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TRUMP CALLS OFF NEW STRIKES ON IRAN

Hours after threats that the U.S. would escalate the war, he cites progress in talks.

By JON GAMBRELL AND AAMER MADHANI

DUBAI — President Trump said Thursday he had called off new military strikes on Iran, claiming a breakthrough in negotiations to end the war just hours after the American leader threatened to escalate the conflict by seizing control of Iran's oil industry.

Trump has said multiple times in recent weeks that the warring parties have been on the cusp of a deal without anything coming to fruition. There was no immediate comment from officials in Iran, which the U.S. and Israel jointly attacked on Feb. 28, or from mediators taking part in negotiations.

Trump opened an Oval Office event Thursday afternoon saying: "We just made a great settlement of the war with Iran." He offered scant details, other than to say he expects an agreement to extend the ceasefire to be finalized "over the next few days."

Extending the terms of the ceasefire gives U.S. leaders more time to negotiate over Iran's nuclear program, the main reason Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used to justify launching the war.

The announcement came after two days of back-and-forth attacks between the U.S. and Iran had pushed the Middle East closer to the resumption of a full-scale war.

Trump had threatened further escalation earlier Thursday, posting on social media that the U.S. would hit Iran "VERY HARD TONIGHT" and take "total control" of its oil and gas industries.

A few hours later, Trump posted on social media that significant points in the negotiations "have been brought to the highest level of Iranian leadership and approved." He also wrote that "discussions and final points have been, in both

[See Iran, A4]



SEAN M. HAFFEY/FIFA



KAYLA BARTKOWSKI/LOS ANGELES TIMES

PERFORMERS, top, dance during the opening ceremony before a match between Mexico and South Africa. Above, Mexico fans in Lynwood cheer. Their team won.

Soccer vs. angst as World Cup begins

Controversies threaten to overshadow the playing and cloud the tournament's legacy

By Kevin Baxter

In many ways, the most ambitious World Cup in history — which kicked off Thursday in Mexico City — has inspired more angst than anticipation, more fear than fervor.

The competition, returning to North America for the first time in more than three decades, has expanded to 48 teams and 104 matches, to be played over 39 days in 16 cities in the U.S., Mexico and Canada. The complex planning was eight years in the making.

Yet even before the competition opened with Mexico facing South Africa at the iconic Estadio Azteca, it has been marred by a number of controversies that threaten to overshadow the soccer and cloud the tournament's legacy.

"I view this World Cup as the most politically combustible World Cup in recent history. And that's saying something," said Jules Boykoff, a political science professor at the University of Portland and author of eight books on the politics of international sport.

"We're in uncharted territory in many ways."

Relations among the host countries, once strong, have been strained by the Trump administration's tariff policies and disagreements over border security. Travel bans have barred potential World Cup visitors — and even support staff and match officials — from entering the U.S., and others are fearful of making the

[See World Cup, A8]

U.S. HOPES: National team, hosting for the first time since 1994, has historic ambitions as it begins play against Paraguay at SoFi. **SPORTS, B10**

Most cases in L.A. abuse payout may be fake, D.A. says

Hochman seeks pause, says he needs more time to track fraud in \$4-billion settlement.

By REBECCA ELLIS

Los Angeles County's district attorney says he believes 4 in 5 claims in the largest sex abuse settlement in U.S. history may be fake — a claim that dwarfs previous assumptions over the scale of fraud within the \$4-billion payout.

Dist. Atty. Nathan Hochman has asked the judge overseeing the bulk of the sex abuse cases to pause payments for six months while he continues his sprawling criminal investigation into the plaintiffs, lawyers and therapists behind the claims.

Distributing the money now, he argues, will hamper his investigation "by complicating witness cooperation [and] obscuring financial trails."

The county agreed in April 2025 to pay \$4 billion to settle more than 11,000 claims of sexual abuse arising from county-run juvenile halls, foster homes and a notorious children's shelter. The claims, many of which

dated back decades, came after California changed the statute of limitations to give victims who were sexually abused as children a new window to sue.

Seven months after the payout was announced, the district attorney's office opened an inquiry, spurred by claims that some plaintiffs made up stories of abuse and were never in county custody. Times investigations found nine people who said they were paid small amounts of cash by recruiters to sue the county for sex abuse in juvenile halls. Four of them said they fabricated the claims.

Hochman's pause, if granted, would apply only to the abuse cases stemming from juvenile halls, which make up the bulk of the lawsuits, and not the cases arising from foster care or the children's shelter. Lawyers in the case are expected to go before Superior Court Judge Lawrence Riff on Monday for a hearing on the request.

