

THE CUENCA DISPATCH

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Carnival celebrations leave 55 dead and 171 injured across Ecuador

Authorities announced this week that celebrations for Carnival left 55 people dead and 171 people injured in Ecuador, most of them in traffic accidents.

During the holiday period between Saturday and Tuesday "55 people died due to different causes," announced the director of the ECUg11 Integrated Security Service, Juan Zapata.

He added that 56,688 emergency calls were received during the four days of Carnival,

compared to 66,130 in 2019 (a 2.5% reduction)

The director of the National Traffic Agency (ANT), Juan Pazos, also reported that there were 33 deaths linked to 139 traffic accidents.

He said that two mishaps involving public buses also lead to deaths. "In total, on public transport in Ecuador, there were nine deaths," said Pazos,

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Doctor is prosecuted for manslaughter in surgery related death of 8-year girl

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IESS App mobile application allows seniors to schedule appointments on their phone

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5 beach areas every Ecuadorian resident should visit at least once

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Cuenca hotels experienced a 70% occupancy rate during Carnival



During the Carnival holiday period, hotel occupancy in Cuenca reached 70 percent according to the Municipal Tourism Foundation for Cuenca (FMTC). This data was obtained after consulting several hotels and hostels in the city.

Several cultural and artistic events were held both in Cuenca and in different cantons of Azuay, such as Gualaceo, Sigsig, Paute, and authorities believe this helped raise the hotel occupancy rates.

"Since [last] Thursday we had around 12,000 people occupy 70% of the hotel rooms in Cuenca (considering that many tourists are also staying in family

homes)," said Angélica León, Executive Director of FMTC.

[This is in contrast to the 100% occupancy rates reported in places like Ambato, Manta and Salinas.]

The Deputy Manager of Environmental Management also announced that during the holiday, the Cajas National Parks were visited by 2,400 local, national and international tourists.

"We have had the visit of approximately 55,600 people visit [Cuenca], a significant number of tourists, that were also able to visit the Network of Municipal Museums that remained open throughout the holiday," León added.

Romo rules out mass deportations of foreigners

The Minister of Government, María Paula Romo, ruled out that the government is seeking the mass deportation of foreigners in the country with its requested reforms to the Human Mobility Law.

What the Government is looking for, she said, is that changes be made in the regulation to permit expedited deportation

proceedings, and if necessary, establish a clear list of grounds for inadmissibility.

These recommendations were made before the Sovereignty and International Relations Commission that prepares the report for the first debate on the draft reforms to the Mobility Law.

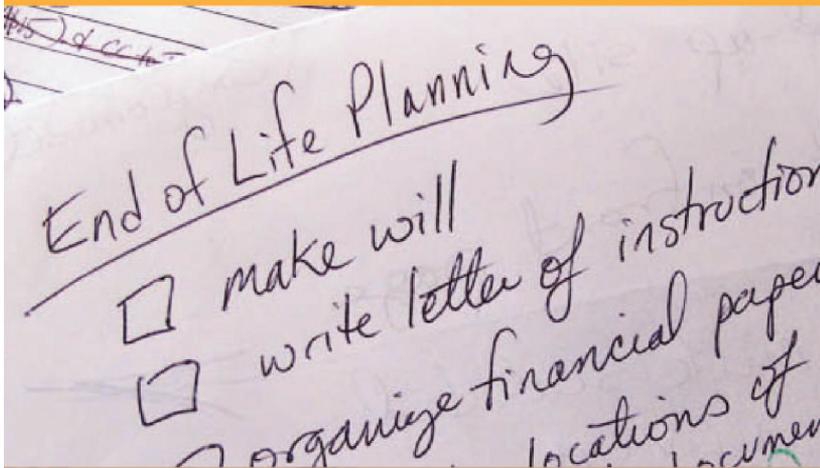
cont. page 4



Arrest made for influence peddling in passport case

see page >> 7

Naturally it's hard to think about,
but perhaps your next step (for your family)
should be more than just a note on your "To-do" list...



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I'M JUST SAGIN'

By Michael Soares

Don't kid yourself

It seems in just the week since I wrote my last column, that the world is becoming an even scarier place. I'm talking about the coronavirus. Yes, I'm serious. This is something I know about. I studied this for my profession, and I believe it has every bit of the possible danger that is being associated with it.

I won't waste the space here to talk about numbers, because by the time this comes out in the newspaper, the current numbers will seem low.

Let me be clear: this virus could easily become a pandemic. In fact, there is no reason to assume it won't. It has the viral characteristics that will allow that—it's easily transmitted, we have no viral memory of it in our immune systems, it can live on any surface and the incubation period is such that we can't tell if someone is infected until they start to present symptoms and they can be infectious before that.

