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FEATURED Q&A

Is Brazil Winning the Fight Against Yellow Fever?



An increasing number of yellow fever cases in Brazil has led health authorities there to step up vaccination campaigns against the mosquito-borne disease. // File Photo: Pixabay.

Q The World Health Organization said Jan. 16 that it considers all of São Paulo State at risk for yellow fever and recommended that visitors to the state get vaccinated against the mosquito-borne disease. Brazilian health officials, however, have said that travelers to the state will not be at risk if they remain in cities, such as the country's largest, São Paulo. Since December 2016, there have been 777 reported cases of yellow fever, including 261 fatal ones, in eight Brazilian states, according to the WHO. How well have public health authorities been fighting yellow fever in Brazil, and how does the latest outbreak compare in urgency to other public health priorities? Is the yellow fever vaccine adequately accessible in São Paulo State and elsewhere in Brazil? How much of an economic impact will the disease have in Brazil, just weeks before the country's Carnival celebrations?

A Francisco Becerra, assistant director of the Pan American Health Organization: "Brazil is currently experiencing a large yellow fever outbreak, including in areas not affected during the outbreak of 2016-2017. There are now four states, including Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, with confirmed human cases. So far, all cases have been linked to jungle mosquito species *Haemagogus* and *Sabethes*. In the current outbreak in Brazil, there is no evidence of human cases of yellow fever virus infection transmitted by *Aedes aegypti*, the mosquito that could sustain urban transmission. However, there is a risk that the sylvatic transmission cycle could change, as cases are being reported near large urban areas. The dissemination of the virus to

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Paul Romer is stepping down amid controversial comments surrounding the World Bank's "Doing Business" report, particularly involving Chile.

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Mexico's Inflation Rate Slows More Than Expected

Mexico's inflation rate slowed more than analysts had expected in the first half of January. The main reason was a smaller increase in energy costs.

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Brazil's Lula Loses Appeal in Corruption Case

A panel upheld the conviction of former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and lengthened his sentence. The ruling upended the country's presidential race in which Lula is the frontrunner. Lula vowed to continue fighting.

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Lula // File Photo: Lula Institute.

POLITICAL NEWS

Brazil's Lula Loses Appeal in Graft Case

Former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Wednesday lost a highly anticipated appeal in a corruption and money laundering case against him, upending the country's presidential race in which Lula has been the frontrunner. In a unanimous decision, the three-judge panel in the city of Porto Alegre

“There is proof beyond a reasonable doubt that the ex-president was one of the actors, if not the principal actor, of an ample corruption scheme.”

— Judge João Pedro Gebran Neto

upheld Lula's conviction and lengthened his sentence from the original nine-and-a-half to 12 years in prison. “There is proof beyond a reasonable doubt that the ex-president was one of the actors, if not the principal actor, of an ample corruption scheme,” one of the appellate judges, João Pedro Gebran Neto, said in court, The Washington Post reported. Lula had been convicted last July of receiving more than \$1 million worth of bribes, mainly in the form of a refurbished beachfront apartment. Although Lula never owned the apartment, in the city of Guarujá, prosecutors argued that he was promised it as a kickback from the OAS construction company in exchange for public contracts, the Associated Press reported. A former company CEO testified as part of a plea bargain that the apartment had been reserved for the former president. Under Brazil's Clean Record Law, defendants who lose an appeal after being convicted of a crime can be banned from holding political office for eight years, The Wall Street Journal reported. Lula still can

appeal to Brazil's Superior Electoral Court and the country's Supreme Court, and Brazilian legal experts have said the case is likely to be finally decided by the Supreme Court, The New York Times reported. The appeals court on Wednesday did not order Lula to be jailed, and he is expected to remain free while his appeals are pending. After the ruling, Lula told supporters that he was innocent and vowed to keep fighting. “No heads down. Heads high ... Never give up,” he told supporters in São Paulo, The Washington Post reported. “I want to warn the Brazilian elite: Just wait, because we will be back.” He added, “I don't want anyone to be worried for Lula. I want us to be worried about what is happening in government.”

