

News in Brief

EU Presidency

Canaries lose out

The recently-commenced Spanish Presidency of the European Union will bring little opportunity for showcasing the Canaries.

Despite the government's promise to spread the meetings far and wide across the country, it appears that the region will host just one of the 350 meetings of ministers and senior officials already confirmed. According to the

Canarias 7 newspaper, the only meeting definitely marked down for the Canaries is a summit of the EU's outermost regions, which is scheduled to be held here in May. The news will come as a major disappointment for the Canarian government, who wanted to use the six-month Presidency as a platform to promote the Islands. It is felt, however, that the logistical problems of transporting so many people

for meetings have persuaded Madrid to look to Spanish peninsula locations instead.

Many still recall the complicated preparations that were required for a one-day informal meeting of EU justice ministers in La Gomera back in the 1990s during a previous Spanish Presidency. Insiders say that the government is also anxious to avoid inter-island squabbles over who should host EU meetings.

Fuerteventura

Soap star visit

Fuerteventura continues to attract famous names keen to get away from the winter cold in other parts of Spain and the UK.

In addition to sporting hero Iker Casillas (Real Madrid and Spain goalkeeper), who spent a few days at a spa hotel near Puerto del Rosario recently and was mobbed by fans), an equally famous face was spotted on a mini-break on the island at the turn of the year. Cheryl Ferguson, currently better known as Heather from BBC soap *Eas-*



The soap star caused widespread comments in Fuerteventura

tenders, was seen by ex-pats and holidaymakers booking a camel ride and quad trip in Caleta de Fuste and her presence triggered a rush to get an autograph and photo. Ferguson's trip came just a few days after the Christmas Eastenders show topped the festive ratings, attracting 11 million viewers. News of her presence spread on the local ex-pat forum, although not all the comments were kind. Some contributors expressed concern that the bulky celebrity might prove too much for the local camels!

Presidential address

New Year optimism

Canarian president Paulino Rivero used his New Year address to the region to express his confidence that 2010 will see the Islands emerge from the economic crisis that has seriously affected the holiday and other sectors.

Speaking from the pictur-

esque location of the Roque de Los Muchachos Observatory on La Palma, where he and the King of Spain inaugurated the world's biggest telescope back in the summer, Rivero said to the people of the Canaries, "wanted political stability and solutions to their problems" and urged all parties and sectors to work together to bring

a more prosperous year to the region. He made a particular plea to unions to resolve their conflicts with the government, "at the negotiating table and not on the streets," and recalled the terrible tragedies caused by forest fires in La Palma and flash floods in Gran Canaria during the past twelve months.

NGO donation

Shamed into charity

MPs from the Canarian Coalition and Popular Party say they have decided to donate their expense allowances for attending a recent sitting of Parliament to an NGO charity.

The decision follows a storm of protest that the sitting, which was considered totally unnecessary by some, lasted just three minutes but

cost a small fortune in travel expenses and allowances. Sources in Parliament say the session had to be held due to the insistence of the PSOE party that a vote had to be taken on an issue before the year end. The donation offer (to an NGO which has still to be chosen) comes just weeks after it emerged that MPs serving on a Standing Committee turned up and

collected their allowances for a meeting even though they knew in advance no business could be carried out due to a procedural matter. Although welcomed in the media, the NGO initiative has been criticised by members of the public on the grounds that it is public money that is being used, and not from the MPs' own pockets.

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