

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 4457

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINR, BL

SUBJ: BIOGRAPHIC NOTES ON NEW CABINET MEMBERS

REF: LA PAZ 4394

1. BIO NOTES FOLLOW BELOW ON SEVEN NEW MINISTERS IN THE ALL-MILITARY CABINET SWORN IN BY PRESIDENT BANZER ON 8 JULY 1974:

2. JUAN LECHIN SUAREZ - MINISTER OF COORDINATION - THE 53-YEAR OLD LECHIN IS A RETIRED BRIGADIER GENERAL. A FULL BIO-REPORT ON HIM DATED JANUARY 1971 IS CONTAINED IN THE BIO-GRAPHIC HANDBOOK, THE REPORT CARRIES HIS CAREER UP TO HIS APPOINTMENT AS AMBASSADOR TO THE UK AND THE NETHERLANDS, A POST HE HELD UNTIL ABOUT A MONTH AGO. LECHIN IS A MODERATE CONSERVATIVE WITH BROAD ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE (E.G. PRESIDENT OF THE BOLIVIAN MINING CORPORATION FROM 1964 TO 1968). LECHIN HAS A GOOD REPUTATION AMONG MILITARY AND CIVILIANS ALIKE.

3. VICTOR CASTILLO SUAREZ - MINISTER OF FINANCE - COL CASTILLO WAS BORN IN 1924. HE WAS UNTIL RECENTLY HEAD OF THE MILITARY SCHOOL IN COCHABAMBA (INCLUDING THE COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF SCHOOL). THE ARMA HAS BEEN IMPRESSED WITH HIS
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SOLID COMPETENCE, BUT HE APPARENTLY HAS NO SPECIAL QUALIFI-

CATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE. SOME COLLEAGUES BELIEVE HE MAY BE EASILY INFLUENCED BY HIS STAFF.

4. GENERAL RENE BERNAL ESCALANTE-MINISTER OF DEFENSE A 50-YEAR OLD ARMY OFFICER, HE HAS UNTIL RECENTLY BEEN CHIEF OF THE COMBINED STAFF. HE HAS SERVED AS MILITARY ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON (A HAPPY MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE FOR HIM) AND HAS BEEN VERY CLOSE AND HELPFUL TO MEMBERS OF THE USMILGRP IN BOLIVIA. HE WAS ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL HIGH RANKING OFFICERS INTERESTED IN EXAMINING THE ACQUISITION OF SOVIET MILITARY EQUIPMENT. HOWEVER, HE RECE DENIED REAL INTEREST AND EXPLAINED HIS PARTICIPATION TO THE AMBASSADOR BY SAYING THAT HIS ROLE CONSISTED SOLELY IN REPLYING POLITELY TO OFFERS PRESSED ON HIM BY THE SOVIET EMBASSY. BERNAL WAS MINISTER OF CAMPESINO AFFAIRS FROM 1964 TO 1966 AND IS BELIEVED TO BE HIGHLY INTERESTED AND INFORMED ON CAMPESINO MATTERS.

5. LT COL WALDO BERNAL PEREIRA MINISTER OF EDUCATION A FORTY YEAR OLD AIR FORCE OFFICER, BERNAL WAS CHIEF OF THE PRESIDENTIAL HOUSEHOLD. HE HAS BEEN TO THREE US AIR FORCE SCHOOLS AND SPEAKS GOOD ENGLISH. HE DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF AS COMMANDER OF THE SANTA CRUZ AIR FORCE ACADEMY. HE HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL, PREGMATIC AND VERY CLOSE TO PRESIDENT BANZER BOTH POLITICALLY AND PERSONNALLY.

6. COL ANTONIO ZELAYA S. MINISTER OF MINING ZELAYA IS A 47 YEAR OLD ARMY ENGINEER WHO IS A GEOGRAPHER AND GEODESIST. HE HAS HELD MANY MILITARY AND CIVILIAN SCIENTIFIC AND ACADEMIC POSITIONS (INCLUDING RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LA PAZ VERY BRIEFLY). HE IS THE MILITARY PRESIDENT OF THE CENTER OF GRADUATES OF THE SCHOOL OF HIGH MILITARY STUDIES. HIS TECHNICAL BACKGROUND SHOULD BE USEFUL, AS THE MINISTRY GIVES GREATER EMPHASIS TO EXPLORATION FOR NEW MINING SITES.

7. CAPTAIN WALTER NUNEZ RIVERO MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS NUNEZ IS A 44 YEAR OLD NAVAL OFFICER. HE RETURNED FROM LIMA WHERE HE WAS BOLIVIAN NAVAL ATTACHE TO TAKE OVER THE MINISTRY. OLD REPORTS INDICATE THAT HE WAS DYNAMIC AND RESPECTED NAVAL OFFICER, BUT THAT HE APPEARED TO HAVE ENRICHED HIMSELF FROM SEVERAL OF HIS ASSIGNMENTS. HE IS STRONG PROPONENT OF DEVELOPING THE WATERWAYS TRANSPORTATION IN THE NORTH AND EAST SECTIONS OF THE COUNTRY.

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8. LT COL MARIO VARGAS SALINAS MINISTER OF LABOR VARGAS WAS UNTIL RECENTLY PRESIDENT OF THE BOLIVIAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (CBF). HE WAS REPORTEDLY GIVEN THE CBF BECAUSE OF HIS HIGH STANDING AMONG THE YOUNGER OFFICERS AND TO REMOVE HIM FROM THE RANKS OF THOSE PLOTTING AGAINST THE BANZER REGIME. HE HAS LOST STANDING WITH THE YOUNGER OFFICERS BUT SENIOR OFFICERS CONSIDER HIM A STRONG PERFORMER. HE USED HIS POSITION WITH THE CBF TO DEMONSTRATE HIS ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITIES. HE IS POLITICALLY AMBITIOUS AND AS MINISTER OF LABOR WILL BE IN AN IDEAL POSITION TO BUILD A POLITICAL FOLLOWING.

9. WE EXPECT TO SEND ADDITINAL FACTS AND COMMENTARY ON THESE
INDIVIDUALS OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS.
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