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MLS Update: Latin America and the Caribbean

LEADING IN THE NEWS

On October 17, the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly elected five new countries to serve two-year terms as members of the U.N. Security Council, including Chile. The new members, whose terms will begin on January 1, will replace countries whose terms are coming to an end, including Guatemala.

On October 17, the USTR released a Trans-Pacific Partnership Leaders Statement, stating that the 12 participating nations in the free trade agreement are on track to complete negotiations. Finalization of the TPP is expected by the end of 2013. TPP participants are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, United States, and Vietnam.

October 22 was the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's 1962 address to the nation regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis. In closing the speech, President Kennedy said: "The path we have chosen for the present is full of hazards, as all paths are; but it is the one most consistent with our character and courage as a nation and our commitments around the world. The cost of freedom is always high, but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender or submission. Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right; not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this hemisphere, and, we hope, around the world."

UNITED STATES – LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN RELATIONS

White House

On October 16, the White House notified Congress of its intention to continue the national emergency with respect to narcotics traffickers centered in Columbia, beyond October 21. In a message to Congress, President Barack Obama said the actions of drug traffickers continue to threaten U.S. national security and foreign policy and result in violence, corruption, and harm to U.S. interests.

Congress

On October 15, Representatives Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), Mike Honda (D-CA), and Hank Johnson (D-GA) wrote to Secretary of State John Kerry urging the State Department to monitor the potential militarization of the Honduran electoral process as part of the November 24 presidential elections. The lawmakers expressed concern for potential election fraud and violence against voters supporting opposition parties. Representatives Grijalva, Honda, and Johnson also urged the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa to condemn intimidation against members of the opposition.

On October 21, the American Petroleum Institute (API) called on Congress to expedite approval of the U.S.-Mexico trans-boundary agreement, which would establish a framework for oil and gas development in the Western Gap area of the Gulf of Mexico. The House and Senate are divided over a provision in implementing legislation regarding Dodd-Frank Act requirements obligating U.S. companies to disclose payments to foreign governments. If the agreement is not approved by January 17, Mexico may move forward on leases without U.S. input.

Department of Defense

On October 8, U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) confirmed four deaths in a recent plane crash in Columbia near the Panamanian border. Air Force Master Sergeant Martin Gonzalez, two U.S. defense contractors, and Panamanian National Air-naval Service Lieutenant Elroy Nunez were killed when their plane crashed during a detection and monitoring operation. The cause of the crash remains under investigation.

Department of Education

On October 22, the Obama administration approved the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico for a waiver from No Child Left Behind (NCLB), in exchange for locally-developed plans to prepare all students for college and career, focus aid on the neediest students, and support effective teaching and leadership. Since fall 2011, 45 states, D.C., Puerto Rico and the Bureau of Indian Education have requested waivers from NCLB in order to implement next-generation education reforms that go far beyond the law's rigid, top-down prescriptions. The Education Department has now approved requests from 42 states Puerto Rico and D.C., with other applications still pending.

Department of Justice

On October 15, the Justice Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives released a significant information report revealing one of the grenades used in a scuffle last week between Mexican police and a drug cartel was linked to Jean Baptiste Kingery. U.S. officials have not arrested Kingery, despite evidence he may be supplying grenade parts and other ammunition to Mexican drug cartels.

Department of State

On October 18, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson met with a delegation of Brazilian university deans working to expand educational exchanges. In addition, State Department Director of Policy Planning David McKean hosted policy planning talks with Chilean Minister Counselor Carlos Olguin at the Department of State.

On October 22, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson

met with Guatemala Ambassador to the U.S. Julio Ligorria. Later in the day, Assistant Secretary Jacobson met with U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala Arnold Chacon.

On October 22, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Energy Resources Julia Nesheiwat delivered remarks in recognition of 2013 World Energy Day and National Energy Action Month. Deputy Assistant Secretary Nesheiwat highlighted efforts to follow the lead of Columbia's "Connecting the Americas" initiative to help enhance energy connections in the Western Hemisphere.

