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Trump hints at Kim contacts after scaling back Seoul drills

Washington, United States

U.S. President Donald Trump said Monday that Kim Jong Un had responded to his recent overtures, a day after he scaled back military drills with South Korea and praised his relationship with the North Korean leader.

Trump said he was making the situation "much safer" through his ties to Kim, whom he met three times in his first spell in the White House, but has yet to encounter during his second term. While praising the leader of nuclear-armed North Korea, he rebuked key ally Seoul for failing to help Washington fight Iran a war Trump says is aimed at stopping Tehran from getting the atomic bomb. Asked why Kim hadn't replied to his requests for a conversation since returning to office last year, Trump told reporters in the Oval Office: "How do you know he hasn't responded?" When pressed about whether Kim had actually responded, Trump said: "Yeah, he has." Asked what stage the conversations with Kim were at, Trump said "it's very positive," but provided no further detail. Trump then doubled down on his praise for Kim, saying their ties reduced tensions.



South Korean protesters hold placards as they attend a rally to oppose the joint military exercise between South Korea and the U.S. named Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS), in front of the U.S. embassy in Seoul on August 17, 2026.

"You see, I'm actually making it much safer. Kim Jong Un has always treated me with great respect," Trump said. "I understand him. He understands me."

- 'Strange' -

Trump initially took aim at South Korea on his Truth Social network on Sunday night, abruptly announcing that he had ordered the Pentagon to scale back "inappropriate and hostile" military drills with Seoul. He also linked the decision

to South Korea's refusal to help with the US-Israeli war with Iran.

"Wait a minute. We have 39,000 soldiers over there, guarding you from Kim Jong Un, your next-door neighbor, and you're not going to help us on a very easy military operation in Iran. That's strange," Trump said in the Oval Office. Trump once again called into question US support for both South Korea and NATO allies that have refused to contribute to the

Iran war.

"We can't go around and protect all of these countries, especially when they're not there to help us," he said.

South Korean officials said the exercises had begun as planned and that they hoped the personal chemistry between Trump and Kim would bring them back to talks. North Korea has not responded publicly, although it has previously voiced anger at the regular joint maneuvers that

take place in the South. The top US Senate Democrat on military affairs slammed Trump's order to downsize the Korean drills, and said China and Russia were "watching how easily this president abandons America's allies".

"This is another inane, haphazard decision by President Trump and his chaotic administration," Senate Armed Services Committee ranking member Jack Reed said.

- Asian anxiety -

The 11-day Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises are designed to prepare for a possible war with North Korea. Colonel Ryan Donald, spokesman for the US and South Korean Combined Forces Command, has said they will simulate combat against North Korean troops hardened by their deployment on Russia's side in its invasion of Ukraine. Seoul's presidential office told AFP it remained in "close coordination" with Washington over the exercises. Pyongyang decries the drills as dress rehearsals for an invasion.

It recently test-fired a ballistic missile over the Sea of Japan, and warned on Friday it could respond to the exercises with a "new level of deterrent". □

Two largest U.S. reservoirs hit record lows amid western drought

Los Angeles, United States

The two largest reservoirs in the United States have fallen to record lows as a severe drought grips the

country's West, according to data released over the weekend.

The new records highlight the difficulties fueled by

climate change facing the Colorado River, a crucial resource for 40 million people.

The river feeds both Lake Powell and Lake Mead, two reservoirs created by massive dams built to distribute water year-round and generate electricity.

Their water levels are now just above the threshold at which electricity production would be affected.

On Sunday, the level of Lake Powell, which lies mostly in Utah, fell to 3,519.80 feet (1,072.8 meters) above sea level, just below its previous low set in 2023, according to data from the Bureau of Reclamation, the federal

agency responsible for monitoring the Colorado River.

On Friday, Lake Mead, created by the Hoover Dam on the boundary between Nevada and Arizona, fell to 1,039.70 feet above sea level, (316.9 meters), data showed.

The seven states that depend on the Colorado River have been arguing for years about how to share the river's water without being able to reach an agreement. The impasse forced the Trump administration to act as arbiter, unveiling a plan at the end of July that includes significant restrictions to address the drought threatening the

river.

The new plan allows the administration to impose restrictions on California, Arizona and Nevada, requiring them to reduce their collective water consumption by up to 3.7 billion cubic meters per year until 2036 the equivalent of 1.5 million Olympic-sized swimming pools.

It does not require major efforts from Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and New Mexico, the other states that depend on the river. This disputed imbalance could lead to a legal battle, and Arizona has already set aside several million dollars for potential lawsuits. □



A "bathtub ring" is visible at sunset during low water levels the Lake Mead reservoir due to the western drought on July 19, 2021 as seen from the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River at the Nevada and Arizona state border.

OpenAI to lease massive new AI data center in U.S., backed by Nvidia

San Francisco, United States
ChatGPT-maker OpenAI will lease a massive new data center in the United States for 20 years, backed by a \$105 billion financing commitment from Nvidia, according to a regulatory filing published Monday. The project will be built on the site of a former Cold War-era uranium enrichment plant in Ohio and could eventually grow to have 8 gigawatts of capacity, making it the largest single data center for artificial intelligence (AI). The data center will also run "exclusively" on Nvidia chips.

SoftBank and the data center's owner, a subsidiary called SB Energy, will invest more than \$4 billion into local energy infrastructure and "build at least 10 GW of new energy generation" to power the data center. OpenAI will commit \$40 million to "support local priorities."

Additionally, Nvidia will invest \$1.5 billion into SB Energy, though the company preemptively pushed back on critiques about so-called circular financing, which has fueled fears about an AI bubble that



This aerial view shows an Amazon Web Services (AWS) data center adjacent to single-family homes in Stone Ridge, Virginia on August 12, 2026.

will eventually burst. "OpenAI will pay the lease," Nvidia wrote in a blog post on Monday, and continued that the deal was made with "the same discipline we apply to supply-chain management." However, Nvidia's financing guarantee, its largest, marks a shift in scale for a practice that has become common in the sector: despite explosive revenue growth, AI developers still depend on financial back-

ing from their own suppliers to build the giant infrastructure underpinning this technological revolution.

- 'Huge site' -

Nvidia previously considered providing a backstop of \$250 billion dollars, according to the Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg in July. Nvidia's shares fell by 5 percent after those reports but they're up by more than 19 percent this year. "This is going to be a huge

site, with enough computing power to help millions of people use AI to do things we can only start to imagine today," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said in a statement. OpenAI expects the project to create 35,000 temporary construction jobs over six years and 2,500 "long-term operating jobs," it said in a blog post. Promises about jobs and energy investments are a response to growing hostility toward data cen-

ters, which need heavy amounts of electricity and water to operate.

More than 70 percent of Americans oppose building them near their homes, according to a Gallup poll from March, and rising electricity bills, attributed in part to these sites, are fueling debate in the midterm elections.

OpenAI and SB Energy maintain that they will cover the data center's energy and infrastructure costs without passing them on to local residents. It will initially have 4.25 GW of capacity with the possibility of adding an additional 3.75 GW. A nuclear power plant can provide around 1 GW of energy. The entire city of San Francisco consumed just over 5 GW of energy in 2024, according to state data. Last year, OpenAI, Nvidia and SoftBank alongside other partners including Oracle also announced a \$500 billion, multiyear data center project called Stargate, in which they've committed to building out 10 GW of capacity across multiple sites. Half of that capacity is being built in UAE. □

U.S. pauses construction of border project in Texas national park

Houston, United States

President Donald Trump's administration said Monday it had paused construction on a \$1.7 billion border project at Big Bend National Park in Texas that has faced fierce local opposition across party lines. The Department of Homeland Security plans to build vehicle barriers, patrol roads, lighting and detection technology across the park, known for its spectacular views and rich biodiversity, including hundreds of bird species, bobcats and black bears. Bulldozers broke ground earlier this month on the public lands that blend desert, river and mountain ecosystems and are home to the famed Santa Elena Canyon. An official map for the proj-

ect shows a "technology and patrol road" would cross rugged territory -- including the Mariscal Mountain -- which critics say would require extensive dynamite blasting. "Last night, I put a pause on all activity in that park as far as construction goes, until I get down there and do a personal evaluation," Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Rodney Scott said in a short video posted Monday on X, adding he would talk with local stakeholders and that more updates would come this week. The Trump administration has waived dozens of environmental laws to greenlight the project, which was awarded through a non-competitive process as part of the president's

broader push to build an immense border wall with Mexico.

