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Trump faces fresh questions over ties to 'humanitarian' Putin

Washington, United States

U.S. President Donald Trump's pivot away from Ukraine has triggered fresh questions about his attachment to Russian leader Vladimir Putin, the man a top American envoy flattered on Wednesday as a "humanitarian."

Trump has cast his dealings with Putin as part of a mega-deal that has secured the release of American detainee Stephen Hubbard and which Trump says will end Russia's war on Ukraine.

At the same time, he has repeatedly berated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and called for him to be replaced.

"I do things that nobody else can do," Trump told an AFP reporter in the Oval Office on Tuesday when asked about Hubbard.

But for Trump's critics, it is the latest example of his willingness to sell Ukraine down the river, especially as he seeks a deal before difficult US midterm elections in November.

His ties to Putin have long been under scrutiny.

Trump still complains of what he calls the "Russia hoax" following an investigation in his first term into whether his 2016 election campaign colluded with Moscow.

Last week, Trump an-



In this pool photograph distributed by the Russian state agency Sputnik, Russia's President Vladimir Putin (R) greets U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff (L) prior to their meeting in Saint Petersburg on October 21, 2026.

nounced a huge agreement under which he said Russia would release diesel to ease prices sent soaring by the Iran war -- and temporarily eased sanctions on Moscow.

Trump insisted on his Truth Social network that there was "no 'swap' necessary" for Hubbard's release.

Yet in another post minutes later, he admitted that if he had not paused the sanctions targeting Russia, "those negotiations would have come to a complete and total halt."

- 'WTF, Steve?' -

The U.S. president has also appeared to give diplomatic rewards to Putin who masterminded the Ukraine war and has pushed his maximalist goals for more than four years of grinding conflict.

In Saint Petersburg on Wednesday, Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff told Putin: "You talk so much about my president, President Trump, being a humanitarian you are a humanitarian also, sir, and I salute that."

Republican Senator Thom Tillis, a frequent Trump critic in recent months, reacted with astonishment.

"WTF, Steve? Look up the definition of 'humanitarian'," he said in a post on X. Trump earlier this week confirmed that he was ready to hold a three-way summit with the Russian leader and Chinese President Xi Jinping during which Ukraine could be discussed.

Moscow then announced Wednesday it would restart three-way talks with Kyiv and Washington.

Yet previous rounds of talks, including a Trump-Putin summit in Alaska in August 2025, have produced no breakthroughs.

Ukraine insists it must be included in any talks. But Trump's response was to again blame Zelensky -- whom he berated in the Oval Office in February 2025 for not accepting a deal.

"Since Donald Trump has come into office, we have seen some gravitational pull towards the arguments of the Russian president," Liana Fix of the Council for Foreign Relations told AFP. Many of the voices that once pulled Trump back towards Ukraine are also now silent, said Fix. Staunchly pro-Kyiv U.S. senator Lindsey Graham died earlier this year, and European leaders are dealing with their own problems at home.

- 'Exploiting Trump's nervousness' -

Putin is "exploiting Trump's nervousness ahead of the midterm elections, and he's playing that very well," added Fix.

Trump has been desperately seeking ways to bring down oil prices, as voters angered by the cost of living look set to punish his Republican Party in the November 3 midterms. □

Trump says U.S. citizen Stephen Hubbard on way home after freed by Russia

Washington, United States Stephen Hubbard, an



In this grab from a handout footage taken and released by the Moscow City Court press service on October 7, 2024, U.S. citizen Stephen Hubbard, 72, accused of fighting as a mercenary for Ukraine, attends his verdict hearing in Moscow.

American taken captive by Russian forces years ago in Ukraine, has been freed and was "on his way back home", US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin first announced the prisoner release during a meeting with U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff, Russian news agencies reported.

Putin reportedly said that Hubbard was at Pulkovo Airport in Saint Petersburg, adding that Witkoff had thanked the Russian leader for the release.

Hubbard, a retired English teacher in his 70s, was

sentenced in a closed trial in October 2024 to nearly seven years in prison for "mercenary work" on behalf of Ukraine, a charge he denies.

Trump said that Hubbard's release was secured without need for a "swap" with Moscow.

"Stephen is on his way back home and will soon be with his family," the American president wrote on his Truth Social platform.

"The United States, out of respect for President Trump, was not required to give anything in return an unprecedented situation for Russia. There was no

'swap' necessary for this release."

However, Trump also tied Hubbard's release to the recent suspension of some American sanctions and tariffs on Moscow.

"If sanctions would have been placed, certainly those negotiations would have come to a complete and total halt," he wrote in another Truth Social post.

Wednesday's announcement came as Witkoff met to brief Putin on his meeting with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky in Oslo a day earlier, which the American envoy described as "productive". □



Illustration from Cambridge Analytica.

Judge orders Meta to pay \$25B to New Mexico in Cambridge Analytica case

San Francisco, United States

A New Mexico judge ruled Wednesday that Meta must pay \$25 billion to the state after a jury found last month that the social media giant had deceived users in a case related to the Cambridge Analytica scandal, according to media reports.

The penalty comes a couple of months after Meta agreed to pay \$18 billion to settle claims brought by 48 other states, including allegations tied to Cambridge Analytica.

Meta slammed the case as "a tax on speech."

"This ruling... makes it all but impossible to do business in the state of New Mexico," Meta said in a statement. "We are confident we will prevail on appeal."

Cambridge Analytica was a political consulting firm found to have improperly harvested personal data from millions of Facebook users for targeted political advertising, notably during the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Revelations at the time showed that the firm had obtained data gathered through a personality quiz app called "thisisyourdigitalife," which was installed by about 270,000 users but also collected information on their friends.

In total, the app reached

roughly 87 million Facebook users worldwide.

Facebook learned in December 2015 that Cambridge Analytica had acquired the data but did not disclose it publicly until 2018, after a whistleblower came forward, sparking a major political scandal.

Jurors in the New Mexico trial found that the misconduct affected all of the state's more than 2.1 million residents.

"We disagree with the verdict and will continue to defend ourselves against efforts to distort our record," a Meta spokesperson said in a statement in September.

New Mexico Attorney General Raul Torrez hailed the ruling as a "historic" win.

This case was "about whether corporations can mislead consumers about what happens to their personal information without facing meaningful consequences. New Mexico stood its ground," Torrez said in a statement.

- Penalties pile up -

Meta has faced a slew of lawsuits in recent months.

Earlier this year, New Mexico won nearly \$1 billion in combined penalties against Meta in a separate case over harms to children. In March, a jury in that case ordered Meta to pay \$375 million after find-

ing the company liable for endangering children by making them vulnerable to predators on its platforms, among other harms.

In August, a judge ordered Meta to implement product changes and pay an additional \$567 million to the state to fund the treatment and prevention of harms caused by Facebook and Instagram.

That same month, Meta agreed to pay up to \$17.7 billion to 52 U.S. states, plus Washington, DC, to settle claims that it deliberately engineered its platforms to hook young users, misled the public about the risks and unlawfully collected data from children under 13. As part of that settlement, Meta agreed to make significant changes to Facebook and Instagram accounts used by teenagers, and portions of the settlement hinge on other major social media companies agreeing to similar changes. In September, TikTok agreed to pay Alabama at least \$100 million and enact limits for teen users, avoiding a trial over claims related to child safety on the platform.

TikTok previously settled other cases that were headed for trial, including a Los Angeles lawsuit brought by a young woman and a suit from a Kentucky school district. □



Guillermo Ortiz, treasurer of the non-profit organization My Safe School M-CDPS, poses for a portrait in Doral, Florida, on October 13, 2026.

Anyone but Trump': Republicans face Latino backlash over immigration

Doral, United States

For nearly two years, U.S. President Donald Trump's heavy-handed deportation drive has sowed fear in immigrant communities and created a flood of grim headlines and social media videos.

Now, with midterm elections looming, many Latino voters who helped propel Trump and his Republican Party to power in 2024 say they are fed up.

In southern Florida's Doral, a mostly Latino community near Miami that is also home to one of Trump's golf clubs, residents told AFP that worries about potential raids have left businesses without staff and classrooms with fewer pupils. Known as "Doralzuela," the area is home to a large Venezuelan population and could be a bellwether for whiplashing Latino sentiment nationwide. "I feel sad and disappointed," restaurant-owner Maria Fernanda Perez told AFP.

"My thinking was that the economy would improve," the 32-year-old said of her vote for Trump.

Three of her employees stopped showing up over fears of being deported, she said, with sales falling 40 percent as people in the community pull back from going out.

"My whole family, all my friends are going through immigration proceedings, and they're no longer working, they're no longer going about their daily lives."

Trump campaigned on promises of a historic deportation drive, but emphasized the targeting of hardened criminals.

With over a thousand people being taken into immigration custody every day, many Latino voters feel misled. Like other communities around the country, residents in Doral have begun exchanging messages to alert one another to the presence of immigration agents or to someone being detained.

