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## Culver City to weigh voting at age 16

Measure VY would let teens cast ballots in local races. Similar efforts are rare in U.S.

By Connor Sheets

Ada Meighan-Thiel, a 17-year-old senior at Culver City High School, acted out an age-old teenage ritual as she stood on Marcelo Chamecki's front porch the week before election day. She was there to try to get an adult to take her and her young friends seriously.

Her arguments were well-rehearsed on this sunny afternoon as she expounded on the virtues of Measure VY, a ballot initiative that would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in city and school board elections in her West-side hometown.

The local measure goes before voters in Tuesday's election. If it passes, it would make Culver City one of few U.S. communities to allow people as young as 16 to vote. No other municipality in the country has the issue on its ballot this year.

"Measure VY would expand the local voting age here in Culver City to 16," Meighan-Thiel said, a clipboard of informational fliers in hand. "By really involving people in democracy from a young age, a value of participation will be instilled in them so going forward they'll be much more habitual, well-informed voters."

Clutching a coffee mug in the wooden doorway of his home on a tree-shaded street, Chamecki, a science professor at UCLA, listened to Meighan-Thiel's pitch, nodding as she explained why she should be trusted to vote. He asked questions about how the proposal would be implemented.

[See Measure VY, A7]



**BRINE EXITING** the Claude "Bud" Lewis Carlsbad Desalination Plant is further mixed with ocean water at the discharge pond. High concentrations of brine can raise toxicity in marine environments.

NELVIN C. CEPEDA San Diego Union-Tribune

## CAN THE OCEAN SOLVE WATER CRISIS?

State's drought drives renewed interest in desalination. There are pros and cons.

By Hayley Smith

For decades, environmentalists have decried ocean desalination as an ecological disaster, while cost-savvy water managers have thumbed their noses at desal's lofty price tag.

But as the American Southwest barrels into a new era of extreme heat, drought and aridification, officials and conservationists are giving new consideration to the process of converting saltwater into drinking water, and the role it may play in California's future.

Although desalination requires significant energy, California's current extended drought has revived interest in the technology. Experts are already experimenting with new concepts such as mobile desalination units and floating buoys, and at least four major plants will soon be operational along the state's coastline.

David Feldman, director of Water UCI at UC Irvine, said desalination could eventually provide "somewhere between 10% and half" of California's potable water — with one caveat.

"Before we can even estimate what percentage of California's potable water would come from desal, we're going to have to consider whether or not water agencies feel confident that they have exhausted other less expensive and less energy-intensive options," said Feldman, who is also a professor of urban planning and public policy at the university.

[See Desalination, A8]

### AMERICA UNSETTLED

## Race for Central Valley's soul

Farmworker's son challenges a farmer for congressional seat

By Alejandra Reyes-Velarde

**BAKERSFIELD** — As a teenager, David Valadao had a long list of chores to do before school every day. He'd jump on his tractor, buck hay and feed the family's dairy cows on their Hanford farm. After school, it was more of the same.

When Rudy Salas was a child, he woke before dawn to join his father in the Central Valley fields. He worked piecemeal, boxing up grapes and fixing machinery. When he injured his fingers doing repairs, his father would tell him, "Put some duct tape on it and tell me about it later."

Valadao and Salas represent, at least symbolically, two of the largest forces fueling the Central Valley — the farmers who drive the area's agricultural industry and the workers

[See Central Valley, A7]



**INCUMBENT** Rep. David Valadao talks to Marcia Bittleston-Bogan, left, and her mother, Winnie Bittleston, in Buttonwillow, Calif.

IRFAN KHAN Los Angeles Times

### Abortion shaping race

Contest for Michigan governor features two women on opposite ends of the debate. **NATION, A5**

### Weighing Black clout

Erika D. Smith examines what a Karen Bass loss might mean for race relations. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

### Latino right on the air

Radio show in L.A. is confident GOP movement will lure disaffected liberals. **CALIFORNIA, B1**



DANIA MAXWELL Los Angeles Times

**KEMPER DONOVAN'S** podcast, "All About Agatha," is devoured by Agatha Christie fans worldwide.

### COLUMN ONE

## 66 books, 6 years, 2 'Agathologists,' 1 beloved podcast

By Deborah Netburn

At first glance, Kemper Donovan's backyard bungalow appears perfectly normal for this Santa Monica neighborhood, but a few clues suggest otherwise.

