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FEATURED Q&A

How Prepared Is the Region for Hurricane Season?



Tropical Storm Amanda left destruction in its wake, including in San Salvador, where flooding from the storm damaged homes. // Photo: UNICEF.

Q Tropical Storm Amanda killed more than a dozen people when it hit El Salvador and Guatemala in late May, and just days later, Tropical Storm Cristobal formed in the Gulf of Mexico and made landfall near Ciudad del Carmen. How prepared are Latin America and the Caribbean for this year's hurricane season? How has the Covid-19 pandemic changed the region's ability to face dangerous storms in terms of emergency response, health care and other areas? What should countries in the region do now to prepare for storms?

A Elizabeth Riley, acting executive director of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA): "Caribbean countries have been looking at specific implications of Covid-19 for storm preparedness this season. This includes considerations of matters such as shelter, as Covid-19 has resulted in adjustments to shelter management protocols. All of our countries have been re-examining arrangements for shelters under the guidance of public health officials. This includes looking at the physical arrangements in shelters and ensuring that health protocols are adhered to, including requirements for physical distancing and hand hygiene, as well as, very importantly, additional training for personnel who are managing shelters. They have to be aware of how to utilize their personal protective equipment and ensure that health protocols are being followed as directed by ministries of health. Another aspect they have been examining is the need for additional buildings to be identified as shelters. Because of the

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TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

Tourists Begin Returning to Mexico's Resorts

Hotels and other businesses in Cancún and the Riviera Maya have started to reopen following more than two months of lockdowns amid the coronavirus pandemic.

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POLITICAL

Chile's Congress Reopens Debate on Migration

Lawmakers in Chile have reopened debate on a measure to restrict migration. The renewed debate follows a report that the country could see an influx of migrants as the pandemic eases.

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POLITICAL

Brazil Resumes Posting Running Total of Covid-19 Cases, Deaths

Brazil's government resumed posting the country's cumulative number of Covid-19 cases and deaths on a health ministry website after Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes ordered it to do so.

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De Moraes // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Brazil Resumes Posting Cumulative Covid Toll After Order

Brazil resumed reporting of the country's cumulative number of Covid-19 cases and deaths on a government website following an order from Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes that it take that action, the Associated Press reported. Last Friday, the health ministry stopped reporting the cumulative totals and began posting only the daily numbers of new cases and deaths, with President Jair Bolsonaro saying the change was intended to improve reporting of the data. However, critics of the move said the change was an effort by the government to hide the severity of the pandemic, the AP reported. The numbers of confirmed Covid-19 cases and deaths have soared in recent weeks in Brazil, where Bolsonaro has downplayed the threat of the virus, likening it to a "little flu." The country has more than 739,000 confirmed cases of Covid-19, the second-highest in the world after the United States, which has more

than 1.9 million. Brazil has more than 38,000 reported deaths related to the disease, after only the United States and the United Kingdom. Bolsonaro has pushed for the country's economy to reopen, and businesses have been starting to resume operations. More than half of the country's shopping malls have resumed activities with limited hours of business, Reuters reported Tuesday, citing an industry group. The pandemic led to the closure of all of the country's 577 shopping malls, forcing them to give discounts and rental exemptions to their struggling tenants.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Tourists Begin Returning to Mexico's Resorts

Mexico's Caribbean coast resort areas of Cancún and the Riviera Maya have begun to reopen, welcoming their first tourists after more than two months of nearly all hotels in the area being shut down due to the coronavirus pan-

NEWS BRIEFS

Chilean Lawmakers Reopen Debate on Restricting Migration

At the government's request, Chilean lawmakers on Tuesday reopened debate over a bill to restrict migration, Reuters reported. The move follows a report last week suggesting Chile could again become a migration hot spot as the coronavirus pandemic eases. The bill would tighten rules on how prospective migrants can enter Chile, as well as how they are taxed, the recognition of their qualifications and how they can be deported if they do not meet requirements. More than one million people have migrated to Chile since 2014.

Some Canadian Mining Firms Behind on Taxes: Mexico's López Obrador

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said on Tuesday that some Canadian mining firms were behind on their tax payments, calling on Canada's government to put pressure on them to avoid the dispute reaching international tribunals, Reuters reported. López Obrador did not name any specific companies. About 70 percent of foreign-owned mining companies with a presence in Mexico are based in Canada, according to Global Affairs Canada.

