

International

# Ecuadoran president ousted amid massive protests



Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto speaks to the press at Karachi Airport after her arrival from Islamabad, here Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

QUITO, Feb 7: Ecuador's Congress late Thursday ousted eccentric President Abdala Bucaram amid massive protests against austerity measures and promptly named a new head of state, over Bucaram's objections, reports AFP.

Tension grew in the capital as people waited to see if the military would side with Congress or with Bucaram, who told the armed forces he did not acknowledge his dismissal and reminded them he remained their top commander.

Crowds began converging on the heavily guarded presidential palace where Bucaram has ensconced himself as popular discontent mounted over the past two days.

The heaviest Bucaram likes to refer to himself as "El Loco," or the crazy one, Congress agreed, ousting him for mental and physical incapacity. But Bucaram said the move was unconstitutional and amounted to a virtual "coup d'etat."

In a brief statement he said he would not obey Congress' action, which came in a 44-33 vote late Thursday after two days of strikes and massive

protests against economic austerity paralysed this impoverished South American country.

The leader of Congress, Fabian Alarcon, 50, was sworn in as interim president for a period of one year after which elections must be held.

Alarcon, like Bucaram a populist, said he "accepted the mandate of the people" and that he would be willing to put his life on the line for democracy.

The motion ousting Bucaram notably accused him of corruption, nepotism and of tarnishing the dignity of the presidency. Since he was elected on a populist ticket in July, Bucaram has seen his support plummet, and his zany antics, including television appearances in which he danced to rock tunes and sang Latin love songs, drew widespread anger.

Vice-President Rosalia Arteaga, who is at odds with both Bucaram and Alarcon, said earlier in the day an ouster by Congress would be unconstitutional and that only she could take over the presidency.

While there was no immediate reaction from the military,

the Council of Generals and Admirals said in a statement issued shortly before the vote that it was fully aware of the just aspirations of the people."

In a desperate bid to head off the crisis, Bucaram sacked three Cabinet members including his brother just before the opening of the legislative session.

He also announced reductions in the price of gas and electricity, among items which received hefty price hikes when the austerity package was launched in December.

The two-day strike was largely peaceful, although one man was shot in the leg during a scuffle outside the Congress building that was ringed by some 1,700 troops and police.

Police and human rights watchers said 13 police and civilians were injured by rocks, buckshot and tear-gas canisters on the first day of the strike.

Declaring a "state of national mobilisation," Bucaram had Wednesday ordered the armed forces and the national police to enforce a return to work.

But the protests were well supported and according to a private survey 2.2 million people took part in demonstrations in Quito and other major cities in this country of 11.5 million.

The strike marked the first time Ecuadorans of all political stripes closed ranks against the Bucaram government, elected with 54 per cent of the popular vote in July after campaigning on a populist ticket.

He initially enjoyed widespread popularity among the poorest Ecuadorans to whom he promised a better life. He pledged to give his first month's salary as head of state to beggars in Quito.

But his approval rating dropped rapidly, with a survey putting it at just 15 per cent last week. Another survey released Wednesday said 61 per cent of Ecuadorans wanted Bucaram to step down.

Born February 4, 1952, of a Lebanese father and an Ecuadorian mother, he had his first taste of controversy when his father, by Bucaram's own recent admission, failed to register his birth until February 20, after a long drinking binge.

# More aid workers leave Rwanda for safety

KIGALI, Rwanda, Feb 7: More aid workers left Rwanda and others were restricted to the capital or safe outposts Friday, while plans were made to protect them after the killings of foreigners, reports AP.

Rwandan officials have blamed the attacks on Hutu insurgents opposed to the Tutsi-controlled government.

The number of UN staff in Rwanda may be reduced following discussions at headquarters in New York, UN spokesman Paul Stromberg said Thursday.

All aid workers left western Rwanda on Wednesday, a day after the five UN human rights monitors — a Briton, a Cambodian and three Rwandans — were killed in a suspected Hutu rebel ambush in southwestern Rwanda.

The attack was the latest in a series against foreigners in Rwanda. Three Spanish aid workers and a Canadian Roman Catholic priest were killed in two separate attacks in January and at least four other recent attacks against foreigners have been reported.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said "the United States condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks against Rwandans and expatriates in Rwanda in the last several weeks."

"The United States is urging all Rwandans to put aside their differences and to end this violence," Burns said Thursday.

