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A doctor provides care to a patient with Ebola virus disease at the Rwampara Ebola Treatment Centre (ETC) in Bunia, Ituri, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo on July 13, 2026.

U.S. to further restrict travel from DR Congo over Ebola

Washington, United States

The United States said Wednesday that American citizens who have traveled to the Democratic Republic of Congo could be prevented from boarding return flights, an effort to prevent Ebola's spread.

The US health agency said that it would conduct screenings that could result in passengers being restricted from boarding commercial flights to the states, until the individual has spent 21 days outside of the central African country experiencing a deadly outbreak of the virus.

"To reduce the risk of Ebola importation into the United States, CDC, under Title 42, and the Department of Homeland Security, under Title 49, are currently working together on a DO NOT BOARD process with regard to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)," the US Centers for Disease and Control said in a statement. "American citizens who are departing from the DRC may be subject to a DO NOT BOARD order. Americans are able to return to the United States 21 days after leaving the DRC."

The Department of Homeland Security posted the same statement on their X account.

Queried by AFP, the CDC clarified that it was "conducting public health screenings" of citizens departing "to assess whether a 'Do Not Board' request should be made to DHS for a particular passenger."

The statement followed U.S. media reports that the restriction was in effect as of Monday. Non-U.S. citizens who had been in the central African country were already prevented from traveling to the United States.

More than 2,000 Ebola cases, including 754 deaths, have been recorded in DRC, where the World Health Organization warns the outbreak may be two to four times larger than official figures suggest.

The outbreak has spread to five DRC provinces, according to the latest figures released by Congolese health authorities Wednesday.

There is currently no approved vaccine or treatment for the Bundibugyo strain behind this outbreak, but the first clinical trial of an antiviral drug began Tuesday, the WHO said. □

Top U.S. science body readies climate report as Republicans push back



Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) speaks at a press conference with other members of Senate Republican leadership following a policy luncheon at the U.S. Capitol in Washington DC, United States on July 15, 2026.

Washington, United States

The United States' leading scientific body is set Thursday to launch a major report on the link between climate change and extreme weather, a growing research field now underpinning lawsuits seeking billions in damages from the fossil fuel industry. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), an independent body chartered in 1863 under president Abraham Lincoln, will publish "Attribution of Extreme Weather and Climate Events and Their Impacts," its first update on

the topic since 2016.

Ahead of its publication, Republican lawmakers have sought to cast doubt on the authors' work -- sending, for example, a letter in April to the president of NASEM alleging bias and demanding details on the authors' professional ties.

Separately, Senator Ted Cruz and others have introduced the "Stop Climate Shake-downs Act," a bill that would block climate damage lawsuits from proceeding in court, in a move critics call a de facto immunity shield for

fossil fuel companies.

Dozens of such lawsuits are working their way through courts across the country. In one example, Multnomah County in Oregon is suing fossil fuel giants including BP, Chevron and ExxonMobil for more than \$51 billion for pollution that fueled a deadly 2021 heat dome in the Pacific Northwest during which hundreds died.

Attribution science seeks to untangle how much human-caused climate change shaped a specific heat wave, storm or flood, and its findings now shape litigation and policy.

The field first emerged in the 1990s and gained credibility as the U.N.'s climate panel incorporated the work into its assessments. It is now more visible than ever thanks to the rise of rapid analysis studies that can detect the signature of global warming on disasters within days, rather than years. The non-profit Union of Concerned Scientists says it expects a coordinated campaign to target both the report and its individual authors. □

U.S. to require testosterone testing for troops over 30



Secretary of War Pete Hegseth speaks at the Pennsylvania Defense and Innovation Summit at U.S. Army War College on July 15, 2026 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Washington, United States

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced Wednesday that military personnel age 30 and older will undergo testing for testosterone deficiency as part of annual health screenings. "It's well-established science

that as we age, testosterone levels often naturally drop," Hegseth said in a video posted on X along with the text: "The High-T Department of War."

"It's not about artificial enhancement; it's about re-

storing and optimizing your natural capabilities, protecting your longevity, and ensuring you have the biological foundation required to sustain the fight," he said. It will be up to troops whether they receive treatment if it is recommended, Hegseth said, also noting that those who are under 30 may be tested if they choose to do so.

The Pentagon chief used the gender-neutral terms "warfighters" and "warriors" in his remarks and did not specify whether the testing requirement and treatment option is for women -- whose testosterone levels also decline as they age -- as well as men.

Asked to clarify, the Pentagon said: "We have nothing to provide beyond the secretary's video at this time." □

Trump attorney general pick grilled by Democrats on Senate panel

Washington, United States

President Donald Trump's pick to be the next U.S. attorney general his former defense lawyer Todd Blanche came in for tough questioning from Democrats at a contentious Senate confirmation hearing on Wednesday.

"In less than 18 months at the Department of Justice you've shown you're still President Trump's personal attorney," Senator Dick Durbin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said in his opening remarks at the nearly five-hour session.

"This nation deserves an attorney general who loves the Constitution more than any single president," Durbin said. "An attorney general focused on keeping America safe and combating corruption, not satisfying the president's personal grievances."

Blanche, who has been acting attorney general since Pam Bondi was fired in April, defended his record, although he mispoke when asked if he and Trump were "friends." "I'm his lawyer," Blanche replied, before correcting himself and saying "was his lawyer."

Democratic senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Chris Coons took aim at Blanche



Acting U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche testifies during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on his nomination to be Attorney General, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on July 15, 2026.

over the firing of hundreds of career Department of Justice and FBI employees seen as insufficiently loyal to the Republican president.

"You've cleaned house of every attorney who worked on a case related to Trump," Whitehouse said. Coons said Blanche has been "prosecuting the president's political enemies and firing rank-and-file prosecutors and FBI agents because of the cases they were assigned to."

Blanche pushed back, call-

ing Whitehouse's questions "obnoxious" and accusing him of lying about his tenure at the department.

A former federal prosecutor himself, Blanche has been closely tied to what Democrats have dubbed a "retribution" campaign by the president against his perceived political enemies.

Former FBI director James Comey, an outspoken Trump critic, is among those who have been targeted under Blanche. Comey was indicted in April for allegedly threatening Trump's life in

an Instagram post.

Blanche was also grilled about a \$1.8 billion "anti-weaponization fund" to compensate Trump's political allies that Democrats have denounced as a "slush fund."

He reiterated previous statements that the fund was "dead."

But he defended a deal with the Internal Revenue Service that shields Trump and his sons from audits of their past tax returns. A federal judge on Monday voided the settlement.

- 'Phenomenal job' -

Blanche has also come in for criticism from victims of Jeffrey Epstein over his handling of the release of investigative files about the convicted sex offender, a one-time close friend of Trump.

He said charges would be brought against anyone associated with Epstein if merited.

"If we learn today, if we learn next week, if we learn next month that there's an individual that we can investigate, indict, and prosecute out of the Epstein files, you better believe it, we will," Blanche said.

Several women who were victims of Epstein who died in prison in 2019 while awaiting trial for sex trafficking were in the public gallery for Blanche's Senate appearance.

Trump, in a Truth Social post on Tuesday, defended Blanche, saying he had done a "phenomenal job" as acting attorney general. He urged "every Republican senator" to vote for him.