A New York Times and Siena College poll conducted last month showed 66 percent of Hispanic respondents disapproved of Trump's performance, and 78 percent said they would prefer Democrats take control of Congress from Republicans.

Perez declined to say how she would vote in the upcoming election, but said emphatically: "Anyone but Trump."

Psychological pressure

Carlos Bermudez, a lawyer also of Venezuelan origin, receives constant calls from desperate people going through immigration proceedings.

"They don't go out, they can't go to work... It's constant psychological pressure, and it affects the whole community," the 47-year-old told AFP. □

As actors get more physical, Bollywood embraces intimacy coordinators

Mumbai, India

India's film industry, where scenes featuring nudity or sex often rely on improvisation and mutual trust, is gradually welcoming professionals tasked with choreographing intimacy to protect actors and ensure consent.

Once unheard-of in Bollywood, intimacy coordinators are becoming an increasingly familiar presence on sets as filmmakers embrace stricter standards after the #MeToo movement put a spotlight on sexual exploitation in entertainment industries around the world.

The shift comes as streaming platforms have pushed storytelling into a more nuanced territory, creating greater demand for realistic portrayals of sexuality. "Just like a stunt director handles a fight scene... for scenes of intimacy, we map out exactly where the hand goes and where the hair goes so nothing is left



This photograph taken on September 16, 2026 shows intimacy director and BraveSpaces Creative India founder Neha Vyaso (2L) alongside her assistant Sanah Oberoi (2R) conducting a mock intimacy workshop with actors Priti M (L) and Dev Surana for an upcoming project in Mumbai.

to awkward improvisation," said Aastha Khanna, one of a small but growing group of intimacy coordinators in Bollywood.

Most arrive on set armed with "modesty tools" that

allow performers to simulate intimacy while minimising unnecessary physical contact.

A typical kit includes crotch guards, nipple pasties and doughnut cushions, which

ensure a safe distance between performers during sex scenes.

The emergence of such coordinators reflects a broader transformation in an industry where intimate

scenes traditionally relied on trust between actors and directors, often with few formal safeguards.

Khanna said coordinators are usually hired before casting begins.

"The idea is that actors know there are intimate scenes in the script and can decide whether they are comfortable with them before signing on," she told AFP.

- No longer 'taboo' -

Bollywood, one of the most prolific movie-making machines in the world, largely sidestepped physical intimacy on screen for decades because of strict government guidelines and powerful censors.

Kissing and sex were implied symbolically, with flowers brushing against each other, crashing waves or a crackling fire standing in for overt desire and consummation.

Even when filmmakers pushed the boundaries, the mechanics of filming intimate scenes remained largely unstructured.

Among the first mainstream Hindi productions to formalise the practice of intimacy direction was "Gehraiyaan", backed by filmmaker Karan Johar and released on Amazon Prime Video in 2022.

Intimacy coordinator Khanna worked to establish personal boundaries and choreograph scenes, while intimacy coach Neha Vyaso conducted workshops focused on physical dynamics and consent.

This model has gradually spread across productions meant for streaming services, which industry experts say have been the primary drivers of change.

"There's much less censorship and more openness to stories that explore taboo subjects," Vyaso said.

Crime drama franchise "Mirzapur", known for its graphic content, started off without intimacy coordinators in its early seasons. But lead actor Rasika Dugal said such specialists fill a critical gap. □

Canadian publisher says novelist Orelie used AI to write novel

Montreal, Canada

The publisher of top-selling Haitian-Canadian writer Thelyson Orelie said Wednesday it had confirmed that he used artificial intelligence to help write his novel "It Was Either That or Die."

Orelie has denied allegations that he used AI on his breakthrough novel and, last week, Canadian publisher Boreal said it was standing by the 38-year-old writer.

But on Wednesday, Boreal said it had conducted a further investigation into the allegations.

"New information, confirmed over the past few days, indicates that artificial intelligence was used in the writing process" of the novel, a Boreal statement said.

The publisher announced it was "ending its professional relationship" with Orelie.

Boreal said it did not know

the extent of AI's use in the writing process "and we will likely never have a definitive answer."

It said it gathered all the working versions of the novel and hired an outside party to analyze the various drafts.

"The results obtained this week revealed traces of AI tags in the metadata of certain documents," Boreal said.

Before conducting this analysis, the publisher said it had tried to work with Orelie to gather the evidence necessary to prove his innocence.

That effort was inconclusive, and Orelie "subsequently announced that he would not provide any further information," the publisher said.

The novel about migration,

known by its original French title "C'était ça ou mourir," had been scheduled for translation in more than 20 countries.

- 'Slander and heresy' -

The book was shrouded in suspicion and withdrawn from the shortlist for France's top book prize, the Goncourt, after tests with AI detector Pangram indicated a 100-percent probability it contained computer-generated text. In a statement to AFP earlier this month, Orelie called the allegations "slander and heresy."

"Here and there I did use tools for research, particularly for foreign idioms," he said in a statement sent exclusively to AFP.

"But not a single sentence in this book was created by a machine, nor the meaning or the structure of a story that comes from my gut." □



A person holds a copy of the novel C'était ça ou mourir by Thelyson Orelie in Briançon, Hautes-Alpes, France, on October 21, 2026.



People walk beside a padel court in east London on October 6, 2026.

British padel boom spurs enthusiasm, pushback

London, United Kingdom

On a recent weekend, Laura Latham eagerly swung her racquet on a padel court celebrating one year playing one of the world's fast-growing sports now taking hold in the UK.

"I hadn't ever picked up a racquet in my entire life ... and I just fell in love," the 42-year-old civil servant, who lives in Stockport in northwest England, told AFP.

"I know that sounds a bit cliché, but I was just welcomed into this amazing community of fabulous people, all ages, all shapes and sizes ... It's just great." Latham is among a growing number of padel devotees in Britain, where its popularity has exploded after lagging behind European neighbors.

A cross between tennis and squash played by doubles teams on courts enclosed by glass or wire, enthusiasts see it as an accessible and social sport, while critics say it is an expensive fad for trendsetters.

Other complaints range from the noise to private equity firms funding its expansion, especially in the United States.

Tennis legend Rafael Nadal and football icon Cristiano Ronaldo are among players as well as high-profile investors in the fast-paced game, created in Mexico in the late 1960s.

As the sport has grown rapidly in parts of the world, it has attracted finance from a growing array of sources, from real estate firms to specialized institutional investors.

Its recent UK growth has sparked friction in some places, most notably London, where several sites with new or proposed courts have provoked pushback from local communities.

"It's a kind of hedge fund-backed sport, taking over local spaces and sports," complained Agnieszka Wood, 52, who helped spearhead an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to stop a beloved east London skating park becoming padel courts.

"But what happens if there's too many padel courts? What happens if you're taking the spaces from the communities and you're not replacing them?"

- 'Hotspots' -

Padel's growing popularity is unquestioned, with Wood acknowledging even her own children enjoy playing it.

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), the sport's governing body in Britain, announced in May that national participation had surpassed 1 million, with nearly 2,000 courts now open nationwide.

That compares with just 400,000 players and 870

courts at the end of 2024.

Globally, active player numbers climbed last year to nearly 20 million, according to the 2026 Global Padel Report, making it one of the world's fast-growing sports.

Last month it debuted as a medal sport at the Asian Games and harbours hopes of featuring at the Olympics.

Italy, Spain, Portugal and Argentina so-called "padel heartlands" lead the way, while Britain has become one of several "demand-led hotspots", a report by an arm of the consultancy PwC and sport app Playtomic found.

"Padel is tapping into the UK's deep racquet-sport heritage," consultant Ray Algar, who compiled the 2026 UK Padel Report, told AFP.

His report estimates more than half of UK padel courts are in cities with around a quarter in rural places.

- 'Losing places' -

Soul Padel is among the companies behind Britain's boom.

It has opened 16 pay-to-play courts across four sites in central and northern England and Scotland, with seven more surfaces to open imminently.

Host towns include post-industrial places like north-western St Helen's and Warrington a long way from the caricature image of where padel is played. □



World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus looks on during a press conference on global health issues, in Geneva, on October 7, 2026.

G.Bissau police seize vaccines affiliated with contentious U.S. study

Bissau, Guinea-Bissau

Police in Guinea-Bissau have seized a batch of vaccines from a facility affiliated with a stalled, U.S.-funded hepatitis B immunization trial on newborn babies that the WHO has slammed as "unethical".

The study, which would randomize whether or not 14,000 newborns in the highly impoverished west African nation receive a hepatitis B vaccine birth dose, was suspended pending further technical review, the WHO said in February. The Guinea-Bissau judicial police said that on Monday they carried out a "seizure of a batch of hepatitis B vaccines intended for the immunization of children in the country".

The vaccines were confiscated at the Bandim Health Project, which is led by Danish researchers in charge of the hepatitis B testing.

