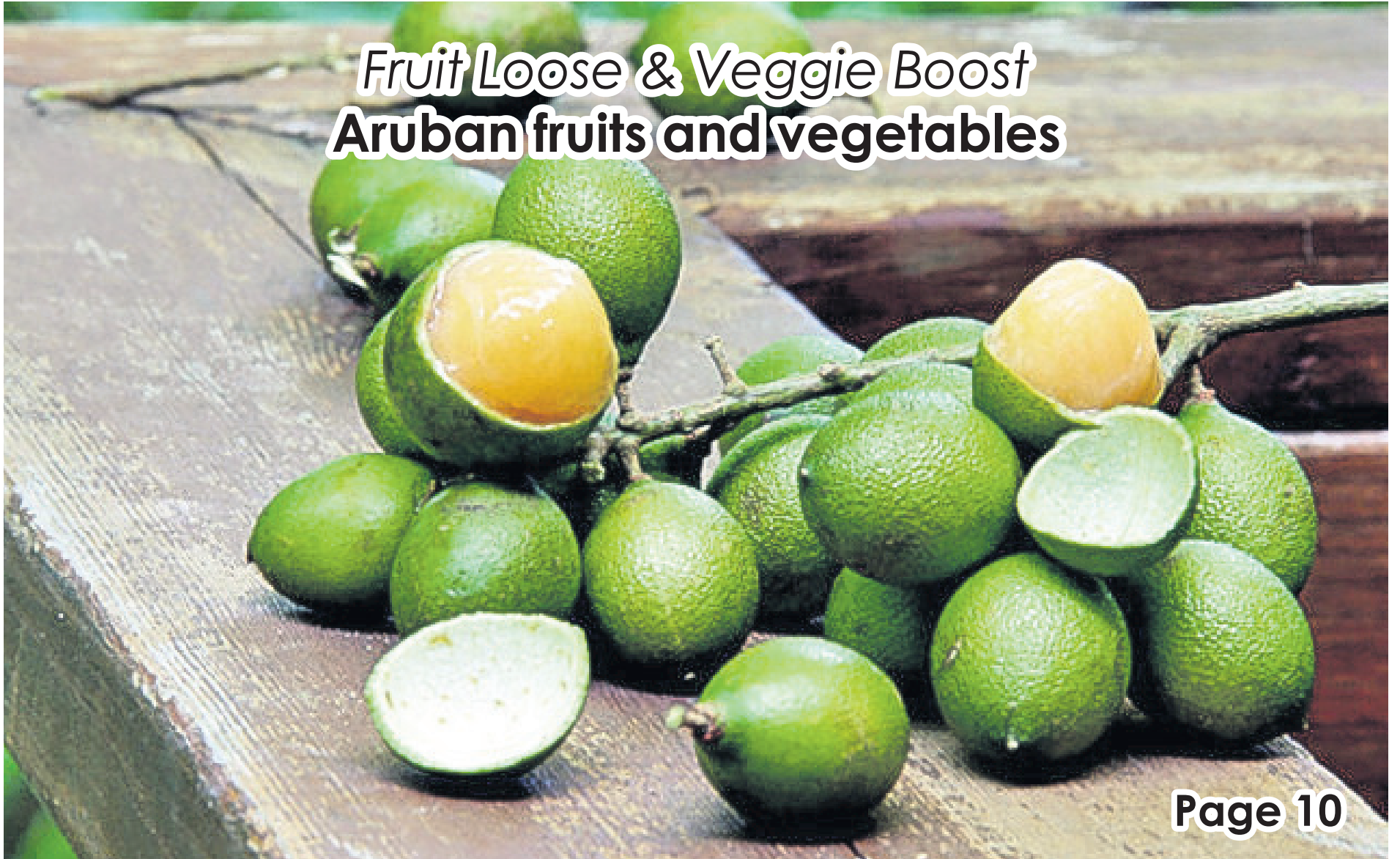


Fruit Loose & Veggie Boost Aruban fruits and vegetables



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U.S. panel backs trendy peptides despite safety concerns

New York, United States

A U.S. review panel on Thursday recommended loosening restrictions on multiple trendy peptides, endorsing proposals that specialized pharmacies be allowed to produce such substances despite alarm bells from medical experts over safety concerns.

The vote came as part of a two-day meeting of the panel tasked with considering whether seven total peptides should be added to the approved compounding list, which allows facilities to create custom drugs that will in turn be more accessible to the public.

As of Thursday afternoon, the panel had greenlit recommendations that bespoke pharmacies be allowed to produce the peptides BPC-157 and KPV.

Peptides are short chains of amino acids, which are the building blocks of proteins. They occur naturally in the body, but synthetic peptides are increasingly buzzy in the wellness industry as the key to an optimized life. Peptide proponents have made sweeping claims about their benefits, rang-



U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (C) attends an event with farmers on the South Lawn of the White House on March 27, 2026 in Washington, DC.

ing from glowing skin and muscle growth to brain health and wound healing. There's scant to no clinical evidence supporting such promises.

Medical experts accused President Donald Trump's health chief Robert F. Kennedy Jr. of packing the Food and Drug Administration advisory committee with people who have strong ties to the peptide

industry, given his personal interest in the products that he says he has used.

The substances under review are among those that the administration of Trump's predecessor Joe Biden restricted from compounding, notably over a lack of human clinical trial data.

But that hasn't thwarted their popularity in many

cases peptides can be purchased online from chemical suppliers "for lab use." They are widely touted on social media among influencers, celebrities and those inclined to follow "wellness" trends, like Kennedy.

Proponents of increasing legal access to peptides, including the health secretary, argue that restricting them would only drive

Americans deeper into the gray market.

The panel's 8-6 vote, with one abstention, to recommend the FDA's addition of BPC-157 and then KPV to the bulks list was at odds with the expert opinions of career scientists at the agency.

Panel member Elizabeth Rebello, a pharmacist and anesthesiologist, told the committee she had voted no on BPC-157 "because of the lack of efficacy data" and "safety concerns."

Member Brian Lee also voted no on that peptide, saying: "I think this endorsement can be potentially harmful, and I cannot in good conscience vote yes."

But they were outnumbered by panelists who voted in favor, with those members citing reasons including "the greater good" and "medical freedom" for their decisions.

- 'Weak evidence' vs commercial benefit -

Before considering each peptide, panelists heard presentations by FDA scientists who warned against recommending greater access, as well as public comment on both sides of the issue.

Peter Lurie, president of the Center for Science in the Public Interest and a former FDA official, urged against easing restrictions on all of the peptides, calling such an action "inconsistent" with FDA standards and dangerous to consumers.

He dubbed the burgeoning world of peptides as one of "pseudoscience and grift."

Interviewed afterward by AFP, Lurie said "what I think we're seeing is the demise of the advisory committee as a useful instrument in scientific decision-making under this administration."

"They stacked the committee with a group of people who, in the face of extremely weak evidence, voted in favor of these products anyway, and the FDA's efforts to balance that out weren't sufficient." □

Vance agent probed after leak about chopper trip for son's golf lesson

Washington, United States

A U.S. Secret Service agent assigned to JD Vance is under investigation for alleged leaks, a spokesman said Thursday, after a report that the vice president wanted to fly his son to a

golf lesson on a military helicopter.

The probe comes after U.S. broadcaster MSNOW last week reported that Vance's security detail had become increasingly "fed up" with personal

travel requests by the vice president and his family.

"A member of the Vice Presidential Protective Division is the subject of an administrative investigation, and potential criminal inquiry, involving allegations of compromising operational and information security," Secret Service communications chief Anthony Guglielmi said in a statement to AFP.

