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By Karina **MARRÓN**

VARADERO.- With the participation of over 6,000 professionals from 54 countries and the signature of business agreements and memorandums of understanding, the 40th edition of the International Tourism Fair (FITCuba 2022) was the perfect occasion to relaunch the Cuban tourism industry.

After two years of mandatory recess because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the event— held from May 3 to 7 at the Varadero Beach resort — showed Cuba's possibilities in the light of the recovery of the sector, in the presence of over 250 travel agencies and tour operators, including 16 new agencies from France, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Bolivia and Chile.

Some of the most outstanding results included the alliance between the Canadian Blue Diamond Resorts hotel chain and the Cuban Gran Caribe group to relaunch the Cayo Largo del Sur destination through a contract that will allow the foreign company to manage all the hotel and extra-hotel facilities located in that area.

The signing of a memorandum of understanding aimed at strengthening relations between the Ministries of Tourism of Cuba and Argentina and the negotiation of agreements or letters of intent between national and foreign companies also stood out.

The Fair included the presentation of the new promotional campaign of the Cuban destination, 'Cuba Única' (Cuba



Fit 2022 showed Cuba's possibilities in the light of the recovery of the sector. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Unique), which appeals to the island's peculiarities, beyond its natural beauty and safety, to focus on the human values of its people, as stated by Tourism Minister Juan Carlos García.

As part of this strategy, new areas for development were revealed, including the Cruz, Paredón and Romano keys — in the central-northern part of the archipelago — and the Ramón de Antilla peninsula — in the eastern province of

Holguín. New products were also presented, such as the Cigar Route.

In the first four months of the present year, Cuba received over 450,000 international visitors, a figure that did not meet the predictions but is higher than that of 2021 in the same period, and gives rise to optimism about the recovery.

In this regard, Cuban Prime Minister Manuel Marrero highlighted that the process might not be going as fast as we want but there is confidence that we are moving towards the normal situation the economy of the country needs.

He also affirmed that the island will continue to resist and develop, and stressed the results reached in the control of COVID-19 and the vaccination of the Cuban population, which allows saying today that Cuba is a safe destination.

However, the tourism industry has challenges ahead, such as the commercialization of 77,809 rooms available, the improvement of services and the increase of quality, in addition to interconnection between the different national destinations.

Other challenges include to continue increasing technological facilities in view of access to the Internet, as well as making arrangements more efficient and to allow clients' interaction in all the hotel facilities, for offers and activities to be known.

The 41st edition of FITCuba will take place in Havana from May 2 to 5, 2023 and will be dedicated to the Cuban cultural heritage.

Tourist Development in Sancti Spíritus

By Raúl **GARCÍA**

SANCTI SPÍRITUS.-The Trinidad and Valle de los Ingenios tourist resorts, World Heritage sites that are highly visited by foreign tourists, continue making progress in the central province of Cuba.

The region's tourism representative Reinier Rendón, told **The Havana Reporter** that there is great demand in the world for the preservation of its buildings, museums and cultural traditions, as well as for the historical values the valley treasures — one of the largest sugarcane producing areas in the colonial period.

After a halt of the tourist activity because of the COVID-19 pandemic — a two-year period in which investment and maintenance was conducted in the facilities — a rebirth is appreciated in the area by both national and foreign visitors, the official noted.

Rendón also highlighted that the presence of foreign vacationers in Trinidad, the third village founded in Cuba by the Spaniards (in 1514),

gradually increases, with about 900 tourists per day on average — a figure that must exceed one thousand in the next high tourist season.

At present, work continues in the final construction of the Meliá Trinidad Península Hotel, with 400 rooms — the largest and most modern facility of its type in Sancti Spíritus, under the management of the Spanish Meliá Hotels International chain, the expert commented.

This big complex is being built at the María Aguilar beach area, in the Ancón Peninsula, where the Trinidad del Mar, Ancón and Costasur hotels are located, with capacity for 650 people.

Trinidad is a cultural destination par excellence due to its rich traditions, music and theater with strong African roots, a legacy of the slaves brought to Cuba by the Spaniards to cultivate sugar cane in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The Topes de Collantes resort, also located in the province, likewise attracts visitors for its rich nature, paths, springs and streams, with beautiful waterfalls, valleys, and flora and fauna, unique of this central part of Cuba.



Valle de los Ingenios tourist resorts, World Heritage sites. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

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Pain and the Strength of a People

By Claudia **GONZÁLEZ**

HAVANA.- The naked structure in the center of Old Havana overwhelms the passerby in the vicinity of the Saratoga Hotel, victim of an explosion that shocked Cuba and united the country in the desire to save.

Last May 6, at about 11:00 hours, a deafening noise, a cloud of smoke and glasses scattered everywhere, were the first signs of the tragedy that happened in what until then seemed to be a peaceful day in that municipality of Havana.

Witnesses to the disaster talked to The Havana Reporter about the profound shock, and agreed to say that the people immediately started running willing to help.

In Orlando Ríos' opinion, "it was terrifying, we did not know what was happening," while other testimonies talk about the screams that boomed in the Prado and Dragones streets.

"The Saratoga Hotel exploded," said messages in virtual platforms; there was even fear that a sabotage could have been the cause.

"It was neither a bomb nor an attack, it is a regrettable accident," stated Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who immediately arrived at the scene of the accident accompanied by other authorities of the Cuban Communist Party and the Government.

A few minutes after the disaster, which was apparently caused by a gas leak, the police cordoned off the place and several fire trucks rushed to the scene to start the search and rescue operations, which were conducted day and night until the last person reported as missing was found, on May 12.

The Integrated Medical Emergency System mobilized ambulances and hospitals, while the health staff was ready to help patients, with the resources needed to face the emergency.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel also arrived at those centers to know about the state of the injured. "Be brave, save our people," the president told doctors and nurses.

The Saratoga blast was so strong that it caused damages to 17 adjacent buildings, including the Concepción Arenal primary school, residential buildings, the temple of the El Calvario Baptist Church, the seat of the Yoruba Association and the Martí Theater.

The people whose houses were affected were immediately taken to safe places and the schoolchildren were evacuated, while contact was established with their families.

After the explosion, the head of the Cuban State stressed that the priority of the country was to attend the victims, their relatives, hospitalized people and the houses that had collapsed, in addition to continue with the investigation about the causes of the accident and the search and rescue of survivors.

For over 140 hours nonstop, forces of the search and rescue team worked in the area of the hotel, which suffered serious damages in about 90 percent of its premises and whose structure ran the risk of collapsing.

Specialized forces managed to rescue alive from the debris two dogs that were the pets of neighbors from the building adjacent to the hotel; however, the people found had no vital signs.

Once the search among the debris finished, the Cuban government decreed official mourning "on the occasion of the deep sorrow of our people at the regrettable accident," stated the President.