A sole Republican "no" vote on the panel could be enough to torpedo the 51-year-old Blanche's appointment to be the chief law enforcement officer of the United States. □

Biden announces memoir, says cancer treatment 'going really well'

Washington, United States

Former U.S. president Joe Biden on Wednesday announced the forthcoming publication of a memoir on his time in the White House, and said that his cancer treatment was going "really well."

In May 2025, just four months after he left office as the oldest sitting president, Biden revealed that he had been diagnosed with an aggressive form of prostate cancer that had spread to his bones.

He subsequently began radiation therapy.

"Since I left the presidency, I've had a lot of people ask me, 'Joe, what have you been doing?'" the 83-year-old said in a video on his X account.

"I've been spending a lot of time with my family. I'm dealing with a cancer diagnosis, and I've been getting treatment, and it's been going really well," he said, thanking his well-wishers.

He said his upcoming presidential memoir, "Promise Me, America," would be about the "challenges we faced as a nation, about the decisions I made, and why I made them."

He listed several key moments that marked his 2021-2025 presidency, including the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of Donald Trump, the war in Ukraine and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

It will also cover "why I chose to run for reelection, and why I chose to step aside," Biden said.

Despite persistent questions about his health as the oldest-ever US president, Biden, then aged 81, decided to run for a second term in 2024.

Following a disastrous debate performance against Trump in June 2024 and a wave of pressure from Democrats, Biden announced his withdrawal from the race.

Trump went on to beat Biden's replacement candidate -- then-vice president Kamala Harris.

Trump, who turned 80 in June, will surpass Biden's age-record by the time he leaves office in January

2029.

With a publication date of November 17, 2026, Biden's memoir will be released just a few weeks after the critical midterm elections.

Harris published her own memoir last year. Titled "107 Days," it covers her abbreviated campaign against Trump after Biden dropped out. □



Former U.S. president Joe Biden speaks during the opening of the Barack Obama Presidential Center in Chicago, Illinois, on June 18, 2026.

Table for one: how Japan's 'Solitary Gourmet' became a TV hit

Yokoshiba, Japan

A lanky businessman ventures into a hole-in-the-wall restaurant and savours his meal alone.

It's a mundane premise for a TV show, yet Japan's "The Solitary Gourmet" draws a cult-like following around Asia, captivating millions of viewers with its simplicity, nostalgia and deeply quirky Japanese feel.

Combining culinary discovery with the showcase of local heritage, the show centres on fictional entrepreneur Goro Inogashira, who drives around in his Mini, using brief business meetings as a pretext for his gastro-nomic wanderings.

On a shoot for an episode of the latest season, which AFP visited, actor Yutaka Matsushige studies the menu at a tuna restaurant where the camera crew has set up, asks the owner for her recommendations, then suggests a rewrite of the script.

"The atmosphere of a restaurant, the welcome from the owners... all of that creates a story that Goro immerses himself in, and you immediately feel the life experience and history of the person behind the stove," Matsushige told AFP.

"When we talk with them, they sometimes suggest dishes that weren't planned, and we add them in during the shoot," he said.

The 63-year-old actor has been playing Inogashira,



Japanese actor Yutaka Matsushige performs a dining scene during the filming of an episode of the TV drama series "Solitary Gourmet" at a tuna restaurant in Yokoshibahikari, Chiba prefecture on May 19, 2026.

invariably dressed in a suit and tie, on screen since 2012.

The character is also the star of the eponymous manga by Jiro Taniguchi and Masayuki Kusumi on which the show is based.

- Nostalgia in a bowl of soup -

That original work "is less a story in the traditional sense than wanderings through unfamiliar regions where you simply stop to eat", Matsushige said.

"I wanted viewers to almost feel like they were watching a documentary," explained the actor, who over the course of his career has worked with a

clutch of prominent Japanese filmmakers such as Takashi Miike, Kiyoshi Kurosawa and Takeshi Kitano.

During the show, Goro's internal musings about other diners at the restaurant as he nods approvingly at the food, peppered with close-ups of the dish, make for a distinctly Japanese experience.

Broadcast late at night in Japan, the series had at first very modest ratings before gradually finding its audience, including in Taiwan and South Korea, where some episodes were filmed. A Mandarin remake shot in Taiwan was also released.

Despite the success of the manga in Europe, the series is only available on YouTube.

Former South Korean president Yoon Suk Yeol, sentenced in February to life in prison for insurrection, declared in 2023 that he was a devoted fan.

For Matsushige, this success stems from the work's uniqueness.

"Nowadays, people expect TV series to be easy to follow and spectacular," he said.

"The expression of subtle nuances, like the nostalgia you feel while drinking a bowl of soup, is being lost." With this show, "we wanted everyone to be able to

have their own interpretation... I'd like the series to evoke abroad a sensibility closer to Yasujiro Ozu's films", which capture the subtle nuances of everyday life, than to the more grand and spectacular films of Akira Kurosawa.

A film adaptation, written and directed by Matsu-shige and partially shot in France, was released in Japan last year.

- Lifetime of experience -

The series also aims to support the family-run restaurants that host the shoots, which are never too chic or trendy, so as not to clash with Goro's character, noted producer Shiori Kojima. But often the eateries brought into the spotlight subsequently see long lines forming at their doors.

Kenji Kamagata, 71, who has run his tuna restaurant for nearly three decades, admits he had previously refused any television appearance for that reason, changing his mind only because he is a "huge fan" of Matsushige.

The actor says he takes his family to dine in the restaurants where he has filmed, but always before the episode airs.

"Many traditional restaurants are gradually being replaced by chains," but those featured in the series "are often run by elderly people who are keeping their know-how alive," said Matsushige. □

Writers union sues to block U.S. Paramount deal



CEO of Paramount Skydance David Ellison attends the premiere of Paramount Pictures' "Billie Eilish - Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour" at Village Theatre in Westwood, California on May 6, 2026.

Los Angeles, United States

The Writers Guild of America (WGA) filed a lawsuit Tues-

day to block Paramount Skydance's proposed takeover of Hollywood studio

Warner Bros. Discovery, arguing the \$110 billion acquisition would violate federal antitrust law and harm writers.

This latest hurdle comes a day after California and 11 other states launched separate suits to block the merger.

With Tuesday's lawsuit, one of Hollywood's powerful labor unions hopes to undo the US Department of Justice's approval.

Many fear the merger will result in massive job cuts in an industry that has been under siege from consolidations and layoffs.

"The proposed Paramount-

Warner Bros. merger threatens the economic and creative health of the American entertainment industry," the WGA complaint said, adding the merger "would eliminate competition for buying film and television writing, resulting in suppressed compensation, worse deal terms, and reduced programming volume and diversity."

The owners of Paramount Skydance, the Ellison family, are close to US President Donald Trump and the deal would give them control of CBS News and CNN, along with film studios Paramount

Pictures and Warner Bros., and streaming platforms Paramount+ and HBO Max. "With fewer competitors, the merged Paramount-Warner Bros. entity would have both the incentive and the ability to lower costs by suppressing writers' wages and reducing output. Writers will be paid less and have fewer employment opportunities," the Writers Guild said in its complaint.

Paramount engaged in a bidding war against Netflix to land Warner Bros., and argues the deal will create a strong rival to Netflix, Amazon and Apple. □

Crowds cross Gibraltar-Spain frontier as border controls vanish

Gibraltar, United Kingdom

A steady stream of pedestrians and vehicles crossed the border between Spain and Gibraltar on Wednesday as an agreement allowing free movement across the frontier came into force.