Fitch Assigns Initial Rating of BBB+ to Credicorp

Fitch Ratings on Tuesday said it has assigned Peru's Credicorp an initial long-term foreign currency issuer default rating of BBB+ and a short-term issuer default rating of F2 with a negative long-term outlook. The ratings agency also assigned the Lima-based financial holding company's new senior unsecured notes a rating of BBB+. Credicorp's ratings are mainly driven by the issuer default ratings of its main subsidiary, Banco de Crédito del Perú, Fitch said.

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physical-distancing requirements, the number of people shelters can accommodate is significantly fewer. Communication will be very important this year. We want to ensure that there are very clear messages going out to the population that both individual and community preparedness are critical. The need to re-examine national-level operational plans, particularly in the context of Covid-19, will be important. It is also important to look at considerations for evacuations if they are required. There are some useful lessons from the Philippines, which was hit by a typhoon at the same time as Covid-19. What we have seen from that experience is the additional time considerations that must be built into planning to make sure that actions such as evacuations can be undertaken within an appropriate time frame that allows us to maintain the population's

safety as a priority. Within the Caribbean, we have a regional response mechanism, a very unique cooperation arrangement for supporting our sister states in the event that they are affected. At the regional level, we are readying ourselves to support Caribbean states if required."

A Ronald Sanders, ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda to the United States and the Organization of American States:

"The Covid-19 pandemic has decimated Caribbean economies, many of which lost at least 20 percent of their GDP in the first quarter of 2020 and are forecast to experience a further 10 percent decline by the end of August. Unemployment has reached unprecedented high levels, and government revenues have drastically declined, while

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demid, the Associated Press reported Tuesday. A few dozen tourists arrived on Monday at the 41 hotels that have partially reopened, but they are nowhere near the 23 million that came to the coast last year, bringing nearly \$15 billion to the local economy. Currently in Mexico, hotels are only allowed to reach 30 percent of their capacity to avoid overcrowding in a bid to curb the chances of spreading Covid-19. More capacity will gradually be allowed, with some hotels hoping to reach 50 percent capacity in July. Before the pandemic, occupancy rates of 85 percent were not uncommon, according to the report. The coastal hotels' reopening comes as Mexico sees a spike in the number of coronavirus cases, adding 4,199 new cases on Tuesday and 596 new deaths, the AP reported. Confirmed deaths last week reached a peak of almost 1,100 per day. The daily total had fallen slightly before Tuesday's rebound. In total, Mexico has 124,301 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 14,649 confirmed deaths. However, officials have acknowledged the country's low rate of testing, and the real numbers are probably many times higher.

Oil Tankers Heading to Venezuela Retreat for Fear of Sanctions

Oil tankers heading to Venezuela have turned around, and others have left the country's waters, as the United States looks at slapping sanctions on dozens of ships transporting Venezuelan oil, Reuters reported Tuesday, citing shipping data and industry sources. Chinese oil firms are also considering whether to reject to charter any tanker that has visited Venezuela over the past year, regardless of where the ship is now, for fear of sanctions, four shipping sources told the wire service on Tuesday. The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, which continues its efforts to pressure Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to step down, is considering blacklisting about a dozen more tankers this week, according to unnamed U.S. sources, a move that would make it more difficult for state oil firm PDVSA to deliver oil to refineries abroad.

HEALTH BRIEFS

Less Than 5% of Latin Americans Trust Gov't Messaging Amid Covid-19: Study

Less than 5 percent of more than 2,300 people surveyed in Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela are extremely confident that current messaging from their national health ministry and international authorities is accurate, according to a recent study by Premise Data. Just 5.6 percent of respondents said they believe their local health care providers are "very trustworthy," while 41.5 percent of respondents are satisfied (31.6 percent) or very satisfied (9.9 percent) with their national governments' response to the coronavirus pandemic. Brazilians are the least satisfied, with just 33.6 percent of respondents saying they are satisfied or very satisfied with how the government has responded to the virus. Additionally, slightly more than 75 percent of respondents were concerned or very concerned that there will not be enough protective equipment for health care workers in their communities, according to the study.

Simultaneous Dengue, Covid Epidemics Could Collapse Latin America's Health Systems

Simultaneously dealing with a dengue epidemic and the Covid-19 pandemic could collapse Latin America's health systems, scientists warn, SciDev.Net reported last month. About 500 million people in the region are at risk of contracting the mosquito-borne disease, according to the Pan American Health Organization. Combating two outbreaks at the same time is an unprecedented challenge for many countries. "Co-infections with arboviruses, like dengue, and SARS-CoV-2 have not been well studied yet," Camila Lorenz, a researcher at the School of Public Health at the University of São Paulo, told SciDev.Net. "However, it is very likely that there will be cases like this in the region where there are both dengue and Covid-19 outbreaks," she added. Many countries in the region, including Brazil but also Honduras and Paraguay, were facing dengue epidemics when the novel coronavirus pandemic broke out earlier this year. The two diseases have similar initial symptoms, which has made identification more difficult and could potentially lead to underreporting of rates of infection for both illnesses, Lorenz said.

