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FEATURED Q&A

What Will Help Brazil Recover From Deadly Flooding?



Devastating floods have left more than 150 people dead and hundreds of thousands of people displaced, while causing billions of dollars in damage, in Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul state. // Photo: Brazilian Government.

Q Catastrophic flooding in Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul state has killed more than 150 people and has left more than half a million people displaced. Experts say the disaster could set off one of the largest cases of climate-related migration in Brazil's recent history. The government on May 9 announced a roughly \$10 billion aid package to address the disaster and help victims. Has Brazil's government gone far enough in addressing the tragedy? What other policy initiatives might be needed to ameliorate the current crisis? How will internal migration sparked by the flood affect Brazil, and does Rio Grande do Sul portend coming trends in climate-related migration? What policies and initiatives need to be implemented to ensure flooding and rains like these do not cause such destruction again?

A Natalie Unterstell, president of the Talanoa Institute: "Any investment made without resilience is a bad investment. The government's recent \$10 billion aid package is significant, yet it primarily addresses immediate relief and reconstruction. The role of the government at this moment is to provide personnel and resources, but the main focus should have been on pre-disaster actions, which have already passed. The catastrophic flooding highlights Brazil's urgent need for comprehensive climate adaptation strategies at the local and national levels. In that regard, the largest infrastructure program in Brazil, called the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC), aims to invest 1.7 trillion reais (\$400 billion, roughly) but contains no forward-looking climate resilience elements. Within the so-called 'Resilient and Sustainable Cities' axis of the PAC, which relies instead on traditional measures

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Brazil, China Call for Talks in Ukraine War

The Brazilian and Chinese governments on Thursday called for peace talks in the war between Russia and Ukraine. The statement was issued during a visit to Beijing by Celso Amorim, a special advisor to Brazil's president.

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POLITICAL

World Court Rejects Mexico's Request to Protect Embassy

The International Court of Justice declined to order emergency measures to protect Mexico's embassy in Ecuador following authorities' dramatic raid there.

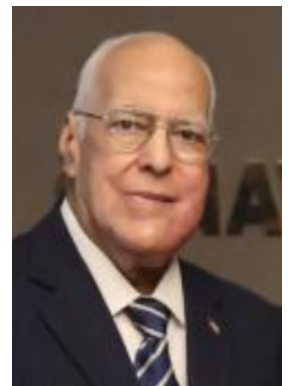
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ECONOMIC

Cuban President Replaces Foreign Commerce Chief

Cuba's president on Thursday replaced his foreign commerce minister, Ricardo Cabrisas. The government said Cabrisas would remain deputy prime minister.

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Cabrisas // File Photo: Cuban Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Brazil, China Call for Peace Talks in Ukraine War

The Brazilian and Chinese governments on Thursday signed a joint statement calling for peace talks in the war between Russia and Ukraine, Reuters reported. Celso Amorim, a special advisor to Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi issued the statement after meeting in Beijing. Brazil and China support international peace talks that are “held at a proper time that is recognized by both Russia and Ukraine, with equal participation of all parties as well as fair discussion of all peace plans,” the statement said, Reuters reported. Brazil and China also called for no escalation in fighting or expansion of the battlefield and for the two sides to avoid provocation. The statement also said that the use of weapons of mass destruction must be rejected and added that “every possible effort must be made to prevent nuclear proliferation and avoid a nuclear crisis.” Brazil and China also said that humanitarian assistance must be increased in order to prevent a humanitarian crisis on a larger scale, China’s official Xinhua news agency reported. Civilians including women and children, as well as prisoners of war, must be protected, the statement added. The Brazilian and Chinese governments also expressed opposition to attacks on nuclear power plants and other nuclear facilities that operate for peaceful purposes, and they added that “dividing the world into isolated political or economic groups should be opposed,” Xinhua reported. The statement also said Brazil and China welcome other members of the international community to endorse and support the call for peace talks and to constructively play a

SUBSCRIBER NOTICE

The Latin America Advisor will not be published on Monday, May 27 in observance of the Memorial Day holiday in the United States. We will resume publishing on Tuesday, May 28.

role “in de-escalating the situation and promoting peace talks,” Xinhua reported. Delegations from more than 50 countries are expected to attend a summit next month in Switzerland, which that country’s government hopes will lead to a peace process in Ukraine, Swiss President Viola Amherd said last week, Reuters reported. Russia, which invaded Ukraine in early 2022, was not invited to the summit.

