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FEATURED Q&A

How Effectively Is Brazil Tackling the Dengue Outbreak?



Brazil saw a record number of dengue cases last year, and Rio de Janeiro declared a health emergency over the disease this month. A worker is pictured spraying for mosquitoes in the city of Canoas in Rio Grande do Sul state. // File Photo: City of Canoas.

Q The city of Rio de Janeiro on Feb. 5 declared an outbreak of dengue to be a public health emergency, a move that came just ahead of Brazil's Carnival celebrations. How well is Brazil tackling the outbreak of dengue, and how effectively is the country's health system addressing the challenge? What lessons can Brazil apply from the Covid-19 pandemic in implementing strategies to fight dengue? How well are other countries in Latin America addressing dengue, and what are the best practices that countries have implemented to fight the disease?

A Fernando Hellmann, professor in the Department of Public Health at the Federal University of Santa Catarina: "Brazil faces the threat of a dengue epidemic of unprecedented proportions, challenging historical records since the disease was first reported in the country in the mid-19th century. The years 2022 and 2023 have already set records, with more than one million cases each, setting an alarming precedent for 2024. By the fourth epidemiological week of 2024, 243,721 probable cases of dengue have been confirmed, surpassing the total annual cases of the previous years by January, with more than a thousand deaths confirmed again. Furthermore, the increase in Chikungunya cases, transmitted by *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the same vector as dengue and zika, has led to high incidence rates, health service overload and diagnostic challenges due to the similarity of symptoms. The circulation of different dengue virus lineages across the country adds complexity to the epidemiological scenario, with the risk of an out-

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Widow of Haiti's Moïse Accused in His Assassination

Martine Moïse, the widow of slain Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, was among 51 people indicted by a Haitian judge in connection with the president's 2021 assassination.

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ECONOMIC

Colombia Eyes Ban on New Coal Mining Contracts

Colombia's energy and mines ministry is proposing to ban all new coal mining contracts and future exploration for the fuel. The bill aims to advance the country's "decarbonization goals."

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POLITICAL

Brazil's Lula Recalls Envoy to Israel

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Monday recalled his ambassador to Israel amid tensions with the Middle Eastern country after he compared its actions in its war with Hamas to the Holocaust.

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Lula // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Widow of Haiti's Moïse Accused in His Assassination

Martine Moïse, the widow of slain Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, was among 51 people indicted by a Haitian judge in connection with the 2021 assassination, The New York Times reported Monday. The 122-page indictment, handed down by Judge Walther Voltaire, does not accuse Martine Moïse of planning the killing, nor does it present evidence of her involvement. However, it does say that she and others provided statements that other witnesses contradicted, suggesting their complicity in the case, The New York Times reported. After assailants burst into the couple's bedroom in the early morning hours of July 7, 2021 and fatally shot the president, his widow said she hid under the bed to shield herself from the attackers, according to the indictment, which was provided to the newspaper. However, the indictment adds that the gap between the bed and floor was just 14 to 18 inches, raising questions about Martine Moïse's credibility. Paul Turner, a lawyer for Martine Moïse, did not immediately respond to a request for comment by The New York Times. However, Turner previously denied

accusations against the former first lady that were lodged in a criminal complaint. "She was a victim, just like her children that were there, and her husband," Turner told The New York Times. He added that Martine Moïse was in hiding, with her whereabouts known to just a few people. Martine Moïse has repeatedly criticized investigators, saying they have been uninterested in identifying the people behind the killing. The president was killed when a group of Colombian commandos who had been hired by a Florida-based security company, broke into the Moïses' home and killed the president, according to a Haitian investigation. Also indicted on Monday in connection with the assassination were former Haitian Prime Minister Claude Joseph and the former chief of Haiti's National Police, Léon Charles, the Associated Press reported. The AP was unable to reach Charles for comment, and Joseph did not respond to the wire service's request for comment. In Haiti, more than 40 suspects accused of involvement in the assassination are jailed and awaiting trial, the AP reported. Eleven suspects were extradited to the United States in connection with the case, and three of them have already been sentenced. Martine Moïse had told investigators that 30 to 50 police officers were supposed to have guarded the couple's home the night of the assassination, but the judge said in his report that only a handful were there that night, the AP reported.

