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FEATURED Q&A

What Can a New Caribbean Energy Alliance Achieve?



Trinidad & Tobago proposed a Caribbean energy alliance with neighboring Guyana and Suriname. Shell subsidiary BG Group's Dolphin Platform in Trinidad & Tobago is pictured. // File Photo: Trinidad & Tobago Government.

Q Trinidad & Tobago Energy Minister Stuart Young on Jan. 23 proposed a Caribbean energy alliance with neighboring Guyana and Suriname. The alliance could bring oil and gas resources from Guyana, Venezuela and Suriname to Trinidad for processing and export and aims to bolster energy security in the Caribbean. Trinidad's negotiations with Venezuela will start soon, after the U.S. Treasury Department last month issued a two-year license to jointly develop an offshore gas field on the Venezuelan side of the border. What are the main ambitions and priorities of the alliance? What energy frameworks already exist in the Caribbean, and how would this one differ?

A Jan Mangal, energy consultant and former petroleum advisor to the president of Guyana: "The proposal implies the 'energy' alliance is an 'oil & gas' (O&G) alliance, but energy is not only O&G. Why are these Caribbean leaders looking backward to O&G, and not looking forward to renewable energy? Trinidad & Tobago (T&T) failed to benefit from its traditional oil industry, and it failed to benefit from its more recent gas (LNG) industry. So why would rekindling its O&G industry lead to anything but failure? There is, however, a role for Guyana in creating an alliance. Instead of giving billions of dollars to ExxonMobil, Guyana could pump billions into a regional fund focused on the Caribbean (akin to a Caribbean Sovereign Wealth Fund), and focused on helping the island states prepare for climate change, improving resiliency and developing renewable energy. Instead of producing more than 10

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TOP NEWS

OIL & GAS

Chevron to Ship More Than 100,000 Barrels of Venezuelan Crude

Chevron is set to ship more than 100,000 barrels of Venezuelan crude to the United States this month, Reuters reported, citing shipping documents.

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POWER SECTOR

Cuba Suffers Third Major Blackout in a Week

Cuba was hit by its third major blackout in a week as power went out in a wide swath of the country between Cienfuegos province and Guantánamo.

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OIL AND GAS

Rioters Storm Suriname's Nat'l Assembly Over Higher Prices

Rioters attacked Suriname's National Assembly on Feb. 17 amid a protest over higher prices for fuel and electricity. Demonstrators demanded the resignation of President Chandrikapersad Santokhi.

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Santokhi // File Photo: Government of Suriname.

OIL & GAS NEWS

Colombia's Cenit Seeks to Fix Damage After Oil Siphoning

Colombian oil pipeline operator Cenit, a subsidiary of state-owned oil company Ecopetrol, is working to contain an oil spill from the Transandino pipeline (OTA), the company said on Tuesday, Reuters reported. The spill was caused by an illegal valve drilled to divert some of the crude. Colombia loses thousands of barrels of oil a day to thieves siphoning off oil from pipelines across the country, which is then typically used to make cocaine or bootleg fuel for illegal mining, the wire service reported. Cenit declared the spill an environmental emergency, posing a threat to local waterways. It is working to contain the damage, and help repair a section in OTA in Ricaurte, a municipality in the Andean country's Nariño province. The company did not disclose how much oil had spilled. "An illicit valve installed by unknown third parties was found on the OTA, which was causing a loss of crude oil," Cenit said. Last year, Reuters reported soaring rates of oil theft in Colombia, in line with the country's growing cocaine production. The volume stolen from two of Colombia's major pipelines more than tripled since 2018, to an average of 3,447 barrels of oil per day, according to police data.

