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## ECUADOR FACES MORE TURBULENCE

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### Memo:

THE AMERICAS; CORRESPONDENT'S LETTER; correction ran on May 28, 1997; see end of text

### Text:

ECUADOR: Political uncertainty looms again in Ecuador.

Ecuadoreans will finally get their say Sunday on whether Congress did the right thing in ousting President Abdala ``El Loco'' Bucaram for mental incompetence.

A complicated 14-question referendum will also determine whether interim President Fabian Alarcon can stay on through August 1998.

But the referendum could just stir up more trouble.

If Ecuadoreans say ``yes'' to Bucaram's Feb. 7 ouster but ``no'' to Alarcon's remaining on in power, no one knows when elections would occur. Or under what rules. Or whether Bucaram could run again.

Diplomats are worried.

``There's a sort of feeling that the country can't take much more,'' one European diplomat in Quito said.

Some fear that voters won't understand the referendum questions, leaving the door open for Bucaram to try to return to power from exile in Panama.

If Bucaram does ever return, he may have some settling of accounts to do. The Crowne Plaza and Colon hotels in Quito say Bucaram skipped town owing them \$45,000.

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VENEZUELA: Ever hunt jaguar?

I hope not. The jungle cats are considered endangered.

But if Venezuela has its way, hunters will soon be able to bag at least 30 jaguars a year, beginning in 2000.

Pressured by ranchers, who claim that jaguar are preying on livestock, Venezuela's National Council on Wildlife and Fisheries early this month approved a plan to let hunters cull jaguar that feed on cattle.

Venezuela's jaguar population has plummeted since the late 1960s. In just one year -- 1968 -- exporters shipped 13,516 jaguar pelts to the United

States. The animals were declared endangered in 1973.

Today, the government estimates that Venezuela has 3,847 jaguars. Wildlife groups plan to fight Venezuela's proposal at a June meeting in Zimbabwe of the organization that governs trade in endangered species.

Speaking of environmental matters, three oil tankers have run aground this year in the Lake Maracaibo shipping channel. One grounding spilled 25,000 barrels of crude. Fishermen say a failure to dredge a deeper shipping channel may portend a larger disaster.

\* \* \*

PERU: Where is **Fernando Zevallos** ? He's the head of Aero Continente, Peru's largest domestic air carrier.

Earlier this month, a Peruvian judge ordered his arrest and Interpol sent out a worldwide alert. Since then, he hasn't been seen, according to news reports.

Twice in the early 1980s, Zevallos was acquitted of drug trafficking charges. Now he is implicated again in a pending drug case from early 1995.

Zevallos' troubles with the law were chronicled in The Herald in March. In an interview then, he said envious business rivals were behind the drug charges, which he said were false.

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COLOMBIA: Don't hold your breath, but a proposal to renew extradition of drug traffickers to the United States is inching along in Congress.

A key vote in the full 102-seat Senate is scheduled for today.

U.S. diplomats are watching the process very carefully -- and silently. They fear that any remarks could sandbag the reform process to lift a 1991 constitutional ban on extradition.

A fear of cartel-sponsored terrorism is also palpable. Police confirm that cartel leaders met last week to plot a major assassination -- perhaps President Ernesto Samper or U.S. Ambassador Myles Frechette -- to frighten legislators from approving extradition.

Even if the full Senate passes the proposal, it still must go before a House panel, and the full House -- before mid-June. In the autumn, both chambers would vote again before enactment.

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**CORRECTION**

An item in Thursday's Correspondent's Letter column incorrectly reported an outstanding claim by a hotel in Quito against former President Abdala Bucaram. The Crowne Plaza Hotel says Bucaram was a complimentary guest of the hotel and owes no money.

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