NEWS BRIEFS

Brazil's Lula Recalls Envoy to Israel Amid Tensions Over Remarks

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Monday recalled his ambassador to Israel amid tensions over Lula's sharp criticism of Israel's actions in its war with Hamas, The New York Times reported. Earlier on Monday, Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said Lula was unwelcome in Israel until he retracts his comments comparing Israel's operations in the war to the Holocaust. "What is happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people has no parallel in other historical moments," Lula told reporters Sunday during a trip to Ethiopia. But, he added, "it did exist when Hitler decided to kill the Jews."

El Salvador's Ruling Party Wins Legislative Supermajority

Electoral officials in El Salvador announced Monday that the party of President Nayib Bukele, New Ideas, had officially won a supermajority in the Legislative Assembly, the Associated Press reported. Bukele won a landslide victory in the Feb. 4 election, but the results of the vote for seats in the legislature were delayed by technical issues and complaints of irregularities. Bukele and New Ideas will now be able to push legislation through the assembly without agreement from any other party.

Argentina's Poverty Rate Rises to 20-Year High

Poverty in Argentina rose to 57.4 percent in January, its highest level in 20 years, according to a study published by the Catholic University of Argentina over the weekend, the Associated Press reported. According to the study, roughly 27 million people in Argentina are living in poverty. Rising poverty in January was driven in part by President Javier Milei's policy to devalue the peso, according to the report.

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break expansion to the northeast, a region historically vulnerable but currently less affected, which could exacerbate the health crisis. In response, Brazil's ministry of health has adopted strategic actions, such as the establishment of an emergency operations center, to monitor and coordinate the epidemic response, in addition to intensifying awareness campaigns and initiating the dengue vaccination campaign this month. Despite the supply of just 6.5 million doses for a population of 203 million, vaccination focuses on areas of high transmission, prioritizing children and adolescents aged 10 to 14 years and excluding the elderly. The most

effective dengue prevention is eradicating *Aedes aegypti* breeding sites, making up 75 percent of mosquito habitats in homes. This crucial strategy for controlling arboviruses highlights the importance of collaborative efforts between government and society."



Katherine E. Bliss, senior fellow at the CSIS Global Health Policy Center:

"The declaration in Rio de Janeiro came in response to a sharp increase in reported cases of dengue in January, as compared to a year earlier. Rio's Carnival parades typically attract thousands, putting people with

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ECONOMIC NEWS

Colombia Eyes Ban on New Coal Mining Contracts

Colombia's ministry of energy and mines has published online a bill that proposes a permanent legal ban on coal mining, Bloomberg News reported Monday. The bill would ban all new coal mining contracts and any future exploration. The law is currently on the energy and mines ministry's website, where the policy is described as seeking to support the "decarbonization goals" of Colombia, Bloomberg News reported. On Friday, Colombia's energy and mines ministry awarded major new licenses for solar electricity projects, increasing the nation's solar energy production capacity by 4,489 megawatts in 2027 and 2028 in a push to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, Reuters reported. Colombian President Gustavo Petro made environmental goals an important part of his election campaign platform and has pursued energy transition policies while in office, notably choosing to grant no new oil or coal contracts; the bill currently proposed would turn that unofficial policy into a permanent law.

BUSINESS NEWS

Brazil's Stark Bank Doubles Profit in 2023: Founder

Brazilian financial start-up Stark Bank more than doubled its net income last year to 71.5 million reais (\$14.45 million) as compared to 2022 and also handled 155 billion reais of payments, an amount three times higher than the previous year, founder Rafael Stark told Bloomberg News in an interview published Monday. The statement marked the first disclosure of the closely held company's financial results for 2023. "While a lot of tech companies are trying to stop losing money we're posting high levels of profitability," Stark told the news

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

How Well Is the Bahamas Tackling Violent Crime?

Q **In the wake of 19 homicides in the first month of this year, authorities in the Bahamas on Jan. 29 announced a plan to crack down on local crime following a recent spike in violence that led the U.S. Embassy to issue a warning to travelers. The Embassy blamed "retaliatory gang violence" for the killings. What's behind this increase in violence? What are the most important parts of Bahamian authorities' plan to reduce crime, and will it be effective? How will the U.S. warning to travelers affect tourism and the Bahamian economy?**

