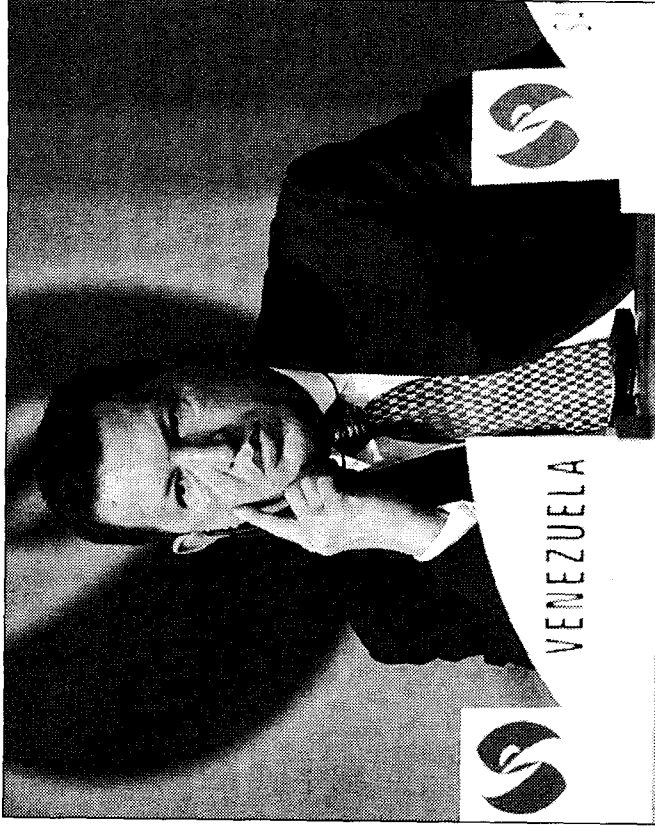


Revolutionaries of another kind

Hugo Chavez has done much to improve the lot of poor Venezuelans but, in the process, he has also gathered many enemies, writes Achin Vanaik



Fidel Castro's mythic status among the poor in Latin America has been long secure, but it is Hugo Chavez, the president of Venezuela, who is today the continent's most charismatic figure. Unlike his counterpart elsewhere (barring Castro), Chavez is both a man of action and an intellectual. A voracious reader, Chavez made the inaugural address at the "World Meeting of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humankind" held in Caracas from December 1 to 6, 2004, in which he referred to numerous writers, poets, philosophers and political thinkers from Lorca and Unamuno, to Russell, Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau and Nietzsche, to Marx, Trotsky and Leonardo Boff (of liberation theology fame).

Unafraid to call Falluja the Guernica of our times, Chavez presents a dramatic contrast to the reticence of most other leaders in this area. He can, in a moment, go from coolly and rationally arguing that socialism, Bolivarianism and "Christianism" are united by an essential commitment to social justice and to the poor, to emotionally declaring that the soul of Brazil lay in its shanty towns and that the soul of Latin America was indissolubly merged with Africanism. No wonder then that he has polarized Venezuelan society as never before.

Chavez is loathed by the country's richest 20 per cent. They see him as a closet Communist and Fidelista who, by imposing capital controls, has prevented their capital from going abroad, as well as enforced far stricter tax-collection standards. American oil majors, backed by Washington, hate him. Oil extraction royalties, once

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ianism that it never possessed earlier. Simultaneously, it has also given it indigenous ideological roots that protect Chavez from right-wing charges of "importing" Communism, even as he discards the traditional Latin American left which looks in vain for the Marx-inspired cadre-based party that is supposed to be backing any such progressive project.

In less than two years, Chavez has transformed social policy and practice by building independent structures parallel to the corrupt, bureaucratized and inept official ministries of health and education. In most *barrios* (working class neighbourhoods) throughout the country, there now exists an integrated community complex. Well-equipped medical clinics staffed by 17,000 Cuban doctors, dentists, surgeons (who live and eat with local volunteer families) provide quality treatment for free, and do it with respect for the dignity of patients. In keeping with the Cuban concept of public health, there are Cuban instructors and sports facilities. Neighbourhood soup kitchens provide two meals a day to the identified homeless. To complete the picture, there will be a subsidized supermarket for cheap basic foodstuffs, a modest cultural-recreational centre and elementary education facilities for young and old illiterates, with secondary schooling and technical colleges and universities for the more advanced. The overall result is the emergence of vibrant community-based structures that can become the foundation for the construction of a nationally coordinated system of popular democracy. This, in turn, can ensure the long-term success of his Bolivarian revolution, eventually outlasting Chavez himself. Indispensable today, he must not remain so tomorrow.

