exciting show presented by the surfers.

To go to Andicuri, you will need a 4x4 vehicle and drive from the ex-Natural Bridge Center. Alternatively, you can make it an adventure by going on a hike! The scenery is unique and beautiful on its own.

Reaching Andicuri Beach can be an adventure in itself, as it can be difficult to find and is only accessible by 4x4 vehicle or walking from the ex-Natural Bridge center, but the impressive scenery makes it all worthwhile!

Arashi

Arashi, a beach located close to the California Lighthouse, is a good spot for learning and having fun – if you're lucky! The waves at Arashi are usually calm, but with just the right weather, a swell forms attracting all the local surfers to the area.

Boca Grandi

Boca Grandi is at the most southern spot in Aruba, and is a popular spot with experienced surfers. Close to the famous Red Anchor and our beloved Sunrise City – San Nicolas, a trip to Boca Grandi can easily turn into an all-day trip to this area of the island. With a beautiful beach (although it is not allowed to swim here, because of strong currents), you can enjoy a relaxing time combing the beach for driftwood, coral, and little crabs and snails.

Hadicurari

Here is where you will find most of the action for surfers in Aruba. With a variety of surf shops and schools in this area, you will find it easy to get in on the action. Hadicurari is also the site of the Aruba Hi Winds World Challenge, which takes



place usually in June/July, and it is the largest windsurfing competition in the Caribbean!

Malmok

If you're a beginner, this is your spot. There are also various shops to rent gear and receive lessons, facilitating learning and just trying out a new experience. The beach is also popular for paddleboarding and other watersport activities. □



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The Aruban Cunukero: From past to present



(Oranjestad)—Aruba's culture consists of rich historical traditions that make up the Aruban identity and lifestyle. However, the life of the cunukero (farmer) is perhaps the most important aspect of our culture, in a sense representing to locals the true essence of the Aruban.

Historically, cunucus (farms) played a huge role in the early social and economic development of Aruba, and its relevance dates back to the early days of the colonization era. Upon being discovered by Spanish conquistadors in the late 15th century, Aruba was used primarily as a ranch, housing horses and cattle brought from Europe. During the Dutch colonization era where the West Indian Company (WIC) dominated the economic sphere on the island, using the land to set up cattle farms and ranches remained popular.

Anthropologist Sidney Mintz divided Caribbean farmers back in four categories:

- The "squatters", who were mostly comprised of illegal and poor colonists, runaway slaves and deserters who took advantage of the Spanish's weak supervision on Caribbean islands like Cuba and the DR;
- Then you have "Early Yeomen", who were legal farmers who came to the west under contract. Once their contract expired, they were given a plot of land for independent use;
- Proto-Peasants were plantation slaves who were allowed to have a small piece of land to grow food for their own consumption. This was to curb the cost of living on the plantations;
- Lastly you have the "Runaway Peasantries", usually comprised of runaway slaves who acquired

farming tools and cattle through stealing or through secret exchanges with other slaves from different plantations.

However, the Aruban cunukeros back then are hard to place, and their history may explain why.

From 1636 (beginning of Dutch colonization era) to before the oil industry in 1924, Aruba's population consisted of mostly farmers. These farmers were mostly indigenous and were characterized as peasants. They weren't allowed to participate in trading, but instead were granted a piece of land to live off of. However, in exchange for this grant, these indigenous farmers were obligated to work for the WIC, doing daily tasks such as taking care of or hunting cattle—large majority of which were destined for Curacao, clean water tanks and chop wood, among other things.

As much as these farmers were given to opportunity to live "free" with a plot of land, their exclusion from the trading and business world, as well as being deprived the chance to become real property and cattle owners, made them a unique group among Caribbean farmers at the time.

The WIC placed a lot of restrictions on these indigenous farmers—a method to safeguard their cattle deposit on the island. The indigenous farmers were mostly granted less than 7 acres of land. Those who owned bigger land were either once

affiliated with the WIC or were colonists who settled on the island to try their luck at farming. In 1767, there were about 120 houses/cunucus on the island.

These Aruban farmers were also limited to the amount of cattle they could keep. Most kept goats as cattle, as only those who were affiliated with the WIC could keep (more) sheep. Of the 76 goat herders on the island, about 45 of them had less than 30 goats, and only 7 of them had more than 60 goats.