National Security Agency

On October 20, German newspaper, *Der Spiegel*, reported the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) hacked the email of former Mexican President Felipe Calderón. The mission, known as "Flatliquid" was detailed in a May 2010 top-secret NSA report. A second mission, known as "Whitetamale" also targeted other Mexican officials for intelligence on the drug trade. Revelations in September, which suggested the NSA was also conducting surveillance on Enrique Pena Nieto before he was elected President, are also under investigation.

On October 21, the Mexican Foreign Ministry issued a statement in response to allegations of U.S. spying by the NSA. The statement labeled the practice of spying as unacceptable, illegitimate, and contrary to international law. Meanwhile, State Department officials indicated the two governments plan to discuss the allegations further via diplomatic channels.

U.S. Trade and Development Agency

USTDA is sponsoring a two-day workshop on February 11-12, 2014 to foster U.S. – Colombian partnerships for state-of-the-art electricity transmission and distribution projects throughout the country in cooperation with Colombia Inteligente (Smart Colombia), an industry coalition established to coordinate the implementation of smart grid technology in country. The event will highlight Colombia's smart grid projects and initiatives, U.S. technologies and the regulatory frameworks, standards, and financing mechanisms available to support them. The workshop will also focus on the applicability of demand response programs. The event will bring together high-level U.S. and Colombian power sector stakeholders, including representatives from Colombia's electric utilities, the independent system operator, the Ministry of Mines and Energy and other regulatory bodies. Representatives from U.S. companies providing smart grid equipment and services should attend to learn about upcoming opportunities and connect with senior Colombian decision makers. Information on how to participate can be found [here](#).

Organization of American States

On October 8-10, the Commission of the Mechanism for Follow-Up on the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption (MESICIC) visited Guyana. The Commission met with government officials, civil society organizations, and private sector and professional associations to assess Guyana's implementation of the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption. A country report will be presented at the March 2014 OAS plenary meeting.

On October 11, the Organization of American States (OAS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) and the Trust for the Americas to improve opportunities for young Latin Americans. The agreement is centered on increasing access to education, technology, and employment.

On October 11, OAS and the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) convened a

meeting on climate change, attended by representatives of the governments of Peru and France, which will organize the upcoming United Nations (U.N.) global conferences on climate change in 2014 and 2015, respectively. Additional participants included representatives from Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Chile, the U.S., Brazil, Bolivia, and Costa Rica.

On October 14, while visiting Aruba for the Caribbean Renewable Energy Forum, OAS Assistant Secretary General Albert Ramdin called for regional collaboration to promote increased use of renewable energy technologies in the Caribbean. He noted while the cost of electricity in the Caribbean is relatively high, there are significant opportunities to take advantage of sun, heat, water, and wind resources to generate electricity.

On October 16, the OAS Program of Assistance for the Control of Arms and Munitions (PACAM) provided assistance to Guatemalan authorities in destroying grenade launchers and 2,079 explosive devices seized from criminals. The weapons were destroyed in Guatemala City, with participation from Guatemala's Ministry of Defense, Public Ministry, and the Public Defender's Office.

On October 17, OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza met with Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Ralph Gonsalves in Washington, DC. The leaders discussed the political situation in the Caribbean and Latin America, as well as the mandate and the budget of OAS.

On October 18, a ceremony was held to mark the opening of the first Drug Treatment Court (DTC) in the Salta province of Argentina. The court was established as part of a pilot program initiated by the OAS Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD). The court will provide alternative criminal proceedings within the justice system for drug dependent offenders.

Communications

On October 14, more than 100 computer networking specialists gathered in Belize City, Belize, for the sixth regional meeting of the Caribbean Network Operators Group (CaribNOG). The goal of the weeklong conference was to share best practices for protecting computer networks from emerging threats, including computer hacking, unauthorized surveillance, and damage or loss caused by failed computer systems.

On October 20, unidentified gunmen shot and killed one of the bodyguards of Karina Rottman, the head of Guatemala's VEA Canal cable TV channel, which broadcasts news analysis and criticism shows. The station is well known for its bias against the Administration of Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina. This year, there have been more than 80 attacks and threats targeting journalists in Guatemala.