Internal and external obstacles remain. An amazing, near-one-million militants, organized into "electoral bat-

tle units", were responsible for Chavez's referendum victory despite absolute media hostility. One-third must now become committed cadres, organized into "social battle units", to carry Chavez's project forward by outflanking the corrupt and faction-ridden Fifth Republic Movement, the party that formally supports Chavez. Over the next decade, the moribund, reactionary and pro-US civilian bureaucracies must be revamped, difficult though it is, by the infusion of young blood trained to be professionally competent.

Externally, what can the US political establishment and its Venezuelan cohorts do, or hope for? Occupied in west Asia, a direct US invasion is ruled out for the time being. The best option for Chavez-baiters is a three-pronged strategy. Ideologically, wage the fiercest possible propaganda campaign against him. Economically, try and destabilize his rule by whatever means including sabotage. Militarily, encourage the Colombian army and government to carry out an unofficial war in Venezuela. But the most effective short-term measure would be the assassin's bullet, a possibility made all too real by the recent killing of Chavez's public prosecutor in a car-bomb explosion.

In all likelihood, Chavez will make an official visit to India early next year. It is too much to expect an Indian government, so ideologically in hock to neo-liberalism and so keen to forge a strategic alliance with the US, to try and understand, let alone endorse, Bolivarianism. But for narrowly pragmatic reasons, New Delhi might see some merit in deepening trade and investment ties with Caracas, exploring the possibility for greater South-South political cooperation, and promoting wider, stronger and freer connections between civil society in both countries. Just this much will be welcome.

The lone ranger

Simon Bolivar: though born in Venezuela and a national hero, is the continent's greatest symbol of independence against colonialism. Bolivarianism, therefore, has mass appeal across national boundaries making Chavez a threat to elite regimes elsewhere. His decisive innovation was to elevate to heroic status Simon Rodriguez, Bolivar's one-time teacher and a radical humanist who left a body of writing expressing his commitment to justice for the poor. This has provided a social content to Bolivar-

the fact that Venezuela is undergoing a genuine upheaval whose fate is uncertain though Chavez is politically at his peak. His resounding victory in the August 2004 referendum was followed in October by the capture in the elections of 21 of the country's 23 states and 270 of 335 municipalities. The military is firmly under his control as ever.

Chavez's real political genius, however, has been in the way he has redefined Bolivarianism as the guiding spirit and the ideology of his political project.

23 massacred in Honduras bus

11-17 2512 *Colin & Helen Amie*

Tegucigalpa (Honduras): Unknown assailants opened fire on a public bus in northern Honduras late on Thursday night, killing at least 23 passengers and wounding 16 others, including women and children, the police said.

The shooting took place in the northern Atlantic city of Chamelecon, said police spokesman Wilmer Torres.

Police in the nearby industrial city of San Pedro Sula had arrested one suspect, believed to be a member of the violent Mara Salvatrucha gang, who was driving a vehicle similar to that identified by witnesses as having participated in the attack. Authorities seized a .38-calibre pistol and several automatic weapons from the suspect, and had begun interrogating him, Torres said.

The assailants left a large piece of paper taped to the bus's front windshield with a message saying they represented a revolutionary group that opposes the death penalty. The message contained "vulgar words" against congressional president Porfirio Lobo Sosa and security minister



Maduro (centre) with Alvarez (right)

Oscar Alvarez, Torres said.

The attack came just two days after Alvarez announced that authorities had uncovered plans by drug traffickers and local criminals to assassinate Honduran President Ricardo Maduro and his family, as well as himself.

"The reports establish that drug traffickers and organised crime have given the gang members the necessary information for them to carry out the attack against the President ... and that worries us," Alvarez said at the time.

Maduro announced on Monday that he was increasing security for himself and his family after receiving death threats from criminal groups the government is investigating in Honduras.

Lobo Sosa is one of four candidates who will compete in a primary on February 20 to determine the ruling National Party's presidential candidate for the November 2005 election. Lobo has suggested instituting the death penalty for severe crimes such as murder, rape and kidnapping. Honduras abolished the death penalty in the 1950s. AP

Pinochet indicted, under house arrest

SF-2
Control of Latin America

Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Dec. 13. — Former Chilean military dictator General Augusto Pinochet was indicted today and placed under house arrest for the kidnapping of nine dissidents and the killing one of them during his 1973-90 regime.

Judge Mr Juan Guzman made the announcement nearly three months after questioning Chile's 89-year-old former ruler, and having him examined by doctors to determine whether he can stand trial.

Mr Guzman said he decided to try Pinochet after carefully reviewing an interview Pinochet granted to a Spanish language television station in Miami. He said he is convinced Pinochet is healthy enough to stand trial. Pinochet's trial is part of Mr Guzman's investigation of the so-called Operation Condor, a scheme by the dictators who ruled several South American nations in the 1970s and '80s to suppress dissidents.