It wasn't until the WIC was defunct in late 18th century that these farmers were able to obtain more freedom as cunukeros. After 1824, the government gave these farmers official permission to keep livestock, and the obligations once placed on them were officially discarded.

Because of the dry climate in Aruba, growing food for commercial purposes was not popular. The focus was mainly on cattle herding and taking care of livestock. However, livestock need food to survive, and when Aruba experienced its duper dry climate, many farmers would see a big loss in their livestock, and hence profit.

Although the WIC at one point did try to come up with an initiative to get more people to have land on the island, the climate never really allowed real profit from farming. Because of the climate, Aruban farmers in general could not keep large quantities of livestock. At a certain point toward the end of the 18th century, the climate got so bad that many farmers decided to leave the island for a while.

For this reason, the farming economy on the island remained small. As the years went by and people noticed that these farms could not really produce any sustainable profit, farmers kept their small piece of land just to live off of. This is why the Aruban cunukeros only played a very tiny role into the plantation economy.

In modern Aruba, cunucus and cunukeros still exist on the island, fortunately with more freedom and more opportunity to tap into the agricultural market. These farmers usually sell their produce on a smaller scale, like during farmers' market events and other types of (holiday) events. □

Source: "Arubaans Akkoord: Opstellen over Aruba van voor de komst van de olieindustrie (Aruban Accord: Essays on Aruba Before the Arrival of the Oil Industry)" by Alofs, Luc; Rutgers, Wim; Coomans, Henny E. red.



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Meet Aruba's biggest hero, Boy Ecury

(Oranjestad)—As part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and due to its strategic geolocation, Aruba was unexpectedly involved in the Second World War. As is known around the globe, this chapter in world history is one of the most tragic yet, and many soldiers and rebels have died on the front line during this time.



One of those rebels who have fought against the Nazi regime, was an Aruban named Segundo Jorge Adelberto "Boy" Ecury. Born in Aruba on April 23rd, 1922, Boy spent his childhood on the island, before being sent to The Netherlands by his father when he was 15 years old to continue his studies abroad. This was in 1937, three years before WWII broke out.

During the war, he actively participated in the rebellion in The Netherlands against the Nazi regime, but his rebellious streak and constant drive to fight for justice began even before the war broke out. Being a person of color with a Haitian heritage living in The Netherlands made him vulnerable to discrimination, and this inspired him to be an ac-

tivist, to stand up and fight against discrimination and oppression. After seeing the horrific bombings of Rotterdam firsthand, he decided to join the resistance. At the same time, he was still studying and living with family in Tilburg. It was there where he met people who printed and distributed the rebellion newspaper. This would be the first of three rebellion groups that he would join throughout his 4-year service to the resistance.

Boy's primary task as member of the group was to distract the German soldiers while others ran into hiding into alleyways. This he was able to do because of his skin color and confronting demeanor. Boy also participated in the multiple sabotaging operations against the German military oc-

cupying The Netherlands. These included bombings on German military trucks and trains. The group also helped people go into hiding, as well as opened fire against allies of the Nazi regime. In these operations, Boy really stood out for his cold bloodedness.

In 1943, he received a notice to be placed for work in Germany. This he refused, of course, and went into hiding using multiple addresses in multiple cities. Because he was a wanted man, he of course could not continue to be active as a rebel. However, stubborn and naturally rebellious as he was, he always tried to join in on the operations regardless.

In 1944, after his friend Luis de Lannoy, a fellow rebel from Curacao, was arrested and executed, he moved to Delft, where he joined his third and last group in Rotterdam. During this time, he wrote a goodbye letter for his family, possibly knowing the risks of him being active again in the big cities. Eventually, he proved himself right. On November 5th, 1944, Boy Ecury was arrested by German soldiers. He was placed in the "Oranjehotel" prison in Scheveningen, The



Hague, where he was questioned. Despite being sold out by an acquaintance, he himself never gave away the names of his comrades. Famously, he told his cell mate: "I will die with a smile on my face."

On November 6th, 1944, Ecury was executed. He was only 22 years old.

Ecury was buried with military honor. In 1949, the Aru-

ban Government erected a monumental bust of him in front of what is now the linear park trail, and in 1984 he received the Resistance Memorial Cross postmortem. Boy's life motto was this: "In my father's house, there is no place for a traitor." □

Source: "De Kolibrie op de Rots (en meer over the geschiedenis van Aruba)" by Evert Bongers.

