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FEATURED Q&A

What's at Stake in the Election for the Next OAS Leader?

Member nations of the Organization of American States, whose headquarters in Washington are pictured, are to elect a new secretary-general next month. // File Photo: Organization of American States.

Q The Organization of American States will elect a new secretary-general on March 10, ahead of the end of current Secretary-General Luis Almagro's mandate in May, after a decade in office. Which candidates are best positioned to lead the OAS, and what factors will decide who is elected? What are the most pressing issues facing the organization's next leader? What will be Almagro's legacy at the OAS?

A Peter DeShazo, visiting professor of Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies at Dartmouth College and former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs: "On the eve of OAS elections, democratic consensus in the region has receded from its high tide in 2001 when the Inter-American Democratic Charter was unanimously approved by OAS members and Cuba was the hemisphere's sole authoritarian state. Departing Secretary-General Luis Almagro leaves behind a legacy of activism in the cause of regional democracy and human rights. Commitment to the promotion of democratic governance must remain a central orientation of the OAS—as well as a fundamental U.S. policy objective in the Americas. The unheralded but most significant accomplishments of the OAS are precisely in the interrelated areas of democracy and security—coordination on: countering terrorism, crime and drug trafficking, defending human rights, promoting good governance and election monitoring. A vital factor influencing the viability of the OAS will be the level of support it receives from the Trump administration. The United States funds about 50 percent of the OAS' operating budget, along with large contributions

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Religious Groups File Suit Over U.S. Immigration Raids

More than two dozen religious groups on Tuesday filed a federal lawsuit against the Trump administration over its move to allow authorities more power to make arrests in houses of worship.

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BUSINESS

Carrefour Bids $920 Million for Remainder of Brazil Operation

Carrefour is seeking to take over the stake in its Brazilian operation that it doesn't already own.

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ECONOMIC

Official Rejects Rate Hike to Fully Pay PREPA's Debts

Robert Mujica Jr., the director of the Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico, rejected the possibility of rate hikes in order to fully pay the $8.5 billion owed to creditors of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority.

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Mujica // File Photo: Financial Oversight & Management Board.

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POLITICAL NEWS

Religious Groups File Lawsuit Over U.S. Immigration Raids

A group of 27 Christian and Jewish religious groups on Tuesday filed a federal lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's move to allow U.S. immigration agents more power to make arrests in houses of worship, the Associated Press reported. The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Washington and names the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as well as the heads of those agencies, as defendants. It argues that a Trump administration policy allowing authorities to make arrests at locations including schools and churches has spread fear of raids and has reduced attendance at worship services and other religious programs, the AP reported. The groups say the result has been an infringement on religious freedoms, namely religious groups' ability to minister to migrants, including ones who are in the United States without authorization, the wire service reported. "We cannot worship freely if some of us are living in fear," the Most Rev. Sean Rowe, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States, told the AP. "By joining this lawsuit, we're seeking the ability to gather and fully practice our faith, to follow Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves," he added. A Department of Homeland Security representative said agents must have approval from a supervisor before conducting any enforcement actions at a church or a school, The New York Times reported. "We are protecting our schools, places of worship, and Americans who attend, by preventing criminal aliens and gang members from exploiting these locations and take safe haven there because these criminals knew that under the previous administration that law enforcement couldn't go inside," said the official, Tricia McLaughlin, the department's assistant secretary for public affairs, The New York Times reported. [Editor's note: See related **Q&A** in the Dec. 19 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Official Rejects Rate Hike to Fully Pay PREPA's Creditors

The director of the federal oversight board for Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority (PREPA), the public utility that exclusively managed Puerto Rico's electrical grid until 2021, on Tuesday announced that the U.S. government can pay PREPA's creditors $2.6 billion of the $8.5 billion owed to them, the Associated Press reported. Robert Mujica Jr., director of the Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico, on Tuesday presented a new fiscal plan for PREPA, which filed for bankruptcy in 2017. The government will cover less than half of the financing for PREPA's debt repayment because it hopes to avoid raising electricity rates for individual customers, Mujica said.

BUSINESS NEWS

Guyana Moves to Cancel License of CGX, Frontera

Guyana's government has given a 30-day license cancellation notice to CGX Energy and Frontera Energy, two Canadian oil and gas firms that operate an offshore exploration venture in Guyanese territorial waters, the companies announced in a joint statement on Tuesday. CGX and Frontera have held a license for the offshore Corentyne Block since 2023 but were unable to find financial partners needed to commercialize the block's oil and gas resources. That led Guyana's government to reject their application for an extension to their exploration license last August, Reuters reported. Frontera and CGX had since appealed that decision; Guyana's government on Monday formally denied the companies' appeal and gave them 30 days to wind down operations in the Corentyne Block, the companies said.