Gibraltar Chief Minister Fabian Picardo and three former chief ministers removed the final section of the frontier fence shortly before midnight in a symbolic gesture marking the end of border controls between the tiny British territory and Spain.

Soon after, crowds crossed freely between Spain's La Linea de la Concepcion and Gibraltar in both directions. Many people held up their phones to record the moment.

The flow eventually waned but picked up again during the morning rush hour on Wednesday as workers crossed over from the Spanish side.

"I woke up this morning and I didn't have to carry my ID anymore," Maria Je-



Workers dismantle the border fence between Spain and the British overseas territory of Gibraltar at the border crossing in La Linea de la Concepcion, southern Spain, on July 15, 2026.

sus Walda, a 34-year-old civil engineer, told AFP as she headed into Gibraltar. "That is the change in principle. Now we'll see how it evolves."

Gibraltar is home to only about 40,000 people but relies on some 15,500 workers who cross from Spain every day nearly half its

workforce.

In the past, long queues formed at the border as documents were checked, particularly during periods of strained relations between Britain and Spain over Gibraltar's sovereignty.

The border was closed by

Spanish dictator Francisco Franco in 1969 after Gibraltar voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to remain British.

The closure, which lasted 13 years, cut off the daily movement of workers from Spain into Gibraltar and separated families.

- 'Drastic change' -

"For decades, the border fence was exactly that, an open wound for the thousands of workers who crossed every day," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Wednesday during a visit to La Linea. He was speaking after workers used a crane to remove the metal gates that had long separated La Linea from Gibraltar.

Leisure visits by people crossing both sides of the border are also affected.

"It's going to be a drastic change, I think for the better. Because we're no longer going to have to rely on whether there's a queue or not to get in or out," Paul Cutthroat, a Gibraltar customs officer, told AFP.

While most of Gibraltar's cross-border workers are Spanish, dozens of nationalities also make the regular journey, including some 1,600 Britons attracted by the lower cost of housing in Spain. □

Venezuelan fashion house stitches body bags for quake victims

Maracay, Venezuela

Seamstresses at Venezuelan fashion label By Efrain Mogollon are used to making colorful dresses with ruffled sleeves and elegant draped skirts, but these days they face a grim task: making body bags for thousands of quake victims.

They never thought they would be making something so morbid, but like other Venezuelan operations, their workshop has shifted priorities following the 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes that struck on June 24.

With over 4,700 people killed and an estimated 50,000 missing, body bags are in short supply.

Designer Efrain Mogollon could not stand by and do nothing.

Within a week of the quakes, he mobilized his 22-strong team in the north-central city of Maracay.

"We were basically in

a state of shock," the 44-year-old told AFP in the worst-hit state of La Guaira.

"We needed to understand what we could do based on what we know how to do... And in this case, it was sewing."

- 'The truth hit hard' -

By Monday, Mogollon's workshop had produced 1,000 bags, half of which went to the National Service of Medicine and Forensic Sciences in Caracas, while the other half went directly to rescuers and relatives of the deceased.

The final product is a body bag made of 500-micron high-density polyethylene, measuring three meters long and 90 centimeters wide.

Each roll of bags bears a prayer card depicting the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

"The truth hit hard when they told us what we were going to do. But at the

same time we feel that we're doing something good," said seamstress Grismay Villegas.

"It's a way of supporting this pain," the 21-year-old said as she deftly stitched a bag together using dark blue thread.

Villegas started out in the workshop aged 17, following in the footsteps of her grandmother and aunt.

She has been sewing since she was eight years old, but says she could never have predicted the task currently at hand.

"There are a lot of people offering support and that's what matters -- that in the most difficult moments we must always stand united as a country," she said, voicing hope that no more bags would be needed.

The United Nations is set to deliver 10,000 body bags.

- 'Necessary evil' -

As hospital and morgue capacity reaches breaking point, the Venezuelan government has created

a makeshift body storage site at the port of La Guaira and has expanded a cemetery to bury hundreds of unidentified victims.

High-rise buildings once lined the seaside city's coast, but the skyline has been reduced to piles of rubble.

Makeshift shelters have sprung up around the city, with thousands of people made destitute by the quakes that buried many

more under the debris.

"Going to ground zero of the disaster completely changed the perspective, not only mine as creative director but that of the entire team," Mogollon said. Andrea Vizcaino, a 38-year-old doctor working in the disaster zone, called the initiative a "necessary evil."

"We can't say... that it's good," echoed volunteer Carlos Solorzano, 44. □



Seamstresses work in the manufacture of body bags for the earthquake victims, at the ByEfrainMogollon workshop in Maracay, state of Aragua, Venezuela, on July 13, 2026.

'We don't have time': Montenegro's bird haven fading

Ulcinj, Montenegro

Every year, tens of thousands of birds glide over the rusting remains of one of the Mediterranean's largest saltworks, to rest in the rare paradise it left behind. But experts warn the sprawling salt flats of Montenegro's Ulcinj salina, a vital stop-off for migrating flamingos, pelicans and other species, is fading fast. The salt company closed 13 years ago and since then, environmental activists and former employees have pushed for the return of production to revitalise both the local economy and a key habitat that relied on industrial-scale salt-water pumping.

"If we wait, probably in three years, we will not have this landscape as we see it today," environmental activist Zenepa Lika told AFP as she stood above the overgrown channels which crisscross the site.

Salt production began in Ulcinj almost a century ago, when the natural lagoon was transformed into a network of shallow evaporating basins.

The unique conditions the process demanded pumping saltwater in and out to maintain a shallow depth



Birds sit on tree branches in a wetland in Ulcinj on June 2, 2026.

were also the perfect environment for hungry wading birds.

As the industry boomed, birds migrating to and from Africa along one of Europe's key flyways were increasingly drawn to the area; today it is internationally recognised as a vital wetland.

But when the salt company shuttered in 2013, the pumping that maintained the basins stopped, endangering the environment the

birds have come to rely on. "We don't have time because every year that we are not working and we are not repairing the site, we are losing biodiversity," Lika, from the Dr Martin Schneider Jacoby Association which advocates for the salina, said.

- Mountains of salt -

For locals, the saltworks had also been a source of pride, a large employer and a rare example of in-

dustrial co-existing with nature.

It survived the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 90s, but collapsed when the company responsible for the site declared bankruptcy amid allegations of mismanagement.

"I remember that as a child I climbed up there, all the way to the main roof tile," former salt farmer Omer Hot said, gesturing at the seven-metre-high storehouse roof.

A dirty grey mound is all that remains of the salt mountains that once filled the building, now a weathered steel skeleton.

"I cannot describe it. I mean, it looks ugly, really ugly," the 69-year-old said, peering through its corroding gates.

- A shifting landscape -

But beyond the crumbling infrastructure lies a bird haven.

According to experts, the salina hosts more than one percent of the global populations of at least seven bird species.

Despite developers eyeing the prime real estate on the country's tourist coast, activists like Lika successfully pushed to protect the site, which is over four times the size of New York's Central Park.

In 2019, it was recognised as an internationally important wetland under the Ramsar treaty designed to protect key habitats around the world.

But official recognition as a protected area changed little on the ground, according to Lika.