"While we will not comment on the specifics of this matter, one principle is unequivocal: any conduct that potentially threatens the safety of a protectee will not be tolerated."

According to MSNOW, Vance's requests included flying him and his son to a secure golf course at Joint Base Andrews near Wash-

ington on board Marine Two, the call-sign of the helicopter that carries the vice president.

The flight ended up being canceled because of thunderstorms, the report said, but was one of a number of last-minute requests made by the Vances.

Vance, who recently welcomed the birth of their fourth child with wife Usha, is the first vice president for decades with young children. He has previously spoken admiringly of the agents and staff who help them.

The Secret Service has said it is dealing with an unprecedented number of threats against the people it protects, including President Donald Trump, who has escaped several assassination attempts. □



U.S. Vice President JD Vance and U.S. second lady Usha Vance watch the opening ceremony of the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games at the San Siro stadium in Milan, northern Italy, on February 6, 2026.

U.S. unveils new tariffs on 60 partners as Trump rebuilds trade agenda

Washington, United States

The United States said Thursday that it would impose new tariffs on 60 trading partners over forced labor concerns, replacing an expiring global duty rolled out by President Donald Trump earlier this year.

The levies, which take effect Friday, range from 10 percent to 12.5 percent and impact major economies like China, India and the European Union.

"The United States has had a forced labor import ban for nearly a century, and rigorously enforces it; it's well past time for our trading partners to do the same," said U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer in unveiling the duties.

The Trump administration has moved swiftly to rebuild the president's tariff wall after the Supreme Court struck down a host of his duties in February dealing a blow to his ability to unleash steep levies at will.

After the legal setback, Trump tapped different authorities to reimpose a 10-percent tariff on imports.



U.S. President Donald Trump is presented with a World Series ring by Los Angeles Dodgers Owner and Chairman Mark Walter (L) as he hosts the 2025 MLB World Series champions in the Rose Garden of the White House on July 23, 2026 in Washington, DC.

But this only lasts 150 days, expiring Friday.

The volley of new duties, initially proposed in June, will now take its place.

The measures were proposed after a months-long investigation and are considered more resistant to le-

gal challenges than earlier moves.

Under Thursday's announcement, economies that have implemented a forced labor prohibition are hit with the lower 10-percent rate. They include Canada, the E.U. and the United Kingdom.

Others were deemed to deserve harsher levies, receiving the higher 12.5 percent tariff, a US official told reporters. Trading partners like China and Japan are covered in this group.

Goods already facing Trump's sector-specific tariffs like steel and aluminum

will not be impacted. Goods entering under the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade pact will also be exempt, a US official told reporters.

- Maintaining leverage -

Washington is separately investigating 16 economies over excess industrial capacity, in probes that could lead to additional duties.

These could result in different rates among countries eventually, as Trump had done before his legal setback.

The Trump administration's move to impose a baseline tariff while sustaining the threat of further duties ahead maintains leverage over its trading partners, trade lawyer Greta Peisch told AFP.

It also creates an incentive for countries to comply with trade pacts that they earlier struck, she added.

In spending time on investigations, officials want their incoming tariffs to be robust if there are court challenges, said Peisch, a former USTR general counsel who is now a partner at Wiley Rein. □

Justice Dept withdraws NY Times subpoenas over Trump plane report

New York, United States

The U.S. Justice Department on Thursday withdrew subpoenas issued to New York Times reporters over a story they wrote about security concerns with a plane donated to President Donald Trump by Qatar.

The Times said federal prosecutors agreed at a court hearing in New York before District Judge Arun Subramanian to "unilaterally withdraw the subpoenas at this time."

The newspaper had challenged the government requests for phone records of reporters and grand jury testimony as an attempt to "intimidate" the press and filed a motion to have them quashed.

Lawyers for the Times said "the Government's actions

violate the most basic First Amendment protections for newsgathering activity." "They represent the latest salvo in an escalating series of attacks on journalists to intimidate them from engaging in reporting that the Trump Administration openly detests," they said.

The subpoenas were issued after a Times report that the Qatari-gifted Air Force One lacked certain security countermeasures, including anti-missile defenses. Qatar's royal family donated the luxury airliner last year after Trump complained about the state of the two aging jets that have served as the official U.S. presidential planes since 1990.

Trump took his first flight on the retrofitted Boeing 747-8

plane on July 1, but questions swirled after he took an older jet home from a NATO meeting in Ankara on July 10.

Turkey borders Iran, and hostilities between Washington and Tehran had flared up again at the time. Trump denied any security concerns and said he was sending the new plane to a British airbase so it could be toured by U.S. troops. He later said the Qatari-gifted Air Force One needed to be sent off for a month to be "maxed out." He did not give details about how the plane would be "maxed out."

Critics have raised a host of ethical, constitutional and security concerns about the gifting of an aircraft worth hundreds of millions



U.S. President Donald Trump disembarks from Air Force One at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland on July 1, 2026.

of dollars by a foreign power like Qatar.

The plane features a new Trump-designed livery in red, white and navy blue, in a change from the previous white and light blue.

Two brand-new Boeing Air Force Ones are due to be delivered later this decade after a series of delays and cost overruns.

Reporters Without Borders

(RSF) welcomed the withdrawal of the subpoenas.

"Today's outcome is a victory for The New York Times and for every journalist who relies on confidential sources to report in the public interest," RSF said. "The court has reaffirmed that the government cannot use its legal powers to intimidate reporters or erode the independence of the press." □

Bollywood blast master keeps it real with fire and fury

Mumbai, India

From fireballs to gunfights, Bollywood special effects master Vishal Tyagi is going the old-fashioned way to create cinematic chaos in a way he says artificial intelligence simply cannot.

The tanker explosion climax in his latest blockbuster action film "Dhurandhar 2" used 500 litres of petrol along with explosives in a carefully orchestrated stunt involving star Ranveer Singh.

"The fragments and fires were 100 percent real," Tyagi, 48, told AFP in an interview.

The sequence reflects a growing trend among Indian filmmakers to deploy special effects, looking to deliver the type of authenticity that computer-generated imagery often cannot replicate.

To create the explosion, Tyagi's team used a real train as a base, constructing the tanker with acrylic panels mounted on a metal frame. "Because acrylic melts into the air, that's why we see fragments flying," Tyagi said.

"Sometimes, to give a real look, we have to use something artificial."



This photograph taken on July 1, 2026 shows Bollywood's leading special effects expert Vishal Tyagi speaking during an interview with AFP at his warehouse in Mumbai.

Also an arms specialist, the shelves at Tyagi's warehouse in a Mumbai suburb are stacked with AK-47s, sniper rifles and rocket launchers, which he supplies as props for movie sets in India and abroad.

His company has worked on productions including Oscar-winning "Slumdog Millionaire", "Zero Dark Thirty", Netflix hit "Extraction", Salman Khan's "Tiger" fran-

chise and Shah Rukh Khan's "Pathaan" and "Jawan".

- 'No threat' from AI -

"Our core expertise lies in executing real, controlled effects, from firearms to large-scale explosions," said Tyagi, showing burn scars on his hand from a recent shoot.

Tyagi inherited the profession and the passion for it from his father Mahen-

dra Tyagi, who moved to Mumbai from Uttar Pradesh state in the 1970s.

Starting with small acting roles, the elder Tyagi gradually set up a business supplying prop guns to the industry.

As a child, his son spent his days surrounded by guns and explosives on movie sets.

"I was always excited about new guns and how

they operated. There was nothing else that I wanted to do," said Vishal Tyagi. His father later died in a studio fire, but Tyagi was not deterred.

"I wanted to pursue this career in the correct manner," he said.