The Danish researchers' previous work has looked into alleged vaccine harms, and their methods have come under scrutiny by the scientific community.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which falls under the leadership of US health chief Robert Kennedy Jr., a vaccine skeptic, had awarded a \$1.6 million grant for the Guinea-Bissau testing.

Junta-run Guinea-Bissau has a high prevalence of hepatitis B and "withholding a birth dose could actually expose infants to a high chance of infection, and that means including a significant proportion of deaths", WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in February.

- Vaccine safety proven -

The study was to take place after Kennedy recommended ending the practice of immunizing all U.S. newborns against hepatitis B.

Kennedy's department had said the Guinea-Bissau study sought to "answer questions about the broader health effects" of the vaccine and "fill existing evidence gaps".

But testing a vaccine already proven effective stirred controversy in public health and scientific circles.

The WHO has reported that the vaccine has a "proven safety record across decades of use".

Guinea-Bissau's judiciary police said in a statement that the seizure "is part of an ongoing investigation aimed at shedding light on the circumstances surrounding this specific batch of vaccines". The investigation, it added, is aimed at "safeguarding the public interest and protecting children's health". According to the WHO, the hepatitis B vaccine is "effective in preventing 70-95 percent of cases of mother-to-child transmission" of the disease, which can be acquired at birth. □

Prized wild pepper at risk in Madagascar's shrinking forests

Mandraka, Madagascar

A rare wild pepper endemic to Madagascar and prized by international chefs is facing an uncertain future, victim of its own success and the destruction of its forest habitat.

With its subtle, aromatic flavor, Voatsiperifery pepper grows on vines that reach into the canopy of the island's natural forests, which shrank 27 percent between 1990 and 2025, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

To reach the peppercorns without having to climb, harvesters often tear down the vine and, in many cases, the trees supporting them, contributing to the relentless retreat of Madagascar's forests.

"At times, I tell myself I should never have made it known," acclaimed French chef Olivier Roellinger, who first encountered the spice 30 years ago, told AFP.

"This pepper blew me away right from the start with that piperine punch that brings out a note of peat, resin, even citrus; it's incomparable," he said. "On a fruit salad, it's absolutely delicious."

Madagascar pepper sells for 150 to 200 euros (\$169 to \$225) per kilogram in



Rabakoliarisoa Faranirina Marie Colette shows abundant clusters of wild pepper (Tsiperifery) harvested from a four-year-old vine thriving under optimal forest microclimate conditions during the secondary winter harvest at the Mandraka site, on September 26, 2026.

France, its main export market.

Roellinger, the founder of the Epices Roellinger spice boutique, is collaborating with efforts to certify authentic pepper based on strictly regulated harvesting zones in Madagascar.

But he was "under no illusions" about the risk these rules could be circumvented, he said.

- Bush fires -

The village of Ambon-

gamarina, northeast of the capital Antananarivo, was at the centre of a rush two decades ago for the pepper, which has a characteristic woody tail, a remnant of its stem.

From a ridge on which the village sits, farmer Maminaina Rabearison pointed into the distance.

"Until 2010-2012, it was still covered in natural forest," he told AFP.

"People used to go into the forest and, for 10 to 20

weeks a year, at least 100 kilograms were sold every week at the market to a trader," the 45-year-old said.

That trader has not visited in a long time. Harvests have dropped as the forest has been consumed by bush fires, charcoal production and slash-and-burn agriculture, or torched in protests against the distant central government.

The destruction of the vines

has also forced harvesters to go deeper into the forest to find the plant, which in Malagasy is called tsiperifery, meaning "that makes wounds not exist", a reference to its medicinal use for generations.

Now, "you have to walk almost a full day to find pepper in the forest," said 51-year-old Herinaina Randrianarimanga, another farmer from the village, which is only 120 kilometers (75 miles) from the capital but takes five hours to reach in a four-by-four vehicle.

- 'A real boon' -

There is no national system to track the distribution, harvesting and export of this precious pepper, said Mima Chateaufneuf, co-founder of bulk export company Jacarandas.

"Today, we have no idea whether the resource is becoming scarce," she said, calling for "traceability" to determine export volumes. In the absence of a regulatory framework, Jacarandas is turning towards organic pepper, which has grown to make up one-third of its exports. "For organic products, traceability is mandatory," Chateaufneuf said. □

Tents spring up in Lisbon as Portugal housing protests spread

Lisbon, Portugal

Protesters pitched dozens of tents in Lisbon on Saturday demanding action to stem housing and living costs in Portugal, mirroring demonstrations that have gripped neighbouring Spain for weeks.

Hundreds of protesters rallied at night in Rossio square located at the bustling, touristic heart of the Portuguese capital following a march that had rallied thousands of people nationwide.

The mostly young at-

tendees vowed to stay overnight, with hundreds singing songs as they sat around the statue of King Pedro IV that dominates the square, AFP journalists saw. "The Portuguese social class that pays taxes, that which keeps this country going, is under attack and is losing its rights, notably its right to housing," said Elena Costa, a 46-year-old social assistant.

"So we are all here together to try to explain that we are suffocating," she said. Engineer Antonio Margado, 52, criticised the centre-right government for "a total liberalisation of rents; owners are protected more and more, while tenants who need a house are those who are protected less and less".

Portuguese housing prices

rose by 124 percent between 2015 and 2024, roughly twice as fast as the EU average, according to official data.

The impact is especially harsh on the young and in Lisbon, which concentrates around one-quarter of Portugal's more than 11 million inhabitants including the capital's greater metropolitan area.

Another of the protesters, Isabel Guerreiro, told public broadcaster RTP: "As a self-employed professional, I obviously don't have the means to pay Lisbon's exorbitant rents and I'm a daughter of Lisbon."

Saturday's camp in Lisbon amplified a housing protest that started in the northern city of Porto, where dozens of tents are set up.

- 'Matter of survival' -

At the earlier protest in Lisbon called by the main CGTP union, demonstrators called for better public services, pensions and wages as well as measures against soaring housing costs.

Marching to the roar of drums, they held placards with slogans including "Their greed, our misery" and "the cost of living increases, the people can't take it anymore."

"There are many problems. Wages, housing, the cost of living: it's a matter of survival," Yolanda Silva, a 43-year-old civil servant, told AFP. Earlier this week, Prime Minister Luis Montenegro said "we fully understand that people want answers" and to "express their outrage at what, in their view, may be omissions in public policies". □



Dozens of tents are pictured during a encampment set up in protest against housing shortage, soaring rents and low wages, at Rossio square in central Lisbon late on October 19, 2026.

How Aruban beaches came to be!



(Oranjestad)—We've talked about the best beaches to visit on the island before, but have you ever wondered how Aruba got its white, sandy beaches, and why there's a clear difference between the northern and southern shores? Here are some fun facts about the development of Aruban beaches. How did Aruba get its white, sandy beaches?

Aruba's beaches have developed over the span of thousands of years. Waves crashing on the rocky formations along our coast line (which consists mainly of coral reefs) have started to wear and tear the reefs over time, resulting in its gradual breakdown. Fish that feed off corals also contribute to this one small bite at a time. Over the course of thousands of years, as waves continue to crash and fish continue to eat off the corals, sand starts to accumulate around the area. However, whether the sand stays there is another question to be answered, and this is where we highlight the biggest difference between the northern and southern coast of the island.

The sand that accumulates around a torn coral reef is swept away along with the debris by the ocean stream. However, in areas where it's shallow and the stream is weaker, the sand tends to stick to the bottom faster. This is why the beaches in the south the areas with weaker stream and shallower ocean floors has sand that stretches for miles. In contrast, the northern area, where the stream is much stronger and the ocean floor is much deeper, there is no sand present they were swept away with the current!

Why is the north deep, but the south shallow?

Aruba is a continental island. The island actually forms part of South America, and the space between Aruba and the South American continent is simply referred to as land that runs under the ocean. This is why it gets gradually deeper in the south, whereas the ocean floor in the north runs steeply to the bottom. □

Source: archival document provided by the National Archive of Aruba (ANA).

Need a ride down town? Now you can check taxi rates from you phone!

(Oranjestad)—If you were planning on taking a trip downtown but want to check how much a taxi ride costs, do we have great news for you. Now you can plan your trip ahead on taxi.aw. With just a few clicks, you'll know exactly how much it costs to take you to your destination.

Although an official fare list already existed, the previous version was very outdated and created confusion among both drivers and customers. The lack of updates and easy access to the official fares contributed to situations where

some taxi drivers charged arbitrary or excessive prices, particularly in tourist areas.

The fare is calculated based on the distance and number of kilometers between different locations on the island. The digital system allows customers to use the same calculation to determine the official fare that the taxi driver must charge during a trip. The website also incorporates different surcharges that officially form part of Aruba's taxi system. The system provides a range of different locations and zones to select. Be mindful that there are also condi-



tions that apply to the rate of your trip, all of which are explicitly explained on the

website's home page. With an easy interface that's accessible to every-

one, taxi.aw can make planning a trip easier, secure and reliable. □

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Experience a taste of Belgium in Aruba – Only at L'Avenue, Palm Beach



Nestled in the heart of Palm Beach, Aruba, L'Avenue brings a fresh breeze of Belgian charm to the Caribbean. Just over a year since its grand opening, this intimate bistro has quickly made its mark with its warm hospitality, authentic cuisine, and elegant yet approachable ambiance.

