

latin american weekly report

05 April 2018, WR-18-13

ISSN 0143-5280

CONTENTS

LEADER	1
Alvarado Quesada makes history in Costa Rica	
CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN TRACKING TRENDS	
ANDEAN COUNTRIES	
PERU	4
Can Vizcarra's cabinet square the circle?	
VENEZUELA	5
Police cell deaths highlight criminal justice crisis	
VENEZUELA	7
Essequibo dispute provides a political wild card	
BRAZIL & SOUTHERN CONE	
BRAZIL	8
End of the line for Lula	
BRAZIL	9
Temer back on the defensive	
ARGENTINA	10
Football rocked by sexual abuse claims	
CHILE	11
Students threaten fresh unrest	
TRACKING TRENDS	
MEXICO & NAFTA	
MEXICO	13
Meade throws down challenge to rivals	
MEXICO	14
Reproved over human rights	
TRACKING TRENDS	
POSTSCRIPT	16
Security issues still daunting in Colombia	
Quotes of the week	

This edition of *Latin American Weekly Report* has been produced for Canning House Corporate Members by LatinNews (www.latinnews.com)

Alvarado Quesada makes history in Costa Rica

After an electoral process characterised by multiple twists and turns, Costa Rica's presidential run-off delivered yet another surprise on 1 April – a landslide victory for Carlos Alvarado Quesada of the ruling centre-left Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC). Up until voting day, surveys had shown him in a dead heat with Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz of the small conservative Partido Restauración Nacional (PRN), whose surge ahead of the 4 February first round (which he won) had caused a major upset [[WR-18-05](#)].

Alvarado Quesada's victory over Alvarado Muñoz, a one-time PRN legislator (2010-2014), evangelical preacher and anti-establishment figure, suggests in the end that the electorate opted for continuity rather than a step into the unknown. Yet Alvarado Muñoz's candidacy exposed major divisions – both within the country and the two main parties, Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) and Partido Unidad Socialcristiana (PUSC). And, given the PAC's weak presence in the next legislature, it is hardly a surprise that Alvarado Quesada, a former minister of labour (2016-2017) and human development & social well-being (2014-2016), is calling for national unity.

With 99.97% of the vote counted, Alvarado Quesada, who at the age of 38 will become Costa Rica's youngest-ever president, took 60.66% of the vote to 39.34% for Alvarado Muñoz. The supreme electoral tribunal (TSE) also reported that participation in the second round hit 66.46%, while abstention stood at 33.54%, marking the first time in Costa Rica's history that turnout for the run-off was higher than in the first round (when abstention amounted to 34.27% of the vote).

This suggests that the calls by the PAC presidential candidate for people to go out and vote met with success. It also reflects the fact that the PRN candidate remains a deeply polarising figure. The latest poll by the centre for research and policy studies (Ciep) at the Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) ahead of voting day cited 37% of respondents as saying that they would never vote for Alvarado Muñoz (compared with 25% who said they would never vote for Alvarado Quesada).

Having won the first round through capitalising on the conservative backlash to January's ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Corte-IDH) on same-sex marriage [[WR-18-04](#)], Alvarado Muñoz's poor showing in the run-off has been attributed to various factors. As well as his relative lack of experience in office, the PRN candidate's association with an evangelical preacher Rony Chávez – whom he described as his "spiritual father" – and who had reportedly spoken badly of figures in the Catholic Church, to which the majority of Costa Ricans belong, proved damaging in the final stages of

Another first

Through Carlos Alvarado Quesada's electoral victory, the PAC has made history for another reason – one of his two running mates, Epsy Campbell, will become Costa Rica's first Afro-Latina vice president as well as the first black female vice president in Latin America. A founder of the PAC which was established in 2000, Campbell has been a national legislator on two occasions – 2002-2006 and 2014-2018. She was also candidate for the vice presidency in 2006.

the campaign. Similarly, Alvarado Muñoz's refusal to participate in some debates ahead of the second round and the ban on elected PRN deputies giving statements to the press did not sit well with the electorate.

Alvarado Muñoz's campaign was further damaged by other gaffes – not least ill-judged remarks made by his running mate, Francisco Prendas, during a radio interview broadcast in late February, that the PRN would appoint heterosexuals rather than homosexuals to government posts to avoid “offending the majority of Costa Ricans”. Such was the negative reaction that Prendas was compelled to retract his words.

Some have also suggested that the decision by key PLN heavyweights – including defeated presidential candidate Antonio Alvarez – to endorse Alvarado Muñoz could have proven damaging to the PRN. This could be attributed to fears that, in the event of a PRN government, the PLN, which registered its worst-ever electoral performance in the first round, would ultimately call the shots from behind the scenes.

Yet Alvarado Muñoz's surge in the polls, having jumped from last place with just 3% in December according to a Ciep survey to winning the first round, and the deep divisions exposed by issues associated with his campaign, such as same-sex marriage (for which Alvarado Quesada is in favour), cannot just be ignored. Similarly, with 14 deputies in the new 57-member unicameral legislature, where deputies will take up their seats on 8 May, the PRN will serve as the second-largest bench, behind the PLN (17), but ahead of the PAC (10) and the PUSC (nine).

The PRN's conservative emphasis on “family values” is also shared by some members of the PLN and PUSC which were deeply divided over whom to support in the second round [[WR-18-12](#)], as well as the right-wing Partido Integración Nacional (PIN) and Partido Republicano Social Cristiano (PRSC) which will have four and two seats respectively in the new legislature, meaning that the Right will wield considerable influence.

Priorities

As well as responding to the divisions within the country exposed by the electoral process, one of Alvarado Quesada's first priorities will be to address the country's rising fiscal deficit, which closed at 6.2% of GDP in 2017, up from 5.3% in 2016. He is calling for the legislature to approve the proposal by the current PAC executive, led by President Luis Guillermo Solís, to replace the current sales tax with a 13% value-added tax (VAT). Solís had initially proposed a 15% VAT rate but was forced to lower it as part of efforts (hitherto unsuccessful) to get the reform approved by the legislature.

Yet in one hopeful sign for the president-elect, who is due to begin his four-year term on 8 May, the legislature okayed a fast-track discussion and approval process for a tax reform bill, now referred to as the Law on the Strengthening of Public Finances, on 28 February. It appears that the bill is due to be submitted to the legislative assembly for a vote at the end of April.

