

Bolivia's president accuses opposition of plotting to oust him

Bolivian President Evo Morales, faced with a strong demand for autonomy in the eastern states of the country, turned down the demand by the rightist ruled states and accused them of plotting to overthrow him.

'If conservatives want me out of office, they will have to take me out dead from Government Palace,' Morales said, accusing the opposition leaders of planning to overthrow him, Spain's EFE news agency quoted Morales as saying Sunday.

Morales was addressing hundreds of miners in the town of Llallagua in the Andean province of Potosi Saturday.

'We have no fear of the oligarchs,' said the president, who has said on numerous occasions that the opposition is conspiring to oust him.

The government of Morales, which assumed office in January 2006, has currently been facing autonomy demand from leaders of four eastern provinces - Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni and Pando - which account for around two-thirds of the total gross domestic product of Bolivia.

Santa Cruz, stronghold of the opposition-ruled eastern provinces, has recently approved an 'autonomy statute', under which it will retain nearly two-thirds of the tax revenues it turns over to central authorities. Following the move, Beni and Pando declared autonomy in a massive rally two days later and another region, Tarija, is expected to follow suit.

Morales said the moves towards autonomy were illegal, and warned to take help of the army to maintain Bolivia's territorial integrity.

Now, accusing the opposition of trying to topple him, the leftist leader said, 'The right, the conservatives, the servants of North American imperialism are reaching out to the armed forces.'

In November, Morales had said the US, former Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar along with the country's opposition were conspiring to oust him.

However, Bolivian opposition leaders have rejected the allegations and demanded the president provide proof of his accusations.

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