



NITHYA RAMAN, left, Monica Rodriguez and Hugo Soto-Martínez at a meeting on Palisades building fees.

## GUTHRIE DEADLINE PASSES; AI EXPERTS AID COPS

Ransom note includes details about home and appears credible, The Times learns.

By RICHARD WINTON AND HANNAH FRY

Investigators in the Nancy Guthrie abduction are consulting with artificial intelligence experts to examine ransom notes to determine the validity and possible origins of the messages, sources told The Times.

On Monday at 5 p.m., the second deadline for the Guthries to pay \$6 million in bitcoin passed without any indication that the 84-year-old grandmother had been found. It's unclear if any ransom was paid. Guthrie had been gone for nine days with no evidence she was taking the medication she needs or proof she still was alive from kidnappers.

The sources who discussed the case with The Times spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

Guthrie's disappearance from her home near Tucson, which police initially said was a missing person case, was odd from the beginning and the mystery has only deepened. In this case, 21st century technology has added a new dimension.

For decades, FBI profilers and veteran detectives parsed the grammar and syntax of ransom notes looking for clues that could reveal someone's education level or socioeconomic background, among other details.

"With traditionally handwritten notes, typed notes, you know it is going to be unique to the person who wrote it," said University of Hawaii Police Chief Andrew Black, who was previously an FBI special agent in charge of the Tucson office. "There will be some indicators, whether it is writing style or grammar or spelling errors, that can help you identify who created it."

Now, such messages can be written by AI, eliminating a writer's signature voice. This, Black said, adds "another layer of complexity" to the investigation.

Piling on to the issues in the case, the kidnappers are asking for money using cryptocurrency, which is much harder to track than the money drops of years past. The way kidnappers have been communicating is also out of the ordinary, Black said.

"The methodology of [See Guthrie, A6]

## L.A. mayoral candidate Raman resists labels

Mix of stances on issues like housing, policing, transportation confound allies and critics alike

By Dakota Smith

More than five years ago, Nithya Raman made history as the first candidate backed by the Democratic Socialists of America to win a City Council seat in Los Angeles, ushering in a wave of other progressive candidates who pushed the council to the left.

Now, her surprising last-minute entry into the L.A. mayor's race is prompting inevitable comparisons to Zohran Mamdani, another DSA-backed politician who was recently elected mayor of New York City.

But Raman's record as a City Council member hasn't always aligned with the far left.

In fact, her stances on issues like homelessness, transportation and protecting immigrants from the Trump ad-

ministration are similar to those of her opponent and former ally, Mayor Karen Bass.

As her campaign moves forward, Raman will have to differentiate herself from Bass — as well as address the narrative that she betrayed Bass, who offered an important boost to her reelection campaign in 2024.

On housing, Raman, 44, has at times angered progressives by aligning with the YIMBY movement, which has pushed for the city to boost housing production and to rewrite Measure ULA, the so-called mansion tax, which applies to property sales of \$5.3 million or more.

In an interview Monday, she portrayed herself as not beholden to any special in-

[See Raman, A5]

## MILAN-CORTINA OLYMPICS

## Amid global tensions, Games in Italy are relatively peaceful

By Kevin Baxter

MILAN — The world is experiencing more conflict and turmoil than at any point since the Berlin Wall came down nearly four decades ago.

There are hot wars in Ukraine and Gaza, cold wars on the Korean peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait, and budding wars in Iran and parts of Africa. The Global Peace Index is at its lowest

level ever.

But four days into the Milan-Cortina Winter Games, harmony reigns in the Olympic villages and venues across northern Italy.

"We're only a [few] days into competition, so let's cross our fingers," said Andrea Varnier, the managing director of the Milan-Cortina Games. "This is sport. It's the athletes of the world getting together and you have to focus on that and try to leave other matters in

other places.

"That's why we do the Games."

Maybe. But the Olympic Games long have been a platform for politics and protest, from the Nazi propaganda in 1936 to the black-gloved fists of John Carlos and Tommie Smith in 1968 to the Munich massacre four years later.

More than 135 countries, including the U.S., have boycotted at least one Olympics

[See Olympics, A3]



VERONA, which will host the closing ceremony, has been packed with visitors.