"The crystallisation basins are covered by grass and sheath and so on.□

Too hot: Buttoned-up Tokyo officials ditch suits for 'cool' shorts

Tokyo, Japan

On a hot, humid day in Tokyo, metropolitan government official Noboru Watanabe overcame embarrassment to come to work in shorts, an unusual choice in a country where formal business attire is still

the norm.

The loosening of a strict dress code, particularly for men, comes as Japanese offices cut reliance on air conditioning due to high energy costs linked to the Middle East war.

On Tuesday, as tempera-

tures in the capital soared to around 34C, at least five brave men at Watanabe's office swapped their suits for shorts.

The 50-year-old told AFP he initially found it "embarrassing" to bare his legs in the office.

"But once you wear them (shorts), you realise just how comfortable they are," he said.

He wears a formal shirt when necessary, but admitted it "feels hot".

The shorts initiative was announced this spring by Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike, citing "challenging outlook for electricity supply".

It is part of an upgraded version of "Cool Biz", an energy-saving campaign that encourages bureaucrats to ditch ties and jack-

ets in summer, and which Koike started in 2005 when she was environment minister.

"We encourage 'cool' attire that prioritises comfort, including polo shirts, t-shirts and sneakers, and depending on job responsibilities shorts," she told reporters in April.

The scheme has sparked some envy among other Tokyo workers.

Takayuki Deguchi, a 30-year-old employee at a marketing company that still insists on suits, loves the initiative.

"I think being able to wear shorts that allow you to regulate your temperature when it's so hot is a very flexible approach," Deguchi told AFP.

However, the campaign has also sparked discus-

sions online over whether short pants are appropriate workwear.

Sachie Koike, a 52-year-old realtor, said she was fine with men ditching a tie or jacket in summer -- but shorts were a step too far. "I associate them with a day-off," Koike said.

"I just don't think hairy legs look very neat" in the workplace, she added.

Last year Japan sweltered through its hottest summer since records began in 1898, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.

Temperatures rising to 40C and above have become so common that the agency in April unveiled an official designation for these extreme weather events, labelling them "cruelly hot" or "kokusho" days.□



Government officials in casual dress code, including shorts, tee shirts and sneakers, work in the office of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building, as part of the capital's "Cool Biz" initiative, in Tokyo on July 14, 2026.

Defense Army Company in the Caribbean Rotates

WILLEMSTAD – On Monday, July 13, 2026, Defense's Rotation 51 company handed over its duties to Rotation 52 during a military ceremony on Curaçao. Captain Luc assumed command from Captain Marnix during the traditional paddle handover ceremony. The unit will train and operate in the Caribbean region over the next six months.

Looking back on an intensive period

After nearly five months in the Caribbean, Captain Marnix looks back with pride on the development of the Bravo/Stier Company. During this period, the unit conducted extensive training on Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba, as well as in the United States. The soldiers worked on their physical and mental development, leadership, and military skills.

Through various exercises, the company made strides in its performance as a combat unit. The platoons executed multiple missions, supported by assets such as snipers, mortar squad, and unmanned systems.

These training activities contributed to the soldiers' continued development and the unit's operational readiness.

The company also collaborated with Caribbean military personnel (CARMIL) and other units under the Commander of Naval Forces in the Caribbean (CZMCARIB). Despite differences in background and working methods, they trained together and worked towards ensuring security and stability

in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom.

New company begins deployment in the Caribbean

The Delta/Ratel Company of the 44th Armored Infantry Battalion (Prins Johan Willem Friso Infantry Regiment) is participating in a Caribbean rotation for the first time. Captain Luc looks forward to the upcoming period and the opportunities for his unit to train in a different climate and terrain.

The company is part of the 43rd Mechanized Brigade based in Havelte. The unit normally operates using the Fennek wheeled vehicle. During its deployment in the Caribbean, however, the emphasis is primarily on operations on foot. The company is reinforced with medical capabilities from the 43rd Medical Company and specialist capabilities from the 11th Armoured Engineer Battalion.

In addition to carrying out missions for CZMCARIB, the unit works on its own training program. The goal is to further enhance operational readiness and prepare for future deployments.

The Royal Netherlands Army maintains a permanent company presence in the Caribbean. Starting with rotation 2026-2, a deployment will last six months. This reduces the logistical burden and allows the unit more time to collaborate with local partners and gain a better understanding of the local environment. The company can be deployed for various tasks under the command of CZMCARIB and will be training on Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao over the coming months. □



Aruba's neighborhoods; the meaning behind their names; Ayo

(Oranjestad)—Just like any other country, Aruba has unique and beautifully named neighborhoods that all form a part of its culture and development. Many of these names have a historical background and meaning that teaches us about the island and its rich culture every day.

With this series, we want to take you on a journey of discovery, where you'll learn not only the beautiful names but the history behind it that gives it life and meaning.

Ayo

Ajo, or Ayo, is a word with

Arawak-Indian origin. A (or Ha) is an Indo-Antillean generalizing word. If you were to change a part of the word "Ayo", namely 'Yo', to 'Yu' and make 'Ayu', it would mean "white."

However, as we now know, the name of the neighborhood is 'Ayo'. The word 'Yo' stands for Yocahu, which is another word for 'creator' in Arawak/Taino and in the Papiamentu spoken today, 'Ayo' means 'bye'.

At Ayo, you can find some of the most well known rock formations. These for-

mations became a well loved and visited attraction at Aruba that is held in high regards by both tourists and locals alike.

If you'd like to know more about the rock formations at Ayo, stay tuned for our article where we tell you all about its location and history.

This neighborhood's abbreviation is; A.

Alto Vista

This word combination can be roughly translated to a 'high point of view' and the neighborhood received this name from the



Hill.

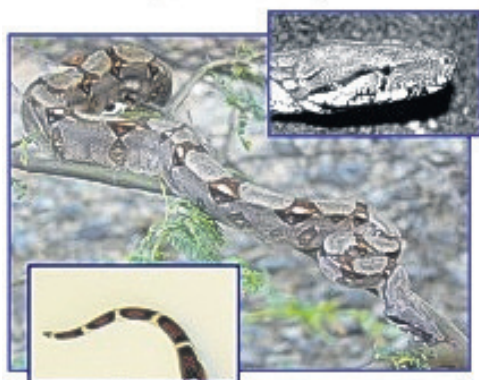
In the surrounding areas, Domingo Antonia Silvestre built his by his own means the very first chapel or church of Aruba. The walls of this church were made with rocks but the roof was made of dry corn stalks. The church was inaugurated by father Pablo Algemesi.

If you'd like to know more about the Alto Vista Church's beautiful history, stay tuned for our article where we tell you all you need to know about it for when you visit it. □

This neighborhood's abbreviation is; AV.

Snakes of Aruba

BOA
(*Boa constrictor*)



CASCABEL
(*Crotalus unicolor*)



SANTANERO
(*Leptodeira bakeri*)



Arikok National Park is home to various unique plant and animal species such as Aruba's rare endemic rattlesnake (*Crotalus unicolor*). This rattlesnake is locally known as the 'Cascabel'. But Aruba has two more snake species living on the island: the Santanero and the Boa.