Other priorities for the incoming government include the need to address unemployment – the main voter concern – which stood at 9.3% in the final quarter of 2017, unchanging since the same quarter in 2016. In his manifesto, Alvarado Quesada proposes to boost job creation through focusing on regional development. His policy offerings include initiatives aimed at activating regional development centres through establishing economic clusters, as well as plans to promote investment in different regions; strengthen the national employment system; provide English language training for 35,000 people over a four-year period; and reduce informal employment, which averaged 42.6% of the national work force between 2012 and 2016.

US and China

A spokeswoman for the US State Department congratulated Carlos Alvarado Quesada on his victory in the presidential elections, praising Costa Rica for its “key role as our partner promoting regional economic prosperity, security, and good governance throughout the hemisphere”, as well as the “peaceful voting that continues to be a model for the region”. China’s foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang expressed his country’s hope that “under [Alvarado Quesada’s] leadership the government and Costa Rican people will make big strides in national development”. Geng said China was keen to deepen bilateral relations and advance in “strategic association based on cooperation, equality, and mutual confidence”.

Anep opposition to fiscal reform

While approval of a new tax reform would undoubtedly be good news for the incoming administration, the umbrella workers’ union, Asociación Nacional de Empleados Públicos y Privados (Anep), has come out against it, suggesting potential unrest ahead.

In a manifesto presented to the legislative assembly on 21 March, Anep complained that the reforms would unfairly impact the working class, as it includes provisions that would subject the wages of public sector employees to a ceiling. As a result, Anep has requested that the bill be withdrawn for discussion by a national dialogue table, providing the union with the opportunity to raise its concerns.

CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

TRACKING TRENDS

EL SALVADOR | No VAT increase. The government led by President Salvador Sánchez Cerén will not increase value-added tax (VAT) despite being recommended to do so by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international financial organisations. “This government and the [ruling left-wing] Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) roundly rejects increasing VAT,” the new communications minister, Roberto Lorenzana, said this week. The newly appointed finance minister, Nelson Fuentes, echoed Lorenzana’s words.

The IMF has said that if the Sánchez Cerén administration fails to present a tax reform then the next government will have to do so. The FMLN is not prepared to risk the public’s wrath by increasing VAT, however, just one year before presidential elections and one month after it suffered a heavy defeat in congressional elections, losing eight seats to finish with just 23 in the 84-seat legislative assembly. The main right-wing opposition Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Arena) has expressed support for a VAT increase.

PANAMA | China trade ties. Panama’s chamber of commerce, industry, and agriculture (CCIAP) is calling for the business sector to play a major role in negotiations between the Panamanian and Chinese governments towards a free trade agreement (FTA).

Panama ditched Taiwan in favour of forging diplomatic relations with China last June. One of the stated objectives of both governments is to negotiate a bilateral FTA. “There are many advantages to obtaining trade relations of these dimensions, with China being one of the most powerful economies in the world, as well as the second biggest user of the Panama Canal and main provider of the Colón free zone,” the CCIAP said in a statement on 1 April.

The Panamanian authorities recently announced their intention to start FTA negotiations with their Chinese counterparts in the second half of this year. In 2016, Panama sold goods amounting to US\$50.9m to China, while importing Chinese goods and services totalling US\$1.18bn. On 22 March Panama’s government announced that the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) would be established in Panama “shortly”.

REGION | First Central American satellite. The first Central American satellite launched from Cape Canaveral in the US on 2 April aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, carrying equipment to the International Space Station.

The satellite was created in Costa Rica for ‘Proyecto Irazú’ by researchers from the Central American Association for Aeronautics and Space (ACAE) and the Technological Institution of Costa Rica (TEC), with support from private companies. Proyecto Irazú is a component of Costa Rica’s plan to be completely carbon neutral by 2021.

This launch marks the first successful design, development, and execution of a space project by a Central American country. The nanosatellite weighs less than a kilogram and will orbit the earth to gather data on forest growth, the environment, and carbon measurements in Costa Rica’s forests in order to provide data on climate change and its impact.

Can Vizcarra's cabinet square the circle?

On paper, Peru's newly appointed president, Martín Vizcarra, faces an unenviable task. Corruption allegations are endemic (they forced the resignation of his predecessor Pedro Pablo Kuczynski); the country's political parties are tainted, and at each other's throats; voters are dissatisfied; and with a minority representation in congress there must be doubts over what the new president can achieve before the next presidential election falls due in 2021. But in the short term, Vizcarra is not doing too badly: the appointment of his first ministerial team has been a relative success.

On 2 April, just 10 days after taking office, President Vizcarra presented his team of 18 new cabinet ministers. The new prime minister is César Villanueva, a deputy linked to the centrist Alianza para el Progreso (APP), a party which supported the former government. Villanueva is experienced: he has been prime minister before, in 2013-2014 during the presidency of Ollanta Humala (2011-2016). And Villanueva shares with Vizcarra a common background in regional government (*see sidebar*).

The new economy and finance minister is David Tuesta, an economist who has worked for the Spanish bank Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA) and for the Andean Development Corporation (CAF). The new foreign minister is a career diplomat, Néstor Popolizio, who has already reaffirmed his predecessor's position that, because of the lack of democratic freedoms in Venezuela, President Nicolás Maduro remains "uninvited" to the Summit of the Americas due to take place in Lima on 13 and 14 April.

Perhaps the key words summing up the ministerial team are continuity, technocracy, decentralisation, and governability. The appointments show that as far as macro-economic policies are concerned, this administration, like its immediate predecessor, is a centre-right, pro-market team. Alongside Tuesta, the new transport and communications minister, Edmer Trujillo, is expected to continue seeking out private investment for infrastructure.

Like the previous cabinets, there is a strong presence of technocrats, but there is now a subtle difference. Under Kuczynski, there was a desire to draft in top business leaders to run the ministries. Under Vizcarra the private sector is still well represented (through energy and mines minister Francisco Ísmodes and production minister Daniel Córdova among others), but the new president has relied much more on civil servants and public administrators.

New cabinet ministers Fabiola Muñoz (environment), Rogers Valencia (foreign trade and tourism), Silvia Pessah (health), Daniel Alfaro (education), and Mauro Medina (interior) were all deputy ministers or senior officials in the ministries they are now running. Many also have a background in regional government. As for governability, a few key ministers (including Villanueva and the justice minister, Salvador Heresí) are intended to play a role mustering congressional support and negotiating with the political opposition.

