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FEATURED Q&A

What Would Access to the Ocean Mean for Bolivia?



Bolivian President Evo Morales' government is seeking, through the International Court of Justice, to compel Chile to enter talks over giving it access to the Pacific Ocean. // File Photo: Bolivian Government.

Q Bolivia's government on March 19 asked the International Court of Justice to order Chile to enter into talks on granting it access to the Pacific Ocean. The landlocked South American country has demanded ocean access from Chile for generations, but Chile holds that the matter was decided in a 1904 treaty. Is Bolivia any closer now than it ever was to regaining access to the sea? Is there any chance that new Chilean President Sebastián Piñera's government will agree to talks? What would having access to the ocean mean for Bolivia's economy, and what are the costs for Chile?

A Guillermo Holzmann, professor at the University of Valparaíso in Chile and CEO of Analytika Consulting: "Bolivia's demand, in the context of the Pact of Bogotá, to ask the International Court of Justice to obligate Chile to enter into a negotiation to address sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean, is based on two major political arguments: first, a requirement established in Bolivia's Constitution to review signed treaties; and second, is the degree of social adhesion that ties the maritime claim to Evo Morales' aspiration for re-election. Thus, Bolivia's claim will remain, regardless of the court's decision. The court's ruling will not imply any transfer of sovereignty, nor a pre-established result for a negotiation process. This means that, regardless of the ruling, Bolivia will still not have sovereign access to the Pacific Ocean. It is important to note that any possible agreement regarding Bolivia's access to the ocean would require two conditions: the modification of the 1904 treaty between Chile and Bolivia, and eventually, the approval of Peru. Bolivia today has privileged access to the ocean through the

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Panama Adds Maduro to Money Laundering List

The Central American country's government added Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to its list of individuals at "high risk" for money laundering.

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BUSINESS

Colombia's Ecopetrol Reports Spill Has Been Contained

The Colombian state oil company said a spill that started nearly a month ago and that contaminated a river has been contained.

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POLITICAL

Carlos Alvarado Defeats Gay Marriage Critic in Costa Rica

Ruling party candidate Carlos Alvarado Quesada defeated Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz in Sunday's presidential runoff in Costa Rica. The issue of same-sex marriage played a major role in the race.

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Alvarado Quesada // File Photo: Alvarado Quesada Campaign.

POLITICAL NEWS

Carlos Alvarado Defeats Gay Marriage Critic in Costa Rica

Carlos Alvarado Quesada, the center-left candidate of Costa Rica's ruling party, on Sunday defeated evangelical singer and legislator Fabricio Alvarado Muñoz in the second round of the country's presidential election. The men are not related. Alvarado Quesada, a former

“My commitment is to a government for everybody, in equality and liberty for a more prosperous future.”

— Carlos Alvarado Quesada

labor minister, won the election with 61 percent of the vote, according to Costa Rican daily newspaper La Nación. His decisive victory defied polls in recent weeks that showed the race in a dead heat. His opponent, Alvarado Muñoz, had surged in support to become the top vote-getter in the first round of the election on Feb. 4 after the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, to which Costa Rica is a signatory, said that international law requires governments to recognize same-sex couples' rights, including their right to marry. Alvarado Muñoz, an opponent of same-sex marriage, called the ruling a violation of Costa Rica's sovereignty and threatened to pull the country out of the court if elected. He also vowed to eliminate sex education in schools, The New York Times reported. “We're not sad, because we made history, because our message touched the deepest fibers of society in this country,” Alvarado Muñoz, of the small, conservative National Restoration Party, told supporters in conceding the race. His opponent, Alvarado Quesada, claimed victory in a speech to his supporters late Sunday. “My commitment is to a government for everybody, in equality and liberty for a more prosperous future,” he told

thousands of cheering supporters, Reuters reported. “There is much more that unites us than divides us.” Alvarado Quesada is 38 and five years younger than his opponent, and will be the youngest person to take office as Costa Rica's president in the country's modern history when he is inaugurated in May. His running mate, Epsy Campbell, will be the first Afro-Caribbean to serve as the country's vice president, Reuters reported.