Chevron to Ship 100,000-Plus Barrels of Venezuelan Crude

U.S. oil major Chevron is set to ship more than 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) of Venezuelan crude to the United States this month, according to shipping documents, Reuters reported Feb. 16. Venezuela's state-owned PDVSA has been under sanctions since 2019, after Nicolás Maduro won his re-election bid in the country's 2018 presidential election, widely perceived as fraudulent. The U.S. Treasury Department

granted Chevron a license late last year authorizing it to resume and expand operations in the South American country. It began shipping in January. Chevron has already exported some 75,000 bpd, mainly to the Pascagoula refinery in Mississippi, Reuters reported. The oil shipped under the U.S. license has come from Chevron's two main ventures in Venezuela: Petropiar and Petroboscan. PDVSA holds majority stakes in the joint ventures. It has tapped a section of Petroboscan's stocks as well as sent crude from Petropiar to its own refineries, the documents said, Reuters reported. Since Chevron's renegotiation of its contract last year, European oil companies have sought greater control of joint ventures in which they are involved in Venezuela, Bloomberg News reported. Italy-based Eni and Spain's Repsol are reportedly reviewing drafts of potential contracts after meeting with high-ranking Venezuelan government officials. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Dec. 23 Energy Advisor.]

Rioters Storm Suriname Assembly Over Fuel Prices

Hundreds of rioters attacked Suriname's National Assembly on Feb. 17, smashing windows and looting area businesses amid a protest over high prices for fuel and electricity, the Associated Press reported. Demonstrators demanded the resignation of President Chandrikapersad Santokhi, who recently acted on a recommendation by the International Monetary Fund in putting an end to state subsidies on fuel and electricity, the wire service reported. Protesters also said they were angry about rising prices of other basic goods and the country's weakening currency. The attack on the National Assembly followed an initially peaceful demonstration against the government's austerity measures, Reuters reported. However, the demonstration turned violent when protesters began throwing bottles and rocks at police, with officers firing tear gas in response. Authorities condemned the attack on the National Assembly and said those who took part in the riot would face justice,

NEWS BRIEFS

Guyana Expecting Annual Growth of 25% for Three to Four Years Amid Oil Boom

Guyana's government is forecasting an economic expansion of 25 percent annually over the next three to four years amid growth in its oil sector, Finance Minister Ashni Singh said Feb. 16 at an energy conference, Reuters reported. Since a consortium led by U.S. oil major Exxon Mobil began oil production in the South American country in 2019, its economy has boomed. "From 2020 onwards, we've achieved extremely strong real economic growth overall," Singh said at the conference.

López Obrador Signs Decree to Nationalize Mexico's Lithium Industry

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Feb. 18 signed a decree ordering the nationalization of the country's lithium industry, Reuters reported. He handed responsibility over lithium reserves to the energy ministry in a move that followed the nationalization of lithium deposits last April. "[Let's make] the nation be the owner of this strategic mineral," López Obrador said during an event in the state of Sonora. Mexico holds significant lithium reserves, with some studies suggesting it has some 1.7 million metric tons of the mineral.

Greenergy Sells Three Solar Farms in Chile for \$44.2 Million

Greenergy, a Spanish renewable energy producer, has sold three solar farms in Chile to Spain's Securities and Exchange Commission for 41.3 million euros (some \$44.2 million), Renewable Energy Magazine reported Tuesday. The plants will be operational in the first quarter of this year, with a total installed capacity of 32.5 megawatt peak. Chile is the energy producer's main market.

the AP reported. “The government respects everybody’s right to protest but will not tolerate actions like the ones demonstrated today,” Santokhi’s office said in a statement, the AP reported. The president’s office added that it had established a task force to find those who attacked the building, Reuters reported. On Saturday, Justice Minister Kenneth Amoski said 119 people had been arrested and that 20 were injured during the unrest, the AP reported. He added that more arrests would follow. “We have the images. It is only a matter of time before you are apprehended,” he said. Police Chief Ruben Kensen said Saturday that the situation was under control and added that authorities would increase security measures. In a broadcast on Facebook Live, protest leader Stephano Biervliet said he did not intend for the demonstration to turn violent. “What happened was not my intention. It was a peaceful protest action that was taken over by malicious parties in an organized context,” said Biervliet, adding that he would report voluntarily to the police.