On October 21, El Salvador's competition regulator Superintendencia de Competencia (SC) called on telecommunications regulator Signet to suspend recently announced spectrum auctions for 40 MHz in the 1900 MHz and 1700-2100 MHz bands. SC objected to the conditions of the licenses and recommended the upcoming spectrum auction be reserved for newcomers, who face several barriers to entering the mobile market.

On October 23, the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars will host a briefing on "Brazil's Vision on Internet Governance: Managing Sovereignty, Privacy, and Technology." The discussion is anticipated to assess the implications of the postponed visit to the U.S. by Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff as well as Brazil's proposed internet regulatory framework. Panelists

include Paulo Sotero of the Brazil Institute, Jamie Hedlund of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, Kellie Meiman of McLarty Associates, Ricardo Sennes of Pospectiva Consultoria Internacional, Carlos Lins da Silva of Politica Externa, and Wesley Wark of the University of Ottawa.

Defense/National Security

On October 11, Director of Panama's National Aeronautics and Ocean Administration Belsio Gonzalez said two Cuban fighter jets seized from the North Korean ship, Chong Chon Gang, in July, as well as 15 replacement engines, were in perfect condition. The aircraft also contained fuel, indicating recent use. The military equipment was found hidden under 10,000 tons of sugar and was not included on the ship's manifest. The ship's captain and crew remain in Panamanian custody, but on October 18, Panamanian Foreign Minister Fernando Nunez Fabrega said the crew and the ship will be returned to North Korea soon.

On October 11, Honduran Seized Property Administration Office Director Humberto Palacios said a raid against the Los Cachiros drug gang, led by Javier Eriberto Rivera and Devis Leonel Rivera, was unsuccessful because corrupt authorities alerted gang members to the raid weeks in advance. The 71 bank accounts seized during the September operation were empty, as were the houses and businesses targeted by the raid.

On October 12, Honduran police clashed with residents in San Francisco de le Paz as they tried to arrest Carlos Peralta, who is suspected of decapitating a seven-year-old boy. Two people were injured in the scuffle and police used teargas to disperse the mob. The villagers allegedly wanted to pursue justice for the boy's death on their own.

On October 13, the Guatemalan National Civil Police (PNC) reported 11 women died in violent attacks within a 24 hour window. Four women were murdered as they slept in their home in Aguamecate. A few hours later, unidentified gunmen shot and killed three women on a road near the village of Chiquimula. In addition, a 16-year-old girl was shot to death by unknown assailants in Costa Cuca, and the body of an older woman who had been missing for five days was found on the bank of a river near Quiche, showing signs of violence. According to government statistics, 600 women have been murdered in Guatemala this year.

On October 15, Honduras deployed 500 police officers to San Pedro and another 500 police officers to the capital city of Tegucigalpa in an effort to combat organized crime leading up to the November 24 presidential elections. In August, the Honduran Congress approved legislation that would deploy as many as 5,000 officers by the end of 2014, funded by a tax on private businesses that was imposed last year.

On October 16, National Civil Police in Guatemala confirmed a lynch mob killed three alleged criminals suspected of trying to extort a local farmer along the border with El Salvador. The three men demanded the farmer pay them \$25,000 and when he refused, began to attack his family and home. After arrested by police, local residents stopped the police patrol and proceeded to beat the suspects and set them on fire.

On October 17, Mexican Interior Minister Miguel Angel Osorio Chong said Mexican authorities will not meet an October 29 deadline for certifying hundreds of thousands of Mexican police officers. Police training is a significant component of the \$2 billion Mexico receives in U.S. aid. Minister Chong said while 100% certification will never be achieved, reforms will be made to make the process more efficient.

On October 19, gunmen dressed as clowns launched an attack in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico that resulted in the death of renowned Tijuana drug cartel leader Francisco Rafael Arellano Felix. The gunmen's identities and a motive for the attack are under investigation. Felix has previously served prison time in Mexico, as well as the U.S. Experts believe the Tijuana cartel is now led by his sister, Enedina, and her son, Fernando.

On October 20, four masked gunmen stormed the El Guácimo restaurant in Garabito, Costa Rica, and robbed four businessmen of \$60,000 in cash. According to the Judicial Investigation Police, the robbers reportedly knew their attackers. The perpetrators ultimately fled the scene on two motorcycles.