World Court Rejects Mexico’s Request to Protect Embassy

The United Nations’ International Court of Justice on Thursday rejected a request by Mexico’s government to order emergency measures to protect its embassy in Ecuador, which Mexico sought following a dramatic raid at the embassy in early April, Reuters reported. Mexico sought the measures after Ecuadorean President Daniel Noboa authorized authorities in Quito to break into the embassy on April 5 to arrest former Ecuadorean Vice President Jorge Glas, who is facing corruption charges and had been holed up at the embassy since December. In his ruling, the World Court’s presiding judge, Nawaf Salam, said Ecuador’s government had already said it would protect Mexico’s diplomatic premises, and he added that the court saw no urgency for additional orders, Reuters reported. The ruling “confirms the unnecessary character of the request,” Ecuador’s foreign ministry said in a statement. “The court recognizes that the good faith of Ecuador should be presumed and makes clear that the present circumstances do not present any risk to the rights of Mexico,” the ministry added, Reuters reported. Also following the ruling, Alejandro Celorio Alcántara, a legal consultant speaking on behalf of Mexico’s foreign ministry, said that although “the provisional measures that the government of Mexico requested weren’t granted,” Mexico received affirmation about the absolute inviolability of its embassy in Quito and that the Ecuadorean government now has a binding commitment to respect the premises. “we would want to see all of the political actors in Ecuador reassuring that an embassy cannot

NEWS BRIEFS

Cuban President Replaces Foreign Commerce Minister

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel on Thursday replaced his foreign commerce minister, Ricardo Cabrisas, 87, Reuters reported. Cabrisas, a confidant of Díaz-Canel and former Cuban leader Raúl Castro, for decades managed negotiations on foreign debt. The government said Cabrisas will retain his role as deputy prime minister, and it did not give a reason for his replacement as foreign commerce minister. Díaz-Canel tapped Oscar Pérez, 53, who is currently first deputy at the foreign commerce ministry, to replace Cabrisas in the role.

Guyana Wants Exxon-Led Consortium to Decide on Gas Field by October

Guyana’s vice president announced Thursday that an Exxon Mobil-led oil consortium would have until October to commit to development of a natural gas field off the coast of the South American country, Reuters reported. If the field is not developed, the consortium will be required to return 20 percent of the valuable Stabroek block back to Guyana. The deadline will force Exxon to change plans, as the company had said it intended to complete an appraisal of the gas findings early next year.

JA Solar’s Project in Chile Reaches Full Capacity

China-based JA Solar’s CEME1 PV solar installation has reached full capacity grid connection in Chile, PV Tech reported Thursday. The 480-megawatt CEME1 project, located in the Atacama desert, is now the largest photovoltaic installation in Chile, representing roughly 10 percent of the nation’s renewable energy capacity. The installation is projected to supply 400,000 Chilean households with electricity, PV Tech reported.

be violated," Alcántara added, the Associated Press reported. Ecuadorean authorities' raid at the embassy to arrest and carry out Glas drew widespread condemnation in the region and increased tensions between Ecuador and Mexico that had been brewing for months, since Glas took refuge there late last year.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Firms Seeking U.S. Oil Licenses for Work With Venezuela

Amid the snapback of U.S. sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry, companies seeking to work with the South American country's oil sector have submitted to U.S. authorities some 50 requests for individual licenses, the chief of the U.S. mission for Venezuela said Wednesday, Reuters reported. The United States had eased sanctions on Venezuela's oil sector last October following a promise by President Nicolás Maduro to hold free and fair elections this year. However, U.S. officials deemed that Maduro violated that promise after Venezuela took actions against the opposition, which included the supreme court upholding a ban on María Corina Machado from holding public office, barring Machado, around whom the Venezuelan opposition had unified, from running. The U.S. Treasury announced last month that it would not renew the license it had granted for Venezuela's state-owned oil company, PDVSA, to pursue new ventures and partnerships. Now, companies must obtain individual licenses in order to explore oil and gas deposits, negotiate contracts and payment, import or export oil, or invest in Venezuela's oil sector, Reuters reported. Spanish multinational energy firm Repsol has been one of the first companies to obtain such a license, sources with knowledge of the matter told Bloomberg News. The license will allow the company to continue operating in Venezuela, Bloomberg News reported Thursday. Oil fields that Repsol will jointly manage with PDVSA are expected to produce 20,000 barrels a day.

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like drainage and slope containment, only 15.3 billion reais is allocated for disaster prevention, which is minimal. These projects do not consider future climate scenarios, making the current PAC non-resilient to both current and future climates. To better address such crises, Brazil must invest in resilient infrastructure, including improved drainage systems and flood barriers, and enforce zoning laws to prevent construction in high-risk areas. Enhanced early warning systems are crucial for timely evacuations. Additionally, reforestation and wetland restoration can improve natural water absorption and reduce runoff. The internal migration resulting from this flood will strain urban infrastructure, disrupt local economies and potentially lead to social tensions. Policies to support displaced individuals' integration, including access to housing, education and employment, are essential. Investing in rural development programs and fostering regional cooperation to address migration flows and share best practices in disaster management are necessary steps, which I hear are planned by the state government of Rio Grande do Sul. Now we hope that the state will get the support it needs, both for response to the crisis and its recuperation."

