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MIDDLE EAST WAR

Israel entering talks with Lebanon

Netanyahu's move aims to boost ceasefire efforts 'as soon as possible,' aiding Trump's Iran deal

By Jon Gambrell, Elena Becatoros and Mike Corder
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — In a potential boost to Middle East ceasefire efforts, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that he authorized direct negotiations with Lebanon "as soon as possible" aimed at disarming Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants and establishing relations between the neighbors. The two countries have tech-

nically been at war since Israel was established in 1948, and Netanyahu later stressed that there was no ceasefire between them. In a video statement, he said Israel will keep striking Hezbollah until security is restored in northern Israel.

There was no immediate response from Lebanese authorities. But Israel-Lebanon negotiations were expected to begin next week at the State Department in Washington, according to a U.S. official and a person familiar with the plans who

both spoke on condition of anonymity due to the delicacy of the matter.

The prospect of talks appeared to bolster the tentative ceasefire in the Iran war that has staggered under the weight of Israel's bombardment of Beirut, Tehran's continued chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz and uncertainty over whether planned peace talks can find common ground.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Thursday that he was "very optimistic" about the prospects of reaching a peace deal, saying Iranian leaders are more amenable

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A government supporter weeps during a mourning ceremony Thursday marking the 40th day since the death of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. **VAHID SALEMI — AP**

INDIO

Coachella festival returns for 25th year



Fans of Junior H react to his performance on the main stage during the second weekend of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio on in 2025. **PHOTOS BY DREW A. KELLEY — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

Today launches sold-out weekends of globally famous music showcase

Staff report

When fans step onto the Empire Polo Field in Indio today, they'll be participating in a cultural milestone — the 25th version of the Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival, which has grown from a fledgling event to a global gathering that shapes the tastes of music fans worldwide.

It wasn't a seamless transition. After the first festival in October 1999 was awash in red ink, it took promoter Goldenvoice a year and a half to try again — and then in a stripped-down, one-day format. From that uneven start, the festival began to grow steadily, expanding to three days and adding the Stagecoach country festival in 2007, and then tacking on a repeat weekend starting in 2012. After losing 2020 and 2021 to the



The Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival has grown from a fledgling event that shapes tastes of music fans around the world.

pandemic, Coachella has returned to form over the past four years, though the second weekend hasn't always sold out.

Here's what to know about this year's festival:

The headliners: Sabrina Car-

penter — who wrapped up her 2024 main-stage set by teasing, "See you back here when I headline!" — tops the bill tonight. Saturday headliner Justin Bieber has never been on the

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RIVERSIDE COUNTY

Warrants to seize ballots were flawed, experts say

Sheriff Bianco dismisses criticism of his election probe amid legal hurdles

By Jeff Horseman
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The reasoning behind search warrants used to seize more than 650,000 Riverside County ballots as part of a closely watched criminal investigation is dubious and relies on baseless allegations, several legal scholars said.

Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco dismissed the criticisms, calling blog posts by two professors "obvious political commentary" steeped in narcissism.

The critics' concerns mirror those of California Attorney General Rob Bonta, who is suing to halt the controversial probe launched by Bianco, a Republican running for governor.

Affidavits in support of the warrants "did not identify

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JURUPA VALLEY

'Grappler' use ends in pursuit crash, suicide

Riverside County to keep using its tethering device after driver shot self

By Brian Rokos
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The Riverside County Sheriff's Department on Thursday said it is standing by its use of the Grappler tether device that's intended to safely end police chases, a day after the technology failed to stop a driver whose car instead was sent careening out of control, crashing through a wall into the yard of a Jurupa Valley home.

The man then shot himself to death during a standoff with the sheriff's SWAT team, a department news release said.

The Grappler technology, which was invented by a

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NASA

Artemis II astronauts describe lunar voyage as surreal, profound

Crew reflects on their historic moon journey as they prepare for a 'fireball' reentry to Earth today

By Marcia Dunn
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — Drawing ever closer to Earth, the Artemis II astronauts tidied up their lunar cruiser for its upcoming "fireball" return and reflected on their historic journey around the moon,

describing it as surreal and profound.

As the next-to-last day of their flight dawned Thursday, humanity's first lunar explorers in more than half a century were less than 150,000 miles from home with the odometer clicking down.

"We have to get back. There's so

much data that you've seen already, but all the good stuff is coming back with us. There are so many more pictures, so many more stories," said pilot Victor Glover, adding that "riding a fireball through the atmosphere is profound as well."

Being cut off from all of humanity for nearly an hour while behind the moon was especially "surreal," according to commander Reid

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The Artemis II crew, from left, Commander Reid Wiseman, mission specialist Christina Koch, pilot Victor Glover and Canadian astronaut and mission specialist Jeremy Hansen shown Wednesday. **NASA VIA AP**

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