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SHELL TO REVEAL BUYER OF DR ASSETS

Shell will reveal the buyer of its 50pc stake in the Dominican Republic's sole oil refiner, Refidomsa, this week, a company official says. Negotiations are taking place with four interested parties, the official adds. Shell announced plans to sell its assets in the country in February. The company also operates 137 of the country's 615 service stations and several fuel storage and distribution depots. The government – joint owner of the refinery – has ruled out purchasing Shell's stake. Justice minister Radhames Jimenez, meanwhile, insists that the sale will not halt an investigation by the government's corruption prevention department, Depreco, into government claims that the company had defrauded the country of "tens of millions" of dollars. Shell denies allegations that it kept gasoline and diesel prices artificially high by altering invoices to increase the shipping cost of imported crude destined for the 35,000 b/d refinery.

- The Dominican Republic will be allowed to pay for the 50,000 b/d that it is importing from Venezuela under Caracas' PetroCaribe facility with beans and chicken, says Venezuelan Ambassador to Santo Domingo, Belisario Landis. The Dominican Republic produces no oil and imports crude to meet domestic demand of 160,000 b/d. Under PetroCaribe, Venezuela's state-owned energy company PdV is supplying Caribbean countries with just under 200,000 b/d under preferential payment terms.
- The Senate has approved the bill that will create the National Tourism Development Institute (INDETUR). The bill now passes to the Chamber of Deputies for review. The new office will be responsible for defining public policies for the sector, and for the planning and development of the country's tourist areas and their infrastructure. INDETUR will be made up of a board of directors that will include two representatives from the National Hotel and Restaurant Association (ASONAHORES) and one from the Dominican Tourism Real Estate Association (ADETI). INDETUR will be headed by Tourism Minister Felix Jimenez and Public Works Minister Freddy Perez. The National Tap Water Institute (INAPA) director will also sit on the board. Tourism generates US\$4bn every year.
- The government plans to spend RD\$53.5bn to build 25 hydroelectric dams, according to the National Hydraulic Resources Institute (INDRHI). The dams will be used for irrigation, drinking water and to generate electricity.
- Real estate tourism is booming in Dominican Republic, says the Dominican Association of Real Estate Tourism Companies (ADETI). Some US\$1.5bn is invested in real estate property developments in the country, ADETI President, Juan Bancalari. But he forecasts that the sector will attract a further US\$3bn over the three years.
- Haiti was Dominican Republic's third most important export market in 2006. Exports totalled US\$147.19m, up 18.80% growth on 2005. Exports of steel rods and wheat flour totalled US\$13.67m and US\$12.66m.
- In 2007, the Dominican Telephone Company (CODETEL) will invest US\$250m in new infrastructure, improvement of networks and the introduction of new services.
- Signing of a Free Trade Agreement between the Dominican Republic and Mexico is imminent, say Mexican officials.
- The north-western port of Manzanillo is falling apart, say users. Some 90% of all bananas leaving the country use this port facility. The Northwest Line Association of Banana Producers is warning that if shippers decide to send their vessels to either Puerto Plata or Santo Domingo, there would be serious economic consequences for banana producers. Each week between 180,000 and 200,000 boxes of bananas leave Manzanillo for markets in Europe and the US. In 2007, bananas could generate between US\$50 and US\$60m. The port is in urgent need of refurbishment. Several ships refused to dock at the port last year.

- Barrick Gold has discovered a new ore body at its Pueblo Viejo mine at Monte Oculito, between two open pits at the 30-year-old project in Dominican Republic. But the company has no plans to alter its mining schedule or plans as a result of the discovery.
- In 2006, Dominicans spent RD\$6bn in "macuteos" or small bribes, according to the National Study on the Cost of Corruption for Dominican Households carried out by Gallup and financed by USAID. "Macuteos" are commonly required from those seeking documentation to travel abroad, at a cost of RD\$2bn. Getting someone out of jail or avoiding jail time cost Dominicans RD\$842m and obtaining birth and death certificates cost RD\$341m in small bribes. The study also found that small bribes are required to obtain drinking water, acquire a passport or get a loan at the bank. Around 2.1% of a household's monthly salary is allotted to "macuteos", or RD\$2,856 per month for services that are supposedly free.
- The Supreme Court (SCJ) President Jorge Subero Isa is calling for the creation of a national anti-corruption prosecutor who would be irremovable and independent of the government.
- Tourism Minister Felix Jiménez will appear before the Chamber of Deputies on 30 August to explain his connection to a tourism project in Samaná and his relationship to business interests seeking to develop tourism projects in protected areas. The Minister has said that he will not let himself be "drowned like a toad in the river" when he's questioned by the Chamber and pledged that he will respond "to the sickly attacks of many deputies".
- The total population stands at 9.3m and will reach 9.5m by July of 2008, according to the National Population and Family Council (CONAPOFA).
- The Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC) has named Amable Aristy Castro as its candidate in the May 2008 presidential election. Mr Aristy Castro made headlines during his campaign after throwing money out of a helicopter to the poor.

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