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Guatemalan President Accuses Two Daily Newspapers Of Printing "systematic Lies"

by Deborah Tyroler

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On April 25 daily newspapers El Grafico and Prensa Libre accepted a challenge by President Vinicio Cerezo to participate in a debate, after the president accused both of "systematically lying." In a message broadcast on radio and television on the evening of April 24, Cerezo asserted that "50% or more" of the information appearing in the two newspapers was exaggerated or false. He then challenged the newspaper editorial staffs to participate in a televised debate to "demonstrate how they have lied about what occurs in this country." Cerezo said he had accumulated a series of false news items to be discussed with the newspaper owners. The president added that he believed "attacks against the president and government institutions" by the two dailies would escalate. The president pointed out that El Grafico is owned by Jorge Carpio Nicole, leader of Guatemala's most important opposition party, the National Center Union (UCN). Carpio Nicole is the UCN's presidential candidate in next year's elections. Regarding the rightwing newspaper, Prensa Libre, Cerezo said its owners are upset because the government recently sent tax inspectors to its offices, a procedure employed "in all enterprises." Cerezo said that he had been accused of numerous types of wrongdoing, including drug trafficking. He added that some of the accusations were simply ridiculous, and all were false. In an editorial published April 25, Prensa Libre asserted that it had accepted the "challenge," and that its reporters would debate on "a network of 100 radio broadcasters and several television channels." The newspaper asserted that Cerezo "must provide details of the alleged lies that have appeared in this newspaper in a way that we have the opportunity to defend ourselves, point by point." El Grafico limited itself to publishing a summary of the president's broadcast. (Basic data from Notimex, 04/25/89)

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