Cascabel (*Crotalus unicolor*)

The small Cascabel or Aruba Island Rattlesnake averages 70 cm in length. The body color is often uniform gray or light brown. There may be a faint pattern of diamond shaped markings on the back. This pattern is most noticeable on younger snakes. The most distinctive feature of this snake is the rattle at the end of its tail which makes a buzzing sound when the snake is alarmed. Cascabels are shy and not aggressive, but their venom can be dangerous to humans. It is best to leave this snake alone. Do not attempt to catch or kill it.



Cascabels hunt by waiting under bushes and fruiting trees to catch passing lizards, mice, rats, small rabbits, and an occasional bird. This is often considered to be one of the rarest rattlesnakes in the world. The range of the Cascabel is restricted to the rugged and mountainous areas of the island mostly within Arikok National Park. The Arikok National Park was designated in the early 1980s to include most of the rattlesnake's population, providing a safe refuge in which the snake can be protected and monitored. The government has also implemented outreach and education initiatives to change local perception of the snake and highlight its ecological and economic importance – it is now being promoted as a national symbol.

Arikok's partnership with the Toledo zoo has safeguarded the rattlesnake ex-situ and led to a number of research projects collecting critical data on the Cascabel's abundance, life history and habitat requirement to help guide future conservation efforts.

Santanero

The slender Santanero or Aruban Cat-eyed Snake is typically less than 50 cm long. This snake is recognizable by the large scales on the top of its head and by its pattern of dark brown bands alternating with light brown bands. The belly is plain white or cream colored without any markings. This snake is shy and not aggressive. However, it has enlarged teeth at the back of its mouth and mild venom which is not dangerous to humans. However, the venom can paralyze small lizards and frogs. Santaneros are most active at night when they search for food. During the day, they hide under rocks or leaves. They frequently climb trees and cactus. Santaneros eat toads, frogs, insects, and lizards. You may find Santaneros near dams during periods of rainy weather or crossing roads at night. This snake is found island wide. A Santanero in your garden will keep away the unwanted insects. If you encounter a Santanero around your garden, please do not harm this species.

Boa (*Boa constrictor*)

Boas are Aruba's largest snakes. The longest Boa found on the island was slightly less than 3 m. Newborn Boas average 35 cm. Boas are not venomous. The most distinctive feature of a Boa is its pattern of dark brown and tan blotches which become red toward the tail. The belly is white or cream colored with numerous black spots. Boas are excellent climbers and may be found in trees and cactus. Boas also hide in the leaves under bushes waiting to catch prey that pass. Boas catch their prey with their teeth and then constrict it in their coils. The Boa's diet consists of birds, lizards, rats, mice, and rabbits. Large Boas have been known to eat small goats and chickens. When threatened, Boas will hiss loudly. Boas are a non-native species. The first Boas were reported on the island in 1999. Since that time they have been found across the entire island in all types of habitats. □

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Aruba Tourism Authority honored loyal visitor at Marriott's Aruba Ocean Club!

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Goodwill Ambassador of Aruba. The honoree was respectively honored with a certificate for her years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honorary certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three levels of honor are as follows:

Distinguished Visitor

(10)years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Goodwill Ambassador (20) years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Emerald Ambassador (35) years consecutively visiting Aruba)

The honoree was:

Goodwill Ambassador

Mrs. Katherine Lombardo from Bergenfield, New Jersey, United States.

Ms. Keyttin Silva representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of Ocean Club bestowed

the certificate upon the honoree, presented her with gifts, and thanked her for choosing Aruba as her favorite vacation destination, as her home away from home.

The top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by the honoree was:

- Aruba's beautiful weather and blue water.
- Aruba's gorgeous sunsets.
- Aruba's amazing staff and management.
- Aruba's great food.
- "Friendship made on this beautiful island."

On behalf of the Aruba



Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and apprecia-

tion to the honoree for her continued visits to the "One Happy Island". □



(Oranjestad)—If you ever been to Aruba before, you probably heard of (and even tried) the Aruban Pastechi. Beloved by young and old, this tasty treat is a staple for party snacks, a quick lunch or even breakfast!

Here's how to make the Pastechi dough.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups of wheat flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder (if using self-rising flour, omit baking powder)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 0.5 cup of melted butter
- 1 cup water
- 1 egg

Directions:

Sift your flour into a bowl

A quick snack for the road

Learn how to make the Aruban Pastechi!

and add all the dry ingredients before giving it a quick mix. Next add the butter, water and egg and mix until thoroughly combined. At this point, your dough will start to get sticky; time for an arm workout. Knead your dough into the bowl you are using or on a clean surface with some flour lightly dusted until its surface is smooth. You'll know your dough is ready when it doesn't stick to your hands or the surface on which you're kneading it. Let your dough rest covered for 15-20 minutes.

After resting, divide your dough into approximately 100 gram balls and roll it flat with a rolling pin. The thickness of the pastechi

depends on your taste, but the average thinness would be around ¼ inch or so.

Filling for the pastechis varies according to your taste. The easiest and most common filling you'll find in Aruba is a simple cheese filling. For this, we usually use shredded Gouda, but feel free to use any cheese that melts well when frying the pastry.

Place the filling on your rolled out piece of dough, fold it in half and pinch the sides shut with a fork. If you have a folding tool, feel free to use it for this process. Your pastechi is ready for the fryer!

If you want to store some pastechis for later use, you can freeze them. A good tip is to place a piece of wax paper in between each pastechi if you are to store them on top of one another. This way the pastechis don't stick to each other when defrosting.

Here in Aruba we enjoy pastechi at any time of the day, but it has become almost tradition to eat pastechis for breakfast on the way to work. Many roadside snack trucks sell pastechi from early morning to noon, and offer a variety of fillings like cheese; ham and cheese; ground beef and pulled chicken to name a few. □

Aruba to me



ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Carlos Roberto and M. Beatriz Montenegro, from Sao Paulo, Brazil.

They wrote to us saying: Aruba to me is REAL LIFE!

We are used to come at least 3 times a year and this time we didn't come since December '25.

At least we will stay 25 days and be back in September for 17 days!

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

The Aruban way of life: Creating community with Cas di Torto

(Oranjestad)—The Aruban people understand that a happy life is spent in great ambience with your loved ones. Passed down from one generation to the other, building community has been a key aspect in forging our traditions and customs. The Cas di Torto (mud house) played a big role in cultivating community, bridging families together and forming close bonds with your neighbors—something we highly value today.

Cas di Torto: History and construction

The origin of the Cas di Torto is said to date back to the early 19th century in the Paraguaná Peninsula in Venezuela. Refugees who sought sanctuary on Aruba introduced this building method to the island.

The uprights of the walls were made with sturdy and straight wayaca or kwihi wood, or from thin mangrove struts. Then, the wattle walls were weaved in using branches and twigs from the warero and sisal



plant, daubed with a mixture of grass and mud. Finally, the walls got a coat of white plaster to seal everything in.

For roofing, corn stalks, palm fronds and straws were used, allowing air to flow freely through the house. This method of roofing was known throughout the ABC islands (Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire), but the use of cornstalks in Aruba eventually got replaced with use of mud and white plas-

ter for the roofs. The white plaster all around made the houses look like cake, hence the name "Torto" (Spanish for "cake").

Building community

Building Torto houses was often a community effort. Young couples who were about to get married had to have their house built before they could tie the knot and start their own family. This is where the help of the community comes into

play.

