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ALEJANDRO TAMAYO U-T

Investigators enter the Tijuana home of Lourdes Maldonado on Monday. A day earlier, the veteran journalist was shot dead inside her vehicle outside the home in the city's Santa Fe area. She was the second journalist killed in the city in a week.

BAJA VOWS TO PROBE JOURNALISTS' KILLINGS

Announcement comes a day after second shooting death in Tijuana in a week

BY ALEXANDRA MENDOZA

The Baja California Attorney General's Office will appoint a special prosecutor to investigate the killings of Tijuana journalists Margarito Martínez Esquivel and Lourdes Maldonado, Gov. Marina del Pilar Ávila said Monday.

The announcement came a day after veteran journalist Maldonado was shot dead inside her vehicle in front of her home in the Santa Fe area of Tijuana, and one week after photojournalist Martínez was gunned down out-

side his home in the Camino Verde neighborhood.

"We are going to use the full force of the state to ensure that justice prevails," Ávila said in a video posted on social media. She was joined by Attorney General Ricardo Iván Carpio and Gilberto Landeros, the state's secretary of security and citizen protection.

Maldonado, 67, had worked with many media outlets, including years as a journalist for a Tijuana affiliate of the broadcast giant Televisa. Martínez worked as a photographer and "fixer"

assisting international outlets including the BBC, as well as for The San Diego Union-Tribune and Los Angeles Times.

In Martínez's case, a man was detained last week and later released as part of the investigation. In Maldonado's case, no arrests have been made.

For years, Mexico has been one of the deadliest countries in the world to be a journalist. Maldonado was the third journalist killed in 2022 in Mexico. Reporter José Luis Gamboa was found stabbed to death in Veracruz earlier in January.

Maldonado, like Martínez, had made it known that she was fearful for her life after receiving threats and had sought government protection. In 2019, she told Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, of those fears at a live news conference.

"(She) wanted protection at night when she arrived at her house, and she wanted nothing more than to have the presence of police there because she felt that this was the most vulnerable moment for her," said Sonia de Anda, a journalist and adviser

BILL WOULD REQUIRE COVID-19 VACCINES FOR SCHOOL

Measure would supersede more limited state mandate

BY MELODY GUTIERREZ & HOWARD BLUME

SACRAMENTO

California students would be required to be immunized for COVID-19 under a bill introduced Monday, offering backup to districts such as San Diego Unified that have struggled with their own mandates while igniting familiar backlash from anti-vaccine activists and parents who say the state should not make medical decisions for their children.

Senate Bill 871, by state Sen. Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, would add COVID-19 vaccines to California's list of required inoculations for attending K-12 schools, which can be skipped only if a student receives a rare medical exemption. If passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor, the measure would supplant a more limited COVID-19 vaccine mandate for schools that was created by Gov. Gavin Newsom last year.

Under the bill, the California Department of Public Health could mandate vaccines in the future without requiring

SEE STUDENTS • A6



DAMIAN DOVARGANES AP

State Sen. Richard Pan of Sacramento announces his bill at a news conference in Los Angeles.

IN SAN DIEGO, NEW CASES SHOW DROP FROM PRIOR WEEKEND

COVID still impacts hospitals despite improved staffing

BY PAUL SISSON

Coronavirus activity across San Diego County over the weekend appeared to slow slightly compared with one week ago, according to the latest set of daily new case totals published by the county health department Monday.

A total of 22,847 new cases were reported from Friday through Sunday, about 5,000 fewer than the 27,441 reported from Jan. 14 to Jan. 16.

The latest numbers arrived with a new publication from the La Jolla Institute for Immunology that strengthens the evolving explanation for why the Omicron wave has featured more infections, but generally less severe illness, hinting at a universal target for future vaccines.

Though preliminary numbers do not provide the true pace of the pandemic because they include some delayed results, comparing two three-day weekend periods a week apart seems to track with overall trends that local health care providers are seeing on the ground.

Joshua McCabe, a registered nurse and director of emergency services at Sharp Memorial Hospital in San Diego, said in-

SEE COVID • A6

INSIDE

HOUSE, SENATE PANELS SEEK INVESTIGATION

■ A5 • Members of Congress are calling for a review of secretive teams within the U.S. Border Patrol after human rights advocates raised concerns.

LOCAL

S.D. AMENDS HOUSING RULES

■ B1 • The San Diego City Council approves changes to the city's inclusionary housing law, which requires developers of market-rate housing to build low-income units or pay steep penalties.

BUSINESS

STOCK MARKET HAS WILD DAY

■ C1 • A wave of panic-selling hit Wall Street on Monday, sending the market down as much as 4 percent before bouncing back and ending with a slight gain.

FORMER RESTAURATEUR ADDRESSES PONZI SCHEME IN VIDEO DEPOSITION

Champion-Cain speaks in case about who knew about fraud

BY LORI WEISBERG

Former San Diego restaurateur Gina Champion-Cain, speaking under oath from prison, said she kept hidden from everyone but her own employees that she was operating a scheme lending fake liquor licenses. That included Chicago Title, which has been sued by hundreds of victims who claim the escrow company was complicit in orchestrating the \$400 million fraud.

Lawyers for the company, which the Ponzi scheme victims say lent credibility to the long-running fraud, assert that Champion-Cain's sworn testimony last week bolsters their contention that Chicago Title was not culpable for investors' losses. However, responses elicited from an opposing attorney representing two major fraud victims — Ovation Finance Holdings and Banc of California — acknowledge that Chicago Title employees were aware that Champion-Cain



COURTESY OF COOLEY LLP

Former San Diego restaurant owner Gina Champion-Cain raises her hand during a recent deposition from prison.

was using fake company emails and that she had also invented a fake escrow company employee to sign documents as part of her lending operation.

Champion-Cain's testimony during a six-hour-long deposition last Tuesday marks the first time she has testified since she was sentenced nearly a year ago to 15 years in prison on fraud and conspiracy charges in connection with the Ponzi scheme. Dressed in blue prison garb and seated in a room at the

Dublin correctional institution where she is incarcerated, she remained largely calm and unflappable as she responded to hours of questioning.

At one point, more than three hours into the deposition, Chicago Title attorney Steven Goldfarb sought to establish the veracity of Champion-Cain's statements, calling her an "incredibly successful liar for eight years" and suggesting that some of her answers may

SEE FRAUD • A7

HEALTH

NATURAL NOD-OFF AID

The popular dietary supplement melatonin's role as a sleep aid has some eye-opening caveats. E1

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to contribute to scientific research

COVID-19 STUDY

La Jolla Institute for Immunology | Life Without Disease

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Eligibility

- 18+ years old
- vaccinated against COVID-19
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Participation

- brief health questionnaire
- up to 6 study visits with blood draws
- compensation up to \$600 for time and effort

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