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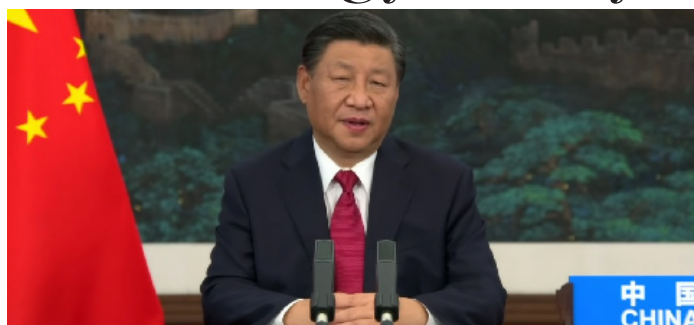
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FEATURED Q&A

Will Latin America Benefit From China's New Energy Policy?



China will stop financing the construction of new coal-fired power plants abroad, President Xi Jinping told the U.N. General Assembly in September in a pre-recorded video message. // Photo: United Nations.

Q Chinese President Xi Jinping announced during the U.N. General Assembly in September that China would stop building new coal-fired power plants abroad, adding that the Asian nation would also “step up support for other developing countries in developing green and low-carbon energy,” Bloomberg News reported. Will the announcement mark a significant shift in Chinese foreign energy policy, and how does the decision to stop funding coal-fired power plants affect Latin American and Caribbean countries? What role does China currently play in financing green and low-carbon energy projects in the region? What potential is there for further Chinese investment in Latin America's renewables sector, and which countries are poised to most benefit from the announced policy change?

A Rebecca Ray, senior academic researcher at the Boston University Global Development Policy Center: “President Xi Jinping's announcement to ‘step up’ support for renewable energy across the Global South has two major implications for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). First, it could unlock a new chapter in LAC energy development. Boston University Global Development Policy Center research has identified 83 gigawatts (GW) in new renewable energy projects that LAC governments have proposed through their Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement, representing a significant increase in the region's current renewable energy capacity. If China were to support that portfolio, it could more than quadruple the amount of renewable energy China already supports

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TOP NEWS

OIL & GAS

Castillo Replaces Energy Minister in Cabinet Shakeup

Peruvian President Pedro Castillo last week shuffled his cabinet, ousting his energy and mines minister, Iván Merino, among others. Eduardo González will take charge of the energy portfolio.

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RENEWABLES

Colombia's Ecopetrol Eying 18 Hydrogen Projects

Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol is evaluating 18 possible hydrogen projects, including pilot projects in Cartagena and Barrancabermeja, according to the country's recently published 30-year hydrogen road map.

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OIL & GAS

López Obrador Details Power Plant Closure Plan

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he wants to close hundreds of privately operated power plants and also cancel several long-term contracts for the supply of energy.

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López Obrador // File Photo: Mexican Government.

OIL AND GAS NEWS

Castillo Replaces Energy Minister, Delays Negotiations

Peruvian President Pedro Castillo last week shuffled his cabinet, ousting Prime Minister Guido Bellido and Energy and Mines Minister Iván Merino, Argus Media reported. Castillo replaced Bellido with Mirtha Vásquez, a former legislator of the leftist Frente Amplio party. Meanwhile, Eduardo González will take charge of the energy portfolio. González is Peru's fifth energy and mines minister in less than a year. Among other government priorities, he is set to lead talks with the six-member Camisea consortium over the companies' 40-year contract for gas and gas liquids production at two blocks. The talks, which were initially scheduled to begin the day of the cabinet shuffle, have been delayed. The rift between Castillo and some of the more radical leftists of his party, including Bellido, became apparent when the former prime minister made public statements regarding the contract renegotiation with Camisea. A week before his dismissal, Bellido said on Twitter that the Camisea-led consortium would have to agree to higher taxes or else face nationalizations. Castillo and other more moderate members of his cabinet, including Economy Minister Pedro Francke, have vowed that no expropriation or nationalizations will occur during his term. Gas from the Camisea projects generates nearly 50 percent of Peru's electricity. Bellido's comments came just as Castillo was visiting the United States in a bid to bring new investment into the Andean nation. Shortly after Bellido's remarks, Castillo softened the rhetoric, saying any renegotiation will take place "with unrestricted respect for the rule of law and to ensure national interests," with "the state and the private sector working together," he said on Twitter. A week later, he replaced Bellido and several of his ministers. "If anything characterizes the current government, it is the lack of clarity in communicating its objectives," Eleodoro Mayorga, former Peruvian minister of energy and mines,

told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published last week. "The word that accurately qualifies the government's performance is 'uncertainty,' which we know is the best way to paralyze private investment," he wrote in his commentary, which he submitted before Bellido's ouster was announced.