On October 21, Hurricane Raymond strengthened to a Category 3 storm, approximately 160 miles off the coast of Acapulco. Following reports indicating the storm would continue to move towards land, Mexican authorities have begun to deploy emergency crews and plot potential evacuations.

Economy/Trade

On October 14, Mexico's Central Bank Governor Agustin Carstens said Mexico has the liquidity necessary to handle a potential U.S. debt default. He highlighted Mexico's \$170 billion in reserves and the country's flexible credit line from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for use under emergency circumstances. Meanwhile Mexican Finance Ministry Chief Economist Ernesto Revilla said last week Mexico's slowing economy could face an extreme situation if the U.S. fails to raise its debt ceiling.

On October 17, Costa Rican Finance Minister Edgar Ayales released a paper called "On the Road to Fiscal Consolidation: Agenda for a National Dialogue." The paper outlines a number of policy proposals to decrease Costa Rica's fiscal deficit. Among the proposals are new taxes on health care and private education, a new value added tax (VAT), and changes in tax burdens in free trade zones. The Ministry of Finance plans to hold five roundtables on the proposals in hopes of introducing legislation in February.

On October 22, the government of Cuba announced that it would begin a process of streamlining its two-currency system, in which tourists use a convertible peso pegged to the American dollar, while locals use ordinary pesos that are valued at about 5 cents and are not eligible for direct conversion into foreign currencies. The value of the two currencies will eventually be unified.

Energy/Environment

On October 3, the National Assembly of Ecuador authorized drilling in the Yasuni National Forest, where there is an estimated 920 million barrels of crude oil. The move was not without controversy, as the national forest is home to native tribes as well as rare animal species.

On October 13, Mexican state oil monopoly Pemex said one person was killed in a fire that occurred when a multipurpose pipeline was illegally tapped in Veracruz state. Pemex released few details on the incident, other than noting the fire was quickly controlled. The illegal tapping of pipelines by criminal gangs is estimated to have cost Mexico hundreds of millions of dollars.

On October 13 a new poll found 95% support for legislation under consideration in El Salvador that would ban metal mining in the country in an effort to prioritize human consumption of limited water resources over industrial and commercial uses of water. While President Mauricio Funes has maintained the previous administration's policy against issuing new mining permits,

cross-border mining continues to threaten the water supply in El Salvador.

On October 15, Pemex announced the tender for the second phase of the Ramones II natural gas pipeline void after receiving only one bid from a consortium including Spanish gas distributor Enagas and French energy firm GDF Suez that did not comply with the project's technical or economic specifications. Pemex said it will continue to work on the financial and legal framework for the project, which it intends to complete by the end of 2015.

On October 16, an explosion at a natural gas storage plant in Mexico's Puebla state owned by Tomza Gas killed at least six people and injured two others. The explosion sparked a fire that led officials to evacuate homes and businesses within a two mile radius and close the main highway linking Mexico City and Veracruz. Those evacuated were able to return to their homes the following day.

On October 16, four lawmakers in San José's Legislative Assembly introduced a bill that would institute a moratorium on the expansion of genetically modified organisms (GMO) in Costa Rica. The proposal would allow companies that have already obtained permission to grow or use GMOs to continue their operations, but would specify GMOs would have to be contained indoors. Environmental groups rallied behind the bill, while biotechnology firms have said the effort is unnecessary.

On October 18, Bloomberg New Energy Finance and the Inter-American Development Bank unveiled the 2013 Climatescope Report, profiling 26 countries on their environment for clean energy investment. This year's report finds Brazil, Chile, and Nicaragua are the three most attractive clean energy markets in Latin America and the Caribbean.

On October 18, Costa Rica launched a new environmental bank, called BANCO2. As the first bank of its kind in the world, BANCO2 does not trade or lend money, but provides commercialization and brokerage services for carbon dioxide credits, as well as promotion, monitoring, reporting, and verification of national carbon dioxide mitigation and reduction programs. According to government officials, the bank will assist Costa Rica in meeting its goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2021.

