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Inside C2

# Southern DAILY

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Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

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Tuesday, July 3, 2018 | www.today-america.com | Southern News Group

## In bloody drug war, Mexico's new leader may try negotiating

CHILPANCINGO, Mexico (Reuters) - For the past 12 years, Mexico has fought violent drug gangs by deploying thousands of police, soldiers and intelligence officers to crack down on cartels and their leaders.

Presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador addresses supporters after winning the presidential election, in Mexico City, Mexico July 1, 2018. REUTERS/Alexandre Meneghini  
If its new president-elect gets his way, however, negotiation may replace the hard-line strategy that critics say has only perpetuated violence.

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a leftist who won on Sunday after two previous attempts at the presidency, wants to rewrite the rules of the drug war, aides said, suggesting negotiated peace and amnesties for some of the very people currently being targeted by security forces.

"The failed strategy of combating insecurity and violence will change," Lopez Obrador said in his victory speech Sunday night, repeating his call to address the socioeconomic ills that push people toward the drug trade and other crimes.

"More than through the use of force, we will tend to the causes that give rise to insecurity and violence," the president-elect added. He said his team will immediately begin consulting with human rights groups, religious leaders and the United Nations to develop a "plan for reconciliation and peace."

So far, his proposals remain vague. And any move toward amnesty, while aimed at lesser and non-violent offenders, is sure to face opposition from the general public, rivals in Congress and U.S. allies who helped Mexico orchestrate its force-based approach.

Still, Olga Sanchez, Lopez Obrador's proposed interior minister, said the new administration would move fast to reconsider drug policies and a militaristic approach that, despite toppling some high-profile kingpins, failed to prevent more than 200,000 murders since first adopted in 2006.

"As soon as we get in, we're quickly going to take some dramatic decisions," Sanchez told Reuters in an interview before the election.

She conceded that any shift, like the demobilization of the military troops fighting drug gangs, would need to be gradual. Longer-term goals, Sanchez added, include decriminalizing the recreational use of marijuana and the cultivation of opium for medicinal purposes.

To consider the possibility of negotiated peace, she said, her team has studied Colombia's peace process with its biggest guerrilla group, which allowed rebel leaders to avoid prison. Aides have also begun planning legislation for "transitional justice."

Typically, such justice involves leniency for those who admit guilt, truth commissions to investigate atrocities and the granting of reparations for some victims. Any clemency, Sanchez said, would be aimed toward farmers, drug couriers and other non-violent law-breakers caught up in the trade - not assassins.

Sanchez said any plan for an amnesty would go to a public referendum. If it received public support, she added, the administration would then put it before Congress, where Lopez Obrador's National Regeneration Movement and allies also gained seats on Sunday. The mere notion of amnesty disturbs many.

One recent newspaper poll found that seven in 10 Mexicans oppose it. Victims' rights groups are also opposed.

"I want to see the guilty behind bars," said Laura Flores, whose husband, Daniel Velasquez, is believed to have been murdered along with 15 other people in 2015.

Flores lives in the Pacific state of Guerrero, one of Mexico's most violent and a region in which a Catholic bishop in recent years has gained attention, and public praise from Lopez Obrador, because of negotiations with local drug cartels.

Lopez Obrador first broached the notion of amnesty in a speech



Presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador addresses supporters after winning the presidential election, in Mexico City, Mexico July 1, 2018. REUTERS/Alexandre Meneghini

last December in the opium-growing mountains of Guerrero, where much of the heroin bound for the United States originates. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, or DEA, Mexico is the source of 93 percent of the drug in the country.

The militarized drug fight, Lopez Obrador argues, has failed to stop narcotics smuggling and violence and does not address the poverty that leads many to the drug trade to begin with.

In Guerrero, Bishop Salvador Rangel since 2016 has been pioneering an approach that proponents of amnesty say has a better chance of succeeding.

The approach basically accepts that armed criminals are de facto authorities in some regions. Getting gangs to reduce violence, they argue, is likelier than destroying them.

The 72-year-old bishop, whose Chilpancingo-Chilapa diocese is one of Mexico's most dangerous, meets with gang leaders and seeks to dissuade them from murdering priests, local politicians and others often targeted by narcos.

When one of his priests received a death threat after preaching against drug violence two years ago, Rangel handed himself over to the gang leader who made the threat. The bishop convinced the drug boss to spare the priest's life, Rangel said, and he began regular meetings with various gangs in the region.