Mexico's López Obrador Eyes Closing Private Power Plants

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Monday presented the details of his plan to close hundreds of private power plants and also cancel several long-term contracts for the supply of energy and clean-energy preferential purchase arrangements, the Associated Press reported. The constitutional reform, which López Obrador sent Congress earlier in October, would cancel contracts that govern the sale of electricity from 34 private power plants to the national grid, and it would declare illegal 239 other private power plants that sell energy directly to corporate customers in Mexico, the AP reported. The measure also guarantees the state power utility, the Federal Electricity Commission, or CFE, a share of "at least" 54 percent of the market. López Obrador's government had previously promised that it would reserve 46 percent of the market for private companies. The legislation would allow the CFE to determine for itself whether it wanted to exceed the 54 percent market share, the wire service reported. The measure would need a two-thirds majority to pass in Congress. However, the ruling Morena party's loss of its supermajority in the lower chamber of Congress in last June's midterm elections puts the passage of such a plan in doubt, Gonzalo Monroy, managing director of consultancy GMEC, told the weekly Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published June 25. "Given the loss of a qualified two-thirds majority in the lower house, the probability of passing a significant reform is close to zero," said Monroy. "Even though President López Obrador has opened the possibility of negotiating with opposition parties, it is a futile attempt," he added. However, in the same

NEWS BRIEFS

AMLO's Government Will Not Issue Lithium Permits Unless His Bill Passes

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said last week that the government will not issue any lithium mining permits unless lawmakers approve legislation declaring it a "strategic mineral" and guaranteeing any future exploration and mining for the government, the Associated Press reported. The president said he will not back down until lithium becomes "the property of the nation." López Obrador recently sent a bill to Congress that would effectively nationalize lithium production, but his coalition currently does not have the necessary votes for its approval.

Iberdrola-led Group to Bid in Chilean Tender for New Transmission Line

Spanish utility Iberdrola will lead a group of energy-sector companies' bid in the tender for Chile's first long-distance HVDC power line, which is to have the capacity of 3 gigawatts, Renewables Now reported last Friday. The 1,500-kilometer long power line will bring investments of more than \$2.5 billion, Iberdrola said. The tender includes the construction of two converter stations as well as the modernization of existing substations.

Raízen Forms Joint Venture for Distributed Generation Power Plants

Brazilian sugar and ethanol producer Raízen and its subsidiary, Raízen Energia, have formed a joint venture with local energy company Grupo Gera to develop and operate distributed generation (DG) power plants, Renewables Now reported last week. As part of the agreement, Raízen will invest 212 million reais (\$38.6 million) in the acquisition of a stake in Grupo Gera companies.

issue, Fluvio Ruiz Alarcón, a Mexico-based oil and gas analyst, said such a reform has “some chance of being approved” in Congress. “President López Obrador has as a main goal for the CFE not to continue to lose participation in electricity generation,” Ruiz Alarcón told the Energy Advisor. López Obrador’s plans could run afoul of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, however. Foreign investors built many of the private power plants that would be shut down under the measure, the AP reported. The plants were built in accordance with Mexico’s 2013 energy reform, which López Obrador wants to roll back. However, the foreign owners of those plants could lodge complaints under provisions of the USMCA that guarantee equal treatment for foreign entities and bar preferential treatment for state-run or local firms, the AP reported.

RENEWABLES NEWS

Colombia’s Ecopetrol Evaluating 18 Possible Hydrogen Projects

Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol is evaluating 18 possible hydrogen projects, including pilot projects in Cartagena and Barrancabermeja, according to the country’s recently published 30-year hydrogen road map, Argus Media reported. The hydrogen program would require between \$200 million and \$300 million in investments, according to the plan. Ecopetrol and an additional seven companies operating in the Andean nation, including Grupo de Energía de Bogotá, have signed a letter committing to the development of hydrogen projects. Earlier this year, Colombian Energy Minister Diego Mesa touted Colombia’s hydrogen potential, saying the country’s renewable water resources put it in an ideal position to produce green hydrogen. Mesa also said German companies have expressed interest in developing green hydrogen in Colombia. However, according to the road map, Colombia will at first focus on blue hydrogen production. “Blue hydrogen would serve as the base to