- Residents, officials opposed -

There has been a bipartisan backlash from residents and local officials, including all 14 Texas border county judges, who signed an open letter saying they supported border security but wanted more "practical solutions."

According to CBP's data, there are relatively few migrant apprehensions in the Big Bend Sector -- 9,624 between January 2024 and July 2026, compared to 23,080 in the Swanton Sector of the US-Canada border over the same period. Jake Knight, executive director of the Big Bend Protection Alliance, gestured



Heavy machinery is seen inside Big Bend National Park in southern Texas, on August 15, 2026.

to the rugged borderlands behind him, telling AFP: "It's quite literally impossible to traverse, whether on foot or in a vehicle, from the other side into this area. Furthermore, this is not the will of the people of this region." The nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity has sued the government to block the project, alleging the

waivers violated the Constitution, and plans to file for an emergency injunction on Monday.

"I've never seen communities so outraged and unified on a single flight, this has become a serious force to be reckoned with," Laiken Jordahl, a national public lands advocate at the nonprofit, told AFP. □

Ceuzany, Cape Verde's golden voice with volcanic emotion

Mindelo, Cape Verde

Barefoot, arms raised and teeming with emotion, Ceuzany belts out the signature track from her latest album, a song dedicated to the fight against domestic violence, in a powerful voice that sends shivers through the Cape Verde bar.

From the very first notes the deep yet soaring timbre of the song, part of a new generation of Cape Verdean music, sparks applause.

"Enough! We're calling it quits, go your own way, I am happy without you," several women sing from the audience, joining the musician who is moved to tears.

On this late-May evening in Mindelo, a city on the archipelago nation's Sao Vicente island, passersby who recognise the singer stop in the street to join the concert.

Ceuzany's voice ranges from crystalline highs to deep lows, as she performs everything from jazz to slam, commanding the stage with wavy blonde hair and earrings framing her radiant face.

The day before she radiat-



Cape Verdean singer Ceuzany Pires sings next to composer and guitarist Hernani Almeida during a concert at a bar in Mindelo, on May 26, 2026.

ed infectious energy under the bright lights of a music video shoot, dancing with abandon in a silver rhinestone suit and Panama hat to the galvanising percussion of her latest and fourth album. The record blends saxophone, percussion and the cavaquinho, a popular four-stringed instrument, although some songs are more stripped down, featuring Ceuzany's voice and an acoustic piano, or a swaying zouk rhythm set

against the warm sound of the ukulele.

"I started singing at age 12 in a competition in Cape Verde, and I haven't stopped since," Ceuzany Pires, 35, told AFP with a beaming smile.

"My grandmother had dreamed of becoming a renowned artist in Cape Verde, but her parents didn't want her to sing," said the mother of two.

"She was always singing serenades at home and

I was always listening. It is thanks to her that I have this taste for music and that I deeply love singing," she added.

- 'Soul coming through' -

Ceuzany is often compared to the legendary Cesaria Evora, the "barefoot diva" who introduced the world to two traditional genres of Cap Verdean music: morna, which is characterized by soft, nostalgic melodies and coladeira, which fea-

tures a faster rhythm.

"Ceuzany is one of Cesaria Evora's heirs, as she is a great morna singer," said her producer, Jose Da Silva, who has served as producer for both women.

"Ceuzany is capable of injecting a bit of rap into coladeira. She is just as comfortable with urban music artists as she is with traditional ones," he said.

Warm and funny, Ceuzany is also "a true daughter of Mindelo, she possesses that same spontaneity that Cesaria had".

The singer herself says that she is "immensely honoured" to be part of the Cesaria Evora Orchestra, which performs around the world to keep alive the music of the "barefoot diva" who died in 2011.

For musician Hernani Almeida, who arranged Ceuzany's latest album and composed several of its songs, she is unique among the new generation.

"When Ceuzany sings, you feel soul coming through," said the guitarist, adding that "it really touches people".

- 'Queens' -

Ceuzany's songs evoke Mindelo, the ups and

downs of love, and difficult topics like the ravages of crack cocaine ("pedra") on the impoverished archipelago located off west Africa.

She says her fourth album is very special to her "because it deals with domestic violence".

"I've been through it," Ceuzany said, explaining that "I gathered the strength to leave a toxic relationship" that lasted nearly five years.

The title track and single "No tchal te li" ("We stop here") tells the story of a romance that sours into a cycle of physical and emotional abuse.

Ceuzany, who has since received numerous messages and has engaged with women who are victims of domestic violence, has turned the song into an anthem of liberation and self-empowerment. □

Monica Bellucci and Florin Serban win at Locarno Film Festival

Geneva, Switzerland

"You Don't Belong Here" by Romanian director Florin Serban won the Golden Leopard on Saturday at the 79th Locarno Film Festival

in Switzerland, while Italian star Monica Bellucci won an acting award in another movie.

Serban, a leading figure of the Romanian New Wave,

said on the festival website that his film was "above all, a portrait of a way of seeing the world that may be disappearing. Or perhaps should disappear."

The jury honored Monica Bellucci for her role in "Kettice" by Giovanni Tortorici, a film about teenagers' search for identity and desire for freedom.

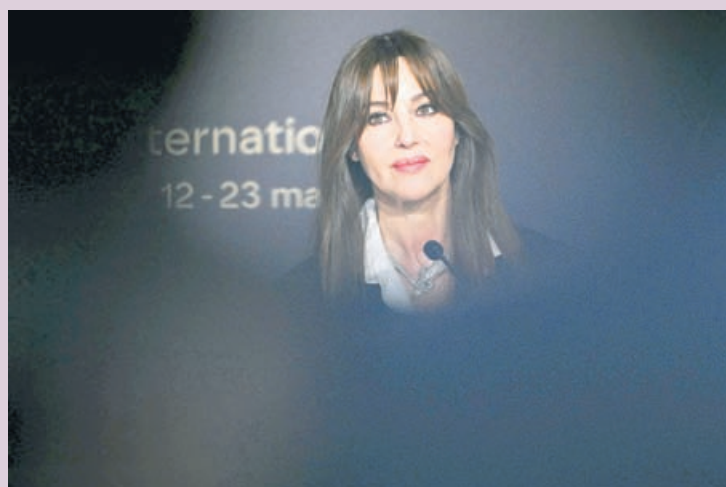
South Korean actress Kim Minhee also won an acting award for "Nowhere to Lay My Eyes," by Hong Sangsoo, the story of a brother and sister visiting their mother on Jeju Island.

Serban's dark film clocks in at more than two-and-a-half hours, exploring the relationship between Marius, the head doctor

at the hospital in his small hometown, and his teenage son Ioan, whom he has raised alone since his wife's death.

Marius's world is turned upside down when he learns that the police suspect his son of murder. The festival jury praised the film for the "strength of its writing, the uniqueness of its vision, and its exceptional command of film language".

Seventeen films competed for the Golden Leopard, the highest honor at the film event held every summer in the small Swiss town on the shores of Lake Maggiore. It comes with a prize of 75,000 Swiss francs (\$92,000), shared between director and producer. □



Italian actress Monica Bellucci attends a press conference for the film "Histoires de la nuit" (The Birthday Party) at the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France on May 23, 2026.

Is this cave in Turkey where Homer wrote 'The Odyssey'?



This photograph shows a part of the caves in Bornova Homeros Valley, believed to be where famous Greek Poet Homer lived and wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey, in Izmir on August 7, 2026.

Bornova, Turkey

On a Turkish hillside overlooking the olive-covered slopes outside Izmir is a cave known to generations of locals as the place where Homer penned "The Odyssey".

"This place was always called Homer's Valley by the locals. Travellers from all over the world would come and see the cave where Homer is said to have composed his poems," explained Turkish researcher Altan Altin, who has written a book on the subject.

In fact, nobody knows exactly where Homer wrote his epic poems and there

is much mythology around the idea of his cave. Today, of course, the debate has become livelier and more immediate thanks to Christopher Nolan's blockbuster film "The Odyssey".

The poet has for a very long time been associated with the Izmir region of Turkey's Aegean coast, which for most of its history was known as ancient Smyrna. "The Smyrnaeans have the river Meles, with its lovely water, and at its springs is the grotto, where they say Homer composed his poems," wrote the 2nd-century Greek chronicler and geographer Pausanias.

Those words have fuelled a centuries-long debate, one that continues today, about Homer's life and the location of the river where he was thought to have been born in the year 8 BC.