A mass at the Havana Cathedral and a vigil at Parque de la Fraternidad, near the wreckage hotel, rendered tribute to the victims.

Construction Minister René Mesa informed about the start of actions in those facilities that could be restored, as well as the excavation process in the area chosen to build residential buildings in Old Havana for the people affected by the explosion.

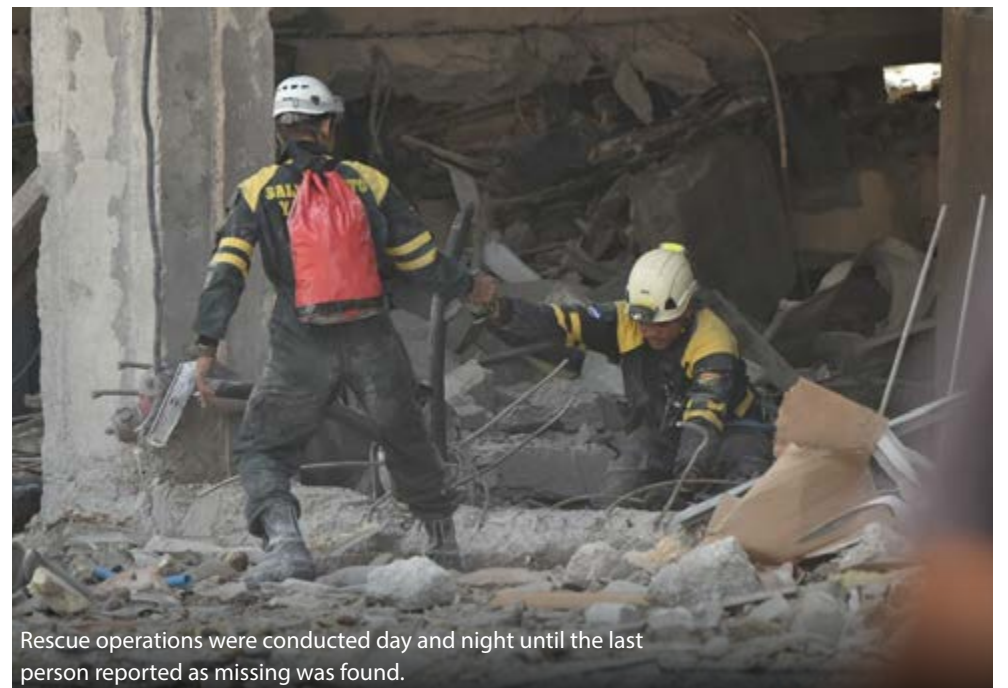
Up to the present, the accident has left 100 people injured and 46 dead, several of them hotel workers, in addition to a pregnant woman, four children and adolescents and a woman of Spanish nationality.



Thousands of people turned out to donate blood. PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.

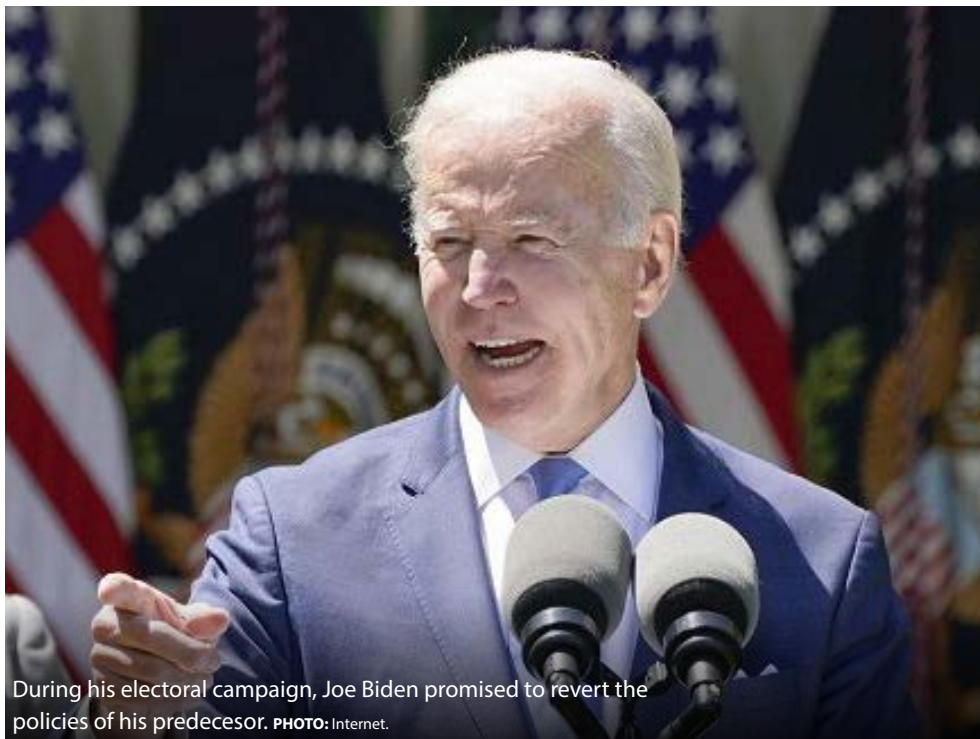


Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, immediately arrived at the scene of the accident. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.



Rescue operations were conducted day and night until the last person reported as missing was found.

Limited and Insufficient Measures



During his electoral campaign, Joe Biden promised to revert the policies of his predecessor. PHOTO: Internet.

By Deisy **FRANCIS**

HAVANA.- The Government of the United States announced on May 16th the easing of some measures enforced on Cuba since the Donald Trump (2017-2021) era, a step in the right direction but insufficient because, in essence, they do not modify the blockade imposed on the island for over 60 years.

According to a statement issued by the State Department, the decision, taken about one year and four months after Joe Biden took office as President of the US includes the elimination of restrictions on remittances, resumption of the so-called 'people to people' travels and the family reunification programs, all suspended by Trump.

Regular and charter flights to the Cuban provinces will also be reestablished; consular services at the Havana embassy will be expanded, among other provisions directed to "increase support for the Cuban people (...) confronting an unprecedented humanitarian crisis," caused precisely by the unilateral economic siege that they forget to mention. Trump suspended visa processes, limited remittances, restricted travels and flights, among the 243 additional measures adopted during his term of office, which strengthened the blockade on the island, a line of action the current occupant of the Oval Office has maintained until now.

In the opinion of activist Carlos Lazo, coordinator of the solidary Bridges of Love project, the government of Biden took the first of many steps that will lead to the lifting of a policy that tries to asphyxiate the Cuban people.

In statements to **The Havana Reporter**, the Cuban-American professor who lives in Seattle said to be "moderately happy" with

the announcement of those provisions, but we will have to wait "to see how they are implemented." The White House did not explain how nor when the regulations for their practical implementation would enter into force.

Lazo described the decision as positive and commented that this could be the beginning of the path towards "the normalization of relations" between both countries.

