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FEATURED Q&A

What's the Impact of Cuba's New Land Use Law?

Cuba earlier this month published a new law for the use of land. Sugar harvesting in Cuba's Chambas municipality is pictured. // File Photo: Matthieu via Adobe Stock.

Q Cuba published its new Agricultural and Forestry Land Law, known as Law 185, in the government's Official Gazette on Sept. 9, expanding the right of individuals, legal entities, foreigners, and small and medium-sized enterprises to use idle state-owned land. The law forms part of a broader package of economic changes the government approved to liberalize and decentralize the economy amid a deepening crisis that has worsened since January, when the United States cut off nearly all of Cuba's oil imports. How significant is this new law as compared to previous attempts at agrarian reform in Cuba, and what institutional or bureaucratic obstacles could limit its implementation? How could the land reform change incentives for farmers, cooperatives and private businesses? What impact could it have on Cuba's agricultural production, food imports and broader economy?

A Lisa Glidden, professor and director of global and international studies at the State University of New York at Oswego: "Cuba has been liberalizing its economy in response to economic crises over the last 30 years. Previous legislation in 2008 allowed for usage rights for those who worked the land so that farmers could sell their surplus products directly or in urban farmers' markets. It also incentivized urban organic gardens, whose surplus could be privately sold. Law 185, which goes into effect at the end of the year, expands usage rights to uncultivated state lands. As with previous legislation, the state still retains land ownership, but individuals, including foreigners, will have long-term usage rights and ownership of what they

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U.S. Bars Dozens of Latin American Officials From Entry

The U.S. State Department announced visa restrictions on more than two dozen current and former Latin American officials and their family members, over allegations of involvement in corruption or drug trafficking.

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Cordovez Tapped as Ecuador's Finance Minister

Ecuador's president named Bernardo Cordovez, a former social security agency official, as the country's finance minister.

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ECONOMIC

Colombia, IMF Reportedly Discuss Financing

The government of Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella has reportedly been engaging recently with the International Monetary Fund on possible financing options.

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De la Espriella // File Photo: U.S. State Department.

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POLITICAL NEWS

U.S. Bars Dozens of Latin American Officials From Entry

The U.S. State Department on Monday announced that it was barring more than two dozen Latin American officials, former officials and family members from entry into the United States on allegations of their involvement in corruption or links to drug trafficking. Among the officials named is Bolivia's current attorney general, Roger Mariaca. In a statement, State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott alleged that Mariaca "abused his public positions by soliciting and accepting bribes to facilitate narcotrafficking and helped violent criminals evade justice." Mariaca rejected the allegations. "We cannot accept that the work I have been carrying out as Attorney General of the State ... be called into question by decisions or statements coming from abroad," he said, EFE reported. Mariaca linked the U.S. decision to investigations his office has conducted, including against Argentine political consultant Fernando Cerimedo, the wire service reported. Cerimedo is a right-wing political strategist who has worked on campaigns including those of Bolivian President Rodrigo Paz and Argentine President Javier Milei, EFE reported. The State Department also imposed visa restrictions on 12 other Bolivians, including current and former judicial officials, as well as two Colombians, two Ecuadoreans, one Peruvian and family members of the officials.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Cordovez Tapped as Ecuador's Finance Minister

Ecuadorean President Daniel Noboa on Monday named Bernardo Cordovez, a former social security agency official, to replace Sariha Moya as finance minister, Bloomberg News reported, citing an executive decree. Ecuador's sovereign bonds due in 2039 slipped two cents to 92.9 cents on the dollar after the announcement, extending recent losses, according to indicative pricing data compiled by Bloomberg News. Noboa has broadened the ministry's scope, renaming it the Ministry of Economic and Productive Development and adding foreign trade and agriculture to its existing responsibilities for public finance and the economy, Bloomberg News reported. During Moya's tenure at the ministry, the International Monetary Fund increased Ecuador's loan program to $5 billion from $4 billion, the news agency reported. Cordovez most recently chaired the board of Ecuador's social security institute, IESS, a post he assumed last November after serving as general manager of its bank, Biess, El Comercio reported. Before that, he worked last year as an advisor at the Ministry of Economy and Finance, joining in April 2025, according to Bloomberg News. He was named the general manager of Biess a month later. Cordovez holds a degree in financial administration earned abroad, according to El Comercio.