- Remarkable precision -

Visiting the cave, which is filled with rocks, is not easy. Inside, travellers have left Greek scrawled on the walls, although it is not clear how old the writing is. Although other places, notably the Greek island of Chios, also lay claim to Homer's origins, ancient Smyrna and its hinterland where Bornova is located

are closely associated with the poet.

"For me, there's no doubt, Homer is from Bornova. In any case, he is from Ionia, which includes Smyrna and Chios. He's from these lands," Altin told AFP. Ionia is the name of an ancient Greek region on Turkey's Aegean coast.

To support his thesis, Altin pointed to a 3rd-century BC frieze depicting the deification of Homer, which he says reproduced the Bornova cave with remarkable precision.

"This bas-relief was already known, but no one had ever noticed the identical details to those found in Homer's cave. This is the first time such a detailed geographical description came to light," he said.

Archaeological evidence from the area also suggests a link to Homer.

"The discoveries from the excavations, especially coins bearing Homer's likeness, show us that the inhabitants of ancient Smyrna considered the poet to be one of their own," archaeologist Mehmet Akif Erdem said. "'The Iliad' and 'The Odyssey' were written in the (ancient Greek) dialects of Ionic and Aeolic, suggesting that ancient Smyrna and Bornova could be among Homer's native lands," he said.

- Homer everywhere -

Beyond the academic debate about his origins, Homer is everywhere in Bornova.

At Yesilova Hoyuk, a Neolithic site considered to be the oldest known prehistoric human settlement in Izmir, there is a bust of Homer with the inscription: "I compiled The Iliad and The Odyssey epics on this land. I lived in Bornova."

The town -- which already hosts a book fair dedicated to Homer and has a statue of Trojan War hero Hector in a local park -- is planning to refurbish the cave and open it to visitors to capitalise on the revival of interest in the ancient poet.

"Preserving Homer's legacy is a duty we owe to humanity. He is one of the founding fathers of literature," Bornova Mayor Omer Eski told AFP.

"The stories he tells are about this land. The question is not whether we should claim Homer or not. His story is also ours," he said.

But not everyone shares his vision.

In 2024, municipal officials from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AKP party proposed renaming Homer's Valley after a Turkish fighter, saying the site should not have a Greek name. □

U.N. laments 'unacceptable' toll of 350 aid workers killed in 2025

United Nations, United States

The number of aid workers killed worldwide in 2025 reached 350, with the most fatalities in Gaza and Sudan, the United Nations said Monday, calling attacks on humanitarians "unacceptable."

The death toll, however, was slightly lower than that of 2024, when 377 aid workers were killed.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) cited the figures from the research and advisory group Humanitarian Outcomes in a statement marking World Humanitarian Day. Some 186 humanitarians were killed in Gaza -- the deadliest place for aid workers for the third year running -- followed by Sudan with 71 killed.

"More than 1,000 aid workers have been killed in just three years and that is utterly unacceptable," Tom Fletcher, under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs,

said in the statement.

"But just calling it out will not protect the next aid worker. States must uphold international humanitarian law and use every tool to protect civilians and our colleagues," he said. "And for those who break the rules, there must be real consequences."

Since the start of 2026, 82 more aid workers have been killed, 97 injured and 39 abducted worldwide.

OCHA voiced particular concern over the proliferation of armed drones "that are putting lethal power into ever more hands and sending more explosive weapons into towns and cities."

In Sudan, armed drones caused 80 percent of civilian deaths in the first four months of 2026, hitting markets and health facilities, the statement said, also noting casualties from drone attacks in the Russia-Ukraine war. □



U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mike Waltz (R), United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher (C) and U.S. State Department Senior Official for Foreign Assistance, Humanitarian Affairs and Religious Freedom Jeremy P. Lewin hold a press conference at the United Nations Headquarters on May 14, 2026, in New York, United States.



Ultra-Orthodox protesters demonstrate against Cafe Basimta operating on Shabbat, the weekly Jewish day of rest, as secular activists stage a counter-protest in support of the cafe, in central Jerusalem, on August 15, 2026.

Sabbath cafe clash lays bare Israel faultlines

Jerusalem, Undefined

Alma Ronen has been fighting in the Israeli military nearly constantly for more than two years. Spending her Saturday not in uniform but in a T-shirt and jeans, she would like to enjoy a coffee outside -- and resents that her more religious compatriots think otherwise.

Every week since June, ultra-Orthodox protesters have descended on a cafe in central Jerusalem that lies precariously close to their neighbourhood, angered it has opened on the Sabbath, or Shabbat, the day of rest when observant Jews shun work, machinery and exchanging money.

Clad in their matching modest black suits, dozens of ultra-Orthodox Jews -- all men and boys shouted "Shabbat!" as they approached Cafe Basimta, with several younger ones working themselves into a frenzy as they screamed and theatrically pretended to spit or throw down their hats.

Secular Israelis were prepared with a counter-protest, blowing whistles to drown out the chants and with some wearing pink lapel buttons showing a mid-

dle finger. One held up a banner, "Our Holy Right to Drink Coffee."

The face-to-face feud on the Jerusalem street presents a snapshot of two very different Israels as the country prepares for October 27 elections that will be a verdict on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu, while personally secular, has relied politically on ultra-Orthodox Jews for nearly two decades. Now leading the most right-wing government in Israeli history, he has helped the ultra-Orthodox exert growing clout.

- Anger over military service -

In a source of particular bitterness for many secular Israelis, ultra-Orthodox Jews enjoy stipends for religious study and with Netanyahu's backing are exempt from military service, even as forces are stretched fighting a regional war since the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas.

"I feel anger in my heart that only some people must go to the army and serve," said Ronen, 20, who has been fighting in Gaza and southern Lebanon.

"These people only have their lifestyle and are not

open to any opinion but their own," she said.

Amit Yair, 77, was blunter as he waited in a long queue to order coffee.

"The Orthodox are parasites. You can't say any other word for this," he said. "All they want is money from the government," he said. "They say it's God's land but they want to kill everything that is here to make it a Halachic state," or a government run by Jewish law.

The cafe was opened by a supporter of preaching Christianity to Jews, a movement derided by many Jews, although customers said the identity was irrelevant to them.

One Orthodox protester, engaged in a shouting match with a counter-demonstrator, said he had chosen to live in a religious area.

"I don't want my kids to leave the house and see a coffeshop open," he said. "It's not a matter of not respecting you, but this is attacking my family's faith," he said. "When you say you're a Jew, that means a commitment."

Ultra-Orthodox Jews approached at the protest declined to speak to journalists, saying that doing so would violate Shabbat. □



A man walks past a mural painting during the eighth edition of the PigmenTrip Muralism Festival -part of the local Festival del Jaguar- in Concepcion de Ataco, Ahuachapan, El Salvador, on August 15, 2026.

Winning back walls from gangs, artists fill El Salvador's towns with color

Concepción de Ataco, El Salvador

On the walls where gang members in El Salvador once marked their turf, urban artists are now creating large murals in a traveling festival that fills the streets of the Central American country with color.

Cans of paint are used by a dozen painters to depict jaguars, faces, flowers, birds, and other local elements, this time in the picturesque town of Concepcion de Ataco, Ahuachapan, nestled among coffee-growing mountains about 65 km (40 miles) west of San Salvador. Before, it was "frightening" to go out into gang territories and paint murals because of the "harassment" from gangs, said Isaac Sosa, 31, founder and organizer of the Pigmen Trip festival, which he has been holding for eight years in different locations in El Salvador.

Gangs have lost power in this small nation due to the "war" waged since 2022 by President Nayib Bukele, a conflict marred by allegations of abuses that could constitute crimes against humanity, according to NGOs. "With this change, this rebirth we are experiencing as a country...it's a different atmosphere, more peaceful, more enjoyable, and with greater freedom of expression," said Sosa.

"Years later, we won back the walls from the gangs," said the muralist who considers art a "magical tool" for "social transformation."

- "It wasn't so easy to paint" -

More than 200 murals have been created since the festival began, which, in addition to Salvadoran artists, has also featured artists from Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Peru and Argentina.

Darwin Flores, a 36-year-old artist, recalls that before the gangs were neutralized, they couldn't attempt to paint in the "hot zones" without taking every precaution.

"You had to know exactly where you were going to be, who you were going to be painting the mural with, because we couldn't afford to be ignorant," Flores said in this town of cobblestone streets and clay tile roofs. Now he says he can enter any neighborhood, as he recently did in La Campanera, which for years was subjected to the terror of the gangs.

