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FEATURED Q&A

How Dire Is the Water Shortage in Mexico City?



Mexico City could run out of water within months, according to an official from the national water commission. A facility of Mexico's Cutzamala water system is pictured. // File Photo: Government of Mexico City.

Q Mexico City could run out of water by late June, an official from the national water commission, Conagua, said last month. The Cutzamala System—which is responsible for providing the capital with nearly a quarter of its water supply—is at 40 percent capacity, a historic low. What are the main reasons for the water scarcity in Mexico City? How likely is the megalopolis to run out of water before July, and what programs and policies could help remedy the situation? What kind of impact could the crisis have on the country's June 2 elections?

A Itzkauhtli Zamora Saenz, professor of sociology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico: "Mexico City has not been self-sufficient in terms of water since the second half of the 20th century. To make up for that, the city depends on external sources, like the Lerma and Cutzamala systems. Despite that, the scarcity or low quality of water in the household is a reality that thousands of people have lived for decades, especially in the borough of Iztapalapa. In addition to the reasons for the scarcity (low levels of water in the Cutzamala basin due to climate change and large-scale developments that take up vast amounts of water), there are also structural problems, like water leakage (40 percent of water is estimated to be lost this way) and urban growth. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Mexico City will experience a 'day zero' by July. Authorities are already undergoing repairs to bring water from neighboring aquifers, and they will implement other emergency measures to ameliorate the crisis. They're likely not the best solutions to remedy the problem in the long term, because what is

Continued on page 3

TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Venezuela Arrests Campaign Staffers of Opposition's Machado

Venezuelan authorities have issued arrest warrants for nine staff members of opposition presidential candidate María Corina Machado's campaign and have already arrested two of them.

Page 2

ECONOMIC

Brazil's Central Bank Cuts Key Interest Rate

Brazil's central bank on Wednesday cut its benchmark Selic interest rate by a half point to 10.75 percent.

Page 2

POLITICAL

Mexico Won't Accept Migrants Repatriated by Texas: President

Mexico will not accept migrants repatriated under a controversial Texas law, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Wednesday at his daily press conference.

Page 2



López Obrador // File Photo: Mexican Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Venezuela Arrests Campaign Staffers of Opposition's Machado

Venezuelan authorities have issued arrest warrants for nine campaign staffers of opposition presidential candidate María Corina Machado and have already arrested two of them on accusations that they were involved in a violent conspiracy against the government, the Associated Press reported Wednesday. In a nationally televised news conference, Attorney General Tarek William Saab alleged that campaign manager Magalli Meda and other staffers of the opposition candidate were involved in a “destabilizing” plot that included protests, plans to attack military barracks and a media campaign, the wire service reported. The two staff members who have already been arrested include political coordinator Dignora Hernández, said Saab. He added that Meda was not yet in custody. Machado, whom the government has banned from holding office, accused President Nicolás Maduro’s administration of “brutal repression against my campaign teams,” the AP reported. Machado, who is far ahead of Maduro in opinion polls four months before the country’s planned July 28 election, said the arrests would not weaken her campaign. “If the regime believes that with these actions they’re going to isolate me, that they’re going to cut me off, be very clear—our team is Venezuela,” said Machado, Reuters reported. The arrests also drew international condemnation. “We condemn the arbitrary arrests and warrants issued today for members of the democratic opposition in Venezuela,” Brian Nichols, the U.S. State Department’s assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs, said in a posting on social media. “We call for the immediate release of these individuals and all those unjustly detained” he added. The United States has warned that, in mid-April, it will reimpose sanctions on Venezuela’s oil industry that it had earlier eased if Venezuela does not allow a fair presidential vote. Phil Gunson, a senior analyst for the Andes region

at International Crisis Group, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published March 8 that a presidential election that is fully free and fair “has never been in the cards” for Venezuela this year. “With polls showing four in five voters keen for a change of government, and Unitary Platform candidate María Corina Machado the clear favorite—even though she has been barred from participating—Maduro is not inclined to take chances and has taken harsh measures against dissent,” said Gunson.