The legend of the Kibrahacha tree

ORANJESTAD—The Kibrahacha is a famous tree known locally for its bright, yellow flowers that blooms for just three days. Scientifically known as *Tabebuia billbergii*, and in English as the Yellow Poui, this tree is native to the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao, and is considered among locals as one of the most spectacular trees on the island. But did you also know that the beautiful yellow flowers have a story behind them?

The Kibrahacha is said to have extremely hard wood—so hard that it can break an axe. In fact, that's what its name means in Papiamentu: "kibra" (break) "hacha" (axe). The flowers bloom around April and May, but this only last for about three days, as the

flowers start to fall off and the tree starts growing its green leaves. The Kibrahacha is especially particular, as it's the only one among its neighboring trees to start blooming first.

The legend of the Kibrahacha

Written by Hubert (Lio Booi)

One day Aterima, who lived west of the hill Sero Warawara, woke up one day to find her father sleeping in his hammock, suffering a bout of terrible fever. Her mother was very worried, and as was the custom in the olden days, asked Aterima to go fetch Kudaweche, who was an epistemophile, to come see his father.

Aterima wasted to time and went to go fetch Kudaweche. Upon telling Kudaweche that her father was sick,

he immediately accompanied Aretima back to her hut, where he encountered her father in a bad state. Not willing to waste any time, he told Aretima that the only thing that can cure her father is a homemade potion made out of the Kibrahacha flower. At the time the Kibrahacha was not yet in her blooming season, but the stubborn Kudaweche was determined to bring back Aretima's father back to health, and so off they went to the nearest Kibrahacha tree.

When they arrived at the tree, they saw that it was covered head to toe in thorns, with only a few closed flowers at the very top. Kudaweche, experienced veteran in all things Aruban flora and fauna, told Aterima to start pluck-

ing the thorns of the tree to climb to the top where the flowers are. Aretima, just as determined to save her father, didn't hesitate to start.

To her surprise, every time she plucked a thorn of the tree, a bright, yellow flower bloomed in its place. The thorns were hard to pluck out, but Aretima continued plucking with enthusiasm and wonder at the unfolding sight before her. Not too long after she was able to fill her entire satchel with the yellow flowers.

Kudaweche, satisfied to see Aretima so happy and encouraged to help her father, took her back to her hut.

Upon arriving back at the hut, Aterima's mother quickly made a tea out of the flowers and gave it to



her sick husband. Miraculously, after just one sip of the tea, the father's fever left his body immediately, and he opened eyes and sprung up feeling new.

The next morning, they all visited the same Kibrahacha tree that saved the life of Aterima's father and they saw another miracle. The tree was covered again in the same bright, yellow flowers, with not a thorn in sight. And as the legend goes, from that day on, the Kibrahacha tree no longer produced any more thorns. □

CROSSWORD

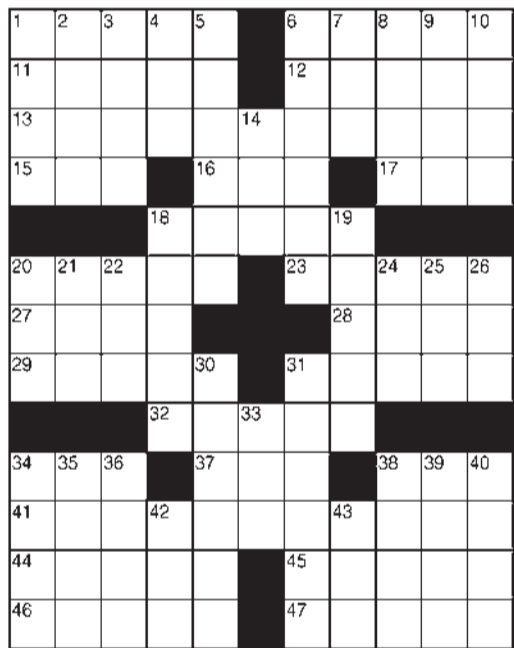
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Planet's path
- 6 Trivial
- 11 One of the strings
- 12 Put on a pedestal
- 13 Ibsen play
- 15 Rent out
- 16 Rap's — Nas X
- 17 Silent assent
- 18 Apple centers
- 20 Smallest mammal
- 23 African charger
- 27 Bucket
- 28 Persia, today
- 29 Really stoked
- 31 Hang loosely
- 32 Sired
- 34 Cry loudly
- 37 "The Matrix" hero
- 38 Carnival city
- 41 Ibsen play
- 44 Central
- 45 Shady spot
- 46 Cowboy contest
- 47 African scavenger