"It wasn't so easy to paint back then, but now everything is very different," says Cristian Juarez, a 29-year-old who works with a prosthesis after losing his right leg in an accident 11 years ago. □

National Park Arikok: Aruba's biggest nature conservation

The National Park Arikok comprises almost 18 % of the island. Its rugged terrain, desert-like hills filled with tall cacti, breathtaking coastline and protected local flora and fauna welcome you to be explored. There are numerous animals to discover, for example the bright blue Cododo or mighty Warawara.

The national park Arikok takes you on a memorable journey of the islands past offering unique geological, cultural and historical sites. These can all be enjoyed and explored either on your own or during guided tours. A wide variety of educational and informative programs and fun activities is available.

Did you know that four of the seven species of sea turtle lay their eggs on Aruba's beaches? In the national park, a Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) keeps a strict eye on a very special event taking place below on the beach: A majestic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) heading back to the ocean after laying her eggs during breeding season. Sea turtles prefer nesting in the cool and dark hours of the night. And hatchlings usually wait for the cue of cooling surface sand before emerging.

Nature Conservation

The protected area of National Park Arikok was officially established in 2000. Arikok National Park is a 34 square kilometers (7907 acres) of natural area, located at the north-eastern part of Aruba which contains examples of most of the island's flora and fauna against a backdrop of great geological complexity. We are proud to state that approximately 18% of the total land area of Aruba is assigned as a National Park, to protect and preserve the flora, fauna, geology and historical remains present within Arikok National Park.

The Landscape

There is a great geological variety within the park. The



main aspects are the rough hills of the volcanic Aruba lava formation, the mysterious rocks of the batholithic quartz-diorite/tonalite, and the limestone rocks from fossilized coral. The two tallest hills on the island are situated within the park. Jamanota hill 188 meters (617 ft) and Arikok hill 176 meters (577 ft), from which the name of the park is derived.

The line of the permanently wind-and-wave beaten North Coast is broken by several bays (boca's). Most of them are small yet impressive inlets at the mouth of dry riverbeds. Some of these bays (boca's) are spectacular sights, adorned with white, sandy beaches and sand dunes, as is the case at Boca Prins and Dos Playa.

Arikok is also home to Conchi, Aruba's most important natural attraction; also known as The Natural Pool. The journey to the Pool is and adventure by itself and only possible by foot, horse, or 4x4 vehicle. As of 2020, ATV's and UTVs are not allowed in the park due to its significant impact on nature.

Cultural and Historical components

There are a number of sites within the park that attest



to the history of Aruba. The Caquetío Indians left rock paintings in Cunucu Arikok and Fontein Cave.

Old plantation (Cunucus) sites tell the story of an active yet challenging agricultural past.

These Cunucus were also residential areas for the few families that worked the land. These families found ways to survive in the difficult conditions, and were able to erect their homes with materials found in the

area. Two of these adobe houses have been restored. Park rangers are learning many of the old building techniques in order to preserve this unique Aruban mud-house. At Cunucu Arikok and near Plantation Prins you can find these adobe houses.

Park Management

The Aruba Conservation Foundation (ACF), formerly known as Aruba National Park Foundation, manages the national park. This foundation was established in July 2003. In February 2017, mangrove and wetland RAMSAR site #198 Spanish Lagoon was annexed to Arikok National Park due to its importance as a feeding and breeding area for water birds and as a nursery area for a variety of marine organisms. With this addition, the areas under management increased by 70 hectares while the amount of species of flora and fauna to be conserved to over 250.

On December 21st, 2018 (AB 2018 no. 77) Parke Marino Aruba currently consisting of four marine protected areas (MPAs) was officially established and subsequently brought under management of ACF. In 2019, preliminary management plan for marine were introduced for Parke Marino to conserve reefs, seagrass beds, and mangrove forests and in 2020 ACF was given additional management areas such as the Saliñas (Druif, Malmok, Cerca, Palm Beach, Bubali etc.) and also additional areas such as Rooi Manonchi, Ser'I Teishi etc. Managed areas can be seen here: <https://acf.aw/>.

Visit the National Park Arikok to see the wonder of Aruba's nature. The visitor center in San Fuego and entrance in Vader Piet (San Nicolas) is open daily from 8:00 AM to 16:00 PM. Contact the ACF via e-mail, info@acf.aw or call +297 585 1234 for more information. □

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Aruba Police Force celebrates 40th anniversary



(Oranjestad)—The Aruba Police Force (KPA) commemorated its 40th anniversary with a Holy Mass at the San Francisco Pro-Cathedral in Oranjestad, in the presence of His Excellency the Governor, authorities, special guests, and a large number of community members. The celebration provided a moment for reflection, gratitude, and prayer for all members of the Aruba Police Force, as well as an opportunity to ask for continued protection as they carry out their important work in service of the country.

The 40th anniversary celebration was also attended by police delegations from the Netherlands, Curaçao, Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius, Sint Maarten, and



Suriname. Minister Dowers extended a special welcome to the delegations and emphasized that their presence symbolizes not only their support, but also their shared commitment to combating crime locally, within the Kingdom, and internationally.

Following the Mass, the various police forces took part in an official parade that passed in front of the Government Office. The official

delegation, including Minister Dowers, received the parade and saluted the participating police forces. With 40 years of history behind it, the celebration marks not only an opportunity to reflect on the journey of the Aruba Police Force, but also to look ahead: strengthening integrity, investing in a new generation of police officers, and preparing the KPA for the security challenges of the future. □

PSA from the Aruba Conservation Foundation: How to behave when you see a “lora”

(Oranjestad)— The conservation of the Yellow-Shouldered Amazon, also known as the ‘Lora,’ relies on how we act as humans. We’ve seen many hikers who’ve encountered the ‘Lora’ in our protected nature areas and we can certainly imagine the pride and joy it brings to any Aruban. However, not everyone may know how to behave when encountering these clever and social birds. This guide is here to explain the behaviors that will most effectively help us in our efforts to conserve the ‘Lora.’ Please, don’t just read but also follow these guidelines so we can ensure the survival of these



birds for future generations.

No interfering, please

Please refrain from interfering with the “Lora”. The Lora is a highly intelligent and social animal, perhaps slightly too friendly

because they have gotten used to the rangers as they prepared for their re-introduction. However, it is our collective responsibility to help them adapt to the wild once again. Please play your part by not inter-

fering (calling, provoking etc.) with the Lora. Simply enjoy their beauty from a safe distance.

Be respectful and keep cats and dogs away

Pets and strays such as cats and dogs are prone to attacking other animals, especially birds, as part of their natural instincts. Please make sure your pets are kept inside of your yard or are kept on a leash when going out for a walk.

Do not feed them food or water

You may think that giving the any food or water is doing a good deed, but it actually does not contrib-

ute to them developing survival skills in the wild. By interfering with the survival instincts of wild animals, we are doing the opposite of helping. Therefore, please do not attempt to give the Loras food or water.

Capturing a Lora is against the law!

The biggest threat to the Lora before their extinction in 1947 was caused by human activities including poaching and killing of the Lora. Let’s work collectively to prevent this from happening again. So when you see the Lora, enjoy their beauty from a distance and admire them as they flourish in the wild. □

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Shalom Hair & Nails Bar | Twist of Flavors | Dunkin Donuts
Treasure Cove | El Patio Tacos & Tequila | M8 Boutique
Fusion Restaurant, Tapas, Wine & Piano Bar

Local fishermen celebrate International Fishermen's Day with fishing tournament in Palm Beach

(Oranjestad)—This past Saturday, local fishermen gathered at the Center for Fishing Hadicurari (Centro di Pesca Hadicurari) in Palm Beach, where 42 boats competed to see who can catch the biggest fish. With a total of 1045.4 kilos of fish caught, this day saw immense dedication and love what has always been a fundamental aspect of the Aruban culture.

The competition started in the middle of the night, where fishermen started reporting their departure

from piers all over the island. From 11 am, tents were set up at the fishing center and visitors arrived to enjoy the food, music and overall vibe of the spectacular event. At the same time, the first few boats starting coming in to weigh their catch.

By 2 pm, fishermen crowded the center with their buckets of fish, weighing their biggest fish and taking pictures of their catch. Winners were announced at 5 pm sharp. The competition had a wide range of cat-

egories, from biggest types of fish caught, to categories specific to smaller and larger boats.

The biggest Dorado/Mahi Mahi caught weighed 12.2 kilos and was caught by the Driftwood Fishing Team. The biggest Tuna caught weighed at 9.3 kilos—breaking the scale—and the category was won by Bloemond boys.

