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The Americas

Chilean politics
Golborne gone

May 1st 2013, 15:22 by G.L. | SANTIAGO

AS CHILE'S mining minister in 2010, Laurence Golborne presided over the remarkable rescue of 33 miners trapped underground in the Atacama Desert, in an operation that lasted 69 days. Mr Golborne's campaign for the Chilean presidency lasted slightly longer—but not much. On April 29th, less than four months after his presidential run officially began, he stepped down, victim of not one but two financial scandals.



His week to forget began on April 25th when the Supreme Court fined Cencosud, the country's biggest retailer, \$70m for abusive practices dating from 2006, when Mr Golborne was its chief executive. On April 29th it emerged that when Mr Golborne became a minister and declared his assets, he failed to mention his stake in a property company in the British Virgin Islands. He said he hadn't bothered to declare it because it was of "second-level" importance. That didn't wash, and the following day he withdrew his bid for the presidency.

Opinion polls consistently suggested that Mr Golborne was the ruling centre-right Coalition's best hope of winning the November 17th election. Even that hope was slim: every poll so far shows Michelle Bachelet, a socialist, as the overwhelming favourite.

Mr Golborne's replacement is Pablo Longueira, a former senator and economy minister. He lacks Mr Golborne's easy charm and ready smile but has vastly more political experience. He will face Andrés Allamand, a former defence minister, in a Coalition primary on June 30th.

Whoever wins will have his work cut out to derail Mrs Bachelet, who left office in 2010 as the most popular president in Chile's history. She looks certain to win the primary of the centre-left Concertación, also on June 30th.

From then on it will be a straight fight between two candidates. There are still six months until the election and Chile's conservatives may yet recover ground. But for now, they are bickering among themselves, and the election is Mrs Bachelet's to lose.