DOWN

- 1 Track shape
- 2 Take the bus
- 3 Wader, e.g.
- 4 Ailing
- 5 Animal suet
- 6 Composer Gustav
- 7 Wedding words
- 8 Person, place, or thing
- 9 Words of approximation
- 10 Oboe part
- 14 Knight's address
- 18 Star
- 19 Polo, for one
- 20 Relaxing resort
- 21 Deli meat
- 22 Tear
- 24 S&L offering
- 25 Snooze
- 26 Count start
- 30 "Raging Bull" star
- 31 "Camp-town Races" snippet
- 33 Hair goo
- 34 Blend
- 35 Cry of distress
- 36 Flex
- 38 Bumpkin
- 39 File stand-in
- 40 Gumbo vegetable
- 42 Tiny
- 43 Use a towel



3-14

A XYDLBAAXR
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.

3-14

CRYPTOQUOTE

FV CYXV SVPITGV WH'G HQV

YBCN HMTV IZXVBHTMV.

— BWJJW AWYXIBBW

Cryptoquote: AMATEURS SIT AND WAIT FOR INSPIRATION; THE REST OF US JUST GET UP AND GO TO WORK. — STEPHEN KING

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.

Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are



open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

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 occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

JULY CRUISE SHIP SCHEDULE

07 <small>TUE</small>	CARNIVAL HORIZON Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
08 <small>WED</small>	FREEWINDS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: Berth: E
12 <small>SUN</small>	FREEWINDS Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E
14 <small>TUE</small>	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: B ADVENTURE OF THE SEAS Arrival: 11:30 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C CARNIVAL VISTA Arrival: 13:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: I
15 <small>WED</small>	ALLURE OF THE SEAS Arrival: 7:00 Departure: 16:00 Berth: I FREEWINDS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: Berth: E
19 <small>SUN</small>	FREEWINDS Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E
21 <small>TUE</small>	CARNIVAL HORIZON Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C

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

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

Difficulty: ★★★★★

7/10

Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★★★

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Two thirds of EU faced harmful ozone levels during heatwave: report



A migrant family sit next to their belongings at a campsite located beneath Line 2 of the elevated metro at La Chapelle station in Paris on July 9, 2026.

Paris, France

Two thirds of the European Union's population may have been exposed to harmful levels of ozone pollution during last month's record-breaking heatwave, a report exclusively shared with AFP warned Thursday.

Nearly 300 million people, including 100 million children and elderly people, faced higher-than-recommended levels of the toxic pollutant during the punishing heat in late June, according to the report from the NGO Global Witness.

The scale of this "invisible threat" highlights how "people are being forced to live through very dangerous conditions as a result of our dependence on fossil fuels," the organisation's senior campaigner Flossie Boyd told AFP.

Ground-level ozone is different from the ozone layer in the atmosphere, which protects Earth from the Sun's radiation -- and is slowly recovering from damage made by refrigerants called CFCs. On the ground, ozone is the main ingredient in smog and can cause breathing problems, damage lung tissue, trigger asthma attacks and lead to other health issues. More than 63,000 deaths as well as billions of euros in crop damage were attributed to ozone pollution in 2023 alone, according to the European Environment Agency.

At ground level ozone is created by chemical reactions triggered by high temperatures and strong sunlight during heatwaves.

The new report was pub-

lished just hours after the EU's climate monitor Copernicus announced last month was Western Europe's hottest June on record.

- 'Worrying' -

The report combined data from 162 air quality monitoring stations across Europe, atmosphere modelling and census information to estimate continent-wide ozone levels from June 21 to 28. It found that nearly 298 million people across the continent were exposed to levels above the EU's recommended maximum daily eight-hour average of 120 micrograms of ozone per cubic metre.

Around 87 percent of the EU's 450 million people were estimated to have faced levels exceeding the World Health Organization's lower guideline of 100 micrograms per cubic metre. And 72 million people faced the "most dangerous threshold" of 150 micrograms per cubic metre, the report added.

Two thirds of the monitoring stations gave readings that were in the top percent of all June days dating back to 2013, the report said.