Team Tech Boys snagged the prize for biggest fish caught in the entire competition when they presented a Cubera Snapper weighing at a whopping 22.9 kilos. This super team also won the prize for greater weight in the big boat category, winning first place with a total of 138 kilos of fish caught. Second place went to STC Boys with a total of 126.8 kilos, and third place went to Bloemond Boys with 77.9 kilos of fish caught in total.

This tournament not only showcased the hard work that fishermen do out in the open ocean, but also proved that the fishing culture is very much alive on Aruba. Under the leadership of long-time fishermen, we see how the younger generation is carrying this tradition into the future, making sure that the fishing sector on the island keeps thriving. □

Some pictures are from the Center of Fishing Foundation Hadicurari (Fundacion Centro di Pesca Hadicurari).



Dining in? Try making some local favorites! How to make “funchi”



(Oranjestad)—One of the most famous Aruban snacks or appetizers is “funchi hasa” (fried polenta sticks), a super easy meal that adults and children will both enjoy. Here’s how to make it!

Before we start, get to know the basics

What is funchi hasa? Funchi, or Aruban polenta, is a popular side dish for lo-

cal dishes, like soups, stews and fried fish. Made from a corn flour, water and butter mixture, this appetizer is traditionally eaten alongside a warm meal. However, locals also like to fry sticks of funchi for a quick and filling snack.

Ingredients (measured by heart)

1. Polenta flour/Funchi flour
2. Water
3. Butter
4. Salt to taste

Directions

Bring water to a boil in a medium-sized sauce pan. Add in some salt and butter to taste in the boiling water and let this dissolve and melt. Then, gradually add the flour while stirring with a

wooden spoon. The mixture will start to begin to harden pretty fast, so be careful not to add too much. At this phase of cooking, you want a goopy thick mixture, but thin enough so you can continue to stir to get all the lumps out.

After reaching a semi-firm, yet flexible texture, grab a baking pan or any large, deep plate, and pour the mixture in. Be sure that this plate is wet or greased so that the mixture does not stick to the bottom. Let this cool completely while it firms up for the last time. Once it's cooled you can enjoy it as is, topped with some butter or shredded cheese. Or, you can take it to another level of deli-



ciousness.

When your funchi is firm enough, cut it into strips (size is up to you). Heat up some oil in a pan and fry those babies up! After frying, you can top it with

some cheese or enjoy it with your favorite dipping sauce.

Photo credit of fried funchi sticks: Jacqueline Felida on Pinterest.

Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas

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

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

Flow of history

If you are looking for history San Nicolas has it.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba’s industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn



about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industries which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experience the touching stories of those who were part of this history.

The Community Museum holds a remarkable collection that spans millennia.

Ancient fossils stand next to tableaus of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barbershop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can



be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment.

The new San Nicolas

In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to 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. □

Adriaan Lacleé: One of Aruba's richest men in the twentieth century



(Oranjestad)—The name Adriaan Lacleé may ring a bell to locals as one of the main roads on the island, but about a century ago, Adriaan Lacleé was a rich businessman, well-known for his generosity, wealth, and taste.

Adriaan was born in 1866 and was the eldest of six children. Not much is

known about his childhood upbringing or any of his earlier business ordeals, but during his hey day he often helped people get loans, was a well-established trader, and owned several plots of land. In fact, he commissioned the construction of the famous La Quinta Carmen manor now a restaurant. Though he himself never lived in



the beautiful manor, his own house also reflected his success and good taste. Currently, renovations are taking place to restore the Lacleé house. It can be found in the back streets of main street Oranjestad.

Regarding his personal life, it has been said that he was married twice during his lifetime. He had his first daughter during his first marriage but lost his wife

soon after her birth. During his second marriage, he fathered 16 children. However, it has been said that only 11 of those 17 made it past 18 years of age. Perhaps two of his most well-known daughters are Maria Monica Lacleé and Maria Veneranda Lacleé, who went on to marry successful brothers Eloy Arends and Maximilian Arends, respectively. Their houses are still standing; Eloy and

Maria Monica's mansion functions as the townhall, used to host civil marriages, while Maximilian and Maria Veneranda's house stands on the opposite side of the road to them though currently under renovation after years left in ruin. □

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

Aruba: The island of Aloes

ORANJESTAD – Aloe Vera, a succulent plant species, is renowned for its incredible properties for the skin. It is widely distributed and usually grows in tropical, semi-tropical and arid climates on the planet. But this plant also had a very prominent role in the history of Aruba, and its significance to the island's economy endures to this day.

The leaves of Aloe Vera contain a good amount of gel which when used topically, is great for the skin. Traditionally, Arubans use this gel to treat minor burns and other skin ailments, or just to keep skin supple and looking bright and nourished. Aside from the gel, aloe contains a bitter, yellow substance (called aloin) which is a gentle but powerful laxative, and it is also the origin of the indus-

try of aloe in Aruba.

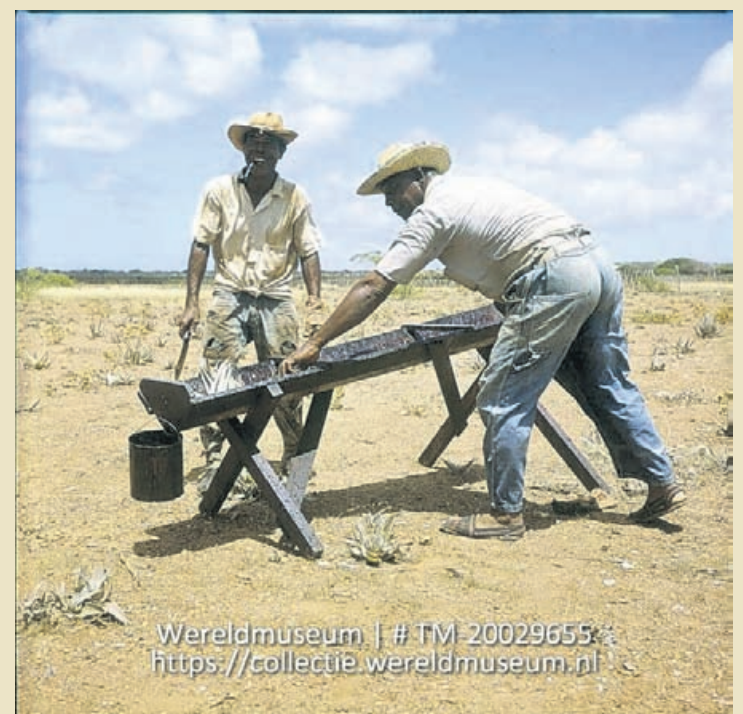
Aloe vera was introduced in Aruba around 1840, when most of the island's inhabitants were farmers of little means. Dutch Governor Van Raders introduced the plant after it had been introduced in other islands of the Caribbean to cultivate and harvest the aloe to produce the laxative.

Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes."

Under Commander Jan Helenus Ferguson (1866-1871), aloe experienced a boom, which is why there is a road named after him, which goes through the aloe fields. In the 19th century, Aruba was the main supplier of aloin for laxative, which was imported

abroad to the United States and Europe. The aloin from Aruba and Curaçao was known to be one of the best in the world and was more expensive, which meant that at the time, it had significant economic impact, particularly for the local farmers.

However, by the time the oil industry arrived on Aruba, it changed the labor market on Aruba, shifting away from agriculture. It would be after World War II that aloe would make a comeback. And eventually, as science learned about the amazing properties of aloe gel, the industry shifted from producing laxative to producing skin care. An interesting fact is that in 1951, the production of Aruban aloe amounted to around 30 percent of the total global production!



The impact and relevance of aloe is visible all around Aruba. While most homes will have a few plants for personal use and decoration, houses are also decorated with aloe motifs, and at some point, aloe even featured on post stamps. Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe

fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes." And in 1955, the aloe became a part of Aruba's coat of arms, symbolizing prosperity for the island. □

Images from the archive of the National Library of Aruba.

