

THE AMERICAS

LATIN AMERICA BRIEFS

● CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

Leaders to discuss Venezuelan oil proposal

From Herald Wire Services

The leaders of Venezuela and several Caribbean countries will meet in Jamaica next month for talks on the South American nation's offer to provide the region with oil under flexible terms, officials said Sunday.



MANNING

The leaders will meet Sept. 6 in the resort town of Montego Bay, the 15-nation Caribbean Community's secretariat said. The leaders will work out specifics of the Petrocaribe agreement that 14 countries signed at a June summit in Venezuela, the secretariat said.

Petrocaribe extends and improves financing arrangements under past oil deals and calls for an expanded fleet of Venezuelan tankers to deliver fuel directly to bypass costly intermediaries. The pact intends to help small Caribbean economies cope with rising oil prices.

Trinidad and Barbados refused to sign the deal in June, saying they wanted more details. It was unclear if the prime ministers of the two countries would participate in the Jamaica meeting.

Trinidad Prime Minister Patrick Manning has expressed concern that the agreement would hurt his oil-rich country's economic interests in the region. Trinidad provides about 60,000 barrels a day to the Caribbean Community.

● BRAZIL

2 COPS, 1 INMATE DEAD IN PRISON RIOT

SAO PAULO — A botched escape attempt at an overcrowded prison in southeastern Brazil ignited an uprising that left two police officers and one inmate dead, authorities said Sunday.

The rebellion in Governador Valadares, a city 470 miles northeast of Sao Paulo, began Saturday evening when inmates took three guards hostage, police officer Alexandre Paiva said.

The 18-hour rebellion ended peacefully Sunday afternoon when the inmates agreed to release their hostages. Police did not provide details of the negotiations.

Police denied media reports that the rebellion began after about 15 heavily armed gunmen stormed the prison in an attempt to free some of the inmates. Some of the inmates armed themselves after breaking into a section of the prison where guns were stored.

● PUERTO RICO

42 DOMINICAN MIGRANTS DETAINED

SAN JUAN — Authorities Sunday detained 42 Dominicans who landed in western Puerto Rico in a wooden boat, police said.

The migrants, 27 men and 15 women, were in good health, police said. They landed in the western town of Rincón aboard a 25-foot boat known as a yola, police said.

Police said they were searching for other migrants who might have eluded authorities after landing.

The U.S. Coast Guard has reported a surge in the number of Dominicans trying to reach Puerto Rico in August compared to the previous year.

More than 900 Dominicans have been intercepted this month in the Mona Passage, a choppy straight that divides the Dominican Republic and the U.S. Caribbean territory, the Coast Guard said. Some 135 were caught during the first three weeks of August 2004, the Coast Guard said.

● ARUBA

BROTHERS QUESTIONED FOR SECOND DAY

ORANJESTAD — Police questioned two brothers who were arrested in the disappearance of U.S. teenager Natalee Holloway for a second day Sunday, a defense attorney said.

Satish and Deepak Kalpoe were taken from a prison in the southwestern town of San Nicolas to a police station in the capital of Oranjestad for questioning, said Elgin Zeppenveltdt, a lawyer for Satish.

Zeppenveltdt said he was not permitted to attend the interrogation.

● ECUADOR

COCAINE SEIZED ON BOAT; 8 ARRESTED

QUITO — U.S. and Ecuador authorities seized nearly seven tons of cocaine hidden in an Ecuadorian fishing boat and arrested eight members of its crew near the Galapagos Islands, police said Sunday.

The fishing vessel was loaded by fast boats in Colombian waters before heading into international waters, police said in a statement. The shipment was to be loaded onto yet another boat for shipment to the United States.

"With the help of the anti-narcotics office, the U.S. Coast Guard intercepted the fishing boat Daniel and found about seven tons of cocaine," the statement said.

Eight Ecuadorian crew members were arrested in "Operation Neptune."

The police statement said that the cargo belonged to a network of "Colombians and Ecuadorians who purchase fishing boats to transport large amounts of cocaine from Colombia."

● CUBA

KATRINA FORCES EVACUATIONS IN CUBA

HAVANA — Heavy rains and waves from Hurricane Katrina forced evacuations in western Cuba on Sunday as the massive storm swept northward toward the southern United States, according to local reports.