Argentina Moves to Privatize Two Power Plants

Argentina's government published a decree Monday authorizing the sale of state-owned stakes in two thermoelectric plants, the Manuel Belgrano plant located in Campana, Buenos Aires province, and the José de San Martín plant in Timbúes, Santa Fe province, according to a government statement and El Cronista. State energy company Enarsa holds 65.01 percent of Belgrano and 68.83 percent of San Martín, according to the statement. A decree that takes effect today allows private operators to take over management of the plants, fulfilling the Bases Law, the reform package passed under President Javier Milei, the government said. The sale will be carried out through a tender conducted with the Agency for the Transformation of Public Companies, which the government called a key step toward privatiza-

NEWS BRIEFS

Hurricane Polo Strikes Mexico's Baja California as Category 2 Storm

Hurricane Polo struck Mexico's Baja California peninsula early this morning as a category 2 hurricane with wind gusts of up to 125 miles an hour, Reuters reported. The storm made landfall south of the town of Las Barrancas. The area is less populated than the Los Cabos resort area at the peninsula's southern tip. Authorities said life-threatening conditions were expected for several hours. The storm was expected to dump as much as 12 inches of rain.

Chile's Kast Unveils $1.35 Billion Jobs Plan

Chilean President José Antonio Kast presented Monday "Chile Despega," a 1.3 trillion-peso ($1.35 billion) national plan to create more than 100,000 jobs, according to Chile's labor ministry. The plan comes amid Chile's 9.5 percent unemployment rate; joblessness in the country has exceeded 8 percent for 43 consecutive months, Reuters reported. The plan aims to accelerate public infrastructure spending, expand hiring subsidies and boost liquidity for businesses via supplier payments and state loan guarantees.

Argentina's Milei Threatens Arbitration Over Falklands Oil Project

Argentine President Javier Milei said Monday that his government will pursue international arbitration against Britain over the Sea Lion oil project off the disputed Falkland Islands, the Associated Press reported. Milei's office gave the United Kingdom two weeks to halt the project, developed by Navitas Petroleum and Rockhopper Exploration. If the project is not halted, Milei said Argentina would go to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea to seek an emergency halt order.

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tion. The decree also allows the government to move ahead with privatizing the Guillermo Brown thermal plant once the administrative process to close out its trust concludes, according to the statement. Officials said the move is part of a broader effort to withdraw the state from the energy sector and let private companies with investment capacity and experience run activities where they are more efficient, a central pillar of Milei's economic agenda.

Colombia, IMF Discuss Financing as Deficit Widens

Colombia's government has been engaging with the International Monetary Fund recently, weighing possible financing options as officials scramble to rein in a fiscal crisis that has spooked investors, Reuters reported Monday, citing three unnamed people familiar with the matter. Among the questions under discussion is whether Bogotá could lock in financing on more favorable terms given its mounting borrowing needs and growing deficits, the sources said. Sunday brought the first public acknowledgment, when President Abelardo de la Espriella, in office since August, revealed he had instructed his economic team to pursue a negotiated fix with the IMF, without confirming that conversations were already underway, according to Reuters. Colombia's Finance Ministry subsequently acknowledged it had requested a technical mission, following meetings in Bogotá between IMF Deputy Managing Director Nigel Clarke and senior Colombian officials, including Vice President José Manuel Restrepo and central bank Governor Leonardo Villar, according to an IMF statement marking the close of Clarke's visit. The IMF said it supports a "homegrown reform program" for Colombia, with a ministry delegation set to travel to Washington, though no financing deal has been announced, Reuters reported. One source said discussing a program's size remains premature, pending a formal IMF staff mission.

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construct, which they can pass down to family members. Several obstacles could limit the law's effectiveness. Cuba, like many countries, has an aging population, and young people generally prefer to work in urban areas. Farm work is hard. Previous legislation, related to the 2006 energy revolution, incentivizing foreign investment in renewable energy, did not bring in the desired investments. Perhaps this is because of U.S.-imposed banking restrictions, or perhaps it was because of concern about longer-term profitability. It may offer lessons for implementation of this law. New farmers also may face a learning curve, as well as supply and equipment shortages. Cuba's current transportation crisis also raises questions about how agricultural products that are grown will be able to get to markets and population centers."