CROSSWORD

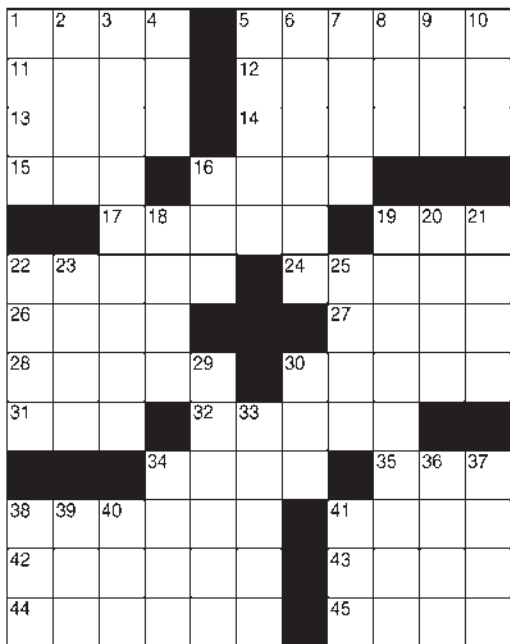
By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Wanes
5 Try to win
11 Enthusiasm
12 Shrewd
13 Risqué
14 Right away
15 Bible boat
16 Singer Baez
17 Left over
19 Used to be
22 Loser to Truman
24 River through Nantes
26 Way to go
27 Pants part
28 "Olympia" painter
30 Heart, for one
31 Texting letters of shock
32 Young pigeon
34 Close
35 Vacuum's lack
38 Perfect place
41 Realty unit
42 Job ad datum
43 Tattoo site
44 FBI employees
45 "You there!"

DOWN

- 1 Poet Pound
2 Yellowstone animal
3 Start of a golf stroke
4 Crafty
5 Mist
6 Lebanon neighbor
7 School on the Thames
8 Merriment
9 Mel of the Giants
10 Old auto
16 Crested bird
18 Singer Seeger
19 Some offensive players
20 Open space
21 Glimpsed
22 Band sample
23 Midterm, for one
25 Gumbo veggie
29 Casual top
30 Unconscious
33 Wharves across
34 Reach
36 Fancy flower
37 Budget amount
38 Can. neighbor
39 Price setting
40 Bullfight cheer
41 Nile serpent



4-26

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

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

4-26

CRYPTOQUOTE

BV NBS GSVZ FSP RFGVQZPWFG

ISRQ ZXUVFTV NXUU MQSCWCUI

FSP RFGVQZPWFG ISRQ NSQGGZ.

— VUCVQP BRCCWQG

Cryptoquote: CHOCOLATE COMES FROM COCOA, WHICH IS A TREE. THAT MAKES IT A PLANT. CHOCOLATE IS SALAD. — ANONYMOUS



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.

CRUISE SHIP SCHEDULE

AUGUST

16 SUN	FREEWINDS DEPT. Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E
18 TUE	CARNIVAL HORIZON Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
19 WED	FREEWINDS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: Berth: E
23 SUN	FREEWINDS DEPT. Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E
25 TUE	CARNIVAL MAGIC Arrival: 9:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: B GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: C
26 WED	FREEWINDS Arrival: 6:00 Departure: Berth: E
30 SUN	FREEWINDS DEPT. Arrival: Departure: 24:00 Berth: E

ARUBA TODAY

SUDOKU

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

King Classic Sudoku

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

Difficulty: ★★

8/18

Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★

8/17

U.S. had hottest month on record in July

Washington, United States
July 2026 marked the hottest month on record for the contiguous United States, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Monday, continuing a recent trend driven by human-caused climate change. The average temperature for the month in the 48 states, excluding Alaska, Hawaii and overseas territories, was 76.9F (24.9C), making it the warmest July and the warmest month of any kind in the agency's 132-year record.

That was 3.3F above the 20th-century average and breaks the previous record for the hottest month, July 1936, which was 76.8F. Above-average temperatures were observed across the interior West, Southwest, Rockies, northern Plains and Upper Midwest, as well as parts of the Gulf Coast and Southeast. Wyoming saw its warmest July and warmest month on record, with temperatures 5.1F above average and 0.9F warmer than its previous July record, in 2007. The other top five warmest months on record nationally are July 2012, July 2006 and July 2022, with human-caused climate change, due mainly to the burning of fossil fuels, looming large over the trend. The so-called "Dust Bowl summers" of the 1930s especially that of 1936 were fueled by drought and extreme heat combining with overplowing across the Great Plains, with the hot, exposed land influencing temperatures across North America and beyond into Europe and East Asia, according to research on the subject.

- Climate change fingerprint -
July 2026 began with a heat wave gripping much of the densely populated eastern United States. Scientists from the World Weather Attribution group released an analysis showing the hot and humid conditions that characterized that hot spell -- which fell



A man wipes himself off as people cope with extreme heat along the National Mall in Washington, DC, on July 3, 2026, as high temperatures grip the US capital ahead of Independence Day celebrations.

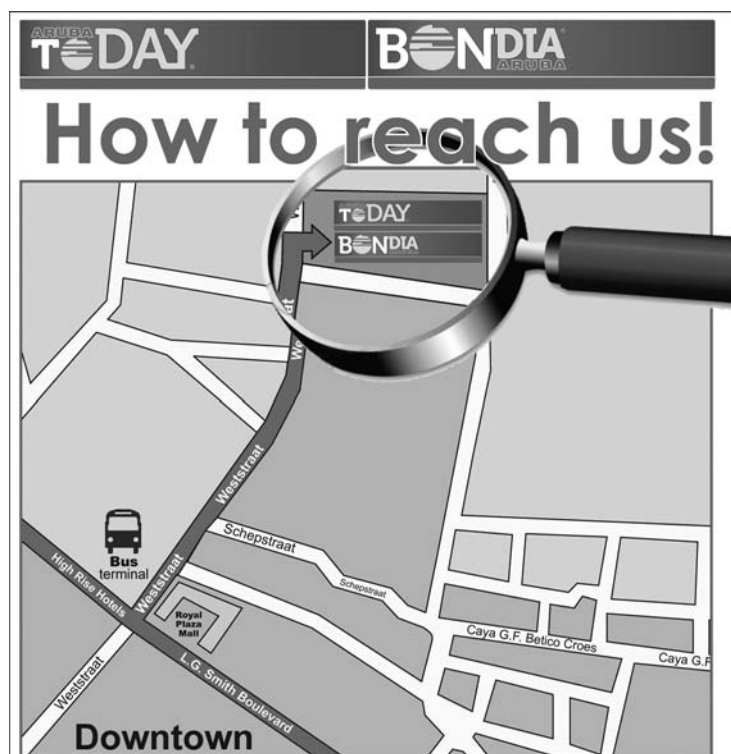
as the country celebrated its 250th anniversary and hosted the soccer World Cup's later stages would have been "virtually impossible" without human-caused climate change. The naturally occurring El Nino climate pattern, which began in June and is expected to peak later this year, is also thought to have influenced a weeks-long heat dome in northwestern states that occurred in July. Record-warm sea surface temperatures in the central Pacific shifted where tropical storms form and release energy, which in turn distorted the jet stream over the western US and allowed hot air to get

trapped in place. Hot and windy conditions meanwhile brought elevated wildfire conditions, with much of the western United States already experiencing abnormally dry to drought conditions across multiple years.

- El Nino's impacts -

Regions home to around 900 million people experienced their hottest July on record in 2026, including the Sahel, Central America, France and Spain, according to an AFP analysis of European Union Copernicus data, which combines observations from satellites and weather stations around the world, together with climate mod-

eling. The strengthening El Nino could shatter all-time records, "adding fuel to a planet already on fire" and pushing the world into "uncharted territory," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned recently. □



ARUBA
TODAY

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HEALTH

DOCTOR ON DUTY

Oranjestad Hospital 7:00 pm/10:00pm Tel. 527 4000	San Nicolas IMSAN 24 HOURS Tel. 524 8833
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PHARMACY ON DUTY

Oranjestad: Oduber
Tel. 582 1680

San Nicolas: Aloe
Tel. 584 4606

OTHER

Dental Clinic	587 9850
Blood Bank Aruba	587 0002
Urgent Care	586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic	588 0539

EMERGENCY

Police	100
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

TAXI SERVICES

Taxi Tas	587 5900
Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

AID FOUNDATIONS

Aruba Food Bank
Tel. 588 0002

FAVI- Visually Impaired
Tel. 582 5051

Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel. 736 2952

Narcotics Anonymous
Tel. 583 8989

Against Domestic Violence(FCVR)
Tel. 583 5400

Centre for Diabetes
Tel. 524 8888

Child Abuse Prevention
Tel. 582 4433

Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

'People could get hurt': Conservationists decry AI wildlife visuals

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The black-and-white image appears to show the unlikelyst of interactions: an orangutan cradling endangered leopard cubs deep in the jungles of Malaysia's Sabah state.

But the viral image is not just unlikely, it is fake, part of a trend of wildlife images generated by artificial intelligence that experts warn endanger animals and people.

AFP fact-checkers have debunked scores of similar synthetic visuals, from an elephant climbing a tree to escape flooding in Myanmar to a pink dolphin leaping out of water in the Philippines.