"It appears that genocidal elements of the former Rwandan army, combined with the Interahamwe (Hutu) militia, have been staging attacks into Rwanda, often killing innocent Rwandan civilians, including government officials."

While the United Nations pondered its next step, other aid agencies withdrew staff from the tiny Central African country.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent evacuated 25 staff members by Friday, leaving only six in Kigali.

"We've suspended operations until we have indications that security is OK again," said IFRC spokesman Andrew Hall in Nairobi, Kenya.

In addition to distributing seeds and farming tools, the IFRC had long-term plans to build 10,000 dwellings to replace those destroyed in the war.

The International Committee of the Red Cross scaled back from staff of 120 to about 30.

"We've frozen all our activities for 10 days to reflect on what we'll do there in future given the killings," ICRC spokesman Glenn O'Neil.

## BRIEFLY

**German minister to visit SA:** German Defence Minister Volker Ruehe will visit South Africa next week to discuss Europe and Africa's president and future military climates, Germany's embassy in Cape Town said Thursday, AFP reports from Cape Town.

Ruehe will meet with his South African counterpart Joe Modise and work on strengthening a defence cooperation treaty signed between the two countries last October, the embassy said in a statement.

**50,000 AIDS cases in Brazil:** Brazil had registered 50,000 AIDS cases by December of 1996, a figure much higher than expected, the Health Ministry said on Thursday, Xinhua reports from Rio De Janeiro.

The figure did not include patients who went to private doctors who did not always report the cases to the health authorities.

Sao Paulo, the biggest city of the country, reported that its AIDS cases in 1996 increased by more than 30 per cent.

**Huge alcohol destroyed in Jakarta:** Indonesian officials have destroyed 20,641 bottles of alcohol seized in Jakarta during raids on stalls, schools and small shops, a report said yesterday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The head of the capital's public order office Kusana Budinartoro said the bottles included locally-made liquor, the Jakarta Post reported.

**Chinese vice-PM to visit ME:** Chinese Vice-Premier Li Langling will make a brief Middle East tour later this month, taking in Israel and Iran, the Foreign Ministry announced yesterday, AFP reports from Beijing.

Li's tour will last from February 17-24, ministry spokesman Tang Guogiang said. Both visits will be made at the head of six-able government delegations, he added.

**Floods swamp west Australia:** Near-records flood levels began retreating Friday in the Pilbara region of northwest Australia as police retrieved the body of a drowned woman from the swollen Hardy River, AP reports from Perth, Australia.

The Ashburton River had peaked between midnight and 3 a.m. Friday, State Emergency Service assistant regional manager Robert Te said.

The Bureau of Meteorology was yet to determine the peak of the flooding or whether a record had been achieved. "The weather bureau haven't been able to access their measuring equipment yet," Te said.

**Japanese PM may visit US in April:** Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto is planning to visit the United States late April to meet with US President Bill Clinton, officials said Friday, AP reports from Tokyo.

Details of the visit, including dates and a final schedule, are currently being discussed between the two governments, Japan's Foreign Ministry said. Hashimoto said after a Cabinet meeting Friday that he is hoping to thoroughly discuss Japan-US relations with Clinton, Kyodo News reported.

## Move to help Chinese women combat poverty

BEIJING, Feb 7: The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) has planned a series of activities to help women out of poverty and eliminate illiteracy, reports Xinhua.

The ACWF's eventual goal is to help Chinese women contribute more to national development and enjoy equal rights with men in political and other fields, today's China Daily cites an ACWF official as saying.

This non-governmental organisation has set forth a target to help one million women escape poverty in the ninth five-year plan (1996-2000).

Last year, some 278,000 women were able to shake off poverty thanks to various aid-the-poor activities conducted by the Federation last year, it reports.

It has also mobilized 10.2 million women to participate

in a project providing training in advanced agricultural techniques which will help them improve their lives.

Huang Qizao, Vice-President of the Federation, was quoted as saying that the Federation's branches in some of the provinces and autonomous regions in northern and western China recently trained 20,000 women in rural areas to grow new strains of soybeans, maize, wheat, rice and cotton.

After training, they have become advocates and demonstrators of new hybrid seeds and growing techniques in these areas. A total 9.24 million households across the country have been chosen to demonstrate the use of scientific techniques in agricultural production.

Huang's organization has helped Chinese women establish 22 national green bases.

