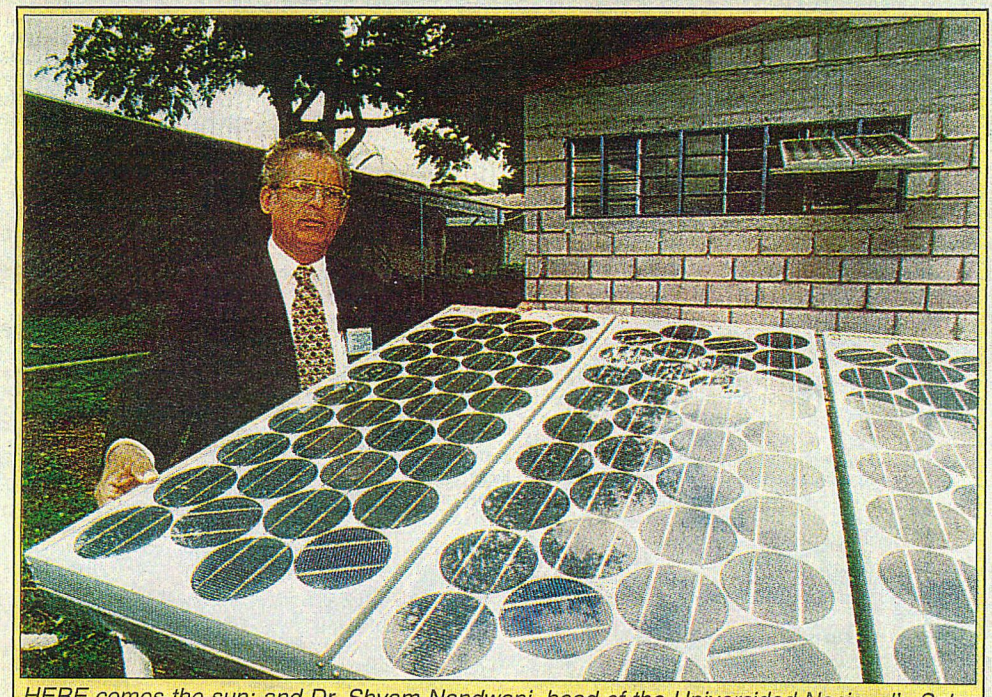
THE TICO TIMES

CENTRAL AMERICA'S LEADING ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER

Member of the Inter-American Press Association

VOL. XLII N° 1492 — 40 pages | San José, Costa Rica, Friday, October 2, 1998 | ¢200

TORTUGUERO'S BACK DOOR "Weekend"



HERE comes the sun: and Dr. Shyam Nandwani, head of the Universidad Nacional's Solar Energy Lab, is ready for it, with solar panels to harness sun power for all manner of uses. (Story, Page 9).

Tico Times/Will Wilson

C.R. Coping With Crisis, Say Experts

BY CHRISTINE PRATT
Tico Times Staff

If the U.S. weathers Asia's and Russia's economic crises — as it has so far — Costa Rica should too, according to government and private-sector economists.

Central Bank President Eduardo Lizano this week reiterated to the weekly financial digest El Financiero this week what he told The Tico Times in April — that Costa Rica's independence from Asia and Russia as trading partners and its domestic-trade-dominated National Stock Exchange have, so far, sheltered the country from direct effects (TT, April 3).

According to statistics by the Export Promotion Office (PROCOMER), only 5.6 percent of Costa Rica's exports go to Asia, and fewer than 1 percent are bound for Russia.

The two regions have been rocked since late 1997 by rapid devaluations of their currencies that in Asia has resulted in widespread defaults on loans, mostly through Japanese banks.

BY comparison, Costa Rica ships nearly 50 percent of its exports to the U.S. and Canada, which economists say have been acting prudently to maintain healthy economic growth.

The U.S. Federal Reserve — the U.S.' Central

(Page 19)

TOURISM NUMBERS COULD HIT MAGIC MILLION BY '99 —Page 20

'Green Tax' on Water Debated

BY GUILLERMO ESCOFET
Tico Times Staff

STILL reeling from recent hikes in water and electricity rates, consumers this week were wary of a proposal to make them pay extra to protect water at its source.

The rumor that this could mean a 10 percent hike in utilities bills was met with resistance by Public Services Regulator Leonel Fonseca, who said now is not the time to impose more increases.

However, the controversy diverted attention from a groundbreaking set of proposals put forward by the Environmental Services Commission of the National Consensus talks launched three months ago by President Miguel Angel Rodríguez (see separate story).

ONE of these is that Ticos should start thinking of

(Page 4)

Slime Scamsters Skimming Goodies By Spraying Goo

BY CHRISTINE PRATT
Tico Times Staff

SLIME-spraying scamsters who douse their victims in goo, then offer to help them clean it off while a conspirator makes off with purses, bags or backpacks, are preying on pedestrians in downtown San José.

The Tico Times has received multiple complaints from tourists and residents who fell victim to the dishonest duo. A recently-arrived Tico Times intern also had a run-in with the glop.

According to all accounts, the victim is first sprayed from behind with a gooey, chocolate-like substance that coats clothes, skin and hair.

THEN a seemingly helpful "samaritan" materializes with tissues and offers to accompany the victims to a nearby restaurant, bar or water supply to clean it off.

Amid the disgust and confusion, the distracted victims inevitably leave their belongings unattended — if only for a minute. The samaritan's cohort then makes off with the booty before the victims are aware that their bags are gone.