He also recalled that the provisions announced endorse, in general, the requests Bridges of Love has made, demanding the resumption of flights to the Cuban provinces, the right to travel and the reopening of consular services at the United States embassy in Havana.

They have also demanded reopening of remittances and the family reunification program.

"But we have to be clear that this should be the first of many steps that lead to the lifting of all sanctions on the Cuban people, to the lifting of the blockade," he stressed.

A statement issued by the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the measures announced respond to "fair demands that have been ignored by the Government of the United States, at a high cost for our people."

The statement added that, by taking these limited steps, the State Department uses an openly hostile language, full of traditional defamations and new fallacies, in fashion in recent months, a sign that the objectives of the U.S. policy against Cuba have not changed, nor their main tools.

During his electoral campaign, Joe Biden, the then presidential candidate, promised to revert the policies of his predecessor to avoid more suffering – he said – to the Cuban families. However, until now, the President has maintained a stance that is consistent with that of Donald Trump and adopted more sanctions against Cuba.

Summit of the Americas Leaves Important Topics Out

By THR **EDITORIAL STAFF**

HAVANA.-The IX Summit of the Americas, whose preparations continue in the United States, will not include nor will respond to key topics of the region, affirmed Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío.

In statements issued in the capital, the official commented that the meeting, to be held this month, will not analyze issues such as racism, women's rights and marginalization.

Debate on inequality to access health services will not be included in the agenda either, nor the impact of coercive measures against the nations, the diplomat added.

According to Washington's official stance, no one has been invited yet to the meeting scheduled in the city of Los Angeles, but there is intention of excluding Cuba from the summit, the Deputy Foreign Minister indicated.

Cuba's potential exclusion, in addition to that of Venezuela and Nicaragua, caused discontent and made several governments of the region announce their decision to be absent from the meeting if the host country insists on that plan.

I hope President Joe Biden corrects himself and invites everyone to the Summit of the Americas, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obador recently said.

"If a country is not able to guarantee everyone's participation, it should not assume the commitment of holding a summit in its territory," Fernández de Cossío stressed at the Mesa Redonda television program.

The United States maintains a hostile policy directed at altering the socio-

economic order, isolating the island in the international arena and promoting a constant campaign of discredit, said the official.

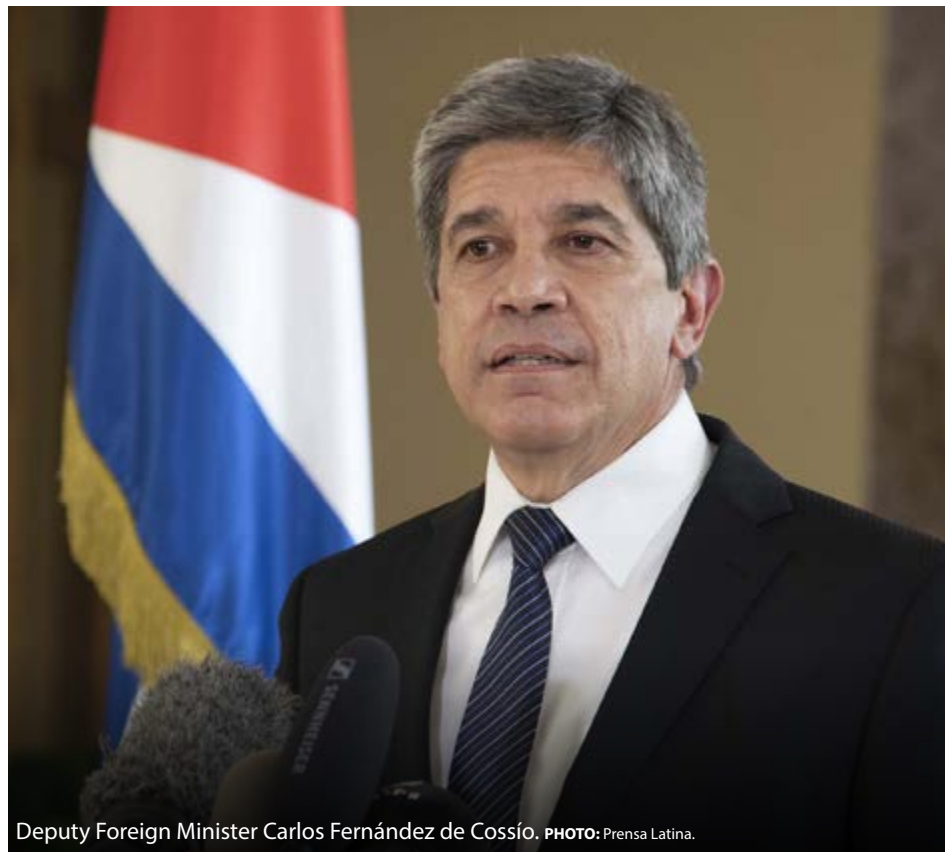
For his part, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez condemned once again the United States' intentions of excluding the island from the IX Summit of the Americas.

In his Twitter account, the top representative of Cuba's diplomacy denounced that Washington is trying to justify that decision, which he described as arrogant, with last-minute deceptions and maneuvers. Those actions are a step backward in the hemisphere's relations, he affirmed.

Rodríguez had recently denounced Cuba's exclusion, by Washington, from the preparation of the forum, to be held from June 6 to 10 in Los Angeles, as well as the pressures exerted on neighboring governments that oppose such stance.

In addition, the Cuban Foreign Ministry indicated that the U.S. government denied the granting of visas to the Cuban civil society delegation that was to participate in the Summit of the Peoples for Democracy, to be held simultaneously.

About 23 Cuban people, including renowned scientists, artists, sportspersons and journalists, were expected to participate in the event. The organizers stated their indignation for such a decision and urged to sign a complaint for the United States to revert this measure, which they considered an insult to the necessary dialogue and to normalization of relations between both peoples.



Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Vaccination against SARS-CoV-2 Continues



About 1.8 million children from 2 to 11 years old have already been immunized. PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.

By Ana Laura **ARBESÚ**

HAVANA.- The Cuban scientific community is conducting several clinical trials for vaccination against COVID-19 in children under the age of 2, a group that has not been inoculated and represents three percent of the population.

About 1.8 million children from 2 to 11 years old have already been immunized, and the results attained in the administration of vaccines in this age group show the security of those injectable medication. Their power, the immune response, the T-cell response, long-duration immunity and memory induction, are other results of the vaccines, said Research Director at the Finlay Institute of Vaccines (IFV), Dagmar García, in an interview.

The strategy to be followed in children under the age of 2, who are also administered other vaccines, is focused on three groups: cero to six months old; six to eleven months, and 12 to 24 months.

Babies who are less than six months old have to be protected through mothers' vaccination and breastfeeding, as they are born with levels of antibodies that are similar to that of their vaccinated mothers, who were administered the Abdala vaccine, produced by the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB).