Electoral Politics

On October 10, Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, the wife of former Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, who was ousted in 2009, led the three-way race for the November 24 presidential contest, although with just under 30% support. Castro, who has never held political office, has campaigned on rewriting the Honduran constitution to centralize power in the government's executive branch – an effort similar to the one that resulted in her husband's removal from office.

Health

On October 10, Panama's Health Ministry said it is exploring whether gene-altered mosquitoes could be used as part of public health efforts to combat mosquito borne diseases, such as dengue fever. The OX513A genetically modified mosquito, manufactured by British biotech company Oxitec, is a male insect that when released into the wild, mates with female mosquitos to produce offspring that do not survive. Approval by Panama's National Biosafety Commission, may allow for the release of genetically modified mosquitos in Arraijan early next year.

On October 11, Costa Rican health officials released a new report finding record numbers of

cases of mosquito borne virus dengue fever recorded over the past year. Since last October, 41,510 cases of the diseases have been reported, but no one has died from the disease. According to health officials, only 12% of patients who contracted the disease were hospitalized for the illness.

On October 21, the Medical Tourism Association was launched in Belize with the goal of attracting more foreigners to Belize to obtain medical services and to end the practice of Belizeans going abroad to seek medical care. The association is focused on attracting investment that will allow Belize to expand, update, and improve existing facilities and to encourage more local doctors to open private medical and dental practices.

Human Rights

On October 15, Guatemalan human rights activities Pablo Ceto visited the World Council of Churches (WCC) offices in Geneva, Switzerland, for a meeting on the rights of indigenous people in Guatemala. The meeting focused on how state and multinational corporations in the mining and resource extraction sectors are violating the human rights of Guatemalans. Ceto plans to facilitate the participation of human rights activities in the U.N. Forum on Business and Human Rights, which will be held December 2-4.

On October 18, Amnesty International opposed recent changes to a law on gender violence in Nicaragua that would offer women mediation with their aggressors in cases where crimes carry less than a five-year prison sentence. Amnesty international argues the law puts women in danger and will perpetuate domestic violence.

International Relations

On October 9, Guatemalan Vice President Roxana Baldetti visited the village of Pamumus outside of Guatemala city to meet with European Union (EU) Development Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, who visited the village as part of a Latin American tour. The meeting comes after last week's announcement that the EU will provide Guatemala with 186 million Euros of assistance in support of the country's zero-hunger strategy.

On October 9, reports surfaced that Guatemalan Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz was under consideration to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Previous Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize winners include politician Rigoberta Menchu and writer Miguel Angel Asturias.

On October 14, during an official visit to Moscow, Russia, Honduran Foreign Minister Mireya Aguero and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Larov signed an agreement that would allow for visa-free travel between Honduras and Russia. The ministers also backed the signing of an agreement between the Honduran National Council Against Drug Trafficking and the Russian Federal Drug Control Services on cooperation in suppressing the illegal trafficking of narcotics, psychotropic substances, and their precursors. In addition, Minister Larov accepted Minister Aguero's invitation to visit Honduras.

On October 14, Venezuelan officials indicated they are exploring alternatives to traditional foreign assistance to Nicaragua, including a \$30 bonus payment for Nicaraguan public employees from the Venezuelan Cooperation Fund. Venezuelan foreign direct investment (FDI) in Nicaragua is down 4.3% from last year. In addition, Venezuelan imports from Nicaragua have decreased by 6%.

On October 17, Personal Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General on the border dispute

between Guyana and Venezuela Norman Girvan met with Foreign Minister of Guyana Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett and Foreign Minister of Venezuela Elías Jaua. The ministers welcomed a proposal, including routine meetings, issued by Personal Representative Girvan focusing on the border controversy. They also highlighted improvements in bilateral relations between Guyana and Venezuela.

On October 17, while visiting the U.S., Belizean Prime Minister Dean Barrow was asked if he had any advice for the U.S. Government to avert another government shutdown. Prime Minister Barrow responded the U.S. should switch to a parliamentary system, similar to the political system in Belize, in which the leader of the majority party serves as the leader of the country.