After months of intense party political warfare Hernán Chaparro, the managing director of opinion pollster GfK, suggests Peru is entering a temporary period of political truce. The battles over impeachment and corruption have in some ways exhausted the political elite, leaving few clear

Villanueva

Peru's new prime minister, César Villanueva, was governor (then known as president) of the northern region of San Martín (2007-2010) while Martín Vizcarra was governor of the southern region of Moquegua. Vizcarra has said he plans to decentralise power and work closely with the regions.

“We have to back Villanueva’s ministerial team after this political crisis, and to allow the country to move forward. This is not the moment to criticise. Let’s hope the ministers get to work to rebuild the country.”

Milagros Salazar of Fuerza Popular

winners. Because of the division between rival sister and brother leaders Keiko and Kenji Fujimori, the main right-wing opposition Fuerza Popular (FP, Fujimoristas) has lost its outright congressional majority.

Vizcarra’s ministerial team seems to have struck the right note for a period of truce. The focus on technocrats and decentralisation may help, at least temporarily, to ease the hot-house atmosphere of Lima politics. Deputy Milagros Salazar, one of the official spokespersons for FP, has praised the choice of new cabinet ministers (*see sidebar*).

How long the truce lasts is another matter: the real test for Vizcarra and Villanueva will come as and when politics gets complicated again. And it is likely to do so: there are various ways this may begin to happen. The presidential pardon granted by Kuczynski to former president Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) is being challenged in the courts; there will be other competing claims to be adjudicated as the government seeks to rebuild a working relationship with a divided congress.

Many analysts say the great weakness of the technocratic Kuczynski administration was its lack of political experience and know-how. Vizcarra may have the same problem. He will ultimately have to show he can strike a better balance between technocrats and politicians.

Vizcarra’s new cabinet	
Prime Minister	César Villanueva
Economy and finance minister	David Tuesta
Interior	Mauro Medina
Foreign affairs	Néstor Popolizio
Justice	Salvador Heresí
Energy and mines	Francisco Ismodes
Education	Daniel Alfaro
Health	Silvia Pessah
Defence	José Huerta
Transport and communications	Edmer Trujillo
Production	Daniel Córdova
Agriculture	Gustavo Mostajo
Housing	Javier Piqué del Pozo
Foreign trade and tourism	Rogers Valencia
Labour and job promotion	Christian Sánchez
Environment	Fabiola Muñoz
Development and social inclusion	Liliana La Rosa
Culture	Patricia Balbuena
Women and vulnerable peoples	Ana María Mendieta

VENEZUELA | SECURITY

Police cell deaths highlight criminal justice crisis

A riot and fire at police holding cells in the city of Valencia, Carabobo state, on 28 March, left a toll of 68 dead and many unanswered questions. One immediate conclusion is that the country’s criminal justice system is in a state of near collapse. Ahead of next month’s presidential elections, some government officials are admitting that changes need to be made.

The exact sequence of events in Valencia remains unclear. What is known is that there were over 200 prisoners being held in police cells that had a capacity to hold no more than 35. At some point during the day mattresses

Disaster waiting to happen

Jeremy McDermott, an analyst at specialised website *Insight Crime*, commented, “Put in the wider context, this country has gone broke. In the list of priorities, people in jail cells are not on anyone’s radar besides their loved ones. This has been a disaster waiting to happen.”

were set alight setting off a wider fire throughout the building. According to Carlos Nieto Palma of prison reform lobby group Una Ventana a la Libertad, a riot had begun when inmates plotting an escape had kidnapped two police officers. On the other hand, the de facto attorney general, Tarek William Saab, said violence had begun during a police inspection of the cells.

In the ensuing fire the authorities now say 68 people died. Of the total, 66 were prisoners: in addition there were two women among the dead who had been on overnight visits to their imprisoned partners. Police fired tear gas at relatives of the prisoners who congregated outside the station demanding information on the fate of their loved ones. The families identifying the bodies of the deceased say that while some were burnt to death, others had also sustained bullet wounds. The death toll makes this the worst single Venezuelan prison system tragedy in the last quarter of a century.

There has been a variety of reactions to the tragedy. The main dividing line is between the supporters of the Bolivarian Revolution on the one hand, and opposition political parties and human rights groups on the other. Interestingly, the response from the former has been less than united. It was characterised by initial silence, followed by denial.

Most prominent in this was the prisons minister, Iris Varela, whose first response was to deny that her department had any responsibility whatsoever for what had happened. Given that the fire broke out in a police station, she said those responsible were the state police and the governor of Carabobo state, Rafael Lacava, a fellow member of the ruling Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). Varela also took the opportunity to claim that Venezuela now has “the best prison system in the world”, and that journalists would be better off spending their time visiting a total of 88 prisons where she claims a new management regime has been successfully introduced.

Attorney general Saab has taken a different tack, admitting to weaknesses in the criminal justice system. He said five police officers have been arrested and are under investigation for their role in the tragedy. He also suggested that the entire criminal justice system should be declared “in a state of emergency”.

The problem, Saab said, was that the courts failed to bring those accused of crimes to trial in a timely manner, causing a massive backlog and acute overcrowding in both the prison system and in police cells. By his estimate some 25,000 people are currently being held in police cells; 3,000 of them have already been sentenced “and shouldn’t be there at all”.

The independent Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones (OVP) says the number of people held in police stations around the country is even higher – 32,600 – and that they are incarcerated in facilities designed to hold only around 8,500. OVP also says a total of 173 prisoners died last year (mainly as a result of violent incidents and diseases such as tuberculosis) and 268 were injured out of a total prison population of 54,788. OVP maintains that the prison system is facing “critical risk” and that the number of prisoners is currently double existing prison capacity.

The opposition parties focused on attacking the government for its poor observation of human rights. The opposition-dominated national assembly (which the government routinely ignores) appointed a commission of enquiry and called on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to send a mission to Venezuela to investigate the prison system, which, perhaps in reply to the prison minister’s claims, it made a point of describing as “the worst in the world”.

Essequibo dispute provides a political wild card

Just ahead of Venezuela's presidential election on 20 May and of the next polls in Guyana (due in 2019), the longstanding territorial dispute between the two South American neighbours over the Essequibo region may be heating up again. On 29 March Guyana formally submitted the dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague. The Venezuelan government immediately rejected the Guyanese move as "unacceptable, sterile, and unenforceable": it favours a settlement based on direct negotiations.

