



CHILENEWS

No. 28 – February 4, 2002

Did You Know?

The portal culturachile.cl, developed by the Communications and Culture Secretariat, was selected as one of the 12 best portals on the Internet this year. Canadian firm Nurun Inc. selected the site from among over 800 located in the Americas and Europe.

The young Chilean soprano Angela Maureen Marambio won Barcelona's 2002 International Francisco Viñas Song Contest. The jury selected her unanimously from among 287 participants.

Fray Jorge National Park protects a unique phenomenon: a hydrophilic (very wet) forest surrounded by a semi-arid area. Located some 450 kilometers north of Santiago, the park is home to 19 species of mammals, 80 birds and over 400 plant species.

2.6% was the inflation rate in 2001; the second lowest in 50 years.

To Consolidate Democracy

The government's proposal to amend some aspects of the Constitution of 1980 passed its first legislative hurdle successfully. By a broad majority, the Senate approved the idea of such a bill, clearing the way for its discussion in both chambers.

The proposed reform amends, strikes or replaces 43 of the 123 permanent provisions of the Constitution implemented by the military regime. It shortens the presidential term from six to four years, bolsters the oversight capabilities of the Chamber of Deputies and eliminates the sentences that stated that the armed forces should "guarantee the Republic's institutional order."

Since the return to democracy, the administrations of the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia have sought to amend these aspects of the Constitutions which are considered less than fully democratic, although previous attempts failed due to a lack of quorum. This time, however, agreement on the amendments has been reached with members of the opposition (from the Right).

One of the key points in the bill is the elimination of appointed and lifetime Senators and the replacement of the current binomial electoral system that seriously distort the popular will. The negotiations on the issue are at a standstill, however, as the administration conditions approval to passage of both aspects, while the opposition favors only the end of the appointed senators.

As President Ricardo Lagos explained, "we want an elected Parliament, yet one that represents the will of Chile and that excludes no sectors."

In addition, the bill acknowledges the diversity of the Chilean nation and notes special concern for original people minorities.

And Now, Electronic Signatures

Technological modernization continues in Chile: Congress just approved a bill on Electronic Signatures and Documents. Not only is this a boost to the development of the Internet and the expansion of e-commerce, but also serves to strengthen legal and technical remedies for cybernauts. Chile is the 15th country in the world to pass legislation on this topic.

Thanks to the new law, companies, individuals and governmental organizations will be able to sign electronic contracts, buy and sell goods and

Facts

Unemployment dropped to 7.9% in the fourth quarter of 2001, a percentage point below the previous quarter.

Beginning January 1, the general duty applied to products imported into Chile is 7%, down from 8%.

Chile's Foreign Investment Committee (which reports to the Ministry of the Economy), received an award as the world's Best Investment Promotion Agency. The World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (Waipa) found that Chile's FIC provided the information requested of them more efficiently, exhaustively and faster than any other.

In 2001, sales over the Internet rose by 60% in Chile as compared to 2000. Virtual transactions originating in Chile last year were worth 30 million dollars.

The English magazine **The Banker** recognized Chilean Carlos Massad as "Central Bank President of the Year 2001 for South America."

services over the Internet and speed legal procedures. The system will be fully operational during the second half of 2002, once the corresponding implementing legislation has been approved.

Foreign trade is high on the list of those sectors benefiting from the measure: electronic signatures will provide a failsafe means of ensuring the accuracy of documents sent electronically. Furthermore, their legitimacy will be beyond repute in the courts. In other words, an exporter or importer has an instant legal guarantee the moment the trade takes place, without the need for a physical signature on any papers.

Electronic balloting is also expected to become available in the future.

Gemini: A Window on the Cosmos

One of the world's clearest windows on outer space opened on January 18: the Gemini South International Observatory. The facility is located on Mount Pachón, northeast of La Serena (some 600 kilometers north of Santiago).

This modern astronomic center will operate in conjunction with its twin telescope (Gemini North) – installed in 1999 on Mauna Kea, Hawaii – to cover the entire sky and thus access key objects in outer space. Mount Pachón was selected for its crystal clean skies, air stability (at 2,700 meters) and isolated location, far from the pollution of manmade lights.

Chile joined the Gemini project in 1992, with a 5% share that ensures access by Chilean astronomers. It is "the first time Chile is a partner in a project of this scope. We are talking about an investment of over 200 million dollars," highlighted President Ricardo Lagos during the opening ceremony.

In addition to Gemini South, construction is underway in Chile on the Southern European Observatory (with a VLT or Very Large Telescope project), with three of its four telescopes already operational on Mount Paranal, some 900 kilometers further north; and the Magellan Project sponsored by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, DC, which consists of the construction of two telescopes with diameters of 6.5 meters, on Mount Las Campanas, north of La Serena. One of the two is already finished.

Lapis Lazuli: The Blue Gem

As unique and scarce as diamonds, lapis lazuli can be found in high quality deposits only two places on earth: Ovalle (Chile) and Badakshan (Afghanistan). Depletion of the mines and the war in Afghanistan have left Chile as virtually the sole producer of this semi-precious deep blue stone traded actively in international markets.

The Chilean deposit, Flor de los Andes, was discovered in the mid 19th century, although the use of the mineral dates back over to 2000 years. Evidence found in Chile shows that the local indians carved lapis lazuli into arrow tips, among other uses.

Quotes from President Lagos

“Today, decisions have been made that have to do with the future. I refer to the procurement that will ensure that we continue to live in a world at peace.”

On the decision to purchase
F-16 aircraft from the U.S..
January 30, 2002

“The constitutional amendment [to the electoral system] will be done based on a Parliament selected by the proper channels. Just as we are against appointed and lifetime Senators, we are against an electoral system that does not adequately represent what this country is.”

