

Venezuela. By Oscar Madrid V.

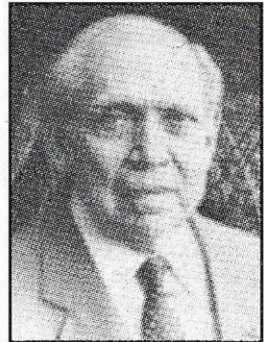
A Thinkers' Summit

Intellectual leaders from 14 Latin American countries were invited to Caracas by Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez to establish the bases for a Manifesto to be presented at the American Thinkers' Summit, part of the 1992 Cinquecentennial Commemoration of the Discovery of America. Initial debate revolved around criteria to describe Latin America's history, contemporary society and the region's future. Discussions revolved around Latin American and Caribbean integration, viewed as the only solution for "facing regional destiny and assuming

the challenge of cultural and technological progress without surrendering ecological patrimony."

According to Venezuelan author and intellectual Arturo Uslar Pietri (a winner of Spain's Prince of Asturias literary prize and a permanent *Visión* columnist), the region suffers from an identity crisis. "The very word *mestizo* (of mixed blood) has a negative meaning in Spanish that is difficult to convey", he points out, "despite the fact that it reflects an identity which stems from a 500 year-old mixture of three

great cultural currents—Spain's, the Western world's and a wide variety of native Indian cultures."



Arturo Uslar Pietri

The conflict basically arises, according to Uslar Pietri, from the fact that "During the entire Conquest of the Americas, no more than 500,000 Spaniards and Portuguese came into contact with between 12 and 20 million Indians at varying stages of cultural development, plus at least 10 million African natives brought into the region by slave traders."

Peru. By Verónica Sáenz Porras

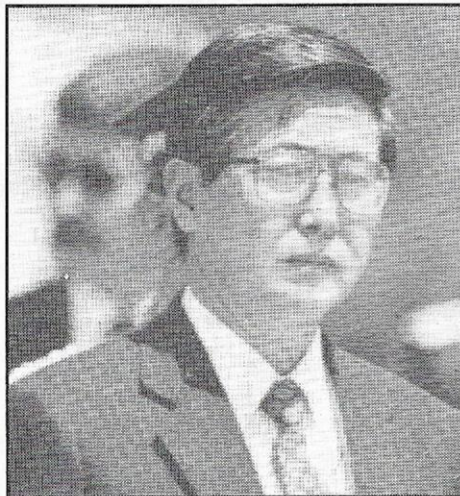
Fujimori's First Year

Lima

A year ago, Dolores Mendoza, who voted for Alberto Fujimori as Peru's next president, stated "My *chino*" ("Chinaman", Peruvians' generic term for Asians) "is the very best." Earning the minimum US\$45 wage as a soap factory worker at the time, she believed that the new era of honesty, technology and hard work would soon double her salary.

Indeed, five months later, Mendoza's wages had been raised five times—but she was still making only US\$45. As a result of water rationing, soap was no longer a commodity. Demand dropped and by July, she joined that 15% of Peru's "economically active unemployed" by becoming one of Lima's 350,000 street vendors.

A year ago, Peru was nine per cent below its 1986 production levels. By September, 1990, national production had fallen 32% in comparison with 1986. In July, 1991, year-to-date inflation of



Alberto Fujimori

1,345% had been reduced without issuing new currency. But the terrorist group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) wants to keep foreign investment out of Peru. The Japanese community is being attacked, a sign observers attribute to "anti-Fujimori" sentiment. The army is

training civilian self-defense groups to fight subversion. And cholera continues to plague Peruvian Amazonia.

Dolores Mendoza doesn't like this "economic liberalization", even though she's been assured that the future will be better. Staple products like milk, sugar, rice and cooking oil, subjected to price controls during Alan García's government, increased 39 times in just one year, while "free market" prices increased only 12 times.

Last December, the situation worsened. Dolores' husband's salary was "frozen", along with that of every other state employee, as part of a program to pay off Peru's US\$21 billion foreign debt and reinstate the country in the international financial system. Today, the couple is unable to earn the monthly US\$160 needed to cover their six-member family's minimum nutritional requirements.

When Fujimori took office, the fiscal deficit was 5.7% of Peru's GNP. Today, it's down to 1%, but as a result, state workers' salaries have shrunk 70%. The Education and Health ministries' workers have been on strike for four months and the central unions have already staged their first 24-hour strike. The country's "acute poverty" index increased by 10% over the past year.