The highest was 233.7 micrograms per cubic metre in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia on June 27. Ground-level ozone is created by chemical reactions that involve nitrogen oxides, commonly from traffic, as well as organic compounds largely from human-driven methane emissions.

If these chemicals are not emitted in the first place, then ground-level ozone

does not form, explained Laurence Rouil, director of the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS), whose modelling data was used in the report.

Compared to a particularly deadly heatwave that struck Europe in 2003, this latest episode is "really remarkable and worrying" because it came so early in the summer, Rouil told AFP.

"International collaboration is essential to tackle the ozone issue," she added.

- 'Making our cities dangerous' -

The EU has reduced nitrogen dioxide levels in recent decades.

However methane accounts for a third of ground-level ozone formation, the report said, adding that the EU has no binding targets to reduce methane emissions from agriculture.

Boyd of Global Witness called for immediate action to "stop these initial emissions driving up dangerous temperatures and driving the ozone and other forms of pollutants that are making our cities and beyond dangerous places to live."

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U.S. crackdown on top AI fuels open-source surge

New York, United States

The U.S. government's shock moves to restrict access to top artificial intelligence systems from Anthropic and OpenAI have sparked growing interest in open-source models -- especially ones from China.

The de facto bans from an anti-regulation White House blindsided the tech world, which had grown accustomed to AI labs releasing ever more powerful models with nary a worry of government intervention.

The episode has thrust a long-simmering debate to the fore: open versus closed AI.

Most of the best-known AI models -- like OpenAI's ChatGPT or Anthropic's Claude -- are "closed," meaning the company keeps the underlying code and data locked away.

Users can access the AI via an app or website, mainly through a subscription, but the company controls who gets in and can shut down access at any time.

"Open-source" or "open-

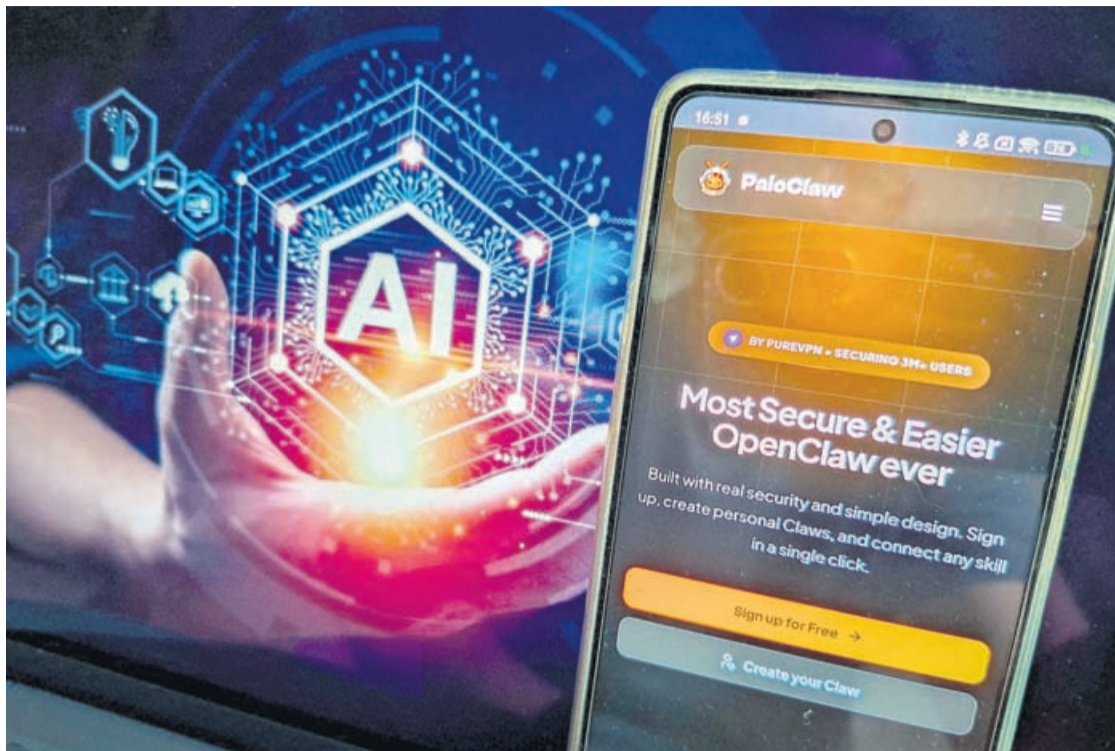


Illustration of OpenClaw, June 19, 2026. OpenClaw is an open-source, distributed, agentic AI autonomous artificial intelligence, published on the GitHub platform in November 2025.

weight" models work differently: the developers release the model's core files for anyone to download, modify and run on their own computers. Once released, no one -- not the company, not a government -- can take them back.