The Essequibo is a resource-rich area of around 159,000km², which represents around two-thirds of Guyana's total territory. For over a century the status quo has been that Guyana has administered the area while the Venezuelan claim to it has been pretty much dormant. But things have gradually begun to change as offshore oil discoveries in the Essequibo have brought the prospects of an oil boom closer to Guyana, and as the embattled Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela has occasionally seen political gains to be made from playing the nationalist card.

In 1899, more than a century ago when Guyana was a British colony, an arbitration tribunal ruled against the Venezuelan claim. This was originally accepted by Venezuela, but half a century later, based on evidence that the British may have unduly influenced the judges, Caracas rejected its findings. Under the subsequent Geneva Agreement signed in 1966 (the year Guyana became independent) the two sides agreed to hold new direct negotiations to resolve the dispute but these failed to make much progress.

During the Venezuelan presidency of the late Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) good relations between the two governments meant the issue was largely left to one side. But under Chávez's successor Nicolás Maduro tensions have begun to grow, conceivably fanned by the major oil finds in the area. Guyana, meanwhile, continues to offer oil and gas exploration licences in the Essequibo despite Venezuelan objections.

On 29 March the government of Guyanese President David Granger said it had formally applied for the ICJ to confirm the legal validity of the 1899 arbitration award. This followed a decision in January by the secretary general of the United Nations (UN), António Guterres, to indicate that, in view of the failure of earlier UN-sponsored 'Good Offices' negotiations, ICJ arbitration was now the next step forward to resolve the dispute. The Georgetown government said its decision to turn to the ICJ was based on the terms of the 1966 Geneva Agreement.

The Venezuelan government disagreed sharply. In a separate statement it argued that the text of the Geneva agreement, which speaks of resolving the dispute "amicably" and in a way "that is acceptable to both parties" in effect rules out going down the route to a "judicial settlement". Venezuela, it said, does not recognise ICJ jurisdiction as mandatory.

Guyana's foreign minister, Carl Greenidge, retorted that UN support had forced other governments ultimately to accept ICJ rulings. What remains to be seen is if this is another short-term flare-up in tension, or if the proximity of the Venezuelan elections will tempt the Caracas government to harden its position further as a way of leveraging nationalist sentiment.

Criminal justice

In a statement the IACHR said there was a criminal justice crisis in the country marked by "high levels of overcrowding, excessive reliance on jail sentences, corruption in the prison authorities, deplorable conditions of detention, and very high levels of violence".

End of the line for Lula

The political career of former president Lula da Silva (2003-2011) appears to be over, although his political legacy as a pioneer for social welfare will endure. Just before we went to press, Brazil's supreme court (STF) rejected Lula's final attempt to avoid a jail sentence for corruption, crushing his hopes of running for re-election in October. This marks a resounding defeat for Brazil's Left and the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) Lula founded.

In the end, the ruling was close. After a marathon 11-hour session, STF judges voted by six-five not to allow Lula to remain a free man before his appeals channels had been exhausted. He will be detained as soon as federal judge Sérgio Moro gives the order, which he is expected to do within a month.

Lula's defeat is hardly a surprise. He had already suffered a series of legal setbacks over the past year. Last July, Moro sentenced him to nine years in prison for passive corruption and money laundering at a federal court in Curitiba. Then, in January, a lower appeals court (TRF-4) extended Lula's jail time to 12 years and one month.

However, Lula's final appeal at the STF was the ultimate test of strength for Brazil's judiciary. The justice who cast the deciding vote, Rosa Weber, rejected Lula's appeal even though he had personally appointed her to the court. Justifying her decision, Weber argued that the court's credibility in combating impunity was more important than her personal feelings towards Lula.

Ahead of the ruling, Brazil's top court came under intense public scrutiny. On the streets, protesters for and against Lula made their feelings clear, while behind closed doors, others bombarded the STF with calls, emails and petitions. Further pressure came from within the judiciary. Brazil's attorney general Raquel Dodge urged the STF not to make an exception for Lula, arguing that allowing him to stay out of jail would "annihilate" faith in Brazil's legal system.

The unfavourable ruling for Lula scuppers his chances of running for another term in October. Although it falls on the electoral court (TSE) to decide which candidates can run, under Brazil's 2010 'Clean Slate' law, those with criminal convictions cannot hold political office for eight years.

Lula's defeat leaves the PT's prospects in tatters. No single candidate would inherit his vote share and possible PT substitutes, such as former São Paulo mayor Fernando Haddad and former Bahia governor Jacques Wagner, lack charisma and are currently polling poorly. Without Lula, the chance that a Leftist candidate will win become slimmer, benefitting those from the political Right and Centre, according to the latest polls.

In a statement, the PT described the ruling against Lula as "tragic". "This is a sad day for democracy and for Brazil. Our constitution was torn up by those who should protect it," the PT said in a statement. It claims that the legal charges against Lula are politically motivated and said their leader would continue fighting to defend his innocence from prison.

The case against Lula, described by PT supporters as a witch hunt, comes against a backdrop of growing tension and insecurity. On 4 April, the head of the army, General Eduardo Villas Bôas, said the military had a mission to repudiate impunity, signalling they might intervene if Lula had attempted re-election. This brought back unwelcome memories of Brazil's military

Remember the case

Former president Lula was accused of money laundering and corruption for accepting R\$3.7m (US\$2.3m) in bribes from construction company OAS to buy a luxury apartment in Guarajá (São Paulo state) in return for political favours. In addition to the Guarajá case, Lula is accused of at least seven other counts of corruption as part of 'Operation Car Wash'.

More outsiders to enter electoral ring

As the deadline for party affiliation (7 April) looms, yet another outsider has joined the electoral fray. Businessman Flávio Rocha from the department store Riachuelo has joined the Partido Republicano Brasileiro (PRB), signalling he could be positioning himself as a presidential candidate. Like many other centrist contenders, he would marry liberal economic policies with an otherwise conservative agenda.

dictatorship (1964-1985) and was interpreted as a sign that the quest for law and order had gone too far. Days before, STF president Carmen Lúcia's called for "calm" following a violent episode last week, when bullets were fired at Lula's tour bus as he was campaigning in the south of Brazil.

BRAZIL | POLITICS

Temer back on the defensive

President Michel Temer has accused his adversaries of trying to "destabilise" the country through their "irresponsibility". He was ostensibly referring to the judiciary, which is doggedly pursuing a corruption investigation into the ports sector, which allegedly links back to Temer.