The new clinical trial in this age group, called Soberana Chiquitines, will be conducted in children from one to two years old, who will be administered the Soberana 02 and Soberana Plus vaccines, produced by IFV. The study will be conducted at the central province of Cienfuegos.

In addition, the Soberana Futuro trial will also be conducted, with children from seven to 11 months, the specialist added. CIGB also works on a vaccination strategy

against COVID-19 in children under the age of two with the Abdala vaccine, at the eastern province of Camagüey, explained Clinical Research Director, Verena Mucio. A plan is drawn up to immunize babies from zero to 24 months old.

At the same time, work is conducted in the design of a research in babies from six to 11 months to evaluate the vaccine's safety, immunogenicity and effect.

The strategy also includes pregnant women, who vaccinate their babies through passive immunity transfer, and newborns are then evaluated, the official added.

This study, called Espirta, will be conducted in four hospitals of Havana, while the second research, in children from six to 11 months, will take place in eight entities of the capital city.

OTHER BOOSTERS

A second booster against COVID-19 will soon be administered in Cuba to groups of risk and people over the age of 60, in addition to immunocompromised people, National Director of Sciences and Technological Innovation at the Ministry of Public Health, Ileana Morales, explained. A first booster will also be administered to adolescents and youngsters from 12 to 18 years, six months after the administration of the Abdala vaccination scheme, a product developed by CIGB.

With over seven million booster doses administered in a nation of about 11,150,000 inhabitants, a study on the duration of the immune response is also foreseen, Morales highlighted.

Several premises endorse Cuba's vaccination strategy against COVID-19, a process that has been gradually conducted through clinical trials and intervention studies, with products created and developed in the country and endorsed by a sanitary system, the official commented.

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Over seven million booster doses administered in a nation of about 11,150,000 inhabitants.

Mayo Teatral: A Sensitive Universe on the Stage



El Gallo de La Habana 2022 award to Argentinean playwright Mauricio Kartun, for his prolific career as a creator and a teacher. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

By Yanisbel **PEÑA**

HAVANA.- A new edition of the Mayo Teatral Latin American and Caribbean Theater Season was held in the Cuban capital after two years of inactivity, to the pleasure of stage art lovers. Held at difficult times, it is worthwhile

highlighting the role of Casa de las Américas Cultural Institution as organizer of the event. Proposals of great value and a varied participation of artists were seen on the Cuban theaters, a sign of the paths this discipline has followed in the continent. The event was attended by artists and groups from Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador,

Peru, the Dominican Republic and Cuba, thus ratifying the importance Mayo Teatral and Casa de las Américas have – the latter, an institution of reference in the defense of the continent's cultural and artistic values. In different premises of Havana and other cities of the country, the audience enjoyed works such as *Oficio de Isla* (Island Trade), based on the text *Tengo una hija en Harvard* (I have a daughter in Harvard), by writer and filmmaker Arturo Sotto, and *Balada del pobre BB* (Ballad of poor BB), by the Cuban Impulso Teatro group. Other works included *La flor de la Chukirawa* (The Chukirawa flower), by the Ecuadorian Contrael viento Teatro group, and *Memoria de pichón* (Chick's memory), a unipersonal by Costa Rican actor and director Andy Gamboa. Other plays on showing included works for the children audience, such as *Platero y yo* (Platero and me), by Teatro Guloya (Dominican Republic), and *Todo está cantando en la vida* (Everything is singing in life), a recital of affection dedicated to Teresita Fernández, by Teatro de Las Estaciones, from the Matanzas province.

Mayo Teatral also showed the sensibility of those who consider art a way to heal the soul, and suspended its activities for two days due to the national mourning decreed in honor of the victims of the Saratoga hotel accident. "The theater stands out as a space of personal and social debate and humanistic affirmation," said director and general curator of the Mayo Teatral Latin American and Caribbean Theater Season, Vivian Martínez Tabares, on the solidary decision of playwrights, directors and actors. This 11th edition of the event also included workshops, conferences and artistic expression sessions, which were highly welcomed by professionals of the sector and amateur artists. One of the most outstanding activities of the event included the granting of the El Gallo de La Habana 2022 award to Argentinean playwright Mauricio Kartun, for his prolific career as a creator and a teacher. The award, instituted by Casa de las Américas in 1996, acknowledges theater groups, personalities, publications or stage events that contribute to the Latin American and Caribbean theater.

A successful Havana International Book Fair

By Claudia **MADEN**

HAVANA.- The 30th Havana International Book Fair kicked off with typical music from Mexico, guest of honor at Cuba's largest literary event, which brought the country closer to the culture and literature of that sister nation.

After stating her appreciation for the warm welcome received in Cuba, Mexico's Secretary of Culture, Alejandra Frausto, commented that it is the people what matters the most to the governments of Cuba and Mexico, and that culture is at the core of both nations, interwoven by common hopes and aspirations.

The secretary extended special greetings of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López, who recently visited Cuba. The official added that both Latin American nations have maintained bilateral relations for over 120 years and recalled, in the field of culture, the presence of Cuba in the Cervantino Festival, in addition to the medical solidarity the island provided to Mexico to face the pandemic of COVID-19. The artistic proposal of the guest country of honor was headed by the Ballet Amalia Hernández's Mariachi Ballet,

bolero singer Eugenia León and the children's group Semilleros Creativos, in addition to the Mexican National Theater Company. The members of this delegation were highly welcomed by the national audience.

The Book Fair included the opening, in Cuba, of a bookshop of the Mexican Economic Culture Fund, an over 80-year old entity headed by writer and intellectual Paco Ignacio Taibo II that will allow bringing important collections to Cuba, such as *Vientos del pueblo*.

The relationship between the island and Mexico has always been frank and open, we are united by dignity, resistance, love and respect for culture, acknowledged the official in reference to the Cuba-Mexico Friendship exhibition, which was held at the Palacio del Segundo Cabo and reflected in 80 snapshots how the roots of brotherhood and cooperation have evolved.

Outstanding intellectuals such as Mario Bellatin, Natalia Toledo, José Gordón, Zel Cabrera, Horacio Porcayo, Ricardo Peláez and Eliza Ramírez came to Havana to offer their works, which are a narration of Mexico's historical-cultural realities and challenges through fiction, myths and indigenous stories.



Cuba's largest literary festival welcomed foreign guests from several nations. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



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Hunger in Africa

By María Julia **MAYORAL**

LUANDA.- The persistent deficit of food for millions of people in Africa could be considered a more powerful and deadly scourge than the publicized pandemic of COVID-19, judging by the facts.

At the beginning of 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) affirmed that at least 160,000 people living in Africa have died because of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, the agent responsible for the disease, while the European Union estimated a higher figure, of approximately 231,000. In any case, most of the international reports doubt the reliability of the official data on COVID-19 in the so-called black continent, as not few states lack a functional civil registry or reliable statistics in relation to births, deaths and the origin of these.

