

Houston gains prominence after Jamaican drug sweep

HOUSTON (AP) — About 40 people were being held in Houston Thursday after a nationwide crackdown on Jamaican drug trafficking led to more than 120 arrests, and authorities who staged the sweep said Houston was gaining prominence as a hub of the group's criminal activities.

The arrests began Wednesday night and covered 20 states, but were focused in Houston, Miami and New York, authorities said.

In Texas, the sweep also included Dallas.

"There's no doubt about it, the message is very clear — not to mess with

Houston, Texas," said Ron Parra, district director of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, one of 16 local, state and federal agencies involved in the Houston crackdown.

"We're not going to let criminals continue this type of violence and this type of behavior to this extent in Houston," Parra said.

Of the 435 arrest warrants issued in the crackdown on Jamaican gangs, called posses, 90 were sought in Houston. Among more than 120 now in custody, 50 had been sought on Houston warrants, authorities said.

"If you compare the statistics, almost

50 percent of all the arrests were made in Houston, more than 50 percent of the cash seizures occurred in Houston and a tremendous percentage of the firearms and narcotics that were seized all came from the Houston operation," said Phillip Chojnacki, special agent in charge with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

Authorities in Houston began their sweep at 7 p.m. Wednesday, and before daylight had arrested 39 people and located 11 others already in custody, and confiscated 12 guns, 45 rounds of ammunition, 35 ounces of cocaine and 35 pounds of marijuana.

Of approximately \$139,000 in confiscated cash nationwide, \$63,000 came from the Houston arrests, Chojnacki said. Thirty-five pounds of marijuana also was seized in Houston, he said.

The numbers further convinced officials of Houston's growing role in Jamaican drug traffickers' nationwide operations, officials said Thursday.

"Our cooperative intelligence data in-

dicates these individuals are being exclusively imported into the United States to commit crimes and also for the importation of narcotics," Parra said.

"Houston has become a fulcrum both for the activity coming in and also as they commit their crimes in other parts of the United States," he said. "They return to Houston because of the international flavor of Houston, to more or less cool off until they can return back to the country or back to other (U.S.) cities."

However, John Ross, coordinator of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, said the Jamaicans are known for violence and also have been a dangerous force within the city.

"They are, in fact, increasing their operations in the city of Houston to the point that they are becoming a very serious problem," Ross said, citing their willingness to use violence.

"When we are referring to posse activities, we're talking about street-level crack dealers," he said.

State agency fights to stop rate hikes

AUSTIN (AP) — A state agency Thursday cited pervasive mismanagement that drove up the price of the South Texas Nuclear Project and has requested billions of dollars in costs be removed from consideration when the plant's utility company partners try to raise rates.

But the plant's managing partner, Houston Lighting & Power, disagreed with the report by the Office of Public Utility Counsel and said it would challenge its findings.

billion share of the project should not be considered when the companies apply for rate increases.

HL&P's Painter said mismanagement costs associated with the plant totaled \$500 million and have already been paid off in an out-of-court settlement with the plant's original contractor, Brown & Root. He said subsequent costs are legitimate expenses that should be recovered by the ratepayer.

But the public utility counsel said mismanagement under Brown & Root caused a 38-month delay in completion and costs which exceed norms in the nuclear power industry by as much as 79 percent.

Because of the delays, HL&P lost a major wholesale customer, Texas-New Mexico Power Co., while other ratepayers turned to cogeneration to supply their power needs.

"We may not be able to undo these indirect burdens on ratepayers, however, the magnitude of the damages underscores the importance of assuring that the disallowance of imprudent project costs is adequate and complete," Ottmers said.

If the Public Utility Commission were to allow the utilities to recover these costs, she said it could mean an additional 40 to 50 percent rate hike for CPL customers and 20 percent for HL&P.

She said the recommendations of her agency may hurt the utilities financially, but added; "it would be a burden on the companies no doubt, but those burdens are the risk of the shareholders and not the ratepayers."

Space

(Continued from page 1)

cause it also could be used to carry such heavy payloads as a module for a large space station and components for interplanetary missions.

Although the Soviets haven't yet launched their shuttle, Thomas said, they have flown a vehicle that the United States hasn't.

"They have a small space plane, with about a 16-foot wingspan," he said. "With a delta-wing flat shape, it's shaped something like the shuttle is shaped."

"It carries a single person, and they have test-flown it about a dozen times now. As far as I know, it has not been manned."

"I think that's a significant little vehicle. Their military doctrine calls for a space fighter plane. I think that little space plane they've developed could be that."

But using the space plane to defend a space station or to destroy satellites is not the only possibility for its use. The plane also could be useful for reconnaissance missions, crew transport and satellite repairs and maintenance.

