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BRIEFS AND COMMENTS

BOLIVIA: Political Turmoil

The Bolivian congress has insisted that junta leader Antonio Natusch step down and will likely reject his offer to continue the democratization process.

Natusch yesterday agreed to end martial law and restore full constitutional freedoms to the congress, labor, and other sectors. A rejection of the accord negotiated between congressional leaders and Natusch probably will result in further political turmoil.

Although there is no evidence that moderate military officers are ready to challenge Natusch at this time, some now believe that the first priority must be to find a formula for national reconciliation--an objective that cannot be reached as long as Natusch continues in power. The moderates are particularly concerned over Natusch's use of force against unarmed demonstrators in La Paz, where at least 100 were killed and hundreds more injured.

The military remains split along ideological and generational lines. A large segment of the officer corps that supports Natusch--composed mainly of colonels and below--now wants to share in the running of the government. A renewal of the general strike and street violence could, however, lead to significant military defections.

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