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## FEATURED Q&A

# What Does Haiti's New Prime Minister Bring to the Job?



Jean-Michel Lapin was tapped as Haiti's acting prime minister, following the resignation of his predecessor. // File Photo: Haitian Government.

**Q** Haiti's president on March 21 named Jean-Michel Lapin as the country's acting prime minister, a move that followed lawmakers' no-confidence vote against Lapin's predecessor, Jean-Henry Céant. The vote to censure Céant followed protests in February in which Haitians demanded better living conditions and a change in government. What does Lapin bring to the job, and how much success is he likely to have in improving living conditions in Haiti? What tasks should be the first on his agenda, and what are the biggest obstacles he will face? What are the main reasons behind this year's protests, and will the change in prime minister lead to calm?

**A** Daniel Erikson, managing director at Blue Star Strategies: "Ever since Haiti's 1987 constitution created the role of prime minister, every officeholder has been quickly thrust into a tug-of-war with the president who offered the appointment. In theory, prime ministers are supposed to run the government of Haiti while the elected president serves as head of state and sets overall domestic and foreign policy. In practice, Haitian prime ministers serve as expendable political shock absorbers that allow the president to better absorb the blows of the body politic. With the recent removal of Prime Minister Jean-Henry Céant, President Jovenel Moïse has firmly grasped this tradition. Thus, acting Prime Minister Jean-Michel Lapin will face the same daunting challenges that defied his predecessors, with perhaps fewer tools and more constraints. On the bright side, Lapin has some prior experience in public office as former minister of communications and culture, but he will need to confront deep concerns about the high cost of living

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## TODAY'S NEWS

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## Reassignments Causing Delays at U.S.-Mexico Border

Reassignments of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents from handling the flow of commercial traffic across the border to handling the control of migrants coming into the United States has been leading to delays.

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## Brazil Proposes Co-governing Amazon Domain

Brazil's government is seeking to co-govern the Amazon.com domain name with the retailer.

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## U.S. Preparing Aid Package for Venezuela: Kudlow

The Trump administration is preparing an aid package for Venezuela in the event that President Nicolás Maduro's government collapses, said Larry Kudlow, the director of the White House's National Economic Council.

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Kudlow // File Photo: Competitive Enterprise Institute.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## U.S. Preparing Aid for Venezuela in Case Maduro Falls

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump is preparing an aid package for Venezuela in the event that President Nicolás Maduro's government collapses, Larry Kudlow, the director of the White House's National Economic Council, said Wednesday, *The New York Times* reported. "We have a lot of plans to revitalize the Venezuelan economy and to move very rapidly," Kudlow said at an event in Washington sponsored by the *Christian Science Monitor*. "It would be a rescue plan. It would be a restructuring plan." The aid package is taking shape at the same time that the Trump administration is cutting off direct aid to Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, the so-called "Northern Triangle" countries of Central America, amid Trump's frustration about caravans of migrants moving north in efforts to reach the United States. Trump has also threatened to cut federal funding to a U.S. territory—Puerto Rico—over its handling of federal money earmarked for hurricane relief, *The New York Times* reported. Venezuela's economy has been in tatters for years amid the country's hyperinflation and shortages of food, medicines and other basic goods. Recent widespread power outages have punctuated the country's crumbling living conditions. The Trump administration is coordinating with South American banks and the International Monetary Fund on a plan to stabilize the Andean nation's economy, Kudlow said Wednesday. The U.S. Treasury, the National Economic Council and the National Security Council are planning to use mobile phones and apps to put money directly into Venezuelans' hands, Kudlow added. "There's many clever ways to get cash in there," he said. "And the cash will not be bolívars; it will be dollars." The White House did not specify how large the aid package would be or any timetable for distributing it. The Trump administration has also imposed economic sanctions on Venezuela as part of its efforts to pressure