Thomas said the Soviets also have been talking about a making a joint effort with the United States to send a manned mission to Mars. He said, however, that he is not sure how genuine their interest is.

The Soviets need United States technology to accomplish a Mars mission, he said.

If the United States cooperates with the Soviets and the mission succeeds, he said, the Soviets would be able to justify their claim that their space program is equal or superior to ours.

Justifying that claim is of great importance to the Soviet Union, he said.

"The Soviet space program . . . is one of the stars in the Soviet crown," Thomas said.

"The space program is very important to them," he said. "The Soviets use science as a way of elevating their self-esteem, and indeed, they have a lot of that science."


"They have done a lot of excellent work in science generally. The space program is a kind of subset of that. It is their effort to claim parity or superiority with other scientists around the world."

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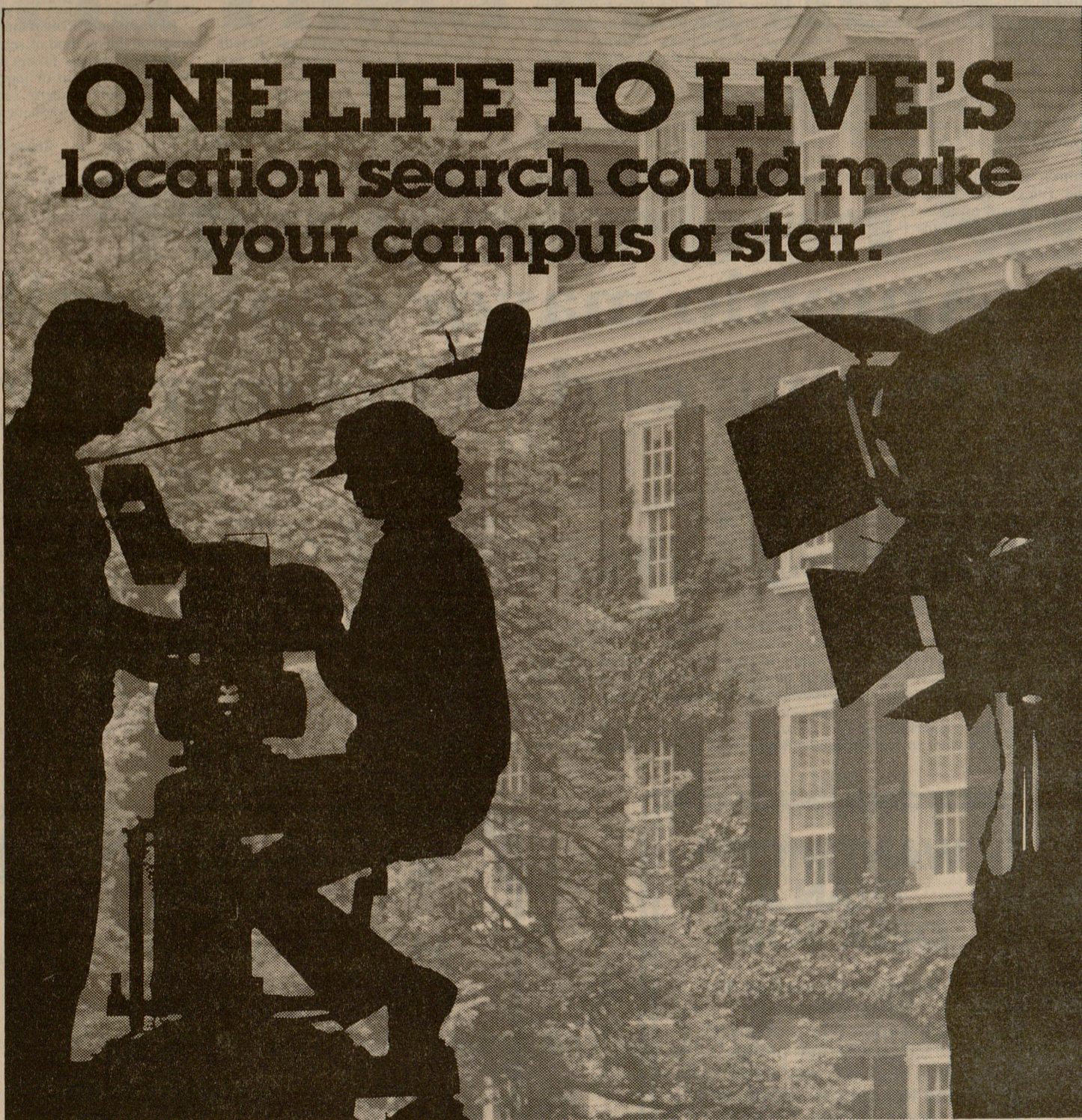
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