

Brazil's Own Air Force 1 Flies into Turbulence

Written by Guy Burton

Monday, 17 January 2005 12:20

President Lula might be wondering whether the order should ever have been made. On Saturday, the government received its new presidential jet, at a cost of US\$ 57 million. Already nicknamed AeroLula, it's generated much critical comment and highlighted the government's weak management of the media.

On Monday the website edition of the Folha de SÃ£o Paulo presented ministers with a bad smell. The story claimed that Lula's government had spent less on water and sanitation than at any time since 1995, spending less than 500 million reais (US\$ 185 million) last year and not enough if it wants to make services universal by 2020.

As if that didn't make uncomfortable reading, another story by the same organisation suggested the governing party's spending priorities seemed somewhat skewed.

According to the accounts, Lula's party (the PT, Workers' Party) colleague, Marta Suplicy, left a deficit of 1.9 billion reais (US\$ 703 million) last year during her failed bid for re-election as SÃ£o Paulo mayor.

Compared to Celso Pitta, Marta's predecessor, that's 530 million reais (US\$ 196 million) more than the debt he left behind for her in 2000.

Meanwhile Marco Antonio Villa, a historian who has written on the droughts in the Northeast during the 19th and 20th centuries, argued that the government "like previous ones" has failed to come up with an anti-drought plan.

Given Lula's roots in the Northeast, the criticism suggests the President has forgotten his roots.

And in Congress the uncertainty continues to build. At the beginning of the year the government announced a number of ministerial changes go on. But they won't take place till February, which has only added to the jitters spreading throughout the political class.

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Unfortunately the longer it drags on the more bad feeling is generated. Already some ministers are worrying that they might be the ones replaced while PT deputies have expressed alarm.

SÃ£o Paulo congressman Ivan Valente made it clear that he wasn't happy at the prospect of the right-wing parties, the PFL and PP being represented in the government.

Whether Lula will listen to this is another matter. With a legislative programme including political and social security reform this year, the government will need all the support it can get.

And according to its allies, the success of the measures is vital if Lula is to be re-elected next year.

The PT's national president, JosÃ© GenoÃ-no, said on Friday that the party would make space available in the government to politicians of other parties.

â€œTo win we have to make alliances. [We need them] to govern as well.â€

But the unanswered question remains hanging: who on the opposition benches wants to help deliver that outcome for Lula?

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