Lula's Workers' Party defiantly responded to Wednesday's ruling and called on supporters to protest, The New York Times reported. “If they think this story ends with today's decision, they're sorely mistaken,” the party said in a statement. “We won't give up in the face of this injustice.” Following the ruling, Lula's supporters denounced it as politically motivated and burned tires in protests in Porto Alegre and São Paulo, The Washington Post reported. Ahead of the ruling, some Lula backers built a small tent city in Porto Alegre and marched as close as they could to the courthouse, but large lines of police on horseback pushed them back. After the ruling was announced, supporters packed buses to go back to their homes amid a driving rain. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) on what Lula's conviction means for Brazil in the July 18 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Mexico's Inflation Rate Slows More Than Expected

The rate of inflation in Mexico slowed more than analysts expected in the first half of January, contrasting with a rise in inflation last year to the country's highest level since mid-2001, according to the National Statistics Institute, The Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday.

NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. Blasts Venezuela's Decision to Call Early Presidential Election

The U.S. State Department on Wednesday criticized the Venezuelan government's decision to hold its presidential election by the end of April, saying it will deny Venezuelans their democratic rights, the Associated Press reported. The “snap” election will be neither free nor fair, said State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert.

Espinosa Confirmed as First Woman on Mexican Central Bank's Board

Mexico's Congress on Wednesday confirmed former Mexican finance ministry official Irene Espinosa as the first woman to serve on the board of Mexico's central bank, Reuters reported. She will take over the seat previously occupied by the Bank of Mexico's new governor, Alejandro Díaz de León. Espinosa, the sister of former Mexican Foreign Minister Patricia Espinosa, is an economist who was formerly treasurer at the finance ministry. Prior to that, she worked at the Inter-American Development Bank and ITAM university in Mexico.

Odebrecht Agrees to Pay Guatemala \$17.9 Million

Brazil's Odebrecht has agreed to pay Guatemala \$17.9 million to make up for the bribes paid to a government official in exchange for public contracts, Guatemala's attorney general's office said Wednesday, Reuters reported. In 2016, executives of the company admitted to giving bribes in exchange for a receiving a contract in 2012 to build a Guatemalan highway. An investigation found this month that former infrastructure minister Alejandro Sinibaldi had agreed to take \$19.5 million in bribes in exchange for arranging for Odebrecht to secure the \$300 million highway contract. Sinibaldi has been a fugitive since mid-2016.

The consumer-price index rose 0.24 percent in the first two weeks of the year to an annual rate of 4.63 percent, and annual inflation was 5.51 percent, below the 5.62 percent projected by analysts in a Reuters poll, the wire service reported. The main reason for the slowdown in the inflation rate from 6.77 percent at the end of December was a smaller increase in energy costs than what was seen during this period last year, when the government raised gasoline prices in anticipation of removing price controls for fuel, The Wall Street Journal reported. The price of gasoline increased by just 1.47 percent in the first two weeks of this year, compared to a 16.8 percent rise during the same period last year. Despite the slowdown in Mexico's inflation rate, the country's central bank plans to raise the overnight rate again in February in order to keep inflation on track to reaching the Bank of Mexico's 3 percent target.

World Bank's Chief Economist Departing Amid Controversy

World Bank President Jim Kim on Wednesday announced that the institution's chief economist, Paul Romer, would be stepping down from his position, which he has held since October



Romer // File Photo: World Bank.

2016, Agence France-Presse reported. Romer's exit follows statements he made two weeks ago in which he raised concerns over the methodology of the World Bank's "Doing Business" report, saying it may have hurt Chile's ranking in business competitiveness reports over the years, The Wall Street Journal reported. Kim did not give the reason for Romer's departure when he announced it in a memo posted to the

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new areas such as municipalities of greater São Paulo indicates there is a high virus transmission, increasing the risk for the non-immunized population. To reduce the risk, the Ministry of Health of Brazil will conduct a mass yellow fever vaccination campaign in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, aiming

“There are now four states, including Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, with confirmed human cases.”