Telephone lines and power transmission were knocked out in many areas in the west hit by the storm and around 8,000 people were evacuated from flood-threatened areas in Pinar del Rio province as Katrina passed to the north.

The coastal city of Surgidero de Batabano south of Havana was 90 percent under water, according to Cuban television reports.

● BARBADOS

FERRY SERVICE TO LINK ISLANDS

BRIDGETOWN — A new passenger ferry service linking Barbados and several other eastern Caribbean islands will be launched next month, an official said Saturday.

The Star Ferries inter-island service will be based between Barbados and the French territory of Guadeloupe and will make stops in St. Lucia, Dominica and Martinique, said Reynold McClean, CEO of Remac Tours, a Barbadian company that will operate the service.

The ferry can hold 400 passengers and will offer meals, a children's play area and duty-free shops upon the service's launch in mid-September, McClean said.

McClean said the service will be aimed both at tourists and businesspeople.

ECUADOR

Ecuadorians enduring a 'tumultuous democracy'

■ In April, Ecuadorian President Alfredo Palacio became the country's seventh president in eight years. So far, his administration has faced continual troubles.

BY STEVEN DUDLEY
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QUITO — When Ecuadorian Interior Minister Mauricio Gándara gave a press conference recently to explain what the government was doing to resolve a week-old strike in the Amazon region that was costing the country millions of dollars in lost oil revenue, he could not sit still. Gándara got up to leave at least four times, only to be called back to his seat for another question.

In many ways, Gándara's rush to depart the press conference symbolizes the impatient nature of Alfredo Palacio's administration. Palacio — a 66-year old physician and former vice president who took office after a series of protests led to a congressional vote to oust the former army colonel Lucio Gutiérrez in April — seems as if he could not be done with this job soon enough.

'VERY IMPULSIVE'

"Palacio is someone who is very impulsive. He changes his mind very quickly. You can never tell if, in the middle of a crisis, he's going to say, 'I'm going to have new elections,'" said Cesar Montufar, the outgoing director of the Ecuadorian activist group, Citizens Participate. "He doesn't have a strategy. He's only surviving."

As the country's seventh president in eight years, Palacio does not have an easy job. In fact, the struggle appears to have no end, aside from pushing forward elections cur-

rently scheduled for October 2006 or, as the president has proposed, holding a constitutional assembly.

Palacio's communications minister resigned last week, the third resignation of a top cabinet member this month. The defense minister resigned Aug. 19, just as the protests in the Amazon region hit their peak, virtually shutting down the country's 540,000 barrels per day of oil production. And earlier this month, Palacio's most visible and popular cabinet member, Finance Minister Rafael Correa, departed in a public huff and wasted little time in criticizing Palacio for his handling of the paralyzing strike in the northeast of the country.

Before his departure, a poll by the firm Market showed Correa with a higher approval rating than the president (Correa is reportedly preparing for a presidential bid next year); newly named finance minister Magdalena Barreiro reportedly asked that Correa sign off on her appointment.

"There's a crisis of authority," said Fabian Corral, a columnist for the El Comercio newspaper. "This is what you might call a 'tumultuous democracy.'"

To compound these difficulties were revelations last week that some aides in Palacio's administration may have forged the president's signature and accepted money in return for public posts.

"This government does not permit corruption, no matter where it comes from," Palacio's top aide Luis Herrería tried to assure the press last week after the scandal broke.

Palacio's problems stem from his lack of political experience and his shaky beginnings in office, analysts say. After Gutiérrez left the palace

'Because there's no justice system, there is the sensation that you can violate the law and nothing happens.'

— FABIAN CORRAL,
El Comercio newspaper columnist

in a helicopter in April following a controversial congressional vote, Palacio immediately promised to "revive" the democratic principals of the country. But the president has no political party affiliations leaving him weak in congress and bereft of grass-roots organizers to promote any of his policies.

The president, for instance, has yet to resolve problems in the justice system, the key issue that led to Gutiérrez's departure. Changes for the Supreme Court, which Gutiérrez packed with his allies causing the huge protests that led to his ouster, are still in the works.

"Because there's no justice system, there is the sensation that you can violate the law and nothing happens," said Corral.