New data released by WHO on May 2022 estimated that the world death toll as a result of COVID-19, either directly or indirectly, had risen to 14.9 million people from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021 (with a potential margin of 13.3 to 16.6 million people).

Without minimizing the importance of this serious issue, it is worthwhile noticing that every 24 hours, about 24,000 people die in the world because of hunger or its related causes, which represents 16 percent of the daily deaths, according to calculations made by the United Nations (UN).

Last April 21, the Save the Children humanitarian entity warned that 16 million individuals were at risk of dying because of famine in three East African countries – Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia – due to the impact of drought.

According to the analysis, the unilateral punitive measures imposed on Russia by the United States, the European Union and other countries driven by Washington will contribute in increasing the prices of food, which could worsen the crisis that this part of the African continent faces.

Five UN bodies predicted in 2021 the worsening of challenges in a report on the state of food insecurity in the world (SOFI).

"This is the highest peak of hunger and chronic malnutrition we have found," said chief economist of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Máximo Torero Cullen.

The sharper increase happened in Africa, where the scourge affects 21 percent of the population – more than twice than that of any other area of the planet, according to SOFI 2021.

The ravages are even higher if those who did not access a healthy diet are added, noted the study, whose predictions for the coming years are not encouraging either: about 660 million people will still face food insecurity by the end of this decade.

According to Torero Cullen, "if we add today all the world production in terms of calories, we would have to feed the

world. If you want to see if we satisfy a vegetarian diet, we almost have what we need. It is not a problem of higher production, but of distribution of what we have. And that is linked to inequality," he said.

In spite of its rich natural resources and its unemployed population, the African continent spends at least 50 billion dollars every year in respect of food import, which could be locally produced, stated Angolan Josefa Sacko, African Union (AU) Commissioner.

According to the agriculturist, if the funds the governments channel for such purchases were directed to support local production, small farmers' incomes would certainly increase, and thus food self-sufficiency.



Every 24 hours, about 24,000 people die in the world because of hunger. PHOTO: Internet.

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Argentinean Masetti and other Cuban and Latin-American journalists founded "the agency that was needed". PHOTO: Prensa Latina

Prensa Latina: 63 years of achievements and challenges

By Jorge LUNA

HAVANA.- Prensa Latina news agency is celebrating, amid achievements and challenges, 63 years of uninterrupted service, in which several generations of journalists defended with their own voice the truth about Latin America and beyond.

Against all odds, the Cuban Revolution's new born news agency opened its first offices in the region in 1959 and grew quickly, competing with the information monopoly of US agencies, Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI).

Its founders, Argentinean Jorge Ricardo Masetti and other Cuban and Latin-American journalists, described their feat as that of "the agency that was needed", because it would have to confront an enormously negative information universe.

They would have to avoid great technological, financial and journalistic obstacles, perhaps similar to those which today are being resisted and defeated by the agency's workers in Havana, its main headquarters, and several of its almost 35 correspondents worldwide.

Since its creation (June 16th, 1959), the agency -which is considered the region's first alternative news outlet- was able to resist censorship of its news items in Latin-American media and the harassment of its reporters in several countries.

On that same date, officials in the US State Department predicted that the new news agency could only survive a month and today, 63 years later, the present US government continues to hinder its journalistic work, within the framework of the economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba, intensified by Washington in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Now converted into a multimedia hub, with several platforms and services, Prensa Latina's readers prefer its message

on regional and international events, based on Masetti's reasoning: "we are objective, but not impartial, because -he said- one cannot be impartial between good and evil". This is verified by the high impact of 350 daily news items, which are even quoted as references by several Western agencies.

That original, Cuban, Latin-American, Third World message is present not only in its 24-hour transmission (www.prensa-latina.cu), but also in some 20 Publications, its social networks, and its radio and television services.

In spite of this recognition, the US insists on hindering the agency's normal functioning and is presently delaying the visas to its correspondents accredited in both Washington and the UN Headquarters in New York, as denounced by the region's press organizations for violating basic journalistic norms in international institutions.

The first attack on Prensa Latina -according to several of the agency's ex-correspondents in the United States- took place in 1960, when its office (originally based in Washington) had to be moved to the UN building, in New York, due to the harassment of its journalists and the arrest of its Chief-Correspondent, Francisco V. Portela, by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

There, the Prensa Latina personnel, were for many years limited to move within 25 miles of Columbus Circle, are only permitted to report on issues related to the UN.

Likewise, visas granted so far to Prensa Latina's correspondents in the UN only allow one entrance to US territory and, each time they leave the country temporarily, they must request entry permission again, a process which always takes several months.

On one occasion, the US State Department denied entrance visas to two Prensa Latina correspondents accredited in the UN, an incident which was later rectified due to protests registered at the UN Headquarters and in several countries.

Remembering early warnings from Masetti in that Prensa Latina's publishing the truth was its main "crime and sin", according to Washington and the Inter-American Press Society (SIP), its workers, mostly young professionals, consider that this agency is, today, more necessary than ever before.



Relations Grow Stronger

By THR **EDITORIAL STAFF**

HAVANA.- Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's recent visit to Cuba strengthened the historic ties between both countries and consolidated a new work stage, as stated in a joint declaration President Miguel Díaz-Canel signed together with his counterpart.

The documents signed at Havana's Revolution Palace, highlights the interest both governments have in fostering development in the fields of education, culture, trade and economy.

It also ratifies cooperation to face the challenges imposed by the pandemic of COVID-19 and other disasters or epidemics.

In the framework of this visit, Cuban Health Minister José Ángel Portal and Mexican Health Secretary Jorge Carlos Alcocer signed an agreement in the training of human resources and assistance in different health areas.

The friendship bonds between both nations were also ratified during Díaz-Canel and López Obrador's official talks, in which the head of the Cuban State thanked the historic support Mexico has given in the fight in favor of the lifting of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States.

Prior to the official talks, the Mexican president laid a floral wreath at the José Martí Memorial, in Revolution Square, accompanied by Cuban Vice-President Salvador Valdés Mesa, a representation of the diplomatic corps accredited to Cuba and authorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

López Obrador was awarded with the José Martí Order, the country's highest distinction. In his appreciation speech, he stated that "since far-off times, Cuba and Mexico, because of their geographical proximity, migration, language,



Presidents of Cuba and Mexico signed a joint declaration. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

music, sport, culture, idiosyncrasy (...) have maintained authentic relations of fraternity."

He also recalled the Cubans who fought in the Mexican wars during the U.S. and French invasions, and the Mexican people who fought in Cuba for the country's liberation.

He stressed that Mexico was the first country to support Cuba's independence and recognize Carlos Manuel de Céspedes as the first president in arms and the Father of the Homeland.