U.S. Airlifting Citizens Out of Haiti Amid Violent Unrest

The United States on Wednesday airlifted more than a dozen of its citizens out of Haiti and transported them to the Dominican Republic as political instability and violence continue to worsen, The Wall Street Journal reported. Haiti’s main airport remains shut down following gang attacks that forced its closure. U.S. government-chartered helicopter flights now plan to carry at least 30 U.S. citizens to Santo Domingo each day, a State Department spokesman said, The Wall Street Journal reported. Haiti’s political transition remains uncertain as a proposed transitional council backed by Caribbean leaders and the U.S. State Department has not yet been able to solidify its membership. The formation of the council is being delayed by infighting among the Haitian political parties and coalitions invited to participate, an unnamed Caribbean diplomat and a source involved in the talks told the newspaper. A notable holdout remains the Pitit Desalin party, led by prominent politician Jean-Charles Moïse, who has allied himself with former rebel leader Guy Philippe. Jimmy “Barbecue” Chérizier, the leader of the powerful Haitian G9 gang alliance, has also dismissed the idea of the transitional council and threatened the families of politicians who choose to participate, Reuters reported. Gangs on Wednesday launched attacks in upper-class neighborhoods and suburbs of Port-au-Prince, areas that were once considered safe, including Pétiion-Ville, Meyotte, Diègue and Métivier, the Associated

NEWS BRIEFS

Argentina Set to Again Break Record for Dengue Cases

More than 120,000 cases of dengue have been reported in Argentina so far during the 2023-2024 season, figures far higher than the previous season and on track to be the worst outbreak of the disease ever recorded in the South American country, Reuters reported Wednesday. Last year’s season in Argentina was previously the worst on record, and experts worry warmer weather may continue exacerbating outbreaks of the deadly mosquito-borne virus.

Mexico Won’t Accept Migrants Repatriated by Texas: President

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Wednesday strongly criticized a Texas law that allows the state’s law enforcement to arrest individuals suspected of having illegally crossed the U.S. southern border, Reuters reported. “We will not accept deportations from the Texan government,” López Obrador said at his daily press conference, Reuters reported. “We oppose this draconian law, it is completely contrary to human rights,” he added. The law was blocked Tuesday by a federal appeals court as the judicial system continues to debate its constitutionality.

Brazil’s Central Bank Cuts Benchmark Interest Rate by Half Point

Brazil’s central bank on Wednesday cut its benchmark Selic interest rate by a half percentage point and said it would cut it again by the same amount at its next meeting, Bloomberg News reported. The bank cut the rate to 10.75 percent and said core inflation remains above target. Brazil’s annual inflation is currently 4.5 percent, and the bank’s target is 3 percent.

Press reported. At least five residents and one police officer were killed in the attacks, the AP reported. "The gangs control the capital and have blocked major seaports and roadways," Cécile Accilien, a professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, told the Advisor in a Q&A published March 7. "Essentially, they are the ones leading the country and dictating what happens," she added.

BUSINESS NEWS

State Street to Provide Services to Brazil's AZ Quest

Boston-based global financial services company State Street Corp. announced Wednesday that it has been chosen to provide fund accounting, fund administration and investor servicing for Brazilian asset manager AZ Quest, which is based in São Paulo. "We are pleased to announce this relationship with AZ Quest, as we continue to expand our capabilities across the region, furthering our goal of supporting leading institutional clients throughout Latin America" Marcia Rothschild, State Street's head for Latin America, said in a statement. "We look forward to working with AZ Quest to help generate and sustain growth to meet their investment objectives," she added. Hebert Almeida, a partner and head of operations at AZ Quest, said the new relationship with State Street will help the asset manager achieve its goals. "We are excited to tap into State Street's expansive set of capabilities to help scale our existing offerings and continue to deliver excellence and innovation for our clients," said Almeida. In recent years, State Street has expanded its activities in Latin America. Last year, it opened a new office in Colombia. In 2022, it opened an office in Chile "to help the firm serve and support institutional clients in the region," the company said. In 2021, State Street announced that its Brazilian bank, Banco Comercial, had started to offer full foreign exchange trading capabilities and sales operations.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

necessary is to tend to the aforementioned structural problems. Without a doubt, the issue of water will continue to be central to the discourse of the presidential and gubernatorial candidates. It will be important to analyze their proposals in order to know whether they are realistic or sustainable."