POWER SECTOR NEWS

Cuba Suffers Third Major Blackout in Less Than a Week

Cuba on Tuesday was hit by a third major blackout in a week as power went out in a wide swath of the center and eastern parts of the country, Reuters reported, citing energy officials speaking on state-run television. The blackout stretched 430 miles from Cienfuegos province in the south-central part of the country to Guantánamo, in the far southeast, leaving half of the country’s population without electricity, Reuters reported. Officials on Tuesday were “investigating the causes” of the blackout, and the government-run electricity company was working to restore power, according to state television. The repeated blackouts left many Cubans concerned about what conditions the summer months would bring, when residents use more electricity to power air conditioners. A blackout on Feb. 18

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billion barrels of oil at an unfair royalty of 2 percent, Guyana could curtail its production to 1 to 2 billion barrels and rebalance the Stabroek Block oil contract to get a fair royalty of 10 to 20 percent—the objective being less O&G but more revenue for the country (and region). Guyana’s Caribbean neighbors would likely back a multi-billion-dollar fund that they would help govern and benefit from, and other nations and international organizations would likely support Guyana’s decision to drastically cut O&G production. Guyana would need this support to rebalance its oil contracts with ExxonMobil. So, there could be an alliance that helps the people of the Caribbean, while at the same time reducing the volume of O&G being produced and reducing Guyana’s negative impact on the planet. But this alliance would look different to the one proposed by Minister Stuart Young.

A **Riyad Insanally, senior fellow at the Caribbean Initiative of the Atlantic Council’s Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center and former ambassador of Guyana to the United States:** “Details regarding the proposal are sketchy although Trinidad & Tobago (T&T) Prime Minister Keith Rowley declared at Guyana’s International Energy Conference on Feb. 14 that T&T was ‘a viable option’ for countries seeking to optimize the speedy monetization of their hydrocarbon resources without incurring substantial capital expenditure. In this respect, T&T is offering its 10 ammonia plants, seven methanol

that officials attributed to a “human operation error” cut electricity for millions of people between Matanzas and Guantánamo. On Feb. 13, a fire in a sugar cane field was blamed for an outage that darkened almost two-thirds of the country. Last week, Cuba’s minister of mines and energy said rolling blackouts would last until May while the country performs overhauls on oil fired power plants that are decades old, Reuters reported. Jorge R. Piñon, director of the

plants and four LNG facilities to process natural gas from neighboring countries, as well as take its 140,000 barrels per day oil refinery out of mothballs. This is obviously of high economic importance to T&T, as is the conditional U.S. waiver of sanctions to allow T&T to develop the Dragon Field in Venezuelan waters. Nevertheless, regional cooperation to promote energy security for Caricom makes ample sense. Caricom’s energy security strategy is built around harnessing hydrocarbon resources to reduce import dependence, pursuing energy diversification and developing renewables. The T&T proposal could be an important step forward, by combining Guyana, Suriname and T&T’s resources and leveraging the latter’s considerable experience, technical capacity and facilities. Although a formal alliance has been mooted, the Caricom Single Market and Economy already provides a framework for the regional private sector to drive collaboration, investment and business. Caricom leaders have urged the United States to remove the sanctions on Venezuela to allow the region to benefit from Petrocaribe, which Venezuela has revived. A word of caution: returning to Petrocaribe with Venezuela still wracked by political and economic problems would not necessarily free Caricom from energy dependence and energy insecurity. And, given Caracas’ hostility to Guyana’s offshore oil sector and continued claims to Guyana’s territory and maritime area, it is highly unlikely that there could be a wider regional cooperation framework involving these two countries in the foreseeable future.