A map of the English county of Devon. A copy of "The Poisoner's Handbook." A professional-looking microphone perched on a wooden desk. And then there's the enormous portrait of Agatha Christie hanging next to the guest bed.

If you use your little gray cells — as Christie's fictional detective Hercule Poirot liked to say — you might deduce that this is where Donovan, 43, records the long-running podcast "All About Agatha." In it, he and co-host Catherine Brobeck set out to read and rank all of Christie's 66 mystery novels, and discuss them in exhaustive detail.

For six years, thousands of Agatha Christie enthusiasts across the globe have downloaded the podcast for what one listener described as a "joyfully geeky" take on

[See Podcast, A12]

## Myanmar rebels keep fight alive

Battles on multiple fronts prevent the junta from regaining its tight grip on power.

By Kyaw Hsan Hlaing and Andrew Nachevson

**CHIANG MAI, Thailand** — The day her 4-year-old grandson was killed, U San Yee had taken him to their local market in rural Myanmar for sticky rice and his favorite fried banana snacks

before he went home to play with his toy cars.

"We didn't know that the Myanmar military would fire artillery shells," U San Yee said. "That's why we were just going about and living our normal lives."

When the first explosions struck Kin Seik, a farming village of about 3,000 people, the two were watching "Tom and Jerry" cartoons.

"We tried to run to another place, but on the way a shell fell on my grandson and his mother while they were holding hands," said U

San Yee, who could only watch as the boy bled to death and his mother was wounded.

Three civilians were killed and eight others injured in the Aug. 28 attack on the community of bamboo houses on the fertile plains of the country's western state of Rakhine. It was one of a series of deadly assaults that marked the collapse of an 18-month cease-fire between the military and the Arakan Army, one of the country's most powerful ethnic insurgent groups.

Nearly 22 months after the country's military overthrew a democratically elected civilian government led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, it is now fighting a war on multiple fronts.

More than 7,000 civilians have been killed since the coup, according to the Institute for Strategy and Policy, a Yangon-based think tank.

Victims include protesters shot in the head, dissidents killed in detention and villagers bound and burned alive.

[See Myanmar, A4]

## Businesses push the envelope to woo workers back to office

By Roger Vincent

In L'Oréal's plush new West Coast headquarters in El Segundo, workers are pampered by a concierge who will fill their cars with gas, pick up their laundry, retrieve their dogs from day care or do any other task employees want.

Personal and professional chores are fulfilled for \$5 an hour, freeing employees to concentrate on their jobs in a former aircraft factory turned office building that now sports such comforts as a fitness center, restaurant, juice cafe and a cabana-like bar that serves

coffee drinks and, depending on the occasion, alcohol.

People work where they wish on the campus, even outdoors, where a park-like setting is served by company Wi-Fi and a vegetable garden grows fare employees can take home. Dogs are welcome inside and out.

L'Oréal's sweet setup reflects a carrot-and-stick approach being used to get people back to the office as pandemic concerns wane among employers. Lure them to work, the thinking goes, by making it a place they want to be.

It's not always an easy sell. In a recent survey by real estate brokerage CBRE,

only 25% of executive leaders said they believe their workers would voluntarily come into the office more often than they do today. In contrast, more than half of bosses said they want their employees in the office more.

Cosmetic company L'Oréal Group demands that employees work in the office at least three times a week, on days of their choosing. Their presence is a necessary part of operating the century-old company based in Paris, said David Greenberg, chief executive of L'Oréal USA.

"We're in an industry that's very much people- [See Back to office, A6]

### Kyiv mayor has dire warning

Ukrainians are told to prepare for a winter of no heat, power and tap water. **WORLD, A3**

### Hyperloop tube is removed

SpaceX's testing site got complaints from the city of Hawthorne. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

### Brady finds way to defeat Rams

L.A.'s struggles on offense continue in demoralizing 16-13 loss to Tampa Bay. **SPORTS, D1**

### Weather

Rain and drizzle. L.A. Basin: 63/57. **B6**



# Insurgents wearing down Myanmar's military

[Myanmar, from A1]

But as the renewed fighting in Rakhine reflects, the military, which has ruled Myanmar with an iron grip for much of the last half a century, remains unable to re-consolidate power.

In one of the latest examples of violence, military jets bombed a concert in the northern state of Kachin on Oct. 23, killing at least 80 people, including civilians and members of the ethnic Kachin Independence Army.