On top of all that, there are now cases throughout the world where health agencies have been unable to identify the original source for some patients. In other words, it doesn't seem that these patients caught the virus from someone they interacted with.

Now in fairness, that can happen in viral infections. In some cases, "patient zero" is never found. But the disturbing thing is that this is happening in several places. That adds to the fear that this could become pandemic.

Add to all that that some leaders are trying to downplay the virus and say it isn't a serious problem for their country. Let me make sure we are all on the same page here: viruses know no political boundary lines. They don't care where they spread, to who they spread, or how much damage they do to the financial markets. They attack hosts in order to perpetuate. It's that simple.

To claim that the threat of the virus is being overblown by the media or an opposing political party is just nonsense. To try to downplay its potential spread because it is affecting the financial markets is just selfish and stupid.

Don't fall into the conspiracy theories about this either. The photos aren't faked. The stories aren't made up. The virus was not created and released by the US to cripple China. We haven't been able to find a cure for the common cold, never mind develop the ability to create a novel coronavirus.

The conspiracists will ask, "So where did it come from?" How about this, the earth. The earth and nature do this. Don't believe me? Then ask yourself this, "Who created and released the black plague in the 1340's?" It wasn't the US.

It was nature.

That killed 20 million people in Europe in 5 years. Granted that was a bacterium and not a virus, but it spread just as easily, travelling person to person pneumonically, or through the air.

And how about the 1918 influenza pandemic? Do you think that was created by man? That was the most severe pandemic in recent history. It was caused by an H1N1 virus with genes of avian origin. Although there is not universal consensus regarding where the virus originated, it spread worldwide during 1918-1919. In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918.

It's estimated that about 500 million people--or one-third of the world's population--became infected with this virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide.

Take all of that into account and then add the most frightening aspect of the corona virus on top of it: mass transportation. The plague and the 1918 flu didn't have that issue to deal with. The plague was slowly passed through Europe via personal interaction. The 1918 flu only spread from Europe to the US because of troops coming back from Europe near the end of World War I.

But now we have mass transportation that can take an infected person from a "hot zone" to a "clean" zone in a matter of hours. And remember, that infected person may not even show symptoms.

And the best some countries will do to stop that is to check the temperature and look for outward symptoms of people travelling from those hot zones (as Ecuador announced Wednesday).

We can hope for the best. We can believe that this won't spread much more and that it will all have been a big unnecessary scare like the year 2000 event.

But don't be lulled into stupidity. Don't believe something just because a politician tells you it. Believe the health officials ALL OVER THE WORLD who say this is a serious threat.

Be smart. Be careful. And be aware.

SUDOKU

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love Sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your Sudoku savvy to the test!

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a Sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the number will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

7		5	3		6		8	
3				9				
			5		2		6	
		2			9		1	6
1		3		2		7		9
9	4		7			3		
	3		6		4			
				8				1
	1		2		7	6		4

See answers on page 11

Word Scramble

There are 4 rivers that pass through Cuenca. The Tomebamba, Machangara, Tarqui and...

CAYUANNY

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Carnival celebrations leave 55 dead and 171 injured across Ecuador (Cont.)



Criminal Activity

Police reported that there were also 15 fatalities as a result of crimes, while the National Risk Management Service reported that seven people died drowned in different sectors of the country.

Pablo Rodríguez, General Director of Operations of the National Police, explained that police performed 1,024 control operations during the Carnival holiday and that 19 criminal organizations were dismantled, 34 vehicles were impounded, 41 firearms were confiscated, and 337 people were arrested for contraventions (alcohol intake, quarrels).

Rodríguez added that "688 road control operations were made, 2,031 citations were delivered, 198 vehicles were stopped, and tourist and road information was given to some 22,000 people."

Among other data, during the holiday period 192,922 citizens travelled throughout the country by public transport.

Related to that, ANT control agents recorded 1,477 speeding buses throughout the country.

Positive economic impact

Ricardo Zambrano, Undersecretary of Management and Development of the Ministry of Tourism, said that 725,931 people moved throughout the country during the holiday.

"This figure is important, since it is generating an economic impact of \$65.3 million of wealth nationwide, this greatly influences the local

economic revitalization and revival of destinations," Zambrano said.

Tourist destinations such as Ambato, Manta and Puerto López registered hotel occupations up to 100%, Zambrano said. The most visited locations were Ambato, Guano, Manta, Guaranda, Salinas, Paute and Baños.

Romo rules out mass deportations of foreigners (Cont.)



Romo said that the Government wants the law to regulate deportation in the most serious cases and to clearly establish cases in which cases it is not possible to deport the foreign citizen.

She explained that currently a person can only be deported after they have been prosecuted, sentenced and served the sentence. The proposed reform aims to review other powers to make decisions on immigration, for more serious crimes. In other words, to be able to deport criminals accused or convicted of serious crimes immediately, without serving a sentence in Ecuador.