Whether you're strolling through Palm Beach after a morning at the beach or looking for a special dinner spot, L'Avenue welcomes you with an inviting terrace, stylish décor, and the comforting aroma of Belgian classics crafted to perfection. It's a place where locals, travelers, food lovers, and beer connoisseurs come together — united by a love for great food, heartfelt service, and that unmistakable European flair.

At L'Avenue, every dish tells a story — one of tradition, seasonality, and bold yet balanced flavors. From crispy croquettes and perfectly poured Belgian beers



to steaming pots of fresh mussels flown in weekly, the menu offers something both comforting and surprising. Lunch includes a variety of sandwiches—with a healthy selection of bread options—if you're going for a light meal, but just like their dinner selection, also includes steak, chicken, fish, and even rabbit if you're craving a bit more of L'Avenue's exquisite menu. And let's not forget their wide selection of Belgian beer and European wine to complete the tasty experience! But that's not all! L'Avenue is offering their guests their Early Bird Special, available every day from 4pm to 7pm. Enjoy this affordable and delectable 3-course meal special at a comfortable price of \$29.50 per guest, which includes a selection of their fine in-house wine.

More Than a Bistro A Culinary Destination

L'Avenue is more than just a place to eat — it's a culinary destination. A thoughtfully curated menu, an extensive selec-

tion of premium Belgian beers, and an atmosphere that balances European elegance with island ease make it one of the most talked-about dining spots in Aruba.

Whether you're looking for a casual lunch, a romantic dinner, or a celebratory evening with friends, L'Avenue delivers a dining experience that's as memorable as it is delicious.

Open daily for lunch and dinner

Located in the heart of Palm Beach, Aruba
Come discover Belgium's best — right here at L'Avenue. □



PSA for off-roaders:

Be careful when driving on rough terrains!

(Oranjestad)—Aruba Today recently received a message from a reader about the rough terrains and dirt roads on the northern side of the island, worried about how they may damage your car.

We at Aruba Today pride ourselves in enhancing your Aruba experience through informative articles about our history, culture and places you can visit. With this, we also want to make sure you take care of yourself and your loved ones.

You may encounter some dirt roads that have deep holes or cracks that can be damaging

if you are traveling by (regular) car. These holes often occur after heavy rain or during the raining season, primarily because Aruba is a hilly island with a lot of downward streams, so rain water travels downward creating cracks and holes along the way.

For your own safety, please be advised to not drive on potentially dangerous terrains or dirt roads with deep holes if you are traveling by regular car. We advise you to rent a 4x4 vehicle instead or better yet, plan your off-roading trip with a tour guide who can provide proper vehicles and assistance. □

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A brief history of the California Light House



(Oranjestad)—At the furthest western point of the island, there lies the tallest structure on the island: The California Light House. Standing on top of a limestone cliff, this lighthouse oversees the entire island, offering one of few best views of the island and the surrounding sea. It is also one of the few monuments that hold a rich history.

The lighthouse was constructed in between 1914-1916, and its first keeper was a young trained lighthouse keeper from Curacao names Jacob Jacobs. Mr. Frederico Fingal was the last man to have occupied this position until 1962. Though his son, Mr. Romulo Fingal did not continue in his father's footsteps, he does have a special connection to the lighthouse. He sat down with our reporter and shared a bit of its history.

As Mr. Fingal explains, "In 1915, cargo donkeys were hired from Figaroa di Noord to help build the Lighthouse at Westpunt. The donkeys had to walk along the beach all the way to Westpunt carrying the cargo, poles, cement, and all these things. At that time, it was a difficult task until Aruba got its first truck.

These things reflect how people could have accomplished this tremendous job with so little." Mr. Fingal said, "At that time, it wasn't a place for people to work. It was very challenging because it was full of goats and donkeys, and it was very isolated. There were no hotels or roads to get there. There was only a donkey trail. Those were the only means of transportation."

Mr. Fingal continues, "In

1939, I was born in the lighthouse, and my father was the last lighthouse keeper until he retired in 1962. After that, they removed the power cables all the way to the top. According to the story, we couldn't have the light ourselves because they dismantled it, and after many years, I heard that it is in a train museum in San Nicolas, where we found this very special lens that, when the light shines through it, it reaches 30 kilometers out to sea." Mr. Fingal told our reporter.

The lighthouse has a long and very interesting history. The reason why the lighthouse was built, according to Mr. Fingal, dates back to the day when the cargo ship S.S. California sank because of the lack of light. In 1913, Aruba made a request to Curacao to build a Lighthouse at Westpunt, and the governor of Cura-

cao responded to Aruba to come back in 1915 with a well-detailed plan. "During the First World War from 1914 to 1918, they had to wait for the light to be transported to Aruba because it was manufactured in France. At that time, there was no electricity, and the light was very interesting because it rotated with a kerosene lamp that planes used; clean kerosene," Mr. Fingal said.

Mr. Fingal discovered something very interesting about the lighthouse after much research was documented in his book 'History of the Lighthouse at Westpunt.' He found many details: "I found out that the height of the lighthouse was due to the absence of electricity. There was also the presence of coral. There is a long steel cable from where the light is, and under the light, at the highest point, there is a hanging weight, a sort of pendulum that swings like that, with a weight that measures about 1 meter by 30 centimeters wide, which is a block of solid iron attached to a cable. When you release it upwards, it comes down, and the weight that comes down pulls it up, gradually. And while it comes down, the same weight that is descending causes many small wheels to turn in the opposite direction. The Lighthouse rotates from 6 pm in the evening, when the sun sets, until 6 am in the morning. During the entire night, the light shines on the lantern, it



goes down 24 meters, and the Lighthouse is 30 meters high. It is designed not to collapse," Mr. Fingal explains.

Mr. Fingal further explains that in one night, the lighthouse rotates 4,320 times and consumes one gallon of kerosene for the whole operation. "At that time, the kerosene was supplied from the Lago refinery. Every day it was brought down, and to start the light again, they had to lift the weight up, so our job as children was to crank it and raise the weight back up in the evening when the light stuck, they would take it down again, and the light stayed down. That's how it worked for a very long time," Mr. Fingal explains.

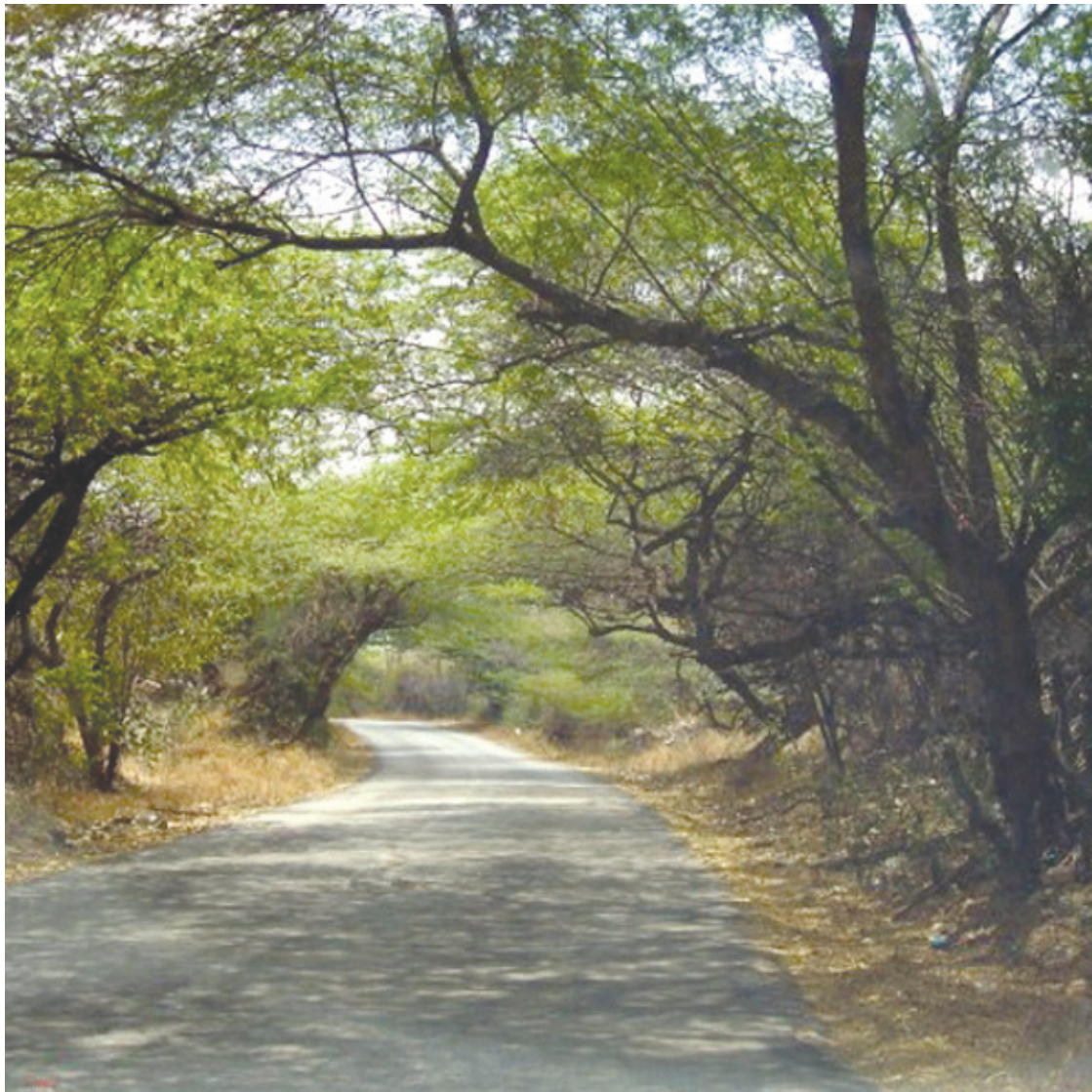
Thanks to the Monument Fund Aruba, which worked hard and is currently in charge of the Lighthouse, Mr. Fingal is very happy with its preservation, along with all the renovations that have taken place. He hopes that the story of the lighthouse will continue to live on for future generations. □