## Congress rejects Dr Farooq Abdullah's proposal

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: The Congress today rejected the reported proposal of the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr Farooq Abdullah, that the line of control be made the permanent border between India and Pakistan, reports PTI.

The party spokesman, V N Gadgil, told newsmen that J and K was an integral part of Indian and Pakistan had illegally and by use of force occupied a part of the state.

This, he said, had always been the stand of the party and therefore "we cannot accept any proposal to cede any part of Jammu and Kashmir."

Gadgil reminded Dr Abdullah that he was no longer a private citizen but the chief minister of J and K and his party was a constituent of the ruling United Front.

Under the circumstances, Dr Abdullah should have carefully considered and henceforth consider carefully the implications of any observations he makes on Jammu and Kashmir," he added.

## New UN special coordinator for WB, Gaza named

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 7: Under-Secretary-General Chinmaya Gharekhan, a former Indian career diplomat, was named on Thursday as UN special coordinator in the Israeli-occupied territory based in Gaza, reports Reuter.

He replaces Terje Roed Larsen of Norway, who resigned last October to return to national politics.

The United Nations has a number of development and humanitarian programmes in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, parts of which are now under Palestinian self-rule.

## Fujimori meets with relatives of hostages

LIMA, Feb 7: President Alberto Fujimori met with relatives of 72 hostages to brief them on efforts to free their loved ones being held by heavily-armed leftist rebels at the Japanese ambassador's residence, reports AP.

It was the second time in a week that Fujimori has invited the families to the government palace. The meeting Thursday night lasted more than two hours. Participants left the palace without making any comment.

A leading Roman Catholic churchman acting as a key mediator in the standoff met with the 15 Tupac Amaru rebels inside the residence Thursday and later said talks had "advanced positively."

"I hope that with the prayers of everyone, we are headed toward finding the light of a peaceful solution," Archbishop Juan Luis Cipriani told reporters, adding that the hostages were in relatively good health.



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (R) invites the chairman of the Federation Council Egor Stroyev (L) to sit down during their meeting in the Kremlin on Thursday. During the meeting Yeltsin made his first television statement of 1997, telling that elderly people could work and receive pensions at the same time. — AFP/UNB photo

## Myanmar accuses ROK lawmaker of interfering in its affairs

BANGKOK, Feb 7: A South Korean lawmaker who was refused entry to Myanmar and forced to leave "blatantly interfered in the internal affairs" of the country during his last visit there, the Myanmar government said Friday, reports AP.

Dr Kim Sang-woo, a member of a South Korean opposition party, said Thursday that he was thrown out of Myanmar earlier that day after being stopped and temporarily detained at the airport in Yangon.

Kim, of the National Congress for New Politics party, said he was braised when officials "grabbed, pushed and shoved" him onto the last flight of the day to Bangkok, Thailand.

He said he held an official passport and a valid visa, and was given no reason for being barred entry.

A Myanmar government statement said Kim had visited Burma in June 1996 and "blatantly interfered in the internal affairs of Myanmar and also collaborated against the country with the anti-government elements residing abroad."

Myanmar is the official name given Burma by the military government. The statement, faxed to The Associated Press in Bangkok, did not identify Kim as a legislator, nor did it specifically say why he was refused entry. It also did not comment on Kim's allegation that he had been manhandled.

Kim, interviewed by phone from his Bangkok hotel room, said he had visited Burma twice

previously without problems.

The 42-year-old lawmaker said he made Thursday's trip to find out firsthand about Burma's political situation. He said he had hoped to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the country's embattled democratic opposition, as well as a US Embassy official and the South Korean ambassador.

Myanmar is ruled by a military regime which seized power

in 1988 after violently suppressing pro-democracy street demonstrations. It held a general election in 1990, but refused to turn over power to the winners, Mrs. Suu Kyi's national league for Democracy.

The military government has been criticized by the US State Department as one of the world's worst human rights violators.

## 'UP govt trying to overturn HC verdict on Phoolan'

LUCKNOW, India, Feb 7: The government of the home state of former "Bandit Queen" Phoolan Devi said on Thursday it had approached India's Supreme Court to save her from possible arrest after she failed to appear in a lower court.

A spokesman for the government of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) told Reuters the state government was trying to overturn a High Court verdict against its decision to drop criminal cases pending against her.

