

boring Iran on guard; the endless violence in Karachi between the Mohajirs, Sindhis, and PPP members; and the recent anti-Christian violence in Punjab may or may not have foreign interference, but all of this together has the potential to blow Pakistan apart.

- The complex Afghanistan situation, which may move into a different level if and when the Taliban militarily control the whole state of Afghanistan. Already, refugees, this time Tajiks and Uzbeks, are leaving their homes in fear of a fresh round of violence against them by the advancing Taliban-Pushtoon militia. In due time, Abdur Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek Jumbash-e-Milli leader, and Ahmed Shah Masood, the Tajik leader and former defense minister, are expected to leave Afghanistan and head toward Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, respectively, to wage guerrilla warfare against the Taliban. Pakistan, meanwhile, has got itself too well identified with the Taliban, and, in essence, Saudi, American, and British interests in the region.

- Internally, Nawaz Sharif, who was ousted in 1993 by former President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, is obligated to use his two-thirds' National Assembly majority to constitutionally amend the eighth amendment, which has been the bane of all elected governments in Pakistan.

- Finally, by trying to do what he must do, Mian Nawaz Sharif will find out what the CDNS will stand for, and how this new coalition of Pakistan's power troika can be directed toward a meaningful goal. The first challenge, perhaps, will be for Nawaz Sharif to improve trade relations with India, and, in due course, to ease the Kashmir dispute. Beijing has already indicated that this should be the course of future Islamabad policy vis-à-vis Kashmir, and Nawaz Sharif seems to be more than willing to move in that direction. If Nawaz Sharif faces opposition from the very establishment that has allowed him to be the next prime minister, he will become a prime minister in name only.

At the same time, Nawaz Sharif should feel blessed by the timing of the elections. The Pakistani elite, dominated by the landed gentry, military, and the bureaucracy—all part of one extended family—is losing credibility within the population, as indicated by the low turnout at the polls. More important, however, are the indications that Pakistan must shift its course now: the economic disparity and economic frustration among the poor; growing unemployment, which leads to adopting criminal activities as a career; the complete breakdown of law and order; and the total discrediting of all institutions, including that of the military.

Loud voices can be heard from across the border, demanding open trade with India and even an open border. It is, therefore, no surprise that, for the first time in Pakistani electoral history, there was no anti-India campaign, and the Kashmir issue was not used to garner votes. These are the positive indicators, and Mian Nawaz Sharif must build on that for his own success.

## Ecuador's cuckoo falls from the nest

by Valerie Rush

On Feb. 7, two million Ecuadorans marched in the streets against their government's embrace of so-called "free market" economics, which has slammed the population with 200-600% increases in transport, electricity, and fuel costs, the planned privatization of the nation's most vital assets, and dollarization of the economy under a British-styled "currency board." The result of this mass strike was a Congressional vote removing President Abdala Bucaram from office, paving the way for new Presidential elections early next year.

Ecuador's mass mobilization against austerity was not an Ecuadoran phenomenon at all. This same grass-roots opposition to British free-trade policies is exploding around the globe, from Hongkong to Bulgaria, from Germany to the United States, from Albania to Colombia. As the international financial system collapses further into bankruptcy, its gendarmes are intensifying their efforts to gouge living standards, in order to save their dying system. Increasingly, those heads of state not prepared to defend the interests of their own populations against these supranational interests, will roll.

### Ecuador still unstable

When the Ecuadoran Congress ousted Bucaram, who is as notorious for his grotesque personal behavior as he is for his corruption, "El Loco" ("The Madman") refused to cede the Presidency, which was simultaneously being claimed by Vice President Rosalía Arteaga, and by Congressional President Fabián Alarcón. The threat of national disintegration loomed, with several provinces announcing they would secede.

Ecuador's military stepped in as the ultimate guarantor of national sovereignty, and helped to broker an agreement between Arteaga and the Congress which averted civil war, and which has, temporarily at least, given the country a new President. Through a vote in Congress of 57-2 on Feb. 11, Alarcón was installed as interim President, and Bucaram's despised austerity decrees, which had been dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), were repealed.

The country, however, remains extremely unstable.

Among Alarcón's first statements to the nation, was the assertion that the already-impooverished nation should be prepared for "belt-tightening and sacrifices." Not surprisingly, the response from Ecuador's largest labor union, the United Workers Front, was, "The Ecuadoran people do not want more sacrifices." The *Financial Times* of London nervously editorialized Feb. 13: "It is to be hoped that [Ecuadorans] do not expect to depose every President who takes an unpopular decision."