"This (is) a historic decision that must



Rosa Silva, daughter of Mario Silva, who was assassinated in Antofagasta in October 1973, during Operation Condor, reacts after Monday's indictment. — AFP

be celebrated by all democrats," said Ms Viviana Diaz, a member of a dissidents' organisation, some of whose members disappeared during Pinochet's regime. "This is great news for all those Chileans who do not accept impunity in the violations of human rights."

Pinochet's lawyers are expected to appeal against Guzman's decision before the Supreme Court. "This is a tremendous violation of a person's most basic human rights," Pinochet's chief defence lawyer Mr Pablo Rodriguez said.

The ruling marks the second time Pinochet faces trial for the abuses during his 17-year-long regime. In 2001, he was indicted for the killings carried out by the Caravan of Death, a mobile deaths squad that executed 75 political prisoners in the weeks after the 1973 coup that brought Pinochet to power. But the Supreme Court later ruled that the aging dictator was physically and mentally unfit to stand trial. His attorneys argue that his condition continues

Pinochet has been diagnosed with a mild case of dementia. In addition he suffers from diabetes and uses a pacer-maker. But Mr Guzman said the reports he received from three doctors who examined Pinochet convinced him that he can stand trial. Mr Guzman said Pinochet's answers during the interview with the Miami station indicated he was mentally alert.

Pinochet faces scores of other criminal suits stemming from the alleged abuses carried out during his regime. An official report issued soon after the restoration of democracy in 1990 found 3,197 people had died or disappeared under Pinochet's rule. Earlier this month, an appeals court stripped Pinochet of immunity from prosecution for a 1974 car bombing that killed an exiled Chilean General and the man's wife in Argentina.

Pinochet's health problems, however, remain the former ruler's best hope to avoid the courts.

14 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

14 DEC 2004

South America meet for economic bloc

9/11
HD-13
CUZCO (PERU), DEC. 8. Presidents and high-ranking officials from 12 South American countries are meeting in this ancient Inca capital high in the Andes to create a political and economic bloc to deal on a more equal footing with the United States and Europe.

The leaders will meet for a two-day summit starting on Wednesday to sign an accord establishing the South American Community of Nations. It is the third meeting of the group since 10 South American Presidents first gathered in 2000 in Brazil to discuss continent-wide problems and solutions.

But with three of the 12 countries' Presidents — Ecuador's Lucio Gutierrez, Uruguay's Jorge Batlle and Argentina's Nestor Kirchner — remaining at home and sending representatives, some critics questioned how serious the commitment

Center of Latin Am
was to forming a powerful regional bloc. Proponents of the new organisation were still optimistic. "In the last 30 years we have sought a Latin America with the capacity for effective international action and we have not achieved it because the countries of South America have been scattered, not unified," said the Peruvian Foreign Minister, Manuel Rodriguez. "With this new community, Latin America will be fortified."

Caribbean community

He noted that the bloc would complement the Caribbean Community and the Central American Common Market.

The 12 nations include Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela, along with Guyana and Suriname, two countries that are participating for the first time. — AP

09 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Cuba will no longer accept US dollars

Havana, October 26

CUBA ANNOUNCED on Monday that US dollars will no longer be accepted at businesses and stores on the communist island starting next month in a move that will radically change the way cash transactions have been done there over the past decade.

The resolution by Cuba's Central Bank seemed aimed at finding new sources for foreign reserves as the US government steps up efforts to prevent dollars from reaching the island as part of a strategy to undermine Fidel Castro's government. Cuba's national currency, the peso, cannot be used with international partners.

"Beginning on November 8, the convertible peso will begin to circulate in substitution of the dollar throughout the national territory," Castro said in a written message to the nation. Castro also asked Cubans to tell relatives living abroad to send them money in other foreign currencies, such as Euros, British pounds or Swiss francs.

The US dollar has been a primary form of currency in Cuba since the early 1990s, when the island government was forced to implement liberal reforms to cope with the loss of Soviet aid and trade. The possession of dollars was legalised in 1993 to draw hard currency from tourism and from family purchases at state stores.

The move announced on Monday was likely to hurt mostly those Cubans who receive American dollars from relatives living in the United States. Cubans and others on the island can still hold dollars in unlimited quantities and can change them into pesos before the new policy takes effect. But they will have to pay a 10 per cent charge to exchange dollars afterward while there will be no such charge for other currencies.