"A special leave petition was filed before the Supreme Court against the High Court's quashing of the state government's earlier decision to withdraw each of the criminal cases pending against her in UP courts," the spokesman said.

Devi, now a lower house member of the Indian parliament, ignored a summons to

appear in special court on Tuesday in the industrial town of Kanpur, where she faced arrest warrants in 57 cases dating back to the 1981 massacre of 22 upper-caste men.

Lower caste Devi, portrayed as a heroine seeking revenge on her upper caste tormentors in the critically acclaimed film "Bandit Queen," was accused of leading the massacre but she later denied the charge.

She surrendered to police in 1983 and spent more than 10 years in prison before being released on parole in 1994.

After her release she then UP chief minister withdrew all cases against her and inducted her into his regional socialist Samajwadi Party, which represents low castes.

Last year Devi won a seat to the federal parliament from a constituency which has a large number of her caste people.

appear in special court on Tuesday in the industrial town of Kanpur, where she faced arrest warrants in 57 cases dating back to the 1981 massacre of 22 upper-caste men.

Lower caste Devi, portrayed as a heroine seeking revenge on her upper caste tormentors in the critically acclaimed film "Bandit Queen," was accused of leading the massacre but she later denied the charge.

She surrendered to police in 1983 and spent more than 10 years in prison before being released on parole in 1994.

After her release she then UP chief minister withdrew all cases against her and inducted her into his regional socialist Samajwadi Party, which represents low castes.

Last year Devi won a seat to the federal parliament from a constituency which has a large number of her caste people.

## Off the Record

### Rare species on dining table

HONG KONG: Two zoo keepers in central China's Wuhan City have been arrested for killing and eating a rare species of European deer, it was reported Thursday, reports AFP.

Zhou Qisheng, 38, and Zhou Young, 19, were arrested after police officers investigating the disappearance of a deer, found deer meat being kept in their house, the Ta Kung Pao daily said.

The two had sneaked into the zoo in the dark on January 23 to kill one of the zoo's three rare white lip deer for food, the report said.

### Bully for kiss

NEW DELHI: A man who kissed a woman in an Indian college was stripped by the police and the woman forced to hit him with a slipper to avenge her humiliation, officials said on Thursday, reports AFP.

The bizarre punishment was handed out in the college at Guntur town in southern India Wednesday after a politician ordered the police to punish the "bully", the Press Trust of India (PTI) said.

The unidentified man was caught, stripped near-naked and taken to the spot where he had kissed the girl. Police officers told the woman to beat him with her slippers, which she did reluctantly.

### Condom machines in schools

PARIS: All French state high schools will have condom machines from September, representatives of teachers and parents said here after talks Thursday with Education Minister Francois Bayrou, reports AFP.

All teachers should also be trained in the knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases STD and be able to take courses on sex education, another 5,000 specialists in such education will be trained over the next two years.

## Tajik rebels release 2 Red Cross workers

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Feb 7: Tajik rebels released two Red Cross workers who were among 16 people taken captive this week by a warlord in the Central Asian nation, a news agency reported Friday, reports AP.

The releases came a day after the Red Cross evacuated most of its foreign staff and suspended activities in Tajikistan, a country torn by four years of civil war.

A brief report by Russia's ITAR-Tass news agency said only that the two Red Cross workers, a Briton and a Tajik, had been released and gave no additional details.

Rebel warlord Bakhran Sadirov continues to hold 14 hostages, including nine United Nations employees, four Russian journalists and their driver.

Sadirov has been demanding that a guerrilla force led by his brother be allowed to come back to the former Soviet republic from neighboring Afghanistan.

The UN Security Council on Thursday "expressed concern at continued acts of violence and demanded the immediate release of all the hostages," council President Njurguna Mahugu said.

The Red Cross strongly condemned the kidnapping Thursday. A spokesman in Dushanbe said the organization was suspending its activities in Tajikistan and on Thursday evacuated most of its foreign staff to neighbouring Uzbekistan.

Tajik President Emomali

Rakhmonov, meanwhile, held urgent meetings with security officials, the Russian ambassador, Red Cross mission chief and UN officials.

Captive Russian journalists used Sadirov's satellite telephone to report Thursday that all hostages were safe and well-treated at the rebel base in Kalainav, 84 kilometers (52 miles) east of Dushanbe.

Sadirov's rebels began their hostage-taking spree Tuesday by abducting five UN workers — an Austrian, two Swiss — as they drove from the central town of Garm to Dushanbe in the west.