BLANK OVAL: U.S. speedskaters Bowe and Jackson come up short. SPORTS, D1

### How to prepare for kindergarten

Here's what experts say about the foundational skills necessary for children to get ready for school.

LEARNING, A8

For the latest news, go to latimes.com.

### Teachers' strike in San Francisco

Public schools shut down as a union calls for raises and improved healthcare benefits.

CALIFORNIA, B1

### Weather

Cooler. L.A. Basin: 66/55. B5

### The merger of SpaceX and xAI

A look at why Elon Musk is combining them, what new entity will do.

BUSINESS, A9



## Bellwether trial on social media addiction starts

L.A. case, alleging harms to kids, could shake up YouTube, Instagram and others.

By Sonja Sharp

A landmark civil trial that will ask jurors to decide whether social media companies can be held liable for pushing a product that they allegedly knew was harmful to children began Monday in Los Angeles County Superior Court, with attorneys sparring for more than four hours in combative opening arguments.

The closely watched test case could rewrite the rules of engagement for social companies and their youngest users — and leave tech titans on the hook for billions in damages.

Judge Carolyn B. Kuhl admonished the 18 Angelenos — 12 jurors and six alternates — not even to talk to their own therapists

about the bellwether trial, the first among thousands of similar suits currently pending together in state and federal courts. Two other defendants, TikTok and Snap, settled for undisclosed sums to avoid the current trial.

The plaintiff, a Chico, Calif., woman referred to as Kaley G.M., said she became addicted to social media as a grade schooler, and charges that YouTube and Instagram were built to snare very young children and keep them hooked, despite known design flaws that made their products dangerous. She appeared briefly in court Monday.

"They wanted to capture Kaley before she even hit puberty," said Mark Lemeir, one of the young woman's attorneys. "It's addiction by design."

He vowed to hammer Mark Zuckerberg — head of Instagram parent company Meta — on that point when the chief executive is called to testify in coming weeks.

[See Social media, A7]



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

PHOTOS of kids whose deaths were blamed on social media are placed at a courthouse in L.A. last week.

## State mask ban blocked — for now

Federal judge strikes down law to end ICE agents' use, but signals a revision may work.

By Kevin Rector

A federal judge on Monday struck down a new California law that banned federal immigration agents and other law enforcement officers from wearing masks in the state, but an effort already is underway to revive the statute.

U.S. District Judge Christina A. Snyder in Los Angeles ruled that the No Secret Police Act does not apply equally to all law enforcement officers because it excludes state law enforcement, and therefore "unlawfully discriminates against

federal officers."

But, Snyder said, the ban does not impede federal officers from performing their federal functions, indicating that a revised law that remedies that discrimination may be constitutional.

State Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco), the author of the legislation, on Monday proposed a new prohibition on mask-wearing by all law enforcement officers in California, a change he argued would bring the ban into compliance with Snyder's ruling.

Wiener said he will immediately file his updated bill in order to unmask U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other federal agents conducting unconstitutional enforcement in the state as soon as possible.

[See Ruling, A6]

## State's voucher plan favors Tesla, rivals say

California has set aside \$165 million for electric trucks not readily available.

By Tony Briscoe

A California clean-air program, designed to rapidly electrify the state's truck and bus fleets, has recently faced intense criticism for reserving its largest-ever tranche of funding to subsidize Tesla's all-electric semitruck, a largely unproven vehicle with a dubious production timeline.

In the last year, the California Air Resources Board, or CARB, and its nonprofit partner CALSTART have set aside nearly 1,000 vouchers, worth at least \$165 million, to provide commercial fleets with steep markdowns

on the long-delayed Tesla Semi, according to state data obtained by The Times. The battery-powered big rig has been advertised as a groundbreaking freight truck capable of traveling up to 500 miles on a single charge.

But the news of Tesla's windfall outraged some in the trucking industry, who allege the state provided the world's wealthiest automaker with preferential treatment for a vehicle that is not ready.

Nearly eight years since Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk unveiled the Tesla Semi as a concept, it still isn't widely available in stock. It has repeatedly faced production delays and still doesn't have a publicly advertised retail price.

In fact, some critics argue the Tesla Semi shouldn't

[See Tesla, A10]