Juan A. B. Belt, president of International Finance and Economics LLC: "Law 185 modernizes Cuba's land tenure by extending usufruct rights (renewable for up to 25 years) to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), foreign entities and cooperatives, while protecting ownership over physical improvements. When Vietnam liberalized its economy, farmers responded by increasing production of crops such as rice and coffee. Yet Law 185 would likely fail to replicate Vietnam's Đổi Mới or resolve Cuba's food crisis due to stark demographic, institutional and structural realities. In 1986, Vietnam was roughly 80 percent rural; Khoán 10 succeeded because millions of working-age peasant families stood ready to cultivate the soil once price controls lifted. In contrast, Cuba is more than 77 percent urban, with an aging, depopulated countryside and less than 15 percent of the work force in agriculture. Urban MSMEs cannot mobilize the rural labor required to clear idle, marabú-choked acreage. There are also institutional and input bottlenecks: The state retains ultimate land ownership, administrative revocation rights for 'inefficient use' and preemptive purchasing authority, discouraging the sinking of long-term capital. Land alone cannot produce food without diesel, fertilizer, machinery and credit, which are all choked by severe foreign exchange shortages. Chronic electrical blackouts disable irrigation pumps, fertilizer production and cold-storage networks needed to transport staples to cities. Output gains will stay confined to niche, peri-urban cash crops. Law 185 cannot restore broad calorie self-sufficiency or revive sugar. Because an urbanized nation cannot farm without power, machinery and labor, Cuba will remain trapped, importing 70 percent to 80 percent of its food, offering no relief to its depleted foreign reserves."

Emily Morris, honorary senior research fellow at University College London's Institute of the Americas: "The reform is a major step that builds on a range of hybrid arrangements developed at the local level over the past decade. Law 185 retains state ownership of the land but goes further than previous measures. Most importantly, it extends usufruct rights to non-state companies—including foreign investors—and lifts limits to the size of the property or duration of the usufruct license. It also permits license holders to use the land for activities other than farming, and it allows contract workers, rather than toiling on the land themselves, to have ownership rights over investments in developing the land and buildings. Effective implementation will depend on overcoming bureaucratic obstruction to the issuance of new licenses, building administrative capacity and introducing complementary reforms, as well as easing financial constraints. Law 185 will not solve the chronic problem of farmers' incentives that plagues the sector, but a package of associated (and long overdue) new laws and regulations will support the effort. They include measures toward liberalizing prices

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and contracts as well as mergers and acquisitions involving state or non-state partners and increasing access to international markets. The impact of the reform will be positive, but its speed and extent will depend on training and cultural transformation within bureaucracies and farms at all levels, further price and currency liberalization and greater access to domestic finance through transformation of the financial system. And crucially, farmers' ability to take advantage of the reforms will depend on whether U.S. sanctions continue to block their access to essential inputs, exports and investment."

Daniel Hellinger, professor emeritus of international relations at Webster University: "Given emergency conditions in Cuba, these agricultural-reform measures likely will be implemented quickly. Good test cases will be the reform's transfer of property disputes from the Agricultural Ministry to local courts and the encouragement of cooperatives to expand and take advantage of economies of scale. The situation in Cuba is too dire for the party, the bureaucracy or the military-business complex to block implementation. However, there are imposing obstacles to rapid expansion of agricultural production. A sugar monoculture for more than 250 years, including from 1959 to 2000, has left Cuban soil heavily eroded and dependent on fertilizer. The U.S. blockade (no longer a metaphor) is just one obstacle. The Russian and the U.S.-Israel wars of choice have caused a global fertilizer shortage. The same applies to energy, making the lifting of restrictions on mechanization a moot point. The Cuban system's domestic legitimacy relies on the egalitarian norms of its revolutionary ideology. Can market openings like this one be reconciled with social values that have long emphasized social rights to health, education and housing? Cubans tolerated acute privation during the 'Special Period,' but that was when the revolutionary generation was still in power. Post-Fidel, openings saw many Cuban-Americans willing to capitalize ventures by their families and friends. Now, once again, hardliners anticipate 'Christmas in Havana,' and they still have the Helms-Burton Act to thwart reforms and diplomatic overtures. Perhaps the Trumpian kleptocracy may succumb to visions of hotels and golf courses. For now, their cruel noose remains tight around the island's neck."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.

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