



THE B1 BRIDGE, Iran's largest, was struck by U.S.-Israeli strikes late Thursday in Karaj, west of Tehran. VAHID SALEMI Associated Press

Pilots rescued after two U.S. warplanes go down in Iran

One is hit by enemy fire after Hegseth said air defense systems had been obliterated.

BY GAVIN J. QUINTON, NABIH BULOS AND MICHAEL WILNER

WASHINGTON — An American pilot flying over Iran was rescued Friday after his fighter jet was shot down by enemy fire, an attack that defied U.S. proclamations of total control over Iranian skies and prompted a hurried search and rescue operation for the pilot's crew member.

Word of the downed F-15E, a storied U.S. fighter jet rarely before defeated in combat, was followed only hours later by news that a second U.S. aircraft had crashed in the area at roughly the same time. Iranian officials claimed credit for shooting down that aircraft, as well. While U.S. officials did not confirm that the A-10 Thunderbolt II had been shot down, they did confirm the successful rescue of its sole pilot.

It was a striking escalation of the conflict that demonstrated Tehran's continued ability to fight back against American forces despite President Trump's assurances that Iran's military capabilities were effectively destroyed.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has maintained for weeks that the U.S. has "complete, uncontested

control of Iranian airspace" after destroying the country's air defenses.

"Iran has no air defenses, Iran has no air force," he said at a March 13 news conference. "Today, as we speak, we fly over the top of Iran and Tehran, fighters and bombers all day, picking targets as they choose, as our intelligence gets better and better and more refined."

But the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps claimed that a new type of Iranian air defense system deployed for the first time in recent days had shot down a warplane on Friday.

The statements stirred a flurry of conflicting instructions from Iranian state-affiliated broadcasters. One local television channel initially encouraged viewers to search for the downed pilot and "shoot them as soon as you see them."

It then changed the instructions, according to the Associated Press, after local police issued a statement asking the public to capture and turn in American pilots alive to security agencies to "receive a precious prize."

On social media, Iranian accounts posted videos purporting to show helicopters searching for downed pilots in Iran's western and southern provinces, according to a report from Fars News.

Fars also reported officials in Iran's southwest were offering a "valuable reward" to anyone "who captures the American pilot alive."

Images of a tail section [See War, A3]

Officials sound alarm on mail-in ballots

A significant number arrived too late to be counted during special election for Prop. 50.

BY DAKOTA SMITH AND VANESSA MARTÍNEZ

SACRAMENTO — As Democratic leaders in California challenge President Trump's latest effort to restrict the use of mail-in ballots, they also must grapple with a troubling development in the last election.

A significant number of mail-in ballots arrived too late to be counted in the Nov. 4 special election for Proposition 50, Gov. Gavin Newsom's successful measure to reconfigure the state's congressional districts, according to state data.

Ballots came in late at an average rate of four times higher than that of the 2024 election, with rural counties seeing some of the biggest increases, according to a Times review.

"Something changed," said Melvin E. Levey, who heads the Merced County registrar of voters. "We don't like seeing late ballots and if someone has made the effort to vote, we want to count it."

Merced saw almost a sevenfold increase in late-arriving mail ballots in the November election compared with the year before.

Vote-by-mail ballots are considered late if they are not postmarked on or ahead of election day or do not arrive within seven days of election day.

The issue appears to be linked to the U.S. Postal Service, which last year reduced the number of trips to pick up mail at post offices in mostly rural areas. Election [See Ballots, A7]

Business renters turn buyers

With office space prices bottomed out, downtown tenants with means are snapping up their buildings

BY ROGER VINCENT

As the office market bottoms out after a long fall, renters are swooping in to buy their own buildings.

Occupant businesses are seizing the opportunity to become owners, especially in downtown Los Angeles, where glittering high-rises have plummeted in value since occupancy dropped during the pandemic. It has never fully recovered, but in-

vestors believe the market has at least stabilized.

Among the latest to snag a skyscraper is fund manager Capital Group, which has agreed to pay about \$210 million for the 55-story Bank of America Plaza atop Bunker Hill, where it has offices. Others choosing to buy over rent include Riot Games and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

"We knew the best landlord we could possibly have would be ourselves," Capital

Group Chief Executive Mike Gitlin said.

There are some good reasons tenants want to become landlords right now, Newmark property broker Kevin Shannon said, starting with timing.

"Everyone knows we're near the bottom of this cycle, and it's always good to buy near the bottom," he said.

Downtown has suffered from an oversupply of office [See Real estate, A12]



SUSANA, who didn't give her last name, and Juan Marin dance at a Los Tradicionales gathering. The Havana event is "therapy," one attendee says. NATALIA FAVRE For The Times

COLUMN ONE

Amid blackouts and distress, some Cubans keep dancing

By Kate Linthicum
REPORTING FROM HAVANA

After another nationwide blackout debilitated Cuba, electricity began flickering back on in parts of Havana on a recent Sunday afternoon.