Last week, two of President Temer's allies, lawyer José Yunes and Colonel João Batista Lima Filho, were temporarily detained by the federal police. They were seized on the orders of Brazil's attorney general, Raquel Dodge, as part of an investigation into bribes allegedly taken by Temer through intermediaries from logistics companies to shape a new ports decree published in May 2017.

The ports decree may seem like last year's story. But the temporary arrests of two Temer allies, along with 11 others for 'Operation Skala', shows the judiciary is back on the offensive. "It's the same plot as 2017," read a Temer statement on the official government website, referring to a barrage of investigations against Temer last year. "But they won't manage to repeat the story because what then seemed like a tragedy now sounds like a farce," he said.

Last year, Temer was twice accused of corruption by the judiciary and twice acquitted by congress. However, the resurgence of corruption allegations this Easter comes at a delicate time for the president just as he is mulling his own re-election prospects. The Planalto palace denounced the loosely termed "authorities" who had "tried to destroy [Temer's] reputation more than once" and "create narratives that generate new accusations".

While Temer is busy railing at unnamed enemies, his former finance minister Henrique Meirelles has positioned himself as a more credible presidential candidate for the ruling Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB). The man credited with helping lift Brazil from a two-year recession has formally quit Temer's government, in readiness for a possible electoral bid in October. Under Brazilian law, all ministers who want to compete in the presidential or legislative elections must resign before the end of this week (7 April).

To minimise disruption, Meirelles has handpicked his successor, Eduardo Guardia, who already works at the finance ministry and should ensure some continuity. According to local media, Guardia is seen as a safe pair of hands, cutting a more technical than political profile. His appointment will be confirmed (or rejected) later this week.

This is part of a wider government shake-up which also affects Brazil's economic policymaking team. Brazil's planning minister Dyogo de Oliveira will become the head of the development bank (Bndes), instead of Paulo Rabello de Campo. Furthermore, Gilberto Occhi, the former president of state-owned bank Caixa Econômica Federal (CEF) will take over the health ministry from the former incumbent Ricardo Barroso. The switching of officials between the cabinet and state-owned banks could increase the potential for political interference in financial institutions.

During the swearing-in ceremony of Oliveira and another new minister, Valter Casimiro Silveira, to the transport sector, Temer appeared to be distracted. In one gaffe, he accidentally called the head of Brazil's federal senate Eunício Oliveira the head of the supreme court (STF).

Death threats

María Elena Leuzzi, head of the anti-rape charity Asociación de Víctimas de Violación (Avivi), reported on 3 April that she had begun to receive death threats by telephone. One of them involved an anonymous caller who contacted the police to report her death. She said she suspected gangs of River supporters (known as the *barra brava*) to be behind the threats, suggesting, “they must be charging a fee to scare me”.

Temer is not the only one with the STF on his mind. Just before Easter, former STF justice Joaquim Barbosa caused a stir by joining the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB), signalling that he too could be eyeing up the presidency. Barbosa’s political potential should not be underestimated. In a recent poll by Ipsos, published on 22 March, he was one of two candidates who the majority of the population did not disapprove of along with former president Lula da Silva (2003-2011).

ARGENTINA | POLITICS

Football rocked by sexual abuse claims

Some of Argentina’s most famous football clubs have been implicated in allegations concerning the sexual abuse of minors. Investigators say this could be the tip of the iceberg, with wider trafficking and prostitution networks yet to be uncovered.

The first allegations were made on 21 March when a member of a youth division of Club Atlético Independiente, one of Argentina’s top football clubs, reportedly told a psychologist that he and another 19 boys were part of a child prostitution ring. Prosecutors began to investigate.

In Argentina it is common for talent scouts to recruit promising young players from the provinces who are brought to the city of Buenos Aires in order to play in the junior divisions and live in premises provided by the clubs. Away from their families, the young players are dependent upon club officials for care and guidance.

In the case of Independiente it has been alleged that some of the young players were regularly taken to private apartments in high-end residential districts where they were sexually abused by adult men in exchange for payment of Ar\$1,000 (US\$50) and gifts of sports equipment.

On prosecutors’ orders, a total of six people were arrested (including a 19-year old player, a student, a lawyer, and a public relations specialist) who were accused of taking part in what was in effect a prostitution ring. All deny the charges. The senior management of Independiente has not been directly implicated and is cooperating with the enquiry.

Similar allegations emerged concerning Club Atlético Temperley, a less prominent first-division football club. But they were then quickly followed by claims concerning Club Atlético River Plate, one of Argentina’s top clubs. River can claim to be the most successful football team in Argentina with 36 national titles, which puts it ahead of Club Atlético Boca Juniors (32 titles).

According to Andrés Bonicalzi, a lawyer for anti-rape charity Asociación de Víctimas de Violación (Avivi), a medical surgeon at River knew of the abuse of children who lived at the club’s boarding facility for young players between 2004 and 2011, and is prepared to testify. According to Bonicalzi there are at least three cases, one of which involved a young girl on a volleyball team, the other two involving young boys on football teams. Public prosecutor María Soledad Garibaldi said, “We are investigating the testimony of provincial families whose children are victims of a paedophile network.”

Because football is such a popular national sport, Argentina’s top teams have always been closely linked to major lobby groups, to governments, and to political figures of the day. This means that uncovering a sexual abuse scandal could have hard-to-predict political repercussions. Independiente’s president is Hugo Moyano, one of the most powerful trade union leaders in the country, currently under investigation on charges of using the club for money laundering purposes. President Mauricio Macri is himself a former president of Boca Juniors.

Support for abortion

A survey published last year by Chilean pollster Cadem revealed that 70% of respondents were in agreement with the decision by the constitutional court (TC) to dismiss challenges filed against the proposed legislation decriminalising abortion in three cases, which paved the way for it to be signed into law.

Macri and the abortion debate

Pro-life (anti-abortion) demonstrations were held across Argentina on 25 March, following a decision by members of Cambiemos, the ruling centre-right coalition, to sponsor a cross-party congressional bill that would decriminalise abortion. The demonstrations followed earlier pro-choice (pro-abortion) rallies in the country.

Some commentators say President Macri has positioned himself carefully to get maximum political benefit from the issue. Macri has said he personally opposes abortion (something in line with the conservative Catholic inclinations he shares with many of his supporters) but that he favours a “mature and responsible” debate on the subject.