In early June, the Trump administration ordered Anthropic to block non-Americans from using its most powerful -- and closed -- models, Mythos 5 and Fable 5.

Faced with the complexity of screening users, the startup simply pulled the models offline entirely.

Shortly after, OpenAI agreed to let the government approve every customer for its newest model, GPT-5.6.

"If everything you need to do has to be on a specific frontier model, that makes whatever you're building a whole lot less reliable" when it is suddenly unavailable, said Oren Michels, co-founder and CEO of Barndoor AI. Haitham Mengad, co-founder of Stems Labs, a startup focused on AI-powered music creation, felt the disruption firsthand.

"Fable has been a game-changing model for me.

Honestly, when they took it off, it was the first time that I realized... it's almost like a drug," he recalled.

The Mythos episode "was a powerful moment" for seeing open source as an alternative, Mengad said.

- 'Being flexible' -

Open models were already gaining fans because using closed AI keeps getting more expensive.

Around the same time, China's Zhipu AI (also known as Z.ai) released GLM-5.2, an open model that performed nearly as well as top offerings

from Anthropic and OpenAI on several benchmarks.

"GLM-5.2 is free to download, fine-tune, and run on an enterprise's own servers, putting pricing pressure on frontier labs at the same time that access looks shaky," AI analyst Andrew Curran noted.

On OpenRouter, a platform that routes requests across different AI models, Google, Anthropic and OpenAI's combined share of usage dropped from 55 percent to 33 percent between January and June.

China's open DeepSeek now leads by a clear margin.

"You want to be as flexible as you can be. Maybe a year and a half ago some large company might say we bought Anthropic or we bought OpenAI, and now no one, no one buys only one," said Michels.

Among Western companies, France's Mistral stands largely alone in championing open models. U.S. tech giant Meta, once a vocal open-source advocate, has stepped back from that.

Meanwhile, early suspicions about Chinese AI models as a security threat are fading, at least somewhat.

"I don't think there's any risk, to be honest," said Mengad. The fears are more "psychological, emotional than rational." □

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Microsoft emissions surge 27% as AI buildout crimps climate goals

Washington, United States

Microsoft's greenhouse gas emissions jumped 27 percent in its latest fiscal year, the tech giant disclosed Thursday, adding to a wave of worsening environmental reports from an industry racing to build AI infrastructure.

Total emissions reached 21.1 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (mtCO2e) in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, up from 16.7 million the prior year, according to the company's 2026 Environmental Data Fact Sheet.

The disclosure follows similar reports from Google and Amazon last week showing emissions surging 18 percent and 16 percent respectively,

as all three companies acknowledged that AI infrastructure expansion is outpacing their decarbonization efforts.

Like its rivals, Microsoft now pollutes more for every dollar it generates in revenue. Its emissions intensity rose to 75.0 mtCO2e per million dollars of revenue from 68.1 the prior year -- the first increase in at least six years -- even as revenue grew 15 percent to \$281.7 billion.

The spike was driven in large part by a tenfold surge in Scope 2 market-based emissions -- those tied to purchased electricity -- which ballooned from 259,090 mtCO2e to 2.7 million mtCO2e.

Microsoft attributed the jump partly to its decision in February 2025 to stop purchasing "spot" energy attribute certificates and carbon removal credits, instruments that had previously been used to offset emissions in the company's accounting. The company said the policy shift reflected a "commitment to high-integrity climate action," acknowledging it would "temporarily move us out of a carbon-neutral position."

Water consumption climbed 22 percent to 8,170 megaliters, with half of all water withdrawals coming from areas classified as having high or extremely high water stress.

The reports from Microsoft, Google and Amazon underscore warnings from the United Nations, which found earlier this month that data centers worldwide use so much energy that only 10 countries each consume more.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launched an AI Environmental Transparency Initiative during London Climate Week on June 23 and urged every major AI company to commit to powering all data centers with renewable energy by 2030.

