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Friday
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Somalia welcomes U.S. reversal on funding international military support



Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud speaks during the 81st United Nations General Assembly at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, on September 24, 2026.

Washington, United States

Somalia said Monday it welcomes the decision by the United States to renew support to international military operations against Islamist insurgents in the country, reversing cuts that had threatened the survival of the coalition.

Washington had stopped funding the United Nations Support Office for Somalia (UNSOS) -- which provides crucial logistics to African Union military operations -- and had given it until the end of 2027 to shut down entirely.

The Al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabaab has been fighting the Somali government for two decades and continues to control large swathes of central Somalia despite the African Union military campaign, which was unlikely to be able to continue without UNSOS support.

But on Sunday, the U.S. State Department said that, after consideration, the United States has decided to "support a one-year renewal of the mandates" for both UNSOS and the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM).

A foreign diplomatic source working on Somalia told AFP the return of US support was welcome but that the sudden swings in policy were "madness".

The source, who requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak publicly on the matter, expressed shock that Washington did not use the promise of renewed funding to put pressure on the Somali government, which has lately triggered fresh political chaos that is undermining the campaign against the insurgents.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has tried to move Somalia towards fully democratic elections, but sparked violent clashes with opposition parties when he pushed through constitutional changes in March that gave him an extra year in office.

Last week, he fired the chief justice of the Supreme Court as it was about to declare the extension of his term illegal.

The fight against Al-Shabaab is also in trouble.

The group claimed last month it had killed hundreds of elite Somali soldiers in an ambush -- potentially one of its deadliest attacks in years, although the government has not released a death toll.

Days later, Uganda, which provides the largest contingent of troops to the international military mission, said it would withdraw all its forces by the end of next year.

- 'Security crisis' -

The Somali government thanked its "steadfast partner", the US, for renewing the funding, which "reaffirms the enduring partnership between Somalia and the United States in the shared fight against terrorism".

It claimed the Somali army was steadily assuming control of military operations from international forces, and that "most major cities and much of Somalia now enjoy greater peace and stability".

But in July, Washington cut the funding in frustration at the Somalia government's failure to "sustain progress against Al-Shabaab, take ownership of its security functions, or undertake serious security sector reform".

The U.S. has provided nearly $2 billion to UN missions in Somalia since 2007, and more than $1.6 billion for African troops deployed there, it said at the time.

The Islamists control large swathes of central Somalia, as well as powerful business networks throughout the country, including in the capital Mogadishu, which ensure they are well-funded.

Although Mohamud's government made territorial gains against the group after he came to power in 2022, these were largely reversed by a counter-offensive in the following years.

The State Department said on Sunday that the renewed support to UNSOS would help contain threats from Somalia and "prevent the emergence of broader security crisis in the region that would undermine US interests," the spokesman added.

The foreign diplomatic source said the change of plan followed an internal assessment by the US State Department that raised fears Somalia could turn into a failed state.

The source suggested this may have worried Secretary of State Marco Rubio, given his potential plans to run for the U.S. presidency in 2028.

The State Department did not respond to follow-up questions on the reasons for the policy change.

But the spokesperson warned there was no "indefinite commitment" of support to Somalia, and stressed the need for Somalia and the African Union to step up planning for a shift to "more sustainable regional security solutions."q

U.S. auctions first ever deep-sea mining leases, despite court ruling



U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum (R) speaks alongside U.S. President Donald Trump during an event at the site of the White House ballroom on November 04, 2026 in Washington, DC.

Washington, United States

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration on Thursday announced it had carried out the nation's first ever deep-sea mining lease sales off the coast of American Samoa, despite an adverse court ruling earlier this week.

The lease sales cover approximately 31 million acres (12.5 million hectares) over two areas off the US Pacific archipelago, and came amid widespread opposition from locals and environmental groups.

Each area sold for $3 million to bidders who have not been identified, for a combined total of $6 million.

"This is the first time the United States has held an offshore critical minerals lease sale in the Pacific and a historic step for America's energy and mineral security," said Interior Secretary Doug Burgum in a statement.

"Today's sale opens a path to learn more about the resources off the coast of American Samoa and assess whether they could contribute to a more reliable domestic supply," he added.

The sale follows an April 2025 executive order in which Trump called leadership in deep-sea science and technology "a core national security and economic interest," and a request by U.S. firm Impossible Metals to open leasing off the territory, which lies east of the independent nation of Samoa.

Mining companies want to scour the ocean's abyssal plains for polymetallic nodules laden with nickel, copper and cobalt -- vital for modern batteries and electric vehicle systems.

Critics fear irreversible damage, with plumes of waste smothering marine life and the thrum of heavy machinery disrupting migrations.

"This premature push to exploit the deep sea before we even fully understand how vital it is will have catastrophic consequences that reverberate for generations," said Oceana Defense Campaign Manager Julia Singer.

American Samoa banned deep-sea mining in its territorial waters in 2024, but the auction concerns the federally controlled Outer Continental Shelf beyond that limit.

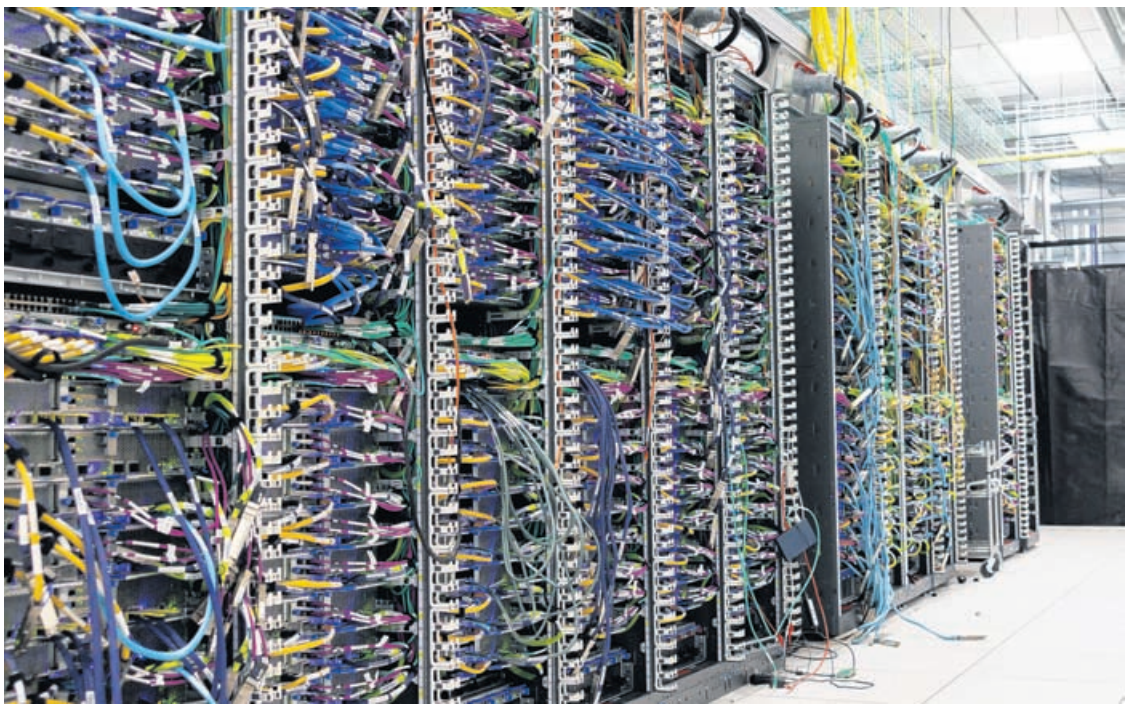
In a public comment in September, Governor Pulaali'i Nikolao Pula said he "does not support commercial deep-sea mineral extraction at this time."

On Monday, a federal judge in Hawaii ruled for community and conservation groups, finding that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) violated the Endangered Species Act when it gave the green light to the sale.

"NMFS failed to even attempt to consider the potential effects on ESA-listed species," Judge Jill Otake wrote.❑

Old infrastructure, AI-driven fixes behind wave of U.S. outages

New York, United States
A sudden spate of disruptive tech breakdowns in the United States has triggered widespread public unease and compelled top officials to counter rampant speculation about everything from malicious actors to unchecked AI.
Flights were grounded, ATMs stopped working, and people couldn't check emails on Outlook or access photos on Apple iCloud. For many, it felt like the whole system was glitching at once.
But experts say the main causes are old, overly complicated systems, and the rush by companies and the government to protect them from new threats created by artificial intelligence (AI).
Secretary of State Marco Rubio took time out of a foreign trip Wednesday to declare there is no proof the problems were connected, and no sign of a cyberattack. U.S. intelligence chief Jay Clayton later echoed the remarks.
Instead, almost all of the outages were traced back to routine maintenance work on the systems, or to software errors known as "bugs."