The district attorney's request on Wednesday for another six-month delay unleashed an immediate backlash among victims, who had expected to receive their payments earlier this year and have grown weary of re-

[See L.A. County, A6]

UC may return to SAT, ACT tests

Faculty say math skills fell after campuses ditched standardized exams in admissions.

By JAWEED KALEEM

Six years after dropping SAT and ACT test requirements, members of an influential University of California admissions board said Thursday that the group will reconsider requiring the standardized tests, a major move favored by faculty who have complained that many students are severely deficient in math.

The potential reversal thrusts the nation's most prestigious public university system back into a contentious national debate over standardized testing, fairness and college readiness, and follows a wave of elite campuses — including Yale and Caltech — that have already brought the assessments back.

The move, announced by the UC-wide Academic Senate's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools, comes amid mounting pressure from UC faculty and outside activists over the test-free approach. More

than 1,400 UC professors — many of them in math, science, technology and engineering — last month signed an open letter calling on UC to reinstate the admissions tests, setting off intense public advocacy and private lobbying of UC leaders from faculty, parents and students on different sides of the debate.

In their letter, the professors bemoaned that "we now observe preparation gaps so severe that instructors must reteach middle-school mathematics."

The plea followed a remarkable fall 2025 report from a UC San Diego Academic Senate group, which found a roughly 30-fold increase between 2020 and 2025 in incoming first-year students whose math skills tested below high school level, with 70% of those students falling below middle school levels.

Then last March, the UC-wide Academic Senate launched a process to further study the admissions process, including high school course requirements.

The decision to revisit standardized testing ultimately rests with the UC Board of Regents. If the tests are reinstated, the

[See Tests, A6]

Prop. 50 tactic paying off for Dems

By KEVIN RECTOR

California Democrats made it out of last week's primary election having kept the promise of Proposition 50 alive by advancing candidates to November runoff in all five Republican-held congressional districts that last year's redistricting measure targeted.

They now head toward November bullish about turning those districts blue, wresting control of the U.S. House from Republicans and delivering their party important leverage to challenge President Trump



MYUNG J. CHUN/LOS ANGELES TIMES

CANDIDATE Randy Villegas canvasses in Bakersfield, where he hopes to flip a Republican House seat.

through the remainder of his second term.

"As Democrats, we are united in our fight to flip this seat and to take back the House for Democrats here in '26," progressive college professor Randy Villegas told The Times after besting his Democratic challenger to advance and take on Rep. David Valadao (R-Hanford) in the redrawn 22nd Congressional District. "We know the path to taking back the House runs through the Central Valley."

Robert Jones, a Valadao campaign strategist, said Valadao "is always humbled

[See House seats, A8]

El Niño is here and looks to be a doozy

Forecasters say the climate pattern could bring the Southland lots of winter rain.

By RONG-GONG LIN II

El Niño has officially arrived, the National Weather Service declared Thursday, bringing with it a greater chance of lots of rain in

Southern California this winter.

The climate pattern developed over the last month and is expected to continue to strengthen, with the weather service's Climate Prediction Center assessing a 63% chance of a "very strong" El Niño later this year that would rank among the most powerful on record since 1950.

A very strong El Niño "more significantly tilts the

odds towards wetter-than-normal conditions here in Southern California," Ariel Cohen, a meteorologist at the weather service's Oxnard office, said during a briefing Thursday at the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach.

Oceanic conditions have rapidly changed in recent months, giving scientists greater confidence of a strong or very strong El Niño later this year — particularly

from November through January. Among them are temperatures increasing deep beneath the ocean's surface, as warmer water from the western Pacific Ocean moves east.

Those deeper, warmer waters "are the fuel, if you will, for the development and strengthening of the upcoming El Niño event," which is one reason why scientists are expecting

[See El Niño, A12]

Key spy tool on verge of expiring

Congress fails to extend FISA's surveillance powers in wake of a controversial Trump pick. **NATION, A5**

Damages climb in boys' deaths

A civil jury finds Rebecca Grossman and another motorist should pay nearly \$200 million. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

L.A. drivers feel pain at the pump

Residents scramble to cut back on other expenses as the high price of gas hits California hard. **BUSINESS, A10**

Weather

Partly sunny. L.A. Basin: 83/64. **B6**

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ROBERT GAUTHIER/L.A. Times
A VINTAGE poster from "This Land Is..."

The Huntington's 250th salute

The San Marino museum marks America's anniversary with a retrospective exhibition. **ENTERTAINMENT, E1**

Markets **A12**
Opinion Voices **A13**