"The Government does not attempt any mass deportation," Romo said. She added that deportation—by its characteristics and by the type of judicial procedure—has to be individualized. Therefore, she insisted that they are not seeking a mass deportation procedure.

"Each person has to take responsibility for their actions, it is not an expulsion by nationality," said the Minister of Government. Romo added that the reforms proposed by the Government do not require a constitutional reform.



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Doctor is prosecuted for manslaughter in surgery related death of 8-year girl



The Prosecutor's Office for "Persons and Guarantees of Cuenca" opened a trial last week against the physician Juan Pablo A., for the alleged crime of manslaughter for professional malpractice. The physician's victim Sofia G., 8, died during tonsillectomy surgery.

At the hearing of charges last Friday, Judge Carlos Guzmán ordered that Juan Pablo A. be monitored through the use of the electronic surveillance device and periodic filing. The judge also prohibited the suspect from leaving the country and from disposing of property. In addition, the court also issued protective measures for the victim's family members.

The investigation, led by prosecutor Paola Molina, began after the death of the girl Sofia G., 8, allegedly due to surgery known as tonsillectomy. Juan Pablo A. performed the surgery in a private hospital on November 18, 2019.

According to the autopsy report, the cause of death was due to an incision in a section of the left carotid artery and severe cerebral edema.

Legal data

Juan Pablo A. was prosecuted according to article 146, numeral 3, of the Organic Integral Criminal Code (COIP), whose sanction establishes a prison sentence of three to five years if the death is caused by unnecessary, dangerous and illegitimate actions.

José Carrasco Hospital has 21 new pieces of medical equipment



Hospital Regional del IESS "José Carrasco Arteaga"

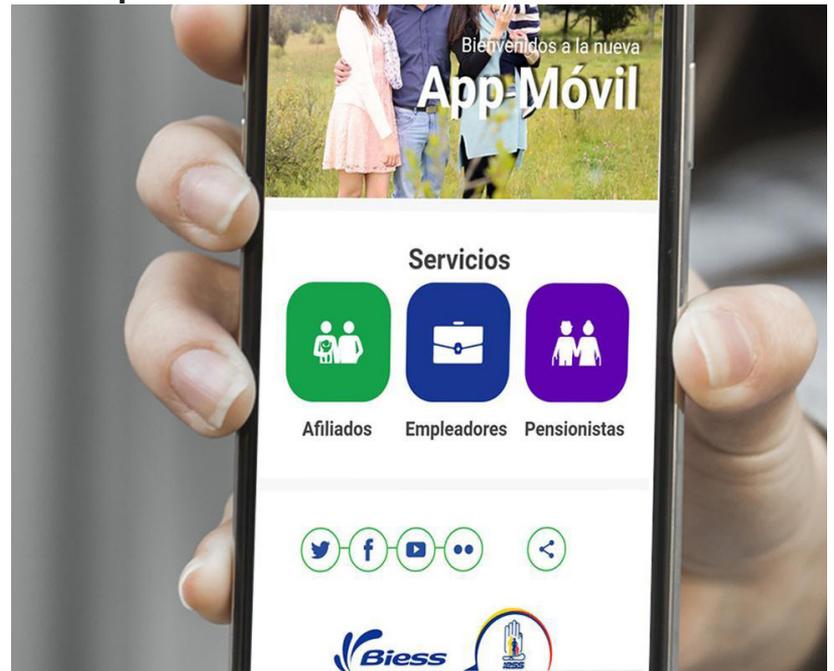
At a cost of nearly one million dollars, the José Carrasco Arteaga hospital of the Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security (IESS), has acquired 21 new pieces of medical equipment for use in 10 areas of the hospital.

Among the new medical devices are a colposcope, an incubator, a biological safety cabinet class II, two articulated gas arms for anesthesia station, a continuous suction aspirator and pieces of the latest technology. The equipment are destined for use in gynecology and obstetrics, the clinical pathology unit, the microbiology area, anesthesiology and in general surgery and other areas.

David Vera, Chief of Surgery for the hospital, said that these pieces of equipment will allow the hospital to continue to develop and pursue highly complex surgeries.

The Executive President of the IESS, Paúl Granda, said that the investment in these devices is part of a set of interventions that the hospital is undertaking during the renovation of the Trauma Center. "In this area there is more patient congestion and more space and a management model that means more attention is required," he said.

IESS App mobile application allows seniors to schedule appointments on their phone



In early February, the Ecuadorian Social Security Institute (IESS) launched the IESS App mobile app, that allows priority groups (those over 65 and under five years of age) to schedule medical appointments with their phone.

The service is available for appointments in Guayaquil, Quito and Cuenca.