"I've asked them to try and stop killing, stop kidnapping and stop extorting people," Rangel said in a recent interview in a church in Chilpancingo, Guerrero's capital. "Thankfully, they've responded."



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# Commuters cheer as Loop 610/U.S. 290 access lanes set to open

By Dug Begley

The Fourth of July isn't the only thing Houston drivers can celebrate next week, as transportation officials plan to untie one of the region's worst traffic knots.

By Monday morning crews expect to open the permanent connection from the northbound lanes of the West Loop to westbound U.S. 290, shifting the lanes back to the left side of the loop as the interchange was in its previous form — but with key improvements that will make it a smoother and safer trip, Texas Department of Transportation officials said.

"The big thing is there is no weaving anymore," said Hamoon Bahrami, project engineer for the U.S. 290 project.

Workers are putting the final touches on the new connection from northbound Loop 610 to westbound U.S. 290.

After years of construction along U.S. 290 in Harris County, commuters are anxious for completion but also happy to see portions of the project are already improving.

"I can say I survived it, I made it through to see it open up," Jason Wasserman, 54, said as he stopped for gasoline on the way home to Jersey Village from his office in The Galleria. "It does look good."

For two years, drivers have slogged through a sometimes maddening merge using a temporary ramp to the ramp from Interstate 10 to U.S. 290. The shift has been especially trying to northbound drivers on Loop 610, who fight for position for the single lane headed to U.S. 290, which can line traffic up for nearly a mile during peak commuting periods or when there is an accident.

Monday's shift, preceded by a weekend-long series of closings, puts the freeway back like it was before construction began, with the two left lanes of northbound Loop 610 curving left onto westbound U.S. 290 and the three right lanes continuing on the loop.

The main before-and-after difference is that drivers from I-10 now have their own direct access to U.S. 290, avoiding a chaotic weave as traffic along Loop 610 raced to make it into the correct lane.

The construction area for U.S. 290 project near the Loop 610-290 interchange Thursday, June 28, 2018, in Houston. TxDOT is planning to return traffic to its normal flow from before the interchange work started, with northbound Loop 610 merging from the left onto westbound U.S. 290.

The interchange is one of 13 projects widening portions of U.S. 290 from Loop 610 to Waller County. The 38-mile construction zone — representing \$1.8 billion worth of construction — has been a gauntlet for drivers as narrow lanes and heavy truck traffic made it a white-knuckle journey for many motorists.

"I guess I got used to it, if you can ever get used to something like that," said Cliff Daugherty, 55, who drives often in the Cypress area for his plumbing business.

Drivers started seeing signs of progress, slowly, and finally some relief earlier this year. Portions outside the Grand Parkway — the most northwestern segments — opened in late March with four lanes in each direction. Eastbound lanes from Pinemont to Loop 610 opened earlier this month. Lanes westbound from Antoine to Pinemont opened Monday.

Throughout the summer, many more openings are planned, along the freeway main lanes, frontage roads and key exits and entrances. Many of the main lanes between Loop 610 and the Sam Houston Tollway in both directions will be open by mid-July, said Frank Leong, area engineer for TxDOT's West Harris County office.

One key piece of that timeline is completion of the bridge at Fairbanks North Houston Road, where crews were busy Thursday completing metal work before they can pour concrete along the span.



The construction area for U.S. 290 project near Fairbanks North Houston Road Thursday, June 28, 2018, in Houston

Work on the interchange, like much of the U.S. 290 work, is months behind initial schedules. But it remains on pace for all freeway lanes to open by year's end, Leong said. The middle portions between the Sam Houston Tollway and Grand Parkway will likely be the last completed, as bridge work in the area is behind other segments.

Even once main lanes are open, Leong said crews will be active in the area for months, completing frontage roads and local intersections, along with a new bridge carrying FM 1960 over the freeway.

Work also remains at the Loop 610 and U.S. 290 interchange, where crews will finish the direct maps from I-10, which were halted by the temporary Loop 610 connection, along with other key exits to Katy Road via southbound Loop 610.

The progress so far has at least softened some of the concerns TxDOT officials have heard over the past few years.

"People are becoming a bit more positive," Leong said. "They're seeing we are moving forward and I think that's giving them some relief."