Wires from Amazon Web Services Trainium3 UltraServers are seen at a QA lab in Austin, Texas, on February 3, 2026.

Senator Mark Warner, a Democrat and a top member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said powerful AI tools can now find weak spots in computer systems faster than ever.
That is creating "enormous pressure on companies and government agencies to patch those vulnerabilities immediately, often all at once," he said, which puts "tremendous strain on systems that weren't built to handle that pace of change."
"While we still need to get to the bottom of these incidents, the evidence so far points toward legitimate efforts to secure our systems, not malicious activity," Warner added.
Steven Jackson, a professor of information science at Cornell University, said these systems combine software with physical equipment. "So correcting something like that, without accidentally breaking something else, is actually a challenging task," he said. That is especially true, he said, "when you're doing it under duress, under time pressure, under significant anxiety and threat."

- 'Hard to justify' -

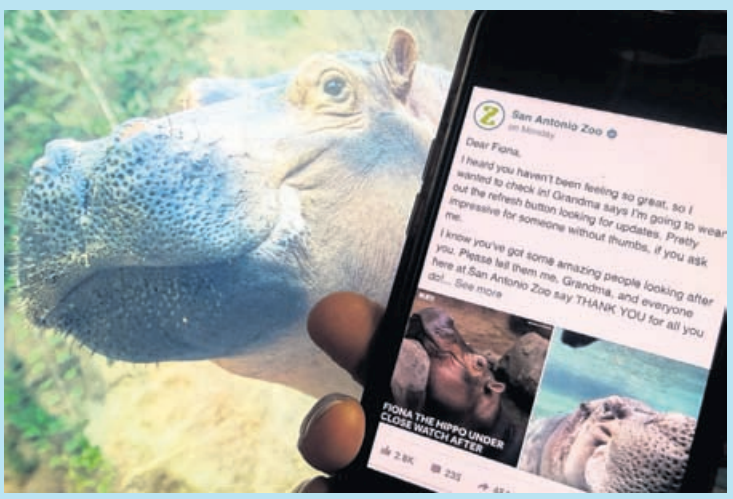
Another problem is the cloud vast, outsourced networks of computers used by companies to store data and run programs instead of on in-house machines.
Today, only a few large companies can provide such large computing power. So when one has a problem, even a small one, millions of people can be affected right away, as happened with Microsoft's Outlook.
Researchers at the research firm Forrester said in a report that it is time to deal with the problem of so much power sitting with so few companies.
Kalle Lyytinen, a professor at Case Western Reserve University, said companies are also cutting the number of workers who maintain their systems.
Running these systems "requires very deep technical knowledge about the software architectures, the code," he said, so that when something goes wrong, someone can find the defect and fix it.

Some of these workers are being replaced by AI. But Lyytinen said AI-written code doesn't understand how the whole system fits together, and fewer and fewer people really understand what the code is doing.❑

Fiona the hippo dies after failed effort to remove swallowed hat

Washington, United States
World-famous hippopotamus Fiona has died after several failed attempts by vets to remove a woolly hat that she accidentally swallowed, the Cincinnati Zoo announced Thursday.
Beloved for her antics on social media, the nine-year-old Nile hippo ingested the knitted cap last week and began to lose her appetite.
"It is with extreme sadness that we share with you the devastating news that Fiona did not make it after multiple attempts from our amazing vets and keeper team to help her through what ended up being a medical emergency," the zoo wrote on social media.
"The vet staff tried everything they could to help her after she ingested a hat that ended up in her habitat by accident last week.
"Despite multiple attempts to move the hat out of her system, it was ultimately too much to overcome. The team performed necessary supportive care today in an attempt to save her, but it was not successful and she did not recover." Her plight triggered an outpouring of global support. "I have never prayed so much for a hippo to poop," wrote one user on Instagram.
Others blamed the parents of a child who, according to the zoo, threw a hat in the air, which was then caught by a ceiling fan and sent flying.

Fiona's care team resorted to unusual methods, using a "vibration plate" borrowed from a local horse farm to "help encourage movement through her digestive tract and help the object pass," the zoo wrote in an Instagram post.
They also offered her a sniff of coffee, to which she responded with approving grunts and ear twitches.
Mike Wenninger, the zoo's director of animal health, said she had been under 24-hour supervision and medical care that included enemas and pain and anti-nausea medication.
Because she was full-grown, surgery wasn't considered a viable option, and attempts to retrieve the hat with a nine-foot-long scope, passed through her rectum while she was sedated, were unsuccessful.
Fiona was born in January 2017, the first Nile hippo born at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden in 75 years.
She was premature and initially unable to stand or nurse from her mother, Bibi, but staged a remarkable recovery.
Fiona and her younger brother Fritz, born in 2022, charmed people across the world with videos of them chomping on watermelons, wading through their water tanks surrounded by tilapia fish and reaching up for leaves.
The Cincinnati Zoo opened in 1875, making it the second-oldest zoo in the United States.❑



Screens display an image of Fiona the hippo provided by Cininnati Zoo, and a message of support by San Antonio Zoo, taken in Washington DC earlier November 19, 2026.

Scattered by war, the band that gave voice to Sudan's revolution plays again

Cairo, Egypt

The Cairo studio where Sudanese musician Mohamed al-Mustafa strums his guitar is a long way away from the Khartoum protests where his band once performed for thousands demanding democracy, before war scattered them across multiple continents.

After living through revolution, war and years of displacement, Mustafa and his fellow musicians in "Aswat al-Madina" (Arabic for Voices of the City) have reunited in the Egyptian capital, returning to both recording and live performance.

"I still can't quite process the fact that we're back together," said Mustafa, the band's guitarist and co-founder, who goes by Timon.

"It still feels unreal," he told AFP between recording takes, as back home war rages between the two forces Sudan's youth once rallied against: the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

In the studio, old stories and songs transport the musicians back to Khartoum, where they became the soundtrack to Sudan's 2018 uprising against longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir.



Sudanese keyboardist Ruba Basher (back), member of Sudanese music band Aswat al-Madina (Voices of the City), performs with the band at a studio as they record a new song in Cairo's Heliopolis district on October 10, 2026.

Two days before war erupted between the army and the RSF, former allies who worked together to derail Sudan's transition to democracy, the band was debating setlists for their next performance.

Instead, they found themselves swept up in the conflict, which has since devastated Sudan, killing tens of thousands of people and displacing millions more.

- 'Never left me' -

Founded in Khartoum in 2014, Aswat al-Madina was part of a wave of underground bands pushing Sudanese music beyond conventional boundaries.

Blending folk traditions with jazz, reggae and contemporary rhythms, they sang about corruption, social injustice and life under authoritarian rule.

"Before the revolution, we used a technique where everyone understood what we meant, but nobody could prove it," said lead singer Ibrahim Ahmed Taha, who was arrested several times over their music.

When Sudan's youth took to the streets in December 2018, demanding an end to Bashir's rule, the band's songs blasted from phones, passing cars and makeshift barricades.

Timon still remembers one demonstrator carrying a giant speaker blaring their music through the marches.

"The music pushed people forward. It told them not to retreat in the face of repression.

"That image has never left me."

The band was a regular fixture at pro-democracy protests, including at the sit-in outside military headquarters in Khartoum, where protesters gathered each evening to listen to speeches, poetry and music.

"Find me in the square at half-past revolution; tonight, the devil falls," one track goes.

That sit-in became the site of a massacre in June 2019, when security forces led by the military and the RSF killed at least 120 protesters.

Four years later, when those same forces turned their guns on each other, the band like many Sudanese lost everything.

From their five-storey creative hub, "everything was gone," Timon said.

"Not just the musical equipment. Even the chairs and tables had been looted."

"You'd step into the street and see bodies lying there and buildings reduced to rubble. That's when you realise everything has fallen apart," Timon said.

As fighting spread, the musicians fled Sudan, carrying little more than backpacks and laptops.

- 'In Khartoum again' -

Timon escaped to the United Arab Emirates while others settled in Egypt and elsewhere in Africa. Regular rehearsals gave way to anxious discussions of visas and relatives still trapped in Sudan.

It was only this August that the band could reunite in Cairo, for its first performance since the war began.

As familiar songs filled the venue, audience members sang along to every word, shouting requests.