"A lot of times I don't get paid as much as the work deserves because some filmmakers don't have that kind of budget, but I never compromise on quality. It's my passion."

Despite rapid advances in artificial intelligence, Tyagi says technology cannot replace practical special effects.

"AI is not creating anything new. It will show you only what you feed into the system, so there is no threat," he said.

"We are dealing with nature. Fire is nature. Smoke is nature. Rain is nature. Technology cannot compete with nature because nature is unpredictable."

- 'Always on gas' -

For Tyagi, that unpredictability is what audiences appreciate on screen.

The biggest challenge, he says, is that Bollywood often expects special effects crews to deliver Hollywood-scale results with only a fraction of the preparation. He points to the explosion scene in the James Bond film "Spectre", which took weeks of planning and testing before cameras rolled.

"We don't get that kind of time here," he said. "Here we are always on gas."

His crew follows strict safety protocols, with restrictions on mobile phones and walkie-talkies that can trigger detonations, but risks remain.

Tyagi recalled a recent accident on a set in Chennai in which one worker was killed when diesel tanks exploded.

And on the set of Shah Rukh's upcoming flick "King", where Tyagi was injured while executing a scene involving 1,200 litres of petrol, he said heat from the massive explosion burned his hand despite precautions. □

Comic-Con kicks off with Marvel's return

San Diego, United States

Comic book fans will return to San Diego, California on Thursday for the latest Comic-Con, with many convention-goers buzzing about this year's return of Marvel.

The studio skipped last year's event, but will be back at the coveted Hall H on Saturday to promote

"Avengers: Doomsday," which is slated to premiere in December.

Under the Russo brothers' direction, the latest superhero flick will pick up where 2019's "Endgame" left off, bringing together heroes and villains from X-Men, the Avengers, Black Panther and the Fantastic Four to duke it out once

more.

The last time Marvel was in Hall H, they stunned more than 6,000 attendees by announcing Oscar-winning actor Robert Downey Jr. would return to the Marvel Cinematic Universe or MCU as breathless fans call it not as Iron Man, but as the villainous Doctor Doom.

DC Studios will also grace Hall H to preview its HBO series "Lanterns," starring Kyle Chandler and Aaron Pierre as small-town Nebraska detectives, which debuts August 16.

The flesh-and-blood narrative offers a new take on 2011's "Green Lantern," a Ryan Reynolds-led space adventure movie.

- Sneak peeks -

Since the pop culture festival began in 1970, it has grown into a major

event, with thousands of sometimes-costumed fans gathering in San Diego to buy memorabilia, see their idols and celebrate beloved stories.

Mexican director Guillermo del Toro will mark the 20th anniversary of Oscar-winning "Pan's Labyrinth" on Friday.

Crew members from "Star Trek" will also land in San Diego on Saturday, to commemorate six decades of exploring the far reaches of the universe.

"That's what I'm most excited about," local fan Reyna Villalobos told AFP.

"They told me there will be actors from across the franchise and I think that's incredible."

Studios line up to showcase their best and newest offerings at Comic-Con, with dozens of panels to entertain fans. □



Cosplayers dressed as Marvel characters pose outside the Convention Center during San Diego Comic-Con International in San Diego, California, on July 22, 2026.



Venezuelans search for animal companions lost in the quakes

From bath to fish market: DJs play to revive Japan neighborhoods

Tokyo, Japan

In a century-old Japanese public bath, a DJ works the decks while naked men bathe behind him and students film the scene.

The Tokyo bathhouse is one of many traditional businesses in Japan threatened by urban development and demographic decline, but the students want to showcase its value by transforming it into a pop-up club.

Their collective, Login.jp, moves from shoot to shoot across the archipelago: from a dye workshop and a tofu store to a rice field and a rural train.

They have so far posted around thirty YouTube videos, "digitally archiving" small businesses by transforming everyday scenes through the ambient tracks of a DJ.

The two founders of the collective say they developed a special sensitivity to this heritage because of their backgrounds: Jun Kim is of Korean origin and Rihito Mizoguchi lived in the United States for many years. "Sometimes when you're too close to something, it becomes normalized to you, and your appreciation for that thing tends to dwindle," 21-year-old Kim told AFP.

"We kind of wanted to re-highlight and bring those experiences to people who are living amongst these

businesses and cultures on a day-to-day basis."

Through their project called The Shoten ("small shop"), they also hope to use music to reconnect young people with the local community.

Rihito, 20, explained that being teenagers during the Covid pandemic when most nightclubs were closed shaped their musical culture.

Once everything opened up again, he and his friends were looking for experiences purely focused on music, he said, and were not drawn to club culture which he sees "as more of a party base".

- Beyond Mount Fuji -

The collective posted their first video on YouTube in early 2025, shot in a fish market in Tokyo's Akabane district, known for its retro shopping arcades.

To find a business willing to let them film, they had to bang on the doors of around 30 or 40 shops, said Kim. "Each neighborhood has its own distinct community, and how they do things in that area, (so you have to) take time to speak with the owners, and learn about... the culture around what they do," he added. Kim said the project was about getting "underneath that superficial layer of Japan" and going beyond "Tokyo Tower, Mount Fuji".

Headphones on, 28-year-old DJ Zendo nods his head to the music at the bath or sento in Tokyo's Sumida ward, home to a number of traditional old downtown neighborhoods.

Bathers relax in the water, and soak up the sounds.

"In a typical club, you drink alcohol and chat with your friends, but here taking a bath puts you in a state where you really focus on the music," he said after his set.

"It's a completely new approach."

- Disappearing buildings -

Bathhouse owner Katsuhito Okubo admits he was wary at first. "A lot of people just want to hold events here," but "as we talked, I felt they were really trying to understand our living space".

Okubo, 32, took over the Denki-yu bath, which has been in his family for four generations, after learning it was under threat of demolition.

"Many buildings disappear almost overnight and become vacant lots, and then we neighbours find ourselves asking each other: 'What used to be here again?'"

He believes the sento is one of the few spaces where people learn "kyozai", the act of "coexisting and tolerating one another's presence" without necessarily exchanging a word. □



Volunteer veterinary teams continue to care for animals impacted by the earthquakes at temporary facility in of La Guaira, Venezuela on July 8, 2026.

Venezuelans search for animal companions lost in the quakes

La Guaira, Venezuela

Hundreds of hapless creatures are waiting to be reunited with their owners or find refuge with an adoptive family after Venezuela's devastating earthquakes struck one month ago.

Cats, dogs, turtles and even a goat were made homeless by the 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude quakes on June 24, adding to the human misery of the disaster.

The tremors that struck within a minute of each other killed over 5,000 people, and left over 23,000 homeless in the worst-hit state of La Guaira and injured some 17,000 more.

Survivors wracked with grief over the loss of their loved ones have set about looking for their pets in animal shelters that have popped up around the coastal city of La Guaira, north of Caracas.

"When the earthquake happened, we ran out and she stayed behind. I haven't been able to find her since that day," 42-year-old Raquel Ramos told AFP as she searched for her cat Mia.

Ramos was with her young son in the Tanaguarena neighborhood when the quakes hit.

Like countless other spots along the coast, Tanaguarena is now nothing more than mounds of rubble.

Ramos says she regrets leaving Mia behind and grew teary-eyed as she gazed at a photo of the white-and-orange fur baby on her phone.

"I'm going to other shelters to see if I can find her," she said.

- Four kittens -

In a state-run shelter, dogs play in an open space while cats lounge around in cages, occasionally nibbling at food.

The facility has taken in 326 pets, with around 50 adopted.

Teenager Astrid Ugas was planning to adopt a cat to keep hers company after its partner disappeared during the earthquakes.