## Taliban hold talks to obtain UN representation

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 7: A delegation sent by Afghanistan's Taliban movement, which seized power in Kabul four months ago, has held talks here in a bid to obtain UN representation, a UN spokesman said Thursday, reports AP.

The delegation, led by Wakil Ahmed, has met with UN Under-Secretary-General Marrack Golding for talks which were described as part of the ongoing contacts between the United Nations and all Afghan parties.

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 7: A delegation sent by Afghanistan's Taliban movement, which seized power in Kabul four months ago, has held talks here in a bid to obtain UN representation, a UN spokesman said Thursday, reports AP.

The delegation, led by Wakil Ahmed, has met with UN Under-Secretary-General Marrack Golding for talks which were described as part of the ongoing contacts between the United Nations and all Afghan parties.



In this photo released by the Reagan Library on Thursday, former US president Ronald Reagan (L) receives cookies from members of Girl Scout Troop #313 as a gift for his 86th birthday Thursday at Reagan's office in Los Angeles. — AFP/UNB photo

## Haitian president distributes land to peasants

PONT SONDE, Haiti, Feb 7: When Haiti became the world's first black republic in 1804, its leader promised to divide the land among the slaves who fought with him to throw off French colonial rule, reports AP.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines was murdered for that policy. Haiti's current leader says he wants to fulfil Dessalines' promise — starting Friday.

Rene Preval will hand out 2,500 acres (1,000 hectares) of rice paddies in the Artibonite River Valley in a ceremony marking his first year as president, a year in which he admittedly has failed to relieve the country's abject poverty.

"We have begun in the Artibonite because it has great productive potential... and because people are dying in land disputes" there, Preval said this week.

But Friday's handover, in an area notorious for bloody feuds

between peasants and landowners, has provoked loud complaints from people left out of the deal and criticism from those who call the move a half-measure.

For weeks, four peasant associations have been choosing 1,600 families to get 1.2-acre (0.5-hectare) plots. Bernard Etchart, director of the National Agrarian Reform Institute, said some plots already are being worked by more than one family; one of the two presumably would be pushed out in the deal.

The lucky families — chosen for how long they have worked the land and their standing as citizens — will get temporary contracts until Parliament defines the terms of ownership.

Peasants have been debating the issue passionately in Pont Sonde, a hamlet of Artibonite farmers 40 miles (65 kilometers) northwest of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

"If the government expropriated the big landowners, I'd be 100 per cent behind it," said Audesson Charles.

"But it isn't! Lots of people have 300 acres (120 hectares)," added Charles Henri. "The government isn't explaining what land reform is. It's rushing things and making enemies."

Critics accuse Preval of arranging the package hastily to recoup support after a series of protests that culminated in a one-day general strike last month.

"It's political," Artibonite legislator Renold Jules told Radio Vision 2000. "It won't solve the problem."

The general strike, the first against a democratic government in Haiti, protested the austerity measures, including lower tariffs protesters say will bump farmers' produce from the market.

Haiti has struggled to make the passage to democracy since

Preval succeeded President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the first peaceful transfer of power in the country's 193-year history.

But the fight over land goes back a long way, with warlords honing their swords and peasants sharpening machetes.

Dessalines' murder following Haitian independence in the early 19th century unleashed a spiral of violence that twisted and turned through succeeding decades. Revolutionary war generals took over confiscated plantations, living in feudal luxury off the labour of freed slaves.

One dictatorial regime after another redistributed land to its partisans, creating a maze of land titles.

Since then, changes in the condition of the land have been equally wrenching. Most of Haiti's current population of 7.2 million are peasants whose

miserly has increased in direct proportion to soil erosion and land-sharing.

Traditionally, land is divided among the owner's descendants. After many generations, the heirs inherit so little that they cut down soil-holding and fruit-bearing trees to make charcoal for a living. Trees now cover less than 2 per cent of Haiti's 11,000 square miles (28,500 square kilometers).

Since the 1970s, a rural exodus has caused a mushrooming of shantytowns in Haiti's cities. Agronomists say that if productivity increased, people would remain on the land.

Agronomist Jean-Andre Victor is skeptical that the handover will bring about any real change.

"The government programme is unlikely to diminish tension in the valley," he said. "It is not land reform. It has not even been initiated within a legal framework."