A **Andrea M. Ewart, founder and chief executive officer of DevelopTradeLaw, LLC:** "The high levels of transnational criminal activity across the Caribbean make it a crapsheet as to which country will, at any point in time, claim the spotlight as the region's 'murder capital.' Jamaica, claimant for several years, recently slipped to second place only because of the climbing murder rates across the Caribbean, according to InSight Crime. The Turks and Caicos Islands topped InSight Crime's 2022 Homicide Round-Up of Latin American and Caribbean countries, while the Bahamas ranked eighth. The 19 murders in January 2024 are an unexpected and unwell-

service. "There's no need to keep raising money and diluting my stake. It's better to grow and create much more value further down the road," he added. The start-up, which is funded by investors including Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos' family office, is generating profit from helping businesses to handle payments while leaving untouched money that it has raised in funding rounds, Bloomberg News reported. Stark Bank is focusing on gaining market share in Brazil from large traditional banks, the founder said. In its Series B funding round, the bank raised \$45 million. In addition to the

come spike for the Bahamas. The causes of these high murder rates across the Caribbean are organized crime, fueled by the easy access to guns from the United States and the growth of an underclass of primarily at-risk youth, as countries have failed to make the structural changes needed to achieve inclusive growth. It is cause for hope that the Bahamian government's five-pillar anti-crime strategy incorporates initiatives to expand youth programs, community centers and educational opportunities, particularly for at-risk populations. The devil will be in the details, specifically in resource allocation, when it comes to giving Bahamian youth real opportunities to succeed. In the near term, this has to focus on the tourism sector, which accounts for 50 percent of the country's GDP. The enclave approach to tourism contributes to the problem. At the same time, Jamaica's experience suggests that it will also insulate the Bahamas from any serious drops in tourist arrivals as a result of the U.S. warning."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the [Q&A published in the Feb. 13 issue of the Advisor](#).

funding from Bezos' family office, Bezos Expeditions, Stark Bank also raised funding from Ribbit Capital. The funding valued the company at \$250 million. Investors who provided money in earlier rounds of funding included Fabio Igel of Monashees Capital, Stewart Butterfield of Slack Technologies, Brian Armstrong of Coinbase Global and Arash Ferdowsi of Dropbox, Bloomberg News reported. In its initial round of funding, Stark Bank raised \$13 million, Reuters reported in April 2022. The initial round of funding came despite waning investments in Brazilian start-ups.

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limited exposure to dengue at risk this year for infection with the virus, which can lead to serious health complications, including death. Dengue cases have increased across the country, including in areas where the virus has not been reported previously, and Brazil is on track to exceed the more than three million dengue cases reported last year. The phenomenon in Brazil, and in neighboring Argentina and Paraguay, is linked to the El Niño-Southern Oscillation weather pattern, which fosters the warmer conditions hospitable to the aedes aegypti mosquito species that transmits the virus. To address the surge in cases, Brazilian health authorities have opened new clinics to treat victims, increased spraying of insecticide and launched a national vaccination campaign, making Brazil the first country in the world to provide the recently approved dengue vaccine, Qdenga, through public health programs. Dengue has been a health challenge in Brazil for at least three decades, and health authorities have considerable expertise in vector control and disease surveillance. Applying lessons from the dissemination of new vaccines during the Covid-19 pandemic, including the importance of combating misinformation and building trust in health services and vaccines at the community level, will help ensure a successful immunization campaign and strengthen efforts to prevent new costly and deadly dengue infections in the longer run."

A **Ricardo Izurieta, professor and director for global communicable diseases at the University of South Florida:** "Dengue, the most prevalent and widespread mosquito-borne viremia throughout the tropics, is a leading cause of febrile illness among Central and South America populations and becoming an urgent public health problem in the region. Currently, it is spreading south to north at an alarming rate in the Ameri-

cas, and its arrival in the northern latitudes is just a matter of entering into the next summer season. The four elements in the chain of transmission will determine the magnitude of epidemics: First is the agent, with the arrival of new dengue virus (DENV) serotypes to geographic areas where they have not recently circulated. Second is the

“**There is hope for the effectiveness of the new ... live-attenuated vaccines to prevent those events.**”

– Ricardo Izurieta

host, as these new DENV serotypes will find populations immunologically naïve to them. Although previous exposure to a different DENV serotype can increase the risk of developing hemorrhagic dengue, possible immunological cross-protection has been described with previous exposure to yellow fever wild virus, the 17D vaccine and Zika virus, a scientific postulate that should be deeper investigated. Third is the vector, Aedes spp. mosquitoes, including Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus, are present in various territories throughout the Americas from the southern United States to northern Argentina. Fourth is the environment, as variations in the amount of rainfall, humidity and temperature will occur due to the influence of the El Niño weather phenomenon and climate change. All these conditions may cause epidemics that will overwhelm hospitals, especially in resource-limited settings. Nevertheless, there is hope for the effectiveness of the new Butantan-DV and Takeda Qdenga live-attenuated vaccines to prevent those events.”

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

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