There is significant pressure from international banking interests, and from their media mouthpieces, for the restoration of Bucaram's economic measures, with or without Bucaram. The *New York Times*, for example, editorialized on Feb. 11, that Ecuador cannot avoid dealing with "budget-wrecking subsidies and restrictive regulations" which go against the trend of a region "committed to market reforms." The *Washington Post* on Feb. 12 lamented in its editorial that "Ecuador now lacks both the constituency to support necessary further major privatizations, and the capacity otherwise to attract foreign private capital." On Feb. 13, the *Post* cited an unnamed "diplomat" threatening Ecuador with reprisals, should it put up resistance: "Once international lines of credit get shut off, this country will go down the chute."

What all this huffing and puffing is about, is that the Ecuadoran mass strike served as a direct rebuff to the international bankers' "golden boy" Domingo Cavallo. Formerly Argentina's finance minister, Cavallo—along with his staff—was hired for \$10 million to advise Bucaram shortly after the latter's accession to the Presidency last September. Cavallo is the infamous architect of Argentina's so-called "convertibility plan," a British-modeled currency board from the colonial era, which pegs the national currency to the U.S. dollar and strips the government of any decision-making powers on economic policy. Cavallo was recommended to Bucaram by none other than drug legalization bankroller and international master-speculator George Soros.

It was Bucaram's Dec. 1, 1996 announcement of an Argentine-style "convertibility plan" that triggered the initial protests from both labor and business circles in Ecuador. And, in a Feb. 11 interview with the Argentine daily *Clarín*, Bucaram admitted that it was precisely Cavallo's convertibility plan that led to the "conspiracy" against him.

### **Sovereignty vs. 'democracy'**

There is also a great deal of distress in "Project Democracy" circles over the Ecuadoran military's "behind-the-scenes" role in bringing the Presidential crisis to a quick resolution. Geopolitician Roger Fontaine screams in the pages of the *Washington Times* on Feb. 12, that Ecuador "has opened a Pandora's box. It has invited the military to take sides at a time when the region's armed forces had been in an increasingly politically quiescent state."

The Feb. 11 *New York Times* editorial similarly complains that "democratic legitimacy was undermined, [and] the military drawn deeper into civilian politics." It is this same editorial, in fact, which was cited by Argentine President Carlos Menem to justify his defense of Ecuador's "El Loco," something no other head of state on the continent has dared.

Bucaram himself would exploit this cultivated obsession with the trappings of "democratic legitimacy," which has been used so effectively by the international financial oligarchy and their "human rights" fronts to target the continent's armed forces for annihilation. In an interview with Colombia's Caracol radio network, he warned: "The Latin American community wants no such Pandora's box . . . that could turn into a habit. If Bucaram does not go back, it will set a bad example and we'll have dictatorships in all countries."

### **Ecuador has given us 'a beautiful lesson'**

The precedent of a mass strike driving out an Ibero-American government for imposing the IMF's killer austerity prescriptions has dramatically changed expectations across the continent. Nowhere is this more visible than in neighboring Colombia, which is itself currently in the throes of a nationwide strike directed, as in Ecuador, against a combination of brutal austerity, privatization schemes, anti-labor policies, and widespread corruption. The strike, which was launched on Feb. 11 by the country's labor federations, has been joined by political opposition forces of every stripe, as well as by the organization of military and police reservists, and others, turning it into a plebiscite against the ruling government of narco-President Ernesto Samper Pizano.

On the first day of the Colombian strike, which has been declared "indefinite," 100,000 citizens initially poured into the streets in the capital city of Bogotá, bearing signs that read: "Samper and Bucaram: Two Cases of Mental Dwarfism," and "Down with Samper's Narco-Government." Columnist Luis Carlos Sachica of the anti-government daily *El Espectador* wrote: "It is a beautiful lesson that the Ecuadorans have given us."

The lead editorial of *El Espectador* that same day issued a clarion call: "Preserving democracy from obstructions which nullify it, is, no doubt, the duty of the citizens of a free country. It is not enough to elect a President. It is an indispensable corollary to know how to replace him."

A mass strike process is ongoing in Honduras, as well, where the country's 14,000 hospital workers have just joined 70,000 public sector workers in a nationwide strike against that country's austerity policies. As we reported last week, in Venezuela, where living standards have plummeted under a similar IMF program, it was the federation of public hospital doctors that led a wave of nationwide strikes to force the government to abandon a murderous IMF-imposed ceiling on wages.