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in the region. This announcement could also herald a boost in China’s demand for lithium, particularly from the ‘lithium triangle countries’ (LTCs) of Argentina, Bolivia and Chile. Regardless of where China supports renewable energy around the world, intermittent power sources such as solar and wind will require lithium for power storage. China already has a presence in all three LTCs’ lithium sectors, where this announcement may bring renewed interest. Crucially, increasing China’s presence in the LTC lithium sector will require attention to environmental and social concerns. Lithium extraction uses tremendous amounts of groundwater in a water-scarce region, which could potentially trigger social conflict with local communities who depend on that resource for traditional livelihoods. Two LTCs—Argentina and Bolivia—have ratified the region’s new Escazú Agreement, committing them to community engagement, transparency and accountability on environmental matters. The extent to which these two countries honor their Escazú commitments—and whether Chile joins them—may determine the direction of this important new sector.”

A Benjamin Gedan, deputy director of the Latin America Program and director of the Argentina Project the Wilson

Center: “It is up to Latin America’s leaders, not China, to address the region’s environmental challenges, from deforestation to the sluggish transition from fossil fuels.

start expanding the hydrogen value chain in Colombia to the large-scale competitive development of green hydrogen,” said Ecopetrol CEO Felipe Bayón, Argus Media reported. Blue hydrogen is derived from methane in natural gas, and it has faced criticism for not being as clean as it appears due to its greenhouse gas footprint, according to a report by Smithsonian Magazine. “Colombia has tremendous potential in the production of blue hydrogen in a first stage, but in the long term, green hydrogen

Undoubtedly, China is part of the problem. Its top imports from Latin America, including soybeans and oil, have a vast ecological footprint, and China’s investments are mostly in the same industries. There are some bright spots. Most of the region’s electric buses are built in China, and the same is true for solar energy hardware. However, in countries with inadequate environmental rules and enforcement, Chinese companies rarely exceed low local standards. Still, the region has the power to tighten its climate and environmental rules and improve enforcement. Its record is unimpressive: Of \$53 billion in pandemic spending, only \$1.2 billion, or 2 percent, funds green projects. Mexico, Colombia and others are subsidizing oil and gas firms and courting investment in hydrocarbons. In the last decade, forest cover fell from 53 percent to 46 percent of land area. Spending on environmental protection averages just 0.2 percent of the budget. That is not to minimize China’s impacts. But Latin America, beset by intensifying hurricanes and drought, has an opportunity to shape its own development by favoring sustainable infrastructure investments designed to decarbonize. That means more Chinese wind turbines and solar parks and fewer Chinese pig farms and cattle ranches. Implementation of the Escazú Agreement, which promotes environmental justice, could also help by exposing China’s impacts on the region’s biodiversity, especially deforestation. China should be a better steward of the planet, but the responsibility for protecting Latin

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has more competitiveness,” Natalia Gutiérrez, executive president of the Colombian Association of Electric Energy Generators (Acolgen), told the Energy Advisor in a Q&A published July 30. However, Colombia is trailing behind some other countries in the region who have been focusing on regulation of the blooming green hydrogen industry, such as Chile. “[Colombia] will undoubtedly become a leader in this area,” Jose Zapata, partner at Holland & Knight, said in the same issue. “This will require clarity in

the rule of law, stable taxes and timely permitting, considering that Chile already has a head start," he added.

POLITICAL NEWS

Opposition Members Seek Impeachment of Chile's Piñera

Chilean opposition lawmakers on Wednesday launched impeachment proceedings against President Sebastián Piñera over alleged irregularities related to the sale of a family mining company, the Associated Press reported. Alleged details about the sale of the Dominga mining project came to light as part of the release earlier this month of millions of leaked documents related to offshore accounts reportedly used by dozens of world leaders, businesspeople and celebrities. Piñera used

The case stems from the recent leak of confidential documents known as the Pandora Papers.

"his office for personal business," lawmaker Thomas Hirsch alleged in presenting the accusations to the Chamber of Deputies, Agence France-Presse reported. On Wednesday, a committee of Chile's lower house of Congress selected five legislators to review arguments against Piñera, the AP reported. They will then make a recommendation to the full chamber on whether it should continue with impeachment proceedings. At that point, the committee would formally notify Piñera of the proceedings, and he would have 10 days to respond, the AP reported. Leaked documents related to the sale of the Dominga mining project indicate that Piñera used companies in the British Virgin Islands in connection with the sale of the project, which his family partially co-owned with a friend. Last week, Chile's prosecutor's office said it was opening

ADVISOR Q&A

Will Castillo's New Cabinet Inspire Confidence in Peru?

