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Costa Rica: New Government To Offer U.S. Greater Flexibility In Drug War In Exchange For Continued U.S. Aid

by Deborah Tyroler

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In a March 19 report, Notimex quoted reliable unidentified sources as saying that Costa Rica's incoming government plans to offer the US Drug Enforcement Administration greater freedom of action in Costa Rica in exchange for continued funding by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) at present levels. In statements to reporters, president-elect Rafael Angel Calderon Fournier said that the two major topics of discussion at a scheduled meeting March 20 in Washington with President George Bush will be the \$30 million reduction in USAID funding planned for 1991, and bilateral cooperation in anti-drug efforts. Calderon said the aid cutback could be compensated by funds from multilateral organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. He added, "What we need is the certainty that President Bush will help Costa Rica..." Calderon will be installed on May 8. Notimex said its sources indicated greater liberty of action by the DEA in Costa Rica, and loosening up a bilateral extradition treaty would be of great interest to Washington. Both facilities are essential for the DEA to be able to rapidly mount operations similar to a major drug bust last weekend at the Quepos airport, located on Costa Rica's Pacific coast. In a joint effort, undercover DEA agents and Costa Rican narcotics police seized 550 kg. of cocaine belonging to the Medellin (Colombia) drug ring. DEA agents worked with a top Medellin "capo," Cuban-born Juan Merino Noriega, to open up a large-scale supply network connecting Peru to San Francisco. The Quepos airport was to be used as a supply route link.

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