On the constitutional amendments.
January 19, 2002

“At this time, we have a country that is recovering, despite all the hardships. This year we can debate whether we will grow at 3, 3.5 or 4%, but Chile will expand in a world where the trend is toward 0 growth. We have more reasons to be optimistic than pessimistic.”

On *Biobío Radio*, January 21, 2002

“Our plan for the year is to combat the drop out rate, because we want all children to spend at least 12 years in school. We understand this to be the only way to prepare ourselves for the future.”

On the accent to be placed on education
this year. January 21, 2002.

Chile mines a pale blue color lapis of tremendous purity and quality. Annual production stands at some 300 tones, with forecasts for 2002 showing growth of as much as 50%. Most of the exports are finished products: handicrafts, decorative pieces, flatware, letter openers and floor coverings. The most recent use is as a pigment that is added to paints and dyes: thanks to its limited toxicity, lapis coloring is now being used in everything from the automobile industry to cosmetics.

La Sebastiana: Winged Yet Firmly Rooted

Pablo Neruda sought a place to write calmly and “escape from the fatigue of Santiago.” He found a house perched above the port of Valparaíso, among the narrow alleyways that sculpt the hills, which he called “La Sebastiana.” Built on the very spot where “the entire bay can be grasped in a single glance,” on Bellavista hill, the home met the poet’s demands: “Not too far up, nor too far down; reclusive, but not excessively so; neighbors, preferably invisible; original, but not uncomfortable; sublimely winged yet firmly rooted.”

Following Neruda’s death in 1973, the house remained closed for almost 20 years, until it was restored and transformed into a museum in 1992. Its 10th anniversary was celebrated in January, with a variety of free cultural activities: a International Story Telling Meeting, a gathering of strolling singers (“*payadores*”) and an exhibit of embroidery from another of the Nobel Laureate’s homes in Isla Negra.

At La Sebastiana today there is also a cultural center (that occupies two of its five floors), a poetry workshop for youth, and an art gallery displaying works by Chilean artists on a monthly basis. The facilities include a coffee shop, bookstore, stained glass-making workshop, and the permanent exhibit of Neruda’s magical collections and personal possessions.

“War” on Rapa Nui

These days, people on Easter Island are fixating and enthusiastically preparing for the annual *Tapati Rapa Nui* celebration to be held February 9-22.

More than a party, *Tapati Rapa Nui* is an outpouring of cultural expression. Competitions are held in variety of traditional sports, such *haka pei* – sliding downhill on banana tree trunks – and a sort of islander triathlon. Locals also compete in body painting and in typical handicrafts: carvings in wood or tree bark, as well as stringing seashell necklaces. Typical foods and Polynesian dances are also part of the festivities. The latter is one of the toughest competitions and, to the delight of the locals, one in which some foreign tourists dare to participate.

To say that the island practically comes to a standstill for *Tapati* is no exaggeration, as most of the islanders revel in the merriment. That’s why they say: “*Tapati* is like war... in terms of competition.”

Overheard

“Success in the global economy comes to countries that maintain fiscal discipline, open their borders to trade, privatize inefficient state enterprises, deregulate their domestic markets, and invest in the health and education of their people. And those who promise painless protectionism or security through statism, assure a bleak and stagnant future for their people. Countries that stay on the hard road of reform are rewarded. Just look at Chile. Chile has cut its poverty rate in half over the last decade. It has cut its child mortality rate by almost two-thirds since 1980.”

George Bush, President of the United States.
In his speech to the OAS on conditions in the Americas. Washington, DC, January 16, 2002

“We have a model nearby (Chile), that develops all of its potential, defends its interests and is part of the world community.”

Eduardo Duhalde, President of Argentina.
Buenos Aires, January 13, 2002

“There is no evidence of contagion in Chile as a result of the Argentinean situation, since Chile’s economy is well grounded in solid economic policies.” “The macroeconomic indicators look very, very good.”

Anne Kruger, First Deputy Managing Director,
IMF. Santiago, January 18, 2002

Q&A

2002 National Population and Housing Census

When will the census be conducted and by whom?

The census will take place on April 24, a decade after the previous tally. The National Statistics Institute (INE) is responsible for the count and, through a team of 385,000 volunteers, will survey some 15.6 million people from the northern border to Chile’s Antarctic territory.

The total cost of the process is 2.15 million dollars, including the drafting of the questions (reflecting information and the needs of different institutions within Chile), practical roll-out and the announcement of the final results.

What is on the questionnaire?

The form contains 36 questions, divided into three sections: Population, Housing and Household. The questions are similar to the previous version in order to facilitate comparisons, although this year’s study will also follow the parameters used by the Mercosur to allow contrasts to be drawn among member countries of that trading bloc.

What’s new?

New topics have been added to define better who Chileans are and how they live: access to new technologies (computers, Internet connection, cellular telephones, cable and satellite TV), use of modern appliances in the household; quality of building materials; membership in ethnic groups identified in the Indigenous Peoples Law; religious options beyond Catholic and Evangelical: none, atheist, agnostic; Jewish; Muslim; Jehovah Witness; Mormon; Orthodox; or other religion or belief.

When will the results be available?

The goal is to publish the final results by the first half of 2003. Nonetheless, preliminary results will be announced this year.

Agenda

- February 21: Working visit by President Ricardo Lagos to Sweden.
- February 22-23: Progressive Leaders Summit. Sweden.
- February 25-26: Official visit by President Lagos to Finland.
- February 26-28: Official visit to Italy and the Vatican

EDITOR -IN-CHIEF

Javier Luis Egaña

Director, Communication and Culture Secretariat

EDITOR

María Paz del Río

Chief, International Press Department

TEXT

International Press Department

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE SECRETARIAT
MINISTRY GENERAL GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT

depreint@segegob.cl