

CAFTA Protest Scheduled for Sunday

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Groups opposing the controversial U.S. trade pact that will be voted on next week in a nationwide referendum are staging a march this Sunday in a final effort to convince Costa Ricans to vote “no” on the Central American Free-Trade Agreement with the United States (CAFTA).

The protest, which will mark the close of the “no” campaign, is scheduled to start at about 9 a.m. along downtown San José's Paseo Colón, according to a statement from the Patriotic Movement for No on CAFTA, one of several groups gearing up to participate.

The protest is scheduled to cumulate at about 11:30 a.m. on the main stage, next to the Toyota building. Two additional stages will be set up in front of the Mercedes tower and near the pedestrian bridge to hold cultural events including face painting, the statement said.

Traffic Police did not know yesterday whether streets will be blocked off Sunday for the protest; in any case, drivers in San José may want to avoid Paseo Colón.

Smaller protests are also scheduled in major towns and cities around the country.

The “yes” camp also seems to be pulling out all the stops in these final days before the vote. A full-page ad ran yesterday in the daily La Nación with a photo of Costa Rican astronaut and national hero Franklin Chang, who has openly supported CAFTA, beside a photo of outspoken CAFTA opponent and Broad Front legislator José Merino. Readers are asked to choose one of the two sides, Chang's “yes” or Merino's “no”.

Below Chang's photo, he is described as a “Costa Rican astronaut who said ‘yes,’” while Merino is billed as a “Communist leader, friend of Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro and promoter of ‘no.’”