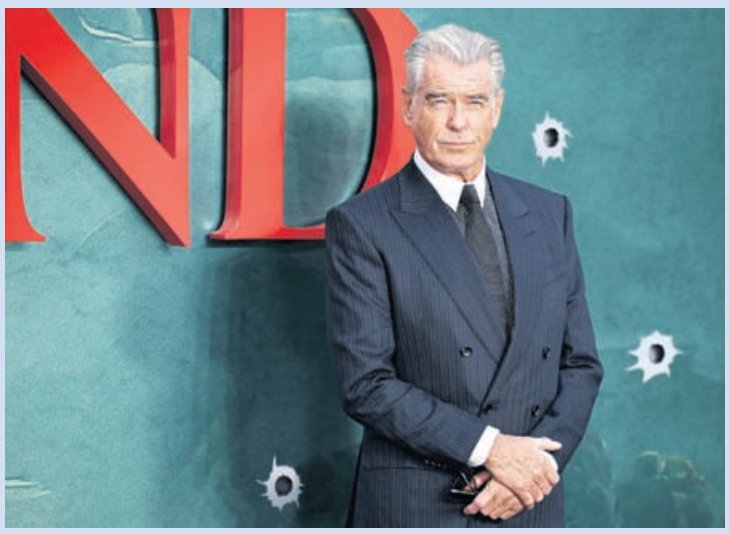
"For a moment," Taha said, "I felt like I was in Khartoum again."❑

Pierce Brosnan tells new 007 Pattinson: 'Enjoy the ride'

London, United Kingdom

Irish actor Pierce Brosnan, who once played the role of the world's most famous spy, has welcomed Robert Pattinson to the "world of Bond", urging him to "enjoy the ride".

"You are going to be magnificent," Brosnan wrote in a post on Instagram, under a black-and-white picture of Pattinson dressed as secret agent James Bond in a tuxedo and brandishing a hand-gun.



Irish actor Pierce Brosnan poses upon arrival for the world premiere of season two of the Paramount+ series "MobLand", in central London on September 10, 2026.

"It has been a joy to watch you create a remarkable body of work and to go from strength to strength," he added.

Brosnan played Bond in four films from 1995 to 2002, including "GoldenEye" and "Tomorrow Never Dies", before handing over to Daniel Craig.

After months of speculation, Amazon MGM Studios on Monday named British actor Pattinson as the seventh performer to step into the coveted 007 role, replacing Craig.

Pattinson became a global pop culture phenomenon with his vampire role in the "Twilight" saga before being cast as Batman.

He also starred alongside Brosnan in the 2010 romantic drama "Remember Me".

Brosnan signed off his message with "Gra Mor, Pierce" Irish for "big love".

Another Bond alum, George Lazenby, who played the agent in the 1969 film "On Her Majesty's Secret Service", said on social media: "Robert, welcome to the most exclusive club in the world."

Craig, who played Bond in five films from 2006 to 2021, has yet to react to Pattinson stepping into his shoes.❑

China's used phones find new homes from Karachi to Algiers

Shenzhen, China

In the maze of Shenzhen's neon-lit Huaqiangbei electronics market, buyers from Africa to Bangladesh buy dozens of used phones at a time even with cracked screens to sell back home.

"From all China, the broken mobile phones come here," Akhtar Muhammad, 38, a Pakistani businessman, told AFP as he browsed the stacks of devices in the southern Chinese city.

"We will fix them in Pakistan."

The supply is mind-boggling. As the world's largest smartphone producer, China discards over 400 million devices annually, the China Association of Circular Economy estimates.



Technicians repair smarthphones in a shoping mall dedicated to the sale of smartphones in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, on November 2, 2026.

As chip shortages and rising prices around the world make new devices harder to afford, so the demand for pre-owned phones is also soaring.

Mama, a 24-year-old Nigerian buyer, said he had bought around 40 used phones in one day in Shenzhen, which this week hosts Asia-Pacific leaders including US President Donald Trump.

"They are more expensive in Africa because we don't have big suppliers or markets like this one," Mama told AFP. "If I buy and send them to my country, I get profit."

Nearby, another Nigerian buyer haggled with a stall owner. His haul included damaged iPhone 13 Pro and 14 Pro models bought for 1,000 to 2,000 yuan ($150 to $300) each.

He plans to repair their screens locally before shipping them home for a lucrative resale.

- Repair not replace -

In particular, people in emerging markets such as South Asia and Africa, where there is less purchasing power, are turning to used models, Counterpoint Research analyst Ivan Lam told AFP.

The global secondary smartphone market grew 13 percent year-on-year in the first half of 2026 to 150 million units, according to Counterpoint.

In Pakistan, people often opt to repair rather than replace broken devices, said Muhammad, who has been coming to China since 2007.

"Maybe people use one mobile phone for four or five years. It's not the same like USA, Europe. They change every year or every six months," he said.

But outside Huaqiangbei's crowded stalls, a more formalised alternative is taking root: PaiJiTang Mall, a self-service second-hand marketplace run by Chinese recycling company ATRenew.

Inside, rows of over 20,000 used phones are on display. Buyers scan QR codes for instant inspection reports and pricing, test the units and purchase in bulk.

The shop draws up to 1,000 visitors daily, with international traders making up about a third, said store manager Zhang Xiaoming.

Abdul Rahim, a 20-year-old shopkeeper who flies to China up to three times a month to stock his phone and accessory store in Algeria, capitalises on a price gap of 100 to 120 euros ($110 to $132) per device.

"It's very easy for Algerians to get the visa to China. You put in your papers and in two or three days you have the visa in your passport," he told AFP.

"For Europe, there just aren't visas... So we come here."

- 'Buy, buy, buy' -

Apple devices account for 70 to 80 percent of sales, with the rest split among Chinese brands such as Huawei, Xiaomi, Oppo and Vivo, Zhang noted.

Older models like the iPhone 11, 12 and 13 losing ground to cheap Androids in China retain strong brand power overseas, where they find a second life, explained Jeremy Ji, ATRenew's head of corporate strategy and overseas business.

At ATRenew's massive processing hub in Dongguan, north of Shenzhen, roughly 30,000 second-hand gadgets arrive daily and are inspected and packed by over 300 technicians.

Rising prices are also changing buying habits in China itself with consumers opting increasingly for pre-owned models, particularly nearly new premium models, said Arthur Guo, an analyst at IDC China.

Most phones discarded in China are still sold domestically, and bulk exports via official channels have not increased significantly, Lam, of Counterpoint, told AFP.❑

Nearly a quarter of world's children live in conflict zone: charity

Amman, Jordan

Nearly a quarter of the world's children are currently living in a conflict zone, a record rate since statistics were first recorded in the 1990s, the charity Save the Children said on Thursday.

"Almost one in four children worldwide are now living in conflict zones, the highest number since records began in 1990," the London-based charity said.

"The figure represents an increase of more than 50% in a decade, jumping from 378 million in 2015 to 589 million in 2025," it added.

The report was titled "Stop the War on Children: Changing the Odds" and drew on statistics from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).

The percentage of children living in conflict zones has doubled from 10 percent in the mid-1990s to 23.4 percent in 2025.

"These record-high figures are a stark reminder that conflict is devastating the daily lives, education, health and future prospects of hundreds of millions of children," said Gudrun Ostby, a research professor at PRIO.

"Unless greater efforts are made to protect children in conflict settings, the consequences of today's wars will be felt for decades to come," he added.

The report defines conflict zones as areas existing within a 50-kilometer radius in which at least one armed attack took place.

Africa has the largest number of children living in conflict zones, at about 260 million, or 44 percent of the total across the globe, the report found.

Rates have surged in the Middle East as well, from 52 million children in 2024 to 67 million in 2025, a 29 percent increase.

An average of two in five children in Africa and the Middle East are living in conflict zones, it added.

"The scale of this crisis is rapidly growing, and the systems meant to protect children are being pushed to breaking point," said Inger Ashing, chief executive of Save The Children International.❑



Crown Prince Haakon visits the Norwegian Institute for Peace Research (PRIO) in Oslo on Tuesday.

‘Our culture’: Deaf Nigerians embrace indigenous sign languages

Abuja, Nigeria
With a quick flick of the wrist, Umaru Zayyanu conveys the phrase “I am a Nigerian”.
But the 37-year-old is not speaking or signing, rather in the west African nation’s official sign language. Instead, he’s using Hausa sign language.

Such indigenous sign languages abound in Africa’s most populous country, where deaf people were communicating with each other long before the advent of formal sign language taught in deaf schools, in 1960.
Today, Nigeria, like many countries on the continent with limited education budgets, has a hard enough time placing children in dedicated schools for the deaf and hard of hearing.
And there’s even less attention paid to local sign languages used outside the school system a serious disservice to the country’s linguistic diversity, Festus Zenda, who has worked on documentation projects with local deaf communities, told AFP.
“These indigenous signing systems should be studied, documented and preserved before changes in education, migration,



Deaf residents use sign language gesture during a group photograph at a community meeting in Zuba, near Abuja, on October 16, 2026.

technology and wider use of Nigerian Sign Language cause some of them to decline or disappear,” said Zenda, who has helped document the local sign language used by the Tiv ethnic group, in Benue state.

