

# Venezuela growing again

Business Guardian journalist Raphael John-Lall in Caracas:



Skyline and traffic jam at Las Mercedes, Caracas.





Workers at the Café Madrid plant arrange bags of coffee beans. PHOTO BY RAPHAEL JOHN-LALL

Guardian Media's freelance business reporter, Raphael John-Lall, visited Venezuela last week as part of a group of journalists from 50 countries who were invited by Venezuelan government. The journalists toured key non-energy businesses and participated in workshops and discussions about social and economic developments not only in Venezuela but the Global South..

The group of journalists stayed in the Las Mercedes region of Caracas, which is described there as Venezuela's Manhattan. Business seems to be booming in Las Mercedes with new malls, stores and car dealerships.

"Caracas looks clean and stable. Much work is being done to give Caracas a facelift, including the underground subway, which is well organised and cheap. Salaries are still low as the economy is smaller than it was 10 years ago. The next step would be continuing to grow the economy so Venezuelans can stay at home without needing to go to Trinidad or Brazil or Colombia or Miami," said John-Lall.

Venezuela's economic recovery will not only benefit its citizens but T&T and the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America.

That is the view of economist and former head of the Institute of International Relations at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Dr Anthony Gonzales who spoke to the Business Guardian about a series of workshops held in Venezuela last week.

According to the Office of International Communication of Venezuela's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the press tour aimed to create and articulate a multipolar world where the media from developing countries can tell their own stories.

Venezuela's economic diversification thrust comes as US oil company Chevron is set to restart crude shipments from its joint ventures in Venezuela under a renewed US Treasury sanctions waiver, CEO Mike Wirth confirmed last Friday.

Wirth stated that a "limited amount of oil" would be flowing to US refineries once more in August.

The oil executive added that the restart of oil drilling and export operations in Venezuela would have a limited short-term impact on Chevron's profits but would help the firm begin recouping debts.

Gonzales said the return of Chevron to Venezuela signals a change in US policy to the Nicolás Maduro government and in the future, it may even facilitate the granting of Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) licences for T&T to exploit Dragon and Cocuina gas fields.

"This would enhance natural gas supply in T&T and support more downstream petrochemical production. Chevron's return also implies that other European companies would be allowed to re-enter Venezuela, so foreign investment in oil and gas production would get a boost which would expand growth and employment in Venezuela"

Gonzales said stronger economic growth in Venezuela would mean more stability and fewer Venezuelans leaving the country for greener pastures elsewhere.

“Under these conditions, migration from Venezuela would decline. T&T therefore could expect less migrants in this scenario. Business with Venezuela should also increase as there would be more import demand for goods and services from T&T. On the whole, the T&T Government would seek to enhance its relations with Caracas and that should favour greater travel and investment between both countries.”

According to data from Venezuela’s Central Bank, the economy grew by 7.7 per cent in the first half of 2025 and the Government projects a nine per cent gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate by the end of 2025.

Two weeks ago, the Business Guardian reported that over 12,000 T&T nationals have visited Margarita in the last two years and there are plans to have locals visit Caracas for shopping and entertainment as was popular in the 1980s and 1990s.

### Diversification

Highlighting a transition from over-reliance on oil revenues and a move towards developing new sectors, Venezuelan authorities carried the international journalists on tours of different industrial and manufacturing plants during the course of the visit.

Venezuela now produces over 90 per cent of its own food and 70 per cent of its own medicine and drugs, according to Government statistics.

Even the Yutong buses that transported the international journalists are manufactured in Venezuela in a joint partnership with China. And the Dongfeng ambulances that accompanied the buses during the tour are also assembled in Venezuela in a joint venture with China.

The importance of local industry and production was highlighted when visiting international journalists toured the state-owned Café Madrid Coffee plant in the state of Carabobo in Venezuela.

Venezuela’s coffee production is now at a level where it satisfies domestic demand and Venezuela is now exporting coffee to foreign countries, according to Venezuelan officials who accompanied the journalists.

Coffee beans are sourced from various coffee growers, who have plantations in the mountainous regions of Venezuela. These coffee plantations are at an altitude of more than 1,000 meters above sea level, and this, according to the coffee growers, allows for the development of beans with intense flavours and aromas.

Following a rigorous process, the beans get into the Café Madrid plant, where they go through the various stages of production, resulting in the final product.

The plant has a capacity to store 400,000 kilogrammes of coffee beans.

The next step is the roasting process, one of the most important in producing quality coffee.

The Café Madrid coffee brand has established a strong position in the international market, being exported to several countries.

That is why quality control and packaging are fundamental steps of the process.

Workers at the coffee processor are on three 8-hour shifts, productivity here is optimum.

More than 58,000 coffee growers cultivate coffee beans in 21 of Venezuela's 23 states.

International journalists were also given a tour of one of Venezuela's major rum producers.

Santa Teresa 1796 is a Venezuelan rum produced at the Hacienda Santa Teresa in the Aragua Valley, founded in 1796. This can be described as Venezuela's equivalent of T&T's Angostura based in Laventille.

Here, Venezuelan authorities showed how alcohol is produced and then exported globally.

Official figures reveal that in the first four months of 2025 alone, Venezuela's non-oil exports increased by 87.66 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Among the most notable products is rum, with more than two million cases exported to over 100 countries, representing three per cent of the country's GDP.

Commenting on Venezuela's attempts to move away from its over reliance on oil, Gonzales said that this will mean more business opportunities for T&T.

## Tariffs

Last Thursday, US President Donald Trump set a 15 per cent tariff on imports from T&T under a new executive order titled "Further Modifying the Reciprocal Tariff Rates."

Guyana and Venezuela also face a 15 per cent tariff. The announcement by the US was part of a sweeping update to the U.S. tariff schedule affecting 69 trading partners worldwide.

When asked if these tariffs show that T&T and the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America are now experiencing what Venezuela has survived for many years, Gonzales said tariffs and sanctions are two different things.

"Venezuela suffers from US sanctions that seek to restrict revenue to PDVSA and the Maduro Government. These sanctions impact negatively on foreign investment going to Venezuela as well as exports from Venezuela, particularly in the energy sector.

The imposition of tariffs is different.

In one way or another, the US is raising tariffs on all its trading partners making it more difficult for them to export to the US.

"At the same time, the US is trying to lower tariffs and other trade barriers to its exports to these countries. Venezuela is also like T&T, part of these higher tariffs by the US."