Maduro to step down. More sanctions could be on the way if Maduro remains in power, said Kudlow. The statements came a day after Venezuela's government-aligned Constituent Assembly stripped opposition leader and National Assembly President Juan Guaidó of his legislative immunity from prosecution. Guaidó has recognition from the United States and dozens of other countries as Venezuela's acting president. Guaidó, who now could be jailed, responded by saying that his arrest "would only catalyze local and international pressure, and I dare say, would be one of the government's final erratic political actions," *Bloomberg News* reported. Guaidó said that if government agents do arrest him, the opposition has a plan to continue with efforts to force Maduro from power. "In the event that they want to, or try to, kidnap me, which they can do without a doubt, there is a complete strategy ready to continue with leadership, but also to intensify pressure," he said. Today, European Union governments condemned the Constituent Assembly's move to strip Guaidó of his immunity, *Reuters* reported. "The E.U. rejects the decision taken by the non-recognized National Constituent Assembly to lift Juan Guaidó's parliamentary immunity. This decision constitutes a serious violation of the Venezuelan Constitution, as well as of the rule of law and separation of power," the European Union said in a statement. "These acts undermine a political way out of the crisis and only lead to further polarization and escalation of tensions in the country."

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Reassignments of U.S. Agents Causing Delays at Border

Mexican officials and business leaders are warning that delays at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border are causing tens of millions of dollars in losses for shippers and logistics companies as U.S. President Donald Trump continues to threaten to close the border between the two countries, *The Wall*

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Economists Raise Estimates for Inflation in Argentina

Economists increased their expectations for this year's level of inflation in Argentina to a median forecast of 36 percent from 31.9 percent in the latest central bank poll, *Reuters* reported. In the survey, released Wednesday, economists also expected a median economic contraction this year of 1.2 percent.

## Deadline in Nicaragua Talks Passes Without Progress Toward Deal

Month-long talks between Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's government and the opposition passed Wednesday's deadline without progress in their aim of resolving the country's deadly political crisis that began nearly a year ago, *Agence France-Presse* reported. The negotiations have stalled over disagreements on issues such as the release of political prisoners, with the opposition accusing the government of lacking political will. Both sides could decide to continue the talks. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the March 19 issue of the Advisor.]

## Father-in-Law of Former Salvadoran President Funes Arrested

Authorities in Costa Rica have arrested Juan Carlos Guzmán, the father-in-law of former Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes, *El Salvador's* police deputy director said Wednesday, the *Associated Press* reported. Guzmán is wanted in his home country for money laundering charges related to a corruption network, which accusers allege funneled some \$351 million from government coffers under Funes' leadership. Funes and his partner, Ada Mitchell Guzmán, are both in Nicaragua, where they were granted political asylum in 2016. They deny wrongdoing.

Street Journal reported Wednesday. Delays came after some 750 U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials who handle the flow of commercial traffic were reassigned on Monday to new posts to control the flow of migrants seeking to enter the country. The Department of Homeland Security, or DHS, cited a “growing security and humanitarian crisis at the border,” the newspaper reported. The number of reassigned agents may rise to 2,000, it added, or roughly one-eighth of the total at the Mexico border. As many as 100,000 migrants tried to enter the United States at the border in March, according to DHS estimates, the highest level



Ebrard // File Photo: Mexican Government.

in more than a decade. Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard on Tuesday said that the reassignments were causing significant delays in commercial traffic. “If we don’t succeed in normalizing this very soon, it’s going to cost us economically, in both countries,” Ebrard said, The Wall Street Journal reported. Trump has insisted on closing the border, despite acknowledging that “it will have a negative effect on the economy,” he said Tuesday, CNBC reported. “Trading is very important. The borders are very important. But security is what is the most important,” Trump added.

## BUSINESS NEWS

# Brazil Proposes Co-governing Amazon.com Domain

Brazil’s government is proposing to co-govern the Amazon.com Internet domain with the online retailer after a seven-year dispute over

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and cutting state expenditures. The recent surge in protests makes it clear that the Haitian people remain frustrated by corruption and the country’s economic deterioration. In early March, the IMF approved a three-year no-interest \$229 million loan to Haiti, but last week suspended implementation until a new government and budget are introduced. As acting prime minister, Lapin is allowed only to oversee day-to-day affairs but is not permitted to enter the government into new contracts. Therefore, his success will rely on building confidence with the Haitian people without full authority to deliver. It will be a hard trick to pull off.”