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美南新聞日報  
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Houston, TX 77072  
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Mexico's Presidential Election



Presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador waves as he addresses supporters after polls closed in the presidential election, in Mexico City



# National Geographic Launches Effort To Reduce Plastic Waste

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

In addition to changing the packaging on its own magazine, the National Geographic initiative will include an awareness campaign about plastics pollution, investment in research programs and partnerships with companies like S'Well and The North Face, which will sell shirts made from recycled bottles collected from National Parks. The partnership between The North Face and the National Park Foundation also provides a dollar for every product sold to support projects in National Parks, according to the foundation's website.

Nick Mallos, the director of the Trash Free Seas program for the advocacy group Ocean Conservancy, said it's important to emphasize that there is no single solution to the issue of plastic pollution but that the commitment from National Geographic and other companies is a positive step. "I think it's fantastic that they've covered this issue so holistically — specifically, to see all the facets of ocean plastic that they've explored in this piece. These initiatives can have a tremendous impact," Mallos said.



**Plastic bottles choke the Cibeles fountain, outside city hall in central Madrid. An art collective called Luzinterruptus filled this and two other Madrid fountains with 60,000 discarded bottles last fall.**

**Related**

**This National Geographic Cover Has People Buzzing For An Important Reason The striking cover certainly makes you think.**

They say you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, but magazines — including Nation-

al Geographic — have long been known for their iconic covers that spark conversation. Now, the 130-year-old publication has new cover art to add to the collection of images that get people buzzing. The June 2018 issue, "Planet Or Plastic?", features what appears to be an iceberg. But look more closely:



**"Plastic Bag" magazine cover**

Yep, it's a plastic bag. The artwork, called "Iceberg Plastico," was actually created in 2017 by Mexican artist Jorge Gamboa, but National Geographic saw the illustration and decided it would be the perfect image to kick off its "Planet or Plastic" campaign, the magazine's "multiyear effort to raise awareness about the global plastic trash crisis."

The amazing cover has already done a great job of prompting discussion all over the internet. Vaughn Wallace, the magazine's senior photo editor, tweeted out the cover on May 16 and it has already gotten more than 57,000 retweets.



**Gerald Butts**

✓@gmbutts  
Brilliant cover. This one will be an icon. Well done, @Nat-

Geo. <https://twitter.com/NatGeoMag/status/996752298822037505>  
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And National Geographic is walking the walk itself. Starting with this issue, Wallace said the magazine will no longer be shipped to readers in a plastic bag, but will be sent out in a paper envelope instead. "This change alone will save more than 2.5 million single-use plastic bags every month," wrote Editor-in-Chief Susan Goldberg. "We've also challenged all our international partners — who publish 36 local-language editions of National Geographic around the globe — to get rid of plastic wrappers by the end of 2019."



Under a bridge on a branch of the Buriganga River in Bangladesh, a family removes labels from plastic bottles, sorting green from clear ones to sell to a scrap dealer. Waste pickers here average around \$100 a month.

Goldberg went on to assert that the plastic wrappers effort is just the first step in a larger campaign. "Under the campaign banner of 'Planet or Plastic?' we'll deploy content across all our platforms to raise awareness and encourage consumers to act," she wrote.

The cover story was written by Laura Parker and features data, stories and even more photos of just how bad the plastic problem is.

"The miracle material has made modern life possible," Parker wrote. "But more than 40 percent of it is used just once, and it's choking our waterways."

Reducing the amount of plastic in our environment is an enormous issue that will require a global commitment to change. Luckily, National Geographic isn't tackling this issue solo. Other efforts to reduce the amount of plastic in the environment are underway



**On Okinawa, Japan, a hermit crab resorts to a plastic bottle cap to protect its soft abdomen. Beachgoers collect the shells the crabs normally use, and they leave trash behind.**



"Planet or Plastic" is the cover story on the June 2018 issue of "National Geographic" magazine.

National Geographic launched a new campaign last week to reduce waste from plastic products like single-use bags and straws, which includes a major change: most National Geographic magazines will now be delivered in paper packaging instead of plastic.

The magazine reports that 18 billions pounds of plastic waste end up in oceans every year and that less than a fifth of plastic produced around the world is recycled. The launch of the "Planet or Plastic?" initiative coincides with National Geographic's June issue, which has a photo of a plastic bag positioned like an iceberg on the cover.

Company officials said in a press release that from now on the U.S, U.K. and India editions of the magazine will be delivered in paper instead of plastic, which the release said will eliminate 2.5 million single-use plastic bags every month.

Several other companies have said they will either change or recycle more of their packaging to reduce plastic pollution in oceans, including Nestle, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Walmart.