The images are often accompanied by heartwarming anecdotes and have circulated widely in multiple languages on platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and X.

They may seem more like feel-good fiction than dangerous misinformation, but experts warn hyper-realistic visuals of wild animals behaving like pets, or even like humans, can distort



A toque macaque (*Macaca sinica*) plays with other macaques in Dambulla, Sri Lanka, on August 15, 2026.

public perceptions of wildlife and harm conservation efforts.

"This misunderstanding can lead people to approach animals too closely or interact with them in unsafe ways," Jose Guerrero-Casado, a zoology professor at Spain's University of Cordoba, told AFP.

He cited a widely reported

incident in China's north-west Xinjiang region in January, where a woman was attacked by a rare snow leopard after trying to get closer for a photo.

China's forestry department said it stepped up patrols after the incident and warned the public to maintain a safe distance when encountering wild animals.

- Sowing doubt -

Conservationists say AI visuals portraying wild animals as cute or cuddly make it harder for social media users to discern what is real and can fuel exploitation. They increase demand for certain species "to be used in the tourism industry as photo props, exploited to

make social media content or to be kept as pets", said Chris Lewis, a researcher at the international wildlife charity Born Free.

And while the visuals could encourage some people to support animal protection, "the negative impacts outweigh that completely," said Jenny Roberts of conservation group WWF. "People could get hurt," she told AFP.

WWF uses real images for its fundraising efforts, but fake content online "desensitises" people to even the most incredible original visuals, she said.

"When you do have something remarkable, people question it," Roberts said, recounting an incident where a camera trap set up by her charity captured a tiger with five cubs in China. Such footage had never been filmed before in the East Asian country, she said.

"But when we put the content out there, we were questioned on social media: 'Is this AI-generated?'"

- 'Major threat' -

A September study in the journal *Conservation Biology*, co-authored by Guerrero-Casado, concluded that the rapid spread of AI misinformation and its potential to harm environmental efforts is a "major threat" to society.

The researchers highlighted another challenge for those working in conservation: AI images "could affect the ability of people to identify species" and cause misunderstandings about the abundance and distribution of wildlife. Scientists often mine data from citizen science platforms that accept photos and recordings of wildlife submitted by users.

But AI generation and manipulation could lead to flawed research, several experts warned in a recent commentary in the journal *Nature*.

They called for more robust authentication of submissions, and education of users about the risks of manipulating images and recordings. □

India's Modi woos youth with free coaching, AI training

New Delhi, India

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Saturday his government would provide free online coaching lessons for competitive exams, weeks after massive youth-led protests forced the education minister to resign.

Modi said the initiative was aimed at easing the financial burden on millions of families caught up in the country's fiercely competitive education system.

The 75-year-old leader made the announcement while speaking from the ramparts of New Delhi's

imposing 17th-century Red Fort to mark the country's independence from Britain on August 15, 1947.

"We have decided to provide free online coaching for various competitive examinations for our youth. We have the digital public infrastructure, and we have highly talented teachers and educators," he said.

The move comes after nationwide protests triggered by the leak of a key medical entrance examination paper and a series of other recruitment scandals.

The protests, which culminated in the resignation of education minister Dharmendra Pradhan last month, exposed deep frustration among young Indians over access to jobs and educational opportunities.

They also highlighted im-

mense pressures on students in India, the world's most populous nation where admission to government-run colleges remains one of the most sought-after pathways to economic security.

The cut-throat competition has fuelled a sprawling coaching industry where students spend years preparing, often at enormous financial cost for their families.

Modi said the free online classes would ease financial burden on "poor and middle-class families".

"The competition surrounding coaching classes has become a huge burden for middle-class families... (Students) can stay close to their families, receive their care, and avoid placing an additional financial burden on them," he said. □



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets others as he arrives to address the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort during the celebrations to mark the country's Independence Day in New Delhi on August 15, 2026.

Pallister stuns Ledecy in Pan Pacs 800m free as two world records carry Douglass to gold

Los Angeles, United States
Australian Lani Pallister dealt U.S. great Katie Ledecy her first 800m freestyle defeat in a major international meet on Saturday, beating her one-time idol at the Pan Pacific Championships in Irvine, California. Pallister led wire-to-wire on the way to victory in 8min 06.10sec and Ledecy's desperate late charge wasn't enough as she finished second in 8:07.26.

It was a stunning result on the final day of Pan Pacs action that saw American Kate Douglass break the 50m freestyle world record twice on the way to gold and earn 200m breaststroke silver and medley relay gold as well.

Ledecy has dominated the 800m since she won Olympic gold in 2012 as a 15-year-old, winning 13 international golds since then. That includes four Olympic gold medals and seven world titles in the event.

Canadian Summer McIntosh did beat Ledecy in the 800m free at a minor domestic meeting in Florida in February of 2024.

But world record-holder Ledecy maintained her hold on the event with a razor-thin victory over Pallister and McIntosh in a World Championships thriller last



Lani Pallister of Team Australia reacts after finishing first place in the Women's 800m Freestyle Final on Day 4 of the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships at William Woollett, Jr. Aquatics Center on August 15, 2026 in Irvine, California.

year in Singapore, where Ledecy said her rule as younger swimmers began closing in was "I don't lose 800s."

Pallister, who claimed her first career win over Ledecy in the 400m free earlier this week before finishing second behind her in the 1,500m, showed that rule can be broken as the 29-year-old American looks to adding to her collection of nine Olympic gold medals at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

The Australian punched the water in delight and got a hug across the lane rope from Ledecy.

"Katie is such a dominant force," said Pallister, who finished the week with gold in the 200, 400 and 800m free and the 4x200m free relay.

"Without her, we wouldn't have women's distance swimming in the place we're at at the moment.

"To be part of that story at the moment (it's) pretty much all because we get to chase Katie."

Douglass, meanwhile, firmly established herself as the one to chase in the 50m free, winning the final in a devastating 23.19sec.

That sliced three-tenths of

a second off the world record of 23.49sec she set hours earlier and saw her finish a whopping 55-hundredths of a second ahead of US teammate Gretchen Walsh.

Walsh had set a world record of 23.55 on June 28 in Rome where she broke the world mark Douglass had set on June 19.

Australia's reigning world champion Meg Harris took bronze in 23.89.

Douglass returned less than half an hour later to claim silver in the 200m breaststroke won by Canadian Alexanne LePage in 2:21.73. Douglass capped her night

swimming the freestyle anchor leg for the U.S. 4x100 medley relay team that took gold in 3:50.43, 4.66sec ahead of Australia.

Australian Jamie Jack won the men's 50m free in 21.35sec and Zac Stubblety-Cook rallied from fourth at the final turn to win the men's 200m breaststroke in 2:08.09 and give Australia another gold in the four-day meeting of top swimmers from non-European countries.

- More McIntosh disappointment -

Chinese Olympian Yu Yiting started the night with an upset of world record-holder Summer McIntosh in the 200m medley, leading most of the way and holding off the Canadian's charge on the final freestyle leg to win in 2:07.45.

McIntosh, the reigning world and Olympic champion, touched in 2:07.47.

It was another disappointment for McIntosh in a meet that included 400m medley gold but only silver in the 200m free and a failure to make the championship final in the 400m free.

Japan's Tomoyuki Matsushita completed a men's medley double with a 200m victory in 1:56.02.

Sam Short clocked an Australian record of 14:33.97 to add 1,500m freestyle to his 400m and 800m gold. □

Vingegaard brings curtain down on season

Paris, France

Two-time Tour de France champion Jonas Vingegaard will not race again this season as he is still recovering from the broken collarbone he suffered in this year's race, his team Visma-Lease a bike announced on Monday.

The 29-year-old Dane had had a successful campaign up to his crash last month, peaking with victory in the Giro d'Italia in May.

"After a long and intense racing period, a recovery period was planned after the Tour de France anyway," said Vingegaard in a team statement on their website.

"Due to the collarbone injury, the start of my training has been delayed and it is not possible for me to get back to top level in the coming period.

"The focus is on preparing optimally for

the goals of the 2027 season. I will discuss these specific goals with the team in the coming period."

Vingegaard was in second position overall in this year's Tour de France trailing eventual winner Tadej Pogacar when he came to grief on the 15th stage.

His crash came after he and his team had been subjected to a doping test in the early hours of the morning.

Unlike Pogacar, Vingegaard rarely competes in the one-day Classics and will he will miss the world and European championships.