It is argued that the debate may be politically useful to him: it could distract attention from some of the government’s current weak points (high inflation, criticism of ministers for using overseas tax havens and other matters). It could also embarrass his predecessor and opponent, former president Cristina Fernández (2007-2015), who, unlike many of her supporters, is also very conservative on this issue and opposes abortion.

Opinion polls suggest that views in the country are evenly divided, with a narrow majority favouring decriminalising abortion. Hugo Alconada, an Argentine lawyer and journalist went as far as suggesting in an article for the *New York Times* that Macri’s ultimate calculation – and hope – is that the bill will be defeated in the federal senate, allowing him to embarrass his opponents without an outcome counter to his personal convictions.

CHILE | POLITICS

Students threaten fresh unrest

With President Sebastián Piñera yet to complete a month in office, a ruling by Chile’s constitutional court (TC) last week, striking down part of the higher education reform passed by his predecessor Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010; 2014-2018), is threatening fresh unrest from students. It comes amid other concerns regarding efforts by Piñera’s right-of-centre Chile Vamos coalition government to row back on initiatives promoted under the previous Nueva Mayoría (NM) coalition government.

While the TC ruling, which was announced on 27 March, is due to be published in its entirety on 26 April, the local media is reporting that it has struck down a provision that would have banned universities and higher education institutions from operating for profit. Along with constitutional reform and fiscal reform, free higher education was one of Bachelet’s three chief electoral promises – a response to the repeated student unrest which took place during Piñera’s previous term in office (2010-2014). The TC’s ruling deals a blow to this pledge.

With Bachelet herself tweeting that the TC ruling “distorts the democratic decision to eliminate profit from higher education”, it has prompted outrage from NM, with presidents of both chambers of congress, Senator Carlos Montes and Deputy Maya Fernández (both from Bachelet’s Partido Socialista), complaining that it was in breach of the “sovereign will expressed in congress” and is “damaging to democracy”.

Students and academics alike have similarly responded with anger. Sandra Beltrami, a spokesperson for the university student organisation Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile (Confech), said it would cause “enormous damage” to Chilean education – a view which has been shared publicly by university deans such as Juan Manuel Zolezzi, of the Universidad de Santiago (Usach). Along with the secondary school organisation Coordinadora Nacionales de Estudiantes Secundarios (Cones), Confech has already called demonstrations for 19 April to protest against the TC’s ruling.

UK-Brazil ties

Brazil also benefits from the UK government's development programme, the Prosperity Fund, financed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Between 2011 and 2016, Brazil received more than £14m (US\$19m) from the Prosperity Fund, which was spent on projects to improve the business environment, attract new investment in infrastructure, and raise money for public-private partnerships. The British Deputy Head of Mission (DHM) in Brazil, Liz Davidson, and Brazil's industry & trade minister, Marcos Jorge de Lima, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to build on this initiative in years to come, once the UK government approves it.

Abortion law

Having already revealed plans to shelve Michelle Bachelet's proposed draft constitution, which she sent down in the final stages of her mandate [WR-18-11], President Piñera has also faced criticism over changes to abortion legislation passed by his predecessor in 2017 which decriminalised abortion when the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, when the life of the pregnant woman is at risk, and in cases of fatal foetal impairment. Prior to the changes passed by Bachelet (which it is worth pointing out had public support – see page 11 sidebar), Chile had been one of the few countries in the world with a total ban on abortion after legislation introduced during the military dictatorship led by General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) made it punishable by up to five years in prison.

Having publicly taken a pro-life stance, however, on 23 March Piñera announced changes to the conscientious objection protocol, which gives institutions the right to refuse to perform the procedure.

Assurances by Health Minister Emilio Santelices that "nothing will affect the law nor its regulation, nor women's right of access to an abortion" have failed to convince the opposition or women's rights groups. A string of former ministers from the previous administration – Paula Narváez (government spokesperson), Claudia Pascual (women's minister), Carmen Castillo (health), and Gabriel de la Fuente (secretary general for the presidency) – all condemned the changes which Karol Cariola, a national deputy for the Partido Comunista de Chile (PCCh), described as an "ideological and antidemocratic boycott by the current government".

TRACKING TRENDS

BRAZIL | Trade and diplomacy. Brazil's industry & trade minister, Marcos Jorge de Lima, met the UK secretary for international trade, Dr Liam Fox, on 28 March and signed a series of bilateral accords to strengthen trade and investment. During a meeting in London for the UK-Brazil Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), ministers signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to boost bilateral trade, increase regulatory cooperation, and improve the participation of small-to-medium sized businesses (SMEs) in foreign commerce. The two ministers also stressed their support for the bilateral Patent Prosecution Highways (PPH) programme, which comes into effect this Autumn and aims to protect the intellectual property rights of UK and Brazilian businesses.

Bilateral trade between Brazil and the UK was worth around US\$5.15bn in 2017, but has already grown by 30% in the first two months of this year. This shows there is room for closer commercial relations, argued Jorge in a statement on Brazil's industry & trade ministry (MDIC) website.

With regard to multilateral trade, delegates from Brazil and the UK stressed the importance of upholding the World Trade Organization (WTO) framework outlined at the Buenos Aires Ministerial Conference in December 2017 (see sidebar).

As the UK prepares to exit the European Union (EU), it will look to Brazil as a 'key partner' to re-establish itself as an independent member of the WTO, read a statement on the UK government's website. In turn, Brazil will call on the UK to support its bid to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Meade throws down challenge to rivals

José Antonio Meade, the presidential candidate of Mexico's ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), has challenged his presidential rivals to explain the provenance of all their assets in a public debate. "Those that owe nothing fear nothing. Let everyone know who is who in this election," Meade goaded his rivals. Meade's new campaign strategy appears to be to focus on showing that he is cleaner than clean and more determined to eradicate government corruption than any of his rivals. The big question is whether this bold strategy will succeed in propelling him into contention in the 1 July presidential elections.

Meade continues to languish in third place in all voting intention polls behind Ricardo Anaya of the Por México al Frente Right-Left opposition coalition and Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the left-wing opposition Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena), who remains in the lead. This appears to have prompted Meade to adopt a change of tack to try to garner the kind of support that will allow him to become a contender in the first-past-the-post presidential election. The new strategy began with the 2 April publication of an extensive interview with the local press, the first since the start of the formal electoral campaign period on 30 March, in which Meade outlined some of his proposed plans to combat corruption and insecurity in Mexico (*see below*).