Through the IESS App app, patients can make an appointment, check their next appointment and even see the indications for any medications they have been prescribed.

The application includes information and services for affiliates (patients), employers and retirees. For example, patients can view and download their work history, see their reserve or severance funds and also get a membership certificate.

In addition, in the option "Locate us," users can locate the nearest IESS hospital and learn the treatment options for each center.

The IESS App is in Spanish and requires you to register in the app before you can schedule any appointments. The app is available for both the iOS (Apple App Store) and Android (Google Play) systems.

You may also see an IESS Online application when searching for this app. Be sure to choose the "IESS App" for use on your mobile device.



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5 beach areas every Ecuadorian resident should visit at least once



Anyone who has visited Ecuadorian beaches can attest to the fact that they have a unique and special attraction. The country's geography, climate and differing cultural experiences make each one of them a completely idyllic place to enjoy a moment of relaxation.

There are many beaches to visit in Ecuador, but there are always some that are more visited than others by both domestic and foreign tourists. Here are the 5 most recommended beaches to visit during a holiday—for their beauty and everything else that each has to offer.

Galápagos Islands

There's no doubt that first place is occupied by the archipelago that charmed Charles Darwin. Here the turquoise waters merge with the intense blue of the sky and the abundant sunshine. It is a place full of a completely different fauna from that found in the continental territory and also endemic species that can be seen in abundance by tourists, especially the sea lions and iguanas that seem to be owners of the seawalls and docks.

The Galápagos islands offer white sand beaches, warm waters and impressive natural landscapes where one can find all kinds of water activities like snorkeling, diving and kayaking and beautiful land adventures on bicycles and while hiking. Of course, probably one of the most exciting adventures is exploring the marine fauna that offers a show full of diversity and color.

The following places are a must see when visiting the Galápagos: Santa Cruz Island: Tortuga Bay, "Los Alemanes" beach and Las Grietas. Isabela Island: Pearl Shell, Isabela Malecon. San Cristobal: Sleeping Lion.



Los Frailes Beach, Province of Manabí

The imposing peñascos (large rock or boulder formation) that border the coastal profile on this beach are a real spectacle for those who

stop to admire the landscape. The greenish waters and the warm sand create a special harmony. Los Frailes is located in a hidden place in the Machalilla National Park. The beach boasts calm waters and white sands, surrounded by impressive natural settings where forests, cliffs and other rock formations intermingle.

You can reach this beach by car or by two walking paths. Walking on the trails is usually an incredible experience, especially for those who love long strolls. Depending on the route taken, these paths can lead you to the beach in anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours. The longest trail is the most famous because it crosses a dry tropical forest, with viewpoints that allow you to appreciate a panoramic view of the city and other beaches.

Rosada Beach

This beautiful beach is located in the province of Santa Elena, between the communities of Palmar and Ayangué, and is part of the tourist corridor of the Ruta del Spondylus (Intrastate E15). It is 600 meters long with curious rock formations, and has a large variety of birds such as seagulls, herons, pelicans, etc. It owes its name to the color of the minerals that make up its sands. Playa Rosada can also be accessed by bus from Montañita; the trip takes about 40 minutes.

Same Beach in Esmeraldas

Same is one of the most exclusive beaches in Ecuador, and lays in a dream setting surrounded by hills and vegetation, with fine sands and calm waters. Very close to the beach, you'll find the town of de Súa, one of the most famous places in the country to enjoy the humpback whale-watching season that arrives in Ecuador between June and September.

The Salinas Lobería

La Lobería is a beach of coral sand, famous for the large number of sea lions that rest on its rocks and for its great surfing.

It is a beach within the Coastal Marine Wildlife Production Reserve Puntilla de Santa Elena, in the province of the same name. It is only five minutes by car from the main seawall of Salinas and is reached by entering the main gate of the FAE (Ecuadorian Air Force base). Access is free for nationals and foreigners.

The Ministry of Environment developed a new infrastructure plan that includes self-guided trails, the La Puntilla viewpoint, cabins, sanitary stations and a large cycle path built in harmony with nature. In fact, almost the entire reserve can be crossed by bicycle (entrance is not allowed after 5pm).

Ecuador has many options for those looking for a beach holiday, and while these five are the most sought after, don't hesitate to drop into Playas where it is said the sun shines year round, or to take the drive up the Ruta de Spondylus which starts around Ballenita (just north of Salinas) and goes along the coast all the way to the Colombian border.

Along the way you just may find the perfect beach for you.

Arrest made for influence peddling in passport case



Prosecutors have filed charges against Marco Vinicio G., for his alleged participation in the offense of "offering to conduct influence peddling." He was arrested after allegedly receiving money from a citizen in exchange for shortening the processing time of a passport in the Civil Registry.