Aruban legends: Frenchman's Pass

(Oranjestad)—If you ever plan on taking a group tour of the island, you may pass through the Frenchman's Pass in Balashi. The Frenchman's pass (known to locals as "Franse Pas") remains a mysterious—and spooky—road of which its legend is told from generation to generation.

The history of the Frenchman's pass—and how it got its name—dates back to the colonization era, when the French tried to colonize the island, but were met with an angry mob of indigenous settlers, refusing to give up their land. However, as the French were heavily equipped with fire arms, the indigenous settlers began to retreat, and hid away in nearby caves. The French colonizers tried to smoke them out of the caves, but the indigenous settlers ended up inhaling too much smoke and most died in those caves. From then on, this passage was known as Frenchman's Pass, and there have been many accounts of spirits roaming the area of Spanish Lagoon.

There are many ghost stories surrounding this area, but one of the most famous one involves a lonely hitchhiker,



trying to find a ride back home in the dark rainy night.

Sometime after trying to hitch a ride home, the man saw a car approaching, appearing almost ghost-like in

the rain. However, since he needed a ride real bad, he didn't think twice and jumped in. But to his horror, he noticed that there was no driver in the front. Paralyzed with fear, he

didn't dare to get out, and the car started to move.

When approaching a sharp turn, the hitch hiker braced for impact, but just when he thought the car might

drive straight off the road and crash, he saw a hand appear out the window and turn the wheel. For the next few turns, the hand appeared again. After having had enough, the man decided to jump out and he ran to Santa Cruz.

Arriving at a nearby bar, he ordered a drink and began to tell everyone about his experience. Everyone grew quiet, because they realized he wasn't some drunk messing around; he was telling the truth.

Sometime later, two men walked into the bar and one of them noticed the hitchhiker. He called out to his buddy and said: "Look, there's the idiot who sat in our car when we were pushing it!"

French man's pass is one of the few sites on the island that keeps the locals on their toes. While most ghost stories may not have real grounds—or some may even be a set up story for a joke, this pass holds a lot of value to our culture of folkloric story-telling. □

Source: visitaruba.com

A quick snack for the road

Learn how to make the Aruban Pastechi!

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

Here's how to make the Pastechi dough.

Ingredients:

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

Directions:

Sift your flour into a bowl and add all the dry ingredients before giving it a quick mix. Next add the butter, water and egg and mix until thoroughly combined. At this point, your dough will start to get sticky; time for an arm workout. Knead your dough into the bowl you are using or on a clean surface with some flour

lightly dusted until its surface is smooth. You'll know your dough is ready when it doesn't stick to your hands or the surface on which you're kneading it. Let your dough rest covered for 15-20 minutes.

After resting, divide your dough into approximately 100 gram balls and roll it flat with a rolling pin. The thickness of the pastechi depends on your taste, but the average thinness would be around ¼ inch or so.

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

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

If you want to store some pastechis for later use,



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

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

Cas Floria: The Decorated Houses of Aruba

(Oranjestad)—There may be as many as 200 to 300 houses in Aruba that have beautiful decorations, including curtains, stars, flowers, half-moons, etc., placed on the corners or the upper parts of the house.

These houses can be found everywhere, in nearly every district of Aruba. People always thought that these designs came from an Indigenous culture; possibly, the star design resembled the way it was shown, similar to the "God Sun" of the Indigenous people. However, the history of this decorative system does not go very far back in time.

In his book *Millefiori di Aruba*, Father Nooyen declares that the first house to receive this type of decoration was the home of Mr. Bernardo Eman Croes in Pos Chikito. Julien (Janchi) Christiaans and Gregorio (Goy) Semeleer built this house in 1920 and created the decorations on the upper corners of the house. Other people in Pos Chikito, who saw this beautiful work, also wanted their houses decorated in the same way.

Leoncio (Joonchi) Henricus of Pos Chikito learned the work from Janchi Christiaans and, together with his son Bonifacio (Bonny) Henricus, continued decorating houses in Pos Chikito and Sabana Basora.

Janchi Christiaans, Goy Semeleer, and others from Noord, such as Hilario Christiaans, Victor Tromp, Gerardo Jacobs, and Cornelis Rosa, brought the same decoration to houses in Noord and Paradera. In 1927, Janchi Christiaans built a house for Julian Tromp in Buguruy.

This was the first house in Noord to receive this type of decoration. Later, those in Paradera, Santa Cruz, and Savaneta copied the house decorations. They practiced these systems up until 1944.

Even today, the patterns are well preserved and protected, but they are no longer used.

Janchi Christiaans began cutting the patterns out of zinc plates and cardboard. He also had his own creations and systems, while Leoncio and Bonifacio Henricus produced their own fantasies. This is what made these decorations popular: many people could turn their imagination into expressive art.

However, the decoration of houses was not originally Janchi Christiaans's idea. Janchi was a disciple of his father, Hose Christiaans, and of the Donati family, from Italian ancestors. They also made these decorations, though without using any patterns, simply designing and applying them with common plaster as the material.

Using Dr. Johan Hartog's *Aruba, Breve Historia* as reference, I noticed that he also writes that these designs are not indigenous symbols, but only decorative fantasies. One point of disagreement is that he wrote that in 1820 someone from Curaçao began this type of decoration in Aruba.



This means that, according to Father Nooyen, who declared that it began in 1920, it would have actually started 100 years earlier. As part of his research, Ito Tromp also interviewed Mr. Julio Maduro of the Department of Labor at that time, who told him that around 1880 Johannes (Janchi) Wolff began with house decorations. And as Janchi himself said, he learned this from his grandfather, who in earlier times had built the first lighthouse at California Point.

After comparing his information, Ito Tromp wrote that Hartog was right concerning the period when decorated houses began in Aruba in 1820. However, it was not people from Curaçao who started it. Victor Tromp, who was 87 years old at the time of writing, was a member of Janchi Wolff's family.

Julio Maduro said that in 1920 they began again with this type of decoration. In general, there is no specific year (up to now) when Arubans first began with this decorative artistic expression. It is interesting to know that these decorations are a kind of symbol for several generations.

For example: Decorations that appear on the house of the Arends family could also be seen on the houses of the Bermudez or Croes families. This was because parents always gave a specific sign to their sons or daughters when they were getting married.