- Displacement by formal signing -
The working-class Abuja exurb of Zuba is a symphony of motorcycle horns, plantain hawkers’ shouts and the dull hum of construction work.
Another group adds their own, milder contributions: claps, muffled shouts of exclamation and the swish of rapid hand gestures as they chat in Hausa signs.

Nigerian sign languages, like their spoken counterparts, are sometimes confined to a small number of speakers in a country crowded with some 500 tongues and an unknown number of sign languages.
But Hausa sign language has become a lingua franca for deaf people across the north of the country.
“I cherish my culture, I cherish my indigenous sign language,” Sanni Lawal, who runs a laundry business in Zuba’s crowded market, told AFP through an interpreter. “I want it to expand everywhere.”
Nigeria traces its official sign language to Andrew Foster, an American who introduced formal deaf education across a swathe of African countries at the dawn of independence from colonial powers.
Many countries in the region today use an official sign language based on American Sign Language.
But in the decades since, some scholars argue indigenous signing has languished as governments have prioritized formal languages.
“People gather in the moonlight narrating their folklores in indigenous sign,” said Joshua Gyang, who has researched local languages with Nigeria’s deaf activist community.
Nevertheless, he warned they will “certainly perish” without preservation.

- ‘Our culture and identity’ -
The government doesn’t completely ignore local sign languages: politicians often bring Hausa signers to campaign stops to court deaf voters, Zuba residents told AFP.
The strategy makes sense: there’s no school there to teach formal sign language.
Under a USAID program administered by Gallaudet University the United States’ premier university for deaf and hard of hearing students, and Foster’s alma mater researchers were providing training to deaf educators in Nigeria, which touched on local languages as well.❑

UK PM urges Google to remove Russell Brand’s innocence claim video

London, United Kingdom
British Prime Minister Andy Burnham on Thursday urged Google to “show decency” and remove a YouTube video with a message from convicted rapist Russell Brand protesting his innocence.

The British comedian and influencer, who was last week sentenced to 10 years in prison for rape and sexual assault against four women, insisted he is innocent in a statement read out by his wife, Laura Brand, in a video uploaded Sunday to YouTube.
YouTube’s owner, U.S. tech giant Google, has not complied with a request by the UK government to remove the video with the message and it has been viewed over 900,000 times.
Responding to a journalist’s question, Burnham said “I would call on those social media companies to take these interviews down”, adding that Brand’s victims “shouldn’t be hearing from him”.
“I feel for the victims, they’ve heard quite enough from this convicted criminal,” he added.



Britain’s Prime Minister Andy Burnham speaks to the members of the media following summit of the so-called “Coalition of the Willing”, a group of Ukraine’s most significant allies and supporters, at the chancellery in Berlin on November 19, 2026.

Government minister Matthew Pennycook told the BBC earlier that UK authorities “don’t have any power to mandate a removal of content”.

“That is up to Google,” he said.
“We’ve made a request in this instance because we feel very strongly that victims shouldn’t have to see this content.”
Asked if he would change the law on this, however, Burnham said: “I wouldn’t leap to that.
“I would first say to the social media companies show some responsibility here. Think of the victims, that’s the main thing. Show some decency,” he added.
The YouTube video prompted an immediate backlash from victims’ advocates, political leaders and others.

Burnham’s spokesman called it “clearly appalling” on Monday, and it is understood the Ministry of Justice subsequently submitted an official request to Google to remove it.
“It is only right that the government asks for content that is distressing for victims to be taken down, and we strongly believe YouTube should remove this content,” a ministry spokesman said in a statement to AFP.
“Removal ultimately depends on the platform’s own terms.”❑

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.

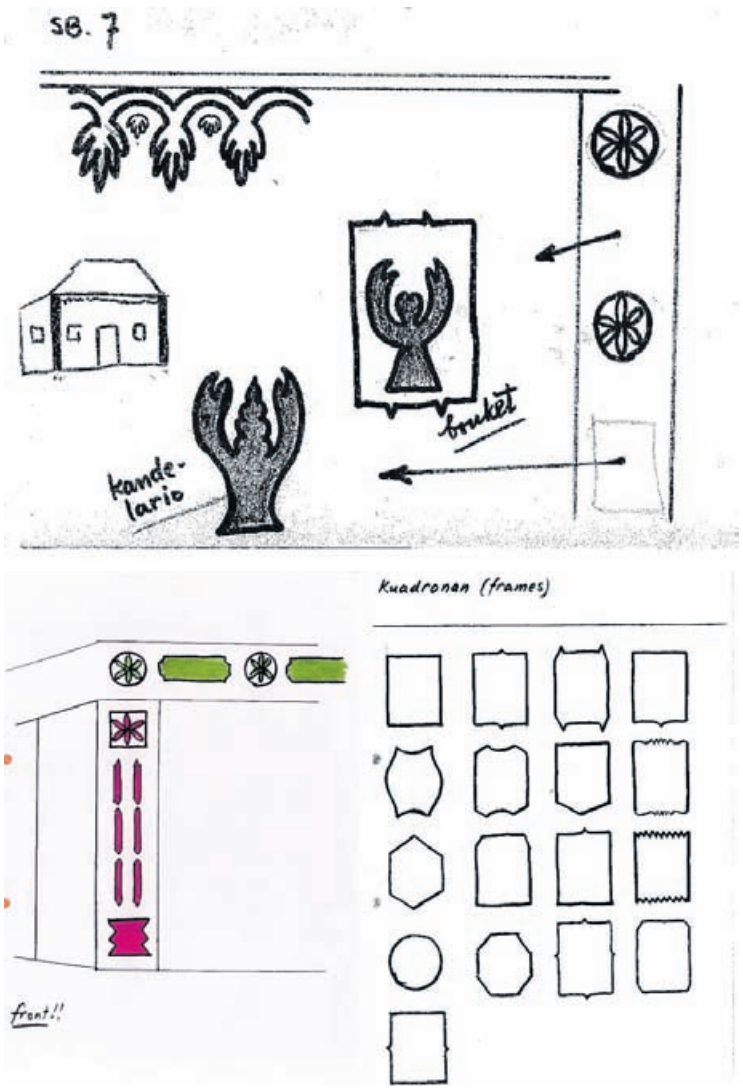
This was the first house in Noord to receive this type of decoration. Later, those in Paradera, Santa Cruz, and Savaneta copied the house decorations. They practiced these systems up until 1944.

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.

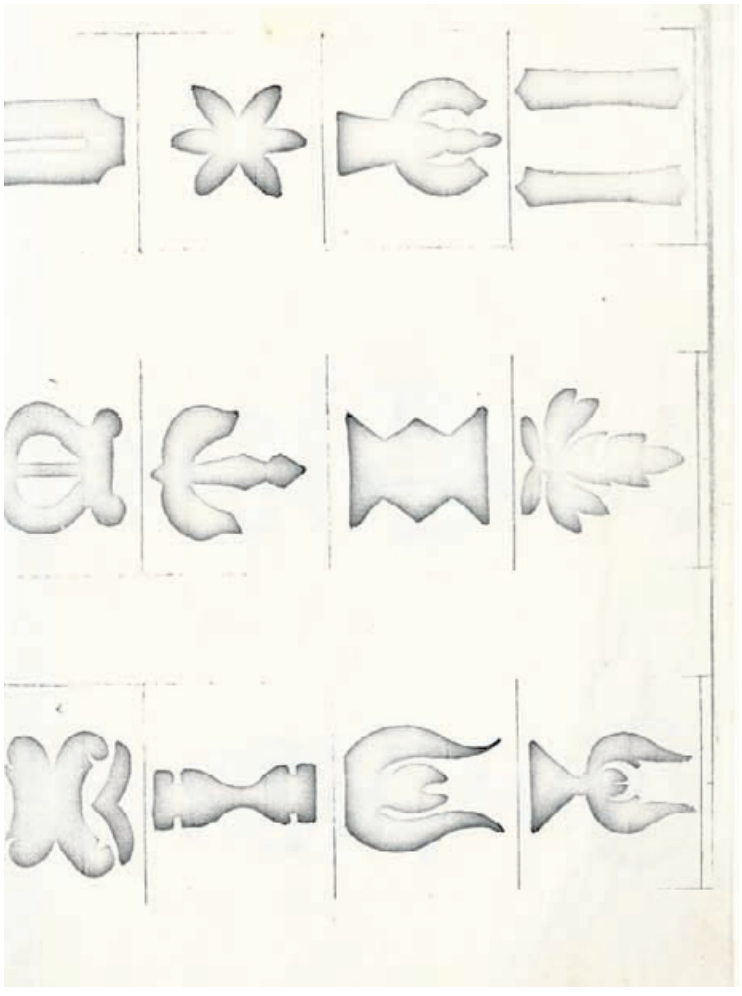
After comparing his information, Ito Tromp wrote that Hartog was right concerning the period when decorated houses began in Aruba in 1820. However, it was not people from Curaçao who started it. Victor Tromp, who was 87 years old at the time of writing, was a member of Janchi Wolff's family.