Similarly, López Obrador referred to José Martí's stay in Mexico (1875-1877) and to the legacy of the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, while ratifying rejection to the blockade imposed by the United States.

On his return to Mexico, he stressed during a press conference that he would not attend the Summit of the

Americas summoned by U.S. President Joe Biden if Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua are excluded.

How is it possible to have a meeting of the Americas without everyone?, asked the Mexican president, who stated that it is impossible to adopt agreements on integration in the absence of countries of the region, and to attain the indispensable regional unity which Biden's exclusive policy prevents.

When evaluating his recent tour of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize and Cuba, López Obrador reiterated his condemnation of the exclusion of the Cuban government, headed by Miguel Díaz-Canel, whom he described as a capable, charismatic and highly humane leader.

"My appreciation to the generous, solidary and exemplary people of Cuba. I have never bet nor I will bet on the failure of the Cuban Revolution," he affirmed.

Solidarity in Mexico

By Luis Manuel **ARCE**

CIUDAD DE MÉXICO.- The brotherhood of Mexico And Cuba, which defies time and vicissitudes like reefs defy the blow of the waves, was once again made manifest in Xalapa, Veracruz, at the XXVI Meeting of the Mexican Movement of Solidarity with the island.

The event, which brought 524 people from 22 federal states together, was not held in-person the past two years due to the pandemic.

The attendance far exceeded the expectations which, according to its organizers, largely owed to the announced participation of Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, one of the five prisoners of the empire, and Aleida Guevara, Che's daughter.

The mass attendance and interest shown by all the delegates that asked permission to speak responded to the fact that there was a lot to talk about, important things to tell, plans to arrange and goals to achieve, Gerardo, who is also the national coordinator of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), said in one of his addresses.

The Final Declaration contains concerns, denunciations against the U.S. government, expressions of support for the people of Commander-in-chief Fidel Castro, and willingness to do a lot more in favor of Cuba-Mexico friendship and affection.

Likewise, it stresses the need to repeatedly urge the White House to lift the blockade once and for all and return to Cuba the appropriated territories in Guantánamo, where the U.S. naval base is located.

The participants praised President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's stances as denouncing the blockade and demanding that Cuba is not excluded from the Summit of the Americas that President Joe Biden is organizing for June in Los Angeles.

The large Cuban delegation was headed by ambassador Marcos Rodríguez and, in addition to Gerardo and Aleida, it also consisted of the first vice president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), Noemí Rabasa, the president of the Jose Martí Youth Movement of Cuba, Yusuam Palacios Ortega, and Omar Valiño Cedré, director of the José Martí National Library, among others.

One of the most exciting moments was the friendly hug between two important heroes for Cuba, Gerardo and Antonio del Conde, whom Fidel baptized as Cuate. He made the arrangements to get the Granma Yacht, which left the Tuxpan River in Veracruz, setting course for Cuban coasts with 82 expeditionary soldiers onboard to begin the necessary war in the Sierra Maestra mountain range.

According to the participants, the meeting was a strong sign of the solidarity and friendship between Mexico and Cuba.

The delegates were deeply sorry for the losses left by the accidental explosion caused by a gas leak at Hotel Saratoga in Havana last May 6, and reiterated their will to increase the aid and support for Cuba.



The XXVI Meeting of the Mexican Movement of Solidarity with Cuba was held in Xalapa, Veracruz. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

New Laws and Economic Regulations Approved

By José Armando **FERNÁNDEZ**

HAVANA.- The fifth extraordinary session of the National Assembly of the Peoples Power made progress in the legislative timeline and announced new economic measures. The legislative body was summoned in a difficult context for the national economy, which gradually recovers its level of activity before the COVID-19 pandemic, amidst the strengthening of the U.S. blockade and plans of domestic subversion.

In the three-day meeting, held last month, the parliamentarians met an intense work agenda that included the approval of eight draft bills and the presentation of the results attained at the popular consultation on the New Families Code.

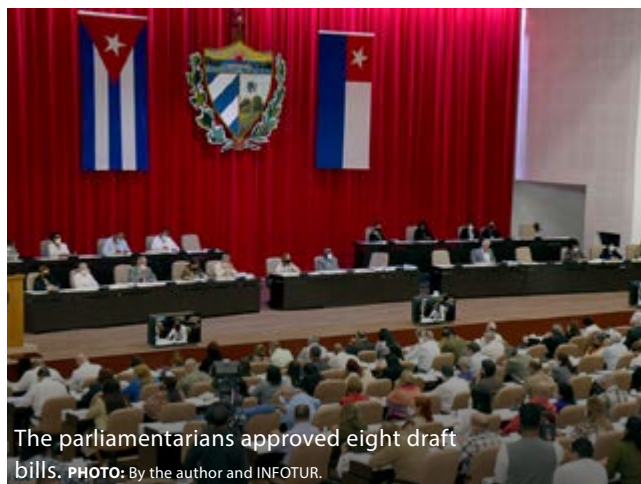
In the opinion of Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, these legal bodies give legitimacy to the political system and strengthen the work of the courts when guaranteeing children, women and people with special needs fundamental rights.

With these norms, the legislators followed up the provisions of the Constitution approved in 2019, while including international treaties' concepts and regulations and adapting legality to Cuba's new socio-economic context.

These norms are in line with the democratic process of the legislative exercise in Cuba, which includes popular

consultations, meetings with experts and academics and people's opinion, which was important for the constitution of the Families Code.

In this sense, about 60 percent of the opinions stated were positive and over six thousand proposals were made, which were submitted to the drafting commission, so that in June parliament members receive the text to be submitted to referendum.



The parliamentarians approved eight draft bills. PHOTO: By the author and INFOTUR.

During the analysis of the implementation of social and economic strategy in the first four months of 2022, the deputies were informed that there are signs of a slow recovery of the country's productive indicators.

Inflation, which at the end of March 2022 rose to 2.93 percent, is the most evident result of this situation, caused by difficulties in the availability of fuel and foreign currencies, as well as by a price hike in food import.

In order to face these challenges, the Cuban government announced a gradual and selective foreign currency sale scheme addressed to national suppliers and state and non-state actors, in addition to the imposition of restrictions on the incomes of those companies that do not have productive increases nor higher efficiency.

On top of this comes an additional 158-measure package related to updating of the governmental strategy, which includes the promotion of quality employment; analysis of companies that have losses, in order to take specific actions; budget's fiscal sustainability, and personalized attention to people living in vulnerable situations.

The Assembly's next session will take place in July, although legislators will previously discuss other draft bills being developed and will check governmental programs.

Contribution to the Family Code

By Orlando **ORAMAS**



HAVANA.- The Editing Commission of the new Families Code already has in its possession the opinions of thousands of Cuban people who, for three months, participated in popular consultations that will help draft the final document.

The above was stated by Justice Minister, Oscar Silvera, at the National Assembly of the Peoples Power (ANPP) after receiving the results of the consultations held from February to April in communities, workplaces and schools throughout the country.