She ended up taking in four kittens.

"I want to help everyone who needs it," the 17-year-old said.

One rescue team managed to pull a cat alive -- from the ruins of one building almost one month after the disaster, sparking hope that other pets might have survived too.

The small black feline was found in a decimated area of the city, where six housing complexes, measuring between 12 and 17 stories tall, had all completely collapsed. □

Giant swing on Swiss peak aims to boost summer tourism as Alps warm

Villars-sur-Ollon, Switzerland

As the chairlift nears the Grand Chamossaire peak at the Villars ski resort in the Swiss Alps, screams of terror and delight suddenly pierce the air.

Perched on the mountain-top, at an altitude of 2,110 metres (6,923 feet), a towering V-shaped structure glistens in the summer sunshine, holding a giant swing that catapults visitors out over a gaping void with a breathtaking Alpine panorama stretching before them.

"I had a bit of a pit in my stomach" before getting strapped in, acknowledged Alexandra Henchoz, 37, who tested the new swing with her husband and 10-year-old daughter.

"But once it is happening, it is just incredible. You feel like a bird flying."

The Grand Chamossaire swing, which opened earlier this month, is the latest effort by Alpine ski resorts to attract off-season visitors and make use of ski lift infrastructure as snow becomes less reliable due to climate change.

"We are really trying to diversify our offering," Martin Deburaux, head of the



This photograph shows tourists enjoying the new BalancAIR, a giant swing at the top of the Grand Chamossaire peak, above Villars-sur-Ollon, western Switzerland, on July 20, 2026.

Villars-Gryons-Diableret ski area, told AFP.

The new 12-metre-high swing "provides us with a source of attraction that can function independently of snow conditions", he said.

- Preparing for less snow -

Deburaux stressed that the resort had seen record numbers coming during the past two ski seasons, as visitors who usually skied lower-lying slopes sought higher ground and more

snow.

"But we know we are facing climate change," he said.

"We are looking for substitutes to conserve jobs, the dynamism and the tourist economy built up around our ski lift facilities."

Currently, the resort draws more than 700,000 people during the winter season, but just 100,000 in summer. It aims to triple its summer season numbers in the next couple of years, Deburaux said, adding that doing so

would require offering a multitude of activities.

Nearby hikers filled the grassy paths, while mountain bikers sporting helmets and protective gear sped down a separate, steep dirt trail.

They wind past an ephemeral land art fresco painted by French artist Saype across an entire hillside showing a child drawing.

Deburaux said the new swing had intentionally been erected in a spot that had already been brim-

ming with activity, while leaving other parts of the resort untouched to appeal to those seeking a pristine nature experience.

- Terrified -

The swing, which is accessible to anyone with a ski lift ticket, can take three people at a time.

Each person straddles a saddle affixed to a metal structure made to look like an Alpine Ibex, their hands clenching handlebars as they are strapped down tightly.

Then an elaborate system of cables and pulleys is used to draw them as far back as a 90-degree angle, leaving them suspended face down, perpendicular with the metal platform far below.

When the security cable is suddenly released, the swing plunges forward out over the sharp, jagged drop to exalted screams and a sprinkling of curses, before a spectacular view of the valley below against a dramatic backdrop of rocky and snow-dusted Alps rushes in.

"The feeling of hanging up there, and then being released, it's an amazing sensation," said Yannick Boudouin, 38. □

'Like a war zone': France evacuates 20,000 due to wildfires



This photograph shows residential houses and buildings as smoke and flames from a wildfire emanate from burning trees and vegetation of a forest near Cotignac, southeastern France on July 23, 2026.

Le Porge, France

Black smoke darkened the skies and crackling flames roared through pine trees in a forest in southwest France on Thursday as wildfires have forced more than 20,000 residents and

holidaymakers to flee.

Around 800 firefighters have been fighting the flames some 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Bordeaux.

Hundreds of gendarmes and soldiers have also

joined the operation, while firefighting planes have been dumping water since the blaze erupted Wednesday.

Officials and residents said the fire appeared to have been started by a brush-clearing machine.

John Wilmes, who has been renting a house in Lege-Cap-Ferret, said: "It feels like being in a war zone."

The fire began in the village of Saumos, before spreading to Le Porge and then advancing toward Lege-Cap-Ferret.

Known for its sand dunes, cycle paths and oyster shacks, Lege is popular with French stars.

The blaze advanced rapidly through a dense pine forest, with flames soaring

to 10 metres (33 feet) in some places. It has ripped through 3,400 hectares (8,500 acres), an area about five times the size of Gibraltar, firefighters said.

Three houses were scorched by the flames and a caravan destroyed, but no casualties have been reported so far.

The European Union deployed three water-bombing aircraft from other countries after France sought help, EU officials said.

France has been battered by three heatwaves since May as part of increasingly common extreme weather episodes linked to climate change, causing thousands of excess deaths, drying up rivers and fueling wildfires.

Lege mayor Philippe

de Gonneville said "the weather is not on our side". "We have temperatures above 30 degrees Celsius, with winds that have shifted to the east and north-east and are fairly strong." The blaze was now contained north of Lege, according to officials.

- 'A bit scary' -

Authorities said they had evacuated 12,000 residents and tourists from campsites, holiday lets and homes on Wednesday, then a further 8,800 from camp sites on Thursday. About 15 emergency reception centers have been opened.

Wisps of smoke rose from charred or crackling tree trunks between Le Porge and the village of Lege-Cap-Ferret to the south. □

Why 'Rock Stacking' is more dangerous than you think



(Oranjestad)—“Rock stacking” is not illegal in Aruba, but its impact on nature is harmful as the stones form part of the natural habitat of small animal species living in Aruba’s wilderness. Conservation organizations repeatedly warn people not to participate. To understand the growing opposition to the practice of stacking rocks, it is necessary to understand the deep and negative impact behind it.

The act, called rock stacking, has been practiced for thousands of years and was originally used to guide people on hikes or travelers in mountainous regions, as well as for rituals, burials, and memorials. However, the modern trend is quite different. Today, the popularity of rock stacking has less to do with utility and tradition and more to do with social media. An American artist based in Colorado, Michael Grab, noted that the trend really began gaining popularity around 2014 and 2015, before it exploded and became an international art form.

The reasons behind participation vary widely, ranging from something purely practical or a tradition from the past, to an activity for its “beauty.” For many, it is about leaving a mark, creating “art,” or simply enjoying the process of balancing rocks. In recent times, those who participate in this—especially in Aruba—do so to leave proof of their presence or simply to post on social media.

Although it may seem harmless, there are several problems and negative impacts behind it. One of these is that many animal species hide under rocks to live, reproduce, or escape predators. If you move a rock, you may be destroying a home. If you stack one on top of another, you may expose prey to predators. Whether this is done in nature areas, along the coast, or in desert environments, it can destroy entire colonies and, in the worst case, threaten species that are already endangered.

There are microorganisms and small species such as insects or certain snakes that live in the soil beneath rocks commonly used for stacking. These rocks help trap moisture underneath, allowing the ecosystem to sustain itself. When you remove a rock, the soil is exposed and the moisture can dry up, killing all living organisms that depend on that humid environment.

Additionally, each rock is full of life—everything from aquatic plants to microorganisms attaches to them. Especially when it comes to rocks near the sea, they create habitats for some marine animals. Holes in the rocks can hold eggs, supporting them until the animals hatch. An expert explained that removing rocks from a fragile environment is essentially the equivalent of removing bricks from someone’s house while also taking everything out of their refrigerator.

