

# Cuba says it will open its economy to majority-owned foreign investments

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Cuba has announced it will open its centralized Soviet-style economy to foreign investments with Cuban minority participation, a key change because, until now, Cuba has insisted on keeping a majority of the shares when foreign companies build hotels and other projects on the island.

"We are, no doubt, facing what is probably one of the most relevant structural changes in the Cuban economy, especially because it leaves Cubans without participation in a process that the regime wants to put under its control," said Cuban-Spanish economist Elias Amor Bravo.

Foreign companies will be able to have majority shares in businesses such as tourism, biotechnology, the pharmaceutical industry and in wholesale trade. According to the government, the new measure will eliminate the previous restrictions as part of "general adjustments to give more



The Iberostar Grand Packard Hotel in Havana is part of the global company's investments in Cuba.

flexibility" to investments.

Cuba will also allow "the participation of investment funds," a financial instrument that in the past has been demonized by the ruling Communist party. Companies with 100 percent foreign capital can be allowed to take part in technology development areas, such as the one that already exists in Havana.

Cuba's foreign trade minister, Rodrigo Malmierca, said the potential investment portfolio in Cuba is valued at \$12 billion.

However, the country's ability to attract foreign investment remains in question. The Mariel Special Development Zone, Cuba's flagship foreign investment project, has been a failure judging by

official figures. The government's forecast when it opened the zone at the end of 2013 was that it would raise at least \$2.5 billion annually and a total of \$12.5 billion in its first five years. At the end of that five-year period, the zone had raised less than 10 percent of its goal, a total of \$1.19 billion.

"Cuba, in foreign investment, does not amount to anything. Compared to its neighboring Dominican Republic, it doesn't come close. The Dominican Republic, even in times of pandemic and crisis, has received \$3 billion in investments," said Amor.

For Omar Everleny Pérez, an economist who worked for the Center for Studies of the Cuban Economy at the University of Havana, Malmierca's statements are positive.

He said the government has recognized its complex economic situation and that it's necessary "to change the existing mentality if it is to attract foreign capital"

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# Election leaves Venezuela in political standoff

BY SCOTT SMITH  
Associated Press

CARACAS, VENEZUELA

President Nicolas Maduro has cemented formal control over all major institutions of power in Venezuela with authorities reporting Monday that his political alliance easily won a majority in congress. Yet he remains a pariah to much of the world following an election critics called deeply undemocratic.

Maduro's domestic adversaries are scrambling to assert their own relevance after boycotting elections for the National Assembly that has been their stronghold for five years.

Opposition groups led by Juan Guaido launched a risky referendum on Monday, betting some of their prestige on hopes they hope can reignite a campaign to oust Maduro in a nation suffering unprecedented economic and political crises that have spurred millions to flee abroad.

And both sides are waiting to see what happens in Washington as President-elect Joe Biden takes office next month, replacing a Trump administration that piled sanctions atop criminal charges atop embargoes in so-far unsuccessful attempts to drive Maduro from power.

While Biden has referred to Maduro as "a dictator," he and aides have made few detailed statements about how they will approach the crisis in Venezuela.

"Both the Guaido interim government and the de facto Maduro regime have failed to deliver on their

promises and produce results," said Michael Shifter, president of the Washington-based Inter-American Dialogue. "The distrust is almost total, and with good reason."

Just 31% of Venezuelans eligible voters voted Sunday, according to Venezuelan electoral officials loyal to Maduro. Authorities said that his United Socialist Party of Venezuela and allied parties captured more than 67% of votes for seats in the National Assembly. Turnout for the previous congressional election in 2015 was more than double that percentage.

The number of overall seats won was not immediately clear.

"The results of the election show a discouraged, tired people, the vast majority doing everything possible to survive," Shifter said.

The U.S., Panama, Canada and Germany have condemned the election by Maduro's government following announcement of the results.

In a statement, European Union foreign ministers said Monday the vote "failed to comply with the minimum international standards for a credible process and to mobilize the Venezuelan people to participate."

More than 5 million people have fled the country in recent years, the world's largest migration after that of war-torn Syria. The International Monetary Fund projects a 25% decline this year in Venezuela's GDP, while hyperinflation has devoured its currency, the bolivar, now worth less than a millionth of a dollar on the free market.

# On Human Rights Day, U.S. sanctions ex-Haiti cop, two government officials in 2018 massacre

BY JACQUELINE CHARLES  
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Two former high-ranking government officials in Haitian President Jovenel Moise's administration and an ex-cop turned influential gang leader have been sanctioned by the Trump administration for their involvement in a 2018 Haiti massacre that left scores dead, homes torched and families in a low-income Port-au-Prince neighborhood displaced.

Jimmy Cherizier, known as "Barbecue," Fednel Monchery and Joseph Pierre Richard Duplan were sanctioned Thursday by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, the agency in charge of enforcing U.S. sanctions, for their role in the La Saline massacre. Monchery and Duplan were senior officials in Moise's administration when they allegedly spearheaded the killings and were only eventually fired after pressure from Haitian civil society.

The trio has been sanctioned under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States is using these sanctions along with the Department of State's 7031(c) visa restriction to promote accountability and deter human-rights abuses and corruption in Haiti and elsewhere.

"In total, the United States and the United Kingdom designated 37 actors in the past 48 hours in connection with corruption or serious human rights abuse," Pompeo said.

Responding to the news, U.S. Rep. Andy Levin, D-Mich., who has been concerned about the troubling human rights situation in Haiti and the lack of justice in the horrific killings, tweeted that the sanctions are "an important step on the road to accountability."