Maduro at ‘High Risk’ for Money Laundering: Panama

Panama's government on Thursday placed Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and more than 50 other Venezuelan officials on a list of individuals that are considered a “high risk” for money laundering, Argentine daily newspaper La Nación reported. The decree, which was published in Panama's Official Gazette, imposes restrictions on the officials' travel to Panama, prevents them from doing business in the country and suggests freezing



Maduro // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

accounts. With the move, Panama becomes the first Latin American country to impose official sanctions on Venezuela or its officials, the newspaper reported. “This will force Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Peru to take similar decisions,” Andreína Chasín, an exiled Venezuelan human rights lawyer, told the Associated Press. “The other members of the Group of Lima will see themselves as having to stop talking and start acting.” Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his government are facing an international backlash over their handling of the economy and widespread shortages and hunger in the

NEWS BRIEFS

Former Guatemalan Dictator Ríos Montt Dies of Heart Attack at 91

Efraín Ríos Montt, who spent a year and four months as Guatemala's military dictator in the early 1980s and was later convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity, died of a heart attack Sunday at age 91, The New York Times reported. Ríos Montt's conviction in 2013 of trying to wipe out the Ixil Mayan group was later overturned, and at the time of his death he was being retried in absentia.

Trump Threatens to Exit NAFTA, Drop Support for DACA Deal

U.S. President Donald Trump threatened in a Twitter posting to exit the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, in response to what he said was insufficient border security cooperation from Mexico, CBS News reported Sunday. In a series of tweets concerning his administration's immigration policy, Trump also said he'd no longer support a deal over the status of children in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, due to insufficient border security. Arrests of people entering the United States from Mexico in 2017 were at their lowest level in 46 years, according to NPR.

Venezuela Detains Five Police Officers in Deadly Jail Fire

Venezuela has detained five police officials suspected of involvement in a fire that killed 68 people last week, according to the country's Attorney General Tarek William Saab, The Washington Post reported Saturday. Saab vowed to give Venezuelans “an explanation of these tragic events and punishment to all those responsible,” according to a Twitter posting Saturday. The March 28 fire in a Venezuelan police station jail was among the deadliest in Venezuela's history.

country, as well as consolidation of power and a crackdown on dissent. The document also named Diosdado Cabello, the second-highest ranking official in the ruling Socialist Party, as a "high risk" for money laundering. On March 28, the Swiss government imposed sanctions on Cabello and seven other Venezuelans over allegations of human rights violations, Reuters reported. The Swiss government froze the officials' assets and imposed travel restrictions, adding itself to the growing list of countries to place sanctions on the South American country. The United States has also imposed sanctions on dozens of Venezuelan officials, including Maduro.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Oliveira to Take Over Brazil's State Development Bank

Brazil's government announced on Saturday that Dyogo Oliveira, the head of the country's planning ministry, will take over as head of the state development bank, Folha de S. Paulo reported. The National Bank for Economic and Social Development, or BNDES, faces the task of kickstarting infrastructure projects around the country. The bank has reportedly had tensions with regulatory and control bodies, such as the Audit Court of the Union. Oliveira will be succeeded by his deputy Esteves Colnago at the planning ministry. The move is the latest in a reshuffle of President Michel Temer's economic team following the expected resignation this week of Finance Minister Henrique Meirelles, who reportedly may challenge Temer for his party's presidential nomination. The executive secretary of the Finance Ministry, Eduardo Guardia, is expected to take over as Finance Minister in Meirelles's place. Also on Saturday, the government confirmed that Gilberto Occhi, CEO of state-run bank Caixa Econômica Federal, will become health minister, the newspaper reported. The country's vice president of housing, Nelson Antonio de Souza, will take Occhi's place as CEO of Caixa.