Last Thursday, at a flagrancy qualification hearing, Judge Cecilia Otatti issued a thirty-day preventive detention order against the defendant. During that time, the Prosecutor's Office will try to determine whether there are others involved in the alleged crime.

Prosecutor Fernanda Aguirre reported that the victim had an appointment to get her passport for March 25th. However, she needed to leave the country before this date, so she contacted a cell phone number published on the Facebook account "Vicky Victoria;" the account holder offered to get passports for people in twenty-four hours.

Through messages, the victim agreed to meet Marco Vinicio G. at 10:00 on Wednesday, February 19, in Luis Cordero park in Cuenca. The defendant arrived with a companion, and along with the victim, they walked to a local business where he asked her for \$80, that she then deposited into the account of a woman.

From there they went to the Civil Registry. Along the way, Marco Vinicio G. contacted an official of this Institution, who allegedly told him that the money had been deposited and that she had obtained (them) an appointment for the same day.

The three people arrived at the Civil Registry and in a few minutes handed the victim her appointment ticket. After she paid an additional \$70 at the payment window—which corresponds to the cost for passport processing—she obtained her new passport and left the Civil Registry with Marco Vinicio G., who then allegedly demanded that the victim pay him an additional \$100. This led to a public argument; police officers who were nearby figured out what had happened and arrested Marco Vinicio G. and his companion.

Diego Cabezas, holder of the Civil Registry in zone 6 said that the Azuay Prosecutor's Office should investigate whether an official of the agency, who has the position of service operator, is also an accomplice of this crime and should be prosecuted as well.

The Prosecutor's Office presented—as evidence of the crime—the victim's version of what happened, the testimony of Cabezas and the Police officers involved and the Civil Registry certification of the victim's original appointment that was scheduled for March 25th.

Fire destroys 10 hectares of scrub and grassland near Portete

An extensive area of grasslands and shrubs were consumed by a fire in the protected area of the Yanuncay-Irquis area, in the Victoria del Portete parish.

According to the reports of the Fire Department, the burning happened at dusk last Tuesday, but due to the darkness and the difficulty of access, the fire-fighting tasks were suspended.

The task was resumed Wednesday morning with 10 firefighters, three service vehicles and a 4x4 vehicle. At noon, firefighters reported that the fire had been completely extinguished. They estimate that the flames consumed 10 hectares of primary and scrub forest.

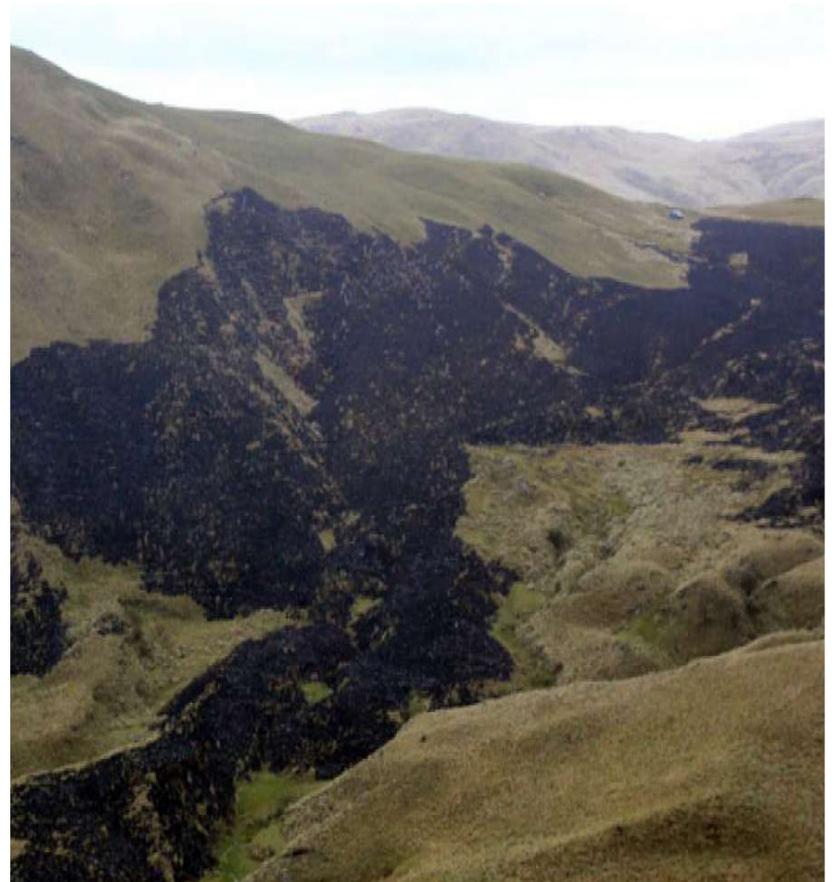
In the area where the burning occurred, ETAPA has places signs that warn that the practice of motorized sports is prohibited because it is an area of protective forest of water sources. However, there is no proof as to what started this most recent fire.