Treasury's announcement came on

International Human Rights Day, during which Haiti's alarming violence degrading human rights was also the focus of a 2 p.m. virtual hearing by the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

"As we recognize International Human Rights Day, the United States stands with innocent civilians around the globe who have been victims of violence and oppression," said U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Justin G. Muzinich.

The U.S. has been the object of harsh criticism by human rights defenders in Haiti. They have accused the U.S. of being indifferent to the ongoing deterioration of human rights in the country and the rise in criminality by armed gangs, some of which are said to be behind the kidnappings.

Last week, several Haitians showed their disgust by lying in the streets of the capital, blocking traffic and holding up placards criticizing the U.S.

But Thursday's announcement is significant, even if it comes two years after the massacre and a year after a United Nations investigation concluded that the two-day reign of terror in the La Saline neighborhood was condoned by the Haitian government. It signals not only the Trump administration's growing frustration with Haiti overall, but in particular with its dysfunctional judiciary.

That judiciary, the Treasury Department said in its statement, bolsters the country's armed gangs and insecurity problem and it "does not prosecute those responsible for attacks on civilians."

"These gangs, with the support of some Haitian politicians, repress political dissent in Port-au-Prince neighborhoods known to participate in anti-government demonstrations," the statement said. "In exchange for executing attacks designed to create instability and silence the

Port-au-Prince population's demands for improved living conditions, gangs receive money, political protection and enough firearms to reportedly make them better armed than the Haitian National Police."

The assertion was dismissed by Haiti's ambassador to the OAS, Bocchit Edmond, who told members of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that "there is political will to make the justice system more robust."

He also said that the government does not see La Saline victims as political partisans, but as citizens owed justice.

At least 185 Haitians have died this year in massacres or attacks by armed gangs in the metropolitan Port-au-Prince area, according to a report published Thursday by the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights. This includes 25 women and five minors, who lost their lives in armed attacks perpetrated by gangs. Also, at least 525 deaths have been registered on the streets of Port-au-Prince as a result of worsening violence.

"There have been unprecedented cases of human-rights violations," the non-governmental human rights organization said.

Haitians have for months been protesting against their dysfunctional judiciary. On Thursday, however, the focus in Port-au-Prince wasn't on corrupt judges but rather the alarming spike in violence that is sweeping the country.

"The people of Haiti are rising up, speaking out and on the national day celebrating human rights," human rights attorney Mario Joseph told the commission. Joseph's *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux* in Port-au-Prince and the Boston-based Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti both requested Thursday's human rights hearing. Joseph later asked that Haiti be put under oversight, requiring visits

to the country by the OAS commission.

Earlier in the day, thousands had taken to the streets of Port-au-Prince and the nearby city of Gonaives in a "Walk for Life" to denounce widespread violence. As they walked, they shouted, "We march for life," and called for an end to kidnappings. Others demanded the resignation of Moise, who has been ruling by decree since January and seems incapable of controlling the violence.

Organized by various human rights organizations in Haiti, the demonstrations were largely peaceful, although the Haiti National Police did fire tear gas at a gathering crowd in front of the ministry of justice on the Champ de Mars. Some protesters were also spotted throwing rocks at police and burned tires in defiance of a new presidential decree redefining tire burning and fiery barricades on public roads as terrorist acts punishable by a fine and years of imprisonment.

One of the scenes of burning tires came from the vicinity where a locally hired security agent who works at the U.S. Embassy was reported to be the latest victim of a kidnapping, snatched in the Turgeau neighborhood while on his way home. There were also unconfirmed reports on social media of additional kidnappings.

"The situation is dire," Joseph said. "We have a political crisis upon us and impunity has become general."

Joseph said the increasing violence, kidnappings and savage killings are taking a toll on the country's 11 million residents. He noted that in addition to La Saline there had been many other massacres and that this one in particular has brought back the darkest hours of the Duvalier family dictatorship.

"Haitians deserve justice," Joseph said. "La Saline was the victim of the horrors of the present regime. Civilians were massacred, both women and little girls were gang raped, many others were tortured and countless others were disappeared. This led to forced displacements of hundreds of thousands of families that were already living precariously."

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## Companies Relocating to South Florida Amid COVID-19

Companies, particularly from tax-burdened Northeastern states, are relocating or expanding their offices to South Florida amidst COVID-19. The surge is also bringing employees, who are now becoming permanent South Florida residents.

Billionaire Carl Icahn moved his headquarters from New York to Sunny Isles Beach in August 2020. New York-based global investment group Blackstone (215 employees), California-based tech firm ShiftPixy (50 employees), Chicago-based Balyasny Asset Management (up to 30 employees), Bahamas-based Adi Dassler Family Office (25 employees), Wealth management group Boston Private (20 employees) and Boston-based technology advisory Nucleus Research (15 employees) are some of the companies relocating or expanding to South Florida recently.

COVID-19 is just one reason why Northeastern companies and their respective employees are moving here.

South Florida has the weather, housing amenities, quality of life, a place to avoid the winter and a better tax structure.

In 2018, the Tax Cuts And Jobs Act was passed. The act limited itemized deductions on state, local, and property taxes to \$10,000. This was a big hit for New York area residents, where salaries, home prices and the mortgages that go with them can stretch into the millions.

In addition to lower taxes, the pandemic is another catalyst for Northeastern consumers. COVID put people who had been on the fence the last decade about moving to South Florida over the top and ready to commit.

According to real estate firm FCP and geospatial analytics group Orbital Insight, South Florida is the No. 4 top relocation destination for Americans who have moved during COVID.

South Florida luxury real estate is seeing the largest increase in sales. Miami single-family luxury (\$1-million-and-up) transactions jumped 122.1% year-over-year to 171 sales in October 2020. Miami existing condo luxury (\$1-million-and-up) sales increased 27% year-over-year to 80 transactions.

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