President of the National Electoral Council (CNE), Alina Balseiro, handed over the extensive information that gathers the comments, proposals, additions and disagreements stated by thousands of citizens in public meetings, which resulted in the conception of the sensitive normative document in the last months.

Over 60 percent of the proposals stated in the popular consultations on the project showed positive opinions, CNE president commented. In that process, over six million people participated and over 434,860 proposals were collected, she added.

Balseiro affirmed that the topics that received the highest number of proposals were those

related to marriage, parent responsibility, adoption, solidary pregnancy, progressive autonomy, discrimination and violence in the family, children's rights and assisted union.

Over 85,500 interventions with proposals of amendments were conducted, mostly focused on topics linked to marriage and parent responsibility, she said.

The official stressed the discipline and organization the people showed in the exercise of this process, developed with transparency and in accordance with the truth.

The report shows a large participation and a diversity of opinions Parliament President Esteban Lazo affirmed, while highlighting that the final document, in the hands of the Editing Commission, will be analyzed in the next period of session of the legislative body – foreseen to take place in July.

The Justice Minister stressed that the commission worked in 24 versions and its members held exchanges and actions for contribution with about three thousand representatives and experts from different sectors.

We received all the information and will analyze again all the opinions on the paragraphs and articles of the project, taking in mind the results of the consultation, the constitutional precepts and in accordance with the legal order, Silveira affirmed.

The Minister praised the work the media has conducted to spread the scope and the content of the new draft Code, with the support and the participation of jurists and other professionals.

However, he noted that more information and promotion is still needed, with concrete examples of the country's social reality, in order to attain an inclusive Families Code. After its next presentation at the Parliament, the final text of the Drafting Commission will be finally submitted to referendum, where citizens will have the last word.

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Magical Trips through Saetía Key

Text and Photos Francisco **MENÉNDEZ**

HOLGUÍN.- Located in Holguín province, in the eastern region of Cuba, Saetía Key is a place full of color and an ideal setting for adventure, with numerous possibilities for those who want to spend active vacations.

This spot, which attracts European travelers, can be accessed from the sea, after a two-hour journey that affords a view of the Ramón peninsula.

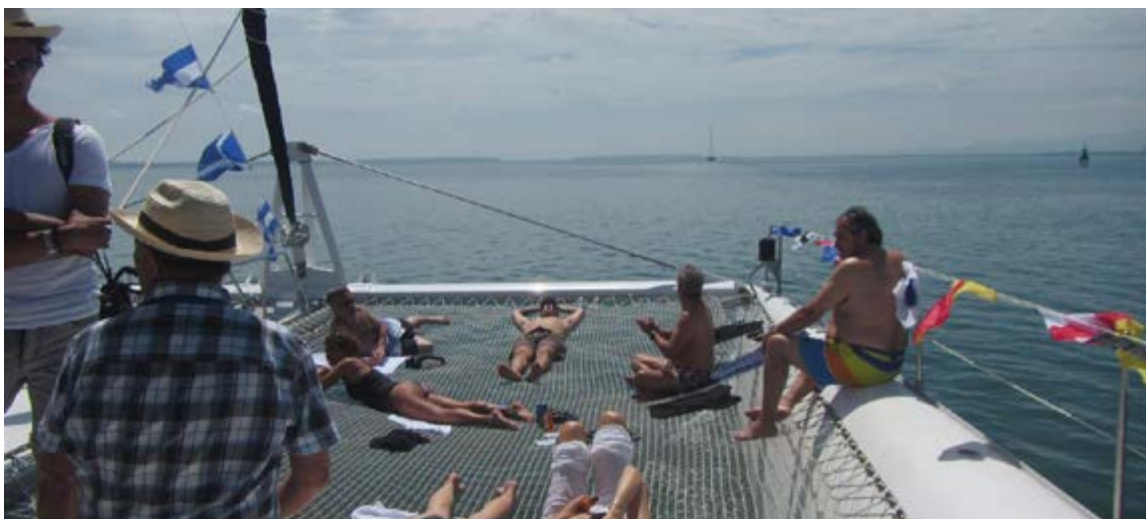
Saetía Key (also called Sae-Tia) is a 42 square kilometer islet located at about 120 kilometers southeast of Holguín, between the Nipe Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Its beaches and varied vegetation meet the expectations of the most demanding tourists.

The key is connected to the mainland through an animal-control bridge, a journey that takes too long and the reason why sailing is the best option. Under the auspices of the Gaviota Tourism Group, this wonderful place allows enjoying virgin beaches and touring the island in jeeps or trucks to watch the fauna of the area, which includes deer, buffalos and even some ostriches.

In addition, the food served in the ranch-style restaurant by the beach is excellent, an attraction for those who spend the day in the area enjoying its nature.

The Cuban Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) plans to build 19,000 rooms in the Ramón Peninsula in the near future, a site located on the way to the key.

There are enough attractions in Saetía Key for people to visit, just to tour Holguín province and spend a nice time.



Peru: A Crisis without a Foreseeable Solution

By Manuel ROBLES

LIMA.- Peru is living today a crisis without a foreseeable solution that dates back to several years and which many consider structural, a situation aggravated by the polarization existing between the government of

President Pedro Castillo and the Congress of the Republic, in the hands of the opposition. Castillo is undergoing a war of attrition in which the extreme right has added at this stage the support of the center groups, in its endeavor to finish with the Government. The goal of the opposition seems to be attainable, after two failed attempts to make

the Parliament remove Castillo for a "permanent moral incapacity," even though the votes needed – two thirds of the congresspersons – were not reached (87 to 130).

In spite of that, some people think that Castillo has become weak because he lacks parliamentary majority, and because he has made mistakes in ministerial appointments, with about 50 reshuffles.

Such fragility can make people think that Castillo could be removed, especially if a survey conducted by the IPSOS Company is taken into consideration, as this states that endorsement to the president's management decreased to 12 percent and the disapproval rate reached 72 percent in almost 10 months. However, situation seems worst on the other side of the balance, as the abovementioned IPSOS monthly survey – of May 2022 – says that the Parliament has an approval rate of 12 percent and a disapproval rate of 82 percent. The Legislative body's marked deterioration of its image has become more pronounced after the highly criticized situations that happened on the second week of May, with a marathon of questions to Prime Minister Aníbal Torres and heads of Interior, Alfonso Chávayri; Labor, Betssy Chávez, and Energy

and Mines, Carlos Palacios, in a period of two days.

The legislators launched attacks and even insults, while criticisms did not seem to end, at a time in which the Congress was getting ready to censure Chávez and Palacios and question the Minister of Agriculture, Óscar Zea, for different reasons.

The opposition, though, does not seem to have the intention to censure Prime Minister Torres, on which a journalist asked the leader of the Fuerza Popular Right-wing Party's parliamentary group, Hernando Guerra, if fear was the reason.