There is also the issue of erosion and soil damage, because rocks help hold the ground in place, sealing the surface and helping manage excess water, even allowing new life to grow. When these rocks are removed, the soil becomes loose, significantly increasing the rate of erosion in that area.

This erosion can cause sedimentation in nearby bodies of water, negatively impacting aquatic habitats and water quality.

Rocks along the coast are part of a natural ecosystem and play an important role in protecting the shoreline from erosion and the force of the ocean. When people remove or stack rocks, it affects coastal stability, increases the risk of erosion, and damages ecosystems. According to South African National Parks, this is particularly relevant for an island like Aruba—especially considering that most, if not all, rock stacking on the island takes place near coastal areas.

It is understandable that rock stacking may seem like a fun activity to do while off-roading; however, the survival, protection, and conservation of the island are just as important—if not more so—to ensure that in the future there will still be an island for both locals and visitors. We want our visitors to appreciate what Aruba has to offer—in a healthy and sustainable way. □

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Fun facts about the Terns

(Oranjestad)—Throughout the months of January to September, big groups of terns migrate to the island for breeding season. These terns are important sea-birds, and their presence on Aruba is a unique phenomenon. Here are some fun facts about terns.

Why terns matter

Terns (Sternchi in Papiamentu) migrate annually to Aruba for breeding season. Our island, hosts 10 different species of terns which is crucial for global seabird conservation. 90% of Caribbean population of Common Tern nest on Aruba, 25% of Global population of Cayenne Tern nest on Aruba and 25% of Caribbean population of Black Noddy nest on Aruba, making their conservation especially important.

Breeding season

The terns breed mainly



along the north coast of Aruba as well as the San Nicolas Reef Islands (No-Go conservation zones). Baby Beach is a particularly special site for terns,

since this is where they carry out their reproduction rituals. Referred to as a "discotheque" by Natasha Silva, the point of Baby Beach near the open wa-

ter is where a large group of terns spends the season searching for their partner—for life—to reproduce. In Aruba, there are ten different species of terns, all

of which breed at different times. The ten species of terns that migrate to the island include the Cayenne Tern; Cabot's Tern; Common Tern; Roseate Tern; Least Tern; Brown Noddy; Black Noddy; Sooty Tern; Bridled Tern and the Royal Tern

Main threats to these sea-birds are human proximity, kite-surfing, unleashed dogs, ATVs/UTVs, Jet Ski's and pollution.

How to protect them

Aruba Conservation Foundation advises everyone to keep their distance from these seabirds, do not visit the reefs, do not fly drones around nesting areas, keep your dogs on leashes, do not drive on the coastline and do not leave trash thrown about. "Nature has no boundaries and its protection is a shared responsibility." □

Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas

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

Over the course of four decades, its demographics had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing and population are clearly visible

in San Nicolas – more than anywhere else on the island.

Flow of history

If you are looking for history San Nicolas has it.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn about gold, aloe, phos-

phate, 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 refin-



ery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub — varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. □



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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. □

Skipp and Winnie celebrated 68 years of a happy marriage in Aruba!

(Oranjestad)—We'd like to give a shout out to a couple who time and time again show how much they love Aruba! This couple have been coming to Aruba twice a year for the last 42 years and already have a booking for a 6-week vacation here in Aruba next year.

Winnie was a school teacher for 35 years and she was also the sole owner of 2 pro stock race cars with her son Robby as the driver. They competed for 25 years and won many 1st places. Skipp is a mechanic and has his own garage—Speed Garage in NY—so together they make a very good team at home and on the

track!

68 years ago they got married and as all couples go through ups and downs, but love was their "secret sauce". They love Aruba and our people and made so many good friends over the years. To this day you can still see them together on the beach. Winnie is 87 and Skipp is 86, but Skipp



is planning to retire in 15 years—yes, in 15 years! Over the years Skipp and Winnie have brought more than 120 of their friends and family to Aruba. We all

want to wish this amazing couple many more years of happiness and see them back in January 2027. Congrats guys! □

Photo by @SteveFrancees

Fruit Loose & Veggie Boost

Aruban fruits and vegetables

Fresh fruits make a tropical holiday's picture complete. Whether you see the mango's hanging in the trees or the fresh fruit cocktail on the side table of your pool bed, the link is there: you are in the tropics. Aruba grows her own fruits and veggies and there are some pretty out-of-space local species you may never had heard of, but really healthy and delicious.

Mispel

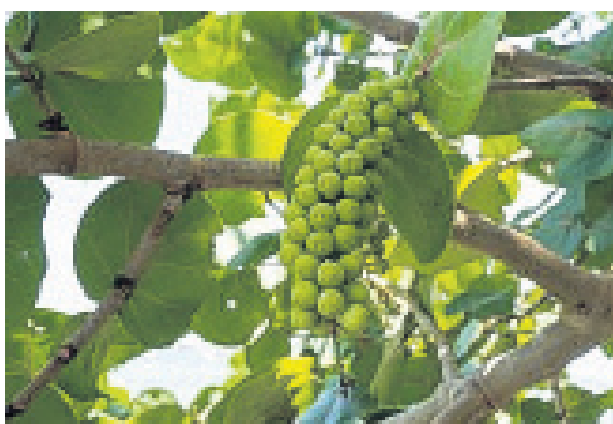
This is a fruit with a character (5-10 cm/2-4 inches). It does not ripe until it is picked or falls off the tree. Mispel is hard with a sandpaper like texture when immature, soft and juicy when ripe. It's technically a berry, but contains a skin similar to that of a kiwi. It's grainy and sweet, with a light, musky flavor. The sap or gum from the tree is also a source of 'chicle' the original ingredient used to make chewing gum. Rich in tannins, antioxidants shown to contain anti-inflammatory compounds, and vitamin C, essential for healthy immune function. Season: year- round.

Kenepa



Ovoid green fruit that grows in bunches on trees up to 30m high. The fruit is related to the lychee and have tight, thin but rigid skins. Inside the skin is the tart, tangy, or sweet pulp of the fruit covering a large seed. The pulp is usually cream or orange colored. Kenepa strengthens the immune system, and prevents the reproduction of bacteria and viruses in the body. This fruit is highly recommended to treat lung infections and urinary tract infections. It also helps to cure insomnia and rejuvenates the nervous system. Season: the fruit typically ripen during the summer.

Druif



There is no chance you did not bump into one of the sea grape trees while spending your vacation on Aruba. The sea grape plant is often

used in ocean-side landscaping in sandy soil right on the beach and it produces clusters of fruit that resemble grapes. Are sea grapes edible? Yes, they are. Animals enjoy sea grapes and humans can eat them as well, and they are used to make jam. They contain very low calories and sugar, enabling good bacterium to digest food and excrete waste quickly which is effective in preventing constipation. Season: Sep-Oct.

Shimarucu

Maybe Aruba's most popular wild fruit tree. You may have noticed cars at the side of the road and people picking those red berries. Well, that's Shimarucu. The local habit to stop for these delicious fruits goes from generation to generation. Its fruit's degree of sour depends on the amount of rain it gets. Red Shimarucus tend to taste better than orange. The fruit has super power: a true vitamin bomb. Adults only need to eat 3-4 of these berries to meet their daily recommended amount of Vitamin C. Season: Rainy months (Oct-Jan).

Tamarind



A delicious, sweet fruit that has a wide variety of uses and applications, both for medicinal and culinary purposes. It is a medium-sized bushy tree with evergreen leaves and fruit that develops in pods characterized by long, brown shells. Inside is a sticky, fleshy, juicy pulp, which is the Tamarind fruit. Both sweet and sour in taste, the fruit contains a significant level of vitamin C, as well as vitamin E, B vitamins, calcium, iron, phosphorous, potassium, manganese, and dietary fiber. There are also a number of organic compounds that make tamarind a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent. Season: March.