The Cuban government said the change is necessary to protect its economy as the Bush administration seeks to punish banks and businesses that ship American dollars to Cuba, which has been under a US trade and financial embargo for more than 40 years.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 OCT 2004

Castro laughs off fall, suffers two fractures

Associated Press
Havana, October 21

PRESIDENT FIDEL Castro fell down as he was leaving the stage after a televised speech yesterday, breaking his left knee and right arm, but recovered his composure to assure Cubans that he was otherwise "all in one piece."

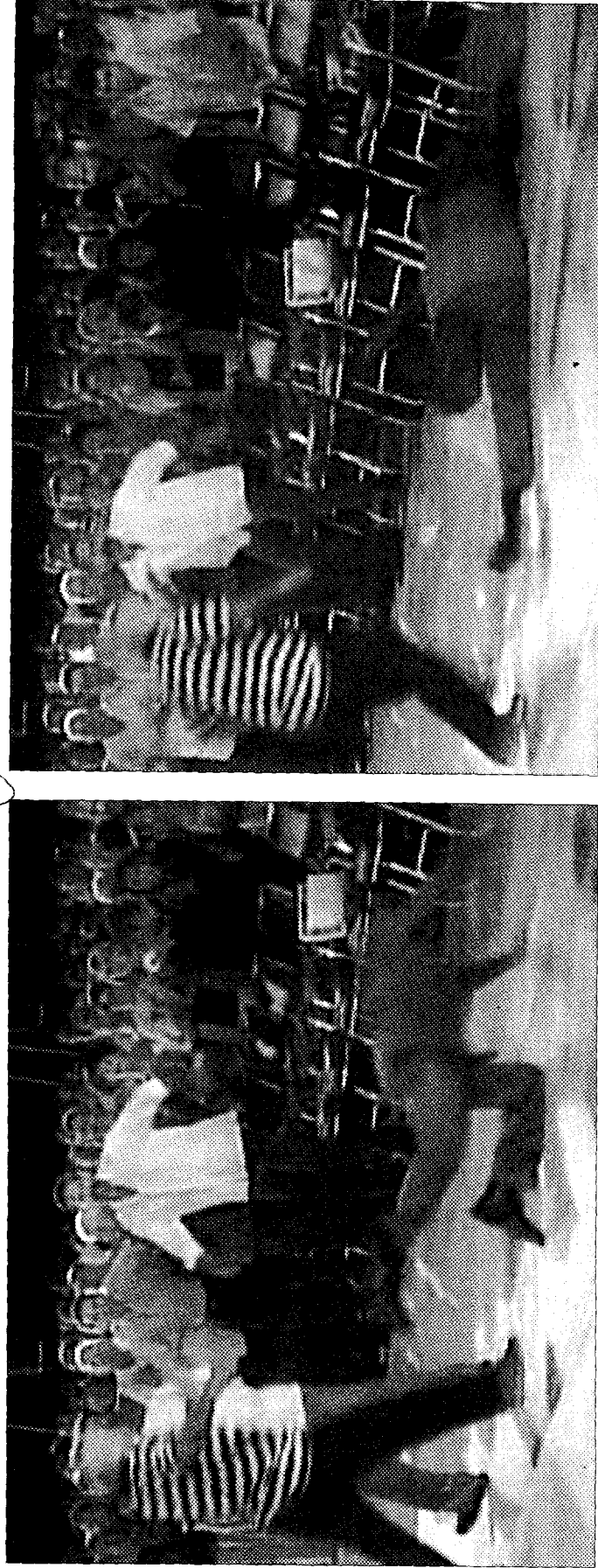
Castro, 78, was shown on live television after his tumble, sitting in a chair at the outdoor event in the central city of Santa Clara, a three-hour's drive east of Havana. Holding a microphone, he said that, "maybe I broke my knee, and maybe an arm ... but I am all in one piece".

People watching television could not see what happened after Castro wrapped up the speech at a graduation ceremony for arts instructors and left the stage. Television viewers only

saw several of his security men running, evidently to assist him. Castro tripped on a concrete step after he finished walking down the wooden stairs from the stage, then fell onto the ground on his right side, first hitting his knee and hip, and then his elbow and arm. He was surrounded by security agents and others who rushed to help him up.

As he has grown older, Castro's knees have seemed to bother him more and his step has seemed less steady. Dressed in his typical olive green uniform, Castro was sweating profusely when he appeared on camera less than a minute after the fall.

