



Photographs by ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

**BOB** Stephens of Rancho Cucamonga is among the amateur astronomers awaiting the Blaze Star. He uses a Borg 101 telescope.

## COVID surge's tenacity surprises experts

Doctors, others say infections have been strong this summer, with KP.3.1.1 subvariant the most common.

By RONG-GONG LIN II

California's summer COVID surge has proved to be particularly strong and enduring, surprising experts with its tenacity as it storms into a third month.

The strength of this summer's COVID surge probably is largely related to the ever-more infectious subvariants that continue to emerge as the coronavirus evolves, said Dr. Elizabeth Hudson, regional chief of infectious disease at Kaiser Permanente Southern California.

A dizzying number of related subvariants — collectively dubbed FLIRT — have emerged in recent months. One in particular, KP.3.1.1, has been picking up steam at a startling pace and has become the most common strain nationwide.

"KP.3.1.1 seems to be the most adept at transmission," said Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, an infectious-disease expert at UC San Francisco. "And it's the one that people think will continue to take over, not only in the United States, but ... around the world."

Coronavirus levels in California wastewater have surpassed the peaks seen in each of the last two summers, according to data estimates released Friday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which run through the week ending July 27.

Coronavirus levels in sewage have been "high" or "very high" for eight consecutive weeks, the CDC said. [See COVID, A6]

## Ever see a star explode? You're about to get a chance soon

With a rare star explosion expected soon, astrophysicists are relying on a community of hobbyists with telescopes to tell them when it erupts

By NOAH HAGGERTY

Every clear night in recent weeks, Bob Stephens has pointed his home telescope at the same two stars in hopes of witnessing one of the most violent events in the universe — a nova explosion a hundred thousand times brighter than the sun.

The eruption, which scientists say could happen any day now, has excited the interest of major observatories worldwide, and it promises to advance our understanding of turbulent binary star systems.

Yet for all the high-tech observational power that NASA and other scientific institutions can muster, astrophysicists are relying on countless amateur astronomers such as Stephens to spot the explosion first.

The reason? It's just too costly to keep their equipment focused on the same subject for months at a time.



**STEPHENS** has years of T Coronae Borealis data. Oscillations in the data represent the two stars orbiting around each other.

"I think everyone will look at it while it happens, but sitting there just looking at it isn't going to make it happen," said Tom Meneghini, the director of telescope operations and executive director emeritus at the Mt. Wilson Observatory. "It's like a watched pot," he joked.

The star is so far away that it takes 3,000 years for its light to reach the Earth, meaning the explosion occurred before the last of the Egyptian pyramids were built. It will appear about as bright as the North Star for just a few days before fading into the darkness.

Once it's spotted, some of the most advanced observatories on Earth and in space will join in watching, including NASA's James Webb Space Telescope.

[See Star, A6]



**GEET JAIN**, an inspirational speaker and English teacher, cannot reach any of her millions of followers in India through TikTok as a result of the country's ban.

## After the TikTok ban in India

As influencers in the U.S. fret over the app's future, the Asian country's decision serves as a case study

By STEPHANIE YANG

Is there life after TikTok? The question is front of mind for U.S. influencers and many small businesses as lawmakers threaten to ban the Chinese-owned social media app that's become a cornerstone of inter-

net culture and e-commerce. For an answer, they might turn to India, which has been surviving without TikTok since June 2020.

That month, after 20 of its soldiers were killed in a border clash with China, the Indian government gave TikTok users a day to post tearful goodbyes and steer

followers to other social media accounts. Then the app went dark.

"When it got banned, I had nothing," recalled Gaurav Jain, who was one of the country's more than 200 million TikTok users.

He was 25 and had just notched his millionth fol-

[See TikTok, A4]

## After months of protests, eyes turn toward Chicago

Pro-Palestinian activists plan to march at the Democratic convention, and hope to avoid another 1968.

By JEFFREY FLEISHMAN

CHICAGO — He walked down a side street, eyes darting here and there, wondering how it would unfold.

"What kind of fences will the police have? Will they

bring dogs?" Hatem Abudayyeh asked. He stopped in the shadow of the United Center, home of the NBA's Bulls and the NHL's Blackhawks and a draw for tens of thousands of pro-Palestinian demonstrators who are expected to protest against U.S. support for Israel at the Democratic National Convention this month. "I hope they don't militarize it," he said. "The first statement the police made was about mass arrests. They've backed off a little. But they're trying to

intimidate us."

The son of Palestinian immigrants, Abudayyeh is one of the march's organizers and has long been at the center of civil rights protests. He was investigated by the FBI more than a decade ago — no charges were brought — and in 2017 he helped block traffic at Chicago O'Hare International Airport over then-President Trump's Muslim travel ban. The demonstration he is preparing comes as this one-time city of stockyards and

[See Chicago, A10]

### Families struggle as home care lags

Many must fill the gap as thousands wait for state benefits and only 200 new slots open a month. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

### A mindless frolic at the Ahmanson

"Clue: Live on Stage!" is fast and fun, even if it isn't our critic's idea of a theatrical good time. **ENTERTAINMENT, E1**

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**NOAH LYLES** exults after his triumph in the 100 meters in Paris.

### A razor-thin win for Lyles in 100

U.S. sprinter leans at the finish line to edge Jamaica's Kishane Thompson for the gold medal. **SPORTS, D1**

### Weather

Mostly sunny, hot. L.A. Basin: 94/68. **B5**

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