Turkey Sends Medical Supplies to Brazil, Paraguay

Turkey on June 7 sent medical supplies and equipment to Latin American countries including Brazil and Paraguay as it seeks to help them in their fight against the coronavirus pandemic, pro-government Turkish daily newspaper Daily Sabah reported. A shipment of 650 domestically manufactured respirators from Turkey arrived in São Paulo on Sunday. According to Brazilian media, the 650 respirators are part of 1,500 ordered from the European country, which are to be distributed to hospitals. Turkish Industry and Technology Minister Mustafa Varank shared a video on Twitter showing the delivery in Brazil. Varank said Turkey's intensive-care-unit respirators have become "the breath of the world," adding that Turkey had exported nearly 2,000 ventilators during the pandemic. Paraguay's ambassador to Turkey said Sunday that the European country is also sending medical supplies there following a health-sector cooperation agreement the two nations recently signed. The medical aid includes 50,000 protective suits, 30,000 N-95 masks, 100,000 surgical masks, 2,000 protective glasses and 50,000 footwear protection covers, according to the report.

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expenditures have increased extraordinarily to contain the coronavirus and treat its victims, including through purchase of medical supplies and construction of infectious diseases facilities. Debt levels have also risen, and many governments are unable to service repayments, which, even before the pandemic, were absorbing as much as 48 cents of every dollar. Consequently, government spending on hurricane preparations has been diverted to mount programs to feed the poor and to support the unemployed. Payments for insurance of properties against hurricanes have lapsed through unemployment and business closures, rendering communities unable to easily rebuild in the wake of destruction by storms. Many Caribbean countries are denied access to concessional financing from the international financial institutions on the sole criterion that they are classified as middle and high-income countries, even though they share many of the structural limitations of less-developed countries. The Paris Club is also opposing suspension or rescheduling of debt payments on the same basis. Therefore, there is little more that Caribbean countries can do to prepare for dangerous storms this year. Regrettably, the G20, which could help, has remained wedded to policies that fail to recognize the dire circumstances of Caribbean countries, abandoning them to a fearsome hurricane season that could damage them even more severely."

A **Raymond A. Joseph, former ambassador of Haiti to the United States:** "It's a double whammy for Latin America and the Caribbean, with the World Health Organization announcing Latin America as the new epicenter for Covid-19, while the Atlantic hurricane season reportedly will be very active. Most countries in the region are mobilizing first responders early and have started information campaigns, using traditional media as well as social networks to warn about evacuation from lowlands.

Haiti, battered by Hurricane Matthew in 2016, has mobilized 3,000 agents in its anti-Covid campaign, Jerry Chandler, director of the Civil Protection Agency, told me. He added, 'At the peak of the mobilization, there will be 30,000 first responders, including volunteers from the Haitian Red Cross, the Scouts and other organizations of civil society.' Meanwhile, there's not much worry in Puerto Rico, where Hurricane Maria caused havoc in 2017. 'A humongous hurricane like Maria comes around every 100 years,' said Matthew Brewer, a meteorologist at the U.S. National Weather Service. 'Nonetheless, we're ready for what may come,' he said. The Dominican Republic, the Caribbean country most affected by Covid-19, has devised the most elaborate plan. The regular hurricane contingency plan has been 'updated under a multi-risk strategy,' said Angie Shakira Martínez Tejera, a spokesperson at the Dominican Embassy in Washington. A novelty includes 'protective equipment and masks for all emergency personnel, as well as for potential evacuees.' But the country that has set an example of preparedness with lasting results is the Bahamas, which last year was ravaged by Hurricane Dorian, devastating two major islands of the Bahamian archipelago. A Ministry of Disaster Preparedness was created, according to Sidney S. Collie, the country's ambassador in Washington. It is dealing with evacuation plans, building new hurricane shelters and resilient infrastructure. Moreover, the government is revising existing building codes, which will include 'no building in flooding-prone areas, building structures that can withstand winds in excess of 185 mph and relocating communities away from coastal zones.' If such measures are implemented by other countries, they will lessen physical destruction and save thousands of lives."

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

LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue, Copyright © 2020

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Latin America Advisor is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005

www.thedialogue.org

ISSN 2163-7962

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