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John Neagle

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Paraguayan Interior Minister Says Election Postponement Unconstitutional

by John Neagle

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On Feb. 15, Interior Minister Gen. Orlando Machuca said any change in the electoral schedule would violate the Constitution. "If we violate the Constitution at the request of the opposition, we also would be authorized to violate other regulations," he said. On the same day, opposition leaders complained that police raided a Feb. 14 meeting of the recently legalized Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PLRA). PLRA leaders said the meeting broke up when activists refused to continue their conference in presence of the police, as demanded by an unidentified police official who supervised the raid. Party chairperson Domingo Laino, Paraguay's most prominent opposition leader, told Agence France-Presse that after the incident Asuncion police chief Francisco Sanchez summoned him to police headquarters to demand prior notice for all future gatherings. The police official said he was acting on orders from superiors to check out the meeting in town of Benjamin Aceval, 40 km. north of Asuncion. Laino, who returned from exile in 1987 and was beaten and imprisoned numerous times in 1988, said the police chief had guaranteed the party's freedom of assembly. (Basic data from AFP, 02/14/89)

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