Q **Leftist Peruvian President Pedro Castillo on Oct. 6 dismissed his controversial prime minister, Guido Bellido, replacing him with Mirtha Vásquez, a moderate leftist and former interim president of Congress. Bellido's ouster came amid a cabinet shuffle in which Castillo also replaced his ministers of mining and labor but left other officials, including Finance Minister Pedro Francke, in place. What do the changes show about the direction of Castillo's government? Does replacing Bellido and others mean that moderates have won out against far leftists in Castillo's cabinet, and will the changes reassure investors in Peru? What actions can Vásquez be expected to take as prime minister?**

A **Carlos Arata, partner at Rubio Leguía Normand in Lima:** "Pedro Castillo is showing intentions of shifting to more moderate positions. First, he ratified Jorge Velarde as president of the central bank. During his tenure at the central bank, Velarde has shown himself to be a strong defender of a conservative approach to the country's finances. Also, Bellido's replacement was a necessary move by Castillo in order to give the markets certain tranquility that Bellido's and Perú

Libre's agenda will not be pursued as a priority. It is clear that Bellido's manners and intentions were creating a lot of instability in the country. The last straw was his statements on the renegotiation of the Camisea gas concession agreement (we renegotiate or we expropriate). Castillo had to ask for his resignation; otherwise, Congress was going to demand an explanation from Bellido (and Íber Maraví, the labor minister, who was accused of being a former member of the Shining Path terrorist group). This does not mean that the government is moderating, as certain new members of the cabinet are still on the far left end of the political spectrum. However, these moves do show, on the one hand, that the friction inside the two factions is real and the moderates are winning. On the other hand, they show that the government is making efforts to move toward less radical approaches. Although we still need to be vigilant and cautious, it seems that economic policies will be more investor friendly and are looking for a more social approach to the country's growth."

EDITOR'S NOTE: More commentary on this topic appears in the Q&A of the Oct. 13 issue of the Latin America Advisor.

an investigation of Piñera over alleged tax violations and bribes related to the project's sale. Piñera has denied wrongdoing. He added that he has "full confidence that the courts, as they have already done, will confirm there were no irregularities, and also my total innocence," AFP reported. According to leaked documents, the final payment on the 2011 sale of the mining project hinged on the government not declaring an area in northern Chile a protected natural reserve, the AP reported. Piñera was president

at the time, and his government did not declare the area a protected reserve, despite appeals from environmentalists to do so. Last week, the president's office said the courts and prosecutors determined in 2017 that Piñera was not involved in managing the company and that Piñera's holdings are currently managed in a blind trust, the AP reported. Jaime Bellolio, a spokesman for Piñera, criticized lawmakers for launching the impeachment effort, saying it involved "an accusation based on facts that are

NEWS BRIEFS

U.N. High Commissioner Calls for Investigation Into Death of Dissident

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights on Wednesday called on the government of Venezuela to allow for an “independent investigation” into the death in custody of well-known dissident Raúl Baduel, Agence France-Presse reported. Gen. Baduel, an ally of late President Hugo Chávez who later broke ranks with the former president and spent years as a political prisoner, died of Covid-19, according to an official announcement earlier this week. The U.N. human rights office also called on Venezuela to provide health care to detainees and release those who were arbitrarily arrested.

U.N. Commission Faults Paraguay in Indigenous Peoples’ Land Case

The U.N. Human Rights Committee on Wednesday ruled that Paraguay failed to prevent toxic contamination of Indigenous peoples’ lands by commercial farming, violating the community’s rights and sense of “home.” The committee monitors countries’ adherence to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The ruling marks the first time the committee has issued a decision outlining Indigenous peoples’ sense of “home” in the context of their relationship with their territories, including their livestock, crops and way of life, the United Nations said in a statement.

Argentine President Wants Deal Soon With IMF

Argentine President Alberto Fernández said Wednesday that he wants a new agreement with the International Monetary Fund as soon as conditions allow it, Reuters reported. “We want to reach that agreement as soon as we have the right conditions,” Fernández said in a tweet, downplaying a newspaper report saying that no deal could be struck before next year.

not true.” However, opposition member Gabriel Ascencio told local media, “It’s impossible not to think that the president is guilty.” In order for the impeachment proceeding to advance, the five-member committee must recommend it, and 78 of the Chamber of Deputies’ 155 members would have to approve it.