Neighbors, extended family and friends would all help in the construction of a Torto House. And everyone had a role: The men oversaw the building of the house, and the women were tasked with collecting wood and straws, cooking and taking care of the little ones.

The couple's family were primarily responsible for feeding everyone who

helped build the house. Before construction, someone usually had the task to prepare the meal; going fishing or slaughter farm animals like goats, chicken or sheep. Even the older kids had their tasks; the older children of the family usually helped with collecting water and mixing the mud.

The average duration of constructing a Cas di Torto was 4 months.

At the end of a long day of work, everyone would gather around and enjoy a feast of hearty food. This type of help from friends and family became a tradition and was called "paga lomba": You help me today; I'll help you tomorrow.

Nowadays, traditional Cas di Torto are rare, especially those that are still inhabited. Houses that do exist probably date back more than a century. □

Picture credits: Aruba National Library (BNA) and the Monumentbureau archive on Coleccion.aw

Watch out for Blue Crab Migration near Savaneta

(Oranjestad)—The department of nature & environment in Aruba are urging motorists to watch out for blue crabs crossing the road in Pos Chiquito to make their way to the ocean.

They added a new bright

yellow road sign with "Land Crab Crossing" to remind people to be cautious while driving on the highway on Pos Chiquito with blue crabs.

Blue crabs in Aruba are found plenty near the beach areas, especially in

Pos Chiquito, because of the amount of mangroves. They are known to dig holes deep in the beach sand in seek of humidity.

The diet of blue crabs consists of decomposed trees, insects, scorpions and rest of dead animals.

Nesting season for blue crabs is between June & July.

Why protect blue crabs?

Because they are of high value for the ecology of the mangroves. Conserving the blue crabs is crucial for the preservation of



mangroves. Watch out for crossing blue crabs on the highway near Pos Chiquito & Santo Largo. □

The district of Savaneta: A quick history guide to the island's first capital



(Oranjestad)—Before Oranjestad became the island nation's capital, Aruba's first capital was the district of Savaneta. Here is where the cultural identity of Aruba was born, and from where the rest of the island developed into what it is today.

Savaneta is said to have been the first place where the Caquetio inhabitants first stepped foot on the island. Though there isn't hard evidence to back this up, but considering the legend of the Cacique Arua, it is believed that there were already movements on Aruba and Savaneta around 88 AD.

The Caquetios probably made their way to the island either from Venezuela, Colombia or other Caribbean islands in the region, but with good weather it was relatively easy for them to travel back and forth in their canoes. So, since the Caquetios discovered the island, Aruba found her first form of civilization.

It wasn't until 1499 when Aruba met another group of people who set foot on the island: the Spanish explorer Alonso de Ojeda. De Ojeda first took notice of Aruba off the coast of Venezuela, during his exploration of the Latin American country. This was on August 9th, 1499. However, de Ojeda didn't actually sail to the island till 4 days later, on August 23rd, 1499. This was the beginning of the Spanish era on Aruba (1499-1636).

Alonso usually didn't stop at every island or land he saw, especially not in the Caribbean. He would often take notice of land from afar and continue sailing. However, Aruba was an exception. He had heard that there were "quebracho" (Kibrahacha) trees on the island, which were commonly used to produce dye or paint. But since these trees could not be found in Savaneta, he continued to search in the area of what is now known as Santa Cruz. The best way to transport the tree barks was via a route passing through Savaneta, and so the first road between Savaneta and Santa Cruz was made.

The Dutch colonial era (1636-1805)

During the 80-year war between The Netherlands and Spain, Dutch explorers and merchants began to travel to the ABC islands. Once they landed in Aruba, they deported the small Arawakan and Spanish community that was living on the island. This was the beginning of colonization of the ABC islands by the Dutch empire. Around the same, the West Indian Company (WIC) was born. Bonaire and Curacao were



mostly used for plantations, where the Dutch had transported slaves from Africa. Aruba, on the other hand, was mostly used to raise cattle and to house the haring factory. The Dutch had often forced the indigenous community to work for them.

In 1636, when the Netherlands won the war against Spain, the country surrendered the islands to the Dutch.

The Dutch administration appointed the island's

first commander, an Irish man named N. Williams. Because the Dutch were interested in other Caribbean islands and countries in South America, they imported Dutch merchants and business men, all of whom resided in Savaneta. This way, Savaneta officially became the island's first capital.

However, at the end of the 18th century, the commander at the time, J.R. Lauffer, moved his office to what is now "Horse Bay" in Oranjestad. Because the

highest office on the island moved away from Savaneta, the capital lost its title to what was called then Playa.

How Savaneta got its name
The name Savaneta probably has a Spanish origin. It was said that when the Spanish climbed a hill called Yara, they saw that the area was mostly open and had no big trees. In Spanish, such a land area is called a "sabana".

Because of its land surface, Savaneta was a great place to construct cattle farms. From here, the farmer culture on Aruba was born. Before the Aruban Gold Rush and the construction of the Refinery in San Nicolas, most residents were farmers, and Savaneta had many inhabitants that farmed fruits and vegetables. They also continued the tradition of raising cattle, like goat, sheep, pigs and horses. Savaneta was one of the first places on the island to have a general farming culture. From this culture, many other traditions were born, like the Dera Gay Holiday that we celebrate every year on June 24th. □

Source: Historia di Savaneta (History of Savaneta) by Adolf "Dufi" Kock.



CROSSWORD

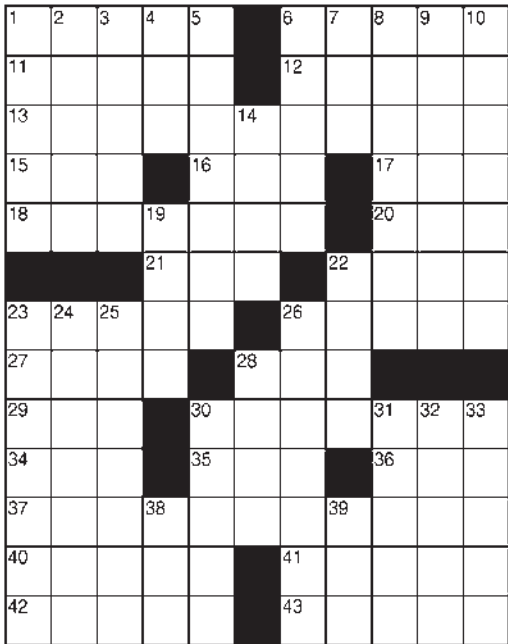
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Book makeup
6 Hacienda houses
11 Island ring
12 Houston player
13 Baking need
15 Stop
16 Touch lightly
17 Cheering cry
18 Tyrants
20 Furious feeling
21 They hold power
22 Photo problem
23 Canary homes
26 Prolonged attack
27 Lofty poems
28 Knight's address
29 Rooster's mate
30 First aid kit item
34 Bullring cry
35 Convoy member
36 Fellows
37 Accountant's layout
40 "— all, folks!"

DOWN

- 1 Betrayed nervousness
2 Make amends
3 Merchandise
4 Caribou's cousin
5 Easy shoes
6 Play groups
7 Cabinet wood
8 Like surgical tools
9 Floor cover
10 "Serves you right!"
14 Puts away
19 Diner desserts
22 Robin or wren
23 Kelly and Ryan, e.g.
24 New York university
25 Army bigwig
26 Serenades
28 Uttered
30 Army bigwigs
31 Add a change to
32 Gaggles group
33 Door sign
38 Greek vowel
39 That woman



3-21

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.

