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Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori's State Address Met with Protests

by LADB Staff

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In his 50-minute State of the Nation address July 28, President Alberto Fujimori pledged to empower local governments and stimulate growth in what he called the "marginalized, isolated" Andes and Amazon regions. As he began his tenth year in office, the president used the speech to unveil some economic measures that would increase funds to pensioners and provide credit and tax breaks for small, struggling businesses.

As Fujimori spoke, opposition legislators held up banners saying, "No to re-election" and "Fujimori, the Peruvian people are dying of hunger." One congresswoman interrupted the president to hand him a cooking pot symbolizing the hunger afflicting many of Peru's 25 million people. Many business leaders and politicians said they had expected more forceful economic measures from the president and an announcement about whether he intends to run for a third term.

The economic problems that Peru has confronted since 1998 have led to an unemployment rate of almost 10% in the first quarter of this year and numerous business bankruptcies. "In general, the message is positive, but there are many unmentioned issues and a lack of detail in what he said," Emilio Navarro, president of the Sociedad Nacional de Industrias, said.

Economic analyst Alejandro Indacochea said the presidential message "was unorganized and lacked details, leaving an unfinished agenda regarding privatization, state modernization, and how the government will fight poverty without dependency on a paternalistic welfare system (asistencialismo).

Fujimori did not address other thorny issues, including charges that his administration largely ignores the basic tenets of a state of law. Nor did he mention any further Cabinet changes, including who will fill the recently vacated spot as interior minister. He made no mention of Peru's future relations with the Organization of American States (OAS), particularly the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), after he refused to accept a recent court ruling and announced that the government would no longer recognize the court's authority to hear cases involving Peru (see NotiSur, 1999-07-09).

The IACHR, to which Peru is a signatory, has several such cases pending. Fujimori leaves re-election question unanswered The president, first elected in 1990 and re-elected in 1995, has yet to say whether he will run again in 2000. He has questionable legal backing to run for a third term, thanks to a series of reforms approved by the administration-controlled Congress, which the opposition says are unconstitutional.

President in re-election mode

Most political analysts say that Fujimori has already begun his re-election campaign, with constant media appearances, appeals to the poorer sectors of society, and the re-emergence of his image as the stalwart foe of subversive groups. They say he used his State of the Nation address to reach out to potential voters. "It was very much an electoral speech, trying to earn political points," said Enrique Zileri, director of the weekly news magazine *Caretas*. "It was clearly aimed at appeasing different sectors, especially the lower and lower middle classes."

Lima Mayor Alberto Andrade said Fujimori's speech showed his obsession with winning another term. "He has always been campaigning," said Andrade. "That has been a serious mistake, the fatal obsession for re-election." Andrade, one of three candidates with a possibility of winning the presidency, called Fujimori's measures to decentralize public administration deceptive. He said the measures were late in coming, "with only nine months left in Fujimori's administration, when he has had nine years to decentralize the country."

Andrade said it was regrettable that in this "critical moment" in Peru, Fujimori has not resolved the unemployment problem. Despite the economic problems, Fujimori's support has risen in opinion polls this year, aided by his signing a peace treaty with Ecuador and his hard line toward "terrorists."

President touts capture of rebel leader

Certain to boost Fujimori's popularity is the recent capture of Oscar Ramirez Durand, "Feliciano," the leader of the Sendero Rojo faction of Sendero Luminoso and the most-wanted guerrilla since the 1992 capture of Sendero founder Abimael Guzman. Fujimori turned the capture of Feliciano into a media event.

The president, who remained overnight at the military base where Feliciano was taken, said he delegated the questioning to security advisor Vladimiro Montesinos, reported to be a distant cousin of the rebel leader. In official television footage of his transfer to Lima aboard a military plane, the hooded and handcuffed Feliciano was flanked by ski-masked military commandos. On July 19, military authorities dimmed the lights and brought Feliciano, the son of a retired general, onto a brightly-lit red-carpeted stage in the auditorium of the Consejo Supremo de Justicia Militar (CSJM). The press was not permitted to question Feliciano. Feliciano's capture came at an opportune moment for Fujimori and helped counteract the negative image created in the international community by his defiance of the IACHR.

Many questions surround the capture of Feliciano, who is expected to be tried on charges of terrorism and treason by a military court and sentenced to life in prison. Fujimori said the rebel leader was captured on a bus between Cochas Chicas and Huancayo as part of an intense military operation.

The Lima daily *La Republica* reported, however, that Feliciano had been captured 25 days prior to the date announced by Fujimori at the Hotel Turistas in Huancayo. To most Peruvians, the details are unimportant. "The capture of Feliciano is excellent news for Fujimori, whose ratings will go up

three or four points because of it," said sociologist Carlos Tapia, an expert on subversion. "But that will not solve the real problems of the Peruvians such as unemployment and poverty."

On Aug. 2, the CSJM gave a 15-day extension to the Direccion Nacional Contra el Terrorismo (DINCOTE) to continue its interrogation of Feliciano. The trial is set to begin Aug. 17 in a military court. "Despite the Inter-American Court telling us that they [terrorists] have to be judged in civilian court, we are a sovereign country that deserves respect and we will adopt our own positions," said Fujimori. [Sources: The Miami Herald, 07/15/99; Associated Press, 07/16/99, 07/19/99; Reuters, 07/15/99, 07/16/99, 07/19/99, 07/28/99; CNN, 07/15/99, 07/28/99; Spanish news service EFE, 07/21/99, 07/28/99; Clarin (Argentina), 07/16/99, 07/29/99; Notimex, 07/15/99, 07/20/99, 07/27/99, 07/30/99, 08/02/99]

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