Newly arrived residents DeEtte Vaughn,

(Page 11)

THIS WEEK:

Fugitive Mom Hopes For Trial Here 6

Bill Menaces Mangroves 5

Indians March for Land, Autonomy 8

News . . . . . pg. 1-15
Central America 10
Business 19-22
Weekend W1-W12
What's Doing W2
Spotlight on the Arts W5
Exploring Costa Rica W6-W7
Water Babies W8
Natura W12

AWARD for The Tico Times: President Miguel Angel Rodríguez presents TT Commercial Director Louis Ross with the National Tourism Chamber (CANATUR) media award for professional journalistic coverage of the industry; CANATUR president Mauricio Ventura looks on. (Story, Page 20)

Tico Times/Will Wilson

INBio Given Land for 'Bioliteracy' Center

BY GUILLERMO ESCOFET
Tico Times Staff

THE National Biodiversity Institute (INBio) received a generous donation recently from a group of foreigners convinced of Costa Rica's potential as a world center for "bioliteracy."

Around 168 hectares of primary and secondary forest bought three years ago on the foothills of Irazú Volcano by two architects and a developer from Utah, U.S., will be owned and managed by INBio, which is in charge of researching all animal and plant species in Costa Rica. The lands are valued at approximately $300,000.

In return, the donors — who operate under the non-profit organization Corporación Bosque Lluvioso de Costa Rica — will be given use of a small part of the reserve to develop an educational/eco-tourist complex christened "Exploratorium." Including an academy, canopy tour and botanical gardens, it will give students (and tourists) from Costa Rica, Utah and other parts of the world a first-hand experience of the life found in tropical rainforests.

"WE donated the land to INBio because their mission and our mission are very similar," said Corporación Bosque Lluvioso president Randall Tolpinrud, who was here from Salt Lake City two weeks ago to sign the agreement with INBio. "We have always believed this forest needed to be in the hands of a Costa Rican science-based organization that would insure its preservation and scientific use for generations to come."

Corporación Bosque Lluviso's local representative, realtor Carlos Manuel Jiménez, explained that teaming up with a prestigious organization such as INBio will also help the corporation raise funds for its project.

In addition, said INBio's General Director Rodrigo Gámez, the corporation realized the Institute would be more effective at certain things, such as providing the legal and material means for the forest's protection, and putting its resources to good scientific use.

ACCORDING to Gámez, a common belief in the importance of bioliteracy — knowledge of the variety of life forms we share the planet with — drew both organizations together.

Just an hour's drive from where the Exploratorium will open its doors to the public next year, INBio is building its own educational "Biodiversity Garden" on a six-hectare plot next to its research center in the San José suburb of Santo Domingo.

The Garden will be like an open-air museum, displaying different ecosystems and their wildlife. According to Gámez, people of all ages will be able to go there for an introduction to the natural wonders in Costa Rica's forests.

The Exploratorium will complement this, he added, by giving those willing to venture a bit further a taste of the real thing.

"The concept of what they are planning to do there is exactly the same as ours in the Garden," said Gámez.

THE Exploratorium's Bosque Lluvioso Academy, comprising a laboratory, school and lodge, will allow visitors to stay in the forest for several days, learning from experts and helping INBio with its research work. The Exploratorium will also include a series of educational pavilions, a renewable energy demonstration, and several experimental waste-treatment facilities.

Tolpinrud explained that the complex will be built with "cutting-edge 'Green' or sustainable development" techniques, such as the use of non-toxic and renewable materials, renewable energy systems, and water and energy conservation designs.

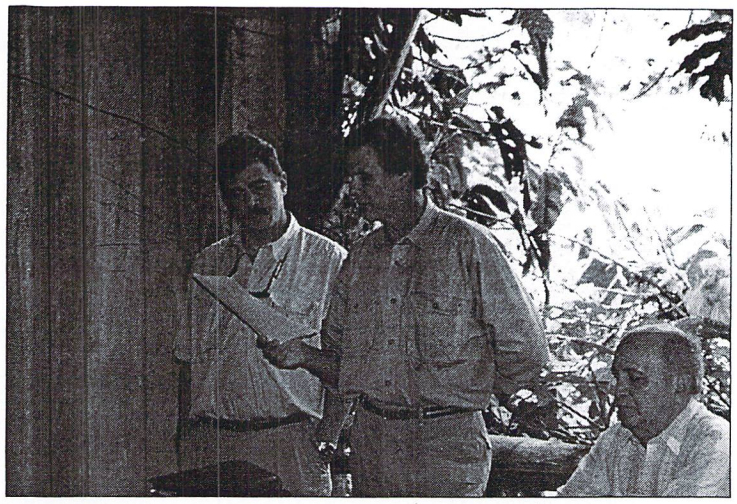


Photo courtesy IMBIO

SIMILAR missions: Bosque Lluvioso's Jimenéz, Tolpinrud sign agreement with Gámez (right).

Jiménez sees Costa Rica as the ideal place for people in the developed world to learn about the natural wealth they are being asked to help conserve in tropical countries.

"In the Amazon, one can travel for three days and never leave the same ecosystem," he explained. "In Costa Rica, on the other hand, there are more than 117 climatic zones within a relatively small area, offering a wide variety of ecosystems."

JIMENEZ, who owns an estate agency specialized in ecotourism and private reserve projects, Tolpinrud and two other partners from Salt Lake City, architects William Connelly and Jerry Robinson, came to Costa Rica a few years ago looking to set up an eco-lodge, which eventually evolved into the academy idea.

The realtor found them the Bosque Lluvioso Reserve, which was being run as a jungle day-tour business. The reserve, which used to be a farm, is bordered by Braulio Carrillo National Park to the south and a mix of farm lands, pastures, and forest patches in other parts.

The corporation intends to expand the borders of the reserve to eventually encompass 1,000 hectares, where experiments in reforestation and natural forest regeneration can be carried out under INBio's supervision. Jiménez hopes the methods learned in the reserve can eventually be applied to other areas in the country where obsolete farm land can be returned to its natural state.