

IN THE NEWS

► Tired of Crime? Give Your Input

This Sunday, Aug. 29 is the last day to participate in Costa Rica's nationwide consultation on citizen security. Organized by the United Nations Development Program, the consultation has been running for the past 10 weeks, and has opened up various channels, including community workshops throughout the country, to solicit input for developing recommendations for President Laura Chinchilla to develop a national citizen security plan. People can give input on the topic, in any language, via Facebook at [Polsepaz Seguridad Ciudadana](http://PolsepazSeguridadCiudadana); via e-mail at info@polsepaz.org; or on the Web at <http://www.pnud.or.cr>.

► Foreign Trade Promoter Muscles Up

The country's Foreign Trade Promotion Office (Procomer) announced additional services to be provided at its Miami, Florida office aimed at assisting Costa Rica-based exporters in their dealings with the United States. According to a Procomer news release, the services will include on-site inspection of containers and fresh produce; legal counseling; research on prospective trade partners; a gauge on markets and competing countries; and more. The new services are set to begin in September. Interested exporters can contact office representative Jorge Zamora at miami@procomer.com or call (001) 305-629-3581.

► La Volpe, Signing or What?

Mexico's former soccer coach, Ricardo La Volpe, came and left Costa Rica this week, striking a preliminary deal to lead this country's national team, La Sele, and leaving the press hungry for a concrete accord. After the much-hyped visit, and even some headlines saying he had struck a deal, the daily La Prensa Libre led Thursday's front page with a large close-up shot of the Argentine and the headline "Didn't sign." The story came after a Wednesday press conference that journalists mistook to be the big signing moment – "but no," wrote a disappointed journalist at the daily La Nación. La Volpe's visit included a tour around the La Sele's stadium-in-progress in La Sabana Metropolitan Park, about which he said the locker rooms could certainly use jacuzzis.

► Media Killings Persist in Honduras

A Honduran radio reporter's murder early this week was the eighth recorded journalist killing since March of this year in this Central American country (TT, May 28). Israel Zelaya, who worked for Radio International, was shot twice in the head and once in the chest, according to press reports. "(Honduran) government officials have sought to minimize the crimes and play down the pervasive climate of impunity in the country," said Carlos Lauría of the New York-based, independent, non-profit organization Committee to Protect Journalists in a statement. Anthony Mills, press freedom manager at the International Press Institute, told CNN newswire, "we would like to again underscore the fact that Honduras has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists".

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Tico Shakes Up Chess World



Photo courtesy of University of Texas at Dallas

Check Mate:
In a groundbreaking win at the U.S. Open Chess Championship this month, Costa Rica's 22-year-old Alejandro Ramírez beat many of the game's brightest lights.

By Matt Levin

Tico Times Staff

Costa Rican Alejandro Ramírez' earliest memories are of playing chess. His dad taught him the game at age four.

At 9, Ramírez already was considered a chess prodigy. And by 15, he became one of the world's youngest grandmasters after defeating a former Russian champion in the Dominican Republic. His biggest achievement to date came earlier this month when Ramírez won the U.S. Open in Irvine, Calif. – a chess tournament previously won by all-time greats like Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky.

Ramírez is the first-ever Latin American winner, beating out 467 other competitors. The road to his championship hasn't been easy, since Costa Rica has such a mild chess scene. He took advantage of chances to compete in Bolivia, China, Cuba, Russia, Argentina and many European countries to earn the prestigious grandmaster ranking.

Ramírez would love to see chess's popularity grow in Costa Rica. Currently, the 22-year-old San José native is an arts and technology graduate student at the University of Texas at Dallas. He spoke to The Tico Times by phone about his chess triumphs.

TT: What were your expectations going into the U.S. Open?

AR: I wanted to see how it would go. I was one of the top seeds but not the top. I hadn't played in a tournament this strong in a while. I wasn't really forcing myself to win it, but by the time the sixth round came, after defeating Grandmaster (Melikset) Khachiyan, I really pushed myself to finish strong in the last two rounds.

What does a victory in a tournament previously won by Fischer and Spassky mean to you?

It's a very big win. It puts me even more out there internationally. I'm not pressuring myself to win more tournaments just because I had success in this one. I just take it easy. I'm pretty happy with my results lately. I've been playing pretty good chess. So take it slow.

Is chess more like a hobby now – especially in America where the sport has become less mainstream?

I wouldn't say it's completely a hobby. But I am leaning more about using my master's degree (in video game engineering). I just finished an internship in California (at Blizzard Entertainment). I wouldn't say that chess has become less mainstream, but I have felt that it has lost some of the attention of the American public. However, if you go back to Europe, you'll find it hasn't lost its appeal.

What does it mean to you to be the first-ever Latin American winner of the U.S. Open?

Of course Costa Rica, and Latin America as a whole, don't have a lot of chess tradition, but it was pretty cool to be up there and be against ex-Soviet champions and U.S. champions, and to be able to win the tournament nonetheless.

How did you learn to play chess so well?

I started playing pretty young, when I was 4. And then I worked pretty hard with my dad and I started playing chess professionally when I was around 12 or 13, and I just dedicated all my free time to chess.

You've traveled the world as a chess player – is there much opportunity for chess players in Costa Rica?

You have to travel a lot if you're going to be a chess player, especially a chess player in Latin America because competition is pretty thin around there. I don't really go back and play tournaments here anymore. I still represent Costa Rica, and I still go back and visit my family. But I wouldn't say I play Costa Rican tournaments very often. ■

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