

OUR VOICE

O Saddam Hussein's mid-December arrest makes it possible to conceive of repositioning the policy of the United States and its main allies. Of the greatest importance for developments in that part of the globe, internally it changes the balance of forces and paves the way for stabilizing Iraq's current precarious equilibrium. Also, domestically, President George Bush's credibility shows signs of recovery with a view to his reelection in November 2004.

With regard to the first point, we can say with some degree of certainty that with Saddam Hussein under arrest, the United States and its forces will be able to recover control over operations and neutralize the remains of the ancien régime that has caused so many casualties both for Washington and its leading allies. However, everything seems to indicate that when he was captured, Hussein had already distributed a large part of the millions of dollars he took out of the public treasury before being overthrown. Presumably, these resources are in the hands of his followers' organized cells. Thus, his jailing does not necessarily signal the end of the actions of the forces opposed to occupation, particularly those with their origins in the old structures. In that sense, it would be a mistake to assume that with Saddam Hussein's arrest, the anti-U.S. resistance—both armed and civilian—will come to an end. There are powerful signs to the contrary, and Washington will have to be prepared to resolve the fundamental reasons behind the high level of discontent with its presence in the region. These reasons involve the unipolar nature of the Iraq war and the fact that bringing order to the country demands a different representative body than the existing Provisional Governing Council and the rapid withdrawal of occupying forces so that this is possible. If the United States does not capitalize on its victory in arresting Hussein in these terms, it will not have understood that this may be the most appropriate moment for contributing to establishing the conditions needed to stabilize the internal political process, conditions that will have to be built in a context of broad international and national consensus.

On the other hand, we could think that, together with recent growth figures for the U.S. economy, the fact that Hussein is in U.S. custody could offer George Bush fertile ground for being reelected to a second four-year term in the 2004 elections. Nevertheless, if the arrest of the Iraqi leader does not contribute to stopping or at least reducing the wave of terrorist attacks unleashed in Iraq in recent months, we will face a complex escalation of violence and uncertainty that will have a direct impact on the U.S. elections, perhaps definitively affecting Bush's chances of reelection. It will be important to watch developments closely to determine the implications that Hussein's arrest will have given the elements of analysis mentioned above. Too much is at stake to not take into consideration these two factors as vitally important for guaranteeing the regional and global stabilization that the conflict in Iraq begins to increasingly demand.

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The dramatic story of the never-concluded Mexican fiscal reform entered another frustrating chapter in December 2003. The fiscal reform is a process of modernization of the Mexican state that all the political forces think necessary for the country's development and its better insertion in the global economy, but most Mexicans do not understand why their elected officials (both in the executive and legislative branches) cannot come to an agreement or consensus in the matter. This inability of the country's main political institutional actors—whether they be the president, governors or political parties—may have untoward consequences for Mexico's fledgling democracy. It may even cause greater disillusionment among the populace than that which already exists about politicians, which would lead to unwanted scenarios of a return to authoritarianism and civic disinterest in politics. Neither the president and his cabinet nor the deputies and senators have been up to the tasks posed by the times.

Our “Politics” section deals with the non-passage of the fiscal reform or of any other important reform: political economist Pablo Ruiz Nápoles looks at some of the Mexican economy’s possible scenarios for the next three years, none of which invite optimism. Paralysis of the administration and stagnation in the legislative branch are undoubtedly a problem of democratic governability. Political analyst Pedro Aguirre contributes an article about the relationship between the branches of government in the new Mexican democracy, observing how, to avoid ineffectiveness, transitions to democracy must include a broad reform of the state and its institutions, an exercise in change that has not gone well in our country. Probably one of the most urgently needed innovations is a complete re-engineering of the rules of Congress and legislative activity; for some specialists like Fernando Dworak, particularly, legalizing the reelection of legislators is one of these changes that cannot be postponed. The section concludes with an interview by political commentator Leonardo Curzio and journalist Jesús Esquivel, correspondent of the influential weekly *Proceso*, with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roger Noriega, who clarifies his country’s strategies for fostering free trade in the hemisphere despite the disappointing results of last November’s Miami summit, strategies that will probably put the emphasis more on bilateral treaties than on a multilateral accord such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas project.

The administration’s paralysis and the political forces’ inability to produce changes benefiting the country have already shown their negative consequences in different spheres of national life. In the economy, for example, foreign investors look increasingly to China to the detriment of our industry. Specialist John Adams begins our “Economy” section with a very complete analysis of the historic, political, social and international policy conditions that have caused Mexico to lose the race against the giant of Asia and other countries for international investment. Bibiana Gómez draws a balance sheet for Mexico of the North American Free Trade Agreement 10 years after it came into effect. She looks at several aspects, among them, trade and the economy, but also those linked to foreign policy and the international institutions that have been created in this regionalization process.