A Robert Muggah, co-founder of the Igarape Institute and principal of SecDev: "Although the Rio Grande do Sul floods are the state's worst natural catastrophe in 80 years, Brazil is no stranger to mass displacement. Over the past two decades, more than eight million Brazilians have fled or migrated due to storms, floods, wildfires, drought and sea level rise. In 2023, roughly 745,000 people were displaced by weather-related events combined with El Niño. The truth is that no one actually knows how many Brazilians are moving, because there's no centralized registration system in place to count them. Rising climate mobility not only exposes the perils of a changing climate, but also Brazil's unpreparedness for the coming storms. The

decision to relocate isn't only motivated by increasingly intense and frequent climate shocks and stresses. It's also a result of socioeconomic risks such as food insecurity, poverty, inequality and access to basic services. Brazil faces a future of rising temperatures, increased rainfall and worsening droughts, and roughly half its municipalities are 'extremely vulnerable' to climate risks. Yet, just 14 of Brazil's 26 states have prepared climate adaptation strategies. Brazil needs a national strategy and a coordinated interagency response that is commensurate with the threat. Brazil could draw inspiration from Colombia, which could soon approve a 'climate mobility' law specifying the rights of climate-affected populations, proposing a unified registry to monitor population movements, and assigning responsibilities for action. At a minimum, the forthcoming National Plan on Climate Change and Green Climate Fund should include provisions and pilots to address climate mobility. Brazil's National Adaptation Plan is outdated and needs an upgrade. The National Center for Monitoring and Alert of Natural Disasters should monitor climate mobility as part of its mandate. Brazil can also improve its early warning and response capabilities and invest in ecosystem-based adaptation strategies including infrastructure upgrades in flood-prone and coastal communities, expand access to drought resistant crops and livestock, retrain populations and relocate people (and even cities) most at risk."

A Jose Perez, research assistant at The Ohio State University: "Rio Grande do Sul state suffered from severe drought since 2021, and now it suffers from extreme rain and flooding. What we are witnessing are the ravishes of climate change. Despite these recent cycles of drought and flooding, the state and municipal governments have shown little zeal for the creation of more robust disaster preparedness and relief plans to face climate change, aggravating

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the situation. There have not been any serious efforts to reinforce or expand the walls that protect Porto Alegre from the Guaíba River, or to prepare low-laying neighborhoods with more shelters, evacuation routes and supplies. There has also been a lack of adequate planning for the cities along the Taquari River valley, even though many are built directly on the flood plain and will now have to be moved. This will probably play out like Hurricane Katrina, where New Orleans saw considerable depopulation after the storm and a slow recovery process. Most of these climate refugees will probably move out of Rio Grande do Sul, and the Porto Alegre metropolitan area, toward Santa Catarina, Paraná, São Paulo and Mato Grosso, where they have family or friends. Furthermore, these affected areas were home to large communities of Venezuelan, Haitian, Senegalese and other migrant/refugee groups. This means that for many of the flood's victims it will be the second time in their lives they find themselves as refugees and have to restart their lives from nothing. Even though only a state within Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul is territorially comparable to Italy and its population before the storm was comparable to that of Greece or Portugal. Therefore, it is important to underscore the magnitude and intensity of this climate change disaster."

A **Eduardo Viola, professor of politics and international relations at the University of São Paulo and the Getulio Vargas Foundation:** "The Brazilian government never invested in adapting to climate change; the focus has been on mitigation, with ups and downs. The Lula administration is reconstructing environmental policy after the tragic Bolsonaro years. The heavy rain and flooding that started this month became catastrophic, affecting 80 percent of the population of the state of Rio Grande do Sul and particularly the capital Porto Alegre. This is the most

catastrophic climate extreme in Brazilian history, with some similarities to Hurricane Katrina. With the advance of the waters, people felt abandoned because there were insufficient public resources and government response in the first days. After that, federal resources were mobilized, particularly the armed forces, which have a very important role in the most difficult rescue operations. The tragedy also promoted a strong wave

“**The federal government has approved a significant budget for dealing with the emergency and reconstruction.”**

– Eduardo Viola

of societal solidarity nationally. The federal government has approved a significant budget for dealing with the emergency and reconstruction. Early estimates say that the cost of the public infrastructure reconstruction will be between \$20 billion and \$30 billion. The cost of rebuilding private property could be much higher. Around 80,000 people whose houses destroyed are living in improvised public housing and are now climate refugees. Around 520,000 people are living temporarily in relatives' and friends' houses, waiting for the lowering of the waters, and some of them could also become refugees. Various levels of government have announced urgent temporary towns for the refugees. Some might also migrate out of state. Brazil doesn't have experience with climate refugees in those numbers, so it'll be a big test. Some neighborhoods and towns should be relocated to higher areas. It will be necessary to pursue an immediate strengthening of the civil defense with resources and qualified personnel, but the process of reducing vulnerability and adaptation will take some years."

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