Vingegaard's triumph in the Giro made him only the eighth rider in history to win all three Grand Tours he added the Vuelta last year to his two Tour de France victories from 2022 and 2023. □

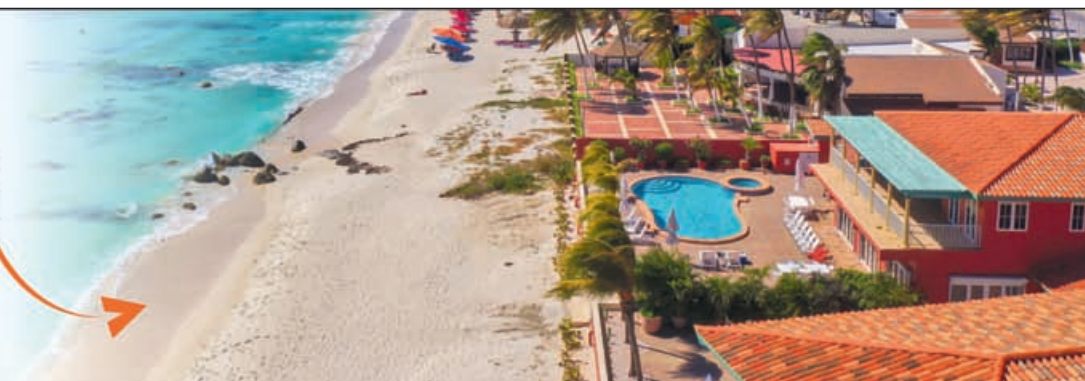


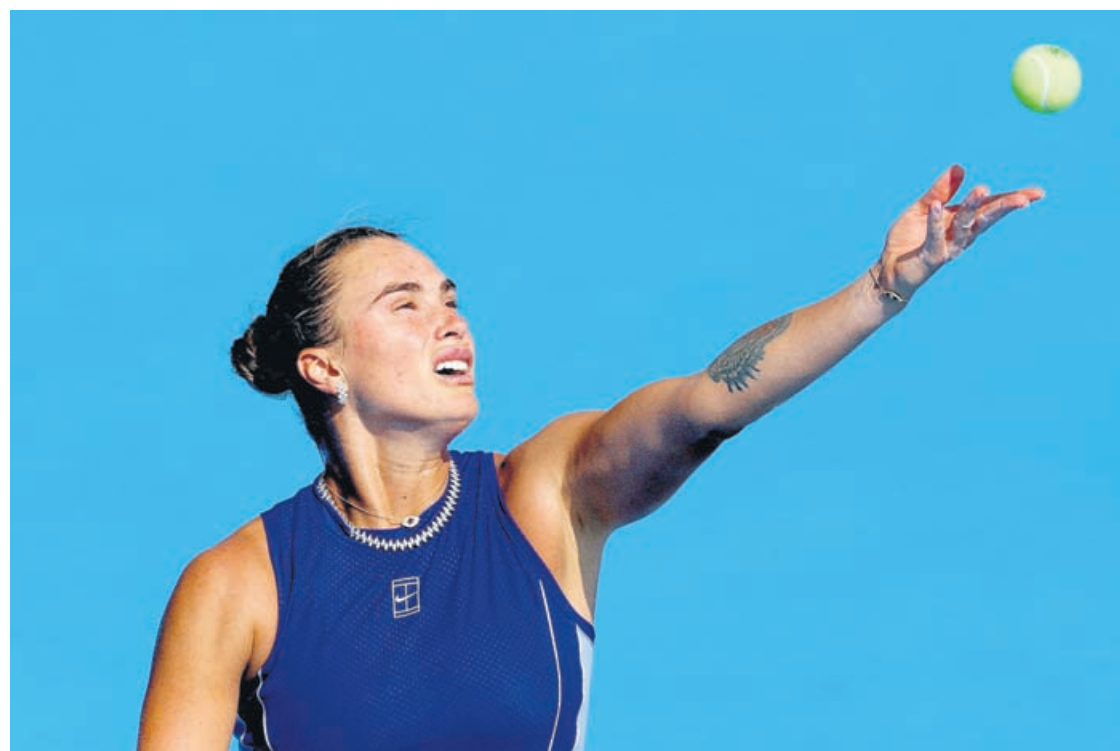
Team Visma Lease a Bike Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard wearing the overall leader's pink jersey celebrates as he crossing the finish line to win in the 20th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2026 - Tour of Italy cycling race between Gemona del Friuli and Piancavallo, Italy, on May 30, 2026.

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Aryna Sabalenka serves to Talia Gibson of Australia during day six of the Cincinnati Open at the Lindner Family Tennis Center on August 16, 2026 in Mason, Ohio.

Sabalenka squeezes out win on sixth match point in Cincinnati

Cincinnati, United States

World number one Aryna Sabalenka needed six match points to subdue Talia Gibson on Sunday and join reigning Grand Slam champions Elena Rybakina and Mirra Andreieva in the third round of the Cincinnati Masters.

Australia's Gibson saved five match points in the 12th game of the second set before Sabalenka came through in the tie-breaker, managing a final winner to get the job done 6-2, 7-6 (7/2) in just under two hours on a windswept Grandstand Court.

"I'm super tired, this is crazy weather," Sabalenka said. "Talia played great tennis and was more aggressive in the second set."

"She put more pressure on my service games. I'm glad I stayed calm and pulled it out in straight sets."

Sabalenka won Cincinnati in 2024 and is hoping for a deep run to carry her into

the US Open, where she'll be seeking her first Grand Slam title of the year.

The Belarusian has won three titles in 2026, but none since Miami in March.

She advanced along with Australian Open winner Rybakina and Roland Garros champion Andreieva, who powered on in convincing style.

U.S. hope Coco Gauff, seeded fourth, had to work harder for a 2-6, 6-4, 6-1 victory over 43rd-ranked Russian Liudmila Samsonova and fellow American Ben Shelton up to sixth in the world rankings after his Montreal Masters triumph last week was sent packing by 79th ranked Jaime Faria of Portugal.

World number two Rybakina, coming off a runner-up finish to Iga Swiatek in Toronto and inching closer to Sabalenka in the rankings, defeated Taylor Townsend 6-3, 6-4.

Andreieva crushed Olek-

sandra Oliynykova with the loss of just one game, breaking five times and saving all seven break points she faced in a 6-1, 6-0 rout.

Rybakina said that she is concentrating on recovery after a tough Toronto run and was glad to get off to a low-stress start.

"Today I'm happy with the serve," she said. "Definitely it helped me a lot. Last week in Toronto was very difficult. A lot of three set matches."

Seventh seed Swiatek, the defending champion who bagged her first title of a rocky season in Toronto, hammered Emiliana Arango of Colombia 6-3, 6-0.

Gauff and Shelton headlined an evening session that proved tricky as blustery conditions gave way to brief rain that halted both matches for just under half an hour.

Gauff pulled out victory with a storming finish, winning the last five games. □



LIV Golf CEO Scott O'Neil looks on during day four of LIV Golf New York at Trump National Golf Club on August 09, 2026 in Bedminster, New Jersey.

LIV Golf cancels Michigan event, to decide team title at Indy

Washington, United States

LIV Golf's scheduled team championship in Michigan next week has been canceled, the series announced on Monday, meaning this week's Indianapolis event will conclude the 2026 campaign.

Spain's Jon Rahm has already clinched his third consecutive season points title but the series will also crown its team champion from Thursday through Sunday at The Club at Chatham Hills.

The breakaway series had been backed by the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund (PIF), which earlier this year announced it was pulling its funding after this season.

After luring away top PGA Tour stars with 54-hole events and huge contracts, LIV struggled to gain a foothold in the golf world with reported huge losses over five seasons.

LIV Golf chief executive officer Scott O'Neil has said he plans to finalize a deal next month to fund a 2027 LIV Golf campaign, but revealed no details.

O'Neil said the early end to the campaign would help LIV Golf's future relaunch.

"By concluding the season now, we can put our full resources behind what comes next and maintain the operational rigor this transition demands," O'Neil said.

"We are reimagining LIV Golf as a fundamentally new league owned by the players and anchored in a sustainable business model, with an evolved fan experience built for the markets where the game is growing fastest across the globe and the support of world-class partners." LIV Golf Michigan had been set as the team championship from August 27-30 at The Cardinal at Saint John's Resort, for which a LIV statement said ticket holders would receive refunds.

"The addition of the Team Championship to this week's event adds even more excitement to the world-class competition in store," said Ross Hallett, LIV Golf executive vice president. □