Seahorse uses a q-tip to ride the ocean currents.



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Overview

Many in the U.S. farm country have been troubled by the on-again, off-again talk of tariffs and counter-tariffs between the U.S. and China.

LAKE BENTON, Minn. — Bob Worth is a corn and soybean farmer in Lake Benton, Minnesota. Now beginning his 48th season as a producer in Lincoln County, Worth is talkative and enthusiastic about the prospects for success on the 2,200 acres he farms with his son.

But he and many others in farm country have been troubled by the on-again, off-again talk of tariffs and counter-tariffs between the U.S. and China, and they worry that decades of building mutually beneficial trade relations could be wiped away.

Worth said, referring to the threat China made early month to impose 25 percent tariffs on soybeans, corn, pork and other commodities, after the U.S. proposed tariffs of \$50 billion on Chinese goods.

President Donald Trump's administration seemed to switch gears slightly in mid-May by announcing that it has put steps toward a trade war "on hold" while talks continue on how to reduce China's huge trade surplus with the U.S.

Worth said he just hopes that with all the back-and-forth, the leaders of both nations will find a way to work out their differences.

Worth said he just hopes that with all the back-and-forth, the leaders of both nations will find a way to work out their differences. "We don't want it to go the other way, because we can't take a major hiccup in agriculture or we're going to lose a lot more people," Worth said.

Growers are already dealing with a weak farm economy, struggling in its fourth year of low crop prices. And Minnesota is the nation's third-largest producer of soybeans with \$2 billion worth of exports in 2016, more than half to China.

Commentary

Soybeans, Tariffs, American Farmers And China

U.S. Ponders Tariffs Against China, While Soybean Growers Worry They'll Be "Collateral Damage"

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Farmer Bob Worth plants soybeans on the family farm last month in Lake Benton, Minnesota. (Photo/TNS)



Bob Worth loads soybean seeds into the planter on the family farm in Minnesota.

Worth says he hopes the U.S. and China will work out their trade differences. (David Joles/TNS)

On a national scale, one in every three rows of U.S. soybeans is exported to China, a market estimated at \$12 billion annually. It's a success story that took years to build and nurture, say farm leaders, but it could unravel quickly.

"The bigger concern is long term, because you don't want to be in the business of having your key customers question your ability to supply their needs in the future," said Mike Steenhoek, executive director of the Soy Transportation Coalition, a trade

group. Brooks Bennett, president of First Security Bank in Lake Benton, said that, "Reducing revenue for these producers, and reducing their profit, means they just don't have the money to spend in town," he said.

Jim Veire, fuel distributor at BioAg Energy Services in Lake Benton, said he doesn't like the idea of tariffs because they create winners and losers, and he doesn't want to see farmers taking a hit.

"We are directly joined at the hip with agriculture," he said. "It's our lifeblood, not only us but a lot of businesses in small communities in the Upper Midwest."

That includes fuel, fertilizer and seed companies that sell directly to farmers, he said, but also the plumbers, electricians and other tradespeople who suffer when farmers don't have the disposable income to fix up

concerning, Naeve said. What's puzzling, he said, is that so many farmers voted for Trump despite his campaign promises to ditch trade deals with China and others, including the North American Free Trade Agreement, and renegotiate them with a tougher approach.

"My gut feeling is that farmers didn't understand what a great thing they had in all these international deals to begin with," Naeve said. Agricultural interests were at the table when the agreements were set up, he said, and for the most part were a beneficiary.

Joel Schreurs, who farms 1,000 acres near Tyler in Lincoln County and is a national director of the American Soybean Association, said that soybean export trade has been a remarkable success story for American farmers, and China needs soybean meal to feed its expanding pork and poultry operations and meet the dietary demands of its fast-growing middle class.

"They need our beans," he said. "It's disheartening that a market we've worked so long and so hard for, and spent hundreds of millions of dollars advancing it, could be swept away with a swish of a pen. Hopefully they can reach some sort of agreement here and get things resolved."

their houses or build new grain bins or machine sheds.

"Agriculture is a tough business, and we've dealt with down cycles before," said Veire, "but quite frankly, there's enough challenges when the playing field is level without throwing a tariff into the mix."

China typically buys most of its soybeans from South America in the spring and from North America in the fall, so recent cutbacks in shipments from the U.S. have been relatively small. But China's holding off on new orders from the U.S. for advance purchases of this fall's crop is



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