Opposition Unites Behind Honduras’ Castro Ahead of Vote

Honduras’ leading opposition parties on Wednesday joined forces behind presidential candidate and former First Lady Xiomara Castro ahead of the November elections in a bid to oust the ruling National Party, which is leading in the polls, Reuters reported. Representatives of the National Opposition Union, or UNO, party announced it would back Castro, 62, the

“If we don’t come together today, the country will lose.”

— Salvador Nasralla

wife of former President Manuel Zelaya and candidate for the Liberty and Refoundation, or Libre, party. A poll last month showed ruling party candidate and Mayor of Tegucigalpa Nasry “Tito” Asfura as the front-runner, with 21 percent of the vote. UNO’s previous candidate, Salvador Nasralla, received 18 percent of support, as did Castro. “If we don’t come together today, the country will lose,” Nasralla told a news conference. “Together, nobody can beat us,” he added. Nasralla narrowly lost to current President Juan Orlando Hernández in 2017 and alleged fraud. Castro ran in 2013 but lost, and in 2017 she endorsed Nasralla, the Associated Press reported. Among her campaign promises, Castro has said she would establish diplomatic relations with China and legalize abortion in some situations. She has also said she seeks to better handle Honduras’ external and internal debt, which stands at around \$13 billion. The ruling National Party has been in power in Honduras since elections following

the 2009 coup that ousted Zelaya. “The upcoming Honduran elections will be among the most consequential since the nation’s return to democracy in 1982,” Hugo Llorens, former U.S. ambassador to Honduras, told the daily Latin America Advisor in a Q&A published Oct. 6. “The latest polls reflect public frustration in the face of an economic crisis compounded by the devastating effects of hurricanes and Covid-19,” he added.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Brazil’s Annual Inflation Rate Hits Double Digits

Brazil’s main measure of inflation, the Extended National Consumer Price Index, or IPCA, in September rose 1.16 percent, the biggest change for the month of September since 1994 and the first time since 2016 that annual inflation passed the double-digit mark, rising to 10.25 percent, state statistics agency IBGE said Friday. September’s increase in prices was driven to a large extent by intense inflation pressures on industrial and manufactured goods, as well as a major price shock for fuel. Brazil’s worst drought in almost a century has put pressure on hydroelectric output, forcing producers to turn to more expensive sources of power. The price of electricity rose 6.47 percent in September from August, and it is up almost 30 percent as compared to the same month last year, The Wall Street Journal reported. The drought, along with unusual freezing temperatures in recent months, have also hit the country’s massive agricultural sector hard. The price of meat has risen by almost 25 percent over the past year. The sharp rise in prices could have political implications for national elections on Oct. 2 next year, especially among poor voters who feel the negative effects of inflation the most, according to the report. While the September inflation data was lower than market analysts had expected, the likelihood that the central bank will be able to drive inflation to the 3.50 percent target in 2022 is low, Goldman Sachs economist Alberto Ramos said in a note.

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America's natural spaces ultimately belongs to Latin Americans, not Beijing."

A **Leonardo Stanley, associate researcher in the economics department of the Center for the Study of State and Society (CEDES) in Argentina:** "Xi Jinping's announcement could be a turning point, coming from a large financier, although not unique nor the most important one. The announcement might also reflect growing global opposition to coal-power investments. Technological upgrading and falling costs have made renewable source a reliable competitor, whereas public opposition and widespread concerns about negative environmental and social impacts push host countries against coal. Chinese banks are also more reluctant to fund new coal power investments. The exit from coal would likely allow Chinese green firms to seek new business opportunities overseas. However, the role that China can play cannot be one in isolation, but rather must be connected to the host country's particular energy transition. In Chile, the Piñera administration recently reached an agreement with the country's largest power companies to voluntarily retire their oldest coal plants by 2025 (originally set by 2040). To advance toward decarbon-

ization, the Chilean government has also decided to include biomass into the matrix and explore other renewable alternatives. Despite ample evidence against relying on coal-based sources, some countries keep

“The role that China can play cannot be one in isolation...”

— Leonardo Stanley

subsidizing coal-fired power plants and mining activities—take the Bolsonaro administration's recent proposal to maintain incentives for Brazil's coal-fired thermal plants. In a bet against the future, the government has also launched a program for the 'sustainable use of national mineral coal.' In Mexico, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is also turning back, proposing legislation requiring the energy grid to favor state-run power plants—which are fueled in large part by crude oil and coal—before less expensive wind and solar energy. Both Bolsonaro and AMLO, as many other carbon-friendly regimes, are exposing their countries to transitional risks, which relate to the problem of stranded assets, reflecting a change in asset valuation."

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