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GRETCHEN FRITSCH, left, and Jay Michael rest in their car in the Moose Lodge parking lot last week in Clearlake Oaks, Calif., during the Ranch fire. It marked the third time this year they had been evacuated.

## Burnt up, burned out in fiery Lake County

Latest blaze poses question for residents: Is it worth it?

BY ALEJANDRA REYES-VELARDE AND PRIYA KRISHNAKUMAR

MIDDLETOWN, Calif. — Clarence Sibsey sat alone at a table in the Twin Pine Casino evacuation center, tired and dejected.

Once again, a fire was threatening his community and he had to leave home. Two years ago, he fled the massive Valley fire. Now he had been driven away by the Mendocino Complex fire, which at more than 340,000 acres is the biggest in California history.

"We've never had fires like this before," Sibsey said. "Why now?"

The battle to control the massive blaze continued Monday, as officials announced the death of a firefighter

on the front lines. The news came amid progress in containing the fire, which enabled more residents to return home.

But the blaze has been a grim reminder for Lake County residents of how their area is now an epicenter for fires.

A Los Angeles Times analysis found that more than 50% of the county's land has been burned since 2012. And it has sparked debate for some residents about whether living in this rural enclave about 120 miles north of San Francisco is worth it.

The Pawnee fire recently threatened nearby Spring Valley, whose residents had to evacuate for a second time in just a few months.

Two years ago, the Clayton fire tore

through almost 4,000 acres and 300 structures, many of them mobile homes and rentals. The blaze hit the town of Lower Lake particularly hard, destroying a 150-year-old church and a Habitat for Humanity office.

In 2015, three wildfires ripped through Lake County, including the Valley fire, which destroyed more than 1,300 homes and killed at least four people.

Resident Bo Stover said he won't be around for the next big blaze. He's tired of the displacement and dangers, and plans to move to Arkansas.

"I'm sick of all this. I'm too old. I'm looking for peace in my life," the 61-year-old said.

In the last five to 10 years, the Lake

[See Lake County, A8]

## More Indians are crossing border to ask for asylum

A growing number of detainees are arriving via routes forged by Latino immigrants, U.S. authorities say.

BY SARAH PARVINI

On a recent visit to the federal prison in Victorville, U.S. Rep. Mark Takano was caught by surprise. Of the hundreds of immigrants detained there, he learned, possibly 40% had traveled from India seeking asylum.

The Riverside Democrat had expected to see a high concentration of Central American detainees, many of them fathers who had been separated from their children.

Not all the men spoke English. The group appointed a representative, who told Takano that the

men were supporters of two different political parties and had been persecuted by India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party.

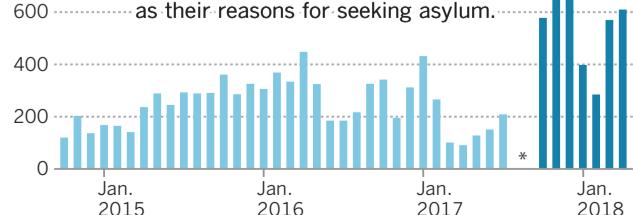
"They said they were often bullied into doing things that were immoral," Takano said. "They would have to carry drugs, perpetrate violence against others."

According to immigration officials and attorneys, there has been an increase in recent years of Indian nationals crossing into the U.S. through Mexico — although they represent a small percentage of those detained overall. Indian citizens are among thousands of migrants from Haiti, Africa and Asia now trekking across Latin America, taking advantage of routes forged by Latino immigrants.

By early August, about 380 of the 680 migrants at [See Asylum, A12]

## Rise in border arrests of Indians

U.S. Customs and Border Protection data show that more Indian nationals have been arrested in the first months of this fiscal year than the same time in 2017.



Source: Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse

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