

Long before he was a presidential

to lose.

to door campaign against mosquito breeding spots.

Pope to defend migrants at Mexico-US border Mass

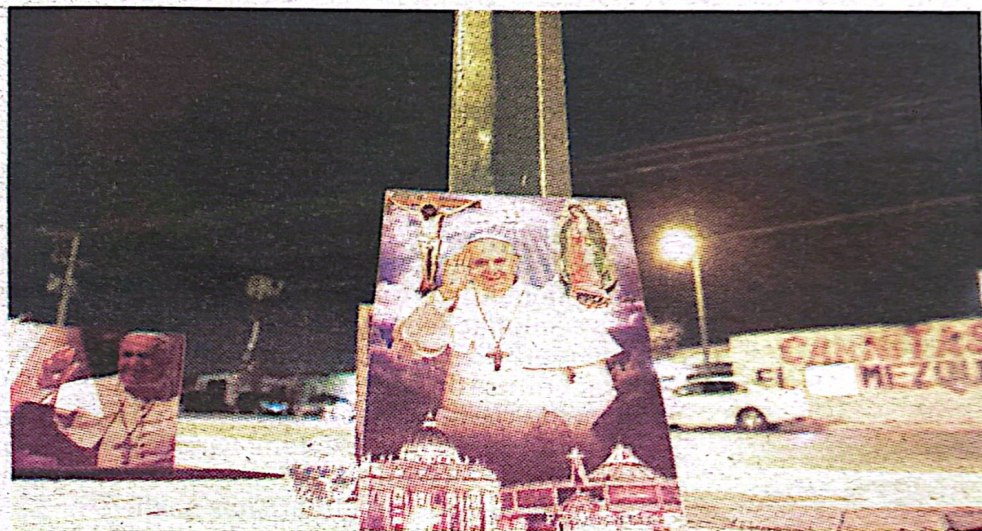
BY AFP

CIUDAD JUAREZ. Pope Francis will celebrate an unprecedented Mass straddling both sides of the Mexico-US border on Wednesday to address the plight of migrants fleeing misery and crime in their homelands.

The 79-year-old pontiff wraps up an intense, five-day trip to Mexico with a visit to Ciudad Juarez, the world's former murder capital, where he will pray with inmates at a prison and lead the service at the border.

After pressing Mexican politicians, religious leaders and society to fight for a nation without drug cartels, Pope Francis will turn his attention to migrants, an issue dear to him, on his last day.

A huge stage was set near the border fence for a Mass with more than 200,000 people.



Images of Pope Francis displayed for sale on a street on the eve of his arrival in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on Tuesday. AFP PHOTO.

Pope Francis is expected to salute people watching on the other side of the Rio Grande in El Paso, Texas. The service will be also broadcast on a giant screen at a 51,000-capac-

ity stadium in the US city.

The pope's decision to make a plea for migrants across from the United States coincides with the US presidential election primaries, in

which illegal immigration is a hot button issue.

Republican White House hopeful Donald Trump, who has promised to make Mexico pay to build a wall along the border, called the pope a "very political person."

"I think that he doesn't understand the problems our country has. I don't think he understands the danger of the open border that we have with Mexico," the billionaire real estate tycoon told Fox Business channel last week.

Central Americans have been leaving their poor and gang-infested countries in droves, crossing Mexico's southern border with Guatemala to embark on their journey north.

The trek is filled with dangers from gangs that steal, kill or seek to forcibly recruit them, as well as corrupt officials who demand bribes to let them travel.