"If AI is to help build a better future, it must be honest about what it costs us now," Guterres said. □

Pogacar reclaims Tour de France yellow jersey with stage six win

Gavarnie-Gèdre, France

Reigning champion Tadej Pogacar stamped his authority on the Tour de France on Thursday, winning the mountainous sixth stage and reclaiming the race leader's yellow jersey.

Pogacar now leads by 2min 42sec from his main rival Jonas Vingegaard, who finished second on the 186km Pyrenean stage from Pau to Gavarnie-Gedre to move up to second overall.

"Today I woke up at seven in the morning already and my mind was going crazy so I was really really excited for today," said Pogacar, who broke the record for the fastest time up the Tourmalet on the way to his 23rd Tour stage victory.

"All the guys (his team-mates) were really hyped so I knew it would be a good day.

"We just committed, we were going like nothing to lose. If we explode, they explode but in the end we succeeded and I'm super proud."

Pogacar's team-mate Isaac Del Toro beat Remco Evenepoel in the sprint for third to leapfrog the Olympic champion in the standings for third overall at 3:27.

Norwegian Torstein Traeen had started the day in yellow but he lost contact with the lead group before the halfway point of the punishing Tourmalet climb with around 50 kilometres still to



UAE Team Emirates - XRG's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar cycles to the finish line to win the 6th stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 186 km between Pau and Gavarnie-Gèdre in the French Pyrenees, on July 9, 2026.

ride, and from then on it was clear that his grip on the jersey was gone.

To make matters worse he crashed badly on the descent -- his second spill in as many days -- and finished half an hour down.

Pogacar's UAE Emirates-XRG team ramped up the pace on the two Pyrenean behemoths, the Col d'Aspin and Col du Tourmalet, on another scorching day in southwestern France where temperatures again hit 40C.

The world champion attacked about 4km from the summit of the Tourmalet and he quickly gapped his rivals.

At the summit, Pogacar led Vingegaard by 30 seconds with Paul Seixas, Florian Lipowitz and Del Toro another minute behind.

Other contenders Evenepoel and Juan Ayuso were in a small group a further 20sec back.

- 'Fight not over' -

On the descent and then the final long but gentle climb to the finish, Pogacar gradually extended his lead, all but suffocating any hope of his rivals challenging him for the overall victory this year.

Vingegaard battled to limit his losses while behind him

the two chasing groups merged but failed to cooperate effectively.

"It was a very tough day, not the day I wanted obviously, but that's how it is sometimes," said Vingegaard.

"They put a big attack in the Tourmalet and I couldn't follow, I had to set my own pace.

"Over the top I wasn't that far but a downhill like this isn't really suited for me."

But Vingegaard, a two-time Tour winner, insisted he had not lost hope.

"I still believe in myself. My legs will get better throughout the race, the fight is not

over." After a rapid start and a relentless battle to make it into the day's breakaway, Australian Ben O'Connor got away on his own with a little more than 100km to ride as French President Emmanuel Macron watched on from one of the official cars following the race.

But his lone foray did not last long before UAE reeled him in. On the Col d'Aspin, the second-most used climb at the Tour, their pace proved too much for Frenchman Alex Baudin, who started the day in the King of the Mountains jersey -- it would finish the day on Pogacar's shoulders.

Then American Sean Quinn and Czech Mathias Vacek, who began the day second and third in the standings, were also dropped, but Traeen hung in for the time being.

The 17km-long and steeper Tourmalet, the most used climb in the Tour which takes riders to more than 2,100 metres above sea level, Traeen was the next lose touch.

It was the first of the Tour's toughest hors-category climbs and Pogacar's team was doing what they do best: driving hard and whittling down the number of riders able to keep up.

It was only a matter of time before Pogacar attacked, and when he did, it was devastating. □



Sweden's Armand Duplantis competes in the men's pole vault event during the Shanghai/Keqiao Diamond League athletics meeting in Keqiao, Shaoxing in China's eastern Zhejiang province on May 16, 2026.

Monaco, Principality of Monaco

Serial world record setter Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis has spent countless hours battling away questions about how he stays motivated in

the men's pole vault.

The US-born Swede set his 15th pole vault world record in March, clearing 6.31m in Sweden, and is one of the star attractions in whatever meeting he appears.