He asked Cubans to forgive him for "any suffering this may have caused. I will do what is possible to recover as fast as possible, but as you can see I can still talk," he said. "Even if they put me in a



A series of two pictures, taken from television, shows Cuban President Fidel Castro tripping and falling down after delivering a speech in Santa Clara, Cuba on Wednesday. AP

cast, I can continue in my work." The international Press has captured it and surely tomorrow it will be on the front pages of the newspapers," said and television camera crews at the event. "The international Press has captured it and surely tomorrow it will be on the front pages of the newspapers," said

Castro. He then encouraged those at the event to continue with their musical program. Castro had made it clear he

did not want to leave the area in an ambulance and was later seen speeding away in his Benz. The health of Castro, in power for 45 years, has long been closely watched — particularly by his political enemies in Miami, home to Cuban exiles.

Center
of Latin
America

A LEADER OF THE MASSES

HD-10
29/8

WITH INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS certifying the fairness of a referendum on the continuance in office of Venezuela's President, Hugo Chavez, his opponents ought to have stifled their cries of protest. However, the anti-Chavez movement shows no sign of abating even though foreign powers that support the opposition advised it to accept the verdict. A motley collection of political parties mounted a massive effort to persuade Venezuelans to vote "Yes" on the question whether they wanted their President to quit office. An elite-controlled media supported these efforts and helped create the impression that the recall vote would be a close run affair. However, the result showed that a significant majority of voters who participated in the exercise did not want to oust their President. The beneficiaries of the socio-economic reforms that Mr. Chavez has undertaken since he first entered office in 1998 came out strongly to defend the gains they have made. The apparent irreversibility of the reform process has so alarmed the privileged sections that they have tried various means to end the presidential term of a person they denounce as a dangerous demagogue. After the failure of a coup they had backed in 2002, upper-crust Venezuelans resorted to the recall process although they had opposed the constitutional changes that created this mechanism. They apparently hoped that a United States administration that has always given them its blessing would heed their complaints about a stolen vote and somehow nullify the outcome of the referendum.

Mr. Chavez's opponents will not forgive him because he is the first leader in Venezuela's history to use the country's oil wealth for the benefit of the masses instead of letting it be monopolised by a local elite and foreign companies. This wealth has been channelled into programmes for raising literacy levels, improving institutions of

higher education, and enhancing health care. For instance, thousands of Cuban doctors were hired to provide effective yet inexpensive healthcare for the needy among the 25 million Venezuelans. Residents of slums are being provided title to the sites they reside on and poor peasants are being helped to recultivate abandoned fields. Significantly, these programmes are not being carried out in a top-down manner or even with the government as the nodal agency. Grassroots networks are being encouraged to initiate measures to increase employment and improve welfare. Women have been empowered since they head the local committees that draw up and implement many of these programmes. As a result of the Chavez administration's efforts at various levels, Venezuela's less-privileged classes have reason to believe, for the first time in recent memory, that they can improve their lot. While Mr. Chavez's rule might not be blemishless, his underprivileged compatriots clearly know they have a vital stake in his administration. This realisation led to a massive mobilisation of the pro-Chavez vote in the referendum.

Mr. Chavez's troubles are not over as his domestic detractors and their foreign supporters will persist with confrontation. They cannot countenance the success of this experiment in social democracy — the "Bolivarian revolution" as its proponents term it — since it sets an example for the rest of Latin America. The history of the region has usually featured a template in which unelected despots allowed local elites and their foreign backers to exploit the impoverished masses. That historical trend is now under challenge in Venezuela. Genuine democrats and progressive people round the world must wish Mr. Chavez well as he pursues his agenda for socio-economic relief and acts as an agent of change — against formidable odds.

THE HINDU

21 AUG 2002

REFERENDUM / OPPOSITION CRIES FOUL

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Centre of labor

An irreversible victory: Chavez

CARACAS (VENEZUELA), AUG. 16. The Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez, survived a popular referendum to oust him in a vote that attracted so many Venezuelans that they overwhelmed ballot stations, according to results announced on Monday.

Backers of the Leftist President immediately set off fireworks and began celebrating in the streets of the capital in the pre-dawn darkness.

The Opposition quickly claimed fraud.

Francisco Carrasquero, President of the National Elections Council, said 58 per cent of voters voted "no" to the question of whether Mr. Chavez should immediately end his term in office, and 42 per cent voted "yes." That tally was with 94 per cent of the votes counted, Mr. Carrasquero said.

"It is absolutely impossible that the victory of the 'no' be reversed," Mr. Chavez, standing on a presidential palace balcony in the pre-dawn darkness, told thousands of jubilant supporters. "This has been a great victory for the Venezuelan people."

'Clear lead'

Mr. Carrasquero stopped short of declaring Mr. Chavez the outright winner of the refer-

endum. But vote counts he released — 49.91 lakhs against Mr. Chavez's recall and 35.76 lakhs in favour — indicated an insurmountable lead.

Haydee Deutsch, an Opposition leader, said fraud had been committed and that the Opposition "has no doubt that we won by an overwhelming majority."