In the interview, Meade first sought to distance himself from the unpopular incumbent PRI administration led by President Enrique Peña Nieto. He said that, unlike Peña Nieto, he did not believe that the pervasive government corruption in Mexico is a cultural problem. Peña Nieto has recently said that the cultural nature of Mexico's corruption problem means that in order to fix it fully, the mindset of Mexicans would have to change. But Meade said that in his view, the country's corruption problem is institutional, and that it can be resolved by strengthening Mexico's institutions through the adoption of effective public policies. Meade, who served as foreign minister, finance minister, and social development minister under Peña Nieto, went as far as to say that the current PRI administration had not achieved the expected results in its efforts to combat corruption and insecurity because its strategies needed updating.

Meade said that in his opinion, the failures in combating government corruption in Mexico owes to the fact that "we don't have the [necessary] institutions and that our institutions don't have the necessary tools". In order to address this, the PRI candidate said that, if elected, his government would adopt practises that have proved successful in combating corruption in other countries, such as facilitating the forfeiture of ill-gotten assets by public officials. Meade also reiterated his proposal to remove the immunity from prosecution enjoyed by elected government officials, including the president, so that they can be easily prosecuted for corruption. "I will be the first president without any immunity and will subject myself to any sort of audit of my administration," Meade said of his proposal.

Challenge

The high levels of corruption and impunity are some of the leading concerns expressed by voters in public opinion polls. However, Meade's proposal to remove political immunity has also been mooted by López Obrador [[WR-18-11](#)] and it no longer sets the PRI candidate apart; and with Meade still far behind the Morena and Por México al Frente candidates in the polls, he

Vitiligo

As part of his electoral campaign, José Antonio Meade has released a new video ad in which he claims to have an enviable record of 20 years of public service during which he has never been tarnished by any corruption allegations. Indeed, Meade quips that the only blemishes that the electorate will find on him are those produced by his Vitiligo, the incurable skin disease that produces visible patches of white skin around a person's body from which Meade suffers.

Anaya dismisses Meade

While Andrés Manuel López Obrador has so far chosen to ignore José Antonio Meade's challenge to discuss the provenance of his assets publicly, Ricardo Anaya has flatly dismissed Meade's proposal as being irrelevant. "With all due respect, I am more interested in debating with López Obrador, not with the third-placed candidate. The first debate is scheduled for 22 April and I hope that the format is flexible," Anaya said in response to a question by reporters about Meade's challenge.

appeared keenly aware that he had to come up with new tactics to energise his campaign. This appears to involve presenting new anti-corruption initiatives and highlighting his reputation for integrity as opposed to his rivals. Meade called for more controls on the evolution of assets of public officials as another way to help combat corruption. He said that any public official that is unable to explain the provenance of his assets should not be allowed to continue holding public office.

Turning on his rivals, Meade said that he has never been tarnished by any corruption accusations in his long career as a public servant (*see page 13 sidebar*). He added that he was prepared to have his finances publicly scrutinised and challenged the other presidential rivals to join him in presenting their sworn declaration of assets and their plans to combat corruption at the first presidential debate scheduled for 22 April, so that they could be scrutinised by the public. "I challenge López Obrador and I challenge Ricardo Anaya to a debate about our assets... are you game?" Meade asked rhetorically.

Anaya is currently being investigated for alleged money laundering and dubious business dealings by the Mexican authorities, and López Obrador has in the past been accused of receiving irregular campaign donations. Meade clearly feels that, unlike him, his rivals are vulnerable to attacks on their integrity. But neither López Obrador nor Anaya are rising to the bait (*see sidebar*).

Security policies

During his interview with the Mexican press, Meade said that his prospective government would seek to improve the fight against organised crime by increasing police presence and capabilities and providing better working conditions for police officers. The PRI candidate also said that he would seek to homogenise the various state criminal codes to ensure that organised crime is evenly punished across the country. However, Meade recognised that while it is only a "temporary solution", Mexico's armed forces would continue to help the police forces combat crime until they are able to assume this task on their own.

MEXICO | SECURITY

Reproved over human rights

Mexico's national human rights commission (CNDH) has accused the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) government led by President Enrique Peña Nieto of allowing violence and impunity to increase in the country during its single six-year term ending in December. In its 2017 annual report, the CNDH said that despite the efforts of the Peña Nieto government the situation of human rights in Mexico remains dire as public insecurity and violence related to organised crime continue to afflict the population. The accusations are scathing for the government, not least because Peña Nieto promised to reduce the high levels of violence in Mexico resulting from the frontal war launched against organised crime. But as Peña Nieto prepares to hand over power it is becoming clear that this has not been achieved.

The annual CNDH report was presented by its head, Luis Raúl González, to President Peña Nieto during a 28 March event at the Los Pinos presidential residence. After holding a private meeting with Peña Nieto, González said the human rights situation in Mexico remains critical and that as Peña Nieto's term comes to an end, progress in upholding human rights has been "unfavourable". González added that throughout the presidential term there have not been "significant changes" in the human rights situation, reducing violence, or improving public security.

New problematic case?

The presentation of Mexico's national human rights commission (CNDH) report on the dire state of human rights in the country came just a day after it announced that it had opened a new investigation into yet another suspected human rights violation by Mexico's federal security forces. This relates to an incident that took place on 25 March in the city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas state. That day a woman and two minors were shot dead after they were caught in the cross fire of a shootout between navy (Semar) officers and suspected criminals. The CNDH believes that the bystanders were killed by Semar bullets and wants to determine if authorities have any case to answer for the killing of innocent civilians.

The ombudsman presented a series of telling statistics to prove his point. He pointed out that the 2017 homicide figure stood at 25,339, the highest figure in two decades and much higher than in any year of the previous administration led by Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012), when the war against organised crime was first launched. Perhaps more problematically, González also noted that continued deployment of the armed forces to combat organised crime has resulted in an increase in human rights abuses by the security forces against the civilian population. He said that there were 274 cases of torture, 89 cases of enforced disappearance, 5,086 cases of arbitrary detention, and 11 cases of extrajudicial execution by the security forces recorded by the CNDH between 2012 and 2017.