3-21

CRYPTOQUOTE

CZ PD RWJ'U SGMED UGCJFE,

EWNDUCNDE UGD UGCJFE

ZWB BWPCJF IE SMJ SMUSG

IO. — B.N. NWJUFWNDQX

Cryptoquote: I DON'T KNOW WHICH IS MORE DISCOURAGING, LITERATURE OR CHICKENS. — E.B. WHITE



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 occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

JULY		CRUISE SHIP SCHEDULE	
07	TUE	CANIVAL HORIZON Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
08	WED	FREEWINDS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: Berth: E	
12	SUN	FREEWINDS Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E	
14	TUE	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: B	ADVENTURE OF THE SEAS Arrival: 11:30 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
15	WED	ALLURE OF THE SEAS Arrival: 7:00 Departure: 16:00 Berth: I	FREEWINDS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: Berth: E
19	SUN	FREEWINDS Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E	
21	TUE	CANIVAL 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

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

Difficulty: ★★★

7/16

Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★★★

7/15

Up to 45% of dementia risk can be prevented, delayed: WHO

Geneva, Switzerland

Up to 45 percent of dementia risk could be prevented or delayed, the World Health Organization said Wednesday, citing modifiable risk factors such as tobacco and air pollution.

Dementia is the seventh leading cause of death and a major cause of disability and dependency among older people globally.

Dementia is caused by brain diseases and affects memory, thinking and the ability to function.

"While there is no cure for dementia, up to 45 percent of the risks can be attributed to modifiable risk factors such as tobacco, alcohol use, social isolation, physical inactivity, air pollution and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including high blood pressure and diabetes," the WHO said in a statement.

More than 57 million people live with dementia worldwide and nearly 10 million people get diagnosed every year, it said.

Alzheimer disease is the most common form of dementia and is estimated to account for 60 to 70 percent of cases.

"Behind these numbers are individuals, families, and communities navigating profound challenges that affect not only health, but dignity, independence,



Neurology research, conceptual image. Scientist viewing brain magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans.

and well-being," said Devora Kestel, director of the WHO's NCDs and mental health department.

"This is not a distant issue; it touches all of us," she wrote in a foreword to updated WHO guidance published Wednesday on how health workers and policymakers can help prevent or delay the onset of dementia. The U.N. health agency issued its first dementia recommendations in 2019, but said the evidence base had grown significantly since.

The guidelines aim to promote early awareness and intervention in a bid to reduce the burden of dementia in the coming decades, it said.

Although more common after 65, the condition is not an inevitable part of aging, the WHO insisted.

- Focus on prevention -

"We know more today than ever before about what drives dementia risk, and these guidelines translate that knowledge into action," said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"Countries now have clear, evidence-based recommendations they can put into practice immediately to protect people's cognitive health."

Because there is no cure for dementia or widely accessible treatment, the guidelines emphasised that prevention remains the most effective strategy to reduce the number of cases. Among other things, the WHO suggested cognitive stimulation and training for adults experiencing mild cognitive impairment. □

ARUBA TODAY

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OTHER

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Blood Bank Aruba	587 0002
Urgent Care	586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic	588 0539

EMERGENCY

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Police Noord	527 3200
Police Sta. Cruz	527 2900
Police San Nicolas	584 5000
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Generative AI's power sparks fears of dumbing humans down

Paris, France

Generative AI chatbots capable of writing emails and computer code, translating, organising a trip or coming up with gift ideas are now readily available, prompting some to ask whether human brainpower could suffer for lack of use.

A simple natural-language prompt is usually enough to draw a useable response from a service like ChatGPT or Claude, with the effects making themselves felt in schools and universities, workplaces from offices to courtrooms and our personal lives.

Recent scientific studies suggest there could be harmful consequences to farming out cognitive tasks to AI.

They highlight memory, decision-making and critical thinking as particularly at risk.

One American-British study of 1,222 people, still under peer review, found that using AI tools to solve arithmetic or reading compre-



hension exercises improved participants' performance in the short term, but in the long run diminished their results and their willingness to keep trying when the tools were unavailable.

"These findings are particularly concerning because persistence is foundational to skill acquisition and is one of the strongest predictors of long-term learning," the authors wrote.

AI's ability to conjure up speedy responses to all kinds of questions "removes learning opportunities"

from users, said Carnegie Mellon University doctoral student Grace Liu, the article's main author.

"What makes AI particularly concerning is that it's not a tool designated for one specific kind of activity. It's something that can be used across pretty much any intellectual, reasoning, cognitive activity."

The technology's adaptability to different kinds of problems sets it apart from previous waves of computerised aids.

Electronic calculators, for instance, may have helped

users solve equations but left the method and reasoning process in human hands.

- Saving energy -

One 2025 MIT study went viral for its finding that students using generative AI to write essays displayed less critical thinking capability. Other research has pointed the same way, highlighting what has come to be called "cognitive offloading" or even "cognitive surrender".

"Human beings have a strong tendency to save

energy," said Johann Chevalere, a researcher in social and cognitive psychology at France's publicly-funded CNRS institution.

"In daily life, we often use strategies that get us to the heart of the matter quicker, without necessarily taking the time to study in depth the information we need to process, as this can be cognitively costly," he added.

Generative AI use could strengthen this tendency, Chevalere said.

"If there are activities you never do, the brain which works by saving energy -- won't go to the trouble of maintaining connections that aren't being used."

- Encouraging reflection -

Under pressure from critics, generative AI developers have begun building so-called "Socratic" functions into their models, which for now remain mostly aimed at students.

In this mode, chatbots do not simply provide the answer, instead offering hints and asking questions to stimulate users' thinking.

Examples include the "study mode" built into OpenAI's ChatGPT, or "guided learning" in Google's Gemini. □

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Publishers accuse Google of stealing copyrighted content in new lawsuit

Washington, United States

Multiple book publishers sued Google on Tuesday for allegedly stealing copyrighted content, using it to train artificial intelligence (AI) models and then generating content that "directly" competes with the

original authors' work.

"The scale and speed at which Gemini can create books and compete with human writers is unprecedented," the lawsuit says. The lawsuit, which requests class action status, was filed in New York by Ha-

chette Book Group, Cengage Learning, Elsevier, author Scott Turow and his publishing company S.C.R.I.B.E.

They allege that "Google secretly copied millions of works" that were provided to Google Books and other services for "limited purposes" and then used that content to train Gemini, its AI model.

Furthermore, they claim the content generated by Gemini directly competes with the authors who wrote the original work.

"Gemini even tailors outputs to mimic the expressive elements and creative choices of specific authors," the lawsuit says.

The plaintiffs requested an injunction and an unspeci-

fied amount of damages.

It's the latest copyright infringement lawsuit brought against AI developers.

In May, multiple publishers including Hachette, Cengage, Elsevier and Turow sued Meta on similar grounds in a New York court.

A U.S. judge in September approved a \$1.5 billion settlement between Anthropic and several authors who claimed the San Francisco company illegally copied their work to train its AI model, Claude.

It was a partial victory for Anthropic a judge ruled that the company's use of books to train Claude was transformative enough to constitute "fair use" under U.S. law but that other uses of pirated materials was not. □



France, Clonas, July 1, 2026. Illustration on a phone showing Google AI Overviews arriving in France this summer, with the French flag in the background.