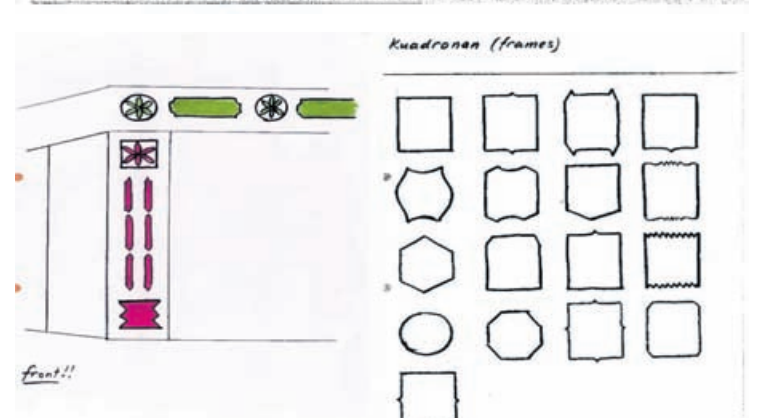
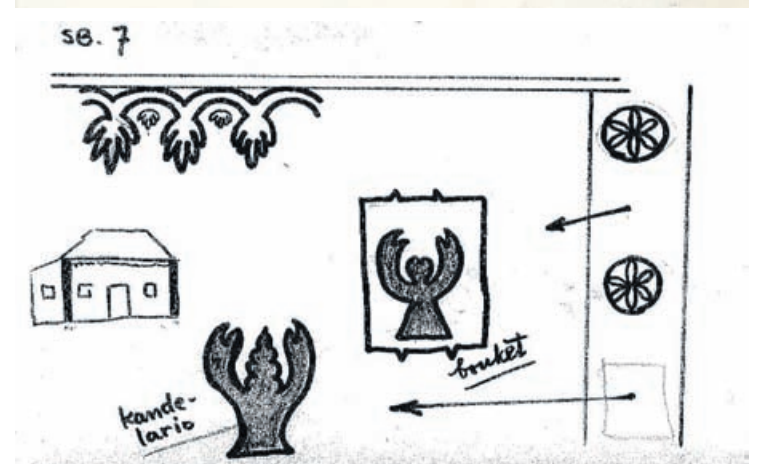
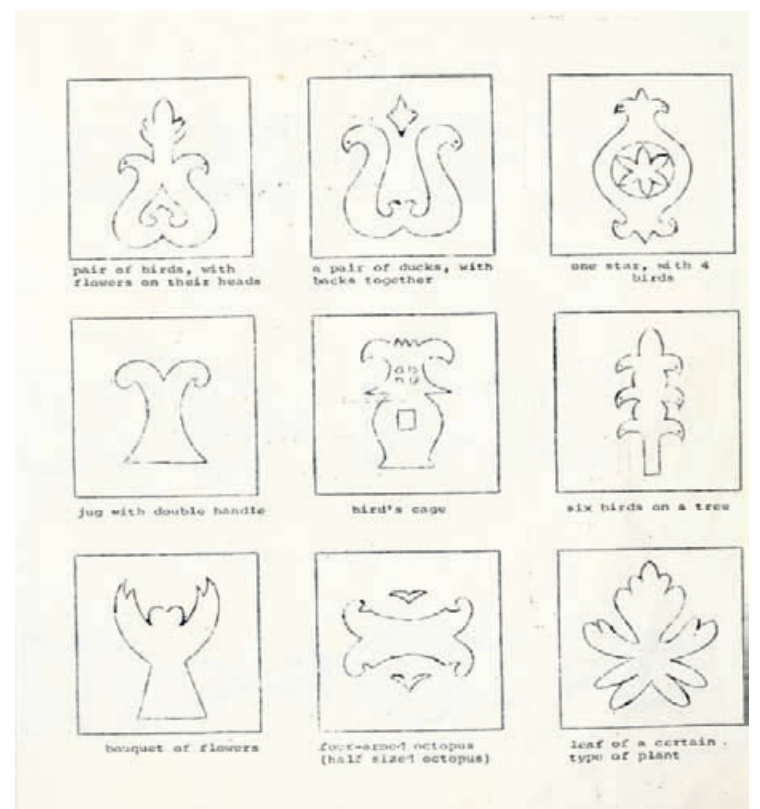
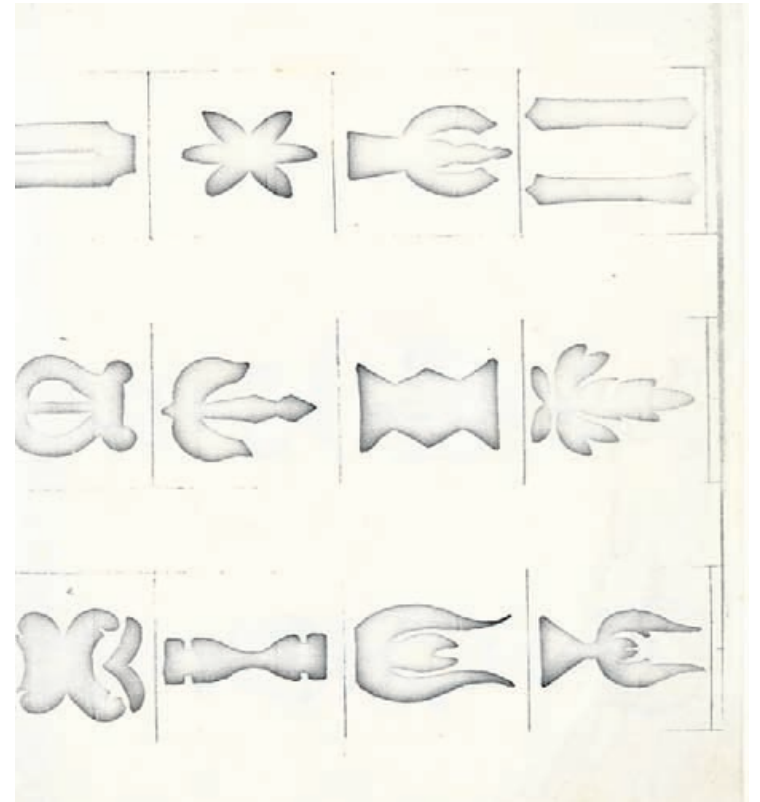
It was also said that these designs had a certain kind of voodoo purpose, to keep away the spirits of the Indigenous people who were buried in the neighborhoods where the houses now stand. However, this has almost completely disappeared.

As for the continuation of these designs from family to family, this is a cultural heritage that is no longer established. For this reason, in earlier times, every young man who married had to have his own house; otherwise, there would be no marriage.

The designs were created according to the individual's imagination. If he saw, for example, six pairs of birds on a tree, he would then paint six pairs of birds on a tree. If he wanted to express his love for his twin children, then he designed a twin.

Nowadays, if you want to use these designs for your house, don't worry—you can simply copy them and paint them. □

Source: *E casnan Decora na Aruba* (1976) by Ito Tromp.



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1. Go by taxi
6. Latte topping
10. Resort off Venezuela
11. Eeyore's creator
12. Heathen
13. 1980 Tony winner for Best Musical
14. Poet Khayyám
15. Director Spielberg
16. Like the Beatles
17. Start of an ode title
18. Snaky shape
19. 1960 Tony winner for Best Musical
22. Cajole
23. Roster
26. 2016 Tony winner for Best Musical
29. Quick punch
32. Brief time
33. Wish undone
34. Looks forward to
36. Dance moves
37. 1999 Tony winner for

Best

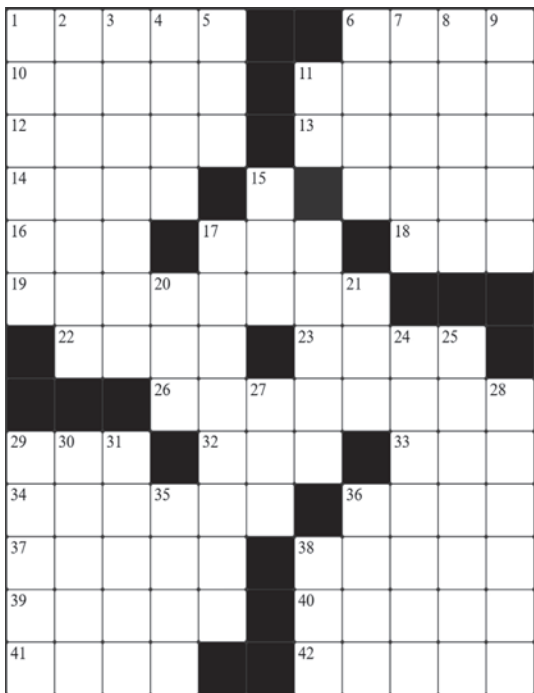
38. Painter
39. Japanese dog
40. Brat's opposite
41. Nevada city
42. Out of style

DOWN

1. Complete
2. Language of biblical times
3. Object of fear
4. Structural girder
5. Sandy color
6. Lincoln's bill
7. Green shade
8. Pays to play
9. Wherewithal
11. Like some auto finishes
15. Musical note
17. 21-Down, informally
20. Cheering cry
21. Well output
24. Orchestra section
25. Bald spot covers
27. -- amis (my friends)
28. Get snug
29. "Aladdin" villain
30. Came to sight
35. Analogy words
36. Comic Carvey
38. Travel aid



Yesterday's answer



AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for 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.

