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# Ibero-America Briefs

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## Northern Brazilian State Eager to Join the BRI

Leading representatives of industrial, port and rail interests in the north-eastern state of Maranhão turned out in force for a 3-day seminar July 11-13, sponsored by the state government, on the subject of “Maranhão’s Potential in China’s New Silk Road: Business and Development Opportunities for Brazil.” The central subject was the proposal to transform the Porto do Itaqui port complex at the state capital, São Luís, which already handles major grain and metals exports from Maranhão and several surrounding states, into a logistics, distribution and manufacturing center on the Belt and Road (BRI).

The featured speaker was Paul Tae-Woo Lee, a professor of International Logistics and Maritime Transport at Zhejiang University, who came from China specifically for the seminar. Lee was one of the authors of the 2022 [study](#), “Strategic Locations for Logistics Distribution Centers along the Belt and Road,” which includes the Maranhão port among the potential sites. Lee briefed the seminar at length on the global scope and current status of the BRI.

The seminar’s key organizer was Maranhão’s state Secretary for Economic Development and Strategic Projects, José Reinaldo Tavares, a civil engineer known for getting things done. He has played a key role for decades in great infrastructure projects aimed at developing Brazil’s poor but resource-rich northeast. He headed SUDENE, the big northeast Brazilian development agency created in 1959 on the model of the TVA; he is de-

scribed as the “author” of the São Francisco Water Transfer project (also modeled on the TVA); and as federal Transport Minister under President José Sarney. Tavares was responsible for the creation of the North-South Railway.

Local media emphasized:

“The Maranhão capital possesses extraordinary conditions for joining [the BRI] because of its road, rail connections and exceptional port conditions.... Including São Luís in the greatest economic expansion program in the world, that of China, will guarantee tremendous resources for infrastructure, commodity distribution centers, and privileged access to the other countries which make up the project.”

Porto do Itaqui President Ted Lago underscored that while the port is already a leading point of cargo shipments to China, making Maranhão into a major center on the BRI can bring South America as a whole into that global project.

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## Guyana’s President Tells Washington that Guyana Will Develop Its Oil

President Dr. Mohammed Irfaan Ali led a high-level delegation to Washington the week of July 25, during which he was lavished with praise for being a “strategic partner,” an “important player in energy security,” and “a leader in climate issues” at events at the Atlantic Council and the Woodrow Wilson Center. It was apparent, however, that Ali’s Washington hosts had an underlying agenda: how the U.S. and its allies might control the Caribbean Basin region, given recent massive oil and gas discoveries in Suri-

name, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana. Their underlying intent is to derail those nations’ efforts to “fast-track” production of their fossil fuels and fertilizers.

The State Department readout of President Ali’s meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized issues such as accountability, balancing development plans with climate demands, creating a sustainable energy future, etc. But at the Wilson Center event, moderator Thomas A. Shannon, former U.S. ambassador to Brazil, entertained questions suggesting that the newfound interest in Guyana might indeed be entirely related to its massive oil discoveries, although he also tried to emphasize climate change.

In the discussion, a very confident Ali stressed food and energy security as the pressing issues for the region. Although he gave too much credence to climate change “concerns,” Ali firmly stated that while it had been assumed by many that “COP26 was a death sentence for fossil fuels ... now there is the realization that it is necessary to take our countries forward.” He informed his audience that many Caribbean Community (CARICOM) leaders feel that the U.S. hasn’t taken the region seriously, preferring instead to maintain a “relationship of convenience.”

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## Chilean Farmers Dump Tomatoes, Protest High Input Costs

Tomato farmers in the northern city of Arica protested the high price of fertilizer and other inputs at a July 11 demonstration, in which they tossed their tomatoes all over Route 5 North

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highway, cutting off transit on the road for several hours. Producers told ADN radio that between what they have to pay for inputs and the low price they receive from merchants, it's impossible to earn a decent profit. So, they reasoned, they wouldn't be losing much by tossing the tomatoes onto the highway and blocking traffic.