Forest Fire Education Campaign

Faced with the threat of forest destroying species of flora and fauna, many of them endemic and in danger of extinction, the Fire Department runs an active campaign called "I take care of the forests."

The campaign consists of visiting parishes and educational establishments to raise public awareness of the damage caused to the environment by forest burning.

During the talks, it emphasizes that the person who directly or indirectly causes fires in native or planted forests or moors, will be sanctioned with prison of one to three years. And they point out that if, as a consequence of this crime, the death of one or more people occurs, the penalty is from 13 to 16 years, according to article 246 of the Integral Criminal Code.



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An environmental commitment generates work in Turi parish



A total of 60,000 cloth bags, to replace plastic ones, are being made in the Tres Marias Association, a guild that is part of the popular and solidarity economy that manages its own projects.

In a workshop located in the Turi parish, 60,000 ecological cloth bags are being made as part of a project by the Azuay Prefecture to replace plastic bags.

The incessant noise of the sewing machines, the stamper, and the rolls and scraps of cloth scattered everywhere make up the scenery of the site. There, Mauricio Largo one of the members of the Tres Marias Association, is responsible for cutting the fabric and also the screen printing, while Martha Barros, on the sewing machine, stitches the pieces in to the 54 by 37 centimeters reusable fabric bag.

A total of eight people who are working daily to make this project materialize.

Support

Martha explained that with the support of the University of Azuay, a mold was made to help the workers make the perfect bag. "They provided us with a system so that the cuts are accurate and save fabric," she said.

"With three rolls of cloth we get 400 bags per day, and we distribute an amount each day according to the number of people who are working on the site," he said.

When they started, they had their machines; then the Prefecture supported them with two more for the process. The CAPIA trained them and the GAD Parish of Turi supported them in the follow-up of the organization.

The Tres Marias Association expects to add more allies to continue with their objective and to make sure these bags reach the entire province.

María del Carmen Farfán, coordinator of Community Economy of the Provincial Government, said that each bag costs the Prefecture 99 cents to make and for the pilot project they are being distributed free of charge at events organized by the institution.

She also noted that in the common market, the same—or lower quality—product is selling at \$2.10 per bag.

Because of the type of material used, the bag can be folded to the size of a cell phone and carried in a pocket, a wallet, or even in the glove compartment of the car.

"So, you can count on these when you buy or not," said Barros. The bags are, washable, very strong and have a capacity of up to 40 kilograms.

Having environmental alternatives and generating employment is the objective

The project was conceived as an alternative to replace plastic bags, which are being phased out of use in Cuenca because of the Ordinance prohibiting single-use plastic that was approved this year.

According to María del Carmen Farfán, Community Economy Coordinator of the Provincial Government, 38 community organizations participate in the project. They plan to include small artisans in the project as well.

"What is sought is to prevent monopolization or economic concentration in certain social sectors," explained the head of the agency.

Farfán added that what is important is that more priority sectors, not only of the Azorean capital, but of the entire province, can be involved in these processes.

The goal is to make a million cloth bags using strategies and links that are being established with the various organizations of the popular and solidarity economy.

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One million trees will be planted in Azuay this year



The Azuay Prefecture has a goal: planting a million trees every year to combat the effects of global warming.

According to the Prefecture, the trees will all native fruit and ornamental plants that will be sown in parishes and cantons. And they will first be planted along the banks of the province's rivers.

Yaku Pérez, Prefect of the province, explained that these degraded areas of land will be chosen due to the

effects of natural erosion and anthropic effects.

He added that it is a program of reforestation and global arborization, and that the Prefecture already has ready one million plants ready in three nurseries in Machángara, Tarqui and Yunguilla.

So, if you see people planting trees in your neighborhood, go over and thank them. Or maybe, get on your hands and knees and help them make the earth a better place.

Spain extradites Correa's former Chief of Intelligence



The Spanish National Court delivered Pablo Romero Quezada—the former National Secretary of Intelligence—to Ecuador this week, 20 months after his extradition was agreed to for the attempted kidnapping of an opponent of the government of former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa.

Romero was arrested on February 18th by order of the Spanish National Court and was ordered to prison while awaiting formalization, which was carried out last Friday.

The arrest occurred twenty months after Spain released Romero Quezada following his first arrest in Spain for his alleged involvement in the attempted kidnapping of Fernando Balda, the former deputy of the opposition party Partido Sociedad Patriótica.

Once Ecuadorian authorities requested the delivery of the former head of the Intelligence services, the Spanish National Court agreed to the extradition.

