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Nov. 30: According to military sources cited by the Agence France-Presse, the recent coup attempt and subsequent looting and violence resulted in approximately US$130 million in damages to military installations and material while damages sustained by the private sector totalled more than US$30 million. (For previous coverage of the coup attempt and related developments, see NotiSur 12/01/92.) Damages to government installations, including the Miraflores presidential palace, the state-owned TV station and the Central University of Venezuela campuses in Caracas and Maracay were also substantial. Isidro Morales Paul, president of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), urged President Carlos Andres Perez to restore constitutional guarantees suspended in the wake of the coup attempt. Morales Paul warned Perez that the legitimacy of the Dec. 6 municipal elections could be questioned by Attorney General Ramon Escovar Salom if held in the absence of necessary constitutional guarantees and rights for voters and candidates. Ret. Gen. Alberto Muller Rojas, a harsh government critic who has formerly served as state governor, National Defense Council deputy secretary, and armed forces comptroller general told reporters he was released 24 hours after his arrest by secret police Nov. 29. Dec. 1: In a press conference, President Perez said security forces had "deactivated" a coup attempt in May when they detained former rebel leaders Douglas Bravo, head of the Tercer Camino rebel group, and Gabriel Puerta Aponte, leader of the Bandera Roja rebels. Perez confirmed that Puerta Aponte, reportedly killed in a clash with security forces shortly before the Nov. 27 coup attempt, was in fact alive. He said it was Gabriel's brother, Eder Puerta Aponte, who had been killed. Perez added that Gabriel Puerta Aponte and Douglas Bravo were both declared "fugitives" following their involvement in orchestration of the coup attempt. Perez refused to indicate the number or identity of civilians arrested during the coup attempt, saying he didn't want to "violate judicial secrecy." Perez rejected the possibility of another coup attempt, dismissed comparisons between Venezuela and Chile in 1973 during the last months of the government of Salvador Allende, and insisted he would not step down before the end of his term in 1994. "My presence in the government has been a guarantee of democratic stability," he said. Perez denied existence of a "conflict" between his government and that of President Alberto Fujimori in Peru. In an apparent modification of his earlier stance, Perez added that the recent constituent assembly elections in Peru appear to have succeeded in securing the participation of a wide range of social sectors. He added, however, that Fujimori's regime is "not yet legitimate." He said Venezuela would consider resuming diplomatic relations after the constituent congress is proved "autonomous and democratic." Venezuela suspended diplomatic relations with Peru following Fujimori's April 5 "auto-golpe," Peru recently granted political asylum to 93 members of the Venezuelan Air Force who fled from the Libertador air base following the failed coup attempt. In reference to the riots at the Catia prison, Perez said that only 63 prisoners died and 52 were wounded, in contrast to widespread reports of over 200 deaths. Perez said plans for the Nov. 27 coup attempt, including plans for the Catia prison uprising, had been found by security forces during a search of the Yare prison, where Lt. Col. Hugo Chavez Frias, leader of the Feb. 4 coup attempt, is being held. According to a report in the Washington Post, following the failed Feb. 4 coup attempt the US assisted the Venezuelan government in a campaign to reduce the likelihood of further uprisings within the armed forces. The campaign, which included removal of military
personnel suspected of sympathizing with the coup leaders, contributed to the failure of the recent coup bid, according to military experts and Venezuelan politicians cited in the report. However, the report indicated that the effort to stabilize the military has not been fully successful, and that another attempt to overthrow the government, possibly within the next six months, is predicted by many military and political analysts. In Iquitos (Peru), Air Force Gen. Francisco Visconti Osorio said he had received assurances from the Venezuelan government that 52 of the soldiers under his command would be allowed to return to Venezuela without fear of prosecution for involvement in the coup attempt. Visconti said the soldiers who accompanied him to Peru were "not responsible" for their involvement in the uprising, because they were "strictly following orders from superiors." Visconti said the rebel soldiers who choose to return could do so within the next 24 hours, along with the C-130 Hercules plane in which they arrived and the weapons carried by the 93 members of the Air Force who sought asylum in Peru. Visconti declared that the coup attempt was intended to "renew democracy in Venezuela." He referred to the current Venezuelan government system as a "partidocracia," devoid of significant participation by the people. Interior Minister Luis Pinerua told reporters the government would lift the suspension of certain constitutional rights imposed after the coup attempt, including restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of movement and freedom of assembly. According to an interview with daily newspaper El Nacional, Defense Minister Gen. Ivan Jimenez acknowledged the existence of continued rebel military resistance, including attacks on the Guaiacaipuro military base and the prison in Yare, 60 km. west of Caracas. "We are working to eliminate these subversives," said Jimenez, who emphatically denied a local radio report that two of the Feb. 4 coup leaders had escaped from the Yare prison. Next, Jimenez said that leftist rebels, who the government has accused of supporting both coup attempts this year, were regrouping in the area of Turimiquire in eastern Venezuela. Military spokesperson Nestor Lara denied rumors that Hugo Chavez had been killed during an inmate uprising at the Yare prison. He characterized the situation at the prison as "completely