**A Raymond Joseph, former ambassador of Haiti to the United States:** “Naming Jean-Michel

Lapin interim prime minister four days after the lower house of parliament fired Jean-Henry Céant underscores President Jovenel Moïse’s decision to get rid of the lawyer he chose for the job six months earlier. That had nothing to do with the nationwide demonstrations that began on Feb. 7 and shut down Haiti for 10 days. The people had demanded the resignation of the president. Last July, when riots broke out in protest of exorbitant fuel price increases, then Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant, fired by parliament, was kept for two months until Céant was approved. From the outset, relations soured between the president and Céant, who vowed to attack corruption and deal with the PetroCaribe scandal. Céant

rights to the digital address, Reuters reported. Amazon.com has been seeking rights to the domain name since 2012, but South American countries home to the Amazon rainforest, including Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana and Suriname, have argued the name refers to the geographic region and should not be “the monopoly of one company,” the wire service reported. The two sides have a deadline this month to reach a deal over the Internet address, which the global Internet

ordered cuts of 30 percent in the budget for his office and asked that this be done in all departments. Apparently, an International Monetary Fund mission liked what was happening. After a 10-day mission in Haiti, on March 8, a zero-interest loan of \$229 million was negotiated for Haiti, contingent on the IMF board’s approval. But one day

“From the outset, relations soured between the president and Céant...”

— Raymond Joseph

after Lapin’s nomination, the IMF’s director of communications said due to ‘political uncertainties’ with the changes, there would be a delay in presenting the report to the board. Lapin’s success will depend greatly on his ability to carry out the reform initiated by his predecessor while a permanent prime minister wins parliamentary approval.”

**A Cécile Accilien, director of the Institute of Haitian Studies at the University of Kansas:** “As a prime minister, Jean-Michel Lapin’s most important tasks should be working toward securing the people’s basic needs: food, access to gas, education, health care and security, to name a few. That is how people will measure whether or not he is listen-

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Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers set. On Wednesday, Brazilian Deputy Foreign Minister Otávio Brandelli suggested Brazil and the online company co-govern the digital address, “with a view to safeguarding and promoting the natural, cultural and symbolic heritage of the Amazon region on the Internet” as a compromise solution. “This would be an innovative mechanism, setting a positive precedent of public-private partnership in the development of Internet governance,” he said.

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ing to them. He will also have to address the issues dealing with the missing PetroCaribe funds. It is hard to say whether the change in prime minister will lead to calm in the long term. That will depend on whether or not Haiti has true leadership that is not governed by outsiders' interests but rather by the interest and well-being of the Haitian people. There must be continuity from one government to another and long-term stability. Last November, bitterness and resentment were building over a scandal involving the apparent diversion of PetroCaribe funds that Venezuela had promised would help build up Haiti's infrastructure. People are angry about gas shortages, failed government promises, inflation and corruption. This, after hurricanes, earthquakes and a cholera outbreak that killed thousands of people in the past decade. Only time and actions will allow us to judge whether the government is listening to people and serving them the ways they need and deserve to be served. When people's basic needs have been totally ignored for so long, it is hard to expect them to just sit and wait. Governments have made false promises and created projects that are not truly helping the Haitian people but instead are being used to enrich foreign nations."

**A** **Georges Fauriol, senior associate in the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies:** "Tension between President Jovenel Moïse and Prime Minister Jean-Henry Céant finally blew up two weeks ago with the prime minister's forced resignation and a somewhat messy parliamentary no-confidence vote. As interim prime minister, Jean-Michel Lapin, communications minister in the outgoing cabinet, has the task of overseeing a hazardous mix of issues—pressures from the streets demanding a government that works and

provides answers to the PetroCaribe scandal, or worse, demands for the resignation of Moïse himself. With violent outbursts occurring like clockwork every three months since last July, the outlook is grim. Moïse's political weakness suggests choosing a prime minister closer to him politically—not a competitor like Céant—and some specu-

**Moïse needs to show results..."**

— Georges Fauriol

lation points to the current foreign minister, Bocchit Edmond. It may just be a coincidence that Edmond issued an editorial in the April 1 edition of the Washington Examiner singing the praises of the meeting Moïse and four other Caribbean leaders had with President Trump on March 22. There is logic to painting the U.S. president as Haiti's new best friend—and it is relevant in the wake of Haiti's recent tortuous shift on Venezuela policy. Moïse needs to show results, and the Mar-a-Lago meeting points to U.S. trade/investment policy promises. Two other issues cloud the horizon: uncertainty with the 2019 calendar for parliamentary and local elections, a problem that complicated Moïse's election in 2016. The other issue revolves around the rolling back of TPS status for more than 40,000 Haitians residing in the United States. Under a reprieve extended to January 2020, Haiti is in no shape for a forced return—highlighted again last Sunday with Haitian migrants drowning off the Turks and Caicos Islands."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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