— Francisco Becerra

to vaccinate 21.8 million people (16.5 million with the fractionated dose and 5.3 million with the standard dose). PAHO/WHO expects that this mass vaccination campaign can effectively limit the transmission of yellow fever, in addition to the country's routine yellow fever vaccination programs in 19 states, which will continue. Since January 2017, the Ministry of Health of Brazil has distributed more than 45 million doses of yellow fever vaccine to areas where cases have been reported in 2016-2017. WHO has updated its advice for international travelers going to areas in Brazil with risk of yellow

fever transmission. PAHO/WHO is supporting Brazil and has mobilized experts to collaborate in the affected states.”

A Ricardo Izurieta, associate professor at the Institute for the Studies of Latin America and the Caribbean at the University

of South Florida: “The declaration by Brazilian health authorities that ‘travelers to [São Paulo] state will not be at risk if they remain in cities, such as the country’s largest, São Paulo’ might not be scientifically sound. São Paulo is a large metropolitan region that is highly vulnerable to the emergence of yellow fever because of its socio-economic features, a high population density, a significant influx of people from places endemic to yellow fever and an abundance of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the urban yellow fever vector. As previously reported, yellow fever cases emerged in Brazil at the beginning of 2017 and have reappeared in several states since the end of the year. Yellow fever cases have been reported in areas close to the city of São Paulo. In early 2018, the GeoSentinel Surveillance System reported a case of yellow fever in a Dutch traveler who had stayed near the São Paulo metropolitan region, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. São Paulo is not only the most populated city, but also

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World Bank's intranet site. In an article published by The Wall Street Journal on Jan. 12, Romer said he would correct and recalculate rankings of business competitiveness in the report, which he said would particularly affect Chile's ranking, and he added that the country's rankings may have been tainted by the political motivations of some of the World Bank staff. Chile had dropped 23 places in the institution's most recent "Doing Business" report, and Romer said the drastic shift in the country's ranking was due solely to the changes in how the World Bank was scoring the different components used to determine a country's ranking, not because of any changes the government

had implemented, Agence France-Presse reported. Romer's statements led to push back from World Bank economists, who defended the report's ranking methodology, while Chilean President Michelle Bachelet called for an investigation following Romer's comments, saying the rankings could “impact investment and development.” Romer later apologized for giving the impression that he “suspected political manipulation or bias,” adding that he had only meant to raise awareness that the World Bank should “do a better job of explaining what our numbers mean.” Kim said Romer will be returning to his position of economics professor at New York University.

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the major touristic, financial, corporate and commercial center in South America. In the U.S. territories where *Aedes* spp mosquito is endemic, the business sector has made major investments in vector-borne disease-control activities carried out by local and state governments, not only to protect their populations, but also to protect their commercial and touristic sectors. Unfortunately, CEOs of major corporations in Latin America seem not to share a similar vision, which impedes them from foreseeing and preventing what may become: not only a public health catastrophe, but an economic one, as well."

A **Grey Frandsen, executive director of Oxitec and Jack Bobo, chief communications officer at Intrexon:** "Yellow fever is a major public health threat in Brazil, especially in large cities with significant numbers of unvaccinated people, who pose an increased risk of disease transmission. While vaccination efforts continue to intensify, the mosquitoes that are at the root of the challenge persist. Amid concerns over national vaccine shortages, it's clear that vector-control efforts to date have been largely ineffective at suppressing this disease-spreading mosquito. Fortunately, new solutions exist

that can play a direct role in suppressing mosquitoes in regions at risk of yellow fever outbreaks. If we seek different results, we need to take a new approach—one that is targeted, scalable and specifically suited for Brazil's urban landscapes. Ahead of the

“**If we seek different results, we need to take a new approach—one that is targeted, scalable and specifically suited for Brazil's urban landscapes.**”

— Grey Frandsen & Jack Bobo

Carnival celebrations in February, the extent of economic impact of this yellow fever outbreak is unclear, because the yellow fever virus has had a very low incidence rate prior to 2017. However, estimates indicate significant losses of \$1 billion as a result of the record-breaking epidemics of dengue, Zika and chikungunya in 2016."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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