Ecuadorian judge Daniella Camacho believes that Romero is responsible for the operation in which Ecuadorian secret agents, under his orders, attempted to kidnap Balda in August 2012, in Colombia. Balda was held for about ninety minutes, but Colombian police thwarted

the kidnapping following a taxi driver's call.

Two Ecuadorian secret agents were sentenced to one year and nine months in prison for the attempted kidnapping after providing the Ecuadorian Justice Department with information implicating former President Correa and Romero Quezada in ordering the kidnapping.

Romero Quezada requested political asylum in Spain, which was denied.

The Ecuadorian International Society of Civil Society (RED) Network organization, has called the Romero Quezada "a persecuted politician," according to its secretary general, Manel García, who attributes it to "systematic political persecution" to those who participated from the Correa Government.

"Spain suffered 40 years of dictatorship; they cannot close their eyes to political persecution in another nation where democracy is only an appearance and abuse of power is a reality," García said in a statement.



Daniela Cordero,
Health Insurance

Daniela Cordero is the agent I talked to – her role includes finding us the best doctors in Ecuador who also speak English. She is very focused on that. She also actually knows doctors who do house calls.

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CRIME REPORT AND ACCIDENT REPORT

Cuenca and National Criminal Activity

(Cuenca) Two individuals who physically assaulted police are facing legal proceedings for the crime of attack and resistance.

Police reported that on Monday, a uniformed police officer who was removing drunks from Padre Miguel Street was attacked by a subject, causing a wound to the officer's forehead.

In another incident, a police officer was assaulted when he responded to a 911 call for help in a domestic violence situation at a located in Visorrey.

According to article 283 of the COIP, a person who attacks or resists with violence or threats to public employees, to the depositories or agents of the public force, will be sanctioned with imprisonment from six months to two years.

If the aggression is committed by many people and as a result of a previous concert, they will be punished with imprisonment of one to three years.

(Cuenca) Last Saturday, February 22nd, ECU 911 dispatched an ambulance from the José Carrasco Arteaga hospital, from the Ecuadorian Social Security Institute (IESS), to Hurtado de Mendoza Avenue and Rio Upano Street, north of Cuenca.

When paramedics arrived at the site, they confirmed that two adults—a father and son—had several sharp wounds and they requested the presence of the National Police.

The first responders provided pre-hospital care to the two citizens at the scene because the wounds were superficial.

The police of the Terrestrial Terminal circuit explained that after inquiries and testimonies of the victims, it was confirmed that unknown subjects stole their belongings and that during the struggle the criminals injured them with a knife.

They explained that the robbery occurred when the two men walked to their homes under the influence of alcohol.

Cuenca Area Traffic Accidents

(Cuenca) Mishaps on the roads of the Azuay cantons were the main emergencies attended by the relief agencies during the Carnival holiday.

Among the last accidents in Cuenca was one that happened at 06:53 on Tuesday on the El Valle-Santa road, El Salado sector, where a truck, after leaving the road rolled down a slope.

First responders from the Fire Department and the Ministry of Health provided first aid to two occupants and transferred them to hospital centers.

Other accidents that left several injured and substantial material losses occurred between Sunday afternoon and evening.

On Los Cerezos avenue and Las Hortensias street, a Suzuki car crashed into a house.

Paramedics of the Red Cross, Fire Department and the IESS helped four wounded people who were inside the vehicle and a woman who was in the house, who suffered serious injuries from falling debris.

Another traffic accident that left six people injured occurred on the Cuenca-Loja road, La Jarata sector. Nabón firefighters reported that a van, after driving off the road, hit a large rock.

(Cuenca) Two people died and four others were injured due to the overturning of a Chevrolet Silverado van, on the Barabón-Soldados-Chaucha road in Cuenca.

The victims were identified as Klever Fernando Montaña Siguenza, 29, and Sandra Cecilia Chaho Villa, 35.

The accident happened around 6:50 p.m. on the last Sunday, February 23rd.

ECU 911 dispatched personnel from the Fire Department, Ministry of Public Health (MSP), Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security (IESS) and Civil Transit agents of the Municipal Mobility Company (EMOV EP).

Rescuers confirmed that two people had no signs of life when they arrived. They required special equipment and use of ropes to reach an area of difficult access.

According to reports from first responders, the van lost control and rushed at least 100 meters down a steep ravine.

The cause of the accident is under investigation.

(Girón) Five people were injured as the result of a traffic accident on Sunday night on the Girón - Santa Isabel highway.

The incident occurred around 12:00 a.m., in the El Pongo sector of the Girón canton. Reports indicate that for unknown reasons, a gray Chevrolet vehicle, lost control and fell down an embankment.