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Latin America and Caribbean Energy Program at the University of Texas at Austin, told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published last August that Cuba’s power generation infrastructure is “frail.” “Ten out of 20 generating units within Cuba’s eight base-load thermoelectric power plants are out of service, and those remaining are operating at less than 70 percent of rated capacity,” he said. Cuba has already suffered from food, fuel and medicine shortages.

POLITICAL NEWS

Mexico's Ex-Public Security Chief Convicted in U.S

Genaro García Luna, who once was Mexico's public security secretary and headed the country's war on drugs, was convicted Tuesday in New York of accepting bribes from drug cartels that he was sworn to fight, CNN reported. A federal jury in Brooklyn convicted García Luna on five counts of engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise, including involvement in an international cocaine distribution conspiracy. García Luna, who was Mexico's public security secretary from 2006 to 2012, is the highest ranking current or former Mexican official to have been put on trial in the United States. The jury announced the verdict after hearing testimony from nearly 30 witnesses over 15 days in a trial that lasted four weeks, CNN reported. García Luna is to be sentenced on June 27, and defense attorney César de Castro told reporters outside the courtroom that a decision on whether to appeal the conviction will be made after that date. De Castro noted that many of the people who testified against his client were drug traffickers. "After many years of trying to build a case against Mr. García Luna with credible and reliable evidence, the government was forced to settle for a case built on the backs of some of the most notorious and ruthless criminals to testify in this courthouse," said De Castro, The New York Times reported. García Luna faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years in prison and a maximum sentence of life behind bars, CNN reported. "García Luna, who once stood at the pinnacle of law enforcement in Mexico, will now live the rest of his days having been revealed as a traitor to his country and to the honest members of law enforcement who risked their lives to dismantle drug cartels," Breon Peace, the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York, said in a statement. In a posting on Twitter, Jesús Ramírez Cuevas, a spokesman for Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, praised the verdict. "The crimes against our people will never be forgotten," he said.

ADVISOR Q&A

What is Behind Costa Rica's Rising Homicide Rate?

Q The U.S. government donated nearly \$14 million worth of security materials to Costa Rica, including telecommunications equipment and drones, to help fight crime, Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves announced Feb. 7. The Central American country last year recorded a record high murder rate of 12.6 per 100,000 inhabitants. Why has Costa Rica's homicide rate surged, and what should be done to reverse the trend? How well are Chaves' security policies and the nation's law enforcement institutions functioning? How significant is the foreign help, including from the United States, that Costa Rica is receiving?

A Linyi Baidal-Sequeira, chargée d'affaires at the Costa Rican Embassy in Washington: "It is well known to us all that security in the Central American region has been an enormous challenge for governments for years due to the incursion of drug trafficking and organized crime. For a country with limited resources like Costa Rica, facing this challenge is very difficult. The support of friendly countries is essential to meet the objectives set in terms of security. Thanks to

our government's commitment, transparency, effective use of the support received through cooperation mechanisms and the good performance of the Ministry of Public Security, the police and the Costa Rican institutional structures working against crime, a new donation for Costa Rica was possible. This donation was announced during the official visit of the commander of the U.S. Southern Command, Gen. Laura Richardson, to San José. The cooperation between the United States and Costa Rica on security issues has been constant over the years and fundamental in the fight against growing transnational crime in Costa Rica and the region overall. This cooperation has been established for decades and focuses on shared interests, including disaster awareness, cyber security, promoting respect for human rights, extended integration of women in security, peace, defense and international efforts to counter transnational criminal organizations."

EDITOR'S NOTE: More commentary on this topic appears in the [Q&A](#) of Thursday's issue of the daily Latin America Advisor.