Oil prices fluctuate

Questions about the future of the world's fifth largest oil exporter led to record high oil prices. On Monday, crude oil prices hit a new all-time high of \$46.90 per barrel amid uncertainty about Mr. Chavez's rule and continuing unrest in Iraq.

However, after the news of Mr. Chavez victory came in, crude oil futures declined.

Plea to accept outcome

Mr. Chavez called on the Opposition to accept the results, and pledged that he would also do so. Venezuelans could either vote "no" to allow Mr. Chavez to serve out the remainder of his six-year term, which began in 2000, or "yes" to recall him.

For Mr. Chavez to lose, more must vote against him than the nearly 3.8 million who voted for him in the 2000 presidential elections, and there must also be more "yes" votes than "no" votes. — AP

Chavez future hangs on poll

By Dan Glaister

CARACAS, AUG. 14. Dressed in a pink lurex trouser suit and munching on a bar of chocolate shared with her sister and a friend, Cristina Mas did not fit the typical image of a political activist.

But the shopkeeper from the La Candelaria neighbourhood of Caracas has been on every march against the Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez, since protests began four years ago.

Final protest

"This is a dream for me," she shouted, trying to make herself heard over the noise of hundreds of thousands of marchers walking through the centre of the city. Ms. Mas was taking part in the final protest to mobilise voters for tomorrow's referendum that will decide whether the charismatic Mr. Chavez continues his six-year reign as President of the oil-rich country.

The vote will, in part, be a verdict on his attempts to tackle poverty. Recent polls have shown Mr. Chavez to hold an advantage of 10-25 per cent over the Opposition, a disparate coalition of some 14 groups and parties. But judging by the mood on Thursday's march, few people place any faith in the polls.

Despite the political tension evident across the capital, the atmosphere was more carnival than protest. Sound systems blared from the back of lorries,

stilt-walkers tottered through the crowds, fireworks were launched and drummers shimied their way through the demonstrators.

Vital function

Ms. Mas had not considered herself a political person before she became involved in the protests. "I hated politics," she said, "I considered myself a very materialistic person. But we've sacrificed things here that people were used to. And for what result? He's done nothing for social welfare, nothing to improve the economy. This now has become like my personal struggle." But she conceded that Mr. Chavez had performed one vital function for his country.

"He's achieved something that nobody has ever managed to do — he's politicised people. So when we get rid of Chavez we won't return to the bad ways of the past. In the future, with the next President, if he doesn't act correctly, we'll throw him out as well," she said.

Around her, five marches converged on the city, bringing to a head a campaign that has gained more signatures on a petition to recall the president than were cast in his favour when he was elected in 1998.

Under attack

But the campaign has come under attack. Critics point to the money allegedly supplied by George Bush's administration to kick-start the Opposition, the

stagnant neo-liberalism of the campaign's economic policies and the preponderance of the country's discredited former political elite among its highest ranks.

The pro-Chavez 'no' campaign has adopted red as its colour, the 'yes' campaign, yellow, blue and red. Irving Bades was sporting his yellow "Primero Justicia" T-shirt with pride.

Like Ms. Mas, he has not missed a demonstration against Mr. Chavez, travelling from his home state of Miranda, half-an-hour from the capital.

Back at the Miraflores Palace, the man who engineered the country's new constitution was assuring the press of his forthcoming victory and of his intention to stand for re-election in the unlikely event that he should lose.

"Given the advantage we have (in the polls) over the Opposition, it is totally impossible that we will lose on Sunday," he said. But, he added: "If I come to lose the referendum, that very same day I will hand over the presidency to the Vice-President. And perhaps I'll go and rest for a few days and to reflect before steeling myself to be a candidate again."

Mr. Chavez spoke of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Abraham Lincoln, Aristotle, Noam Chomsky (who, Mr. Chavez reminded his listeners, had referred to Aristotle as a "dangerous radical" and the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

W. S. ...
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TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2004

W
HP-10

WORKING WITH BRAZIL 27/1

THERE IS MORE to Brazil President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's five-day visit to India than the development of bilateral economic relations. True, the second visit in eight years by a Brazilian head of state signifies the sea change in economic relations between two of the biggest developing countries in the world. Two-way trade has doubled in four years and now stands at over \$1 billion a year. Mr. Lula heads a high-level delegation that comprises a number of provincial governors, senators and business chiefs. Five bilateral agreements, including two on space and tourism, are to be signed and representatives of the two countries are exploring cooperation in pharmaceuticals and information technology. The Brazilian President's visit has already witnessed an unusual and significant development, the signing of a framework preferential trade agreement between India and the Mercosur group made up of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. However, beyond cementing bilateral and regional ties, Mr. Lula has travelled to India to further a grander strategic vision that Brazil hopes it can make a reality along with India, China and South Africa.