When it comes to veggies the island certainly offers a home-grown selection. They taste delicious and have their specific talents to boost your immune system.

Concomber chiquito

This is a sort of local squash, but looks like a cucumber with prickly skin. The taste however is bitterer than the cucumber and the vegetable is smaller in size but bigger in width. Inside is a soft, fleshy pulp and seeds, just like the cucumber. Concomber chiquito is grown in the island and used in salads and 'stoba' (stew) or on its own in vinegar. The veggie contains multiple B vitamins, including vitamin B1, vitamin B5, and vitamin B7 (biotin). B vitamins are known to help



ease feelings of anxiety and buffer some of the damaging effects of stress. Additionally this veggie is rich in two of the most basic elements needed for healthy digestion: water and fiber. Season: year- round.

Yambo

Family of Okra, also known as 'lady's fingers': a green flowering plant. Okra belongs to the same plant family as hibiscus and cotton. A classic favorite dish in Aruba is Sopi di yambo. It has long been favored as a food for the health-conscious. It contains potassium, vitamin B, vitamin C, folic acid, and calcium. It's low in calories and has a high dietary fiber content. Recently, a new benefit of including okra in your diet is being considered. Okra has been suggested to help manage blood sugar in cases of type 1, type 2, and gestational diabetes. Season: year-round.

Bonch'i Cunucu

A long, small bean, boiled for a side dish or snack. Long beans have a chewy, crunchy texture—more so than snap beans—and a flavor reminiscent of the dry navy bean or asparagus. Besides stir-fry, soups and salads, the long bean is a good choice for stewing, braising (to remain chewy and firm), sautéing, shallow frying, and deep frying. With cooking, the long bean's bean flavor intensifies. Long beans are low in calories, about 45 calories per cup, and rich in vitamin A and also contain vitamin C and potassium. Season: year-round.

Pampuna



In the endless summer of Caribbean living we only have to concern ourselves with a wet season and a dry season. Still we do indulge heavily in the pleasures of pumpkin and enjoy Caribbean pumpkin recipes year round. A popular dish in Aruba is Sopi di Pompuna, don't miss it. This dish is made of pumpkin soup, and parsley. Pumpkins are rich in flavonoid polyphenolic antioxidants such as xanthin, lutein and carotenes and also contain vitamins. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, minerals and proteins. Pumpkins are used to make desserts, breads and soups. □

Cas di Torto

Cas di torto (also called cas di lodo or cas di bara) is a traditional building technique from Aruba. It refers to a type of houses made of mud with rounded corners. These houses were usually found around the plantations. The few structures that still exist are the oldest structures that are left standing in the country.

The technique probably came over from the Venezuelan Paraguaná Peninsula

in the 18th century. Existing houses date back 150 years. Until 1925 many houses on Aruba were built using this technique, afterwards it fell into disuse. In 2005 there were 62 cas di torto houses left, of which only four were in good condition.

The skeleton of the houses is made up of round wooden poles placed with distances of 1.5 feet between them. Branches are interwoven between them, completing



the structural support. On this basis, loam is applied, mixed with sand, water and paragrass. This is then coated with aloe vera juice, which gives the white color and helps to protect against the weather.

On top of the poles pieces of wood are fitted that serve as the base for the roof beams. Until 1815 the roofing usually

consisted of corn (maize) stems, afterwards the nuclei of columnar cacti were used. The floor is made of loam, mixed with cement or cow dung.

The houses were usually divided into a kitchen, a living room, a porch and a bedroom. In the kitchen would be a wooden or metal bar-

rel for storing water that was collected in small rain ponds. Around this barrel a thick loam wall would be erected. Often large families would live in these houses; people would sleep on mats on the floor.

If you visit the Arikok National Park you will be able to see a very nice cas di torto. □

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 starts

blooming first.

The legend of the Kibrahacha

Written by Hubert (Lio Booi)

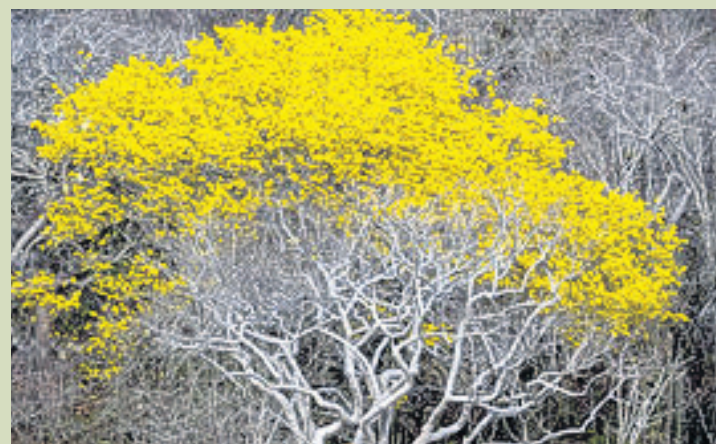
One day Aterima, who lived west of the hill Sero Warawara, woke up one day to find her father sleeping in his hammock, suffering a bout of terrible fever. Her mother was very worried, and as was the custom in the olden days, asked Aterima to go fetch Kudawecha, who was an epistemophile, to come see his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

Aterima wasted to time and went to go fetch Kudawecha. Upon telling Kudawecha that her father was sick, he immediately accompanied Aterima back to her hut, where he encountered her father in a bad state. Not willing to waste any time, he told Aterima that the only thing that can cure her father is a home-made potion made out of the Kibrahacha flower. At the time the

Kibrahacha was not yet in her blooming season, but the stubborn Kudawecha 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. Kudawecha, experienced veteran in all things Aruban flora and fauna, told Aretima to start plucking 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.

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

Upon arriving back at the hut, Aretima'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 Aretima'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. □

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CROSSWORD

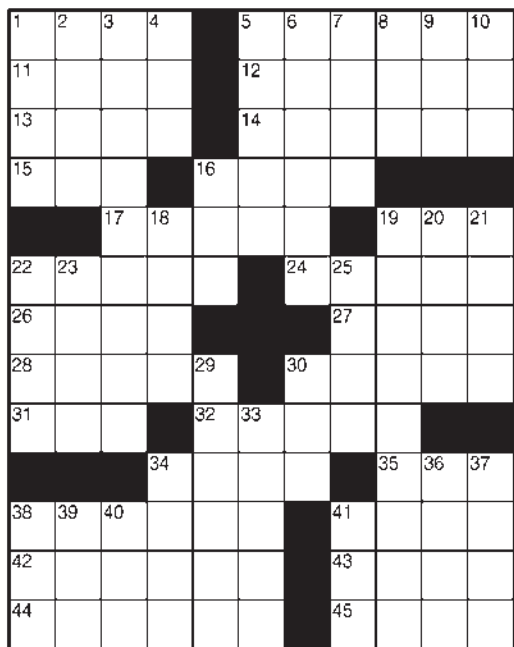
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Informal farewell
5 Collect \$200, maybe
11 Final, e.g.
12 Reverberated
13 Marina spot
14 Worn down
15 — Aviv
16 State frankly
17 Diamond corners
19 Newsstand buy, for short
22 Crab's place
24 Hackneyed
26 St. Louis sight
27 Mob event
28 Gags
30 Stately dance
31 Braying beast
32 Witty remarks
34 Crooned
35 Diving bird
38 Speculative question
41 Lot unit
42 Pal of Pooh