'I'm ready to roll' - hungry Duplantis still motivated

The two-time Olympic champion and triple world gold medallist will compete in Monaco's Diamond League on Friday on the back of victory with 6.13m in Paris and a rare defeat on home cinder in Stockholm.

Since first breaking the world record in Torun six years ago, Duplantis has single-handedly raised the bar, a demonstration of a stunning consistency that has seen him clear the 6.00m barrier for nine straight seasons.

"Time has already gone really, really quickly," Duplantis, who made his Diamond League debut in 2017, said Thursday.

"I've actually been jumping for a long time especially at this level. It's pretty hard to comprehend."

- Like the grind -

While courtesy and politeness are often rolled by the 26-year-old out in answer to questions about whether he still had the desire to compete in one of the most technically demanding events of track and field, Duplantis did not mince his words in Monaco.

"As long as I like it and as long as I like the grind of everything, then I imagine that I'll continue to compete to jump.

"As far as right now I feel like there's a lot of hunger and motivation still in the tank, so I think I'm going to be going for a while.

- New home turf -

The men's pole vault was not initially on the programme in Monaco, the 10th of the 15-leg Diamond League circuit. But Duplantis, as a new resident of the Principality, got down on bended knee with the organisers to include his event. "It's going to be my first time jumping here as a resident, so home turf," he said. "I really had to push hard, to fight hard for us to be added as an extra event. □



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Czech mates Muchova and Noskova to clash in Wimbledon final



Czech Republic's Linda Noskova returns to Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk during their women's singles semi-final tennis match on the eleventh day of the 2026 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, on July 9, 2026.

London, United Kingdom
Karolina Muchova and Linda Noskova will put their friendship on hold when they fight for the Wimbledon title on Saturday after the Czech pair took contrasting paths to their first All England Club final. Muchova saved a match point in a pulsating 6-2, 1-6, 7-6 (12/10) semi-final win

against two-time Grand Slam champion Coco Gauff that lasted over two hours in sweltering 33C heat on Thursday. Just hours later, Noskova followed Muchova onto Centre Court to dispatch Ukrainian 12th seed Marta Kostyuk with a dominant 6-4, 6-4 victory that took just 79 minutes.

It was a remarkable day for two players who have grown close despite being at far different stages of their careers. Muchova and Noskova have been friends for several years, bonding off the court and playing doubles together at the 2024 Paris Olympics. "Karolina is such a great fighter, such an incredible player, but mainly she is such a great person. I'm glad I can play my first final against her," Noskova said. Muchova made her WTA main draw debut nine years ago and has been on the cusp of making her breakthrough at the Grand Slams several times. The 29-year-old was beaten in three sets by Iga Swiatek in her only previous major final at the 2023 French Open. She also lost in the Australian Open semi-finals in 2021 and the last four at the US Open in 2023 and 2024. Muchova, who had lost in the first round on her previous four appearances at

Wimbledon, is at last unimpeded after suffering a multitude of injuries in recent years. In 2022, doctors told Muchova that it would be a good idea for her to quit tennis altogether, while in 2023 and 2024 right wrist surgery sidelined her for 10 months. Muchova takes "pills, sprays, eyedrops" to manage a grass allergy, but she is no longer adverse to playing on the lawns of the All England Club. "It's a very special moment. It's a great achievement," Muchova said. "This is one of the biggest tournaments that we have with all the history, so many legends were playing here, as well as just get to play on the Centre Court, it was so nice."
- 'Gave me the belief' -
In contrast to Muchova's litany of near-misses, Noskova is enjoying a meteoric rise. The 21-year-old only made her Wimbledon debut in

2022 and now she is on the brink of a maiden Grand Slam title. The youngest Wimbledon semi-finalist since Jelena Ostapenko in 2018, Noskova may not be a star just yet, but she has won more matches on grass than any other player on the WTA Tour in the past two years. In the lead up to Wimbledon, she won the Berlin Open for her first grass-court title. "When I play my best I know I can play with the best players in the world and have a great result, which is a final in a Grand Slam I guess!" she said. The Czech duo's run to the final has extended their country's rich history at Wimbledon despite a population of just 11 million. For the third time in the last four years, a Czech woman will hold aloft the Venus Rosewater Dish awarded to the Wimbledon winner after Barbora Krejckova in 2024 and Marketa Vondrousova in 2023. □