10-21 CRYPTOQUOTE

M J H T H E Z M T X O B X A M K

A M E P E Z X Y H E A Z K V W E A P K D

Z X Y H . --- E V V Z E V C U T A

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: FIND THE GOOD. IT'S ALL AROUND YOU. FIND IT, SHOWCASE IT AND YOU'LL START BELIEVING IN IT. --- JESSE OWENS

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

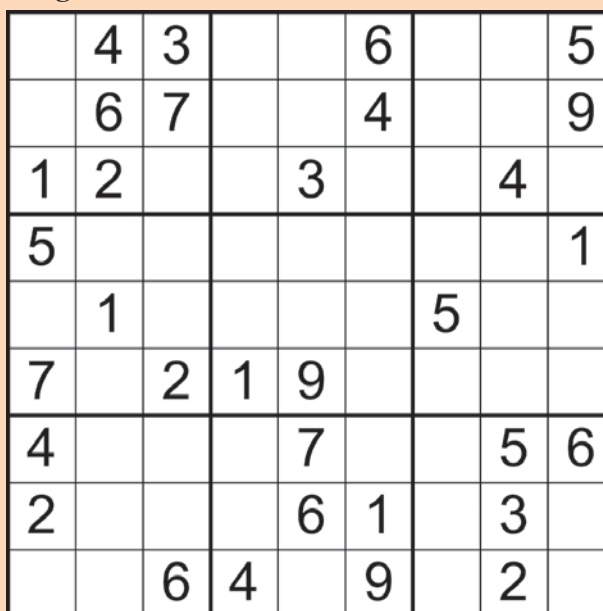
OCTOBER

20 TUE	CARNIVAL MAGIC	Arrival: 9:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: C
	GRANDEUR OF THE SEAS	Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: I
21 WED	EURODAM	Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 17:00 Berth: C
	ALLURE OF THE SEAS	Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 23:00 Berth: I
22 THU	NIEUW AMSTERDAM	Arrival: 8:00 Departure: 17:00 Berth: B
	CARIBBEAN PRINCESS	Arrival: 9:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: C
25 SUN	CORAL PRINCESS	Arrival: 10:00 Departure: 22:00 Berth: C

SUDOKU

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

King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★

10/22

Answer to previous puzzle



Difficulty: ★★★

10/21

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U.N. issues call to arms to combat off-the-charts El Nino

Geneva, Switzerland

The El Nino weather phenomenon gripping the planet is heading off the charts, the United Nations warned Wednesday, saying countries should take urgent action to prepare for the worst.

El Nino is set to peak in December, but the human impact of its associated extreme temperatures, floods and droughts is set to last into 2027 and beyond.

The U.N. called for international preventative measures to protect the millions of people most exposed -- before disaster strikes.

"The current El Nino event could be unprecedented in strength: literally off the monitoring charts that we have used for the past four decades," said Celeste Saulo, head of the U.N.'s weather and climate agency.

"We are already witnessing extreme weather events and expect this to multiply and cascade as El Nino intensifies," the World Meteorological Organization chief told a press conference in Geneva, alongside the U.N. aid chief Tom Fletcher.

They issued a joint call for "urgent and coordinated anticipatory action" to protect the most vulnerable communities already living on the edge.

"We cannot stop El Nino, but we can prevent many of its worst human consequences," said Saulo.

- 'Wrecking ball' -

Fletcher said El Nino was a "wrecking ball" that would bring havoc to Latin America, eastern and southern Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

He said the long-term impact "will be felt for months and potentially years to come... because it's this overlaying of crisis on crisis and crisis".

He cited widespread conflict and displacement, soaring fuel and fertiliser and food prices, and swingeing aid cuts.

"The risk is you have tens of millions of people pushed



World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Secretary-general Celeste Saulo (L) speaks next to United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher during a joint press conference on the consequences of the unprecedented El Nino event in Geneva, on October 21, 2026.

into humanitarian need," he explained, warning that 50 million people could face increased hunger.

Fletcher said the next two weeks were "the critical window to act".

Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya need supplies ahead of heavy rains; southern Africa needs seeds and livestock; Central America needs livelihood assistance, while Asia and the Pacific must prepare for droughts, floods and cyclones, he said.

However, Fletcher warned that the damage from El

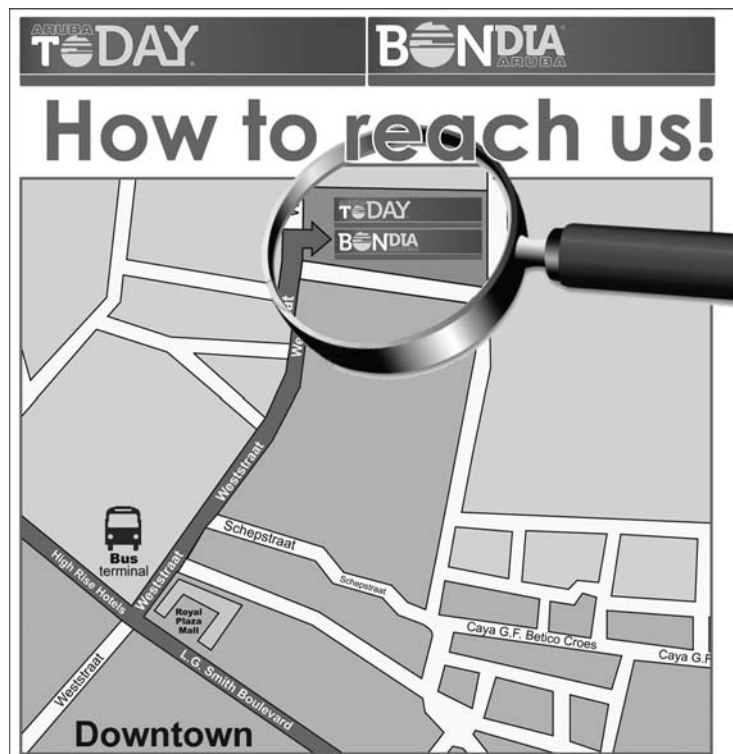
Nino would not be limited to countries on the front line.

"It will create economic shocks for the global economy and drive further conflict, displacement, migration," he said.

"I am sounding the alarm that the humanitarian system... cannot alone cope with a threat on this scale." He called on countries, development banks and international financial institutions to get money moving "before that damage is done".

Fletcher said he had re-

leased \$50 million to help 11 countries on the front-line, including Chad, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan. □



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San Nicolas: Centro Medico
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Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic 588 0539

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Ambulance 911
Fire Dept. 115
Red Cross 582 2219

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Narcotics Anonymous
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Against Domestic Violence(FCVR)
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Child Abuse Prevention
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Websites go dark worldwide as AI exposes critical security flaws

Washington, United States

Government agencies and companies around the world shut down websites Wednesday after two critical flaws came to light involving PHP, a programming language that is the basis for a large share of the internet.

PHP sits underneath popular web design platforms, so the weaknesses potentially affect a vast range of websites, from online stores and news outlets to government services.

Wiz, one of the security firms that found the issues, estimated that PHP runs about 70 percent of the world's websites and said the flaws rank "among the most severe vulnerabilities discovered in PHP, and arguably in software history."

The U.S. National Security Agency told organizations to patch immediately or pull vulnerable systems offline. The flaws "often provide a direct path to the server's file system or database," the NSA said in a statement on X.

Attackers could use them to



An illustration picture taken on October 21, 2026 shows a padlock in front of binary code on a laptop screen in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany.

take over web servers without needing a password.

Volker Dusch, a security engineer at the PHP Foundation, told the Wall Street Journal it was the most serious problem PHP had faced in more than a decade, comparing it to Heartbleed, a 2014 flaw that set off a worldwide rush to patch.

The discovery came amid a surge in software security disclosures driven by increasingly powerful AI models, with the number of vulnerabilities found in 2026 on track to roughly double last year's record total.

PHP volunteers released a fix on Wednesday.

"If you run PHP, it is impera-

tive that you update now," the PHP Foundation, which funds developers working on the language, said in a blog post.

Security firm Calif found the flaws in August using OpenAI's GPT-5.6 Sol model, as part of an OpenAI-funded audit of PHP's code.

Google-owned Wiz said it

found them independently weeks later with help from AI models including Google's Gemini 4 Argon and GPT-5.6 Sol.

OpenAI said on X that it considered the bug "one of the most impactful vulnerabilities in recent memory," adding that it "marks a new phase, where AI can find security bugs with internet-scale impact."

- 'Often and fast' -

Ethan Mollick, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School who studies AI, said that companies he talks to are struggling to keep up with the pace of patches needed to shield from AI-driven cyberattacks.

"Now consumers are going to have the same experience of getting everything updated often and fast," he wrote on X.

The flaws had been reported privately to PHP's developers and kept confidential while a fix was prepared. Details leaked online Tuesday, a day before the planned release of the fix, prompting the rush to take sites offline.

In France, local government websites, including one for Paris police, have been inaccessible since Wednesday afternoon at the request of the French National Cybersecurity Agency, the interior ministry said.

In the Netherlands, the national digital identity service DigiD, the website of the House of Representatives and the site of the national cybersecurity center went offline as a precaution, according to Dutch public broadcaster NOS.

Belgium's foreign ministry temporarily took its websites offline as a precaution, it said on X, although the Centre for Cybersecurity Belgium had recorded no attacks on Belgian sites. In Australia, the Australian Signals Directorate said its own cyber.gov.au site was among government websites affected by the flaws, according to public broadcaster ABC. □

EU probes Booking.com over online fraud risks

Brussels, Belgium

The European Union opened an investigation into online travel agent Booking.com on Wednesday over alleged failures to tackle fake listings and phishing scams.