DOWN

- 43 Onion layer
44 Made tea
45 Sibilant summons
1 Final, e.g.
2 Car bar
3 Members of the offense
4 Band blaster
5 Irritate
6 Clue heading
7 Display
8 Grassy clump
9 "Golly!"
10 Strange
16 Cigar bit
18 Ibuprofen target
19 They hold letters
20 Scads
21 Stan of jazz
22 Mexican peninsula
23 Amorous archer
25 Snare
29 Knight's attendant
30 Costume part
33 Hungry, probably
34 Put away
36 "Exodus" author
37 Lane's co-worker
38 Fly catcher
39 That woman
40 Pro vote
41 Pharaoh's symbol



3-29

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

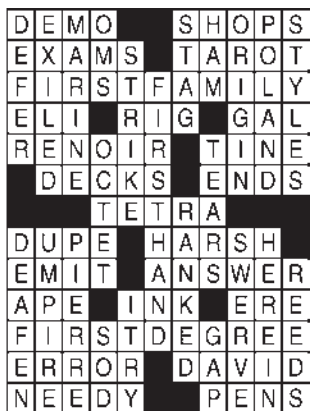
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-29

CRYPTOQUOTE

VO LFHYH HMHY NSWHR D
KDC TFHB TH NDB'L QH
LSUHLFHY, XHHE WH VB CSAY
FHDYL; V'JJ RLDC LFHYH
OSYHMHY. — D.D. WVJBH

Cryptoquote: I ONLY HOPE THAT
WE NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF ONE THING — THAT
IT ALL STARTED WITH A MOUSE. — WALT
DISNEY



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.



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.

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.

CRUISE SHIP SCHEDULE	
JULY	
21 TUE	CARNIVAL HORIZON Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
22 WED	FREEWINDS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: Berth: E
26 SUN	FREEWINDS DEPT. Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E
28 TUE	CARNIVAL MAGIC Arrival: 9:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
29 WED	FREEWINDS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: Berth: E

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

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

Difficulty: ★★★★★

7/24

Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★★★

7/23

AI-led boom in IPOs raises concerns about a bust

Paris, France

This has been a banner year for stock listings, thanks largely to AI firms, but the massive size of the operations raises questions about whether the markets can continue to absorb them.

In just the first half of 2026, there were \$194 billion in stock market listings worldwide triple the amount for the same period in 2025 and more than last year as a whole, according to figures from consultancy EY.

The bulk of the money has been raised in the United States, and to a lesser degree in China.

The massive \$86-billion listing of SpaceX shares in June accounted for nearly half of the total.

Equity markets haven't seen such activity since central banks eased up on corporate financing as part of efforts to prop up economies whiplashed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, "this intense frenzy of demand is really concentrated in a few sectors that are working right now, such as AI and technology, also maybe aerospace and defense, maybe biotech," said Matthew Kennedy, a senior strategist at Renaissance Capital.

Tech firms need to finance hundreds of billions in investments into developing and deploying AI.

Debt markets and private



The Space Exploration Technologies Corp.

financing are not capable of satisfying their needs. Among investors "there is a belief that AI responds to a long-term economic need and that now is the time to invest," said Philippe Kubisa at PwC France.

-China and U.S. dominate -

Eight out the top 10 initial public offerings (IPOs) of shares since the beginning of the year have been in the United States, with half on the Nasdaq which caters to tech shares.

The "financial deregulatory measures undertaken by Donald Trump since the start of his mandate" have facilitated the listings, said EY's Cedric Garcia, who advises companies on stock listings.

"We're even seeing a desire to list as much as possible before the midterm elections in November as

a victory by Democrats could threaten those measures," he added.

The second half of the year could also see blockbuster listings potentially worth hundreds of billions from the two leading AI start-ups in the U.S.: OpenAI and Anthropic. AI is also driving the growth in listings by Chinese firms, as well as the tighter restrictions on capital movements amid continued tensions between Beijing and Washington.

In the current situation "Chinese companies that would have raised funds in the United States are now turning to Hong Kong," said EY's Garcia.

With \$48 billion in funds raised since January, Hong Kong's exchange is in line to record its best performance in five years according to PwC.

The \$3-billion listing of Victory Giant, a supplier for AI chip giant Nvidia, puts it in fourth place globally for 2026. □

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mhalley1204@gmail.com

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mhalley1204@gmail.com

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Oranjestad: Oduber
Tel. 582 1780

San Nicolas: Aloe
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OTHER

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Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic 588 0539

EMERGENCY

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Police Oranjestad 527 3140
Police Noord 527 3200
Police Sta. Cruz 527 2900
Police San Nicolas 584 5000
Police Tipline 11141
Ambulance 911
Fire Dept. 115
Red Cross 582 2219

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Taxi D.T.S. 587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba 583 3232
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AI catches up with humans to score 100% at top maths contest

Shanghai, China

A perfect result at the world's most prestigious mathematics contest used to be the preserve of a handful of bright young minds each year, but for the first time, artificial intelligence has also scored full marks.

Two Chinese tech companies, Huawei and Xiaohongshu, said their AI models each achieved 100 percent on the questions given to human hopefuls at this month's International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO).

They were the first AI labs to announce their scores, but others from around the world may follow suit in the coming days.

"We are delighted with this result, because achieving a perfect score at the IMO is extremely challenging," Xiaohongshu said in a statement this week.

"Previously, no large language model had ever achieved a perfect score under the IMO's official judging process," the firm



A logo of Huawei is seen during the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai on July 6, 2023.

added, referring to the tech that underpins AI tools like chatbots.

In 2025, models made by the likes of Google and OpenAI reached gold-level scores for the first time but could not match the abilities of five human contestants who got 100 percent.

- 'Frontier of AI' -

This year, 666 contestants from different countries took part in Shanghai.

Just seven of them achieved full marks, according to the official IMO scoreboard.

Participants at the IMO, held in different locations each year, must be aged under 20.

Huawei said Wednesday that its AI system "Celia" had shown "comprehensive problem-solving capabilities" across several mathematical fields.

Xiaohongshu, known as RedNote in English, said its model "dots-note-3.0" had entered the IMO for the first time this year.

Tech firms were only provided with the IMO problems after human contestants had taken the exam, with their submissions required within a specified time limit. "During testing, any form of human intervention was strictly prohibited," and the AI solutions were submitted to IMO organisers for grading, Xiaohongshu said.

AI's progress has been fast: at the 2024 IMO, Google achieved a silver-medal score, solving four of the six problems over two to three days.

Deedy Das, a partner at the US-based investment firm Menlo Ventures, said he had given this year's IMO questions himself to four cutting-edge AI models.

All four from leading U.S. labs OpenAI and Anthropic, the startup Axiom Math and "Kimi K3" from China's Moonshot AI scored 42 points out of 42, he said on LinkedIn.

"The frontier of AI has officially moved well past IMO math," Das wrote. □

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South Korea promises free homegrown AI chatbot this year

Seoul, South Korea

South Korea plans to launch this year a free artificial intelligence chatbot service powered by domestic technology, Seoul said Tuesday, seeking to reduce reliance on foreign platforms.

Roughly half of South Ko-

rea's population of 51 million used generative AI applications in February, according to market research firm Wiseapp-Retail. The vast majority nearly 23 million used ChatGPT, developed by U.S. firm OpenAI.

As the technology has

spread, countries have become increasingly concerned with so-called "AI sovereignty" developing domestic models serving their own security, privacy and business interests.

A spokesperson for South Korea's science ministry told AFP Tuesday that a government initiative aims to roll out a general-purpose AI chatbot as well as an AI agent capable of more complex tasks by the end of the year.

"To persuade users to move away from foreign AI services they already pay for, we need to provide services that are even better," Science Minister Bae Kyung-hoon told reporters on Monday.