Indeed, González said that the current administration has been "marked" by some serious cases of violations involving the security forces, such as the mass abduction of trainee teachers from Iguala, Guerrero state; and the extrajudicial executions in Tanhuato, Michoacán state, Nochixtlán, Oaxaca state, and Tlatlaya in the Estado de México. He went on to add that the pain and suffering derived from all of this could not be quantified but that it is clear that Mexicans continue to "live in fear of being affected by the violence, impunity, and corruption... [and] that this is creating hopelessness and distrust in the authorities and institutions in society".

For his part, Peña Nieto said that his government had sought to advance human rights by promoting a series of initiatives designed to bolster the country's legal framework in this area. He pointed to the approval of the new general law of victims of violence, the new law on enforced disappearances, the new law against torture, and the implementation of the judicial reform that seeks to expedite judicial processes as the clearest examples of his administration's efforts. But Peña Nieto recognised that "clearly a lot more needs to be done" to improve the human rights and general public security situation in Mexico. The president argued that thanks to these initiatives Mexico is moving "in the right direction".

TRACKING TRENDS

MEXICO | Unemployment. The national unemployment rate in February fell to 3.3% of the economically active population (EAP), compared with 3.5% in the same month a year earlier, Mexico's national statistics institute (Inegi) reported on 27 March. The underemployment rate, defined as those working for fewer hours than they would like, fell to 6.6% in February from 7.3% in the same month in 2017.

Overall, the employment rate reached 96.8% of the EAP in February; according to the survey responses, 42.2% of employees work in the service industry, 18.5% work in sales, 16.7% in manufacturing, 12.9% in agriculture, 8.4% in construction, 0.8% in other industries, and 0.5% gave no response.

The state of Tabasco had the highest unemployment rate in February with 8.2%, up from 7.3% in February 2017, and the state of Oaxaca had the lowest unemployment rate at 1.3%, a decrease from 2.6% in February 2017.

MEXICO | Trade surplus. Mexico registered a trade surplus of US\$1.06bn for the month of February, a significant increase from the January trade deficit of US\$4.41bn, the national statistics institute (Inegi) reported on 27 March.

An Inegi report stated that the value of exports in February reached US\$35.21bn, a 12.3% year-on-year increase; oil exports were worth US\$2.58bn, while non-oil exports were worth US\$32.63bn. In the non-oil sector, the biggest growth compared with February 2017 was found in exports of manufactured and agricultural products, exhibiting a 10.5% and a 17.3% increase, respectively.

Imports in February were valued at US\$34.15bn, increasing by 11.7% on the same month in 2017: oil imports were valued at US\$3.93bn; and non-oil imports were valued at US\$30.22bn. Mexico's accumulated trade balance for the first two months of the year remains at a deficit of US\$3.35bn.

Quotes of the week

“Costa Rica today reaffirms its commitment with democratic institutionality; equality between men and women, and full respect for human rights.”

Carlos Alvarado Quesada, of Costa Rica's ruling centre-left Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC), after defeating Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz, an evangelical preacher, in the presidential run-off.

“The principle of the presumption of innocence is guaranteed in all countries including Brazil. But in Brazil the judiciary has come to understand that it can only be executed after various different courts confirm a conviction. This exaggeration annihilates the justice system because a judiciary that delays decisions is a judiciary which fails.”

Brazil's attorney general Raquel Dodge.

“This is the team that will accompany me in the task of bringing development and wellbeing to Peruvians in every region of the country.”

Peru's President Martín Vizcarra appoints his new cabinet.

Security issues still daunting in Colombia

Between Colombia's congressional elections held on 11 March and the first round of presidential elections on 27 May the security situation continues to be cause for concern.

On 3 April Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) guerrillas were reported to have kidnapped four people in the north-eastern department of Norte de Santander, including a former local mayoral candidate; they were later released unharmed. Efforts to agree a new ELN ceasefire and push forward with peace negotiations are continuing in Ecuador, with mixed results. An ELN commander has been killed in a clash with the army in Catatumbo, the violence-riven region located in Norte de Santander, near the Venezuelan border.

Defence Minister Luis Carlos Villegas highlighted this week that many current or former guerrilla groups, alongside criminal and drug-trafficking gangs, remain active in Colombia's frontier areas. Villegas said, “We have problems on our frontiers with Ecuador, Venezuela, and Panama. These are three hotspots and in all of them we are conducting important military operations.” Efforts were continuing to secure the release of three kidnapped Ecuadorean journalists, thought to have been abducted by a dissident group of the demobilised Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Farc) operating in the border area [[WR-18-12](#)].

Attacks on social and community leaders appear to be rising. Another community leader, Belisario Benavides, was shot dead in the south-western department of Cauca on 2 April; the day before peasant leader María Cruz Rojas was killed in the south-central department of Meta. An Afro-Colombian group (Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas [CNOA]) says 27 of its leaders were murdered in the first two months of this year.

A report by 500 social organisations says there were numerous human rights violations between 2013 and 2017, and that their intensity did not fall after the government signed a peace accord with the Farc guerrillas in November 2016. Luz Stella Aponte of Corporación Reiniciar, one of the organisations that helped write the report, welcomed the peace agreement but said implementation was poor: she claimed the government was unwilling to admit the true extent of attacks on social leaders by right-wing paramilitary groups.

LatinNews Daily

LatinNews Daily is an essential briefing tool for anyone with a serious interest in Latin or Central America and the Caribbean and is relied upon by thousands of LatAm professionals world-wide.

It is the definitive English language resource delivered via email at 0800 EST outlining all key developments throughout the region with expert analysis on the likely impact of each development.

LatinNews Daily costs just \$1,785 USD or £1,100 GBP for the year. For a 10-day free trial register at www.LatinNews.com, or for further information please contact Maria Isotalo via our online form at: www.latinnews.com/contact-us.

LATIN AMERICAN WEEKLY REPORT is published weekly (50 issues a year) by **Latin American Newsletters**, Hamilton House, Fourth Floor, Mabledon Place, London, WC1H 9BB, England. Telephone +44 (0)203 695 2790, Email: subs@latinnews.com or visit our website at: <http://www.latinnews.com>

EDITOR: JON FARMER. Subscription rates will be sent on request. Overseas subscription sent by airmail. Printed by Quorum Print Services Limited, Unit 3, Lansdown Industrial Estate, Gloucester Road, Cheltenham, Glos. GL51 8PL **COPYRIGHT © 2018** in all countries. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publishers. Registered as a newspaper by Royal Mail. **REFERENCES:** Back references and cross-references in the current series will be made thus: WR-18-01 will indicate Weekly Report, 2018, issue 1.