

Local Briefs

ACEVEDO VILA PENS LETTER OF PROTEST TO NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC OVER ARTICLE

A week after National Geographic magazine published an article about Puerto Rico, Resident Commissioner Aníbal Acevedo Vilá wrote to the publisher calling the piece "unfair and biased."

"National Geographic's recent article by Andrew Cockburn titled 'True Colors' was a departure from your long tradition of balanced and educational reporting showcasing the full breadth and depth of the world's cultures and countries," states Acevedo Vilá's letter.

"We were outraged by the unbalanced and poorly researched story which depicted an extremely unfair and biased representation of Puerto Rico and its 4 million hardworking, educated citizens."

The negativity — including an emphasis on drug use among low-income residents, civil disobedience against the Navy in Vieques and animal cruelty — has provoked dozens of government officials and residents to write letters to the editor of the magazine.

"You showcase a practitioner of *santería*, an exotic religion practiced by merely one percent of the population, while completely ignoring the historical and cultural influences of Catholicism and other Christian religions — practiced by well over 85 percent of the population."

Gov. Calderón has also contacted the mainland public relations firm Edelman, which is under contract with the government, to try and counter the negative image projected by the article.

"It is our hope that future reports about Puerto Rico will better capture the essence of a culture shared by the 4 million Puerto Ricans on the island and 3.5 million spread across the United States," said Acevedo Vilá.

CALDERON: HIGH INDUSTRIAL GROWTH HERE SINCE 2000

Gov. Calderón said Saturday that approximately 281 industries had started or expanded operations here in the last two years.

"Global competition is fierce... but we are winning," she said in her morning radio segment.

She said that of the top 20 pharmaceutical companies worldwide, 14 have manufacturing headquarters on the island. She said 138 manufacturing companies began operations here in 2001, and in 2002 another 143 opened, creating 13,292 jobs.

The governor said her government had been responsible for 168 new projects and growth with an investment of \$2 billion in 2002, representing a job commitment of 13,802 people. In April and May other industries will be expanding, creating 3,975 more technological positions, she said.

D.R. LANDS P.R. COFFEE EXPORT CONTRACT

Salvador Ramírez, executive director of the Agricultural Development and Services Administration, said the Dominican Republic won the bid to export \$20 million worth of coffee to Puerto Rico.

"The Dominican Republic won because of price and quality," said Ramírez. By using the auction method "we were able to get the best price since Puerto Rico started importing coffee after Hurricane Georges." He said they were able to buy the coffee beans at \$89 per quintal. During an interview on Radio Católica, Ramírez said that the other bidders had been Mexico, Colombia and Costa Rica.

The director said this year's coffee production was 190 quintals, 15 more than last year's production, the best year since 1998, when Georges practically destroyed the coffee trees.

From STAR Staff and wire reports

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

Recent Portfolio articles about La Traviata should have said it was an Opera de Puerto Rico production.

The San Juan STAR tries to correct promptly any error in fact or clarify any misleading information appearing in our stories. To report any error or need for clarification, please call 787-782-4200 ext. 2319.



Natural and Environmental Resources Secretary Luis Rodríguez says he will protect 70 acres of the fragile karst zone in San Patricio including this *mogote*, a gumdrop-shaped limestone hill which is home to 40 species of trees and 30 species of birds.

DNER chief pledges to help protect San Patricio Forest

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Stressing that the preservation of urban green areas like the San Patricio Forest is "essential" to maintaining a high quality of life for San Juan residents, the secretary of Natural and Environmental Resources vowed Saturday to help protect and maintain the small island of trees surrounded by a sea of concrete.

DNER chief Luis Rodríguez toured the forest in Caparra Heights and met with representatives of Citizens for the San Patricio Forest, who aired concerns over the DNER's failure to live up to its promises to aid in the co-management of the area.

In October 2001 the group signed an agreement with then-DNER chief Carlos Padín. It called for the agency to establish a plan to guard and oversee the forest; assign a management official and two workers; and provide electricity, light and telephone service as well as a pick-up truck for maintenance work and removing trash.

So far, said group spokesman Javier Almeida, only a manager has been assigned — more than a year after the accord — and the group has been struggling on its own to safeguard the forest.

"We definitely need resources," he said. "Without funds we can't provide services to the people."

Mary Axtmann, a spokeswoman and one of the founders of the group, praised

Rodríguez for hearing out the group's concerns, calling the meeting "very positive."

However, she said that for the non-profit group to continue co-managing the forest, and open it up on weekends, it needs government support.

"The investment is not extravagant in terms of the benefits," she said. "We need the DNER to respect the terms of the agreement. Minimal facilities — electricity, water — would make a big difference for us."

Rodríguez said the group was a "model of co-operation" between the government and the community, and pledged to begin work on providing the personnel and equipment "as soon as I get back to the office."

Developing a priority

"We reached an agreement with the community in 2001 to co-manage the area along with them," Rodríguez said. "The department hasn't complied. The commitment that I'm making is that we're going to comply. More importantly, the development of this forest is going to be a priority."

Since taking over the reigns of the agency late last year, Rodríguez has made co-management a centerpiece of his plans for the DNER. He's working with the Adjuntas group Casa Pueblo on the People's Forest in that mountain town and is looking at the Piñones boardwalk area as another possible co-management project.

"We're going to keep shopping for potential partners," he said. "We get a better bang for the buck when we work with communities."

Part of the island's fragile karst zone, the 70 acres of the San Patricio Forest and *mogote*, or gumdrop-shaped limestone hill, are home to 40 species of trees, 30 species of birds, and exotic reptiles, and is a habitat for the endangered Puerto Rican boa.

Sen. Margarita Ostolaza praised the group Saturday for its efforts, as well as the forest, which she described as a "lung" for the crowded city.

The area was used for Navy housing until the late 1960s, after which the abandoned houses were demolished, and the area began reverting to its natural state. Some of the ruins still exist.

"I was so impressed," Rodríguez said after his tour of the area. "It's really almost a spiritual experience for a city boy."

Area residents have fought development for decades; Citizens for the San Patricio Forest was founded in 1998, and has worked to advance legislation declaring the area an urban forest.

In 2000 a law was signed imposing a moratorium on construction, ordering the DNER to acquire the terrain, and setting aside the land as a protected zone.

The title still remains in the hands of the Housing Department, but Rodríguez said that was not an obstacle to starting work on the area, adding that he's been working to get the land transferred to the

DNER