Girón Fire Department Personnel, Traffic Commission of Ecuador, Ministry of Public Health and residents of the sector helped the occupants who were trapped in the vehicle.

The injured were transferred to the Hospital of Girón, with a serious prognosis. According to the driver's statements, the cause of the accident was due to the dense fog in the sector.

(Girón) A traffic accident on the road to El Chorro, a kilometer and a half from the Cuenca - Girón - Pasaje road, left one dead on Saturday afternoon, February 22, 2020.

The incident occurred at the entrance to the community of Fatima at 1:00 p.m., when a car lost control of its lane, and ended up crashing and overturning.

The red Chevrolet car was heading towards the Girón canton, when for unknown reasons it left the road and hit a telephone service booth.

Paramedics of the Fire Department, Ministry of Public Health and National Police arrived at the place where they confirmed the death of the driver who suffered severe head trauma. It appeared that he was thrown from the car after the impact.

The citizen was identified as Jorge Torres, 59, a teacher from Girona at the Abraham Barzallo school.



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Ecuador seeks infrastructure investment of more than \$1 billion



Ecuador is seeking private investors to fund a series of infrastructure projects worth more than \$1 billion. The country is also asking for “confidence” in the reforms that President Lenin Moreno has initiated to address the country’s financial security.

This was announced by Gabriel Martínez, the Minister of Transportation and Public Works, who is embarking on the search for private partners to offset the budget reduction that the Ministry has suffered in recent years.

“The ministry has gone from an average [investment budget] of \$1 billion dollars annually in the last decade, to \$340 million between 2019 and 2020,” Martínez says. This is money that should be used for “lagged projects (debts payable from ongoing projects) and also some new and maintenance of existing roads.”

The big cut in the Ministry’s budget is due to the financial needs of a country that, in 2017, discovered an accumulated debt much higher than the one declared by the previous Government. This debt has left the country with serious problems in finding financing in the open markets.

To ask for the help of international entities, Ecuador entered into a major adjustment at the public level in 2019 and directed its investment strategy to the “public-private alliance.” “The Ministry is really in a situation in which either it seeks the private (sector) to make new constructions or it becomes very complex to do them,” said Martínez.

Martínez added that there are priorities for the Ministry such as the construction of a Metroférico for Quito, estimated to cost \$740 million, the concession of the port of Esmeraldas, expected to need \$100-150 million in funding, and the installation of non-intrusive inspection systems in the country’s ports (installation of scanners), expected to cost \$150-200 million.

Other projects on the Ministry’s slate are: the South Viaduct of Guayaquil, estimated to \$455 million; the concession of 33 kilometers of road between Loja and Catamayo (in the south), for an estimated \$40 million; the installation of photo-radar systems, coming in at \$57 million, and the concession of the Manta airport, proposed to cost \$70 million.

Martínez emphasizes that seeking outside investors is not a “privatization” of public assets—which can generate discrepancies in Ecuadorian public opinion—but rather “concessions.”

“Privatization means detachment from the asset, deliver[ing] ownership of the asset to the private (sector). This is a concession process in which the asset remains with the central State,” she emphasized. What Ecuador is looking for is a situation in which the Government does not have “anything to invest,” “or risk,” or in which it will “risk the minimum.”

Martínez points out that, unlike how [large public] works were executed in the past, a performance calculation is being made for the State, and not just for investment coverage.

The intention of the President, says Martínez is to assemble a mixture of foreign and national investment, that is ultimately “private.” “In port

concessions we really have a lot of interest from foreign companies ... it can be local as it can be external, but private investment for all the concession projects we have,” he said.

In that order, Martínez said he expected a total of “about \$1 billion in investment,” including the expansion of some roads from two to four lanes.

In May, the Moreno Government enters its last year of control, following the social uprising of October 2019, in which—due to a wave of protests—it had to reverse crucial decisions it was trying to enact to increase the income of the State.

Moreno also had to reverse an economic bill and other commitments included in a fiscal plan that he had reached with international organizations, such as the IMF. This fiscal plan granted the country a credit line of more than \$10 billion.

“Obviously the government had a hard time in October. The country risk skyrocketed, then also the non-approval of the new economic law had a negative impact. This obviously drives the financing for the projects a little, or becomes more expensive,” the minister acknowledged.

But Martínez said, that the country is demonstrating that “investment can be captured,” that its processes are “transparent,” and that “there is no complaint from the companies that are participating” already in concessions and projects.

The search for investors in the current conditions is not easy and there have been circumstances in which a single bidder has appeared. Therefore, Martínez clarified that he is working to “make them more attractive” and “that there are more participants” and considers that “right now there is an environment of much more stability and confidence,” above all, for the efforts aimed at offering the investor legal guarantees that they didn’t have it before.

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Solution to Sudoku puzzle on page 3

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