"We want Korea to move quickly into the era of AI agents and compete in that field," he told a news briefing.

The government's first priority under its "AI for All"

scheme is to integrate public AI agent services that would provide functions unavailable on existing foreign platforms, the minister said.

The plan is also designed to overcome the digital divide by providing AI service for free, compared with many existing models which require monthly subscription payments.

From 2027, Seoul plans to expand the system into personalised AI agents capable of assisting users with tasks such as asset management, learning support and retirement planning.

"Providing free domestic AI services encourages users to adopt Korean platforms, allowing demand and data to accumulate and helping the domestic AI market grow on its own," Kim Yong-beom, senior presidential secretary for policy, said in a Facebook post on Tuesday. □



South Korean President Lee Jae Myung (2nd R) poses with Nvidia founder and CEO Jensen Huang (2nd L), South Korean Science and ICT Minister Bae Kyung-hoon (L) and Hyundai Motor Group Chairman Chung Eui-sun (R) during an MoU to strengthen Korea's physical AI capabilities on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Gyeongju on October 31, 2025.

Norway set to make formal complaint to FIFA over Balogun red card saga

London, United Kingdom

Norway's football chief told The Times they are set to make a formal complaint to FIFA over the suspension of Folarin Balogun's World Cup ban because it has put "the whole game at risk".

Lise Klaveness, the president of the Norwegian Football Federation (NFF), says she will seek the backing of her board at a meeting on August 6 to lodge the complaint with FIFA's ethics committee over an incident that "should not have happened".

Klaveness told AFP the intention is to "include the Balogun affair" in a complaint already filed by the NFF over FIFA president Gianni Infantino awarding football's governing body's inaugural Peace Prize to US President Donald Trump, which was widely ridiculed. "I will bring it to a board meeting and discuss with my board, and then we do it," Klaveness told The Times in an interview published on Thursday.

"To me, it should be in the same sphere of ethical complaint."



President of the Norwegian Football Association Lise Klaveness after a training session with the Norwegian men's national football team at The University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG).

Trump's involvement in the Balogun affair sparked the controversy.

Balogun's red card in the last-32 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina resulted in an automatic suspension for the match with Belgium. But FIFA stepped in and suspended his ban, leading to widespread condemnation, especially when it emerged that Trump had

intervened by phoning Infantino.

Belgium appeared inspired by the row and thrashed the co-hosts 4-1.

"When you bend a rule like this, you're on a slippery slope that will put the whole game at risk," said Klaveness.

"It is a worry for the game when you compromise fundamental rules of the

game.

"First of all, it should not have happened. It is very important now to have honest communication around it.

"We all know that this verdict was influenced from external forces and did not have the proper process."

"We need our leader in FIFA to say that this was an error," she added.

- 'Under the carpet' -

Klaveness, a former Norway international who has been head of the NFF since 2022, said bending over for a head of state was a dangerous precedent.

"If you start to adapt in such a way towards state leaders and state politics, you will move your behaviour and the organisation's behaviour, and also the red line of what states' leaders should interfere with," she said. "And that happened."

Klaveness was unimpressed too that, according to The Times, the decision to suspend the ban had been taken solely by the chairman of FIFA's disciplinary committee, Mohammad al-Kamali, who did not consult the other members.

"When you make controversial decisions, and when there has been an external, very powerful voice in your ear, it's very important that you have more voices (making the decision)," she said. "And if you don't, it's a mistake."

Klaveness said the issue could not just be laid to rest and forgotten about. □

Hearn dismisses Fury talk of Joshua no-show for super fight

London, United Kingdom

Anthony Joshua's promoter Eddie Hearn has dismissed comments from Tyson Fury that the long-awaited clash between the two former world heavyweight boxing champions may not happen. Fury and Joshua are both back in the ring this week for bouts against Poland's Mariusz Wach and Albania's Kristian Prenga, respectively, that are seen as must-win warm-up fights if their 'Battle of Britain' is to go ahead.

Fury, 37, faces Wach in the Thai resort of Pattaya on Friday in what is effectively a charity contest, with no live broadcast, while compatriot Joshua, 36, is in action the following day in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The British rivals are expected to finally meet in November, with a date and venue yet to be announced for a bout many boxing fans wish had taken place when at least one of the duo still held a world championship belt.

Two-time heavyweight champion Joshua's bout with Prenga will be his first professional fight since being involved in a car crash in Nigeria in December that killed two of his close friends.

Fury, in a recent interview with Sky Sports, said he is prepared to face "somebody else" later this year. But Hearn insisted Fury was more likely to pull out given his record.

"Look at history," Hearn

told Sky Sports. "Check the facts, check the resume. If you really want to pick one fighter who's more reliable than the other, I don't think it's a close-run race.

"What fight has AJ ever pulled out of?...Don't forget, AJ has not only fought every contender he could have, he also previously signed to fight Tyson Fury, who pulled out of the fight because of an arbitration ruling involving Deontay Wilder.

"The only thing that's going to stop the fight from happening in November is if one of these guys gets beat this weekend or picks up an injury."

Joshua, speaking Wednesday, said he was still struggling to process the deaths



Britain's boxer Anthony Joshua gestures as he arrives at the Jeddah Yacht Club in Jeddah on July 22, 2026.

of Sina Ghami and Latif 'Latz' Ayodele, who were both killed in the crash near Lagos on December 29.

"It's tough, every time I think about it, it hurts," Joshua told the BBC. "Even talking about it now... pictures... it hurts but I keep my mind occupied you know. If I stop, you let it sink in and I'm not ready for it to sink in yet."

Ghami was Joshua's full-time sport and exercise rehabilitation coach and worked with him for more than 10 years, with Ayodele, also a close friend, his personal trainer. Saturday's bout will be Joshua's first competitive fight since his knockout loss to IBF world champion Daniel Dubois at Wembley Stadium in September 2024. □



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Carapaz claims Tour de France stage as Pogacar loses key team-mate

Orcières-Merlette, France Ecuador's Richard Carapaz climbed to victory on the Alpine 18th stage of the Tour de France on Thursday as race leader Tadej Pogacar lost a key team-mate to illness.

Former Giro d'Italia winner Carapaz attacked his five breakaway companions with just over three kilometres to ride and cruised to his second Tour stage victory, with Swiss Mauro Schmid beating American Matteo Jorgenson to second place. Pogacar finished safely alongside his main rivals around four-and-a-half minutes later but he was counting the cost of a couple of damaging days as Brandon McNulty was forced to pull out.

That came just a day after another team-mate, Adam Yates, struggled home 26 minutes after

stage 17 winner Jasper Philipsen after suffering from an upset stomach. "It's totally different be-

cause Adam had stomach troubles, he was vomiting, and Brandon has a type of constipation," said UAE

Emirates-XRG sports manager Matxin Joxean Fernandez.

"When you don't have a

fever, you're not positive for covid, nor the flu, nor anything, but your throat hurts, you have mucus, a headache.

"That's what Brandon felt today, right from this morning."

Both McNulty and Yates, whom Pogacar said was getting better, are crucial mountain lieutenants for the reigning champion.

UAE's problems Tim Wellens also said on Thursday morning that he was not feeling well could not have come at a worse time.

The next two stages, which both finish atop the iconic Alpe d'Huez mountain, will be brutally tough.

"I'm really sad that today Brandon felt so bad and he could not finish," said Pogacar.

"We will miss him the next two days, obviously, but I think Adam is getting better and tomorrow I think we'll go with the flow. □



EF Education - EasyPost team's Ecuadorian rider Richard Carapaz cycles to the finish line to win the 18th stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 185 km between Voiron and Orcières-Merlette in the French Alps, on July 23, 2026.