Mexico's Congress Slashes Budget, Staff of Elections Agency

Mexico's Senate on Wednesday approved legislation that would slash the budget and staff of the country's independent elections agency, a move that critics say would weaken Mexico's democracy, The Wall Street Journal reported. Senators voted 72-50 to overhaul the National Electoral Institute, with President Andrés

Manuel López Obrador's Morena party and its allies supporting the changes and opposition parties voting against them. The lower house of Congress previously approved the changes. The legislation is a watered-down version of a more ambitious plan that López Obrador proposed last year to amend the constitution and replace the agency. His plan sent thousands of protesters into the streets in November over concerns that it would undermine Mexico's democracy. In a [Q&A](#) published Nov. 29, Lorena Becerra Mizuno, a political analyst at Grupo Reforma, told the daily Latin America Advisor that López Obrador's attempt to do away with

NEWS BRIEFS

Honduras Extends State of Emergency Amid Crackdown on Gangs

Honduras' government extended its state of emergency for the second time on Tuesday, Reuters reported. It was also expanded to cover a broader swath of the country, as President Xiomara Castro grapples to crack down on gangs. The measure was first put in place on Dec. 6, and it was extended in January. It gives security forces additional powers and suspends some constitutional rights. The state of emergency will be in place for another 45 days. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Dec. 12 issue of the daily Latin America Advisor.]

Peru's Congress Adjourns, Effectively Rules Out Elections This Year

Peru's Congress ended its legislative session on Feb. 17, effectively ruling out the possibility of early elections this year, Bloomberg reported. Lawmakers agreed to continue debates on an early vote at the committee level. Violent protests have occurred in Peru since Congress removed then-President Pedro Castillo from office on Dec. 7 after he unsuccessfully tried to dissolve the legislature. Early elections have been among demonstrators' key demands.

Colombian Gov't Proposes Budget With \$5.11 Billion in Additional Spending

The Colombian government on Feb. 17 presented legislation to the country's Congress to increase the public spending budget this year by 25.4 trillion pesos (\$5.11 billion), Reuters reported. Lawmakers had originally approved a budget of 405.6 trillion pesos. The raised spending ceiling would allow President Gustavo Petro to finance his proposed social plans, including purchasing land for agrarian reform, strengthening the health sector and providing subsidies to the poor.

the National Electoral Institute would signify "a radical change to the country's modern electoral system." She added, "It represents an alarming attempt to undermine the strength and independence of the electoral referee, which has maintained exemplary autonomy from political influence and has conducted elections in a transparent, independent and homogeneous manner countrywide since 1997." López Obrador has said that the changes contained in the legislation that Congress passed would lower the cost of the elections process. The measures cut the National Electoral Institute's \$760 million budget by approximately a third, savings that would amount to approximately 0.1 percent of the federal budget, The Wall Street Journal reported. Lorenzo Córdova, the agency's head, said the legislation would entail laying off between 6,000 and 17,000 staff members. "There's a risk that not all polling stations are set up, and therefore, that votes aren't counted properly, and that courts invalidate elections," Córdova said in a recent speech. In his daily news conferences, López Obrador has said the directors of the election agency are corrupt and in the service of his opponents. Mexico's opposition is planning to challenge the legislation in the country's Supreme Court, the Financial Times reported.

U.S. Planning to Tighten Restrictions on Migrants' Asylum

The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden on Tuesday proposed disqualifying migrants who illegally cross the country's southern border from receiving asylum if they do not first request refuge in another country, such as Mexico, CBS News reported. The proposal must go through a 30-day period for public comment before it can be implemented. Once in place, the restrictions would remain in effect for two years, the Associated Press reported. The change is likely to face legal challenges, the wire service reported. In 2019, then-U.S. President Donald Trump attempted to pursue a similar ban, but a federal appeals court prevented it from taking effect. The Biden administration expects the new restrictions to

take effect when Title 42, a pandemic-era rule that bars migrants from receiving asylum on the grounds of curbing the spread of Covid-19, expires on May 11.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Colombia, Venezuela Presidents Sign Trade Deal on Border