The social challenges Mexico will face in coming years are varied and of great concern. The viability of democratic construction with social development will depend on the way they are faced and the solutions found for the different problems. *Voices of Mexico* will dedicate its “Society” section in 2004 to analyzing these challenges: specialists will deal with demographic and population challenges, health, education, labor and social justice problems, issues of security and swift effective justice, all fields in which historic backlogs must be attended to immediately and public policies put in place or reinforced. We thus begin with an article by María José Morales and Jesús Rodríguez Zepeda about discrimination in Mexico; the authors state that beyond “persuasive” actions like publicity and educational campaigns, we need a legal framework and administrative structure, like the new National Commission for the Prevention of Discrimination which began operations in January 2004, that will establish sanctions and real penalties for those who discriminate in the terms stipulated by law. We also present articles about the aging of Mexico’s population and the country’s retirement and pension system, by academics Carlos Welti and Víctor Soria, respectively. Welti maintains that the population dynamic is such that measures must now be taken to ensure the basic conditions of life to an increasingly aged population. This requires above all changes in political practices and our country’s social and labor culture. Not taking these steps now could make for a catastrophe in the future. Soria’s article maintains that the current design of the pension system, with privately managed retirement funds (Afores) not only has not proven to be a solution in other countries like Chile, but has proven to go against workers’ interests given the exorbitant commissions charged by the fund managers. A critical evaluation of the design of a strategy to avert the medium-term collapse of pensions in Mexico is a task that cannot be postponed any longer. The section concludes with an article by Sofía Gallardo, a specialist in civic movements and nongovernmental organizations, who presents a sweeping analysis of the role and activities carried out by international NGOs to advocate fair trade, focusing particularly on their actions at the last WTO summit in Cancún, where the great pressure they exerted was one of the factors leading to the meeting’s failure.

Undoubtedly, economic integration and globalization have had their particularities in North America. In our “North American Affairs Section,” energy researcher Miguel García Reyes looks at the issue of United

States vulnerability with regard to oil and natural gas, a vulnerability that has led it to develop hemisphere-wide integration strategies for energy. “Canadian Issues” offers us Gustavo Emmerich’s balance sheet of former Prime Minister Chrétien’s 10 years in office now that he has decided to retire at the age of 70.

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We dedicate this issue’s “Art and Culture” section to different facets of nature, as a resource that must be defended, as scenery and space that inspires creation, or as a place for discovering the finiteness and inherent quality of the individual. We offer our readers first a review of the exhibit “Nature in Extinction,” in which more than 40 painters and visual artists offer their vision of nature, an often pessimistic vision that goes beyond protest and achieves a reconciliation with our surroundings. Curator and art critic Miriam Kaiser writes about the sculpture of Ángela Gurría, an example of how nature can stimulate the artist’s sensibility to create. Lastly, we include an article about the life and travels through Mexico and the Americas of the famous early-nineteenth-century German naturalist, humanist and scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, who had a decided influence on the piecing together of knowledge of what was then called “the New World.” On the 200th anniversary of the start of his journey, the National Autonomous University of Mexico decided to pay him homage with a series of commemorations, including the exposition we review here.

Veracruz is one of the states of Mexico with the greatest artistic and cultural heritage, among other reasons because of its cities. For that reason we open “The Splendor of Mexico” section to this state once again (see *Voices of Mexico* no. 60). Margarita Montalvo Dehesa and Elsie Montiel write about the state and the port of Veracruz, where the Spanish conquistadors first landed in 1519, the French invaded in the nineteenth century and the U.S. invaded in 1914; it is famous for its architectural beauty, food, its carnival, music and the joy of its people. Historian Jesús Jiménez Castillo offers us a warm introduction to the beautiful city of Xalapa, internationally famous for its gardens and parks and its intense cultural life, which has led some to dub it “the Athens of Mexico.” If Veracruz has an Athens, it also has a Venice. The section closes with a contribution from architect Humberto Aguirre Tinoco about the river port of Tlacotalpan, a small city with such charm that it has been decreed a World Heritage Treasure.

The “Museums” and “Ecology” sections are also about Veracruz. Cecilia Santacruz Langagne introduces us to the Veracruz State Art Museum in the city of Orizaba, where visitors can see the country’s best collection of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Veracruz painters. Photographer and ecologist David McCauley contributes an article and photographs about Los Tuxtlas, its fauna and flora, explaining the deforestation that has occurred in this area, declared a special ecological preserve.

To celebrate the admittance of Mexican writer and editor Adolfo Castañón to the Mexican Language Academy, our “Literature” section includes an evocative essay about his work from the pen of writers Marcela Solís-Quiroga and Juan Antonio Rosado; the authors emphasize Castañón’s having made irony and paradox a literary plus. We also celebrate his work presenting our readers a translation of a fragment of his famous poem “Memories of Coyoacán.”

Two illustrious and dearly loved National University academics recently passed away, and we pay them homage in our “In Memoriam” section. Graciela Hierro’s life was dedicated to feminist philosophy and the women’s movement. Arturo Warman will be remembered for his contributions to the study of the Mexican countryside and indigenous communities and his profound love for poor peasants. Both these academics leave behind them a shining example of dedication, commitment and effort, a legacy to their hundreds of disciples in our university’s classrooms.

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