The strike two weeks ago in the Amazon has reinforced this notion. Protesters overran oil installations and shut down production, an act that may cost the government \$500 million in oil revenue this year. Yet, none of the leaders, among them two mayors and two elected prefects of the rebellious provinces, face criminal prosecution as of yet.

Palacio has also struggled to balance internal demands for more social services and external demands for a more stable investment climate, a problem that third-world leaders across the planet face.

Protesters in the Amazon provinces of Sucumbíos and Orellana, following the rhetoric of the now-departed Finance Minister Correa, have combined calls for more roads, schools, jobs and hospitals with calls for multinational oil companies to leave the country, two virtually incompatible demands since the government's stake in the private oil production, as well as the royalties from this production, would provide the money for these social projects.

SHAKY CONDITIONS

Correa also had a public spat with the World Bank when the bank refused to disburse \$100 million in loans. The overall shaky environment caused Standard & Poor's to downgrade Ecuador's bond rating last month and put it on special credit watch this week. Palacio's approval ratings in the Market poll were 38 percent, down from 74 percent when he took office.

"They say he's a good cardiologist," said Vicente Albornoz, the director of the Quito think tank, Corporation for the Study of Development.

"But he doesn't know anything about politics," Albornoz said.

To escape his plight, Palacio has proposed a referendum on political reform and a constitutional assembly, but neither proposal has much momentum or definition as of yet.

In the meantime, he must settle the local disputes that have international implications, like the one in the Amazon region, and try and maintain some stability in his cabinet even as rumors swirl that the next minister to go will be the hurried Interior Minister Gándara.

VENEZUELA

Jackson supports Chávez, calls Robertson's remark 'immoral'

■ The Rev. Jesse Jackson denounced Pat Robertson for calling for Hugo Chávez's assassination and called for better diplomacy.

BY CHRISTOPHER TOOTHAKER
Associated Press

CARACAS — The Rev. Jesse Jackson offered support for Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez on Sunday, saying a recent call for his assassination was a criminal act and the United States and Venezuela should work out their differences through diplomacy.

The U.S. civil-rights leader condemned last week's suggestion by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson that American agents should kill leftist Chávez, calling the conservative commentator's statements "immoral" and "illegal." Jackson urged U.S. authorities to take action, and said the U.S. government must choose "diplomacy over any threats of sabotage or isolation or assassination."

"We must choose a civilized policy of rational conversation," he told reporters at a news conference.

Chávez, a self-styled "revolutionary," has repeatedly accused the Bush administration of planning to overthrow him. He warned on Friday that some American leaders have considered killing him.

U.S. officials have repeatedly denied such claims.

Robertson's comments last week have increased already tense relations between Caracas and Washington. He called for Chávez's assassination on his TV show *The 700 Club*, saying the United States should "take him out" because the Venezuelan leader poses a danger to the region.



WISTON BRAVO/ABN VIA AP

IN CARACAS: Rev. Jesse Jackson plays a drum Sunday during visit to Venezuela where he defended Chávez.

Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition of America and a supporter of Bush's reelection bid, later issued an apology.

Chávez said Sunday that his

government could request Robertson's extradition for suggesting American agents should kill him.

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission "must

'Though our histories are burdensome with pain and often bitter memories, we must have the strength to get ahead and not just get even.'

— JESSE JACKSON,
speaking to Venezuela's National Assembly

prohibit such threats on the airwaves," said Jackson, who arrived Saturday for a visit along with members of his Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. "I hope the FCC does not remain silent regarding what Robertson said," Jackson added.

Representatives of the U.S. government have expressed concern that Chávez and his close ally, Cuban leader Fidel Castro, are fomenting instability in Latin America. Chávez and Castro deny it, instead blaming the United States for consistently meddling in the affairs of Latin America.

In a speech to Venezuela's National Assembly, Jackson said every country has a right to self-determination, and touched on subjects from poverty to Martin Luther King Jr.'s role in the civil-rights struggle of black Americans.

"Though our histories are burdensome with pain and often bitter memories, we must have the strength to get ahead and not just get even," he said to rousing applause from Venezuelan lawmakers.

Jackson met Chávez and said he planned to meet with Venezuelan opposition leaders, who accuse Chávez of becoming increasingly authoritarian.