The EU fears Booking.com has underestimated the impact of fraud and unlicensed accommodation,

and is not sufficiently protecting users' data from being misused for scams. The probe is the first into Booking.com under the Digital Services Act (DSA), a mammoth online content law that covers a wide array of platforms including social media and digital marketplaces.

"Europeans should be

able to book their holidays without fear of being scammed," EU tech chief Henna Virkkunen said in a statement.

The EU said it was also looking into whether the Netherlands-based firm breached rules "because it did not clearly label as ads those listings whose providers paid for a higher ranking in search results shown to users".

The DSA "sets clear responsibilities" and "we must ensure that the leading booking platform in Europe takes those responsibilities seriously", Virkkunen added.

Booking.com said that it was "cooperating fully" and that "security, trust and the protection of personal information are top priorities".

"We remain committed to working with relevant governments, regulators, law enforcement and industry

partners to combat cybercrime and online fraud and protect travellers and partners," it added.

Booking.com is among over 20 very large online platforms that must comply with the DSA's stricter rules or risk fines that could go as high as six percent of their global turnover, or even a ban for serious and repeated breaches. There is no legal deadline for the completion of the probe but the targeted company can offer commitments to address the European Commission's concerns.

- Suspicions over data -

A senior EU official was critical of Booking.com and its risk assessment efforts since 2023.

"We feel that what they have done is absolutely substandard," the official said on condition of anonymity. □



Executive Vice-President of the European Commission Henna Virkkunen speaks during a press conference on the 'Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Package' in Brussels, Belgium, on June 24, 2026.



The New York Knicks look toward the team's new banner after receiving their championship rings during the Ring Ceremony and Banner Raising to celebrate the New York Knicks' NBA Championship win ahead of the game against the Philadelphia 76ers at Madison Square Garden on October 20, 2026 in New York City.

LeBron, Sixers spoil Knicks party, Thunder top Spurs as NBA season tips off

New York, United States

LeBron James and his new Philadelphia 76ers teammates crashed the New York Knicks' season-opening celebrations on Tuesday, beating the defending NBA champions 106-100 on the night they raised their title banner at Madison Square Garden.

James, 41 and entering a record-extending 24th NBA season with his fourth team, scored 14 points and handed out seven of the 76ers' 28 assists in a tantalizing glimpse of how he will be a facilitator for younger teammates like Tyrese Maxey -- who led all scorers with 28 points.

"I could be a lot better," James told broadcaster NBC. "Still getting my rhythm, obviously just a little bit over two weeks with the new squad."

"But I like the way we played. I think we played exceptionally well, especially defensively."

Jaylen Brown, the former Boston Celtics star who arrived in Philly in a stunning trade for Paul George in July, scored 19 points with eight rebounds and six assists and center Joel Embiid added 13 points and 11 rebounds for the 76ers.

Jalen Brunson led the Knicks with 21 points and Karl-Anthony Towns scored 19 points with 12 rebounds,

but after regaining the lead in the third quarter the 76ers repelled every Knicks charge.

The Knicks ended a 53-year title drought with their victory over the San Antonio Spurs in last season's NBA Finals.

Knicks legends including Bill Bradley, Earl Monroe and Walt Frazier handed out the Knicks' championship rings in an emotional pre-game ceremony at the Garden, where the crowd featured diehard celebrity Knicks fans like Ben Stiller and Spike Lee along with other famous faces including rocker Jon Bon Jovi and NFL commissioner Roger Goodell.

Before the club's third championship banner was raised to the rafters, NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Brunson told fans the Knicks were "ready to turn the page as a team."

"But one thing I would like to say the joy that this city had this summer we'd love to replicate that again," Brunson said of a Knicks team aiming to be the first repeat champions since 2018. James, a four-time NBA champion and the league's all-time leading scorer, admitted that winning on another team's ring ceremony night was especially satisfying.

"It's pretty special," he said.

In the nightcap of the opening day triple-header, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 32 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder rode a hot start to a 116-104 victory over Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs. Wembanyama, widely tipped to end Gilgeous-Alexander's two-year Most Valuable Player reign, made just one basket in 13 attempts, an alley-oop dunk to end the third quarter.

He made his presence felt with 13 rebounds and six blocked shots and scored 12 points largely thanks to 10 free throws.

But the Spurs, led by 24 points from Stephon Castle, ultimately had no answer for an OKC outfit "hungry" after their title defense ended in a seven-game loss to San Antonio in last season's Western Conference finals.

- Tempers flare -

"Obviously this is the team that eliminated us from achieving our goal," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "But for us, I think it was more like we're just happy to be back. It's a longer summer when you don't win, and we felt that this summer."

There was plenty of tension between the young teams tipped to duel for supremacy in the West for years to come. □



Jalen Hurts #1 of the Philadelphia Eagles yells before a game against the Los Angeles Rams at Lincoln Financial Field on October 04, 2026 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

NFL players union wants probe into Hurts' medical care

New York, United States

The NFL Players Association called for an investigation into medical care for Jalen Hurts regarding blood clots on Tuesday while the league's medical director supported treatment by the Philadelphia Eagles.

Eagles quarterback Hurts was placed on injured reserve and is expected to miss the remainder of the season after blood clots were found in his lungs following an earlier clot in his left calf.

The Eagles and Hurts's agent said the star passer has deep vein thrombosis and bilateral pulmonary embolisms.

Hurts, who led Philadelphia to a Super Bowl victory over the Kansas City Chiefs last year, told team medical staff about the injury after being stepped on during a practice in London.

He was diagnosed with a superficial blood clot in his calf and played against Jacksonville in London before flying home, where more examinations showed blood clots in his lungs.

The league, according to a report in The Athletic, is not punishing the Eagles for how the case was handled.

The NFL players union wants more information about the situation.

"The NFLPA is not aware of any NFL investigation into the medical care provided to Jalen Hurts," the NFLPA said in a statement.

"In fact, the league previously informed the union that it did not plan to review the care he received."

"Before conclusions are drawn about how this situation was handled, there must be a full investigation into what occurred."

"Determining the facts is essential to ensuring players receive the highest level of care and protection going forward."

Dr. Allen Sills, the NFL chief medical officer, said Tuesday at the NFL meetings in New York that while he could not speak on specifics about Hurts for patient privacy reasons, he supported the Eagles and the actions taken.

"I have tremendous confidence in the Philadelphia Eagles' medical staff," Sills said, saying team physicians are not influenced by coaches, team owners or executives. "It just doesn't happen," Sills said. "There's no doctor who is taking orders from a football person, a non-medical person."

Sills said he thought medical personnel acted with an abundance of caution and dismissed the idea anything was more important than patient health.

"The notion there are external factors that any of our physicians would put a player in harm's way -- that's nonsense," Sills said. □

Maradona doctor was made 'scapegoat' for his death, Argentine court told

San Isidro, Argentina

A lawyer for Leopoldo Luque, a doctor charged in the 2020 death of Argentine football legend Diego Maradona, said in closing arguments Wednesday that his client was innocent and had been made a "scapegoat." Attorney Roberto Rallin rejected the prosecution's argument that Maradona's November 2020 death was foreseeable, while another defense attorney, Francisco Oneto, maintained that his death resulted from an "acute and unpredictable" heart attack.

"There was absolutely no possibility of predicting this fatal outcome," Oneto insisted.

Prosecutors have requested a 12-year prison sentence



Argentine neurosurgeon Leopoldo Luque arrives at the San Isidro courthouse for the final hearing of defense closing arguments in the trial over the death of Argentine football legend Diego Maradona, in San Isidro, Buenos Aires Province, Argentina, on October 21, 2026.

for Luque, a neurosurgeon considered a key decision-maker for Maradona at the time of his death.

"We are here to proclaim Luque's innocence, not with television slogans, but with the evidence that supports it," Rallin said. "Leopoldo Luque has been the scapegoat."

Maradona died at age 60 from a cardio respiratory crisis coupled with pulmonary edema.

He was found dead in his bed at a residence in Tigre, north of Buenos Aires, rented for his convalescence, following surgery for a subdural hematoma.

The death of Argentina's favorite son plunged the country into mourning in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tens of thousands of people defied social distancing rules to bid farewell to him as he lay in state at the presidential palace.

A total of seven health-care professionals have been on trial since April for potential negligence leading to the star's death during his two weeks of convalescence. Prosecutors have requested sentences ranging from four to 12 years for six of the seven defendants.

In its closing arguments, the prosecution condemned Luque's "inaction," saying his attitude "was always to do nothing" in the face of the warning signs that Maradona was exhibiting.

- Contested medical history -

Luque's lawyers particularly attacked the conclusions of the interdisciplinary medical commission, which had been established by the court in 2021 to provide an opinion on the star's death. The commission, which based its findings on the autopsy and other things, said Maradona had a history of heart problems that should have been taken into account, a conclusion the prosecution emphasized. But Luque's defense lawyers said that clinical tests done prior to Maradona's surgery just before his death didn't reveal any heart issues. □



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