Brazil, under Mr. Lula, has realised that the only way developing countries can retain a measure of national autonomy in a unipolar world is through the larger economies of the South forging closer economic relations and formulating common positions in global fora. The alliance Brazil so successfully crafted and led on agriculture issues at the 2003 Cancun meeting of the World Trade Organisation demonstrated that this strategy could work in furthering the interests of the developing countries. Earlier, Brazil had overseen the formation of a tricontinental body, the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum, to facilitate, among other things, closer coordination

among the three countries in the international arena. Cancun, however, was only one event and the IBSA Forum is still only a channel for dialogue. The leading developing countries have a great deal more to do by way of building formal and informal ties among themselves before they can attempt to acquire muscle and negotiating independence in international economic organisations.

On the eve of his visit to India, the Brazilian President stated that India and Brazil could "change the trade geography of the world"; on his arrival, he declared his country sought "a strategic alliance" with India. What this means is clear: if the two countries increase bilateral trade manifold and simultaneously adopt common positions in global negotiations, they can have a major influence on the shape of world trade agreements. If this alliance includes China and South Africa as well, the impact on the content of global pacts will be much greater. In that event, the pattern of world trade could change. Brazil hopes to unveil its plans in greater detail at the eleventh United Nations Conference on Trade and Development that it will host later this year. India, however, is yet to reveal its mind about the Brazilian vision. It has of course worked with Brazil at the WTO and has been an active member of the IBSA Forum, but it has not openly demonstrated much interest in creating a larger alliance of major developing economies to work on a broader agenda. India's unwillingness to displease what the Government calls its "natural ally", the United States, may underlie this hesitation — just as Brazil's discomfort at being dominated by the U.S. is driving its search for allies in the South. However, it is in India's long-term economic interest to develop a measure of policy autonomy in a globalised world. The country has much to gain from responding more positively to the Brazilian initiative

THE HINDU 27 JAN 2004

Rio appeals against travel checks

Center for Latin America 1-3 3/11/04

Rio de Janeiro, Jan. 7 (Reuters): Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's top travel destination, yesterday appealed a court order requiring US tourists to be fingerprinted and photographed.

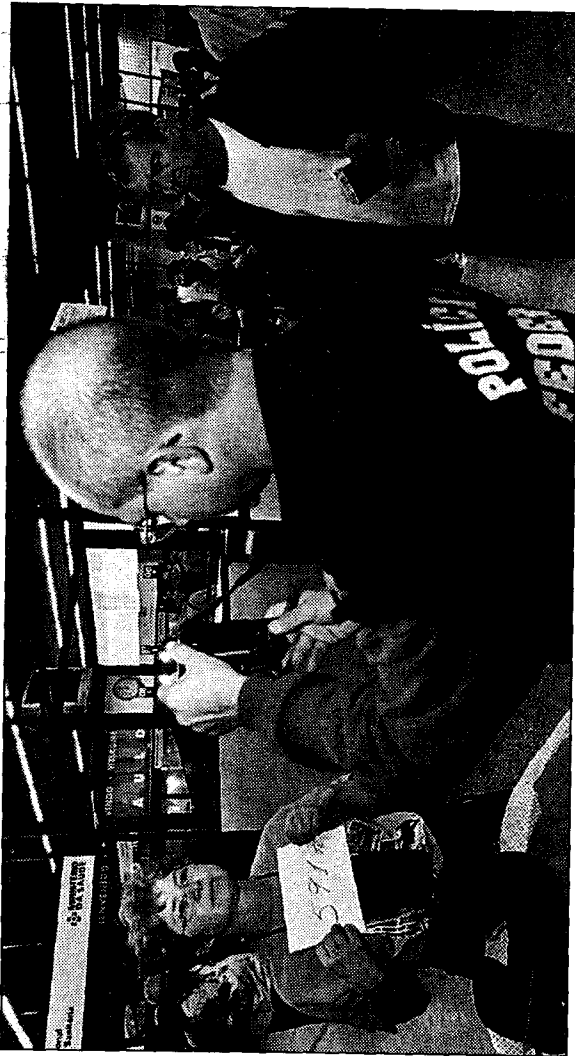
Rio's deputy attorney general Alberto Guimaraes Junior, also said compensation was being sought from the federal government for losses in tourism earnings. He gave no estimate of the value being claimed.

Earlier yesterday, Rio's special secretary for tourism Rubem Medina said that the identification system, which began on January 1 in response to a similar US programme for travellers entering the US, could halve the number of American tourists to Rio.

