

## **Costa Rica unions call strike to protest CAFTA**

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### **Reuters**

SAN JOSE -- Costa Rican trade unions called on Monday for a one-day general strike next month to oppose ratification of a regional free-trade pact with the United States, which they fear could hurt standards of living.

More than 200 unions and civic groups are expected to take part in the stoppage on Nov. 17, which seeks to pressure the Costa Rican Congress to reject the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement, or CAFTA, union leaders said.

Costa Rica is the only Central American nation yet to ratify the agreement. It has been approved by the United States, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic.

Albino Vargas, general secretary of the National Association of Public and Private Employees, said striking workers would march on the country's legislative assembly in protest at the pact.

He said the country could see a repeat of a disturbances following a general strike in 2000, when thousands of workers protested plans to open the Costa Rican energy industry.

Recent public opinion polls in Costa Rica show majority backing for CAFTA , although many trade union and civic groups fear that could erode workers' salaries and drive down standards of living.

Of particular concern to public employees is the possible opening up of state telecommunications and energy monopolies to competition in the nation of four million people.