On October 18, the Russian Foreign Ministry sent a request to Costa Rican Ambassador to Russia Mario Fernández Silva, asking Costa Rica not to extradite Russian citizen Maxim Chukharev to the U.S. Chukharev is wanted in a district court on charges of money laundering. The Criminal Court of Pavas handed down an order to extradite Chukharev on October 3, which can be appealed until October 24.

On October 19, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) concluded a three-day meeting in Kingston, Jamaica, on disaster preparedness. Participants included leaders from 22 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. At the end of the conference, regional leaders adopted a Plan of Action to enhance regional cooperation between governments, civil society, and private sector organizations to strengthen early warning systems, preparedness, and humanitarian response capabilities across the region.

On October 19, Irish President Michael Higgins began an official visit to Latin America, with scheduled stops in Mexico, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. In Mexico, President Higgins visited the Batallon de San Patricio and Chapultepec Park, participated in a bilateral meeting with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, and attended events hosted by the Mexican business community. In El Salvador, President Higgins met with Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes, addressed the Salvadoran National Assembly, and was recognized for his human rights work by the Universidad Centroamericana. In Costa Rica, President Higgins met with President Laura Chinchilla, consulted with civil society organizations focused on national reconciliation, and participated in a roundtable on sustainable development. A planned stop in Nicaragua was canceled due to scheduling issues.

Labor

On October 14, teachers in Mexico returned to 13,500 schools, bringing to close a strike that began on August 19. Over the past two months, teachers have engaged in several protests in Mexico City, in a failed attempt to derail education reforms proposed by President Enrique Peña Nieto.

On October 19, four trade unionists were attacked in Guatemala in what are believed to be coordinated incidents. The attacks left Genaro Cruz Telón, former Secretary and member of SNTSG, Guatemala's National Health Workers' Union, in a coma. Following the attack against Telón, current SNTSG Secretary Dora Regina Ruano received death threats at her home in Guatemala City. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, Guatemala is considered one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a trade unionist.

Transportation/Infrastructure

On October 13, a bus ran off a cliff in western El Salvador, killing at least six people and injuring

48 others. The passengers were fans of a local soccer team in Sonsonate. A preliminary investigation found the bus had mechanical problems.

On October 14, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) convened a hearing during which Costa Rica demanded a halt to Nicaragua's construction of two canals linking the Caribbean to the San Juan River along the countries' shared border. Costa Rican officials discovered the new canals via satellite images. Meanwhile, Nicaraguan officials argue the disputed island where construction is ongoing, known as Isla Portillos in Costa Rica and Harbor Head in Nicaragua, is historically Nicaraguan territory.

On October 14, Mexican authorities began searching for a small plane carrying 14 Mexican citizens that went missing shortly after taking off from Loreto amid bad weather caused by Tropical Storm Octave. According to the Mexican Transportation Department, five civilian and military aircraft are participating in the search, which spans from Loreto to Ciudad Constitucion.

On October 18, President of the Costa Rican Union of Chambers and Associations of Private Business (UCCAEP) Jaime Molina said between 200 and 300 construction projects are stuck in the backlogs of the National Environmental Technical Services (SETENA). SETENA is tasked with inspecting the progress of construction projects. UCCAEP and other private sector groups have requested that Costa Rican Finance Minister Edgar Ayales provide SETENA with additional funding to hire more staff to clear the backlog.

On October 19, Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla was trapped in Tocumen Airport in Panama City, Panama, after attending the Ibero-American Summit due to the failure of Copa Airlines' computer network. Following the incident, the Government of Costa Rica sent a diplomatic letter to Panama asking the country to assist Costa Ricans in returning home as soon as possible.

On October 20, *Reuters* speculated there will be surge in the construction of new automobile factories in Mexico over the next decade. Many of the new cars manufactured in Mexico are anticipated to be exported to the U.S., driving competition with European and Asian auto manufacturers. In addition, U.S. auto companies manufacturing in Mexico are anticipated to make investments to upgrade their Mexican facilities.

On October 21, Mexican airline VivaAerobus announced an order for 52 European Airbus A320 jets. The deal, worth \$5.1 billion is the largest order the European plane maker has ever received from a Latin American company. Previously, VivaAerobus contracted with U.S. manufacturer Boeing for its commercial aircraft.

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