Colombian President Gustavo Petro and his Venezuelan counterpart, Nicolás Maduro, on Feb. 16 met on their countries' shared border to sign an agreement to strengthen trade ties between the two countries and eliminate import duties on dozens of manufactured products, the Associated Press reported. "This is not only about making trade easier, but also about making it easier for people to move between both countries," Petro said during the ceremony on the Atanasio Girardot International Bridge, which connects the two countries, the wire service reported. The trade agreement "updates everything having to do with tariffs, with goods traded, [and] lays the foundations for a new dynamic, for the expansion of trade between Colombia and Venezuela," Maduro said at the event. The deal comes amid warmer relations between the two countries following Petro's inauguration last August as Colombia's first leftist president. The following month, the two countries began reopening the border to cargo trucks for the first time in seven years, the AP reported. Luis Vicente León, president of Datanalysis in Caracas, told the daily Latin America Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Oct. 7 that the border reopening has significant benefits for both countries. "For Venezuela, [it] represents access to competitive raw materials, inputs and finished products in terms of price and proximity, and it generates a logistical opportunity for importing goods from the rest of the world, with a reduction in freight and transportation costs," said León. "For Colombia, it represents an expansion of the country's natural market and an opportunity for complementarity in the areas of chemical and energy areas," he added.

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A **Arantza Alonso, senior analyst for the Americas at Verisk Maplecroft:** “On Jan. 23, Trinidad & Tobago Energy Minister Stuart Young proposed a Caribbean energy alliance with neighboring Guyana and Suriname. Although Young shared limited details concerning the potential framework, it is clear that Trinidad’s main priority is obtaining gas. Supplying enough gas to its Atlantic LNG complex would allow Trinidad to boost LNG and petrochemicals production, including methanol and ammonia. Increasing production would not only provide it with much-needed financial benefits, but also position the country as a key player for the region’s energy and food security. Food security and regional integration have been key priorities for President Irfaan Ali, who is also Caricom’s Head for Agriculture, Agricultural Diversification and Food Security. Ali is a strong proponent of natural gas as a means for energy security in the region. Indeed, his government is counting on gas from offshore oilfields to continue transforming Guyana’s economy by decreasing electricity production costs, powering large industrial complexes and feeding petrochemical production. Guyana, Trinidad and Suriname have signed nonbinding memorandums of understanding and other bilateral cooperation agreements in recent years to develop strategic partnerships in energy, agriculture and food security, infrastructure and security, among others. Indeed, last month Guyana’s and Suriname’s energy chambers signed an agreement to enable business development support, foster joint ventures and partnerships between local and foreign investors, and jointly promote investment at national and regional levels. Therefore, the alliance Young proposed is a natural progression from the collaboration mechanisms and frameworks that these countries have been developing.”

A **Steven Debipersad, lecturer at Anton de Kom University of Suriname:** “Integration of the Caribbean energy services markets could make businesses more competitive, reduce costs for project development and lower prices for consumers. Except for Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname, the Caribbean region has very high electricity prices, with electricity mainly being generated from expensive imported fuel oil or diesel power stations. Considering the pressing demand for energy, countries of the region must band together to mitigate the effects of climate change and ensure a smooth transition to clean energy. According to Surinamese President Santokhi, this is the time to step up joint action and take full advantage of current opportunities. As he spoke at the opening of the International Energy Conference in Guyana on Feb. 14, he highlighted that Guyana’s role in the energy matrix makes it a prime candidate for investment and joint ventures. Just last month, Guyana signed a memorandum of understanding with the Suriname Energy Chamber aimed at promoting joint ventures between investors of the two countries, as well as realizing joint activities that can promote investment at regional and national levels. Similarly, presidents of Brazil, Guyana and Suriname met back in January 2022 to talk about a formal accord on the Arco Norte project, a 3,000 megawatt power connection. The project features a natural gas pipeline that is intended to service several projects along the corridor. Coordination of both projects can contribute to strengthening the energy security of the region while stimulating the competitiveness of its companies.”

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

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