Meanwhile, dozens of junta soldiers have reportedly been killed since late October in Rakhine, northwestern Karen state and the central city of Mandalay.

The junta has increasingly resorted to air power because of growing losses to infantry on the ground from ambushes and roadside bombs.

"The military is getting desperate," said Kyaw Zaw, a spokesman for the National Unity Government, a parallel government filled with deposed civilian lawmakers working to dislodge the junta. "Their only strategy is to terrorize the population by targeting defenseless civilians."

The junta is now confronting newly formed rebel groups such as the disparate People's Defense Force aligned with the parallel government, and an increasing number of ethnic armed groups based in the country's border regions.

Western sanctions and diplomatic pressure have done little to stanch the bloodshed — a civil war raging in the heart of Asia on the doorstep of two geopolitical giants, India and China.

Immediately after the coup, the new junta was confronted by mass protests that were brutally quashed with a series of urban massacres, propelling many of Myanmar's youth to seek training and weapons from the country's myriad ethnic armed groups. In September 2021, the parallel government declared a "people's defensive war" to overthrow the military, forging formal alliances with some of the ethnic rebels.

Initially given little chance of resisting a military equipped with warplanes and heavy artillery, the insurgents have inflicted enough damage to keep the junta hopping. As a result, it is showing signs of stress. Casualties are rising and combat-ready replacements are scarce. Defections and poor pay are reportedly contributing to sinking morale.

If more ethnic armed groups like the Arakan Army join the fight against the military, known as the Tatmadaw, experts say, it could eventually tip the scales in the civil war.

"The junta expected to readily subsume the country into its control with its brutal coercive power, but it has



THANTLANG, Myanmar, in an aerial image after military shelling in October 2021. More than 7,000 civilians have been killed since the military launched its February 2021 coup, the Institute for Strategy and Policy says.



MEMBERS of the People's Defense Force rebel group take part in military training in a forest in southern Myanmar's Kayin state, also known as Karen state.

failed so far," said Ye Myo Hein, a political scientist at the Wilson Center. "It has lost its consolidated control over a vast swath of territory across the country."

"It's hard to predict what will happen next," he added, "but one thing is certain: The junta is losing ground."

Myanmar, also known as Burma, has long been fractured along ethnic lines and dominated by the majority Buddhist Barmars who reside in the largest cities. The Southeast Asian nation roughly the size of Texas is home to more than 100 different ethnic groups, some of which were fighting for autonomy even before Myanmar won independence from

Britain in 1948.

One of those groups is the Rakhine, also known as the Arakanese. Despite being overwhelmingly Buddhist and speaking a language closely related to the Burmese used by Barmars, the Rakhine have long maintained a fierce separatist streak. Rakhine existed as an independent kingdom until it was conquered by the Burmese in 1785 and is isolated from the rest of the country by a rugged mountain range.

"We want our Rakhine state to be independent — it is the dream of every Rakhine person," said a 32-year-old farmer in Maungdaw township, which has also seen heavy fighting in recent months.

That staunch Rakhine-Buddhist identity contributed to one of the worst chapters in modern Burmese history when many Rakhine supported the Tatmadaw's "clearance operations" in 2017, forcing more than 750,000 Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine across the border into Bangladesh.

The United Nations said

the crackdown was "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing." Suu Kyi, who was under house arrest by the military for 15 years before winning landslide election victories in 2015 and 2020, refused to condemn the attacks and defended the military at the International Court of Justice in 2019, leading to her disgrace as a human rights figure. Since the junta took back control in early 2021, she has been imprisoned in the nation's capital.

It was in the wake of the junta's campaign against the Rohingya that fighting between the Arakan Army and the military worsened. Formed in 2009, the self-proclaimed 30,000-member force seeks self-determination for the Arakanese people and is represented by its political wing, the United League of Arakan.

The group's foot soldiers have fought a guerrilla war against government security forces, ambushing military outposts and police stations.

Weary of the attacks, the government agreed to a

'The military is getting desperate. Their only strategy is to terrorize the population by targeting defenseless civilians.'

— KYAW ZAW, a spokesman for the National Unity Government

cease-fire in November 2020. Analysts speculate the agreement was struck so the military could prepare for the coup. The Arakan Army used the lull in fighting to consolidate more territory.