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.

Today is going to be a good day



(Oranjestad)—Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Nature Calls

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center.

For more information, visit the website www.acf.aw

The Lighthouse

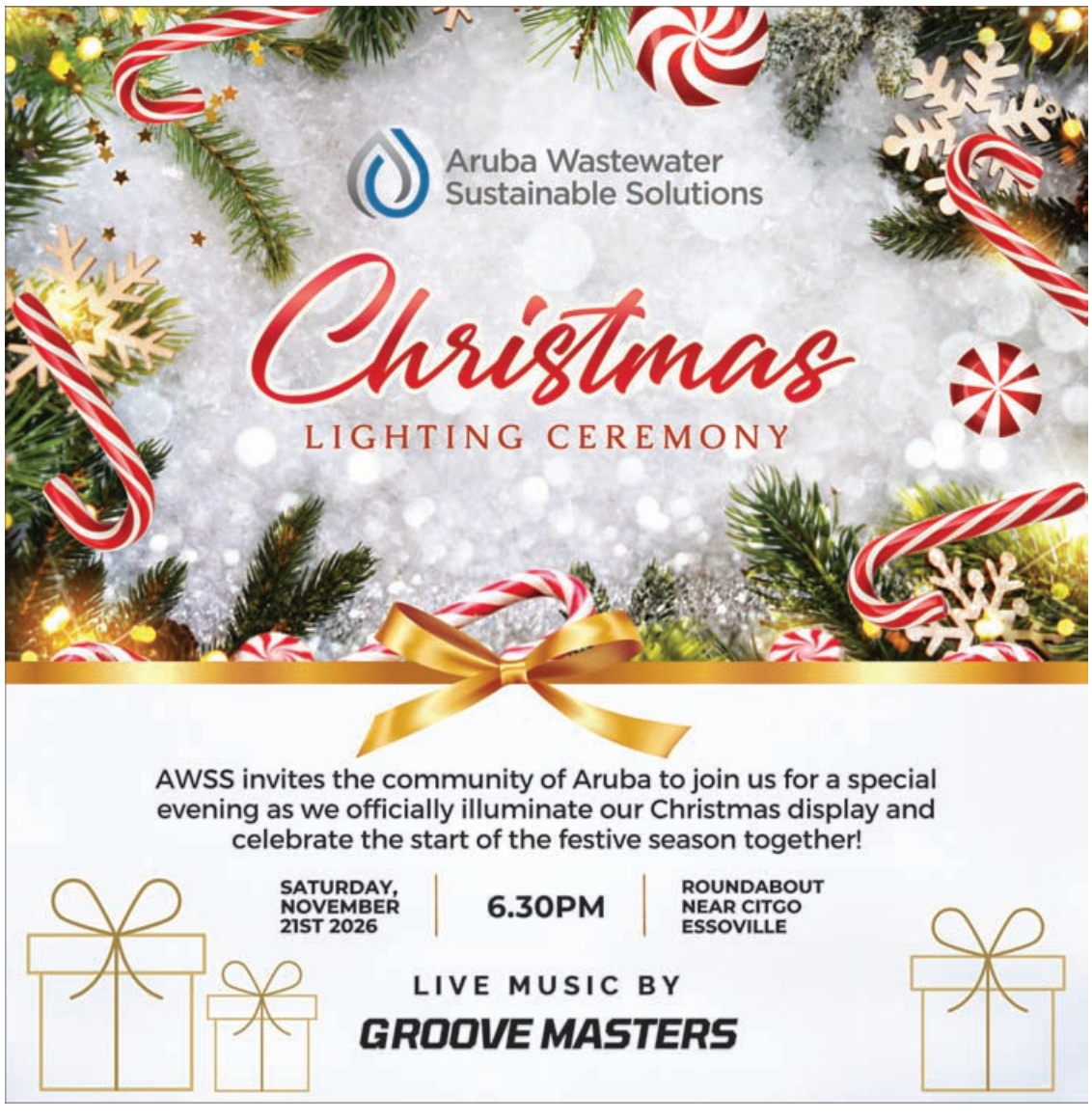
No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel



of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light.

Kayak in the Mangroves

Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout—as it might get a little windy and rough—you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. It's fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. ❑



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 you 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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Shalom Body & Soul Spa | Moments & Memories Jewelry
Magnet Perfume Jewelry & Cosmetics | The Lazy Lizard
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The tree that points west: The 'Watapana'

(Oranjestad)— Standing proudly and always pointing west, the Watapana (also called Divi Divi—though some say erroneously so) played an important role in one of the island's first industries. Since then, it has been recognized as Aruba's national tree. Here are some facts about the sturdy Watapana.

The Watapana name comes from the indigenous word "Guatapana" and is a symbol of hope and resilience. The Watapana grows in the direction of the wind; that's why you will always see a Watapana pointing west.

The name 'Divi Divi' originated in Curacao during the 17th century when Watapana beans were exported from the Antilles to Europe to produce dye. The fruit of the Watapana contains tannin, a chemical compound that naturally produces a dye that was used for tanning leather back then.

In Aruba, the tannin industry gave manylocals temporary work. Watapana beans were collected and taken to the cunucu* owner in exchange for 25 cents for every 20 kilos. After collecting the beans, workers would have to pick out the best ones for exportation: Deep red pods were preferred; green or black pods were considered premature or damaged. The end of the tannin industry in Aruba faded out with the introduction of synthetic dyes. This proved to be a much cheaper option than processing tannin.

In 1979, the Watapana was inaugurated as Aruba's national tree.

*Cunucu: Land used for food cultivation and herd farming.❑



Source: Chabalito magazine - E Watapana (2010)

Aruban snacks and where to find them

ORANJESTAD — Want to taste something different for a change? How about some Aruban snacks that you can find all around the island? Hop in your car, and go to these locations to find some of the most popular and tasty snacks that are beloved by our locals.

One of the staples of Aruban cuisine and snacks is the Pastechi. Pastechi is a Caribbean fried pastry that is filled with cheese, meat, chicken, veggies and sometimes even fish! Or perhaps you might want to try a croquette, locally called a "kroket," which is a crusty fried snack with typically a meat and dough mix filling. The Aruban kroket is based on its Dutch counterpart, the "bitterbal".

These two snacks are typically found in all local snack trucks, which can be found all over the island, including on the side of the main road that stretches from San Nicolas to the Hotel Area. You can also find them at local bakeries all over the island. These places may also sell other snacks and sandwiches too, perfect for on-the-road lunch break.



While you're at it, why not accompany your snack with a refreshing "batido"? Batidos are fruit shakes, typically made with added milk for some creaminess. However, you can also ask to hold the milk. Batidos are commonly found in snack shops too. You may find some batidos along the flea market downtown.

If you are looking for something a bit more fresh and healthy, why not try some coconuts, or shaved ice from local vendors? These vendors carry their little shop at the back of their truck, so they are ever-moving around the island.



However, there are a few spots where you can almost always find a coconut/shaved ice vendor:

- Right next to the Red Anchor in San Nicolas, on the way to Baby Beach.
- Along the main road next to the airport field.
- At the California Light House.
- At the Alto Vista Chapel.

These vendors may also sell other delights, like the beloved coconut-based dessert "cocada" or peanuts. All in all, in Aruba, you can always find some place to take a break and have a bite of something local, you maybe just might have to look for them!❑

Photo credit: wheninaruba.com

Papiamento words and phrases you may want to know!

(Oranjestad)—Aruba is a melting pot of different nationalities, cultures and languages. Primarily for this reason, the average Aruban can understand and speak Dutch, English and Spanish relatively well. However, as much as we pride ourselves in being able to communicate with almost everyone, we cherish our native tongue Papiamento above all else. Want to learn some common words in our language? Here are a few basic words and phrases that can get you a hat tip from an Aruban.



When you arrive at the airport in Aruba, one of the first words in Papiamento you may encounter is "Bon bini." Bon bini in Papiamento means welcome, and is probably the most famous Papiamento word for tourists.

Hi! Bye!

To be fair, there is no unique way to say "hello" in Papiamento—at least not officially. We often just use the English "hello" or "hey", or Dutch "hallo" to greet someone. We do however, always follow it up with "con bay?" or "con ta?" Con bay is a shortened version of "con ta bay?", which essentially means "how are you?"

The word "con" in Papiamento means "how?" and is pronounced with a rounder "o" sounds, like in the English word "cone". "Ta bay" refers to how you are doing.

When we say goodbye, we use the word "ayo" (not like the Ayo Rock Formation, but also…kinda?). We may also use "te oro", which means "see you later".

Greetings during the day

Most, if not all, languages have different ways to greet according to the time of day, and Papiamento is no different. Since Papiamento is heavily influences from Portuguese and Spanish, some of these phrases may look very familiar.