"We make an enormous effort to attract and win over US tourists, and a decision like that one puts us at risk of losing everything," he said. Some 20 per cent of the 350,000 foreign visitors to Rio every year are US tourists, Medina said.

Some US tourists arriving to Rio de Janeiro on Monday were kept waiting up to eight hours, causing many of them to miss connecting flights or a day of sightseeing.

"Ours is all electronic scanning and in and out in a heartbeat. Here it's 15 minutes, 20 min-



An immigration officer (centre) takes a picture of a US tourist at the International Airport of Cumbica in Sao Paulo, Brazil. (AFP)

utes per person," said Lorin Hall, a US tourist who arrived in Rio over the weekend.

Donna Hrinak, US ambassador to Brazil, said in Brasilia that the US and Brazil were trying to find a way to speed up the identification process. The measure was ordered by a Brazilian judge last week in response to a lawsuit that went into court. It requires that

many countries, including Brazil, to be digitally photographed and fingerprinted on arrival at 115 US airports and 14 cruise ship ports.

Critics argue the system is not only humiliating but also ineffective because it exempts tourists and business travellers on short visits from 27 mostly European nations as well as Canadians, who fall under special immigration rules.

Brazilian authorities are mainly concerned that their system will hurt business as cities like Rio prepare for the peak tourist season and the famous Carnival bash next month.

"It's another issue that could curtail the increase in the flow of US tourists to the country at a moment when we are intensifying our marketing campaigns," said Ricardo Schaefer, a special advisor to tourism minister Wal-

frido dos Mares Guia. US travellers to Brazil have increased 58 per cent between 1997 and 2003, Schaefer said.

Medina said attorneys for the city will argue that federal Judge Julier Sebastiao da Silva acted outside his constitutional power by ordering the system.

UN target

With the US tightening restrictions on foreigners entering the country, UN officials, even high-ranking ones, have been a target of searches and detention.

"I know that in the past my colleagues from West Asia with Islamic names have had problems, and they've been detained sometimes at the airport," UN secretary-general Kofi Annan told reporters yesterday.

But he said it was too early to judge whether thousands of UN staff, most of whom are not US citizens, were subject to fingerprinting and photographs, a new system initiated by the US at airports this week.

UN officials have said Tharaya Obaid, a Saudi Arabian citizen and head of the UN Population Fund, has had difficulty entering the US and reported incidents at UN cabinet meetings.

She holds the rank of under-secretary-general and carries a special UN passport as well as her national one.

ব্রাজিলে টিপ ছাপ প্রতিবাদ আমেরিকার

৬ জানুয়ারি— ব্রাজিলের বিমানবন্দরে নামা মার্কিন যাত্রীদের টিপ ছাপ নেওয়া ও ছবি তোলার যে নতুন নিয়ম ব্রাজিল সরকার চালু করেছে তার প্রতিবাদ করল আমেরিকা। মার্কিন দূতাবাস সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, নিজেদের নিরাপত্তা রক্ষার অধিকার যে কোনও স্বাধীন দেশেরই আছে। কিন্তু এ ক্ষেত্রে এই ব্যবস্থা যে শুধু মার্কিন নাগরিকদের ক্ষেত্রেই প্রযোজ্য হচ্ছে তা দুর্ভাগ্যজনক।

উল্লেখ্য, জাতীয় সুরক্ষার খাতিরে আর্ন্তজাতিক বিমানযাত্রীদের টিপ ছাপ ও ছবি নেওয়ার রীতি প্রথমে চালু করে আমেরিকা। প্রত্যুত্তরে ব্রাজিলও মার্কিন যাত্রীদের জন্য একই পদ্ধতি চালু করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেয়। সাও পাওলো এবং রিও ডি জেনিরোতে ইতিমধ্যেই এই প্রক্রিয়া শুরু হয়ে গেছে। ফলে কাল বিমান বন্দরে নয় ঘণ্টারও বেশি সময় ধরে আটকে থাকেন কিছু মার্কিন যাত্রী। ঘটনার প্রতিবাদ করে আমেরিকা বলেছে, আমরা সব দেশের ক্ষেত্রে একই নিয়ম চালু করেছি। একটি দেশের বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া অন্যায়। '১১ সেপ্টেম্বর' যাতে আর না ঘটে তাই আমেরিকাগামী সব উড়ানে পাইলটের সঙ্গে সশস্ত্র রক্ষী রাখার দাবি তুলল আমেরিকা। এর প্রতিবাদে ইউরোপ ও সাউথ আফ্রিকার দু'টি বিমানসংস্থা যৌথ বিবৃতিতে জানিয়েছে, এটা হলে তারা উড়ান বাতিল করবে। — রয়টার্স