The truce would prove fleeting. Heavy fighting returned to Rakhine in July of this year, when the Arakan Army ambushed a column of the paramilitary Border Guard Police. The strike was in response to the military's arrest of supporters and members of the Arakan Army's civilian administration. Clashes quickly spread across Rakhine, including in Maungdaw, near the border with Bangladesh; Mrauk-U, the Arakan kingdom's ancient capital; and Taungup, near a southern beach vacation destination. Paletwa, in neighboring Chin state, also saw fighting.

The Maungdaw farmer who spoke to The Times said there had been no fighting in his area for years. But since mid-August, he frequently goes to bed to the steady sound of shelling and fighter jets, wondering if his village will be bombed. He asked to remain anonymous for safety reasons.

Kyaw Lynn, an ethnic Rakhine political analyst, said the fighting in Maungdaw underscores the Arakan Army's desire to seize control of the border with Bangladesh, which is

important both for economic reasons and issues of sovereignty.

To burnish its legitimacy, the Arakan Army has tried to forge a better relationship with Bangladesh by presenting itself as a more reliable partner than the junta in handling the Rohingya refugee crisis.

More than 900,000 Rohingya are living in squalid camps in Bangladesh, putting a massive strain on the impoverished country. An effort to repatriate many of the refugees has repeatedly faltered under the military.

"The international community, including the Bangladeshi government, has to recognize the United League of Arakan as a key stakeholder in trying to resolve this" crisis, Khaing Thu Kha, a spokesman for the Arakan Army, said at a news conference in September.

Whether the Arakan Army can achieve autonomy may hinge on its burgeoning relationship with the National Unity Government. Formed after the coup by a group of lawmakers elected in the 2020 polls, it includes many former National League for Democracy officials.

While some of its officials are based abroad, other leaders remain in Myanmar, where they've begun rolling out public services in anti-military strongholds. Schools, police forces and healthcare clinics are up and running, typically staffed by civil servants who went on strike in protest of the coup.

Unlike other armed groups, the Arakan Army has refused to pledge loyalty to the opposition forces because of tensions in the past with Suu Kyi and her party. In 2019, a National League for Democracy official referred to the Rakhine insurgents as "terrorists." The following year, the Arakan Army justified abducting three National League for Democracy parliamentary candidates by accusing the party of cooperating with the Tatmadaw.

Now presented with a common enemy, the relationship has thawed. The Arakan Army met with the National Unity Government in May, while rejecting an invitation for peace talks from the junta. At the meeting, Khaing Thu Kha said the Arakan Army would "open the door" to cooperation but reiterated the demands for autonomy — something the National Unity Government is reluctant to grant for fear that other ethnic armed groups will make similar demands.

As long as the junta remains in power, the people of Rakhine will probably struggle to reconcile their desire for self-determination with support for a shadow government stacked with Suu Kyi's acolytes.

"Yes, I want the NUG to overthrow the military. But personally, I want our people to control our state," the Maungdaw farmer said. "I want this to be the final war in Rakhine."

Special correspondents Kyaw Hsan Hlaing and Nagemson reported from Washington and Chiang Mai, respectively. Times staff writer David Pierson in Singapore contributed to this report.

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# 19 die as Tanzanian plane crashes into lake

ASSOCIATED PRESS

NAIROBI — A plane crashed into Lake Victoria as it approached an airport in Tanzania on Sunday morning, killing 19 passengers, the country's prime minister said. A senior policeman said it was raining when the aircraft plunged into the water.

Local authorities said earlier Sunday that 26 of the 43 people who were on the Precision Air flight from the coastal city of Dar es Salaam were rescued and taken to a hospital.

Tanzanian Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa later said the death toll had risen. It was not clear if the new toll included people who died at the hospital.

Photos showed the plane, which was headed to Bukoba Airport in the capital of Tanzania's Kagera province, mostly submerged in the lake.

Precision Air is a Tanzanian company.



RESCUERS HELP passengers from a plane that crashed Sunday into Lake Victoria in Tanzania. The flight encountered bad weather, authorities say.

"We have managed to save quite a number of people," Cmdr. William Mwamphagale of the Kagera province police told journalists.

"When the aircraft was about 100 meters [328 feet] midair, it encountered problems and bad weather. It was raining, and the plane

plunged into the water," he said.

Mwamphagale said the rescue efforts were continuing.