Bon dia is used in the morning, up to about noon. Bon dia essentially means good morning. The word "bon" means "good", and while "dia" does not directly mean "morning" in English, it is used often to refer to the morning time.

Bon tardi

In the afternoon to early evening hours, we use "bon tardi" to greet people, which means "good afternoon". "Tardi" actually comes from the word "atardi", which directly translates to "afternoon". However, the shortened "tardi" is used to keep the rhythm on the phrase. And the same could be said for our last greeting of the day.

Bon nochi.

You guessed it, "bon nochi" means "good night". Just like "tardi", "nochi" is actually the shortened version of the word "anochi".

Yes…no…maybe?

The affirmative and negative expression is very simple in Papiamento. Just like Spanish, our yeses are "si" and our no's are "no". Pretty easy right? If you want to gain some extra points from younger locals, you can also say "se", which is a more casual affirmative used mostly by the younger generation.

However, do note: some older generations may find this improper and not respectful, so keep that in mind.

Thanks man…

Lastly, a word that we can also say more often is "danki", which means literally "thank you". "Danki" is derived from the Dutch word "bedankt". Though we don't really have a translation for "I appreciate it" in English, we do use "masha danki" to convey the message. "Masha" means "a lot" or "very", so "masha danki" means "thank you very much".❑

Alto Vista chapel and its link to Aruba's origins





According to Etnia Nativa, in the 18th century most of the inhabitants of Aruba were indigenous who lived on the north coast, one of the largest communities lived in Alto Vista.

As they were very religious, they had a chief with the name of Antonio Silvester who guided them in the Christian life and it was he who decided to build a stone chapel with a roof of corn rods, which would serve as a place of prayer. In 1750 it was blessed by Father Algamesi who came from Coro-Venezuela and appointed Domingo Antonio Silvester as the island's first prosecutor in the name of the Spanish crown and Rome. In 1752 the prosecution passed into the hands of Antonio Silvester's son-in-law, Miguel Álvarez, who continued to guide the parishioners in their prayers.

According to the book, The History of Alto Vista by R.H. Nooyen, it is not known when Domingo Antonio Silvester came to Aruba from Venezuela. The elders believe Antonio was a Spaniard. In 1780, father Joseph Antonio de la Vegal called Bernardino Silvester, one of Antonio's sons with his wife Anna Cathalina Tromp, "neighbors and naturals of the island Aruba" and thus they became natives.

At the end of the eighteen century many inhabitants the island died as a result of the black fever epidemic and since people believed that the Alto Vista area was the most infected, they began to build their homes further south within the Noord area, so the town of Noord began to grow into a community till getting its own Church. However religious festivals continued to be celebrated at this sacred native place, with the custom of arriving in procession to Alto Vista.

Two-hundred years after the beautiful time of Alto Vista, people can no longer see much of the town of Alto Vista from 1750. With a lot of work they found the old foundations of the Church of the Queen of the Holiest Rosary to build a new chapel on the same place. The entire surrounding area was empty and desolated, making it hard to imagine that Alto Vista was a town at all. A hundred years later, people can see the remains of around twenty houses, some made of stone and others of clay. Nowadays, only around six of these houses remain.

South of the chapel in the yard two graves can be observed, there was the cemetery which father Pablo de Algemesi blessed. It is not certain, but it is believed that the two graves belong to Antonio Silvester and Miguel Alvares, according to Nooyen. About 50 meters near the chapel there are still the markings of an old house, where Antonio and Bernardino Silvester would have lived. About 200 meters from the chapel there is a water tank which the locals call Tanki Cacique. In the past this tank was closed. But mostly water was brought out from the Poz di Noord, a well dug in the sand.

The chapel can be viewed from basically any point in the north side, even from Paradera and Sero Plat. All the historical remains around the chapel provide us with an idea on how the old people of Alto Vista used to live. Don't miss the opportunity to visit a place of historical significance with a window to Aruba's past.❑

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 industry 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.

Fun facts about the 'Lisinbein'

The 'Lisinbein' (Scolopendra gigantea), also known as the Giant Centipede, is one of the largest centipedes in the world and is found in Aruba. Its size and hunting prowess make it a fascinating, if often misunderstood, creature.

Despite its fearsome reputation, it plays a crucial ecological role that often goes unnoticed.

As an apex invertebrate predator, Scolopendra gigantea helps maintain balance in the ecosystem. Moreover, they themselves are a food source for birds such as the Crested Caracara (Warawara) and the Aruba burrowing owl (Shoco).

It controls populations of smaller invertebrates and even small vertebrates, ensuring that no species overpopulates, which could disrupt local biodiversity.

Its presence can indicate a healthy, functioning ecosystem. Its sensitivity to environmental changes makes it a bioindicator of ecological balance.

It can reach an impressive length of up to 30 centimeters (approx. 12 inches) and live for around 5 to 10 years in the wild. Its size and longevity makes it a significant and long-term part of the ecosystem.

A mother's love

In Scolopendra species, the 'mother' typically exhibits maternal care by curling around her eggs and newly hatched young. She stays coiled around the clutch, protecting it from predators and fungi, which are serious risks in the moist environments these centipedes often inhabit. The mother maintains a clean environment for the eggs by carefully grooming them, which helps prevent fungal growth that could endanger the brood. This behavior may continue until the young centipedes have undergone their first molt, making them more capable of independent survival.

This form of parental care is beneficial in increasing the survival rates of offspring, as the mother's protection provides a safe 'environment' during their vulnerable developmental stages. It's a fascinating adaptation because it shows a form of care that resembles more complex behaviors observed in vertebrates.

No bark, but all bite!

The lisinbein is known locally for having a really painful sting. While venomous, the Lisinbein is generally not aggressive toward humans unless provoked. Its role as a guardian of balance in the ecosystem helps protect the natural beauty of Aruba by keeping the ecosystem in harmony.

Editor's note: Information and pictures provided by Ms. Natasha Silva from the Aruba Conservation Foundation.❑



ARUBA TODAY

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

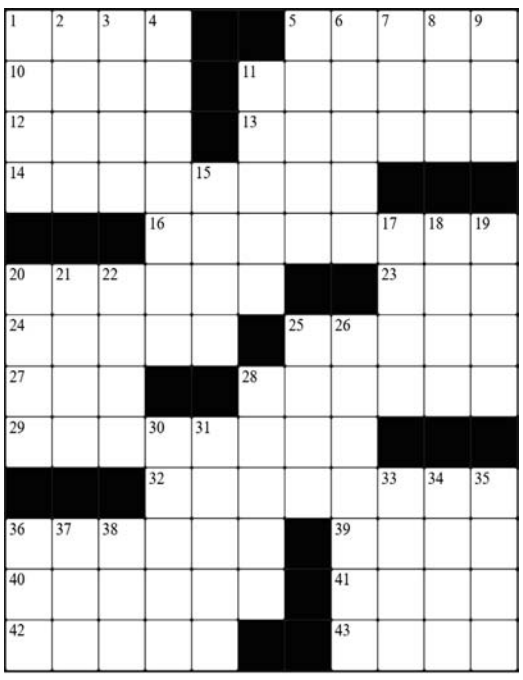
1. View from Tampa
5. Malia's sister
10. Tibet setting
11. Ill humor
12. "Ratatouille" rat
13. Very thin
14. Colorful tree
16. Colorful tree
20. So far
23. Scepter
24. Military choppers
25. Fading, as a fire
27. Common sports injury spot, for short
28. Rough and uneven
29. Colorful tree
32. Colorful tree
36. Worries
39. "Casablanca" role
40. Easter topper
41. Egg setting
42. Take the wheel
43. "American Gigolo" star

DOWN

1. Attire
2. Manual reader
3. Prom transport
4. "King Kong" star
5. Tic
6. Greek vowel
7. View
8. That lady
9. One or more
11. Digging tool
15. Brooklyn team
17. Prudish person
18. Drawn out setting
19. Tense
20. Turn to slush
21. Pained cry
22. Hero setting
25. Noted vampire, familiarly
26. Being gabby
28. Seaport
30. Steak choice
31. Tribal leader
33. Merriment
34. Cold War side
35. Partner
36. Air gun ammo
37. Turn bad
38. Small bill



Yesterday's answer



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.

11-19 CRYPTOQUOTE

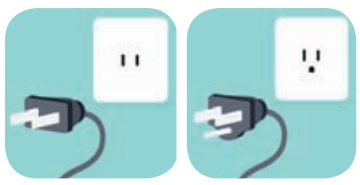
L XYSON TKBZSFK ZY XGFB GMGLBEZ ZYY MFKGZ LBZLVGAP XLZW GFZLEZE GE LZ LE TKFP EKNSAZLTK GBN G OLZZOK NGBMKFYSE. — RSKKB TLAZYFLG

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WHEN THE POWER OF LOVE OVERCOMES THE LOVE OF POWER, THE WORLD WILL KNOW PEACE. — JIMI HENDRIX

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic—but important—information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

Electrical power



Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist



that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.