normal." The Supreme Court formally accepted a series of charges filed against President Perez by the Radical Cause (Causa Radical) party. Some of the charges, which were first presented to the court on Nov. 16, stem from a currency exchange scandal which Perez allegedly used as part of efforts to fund his 1989 presidential campaign. Perez is also charged with having violated the constitution by privatizing the national telephone company and by granting a special coal mining concession to a Colombian firm. The Supreme Court must now evaluate the charges. If the court decides sufficient evidence against Perez exists, it will request authorization from the Senate for an investigation. If an investigation is approved by the Senate, Perez would automatically be suspended from his post for the duration of the proceedings. The Supreme Court would then appoint a special judge to conduct the investigation. In statements to reporters in Lima, President Fujimori said his decision to grant asylum to rebels from the Venezuelan Air Force was not based on "personal rancor" toward any president, "especially not one in Latin America." He said the decision was based solely on the principles of international law and asylum, and mentioned that Chile had recently granted asylum to a Peruvian implicated in the Nov. 13 coup attempt in Peru. Eduardo Orozco, president of the National Association of Journalists (Colegio Nacional de Periodistas, CNP), presented Defense Minister Jimenez with a list of 26 cases of abuse against journalists committed during or since the Nov. 27 coup attempt. In addition, the National Press Workers Union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa, SNTP) presented a list of 25 members who have suffered mistreatment at the hands of government security forces during the same period. Dec. 3: Air Force Gen. Eutimio Fuguet told reporters that only 5% of all members of the Air Force had participated in the coup attempt. According to Gen. Visconti Osorio, about 90% of all members were involved in the uprising. Fuguet said the rebels
were able to take control of a number of planes by claiming that military units from other branches of the military were trying to take over Air Force installations. A special war council began the summary military trials of rebel military officers and civilians implicated in the coup attempt. According to government sources, the two-hour trials will be conducted around-the-clock until all trials have been completed. If convicted on charges of rebellion, the officers and civilians involved face maximum jail sentences of 30 years. The summary trial process is permissible under the military justice code only when constitutional guarantees have been suspended. Under the code, the coup-related trial and sentencing process must be completed within ten days. CSE president Isidro Morales Paul announced that the Dec. 6 municipal elections will be monitored by observer missions from Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, the US, Honduras, Panama and the Organization of American States (OAS). On Dec. 6, voters will elect 22 governors, 282 mayors and 2,118 municipal council members. Approximately 10 million Venezuelans are eligible to vote. Before the coup attempt, an abstention rate of more than 60% was predicted, despite the fact that voting is mandatory. In Iquitos (Peru) Visconti Osorio told reporters that Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario, MBR) were not among the leaders of the Nov. 27 military uprising. Visconti Osorio said the coup was organized among generals from the four military branches. He said the decision to proceed with the coup was made when Perez refused to include a referendum on the continuation of his term in office in the Dec. 6 elections. Visconti Osorio rejected the possibility of another coup attempt "for some time." Dec. 4: Forty-one members of the Venezuelan Air Force returned to the Libertador air base after fleeing to Peru following the failed coup attempt. The remaining 52 officers and soldiers accepted Peru's offer of political asylum. According to Chamber of Insurance Companies (Camara de Aseguradores) president William Phelan, more than US$128 million in losses were reported by businesses looted in the aftermath of the coup attempt. These losses will not be covered by the insurance companies, said Phelan. He said the Chamber's interpretation is that the damage was linked to the military rebellion, which is not covered under normal policies. Dec. 5: Author Juan Liscano told reporters that secret police (DISIP) arrested former Development (Fomento) minister Manuel Quijada on charges of involvement with the recent coup attempt. Liscano said Quijada faces a summary trial in the special military courts. Quijada served in the administration of former president Luis Herrera Campins (1974-1979). Quijada participated in the 1963 civil-military uprising against president Romulo Betancourt, for which he was detained for several years. Dec. 6: In a communique, detained Rear Adm. Hernan Gruber one of the alleged coup leaders rejected any link to leftist civilian groups "of any denomination or color" and said that on Nov. 27, military participants in the coup refused to provide arms to civilians who wanted to aid the uprising. He reiterated that the senior-level officers involved in the coup have for years been fighting against the same "anti-democratic" leftist rebel groups which the government now claims collaborated in the uprising. Gruber also rejected reports that the coup leaders intended to free and arm inmates of the Catia prison, where a riot and mass escape took place during the coup. Gruber said the riot was sparked in order to blame the coup leaders for the resulting massacre. Based on preliminary electoral results, the level of voter abstention in state and local elections was similar to the 56% registered in the previous municipal elections, with a significantly higher rate of abstention in Caracas. The preliminary vote count indicated a clear victory by the opposition COPEI (Comite de Organizacion Politica Electoral Independiente, Christian Democrat) party. (Sources: Washington Post, 12/02/92; Agence France-Presse, 11/30-12/06/92; Associated Press, 12/01/92, 12/02/92, 12/06/92; Spanish news service EFE, 11/30-12/06/92)