This is one example of the generalized discontent among Chilean producers, which was spelled out in dramatic testimony given by several before the Senate Agriculture Commission May 16. One producer, Ricardo Rios, who has run a mid-sized cattle ranch and dairy farm for 30 years, likened the current agricultural crisis to a "category 9 earthquake" due not only to the high prices of fertilizer and other inputs, but also because of Chile's dependence on imported food, including the corn and maize needed for animal feed. The nation's food security is in jeopardy, he warned, adding that the problem isn't just national but global.

Lack of credit and high interest rates mean that many farmers are now producing half of what they once did, and they are being forced out of business. Rios said, "we're disappearing one by one," and it's very rare to find a farmer who isn't deeply in debt. Act now, he told the Senators, before Chile completely loses all food sovereignty.

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## **Bolivia and Argentina Expand Nuclear Energy Cooperation**

The directors of Argentina's National Nuclear Energy Commission (CNEA) and Bolivia's Nuclear Energy Agency (ABEN) met in Buenos Aires July 28, to sign a bilateral agreement to collaborate in the peaceful use of nuclear energy applied to scientific, technical, and academic activities. The Bolivian delegation also included Energy and Hydrocarbons Minister Franklin

Molina Ortiz, among other top government officials from both nations.

Argentina has played a critical role in helping Bolivia develop its nuclear energy capabilities, most recently in the field of nuclear medicine. During the agreement's signing ceremony, as reported by Bolivia's eju.TV, Molina stressed that:

"[The agreement strengthens] the work we've been jointly developing with our brother nation of Argentina, [under the direction of Presidents] Luis Arce and Alberto Fernández. This agreement will allow us to continue advancing in the development of science and technology."

The two governments will engage in inter-institutional activities in a variety of areas, including basic and applied research, developing human resources, and applying nuclear technology in such areas as health, agriculture and mining. The delegation visited the site where the prototype for the small CAREM25 modular reactor is being developed in the Lima district of Buenos Aires. They then traveled to Bariloche in the Patagonian province of Rio Negro, the home of some of Argentina's top scientific institutions.

Molina was optimistic that the new agreement will help Bolivia reach its goals, as it will soon begin applying nuclear technology—food irradiation—to the field of agricultural production. He underscored that one of his government's most important objectives is to "strengthen agriculture in order to increase production and thus achieve food sovereignty."

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## **Caribbean Nations to Develop Oil and Gas Reserves, Green Transition Be Damned**

The nations of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are engaged in a lively debate about their right to develop the very large oil reserves discovered in Suriname and Guyana, as

well as to expand the oil and gas capabilities of Trinidad and Tobago, already an exporter of oil, gas, and fertilizers. Barbados also exports smaller amounts of oil. Like other parts of the Global South, the Caribbean region has been slammed by high prices and shortages of fertilizer and fuel. While the U.S. and its Western allies demand that these nations embrace the transition to green energy in the name of protecting the environment, Caribbean governments say otherwise.

Quoted by Guyana's *Newsroom* July 4 at CARICOM's 43rd Meeting of the Heads of Government in Paramaribo, Suriname, the group's outgoing chairman, John Briceño, Prime Minister of Belize, made clear that the very large oil resources of Guyana and Suriname are needed by the wider Caribbean region.

Briceño addressed the hypocrisy and injustice involved in the green admonitions that his region must cut development to benefit the planet. He pointed out that the Caribbean nations actually release only a small volume of so-called harmful emissions, but yet they are being pressured to forego economic development in order to "slow the climate crisis." That isn't going to happen, he warned. Guyana should be allowed to exploit its resources, but do it in an environmentally sustainable way. "We should be allowed to exploit our resources responsibly for the benefit of our people," he stated.

At the Suriname Energy, Oil & Gas Summit in Paramaribo June 28-30, Dr. Vernon Paitoo, President of the National Energy Corp. of Trinidad and Tobago, emphasized that collaboration among Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago will be crucial in securing the region's energy security. In that way, he said pointedly, "we will not be at the mercy of other countries of the world." Suriname and Guyana have already agreed to jointly develop their natural gas resources.