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

Difficulty: ★★★★ 11/20

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Answer to previous puzzle

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

Difficulty: ★★★ 11/19

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Meta says 'reevaluating' 2030 net zero target amid AI buildout

Washington, United States
Meta said Thursday it was reconsidering its 2030 deadline for net zero emissions because of the artificial intelligence boom, the latest in a broad retreat by corporations on global warming targets.

"We are re-evaluating our timelines, sequencing, and interim milestones including the 2030 timeframe for our net zero emissions goal," Rachel Peterson, vice president of data centers, and Blair Swedeen, global head of net zero and sustainability, said in the company's annual sustainability report.

The company reported its net carbon equivalent emissions increased 45 percent in 2025 to 11.8 million metric tons a figure that is itself based on accounting methods viewed skeptically by climate advocates.

"When we set our net zero emissions goal, we anticipated steady growth, falling clean energy costs, and changes in the broader system that would enable progress at the pace we envisioned. The reality has been far more complex," the executives wrote, adding that delivering on Meta's vision "requires building the infrastructure that powers AI."

In 2020, Meta set a goal of net zero emissions across its entire value chain by the year 2030, in order to align with the Paris Agreement, which seeks to hold long-term warming to 1.5C to avert climate catastrophes.

This involves eliminating emissions as far as possible and purchasing credits from carbon removal projects where emissions cannot be eliminated.

The value chain covers emissions from sources such as purchased goods and services and capital goods equipment, machinery, buildings, facilities and vehicles

A study published in Nature Sustainability this week found that 403 of the United States' most powerful data centers accounted for around two percent of the country's electricity consumption and a carbon footprint comparable to Denmark figures that are only growing.

Around 1,200 such "hyperscale" data centers are now online and hundreds more are planned.



META stand is pictured at the Web Summit at Parque das Nacoes in Lisbon, on November 10, 2026.

- Green retreat -

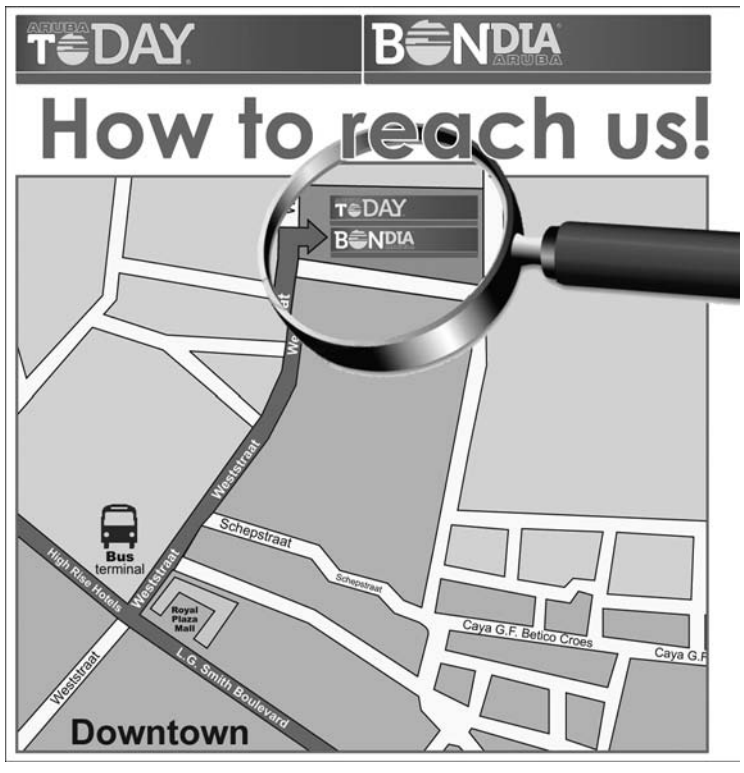
Under President Donald Trump's second term, major American businesses have stepped back from environmental commitments.

Though the explosion of AI data centers looms large over the trend, it is not confined to Big Tech, with car makers, retailers and beverage companies also offenders.

In January 2021, GM set a target of 100 percent zero-emission vehicle sales by 2035. While it technically maintains this target, the company this year backed the Trump administration's weakening of a fuel economy rule to a level that would require no further improvement.

In 2020 retail giant Walmart committed to cutting emissions by around a third by 2025 and two-thirds by 2030 from a 2015 baseline. But in a 2024 report it acknowledged it would miss the first target as well as its recycling goals.

Also in 2020, Google pledged to run on carbon-free energy by 2030, in what CEO Sundar Pichai heralded as a "moonshot."❑



ARUBA TODAY

Editor
Caribbean Speed Printers N.V.
Aruba Bank N.V. Acc. #332668
Caribbean Mercantile Bank N.V.
Acc. #23951903
RBC Royal Bank Acc. #1330772

Editors
Pilar Flores
Richard Brooks
Angenette Figuereo
Oriana Geerman

Sales
Mark Gomes
Sulaika Croes

Classifieds
classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection
accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website
Juan Luis Pinto

Weststraat 22
T: 582-7800
E: news@arubatoday.com
W: www.arubatoday.com
@ArubaTodayNews

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Across the world, gamers dive into 'Grand Theft Auto VI'

Miami, United States

Gamers across the world got their first taste of "Grand Theft Auto VI" on Thursday, diving into one of the most anticipated launches ever after a wave of midnight releases.

Critics heaped praise on the latest installment of the crime franchise, which comes 13 years after the last full edition broke sales records and became one of the most profitable entertainment products of all time.

The series lets players live out gangster fantasies, smash up cars and fight whoever they choose in a fictionalized U.S. city populated by lowlifes, sex workers and thugs.

"GTA VI" launched first in New Zealand at midnight local time (1100 GMT Wednesday) and is rolling out around the world as each market reaches midnight.

In the US city of Miami, which served as inspiration for the game's crime-ridden backdrop, Ryan Jones was waiting by his PlayStation as a clock counted down the minutes until the new edition dropped.



People attend a pre-launch party of Grand Theft Auto VI in Miami, Florida, on November 18, 2026.

"It's cinematic," the 32-year-old said, after the streets of "Vice City" finally flickered onto his screen in what resembled a Hollywood movie.

"It's the best start they ever had."

Across town, Alex Martinez, 25, described the event as "surreal" as he attended a launch party at a bar.

"Since I've lived (in Miami) my whole life, seeing this is just, like, you can't describe the feeling," he added.

Even before the midnight launch, fans were already playing the game on Xbox consoles, having gained access by changing the system location settings to New Zealand.

The release drove more social media posts than this year's World Cup, according to monitoring platform Visibrain.

In the Thai capital Bangkok, British tourists Kyle McKee and Emily Todd said they reserved a PS5 console, TV and sofa at a gaming center, paying around $16 for two hours so they could play the new "GTA" even while travelling.

"It's the fear of missing out, honestly," McKee, 27, told AFP in the neon-lit room.

In the game's official Reddit forum, people raved about improved graphics and interactive elements, such as being able to push a stranded ski jet back in the water.

Review aggregator Metacritic gave the game a score of 99 out of 100.

Analytics firm Omdia estimates "GTA VI" could generate $3.2 billion in sales by the end of the year for studio Rockstar Games and parent company Take-Two Interactive.

PlayStation briefly reported connection issues on its status page before services were restored.

- 'Taylor Swift of games' -

In a review for The Verge, Andrew Webster wrote that "the game is so good that the outsize hype is the least interesting thing about it."

Before the release, Joost van Dreunen, a professor at New York University's Stern School of Business, told AFP the game was an "outlier" in the entertainment industry.

"This is the Taylor Swift of video games," he said.

Many fans have taken time off to explore the fictional state of Leonida, which is modeled on Florida.

"I'm going to take four days off," said Dmytro Shkambara, a 27-year-old Ukrainian player living in Berlin, who said he had been planning his first session "for a very long time."

Human resources platform Remote said it had seen a 32 percent increase in leave requests worldwide for November 19.

Billed as bigger, better and more realistic than its predecessors, "GTA VI" follows a Bonnie-and-Clyde-style couple trying to survive in Vice City.

The game received eight nominations on Tuesday for the Game Awards, the US ceremony honoring the year's best video games, which takes place on December 10.

Rockstar spent more than eight years developing the game.❑

AI being run in a 'mediaeval' way: U.N.

Geneva, Switzerland

Artificial intelligence is being governed in an almost mediaeval fashion, the U.N. rights chief warned Thursday, with power concentrated in the hands of a few tech barons.