Uno-X Mobility team's Norwegian rider Søren Waerenskjold cycles to the finish line to win the 11th stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 161,3 km between Vichy and Nevers in central France, on July 15, 2026.

Waerenskjold wins fastest ever Tour de France stage

Nevers, France

Norwegian Søren Waerenskjold launched a long-range sprint to claim victory at the Tour de France on Wednesday in the fastest stage in the race's history.

Dutchman Olav Kooij, who won the fifth stage, took second at the end of the 161km 11th stage from Vichy to Nevers with Belgian Jasper Philipsen third.

At an average speed of 50.91kph, it was the fastest ever road stage in the 113 editions of the Tour.

"It means everything, it's my biggest win so far," said the 26-year-old who was second in the seventh stage to Bordeaux and last year won the Omloop Het Nieuwsblad one-day classic.

"When I came here, I knew that there are two or three guys that are faster than me, but if I'm lucky and I have a good sprint like today, then it's possible.

"Sometimes I have really good confidence and I believe in myself, but there's many, many times where I feel super tired and it's impossible to win here."

Once again, there was a fairly disjointed sprint finish with none of the teams able to organise a sprint train to set up their fast man.

as the main sprinters hesitated, but Waerenskjold was the first to chase after the Dutchman.

He instantly put several bike lengths of daylight between himself and the rest and although both Kooij and Philipsen caught him by the line, they did not have enough strength to edge past Waerenskjold.

Philipsen was initially demoted after the race with his compatriot Milan Fretin given third place but that sanction was overturned on appeal.

Belgian Tim Merlier, who had won the seventh and eighth sprint stages, finished a disappointing 14th.

Eritrean Biniam Girmay finish fifth to cut Mads Pedersen's lead in the sprinters' green jersey competition to 43 points after the Dane could finish only 10th.

It was the second Tour stage victory for the Norwegian Uno-X Mobility team, which is in its first year as a World Tour outfit, after Jonas Abrahamson succeeded once last year.

The team also held the yellow jersey for two stages this year with Torstein Træen before he crashed out with a concussion and broken ribs.

Pogacar finished safely in the pack to retain his overall lead of more than three and a half minutes to two-time former winner Jonas Vingegaard.

He put down the rapid pace partly to the strength of the breakaway riders.

"There was a lot of chance for the breakaway to go to the finish line, and the sprint teams, they control and they need to catch them," said the 27-year-old world champion.

"Today was a strong breakaway, that's why the speed has to be high.

"Once we caught them, we slowed down immediately and it was so funny to ride from 5km to 2km to go we ride the slowest of all day. "The biggest reason is also the tailwind. With the headwind will be much, much less speed.

"But when you have such a strong breakaway in front, you go fast."

A four-man breakaway had set off early into the stage which began in the ancient spa town of Vichy.

After the suffocating heat of the first 10 days of the Tour when temperatures frequently topped 40C -- there was some welcome rain at the start and milder temperatures, although those did not last long. □

- 'Strong breakaway' -
Reigning champion Tadej

Kooij's lead-out rider Cees Bol launched off the front



Australia's Mollie O'Callaghan competes during the women's 200m freestyle final during the Australian swimming trials at the Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre on June 10, 2026.

Australian swimmer O'Callaghan reveals she has spinal fractures

Sydney, Australia

Australian Olympic champion Mollie O'Callaghan said Wednesday she had been told to "stop swimming immediately" last month because of spinal stress fractures, but has been cleared to race at next week's Commonwealth Games.

O'Callaghan, the reigning Olympic 200m freestyle champion, revealed her anguish in the run-up to the games in Glasgow, which begin on July 23, and the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships in California in August. "Last month I was told I wouldn't be able to compete at Trials, the Commonwealth Games or Pan Pacs. I was also told to stop swimming immediately," the 22-year-old posted on Instagram.

"It was a moment that reinforced just how much representing Australia means to me and how badly I want to be part of this team."

Scans showed stress fractures and bone oedema on her lumbar spine, O'Callaghan said, and her team sought advice from a spinal specialist.

After "further assessment" following the swimming trials, O'Callaghan said she was given the green light to compete at the Commonwealth Games and the Pan Pacific championships.

O'Callaghan is entered in three individual events in Glasgow the 100m and 200m freestyle, and 50m backstroke and several women's and mixed relays, but she hinted her schedule could change.

"Things might look a little different for me at the Commonwealth Games and Pan Pacs but I'll give everything I have and do my absolute best every time I race," she said.

O'Callaghan's health revelations came a day after fellow Australian swimmer Shayna Jack announced she will retire from competition after the Commonwealth Games.

"I'm ready to announce my retirement and be Shayna Jack," she said in an emotional video recalling how "life blew up for me in 2019".

With the 2020 Games in her sights, her world came crashing down after testing positive for the muscle growth agent ligandrol in an out-of-competition test in June 2019.

She was banned for four years despite proclaiming her innocence, insisting the substance entered her system by contamination.

"I want to go out there, head held high, proud of who I am, proud of who I am representing and proud of what I am saying goodbye to," Jack said. □

Messi's Argentina stun England in comeback to reach World Cup final

Atlanta, United States

Lautaro Martinez scored a 92nd minute winner as Lionel Messi inspired World Cup holders Argentina to a stunning comeback to beat England 2-1 on Wednesday and set up a final with European champions Spain.

England had been on course to reach their first World Cup final since 1966 after Anthony Gordon fired them into the lead 10 minutes after half-time in the semi-final in front of 68,239 fans in Atlanta.

But the great rivalry between these nations has produced several memorable contests on the World Cup stage down the years and this will be remembered as the stuff of legends in Argentina as



Argentina's forward #22 Lautaro Martinez scores his team's second goal during the 2026 World Cup football tournament semi-final match between England and Argentina at the Atlanta Stadium in Atlanta on July 15, 2026.

the South Americans denied England with two late sucker punches.

Messi set up Enzo Fernandez to fire in an 85th-minute equaliser and then, with extra time looming, crossed for substitute Lautaro Martinez to head in the winner in the second minute of stoppage time. It was maybe not quite up there with Diego Maradona's legendary display in putting England to the sword in 1986, but the goals this time brought Argentina back from the dead and kept alive their hopes of winning back-to-back World Cups.

No team has retained the trophy since Brazil in 1962, and now Messi will become just the second player after Brazilian great Cafu to appear in three World Cup finals.

The game will take place at the MetLife Stadium on Sunday in New Jersey, as the first 48-team World Cup boils down to a confrontation between the reigning champions of Europe and South America.

Messi had waited until the age of 39 to get the chance to play against England, and now he will face Spain for the first time in a competitive game.

His career appeared to be complete when he dragged Argentina to glory in 2022 in Qatar, but he is clearly not done yet.

England, though, will have huge regrets as they head to Miami to play France in Saturday's third-place play-off, a game neither team will want to contest. The prospect of a first World Cup final appearance since their sole triumph 60 years ago was a momentous one, and they were so close, but will live to regret sitting back after Gordon's opener.

The key men for Thomas Tuchel's side during this campaign have been Jude Bellingham and captain Harry Kane, yet they failed to deliver on this occasion, and England's players slumped to the turf at full time. □



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