As his cell signal returned, Alberto González's phone buzzed nonstop with messages.

"Will you open today?"
"Is there power?"
"Good afternoon, brother. Will there be dancing?"
Until now, it wasn't a question people

needed to ask. Of course there would be dancing.

For decades, González and his wife, Mercedes Cruz, have run a popular weekly dance night in a historic social hall in one of Havana's oldest neighborhoods, a few blocks from the Caribbean Sea. Both 72, they call the event Los Tradicionales — "the traditional ones" — because their goal is to help preserve Cuba's rich dance heritage, from rumba to timba to casino, an ancestor of salsa.

[See Dancing, A4]

Voices MARK SWED MUSIC CRITIC

The arts are in trouble. New York is bringing in L.A. talent for help

NEW YORK — On a recent trip to New York, it was not easy to escape L.A., despite obvious differences. The record highs on the West Coast reached 100 degrees, while mid-March lows in Manhattan descended to the 20s (with wind chill making it feel like the freezing teens). Everyone had a cold or something.

But head to Lincoln Center, and there was Gustavo Dudamel bringing L.A. cheer to a New York Philhar-

monic. Though he doesn't officially begin as music and artistic director until September, Dudamel is already making the orchestra matter more than it has since the days of Bernstein, Boulez and — arguably to many — Mehta.

Across the plaza, the mammoth Metropolitan Opera has been so desperate for funding and excitement that it had turned (with likely little luck) to Saudi Arabia for help. Instead, it is earning it the

old-fashioned way with a new production of Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde." This may have become the hottest ticket in town thanks to star singers, but what made it work is the direction by Yuval Sharon, the operatic magician who created L.A.'s experimental opera company, the Industry.

LA Dance Project also happened to be in town. Benjamin Millepied brought to the Park Avenue [See New York, A8]

L.A.'s top federal prosecutor outlasts other Trump allies

BY JAMES QUEALLY, BRITNEY MEJIA AND KEVIN RECTOR

Across the country, President Trump has installed handpicked loyalists as top federal prosecutors. Several have been pushed out after legal battles because they lack Senate confirmation to serve as U.S. attorneys.

But in Los Angeles, Bill Essayli wields the power of a top prosecutor under a lesser title: "first assistant."

Essayli clocked his first full year in office this week. He has survived the kinds of challenges that had sunk Trump picks in other states through a combination of legal gamesmanship by the U.S. Department of Justice and a lack of action by judges in the Central District of California.

Essayli has used his position to act as one of Trump's fiercest legal foot soldiers. He has pursued criminal

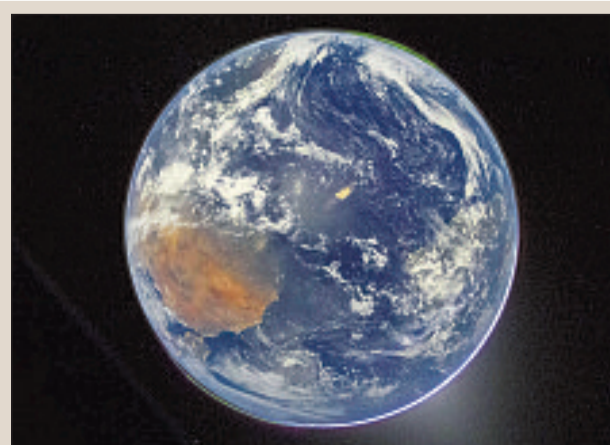
charges against protesters, activists and immigrants while dropping cases involving administration allies and supporting lawsuits over transgender and environmental policies in California.

After Trump's firing Thursday of U.S. Atty. Gen. Pam Bondi, it's unclear how her replacement will handle continuing battles over the legality of Trump's appointees. Essayli is popular with high-level administration officials, and received a congratulatory post on X from Vice President JD Vance over the filing of fraud cases earlier this week.

[See Essayli, A8]

L.A. prosecutors keep losing cases

Even with video of a punch, U.S. attorney's office doesn't get assault conviction. CALIFORNIA, B1



CMDR. REID WISEMAN NASA

ARTEMIS II'S EARTH SHOT

Moon-bound astronauts send back photos of home taken from the Orion spacecraft. NATION, A5

Trump criticizes insurer over fires

Victims of 2025 infernos get unexpected ally, who calls State Farm's practices "absolutely horrible." BUSINESS, A10

Doncic is out for regular season

With only five games left before the playoffs, star's hamstring injury will test the depth of the Lakers. SPORTS, B12

Weather Warm with sunshine. L.A. Basin: 87/57. B8