Speaking at the RightsX summit in Geneva, Volker Turk said that while the story of AI sounded futuristic, underneath it was an age-old narrative of power.

"A handful of men still control much of the world's AI computing power, data and infrastructure. And we still have no common rules to pace or steer AI development," he said.



U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk (R) speaks with a staff member after a press statement following the announcement that South African jurist and former U.N. rights chief Navi Pillay has been awarded the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize, in Geneva, Switzerland, on October 9, 2026

Turk said there was a glaring democratic deficit when five technology companies owned more than 70 percent of global AI computing capacity.

"We have the technology of the future governed in an almost mediaeval way: by a select few, with virtually no checks, no balances, no participation, and no accountability," he said.

"History has taught us: with this kind of power, the rights and freedoms of ordinary people are the first to suffer."

Reiterating his call for rights-centered AI regulation, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights said the technology was increasingly controlling people's lives.

And this, he warned, was often happening without their knowledge, and could distort public debate in "subtle, insidious ways".

Meanwhile biased algorithms could reproduce injustice on an industrial scale, he cautioned.

- 'Civilization collapse' -

"Our transport, food and healthcare are increasingly digitized. We may not be far from the day when AI can cut off the critical infrastructure of entire communities or countries, either on its own or in the wrong hands," Turk warned.

"When people discuss the chances of civilization collapse because of AI, we need to ask: who decides what chances we take?"

He voiced optimism that people would ultimately challenge unchecked power, with the democratic deficit turning into a deficit of trust.❑



Owner Mark Attanasio of the Milwaukee Brewers is presented Commissioner's Trophy by MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred during the Awards Ceremon after defeating the Tampa Bay Rays in the 2026 World Series at Tropicana Field on October 28, 2026 in St Petersburg, Florida.

MLB boss Manfred sees no union deal without salary cap

New York, United States

Major League Baseball team owners will not agree to a new deal with the players union that does not include a salary cap, MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said on Wednesday.

With the MLB Players Association calling such terms a non-starter, the stage is set for a lockout that could jeopardize the 2027 season when the current collective bargaining agreement expires December 1.

"I can't imagine the owners ratifying a deal that does not include a cap and floor," Manfred said at MLB team owners meetings.

If no new deal is in place in two weeks, owners are expected to impose an immediate lockout, what would be the 10th MLB work stoppage since 1972 over how to divide billions of dollars in profits from the American pastime.

Teams and players would cease contact and no trades or signings would take place for the duration of the dispute with March 24 set to be the opening day for the 2027 regular season.

"There's plenty of room for compromise, but there's one thing I will not compromise and that's the issue that we're hearing from the vast majority of our fans they want a salary cap and floor," Manfred said.

"And on that we will not compromise."

That hard-line stance, MLBPA interim executive director Bruce Meyer said in a statement, shows team owners only want to boost profits by cutting player salaries.

"There can be no clearer example of the league's lack of seriousness than their insistence that they will not negotiate over the economics outside of a radical change to the system that would dramatically reduce overall player compensation for all categories of players and strip fundamental rights from players like the ability to have truly guaranteed contracts," Meyer said.

"There should be no illusions about the owners' true motivation in pushing for this system. They want to make more money in profits and franchise values by artificially suppressing player salaries."

Other North American sports leagues have agreed on salary caps but MLB players have fought the concept for decades, notably shutting down the sport in 1994-95 that lasted more than seven months and wiped out the 1994 World Series.

Manfred said team owners are responding to fan concerns about all teams being able to contend for a crown.

"They've told us in no uncertain terms they're concerned about the lack of competitive balance in our game," Manfred said.

Two relatively low-budget clubs, Milwaukee and Tampa Bay, met in last month's World Series to undercut MLB's claims after such big spenders as the Los Angeles Dodgers lost in the playoffs.

"This should not be a once-in-a-decade phenomenon for us," Manfred said. "The proposals they make actually exacerbate our competitive problems... The MLBPA has not made any meaningful effort to move toward us."

- 'Proposal is serious' -

MLB proposes a 50-50 split of revenues with players but with a salary cap of $258.2 million and a floor of $180.2 million starting in 2028 and the current system remaining in place for 2027.

Union leaders want no salary cap and take issue with what MLB considers revenues and expenses.

Manfred said the MLB deal offers higher minimum salaries and better free agency terms but the "overriding objective" is a salary cap after "five years where the competitive posture of the league continued to erode."❑



USA's Ben Shelton hits a return to Spain's Rafael Jodar during the ATP Finals tennis tournament, in Turin on November 19, 2026.

Shelton on brink of ATP Finals last four after beating Jodar

Turin, Italy

American Ben Shelton beat Spaniard Rafael Jodar 7-6 (10/8), 7-5 to take a big step towards the semi-finals of the ATP Finals on Thursday.

With his second win in three group-stage matches, world number four Shelton moved closer to joining Alexander Zverev and Carlos Alcaraz in the last four.

The American, 24, had to work hard against Jodar who held two set points in the first set tie-break. After clinching a hard-fought opening set that lasted over an hour, Shelton quickly broke Jodar's serve in the second.

Trailing 3-1 and then 4-2, the 10th-ranked Spanish newcomer mounted a comeback.

The 20-year-old levelled at 4-4 and then took a 5-4 lead but eventually wilted, losing three consecutive games and falling to his third defeat of the week in his debut at the elite season-ending event.

"It was really tough," said Shelton.

"Rafa is a great player. So many weapons and such a great competitor as well. I knew it wasn't going to be an easy match going in and I was happy to get through some tough moments in the first set, early, when I was down break points to get to the tie-break.

"When I was in the tie-break, I felt confident. A tricky second set and being up a break and losing it. But I think I fought well and competed well. The 5-5 game was a dogfight and I am really happy to get that W."

Shelton will be in the semis unless seventh-ranked Frenchman Arthur Fils beats world number one Zverev in straight sets.

Jodar said he was "super proud" of what he had achieved during a whirlwind breakthrough season.

"I didn't know what I was going to face and what we could expect in the first season," he said.

"I've given everything on court in every match that I've played. That is something that I'm very proud of, not giving up in any match.

"It's very difficult to compete against these types of guys. You have to pay a lot of attention to every detail. You have to play at a very high level, not having many ups and downs during the match.

"That's what I've learned this year, that if you want to compete against the best players in the world, you have to have a consistency during the tournaments and during the months to be at the top."

Meanwhile world number three Alcaraz is awaiting the results of an MRI scan he underwent Thursday on a hamstring injury picked up in his win over Russia's Daniil Medvedev on Wednesday.❑

Jazz upset Lakers, Sixers comeback thwarts Magic



AKeyonte George #3 of the Utah Jazz keeps his dribble in front of Quentin Grimes #5 of the Los Angeles Lakers during a 109-97 Jazz win at Crypto.com Arena on November 18, 2026 in Los Angeles, California.

Los Angeles, United States
The lowly ranked Utah Jazz brought the Los Angeles Lakers' nine-game winning streak to an abrupt halt on Wednesday, clinching only their third victory of the season with a 109-97 triumph on the road.
Keyonte George scored 30 points and Ace Bailey added 19 as a weary Lakers line-up still recovering from Tuesday's overtime defeat of the Charlotte Hornets ran out of steam.
The Lakers' in-form Luka Doncic scored 29 points but was unable to rediscover his shooting touch from long distance, making just 2-of-12 from three-point range.
Quentin Grimes the 47-point hero of Tuesday's win was restricted to 20 points as Utah improved to 3-13 to remain second-from-bottom of the Western Conference.
In the Eastern Conference the Philadelphia 76ers produced another double-digit comeback to defeat the Orlando Magic 121-116 and extend their lead at the top of the table.
Joel Embiid led the Sixers scoring with 26 points while V.J. Edgecombe produced a decisive 13-point fourth-quarter burst in a 24-point performance as Philadelphia improved to 13-3.

LeBron James also weighed in with 22 points after the Sixers recovered from a 17-point first-quarter deficit to claw their way back and extend their winning streak to four games.
It was the sixth time this season the Sixers have come back to win after trailing by 10 points or more.
Philadelphia coach Nick Nurse admitted he had feared the worst after watching a rampant Orlando score 40 points in the first quarter.
"They were just flying around at 100 miles an hour and we weren't right," Nurse said.
"They were really putting it on us. We had to try to change a few things and change the rhythm of the game.
"Sometimes that works and sometimes it doesn't."
Philadelphia trailed until midway through the fourth quarter, taking the lead with just over five minutes remaining via a Jabari Walker three-pointer.
"We did a very nice job tonight of our execution offensively down the stretch," Nurse said.

- Celtics lose, Miami march on -
The Sixers lead the Eastern Conference by 1.5 games from the second-placed Boston Celtics, who suffered a second straight loss in a 105-101 defeat on the road to the Denver Nuggets.❑