A **José Alfredo Ramirez, co-founder and director of Groundlab architecture studio:** "We need to understand whether this is a question of water scarcity or of water management. Also, the contemporary crisis is the result of socio-historical and environmental processes that started with the Spanish conquest, where water was seen as an enemy. Mexico City depends on the extraction of aquifers for 60 percent of its water supply, and this has caused the city's gradual sinking. The remaining 40 percent is extracted from remote basins, like Cutzama-la and Lerma, which require a substantial amount of energy for transportation and exploitation and extraction of landscapes that are invisible to the common user. As if that were not enough, Mexico's drainage system combines rainwater and wastewater in the 'Drenaje Profundo' system, which gets discharged outside of the capital, contaminates its surroundings and prevents rainwater from refilling the aquifer. To understand what could help alleviate the situation, we need to look at this as a water management crisis, not a water scarcity scenario. This is not to deny the crisis of water accessibility and the lack of resources, but rather to highlight which management alternatives are needed. Climate change will deepen the crisis and make the most vulnerable communities more exposed to its effects, which include longer droughts, heat island effects and severe health impacts (such as pollution and poor water quality). There are several solutions, such as the ones that fall under the category of green infrastructure and decentralized nature-based solutions. All of them have a social justice perspective and

resilience approach, but there is no single solution."

A **June Garcia-Becerra, assistant professor at the School of Engineering at the University of Northern British Columbia:**

"Water scarcity in Mexico City is exacerbated by a combination of geographic, management, governance and urbanization factors. The city experiences a distinct dry season from October to April or May, leading to natural water shortages. Weak federal and municipal water governance, exemplified by Conagua and Sacmex, contributes to administrative challenges and limited capabilities, hindering sustainable and long-term water management projects, and a gap between perceived and actual water issues further worsen the problem. The likelihood of Mexico City running out of water before July is contingent on formal and informal practices. Considering the chronic nature of the city's water issues and the reluctance to make evidence-based decisions, the situation is more indicative of longstanding challenges than an imminent crisis. While officials mention approaching 'day zero' for the city's large, centralized infrastructure, predicting this for current decentralized and informal water sources is difficult. For decades, researchers and practitioners have known that the centralized system faces vulnerability due to increasing demand, aging infrastructure and climate change, with estimates suggesting only 75 percent coverage of demand by 2030. However, decentralized and informal water sources (for example, self-managed water sources) and a black market for water makes a precise prediction impossible. Mexico City can address its water scarcity by building upon existing climate change-related initiatives, like implementing decentralized and nature-based solutions for local (off-grid) water and sanitation services, including water reuse, recycling and reclaiming. Encouraging entrepreneurship to foster local and circular economies around

Continued on page 4

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 3

water and sanitation services is also crucial. While some progress is observed, a more comprehensive implementation is needed. These measures can mitigate vulnerabilities to climate change, promote sustainable water management and contribute to avoiding a 'day zero' scenario, enhancing the overall water supply situation in the city."

A **Christina Boyes, assistant professor in the division of international studies CIDE in Mexico City:** "Mexico City, like most megacities, faces significant water supply issues. The city is dependent on rainwater to recharge local aquifers but has faced decreasing rainfall for several years. Inequalities in supply—with the wealthier western side of the city receiving more ample and cleaner water and the most

“While repairs are continuously underway, little has been done to change consumer behavior.”
— Christina Boyes

populous and poorer neighborhoods receiving water by truck—exacerbate the issue. Additionally, the city loses approximately 40 percent of its water supply in leaks and through infrastructure damage. While repairs are continuously underway, little has been done to change consumer behavior. The city recently launched a series of behavioral campaigns, but much more work is needed on this front. Water recycling would also significantly decrease water stress in the city, but public opinion on the issue complicates

adoption of water recycling and treatment as a potable water supply source. Considering how important freshwater is to the city, it is likely to play a significant role in the coming elections. We're already seeing attempts by both sides to politicize the issue."

A **Elias Cattan Cherem, founder and director of Taller 13 architecture studio:** "What is really at stake is the Lerma-Cutzamala (the pipe and pump cross basin aqueduct system that spends the same amount of electricity as Puebla), since we extract at least double what we put back and are doing little to nothing to reverse this. We must understand that we all share a living system. This could be solvable if we let go of our car culture and focus on regenerating our ecosystems, from our 'Bosque de Agua' to our wetland systems. We must also alleviate traffic and improve air quality in the process. We must also update our policies and infrastructure to bring a new way to be rooted in place, as well as honoring our ancient ecosystemic essence and enable true universal access. We should do this not only for humans, but rather focus on designing a multi-species city that deeply integrates biological systems to support human activity and vice versa. Every building can harvest, treat and reuse its own water. We need a systemic approach. Mexico City could be the first metropolis to be self-sustaining, with its own water supply, and export clean, treated water instead of sewage to the Mezquital Valley. We have the power to transform our landscapes in a way that honors life."

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

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