BUSINESS NEWS

Colombia's Ecopetrol Announces Oil Spill Has Been Contained

Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol announced Saturday that an oil spill that forced the evacuation of at least 79 people and caused environmental damage in the vicinity of the country's largest river has been contained, according to Colombia Reports. The spill began on March 3 after a disruption at Ecopetrol's Lizama 158 well, located in the municipality of La Fortuna near the company's Barrancabermeja refinery. Ecopetrol had originally said

the spill had been contained. However, its early attempts to control the spill were not effective. The situation worsened despite the state oil company's efforts at setting up barricades and implementing other procedures. Colombia's National Authority of Environmental Licensing estimated that the spill resulted in 24,000 barrels of oil entering the environment, which would make the incident the largest spill in recent memory in Colombia. Contamination spread throughout the Middle Magdalena Basin, including the Sogamoso River, the Lizama Ravine and Muerto Canyon, according to Colombia Reports. Ecopetrol has said that it has reached out to fishermen affected by the spill and has sought to aid in the project to clean the rivers. The exact cause of the spill still remains under investigation.

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use of Chilean ports and conditions of free transit of goods and services without tariffs or taxes. The possibility of Chile's dialogue with Bolivia has existed both in previous governments and also under the current government of Sebastián Piñera. However, this requires Bolivia's willingness to build a relationship based on future interests, and not on claims. In short, the scenario after a ruling in The Hague will be negative for Bolivia. But if Bolivia focuses on globalization, the Pacific Alliance or the TPP-11, then it will have the possibility of a roadmap for future dialogue and negotiation."

A **Roberto Laserna, director of the Center for the Study of Economic and Social Reality (CERES) in Cochabamba, Bolivia:** "This

is a sensitive topic in Bolivia, and it is often used as an indicator of patriotism. The War of the Pacific occurred more than a century ago, but this feeling of resentment over the loss of access to the ocean emerged in the 1960s, when Bolivia and Chile broke diplomatic relations over the Lauca River, and the government 'discovered' that resentment could mobilize social support. Since then, the issue has gained relevance

and disturbed relations between Bolivia and Chile according to the cycles of internal politics. After the war, in compensation for the lost lands, Bolivia received railroads and free transit through Chilean territory, and

“Patriots want to regain at least a symbolic return of the lost seashore.”

— Roberto Laserna

most of its international overseas trade has been moved through Chilean ports. Here is the problem: patriots want to regain at least a symbolic return of the lost seashore. The request in The Hague asks for a scenario of negotiations with some kind of international supervision, to restore 'sovereign' access to the ocean. In practice, what is truly needed is to improve the quality of roads and railroads, to reduce costs of storage and paperwork, and to modernize the ports. The first two options put stress on relations

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between Bolivia and Chile and may represent an obstacle for the third. If the ICJ concedes to Bolivia, it will be an important victory for the country, upon which the current government will try to capitalize. It will certainly put additional weight for future talks in favor of Bolivia, but the main challenge still remains: how to integrate for a better future."

A Miguel Centellas, Croft instructional assistant professor of sociology and international studies at the University of

Mississippi: "I don't see how any decision by the ICJ will make any tangible difference. The most the ICJ could do is ask Chile to re-enter into negotiations with Bolivia, but it can't guarantee what the outcome of that negotiation would be. Chilean President Sebastián Piñera has already made it clear that he plans to defend the 1904 treaty. Piñera, a traditional conservative, is certainly less likely to offer concessions to Bolivia's President Morales (much less concede territory) than was Chile's former president, Michelle Bachelet, a socialist. Frankly, any sober assessment of the issue must address the costs—to Bolivia—of regaining access to the sea. In the age of free-trade agreements, I fail to see how direct, open access to a sovereign Pacific port would

improve Bolivia's economy any more than simply having a free trade agreement with Chile. Any goods shipped in and out of any hypothetical Bolivian port would still need

“ I don't see how any decision by the ICJ will make any tangible difference.”
— Miguel Centellas

to be transported across hundreds of miles over the Andes and across the Atacama Desert. The 524 kilometers between El Alto and Arica wouldn't magically disappear if the Bolivian flag flew over that port. A strong argument could be made that having Chile pay to maintain those roads (not to mention the cost of maintaining an international port facility) would save the Bolivian government significant expenses."

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

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