NEWS BRIEFS

Argentina Taking Bids to Deepen Navigation Channel in Paraná River

Bids are due to Argentina's government today for companies that are seeking a 30-year contract to dredge a deeper channel for boats in the Paraná River, Bloomberg News reported. The project to upgrade the channel, which has not been deepened since 2006, would allow larger vessels to travel inland along the waterway and access Argentine agricultural products closer to farms of origin, ideally cutting costs for shippers. Ships currently run aground in the Paraná around once per month, according to Bloomberg News.

France's Carrefour Bids $920 Mn for Remaining Stake in Brazil Unit

French grocery chain Carrefour has bid $920 million to take over the remaining 32.6 percent stake in its unit in Brazil, The Wall Street Journal reported. Carrefour's decision to fully privatize its operations in Brazil reflect the company's confidence that consumer spending will continue to grow in the South American country, the newspaper reported. The bid places Carrefour's Brazilian unit's total value at $2.8 billion.

LM Wind Power Closing Wind Turbine Blade Factory in Brazil

LM Wind Power, a subsidiary of GE Verona, will close its wind turbine blade factory in northeastern Brazil amid slumping demand in the region, a company spokesperson told Reuters on Tuesday. The factory in the town of Suape in Pernambuco state employs around 1,000 people, according to Reuters. The rate of new utility-scale wind energy installations in Brazil fell by more than 30 percent last year, the wire service reported.

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to specific OAS activities. The evolution of U.S. policy in the Americas under the Trump administration, especially regarding bilateral relations with key OAS members such as Canada, Mexico and Brazil, will resonate in terms of OAS effectiveness. The election of the new OAS secretary-general looks to be a contest between the Caribbean (Caricom) candidate, Foreign Minister Albert Ramdin of Suriname and his Paraguayan counterpart, Rubén Ramírez Lezcano. Ramdin appears to be close to a majority of votes needed. Regardless of the outcome, big challenges lie ahead for the new secretary-general."

Vito Villar, consultant at BMJ Consultores Associados: "The election of the next secretary-general of the Organization of American States comes at a critical juncture for the institution. With Luis Almagro's decade-long tenure coming to an end, the selection will be shaped by the political dynamics among member states, particularly the influence of the United States. Recently, Paraguayan President Santiago Peña stated that his candidate, Foreign Minister Rubén Ramírez Lezcano, has the necessary votes to secure victory. Aside from Paraguay, only Suriname has expressed interest in nominating a successor, with its own foreign minister, Albert Ramdin, as the candidate. The key challenges facing the next secretary-general include strengthening democracy, protecting human rights and managing regional crises such as political instability in Venezuela and Haiti. Additionally, issues such as migration, drug trafficking and corruption require continued attention. Revitalizing the OAS as a relevant forum for conflict resolution and hemispheric cooperation will be essential, particularly in light of the United States' increasing political isolationism, even toward historical allies. Almagro's legacy is characterized by a strong defense of democracy and human rights, particularly against authoritarian regimes. However, his approach created divisions among member states, drawing criticism over perceived partiality and the potential compromise of the organization's neutrality. The United States' position will likely be the decisive factor in the election. While both candidates share alignment on key U.S. priorities, neither emerges as an obvious choice. The next leader will need to balance the defense of democratic principles with maintaining unity among member states. Strengthening key institutions, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and fostering cooperation in areas like security and sustainable development will be fundamental to ensuring the OAS' continued relevance in the hemispheric landscape."

Beatrice Rangel, member of the Advisor board and managing director of AMLA Consulting in Miami Beach: "All scenarios lead to Albert Ramdin's victory over Ruben Ramírez Lezcano. Ramdin started the race with 15 votes from Caricom. He will probably get Mexico's support to reach 16 votes. Should Central America vote as a block, Ramdin would get five additional votes. Should Central American countries choose the road of individualism, then there is a high probability that Honduras and Nicaragua would vote for Ramdin. Individuality would bring Ramdin's tally to 18 votes. Ramírez, for his part, started with five votes from Mercosur members. Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia most likely would also adhere to the Ramírez candidacy to bring the tally to nine votes. Should the Central American bloc fracture, then El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica would for vote for Ramírez to increase his tally to 13 votes. With the United States, the Dominican Republic, Panama and Haiti, Ramírez would reach 17 votes. If Central America votes as a bloc, Ramdin will probably secure 21 votes while Ramírez gets 17. Thus, I believe Ramdin will become the next OAS secretary-general, a role that he could fulfill diligently and efficiently, as he was undersecretary-general during the mandate of former Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza."

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