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Anti-Drug Efforts Reported Throughout Latin America

by LADB Staff

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March 15: Mayor of Mexico City, Manuel Camacho Solis, told reporters that his government will soon introduce a program to curb juvenile drug addiction. Included are stiff sanctions applied to persons "who corrupt and economically exploit minors, and make them into addicts." Gustavo Gonzalez Baez, representative of the Mexican Attorney General for narcotics affairs at the Mexican Embassy in Washington said his government learned of US satellite surveillance in mid-February, a few weeks before the State Department issued its annual report on foreign narcotics production and anti-drug efforts. He said the satellite surveys of drug crops was without Mexico City's knowledge, and that Washington had not yet responded to requests for an explanation.

The State Department report estimated Mexican marijuana production at 52,468 tons in 1989, up from an estimated 6,235 tons in 1988. Acreage dedicated to marijuana cultivation was estimated to have increased from 22,239 acres in 1988 to 143,133 acres last year.

March 16: Spokespersons for the Fourth Army Brigade in Medellin, Colombia, reported that 61 members of the Medellin drug trafficking ring's financial and intelligence network had been arrested in the past 48 hours. Next, Colombia's Judicial Investigations Police dismantled a network in charge of communications between Medellin drug ring leader Pablo Escobar Gaviria and cocaine laboratories in the eastern region of the country. Police arrested six persons, and seized a large number of radios, telephones, vehicles, antennas and other communications equipment.

Notimex reported that Peruvian narcotics control police, in collaboration with the US Embassy in Lima and the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), have experimented with herbicides on a coca leaf plot in the Upper Huallaga Valley for the past year. The 110 meter by 600 meter plot is located 15 minutes by helicopter from the Santa Lucia military base. The herbicide is tebuthiuron, commonly known as synthesized urea or urea substitute. The experiment consisted of spreading 3.3 kg. of the chemical per hectare via aerial crop dusting. According to Notimex, the coca plants are definitely dead.

According to commander of Peru's anti-narcotics police force, Gen. Juan Zarate, nine Peruvian scientists, four US agents, and a Colombian participated in the experiment. Police sources said there have been no negative effects on other flora and fauna in the environs of the experimental plot. A soil specialist employed by the anti-narcotics police, who requested anonymity, told Notimex that the effects of chemicals used in experiments during the past year on flora and fauna are annulled by the temperature, precipitation, and soil type of the area. He did not rule out future negative effects of herbicide use.

The Colombian Foreign Ministry announced having lodged a protest late March 15 at the US Embassy in Bogota, saying that US Coast Guard cutters stopped and searched two Colombian ships. No drugs were found. The freighters Taru and Ciudad de Zipaquira were stopped separately on

March 9 about 125 miles north of Colombia. The Ministry said the protest was delivered over the searching of Taru. Hours later, said the Ministry, the Ciudad de Zipaquirá had the same experience.

Last month, President Virgilio Barco advised Washington that his government would not permit its ships be stopped and searched without prior approval. He told reporters at Bogotá's airport upon returning from Brazil on March 16 that he spoke there with Vice President Dan Quayle about the first incident. He gave no details. The two ships were stopped well outside the internationally recognized 12-mile territorial limit. Colombia claims a 200-mile limit for fishing and mineral and oil rights. The ships were stopped within a corridor between the Colombian mainland and a group of Colombian islands about 400 miles out into the Caribbean.

Colombia's protest note spoke of "an exclusive economic zone." The Taru was carrying cement from Barranquilla, Colombia, to the Colombian island of San Andrés. In an interview with Colombian radio network RCN, Deputy Foreign Minister Clemencia Forero said, "The Colombian ship was in an exclusive economic zone, where according to international agreement there is freedom of navigation and trade."

March 17: Police raided a drug laboratory near the town of Bolívar, located southwest of Bogotá, Colombia. Thirteen people were arrested, and 3,960 pounds of pure cocaine were seized. Police said they also found an airstrip used by small planes bringing coca paste from Bolivia and Peru and carrying cocaine to the US.

March 18: In the town of Candelaria, Valle department, Colombia, police raided a lab capable of processing more than 100 pounds of cocaine per day. Coca base, chemicals, and several vehicles were seized.

March 19: Experts in narcotics processing commenced a five-day meeting in Buenos Aires. The objective of this conference is to draft a model set of regulations to control and monitor the sales of machinery, equipment and chemicals used in drug processing.

On March 27-30, the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission for Control of Drug Abuse (CICAD) will convene for its annual congress in Buenos Aires. CICAD member-nations include Antigua, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, United States, Uruguay and Venezuela. A ministerial-level conference for OAS member-nations is scheduled for April 17-20 in Ixtapa, Mexico.

The principal objective of the conference is to strengthen the role of the OAS in anti-drug efforts. Notimex cited reliable unidentified sources as saying that Costa Rica's incoming government plans to offer the US DEA 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 Ángel Calderón 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, and bilateral cooperation in anti-drug efforts. Calderón said the aid cutback in 1991 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 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. At a meeting with Mexican news correspondents in Washington, Mexico's Ambassador to the US, Gustavo Petricioli said that his government maintains close collaboration with all US agencies involved in anti-drug efforts, although certain questions remain to be clarified. He said Mexico City has commenced a "new era" of communication with US society to avoid distortions regarding what Mexico is accomplishing to combat drug trafficking. In reference to US satellite surveillance of Mexican drug crops (see March 15 entry above), Petricioli said the US State Department was requested to provide Mexico with "all the information it had on estimates of marijuana production in Mexico and the technology used to obtain that information." He added, "We have not yet received a response."

Next, the ambassador said the embassy had not yet received a response from the State Department to a request for information on a recent Supreme Court ruling which stated that US agents are legally permitted to implement searches and seizures outside the US. Referring to the State Department's figures on estimated marijuana production in Mexico last year, Petricioli said, "In no way are we accepting the figures reported by the State Department. We are requesting information on the procedures used. Assuming we accept that the information has some validity, that it can be useful to us, then we will see what we will do with it." The ambassador added that drug money laundering in Mexico, which the State Department said takes place in exchange houses located on the border with the US, will be dealt with by Mexican authorities under Mexican law. "We are willing to collaborate, but in no way do we accept the action of other governments in Mexican territory," he said.

Xinhua cited a recent report by the United Nations which estimates that the cocaine industry employs between 600,000 and 1.5 million people in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia. According to a report by Interpol released in Bogota, Colombia, government efforts to combat drug traffickers, increased funding dedicated to the drug war, stepped-up surveillance of drug ring leaders, and the seizure of large quantities of cocaine have not made a dent in the supply and price of cocaine in the US and Europe.

The report notes, "The cartels have managed to expand their operations, open up new consumer markets and expand their already lucrative financial empires." Peru continues to be the leading supplier of coca leaf, according to Interpol, with an estimated 230,000 ha. under cultivation. At an average two kilos of cocaine chlorohydrate per hectare, Peru has the potential of producing 460

tons of cocaine per year. The report said Bolivian coca acreage comes to about half of Peru's, and Colombia, one-fourth. In both countries, the cultivation, refinement, and processing of coca has increased, according to Interpol. Next, Interpol said there are "unequivocal indications" that the drug trafficking rings have expanded connections with underworld figures around the globe. (Basic data from Notimex, 03/15/90, 03/16/90, 03/18/90, 03/19/90; Prensa Latina, 03/16/90; Xinhua, 03/19/90; AP, 03/16/90, 03/19/90)

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