"We should not mistake care for fear," said the parliament member in reference to the fact that, if the Prime Minister were censured, all the ministerial cabinet would have to resign, and if a similar situation happened again, President Castillo would have the constitutional power to dissolve the Congress. In view of what some people described as "catastrophic tie," some from the right consider the possibility of getting rid of Castillo by approving a law that reduces to simple majority (66 to 30) the votes needed to remove him; but those who rule that option out say that it would be illegal, because it would be a named law.



The crisis is aggravated by the polarization existing between the government and the Congress of the Republic. PHOTO: Internet.

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Slow Recovery and Several Challenges

By Camila**MAYO**

HAVANA.- At the end of the first three months of 2022, the Cuban economy shows signs of recovery, though its rate of progress is slow and full of difficulties, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economics and Planning, Alejandro Gil, stated at the National Assembly of the People's Power (Cuban Parliament).

Problems in the availability of fuel and foreign currency, rising food import prices, and circumstances such as the country's macroeconomic imbalances are some of the causes slowing the take-off, even though exports of goods worth 590 million dollars have been recorded during this period.

Such figure represents an increase of 162 million dollars in comparison to the similar period of last year; however, that volume does not meet the needs of an island that invested 2,397 million dollars in respect of imports in the same three-month period.

Gil commented that Cuba also faces a deterioration of salaries' purchasing power and an increase of consumer prices index, which at the end of March 2022 accumulated 2.93 percent – although the rate at which prices increase decreases.

The Deputy Prime Minister stressed that that is a key objective for the country, as the gradual recovery of the purchasing capacity with incomes generated from work must be the core issue, through higher production and efficiency, in order to increase the offer.

Several of the 158 measures updated in the Cuban economic and social strategy, intended to guarantee the fulfillment of the economic plan for the year, are addressed to that direction.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economics and Planning, Alejandro Gil. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

The regulations focus on issues such as the macroeconomic stability, the increase of national production and exports, in view of the availability of foreign currencies to support the economy.

The effective substitution of imports and the increase of productivity, in addition to higher efficiency in the investment process and a real productive connection between the different economic actors, are also part of those measures.

Among those actions, the proposal addressed to implementing a gradual and selective foreign currency sale scheme for national, state and non-state suppliers – with whom levels of production and prices for commercialization in Cuban pesos will be negotiated – also stands out.

In this regard, the Minister of Economics and Planning explained that the official exchange rate for the dollar in Cuba equals 24 pesos, but the need of freely convertible currency (MLC) to buy products and goods, in addition to the low availability of this for its sale, led to the emergence of an unofficial market whose exchange rate equals 125 pesos per dollar.

This difference mainly impacts non-state actors, who are forced to buy hard currency, at those values and then transfer costs to final prices, which causes a gap in productive connections with the state sector and influences on the population.

In order to try to restore the balance, it is intended to create a secondary foreign currency allocation scheme, through which foreign currencies would be gradually sold to economic actors at a price that would be higher than 24 pesos but lower than that of the informal market. This action would allow supporting certain productions that would later be commercialized in Cuban pesos, essentially through state entities, the minister noted.

Gil stressed that this is a first step, and it will be addressed to the production of food and other products that are in high demand. He also added that it is a progress that would later allow having a foreign exchange market, a piece the economy lacks. Then, we could think of restoring the sale of foreign currency to the population, he concluded.

Sale of Premium Cigars Breaks Records

By Roberto**CAMPOS**

HAVANA.- The Habanos S.A. International Corporation broke its Premium cigars' sales record after earning 568 million dollars in 2021 – 15 percent more in comparison to the previous year.

When announcing the corporation's results in 2021, Habanos S.A. officials stated that such figures show the solid path the entity has followed in spite of the crisis caused by COVID-19.

Last year, the corporation exceeded 500 million dollars for the sale of that brand of Cuban cigars in the world, an all-time record in that category.

The corporation's co-chairmen, Inocente Núñez Blanco and Luis Sánchez-Harguindey Pardo de Vera, highlighted that the Habanos S.A. authorities are proud of both, leading the Premium cigar category and continue growing, in spite of the situation experienced in the last two years.

Spain, China, Germany, France and Switzerland were the Habanos S.A. first five markets in what regards the sale volume.

Spain and China are again the most important individual markets, while by regions, Europe remains the main market with 59 percent of the sales, followed by Asia-Pacific (16%), Américas (14%) and Africa and the Middle East (11%).

Habanos S.A. Commercial Vice-President, Leopoldo Cintra, and Development Deputy Director, José María López, commented that the entity is committed to offering best experiences, exclusive products and new features while preserving quality, tradition and uniqueness.

They said that Cuba's cigar aficionados remain loyal to cigars and have incorporated into domestic consumption bands and brands that were previously part of a more social range. The exceptional situation people have experienced because of the pandemic has caused certain changes in the habit of smoking cigars, they explained.

As part of the new concepts, the corporation has adapted itself to the current time and has maintained alive passion for cigars in coordination with its Exclusive Distributors through its marketing strategies, cigar presentations, innovations, virtual or in-situ events.

In spite of the difficult situation experienced in 2021, by the end of the year, the entity increased the number of specialized sale establishments in the world with 20 Cohiba Atmosphere shops; 160 La Casa del Habano centers (three percent increase); 1,217 Habanos Specialist establishments; 2,465 Habanos Point shopping centers (seven percent increase), and 486 Habanos Lounge-Habanos Terrace shops.

In addition, 38 new products were exported last years, and according to experts, Cohiba Ámbar, Ideales and Edición Limitada 2021 were the presentations expected the most in the markets, all of them dedicated to the 55th anniversary of that brand.

The Habanos S.A. Corporation is a world leader in the commercialization of Premium cigars, for which the entity has an exclusive distribution network in all five continents and over 150 countries.

The company commercializes 27 Premium brands that are totally hand-made and are endorsed by the Protected Origin Denomination (D.O.P.), among which Cohiba, Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta, Partagás, Hoyo de Monterrey and H. Upmann are included.



Last year, the corporation exceeded 500 million dollars for the sale of Premium cigars. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Diversifying Access to Foreign Financing

By Raquel **DÍAZ**

HAVANA.- Access to foreign financing is more important in relatively less developed countries and is essential to complement insufficiencies related to domestic saving. This reality also includes Cuba, said the University of Havana's director of the Center for Research on International Economy (CIEI), Carola Salas.

In an interview with **The Havana Reporter**, the official explained that Cuba needs to access those capitals on the financial markets, which is difficult because the

country does not belong to any of the international institutions of this kind.

The World Bank, for example, has five agencies specialized in financing issues, but it is more difficult for Cuba to obtain capitals from those sources because it cannot join those bodies.

However, Salas explained that there are options linked to regional bank entities such as the Central American Bank, of which Cuba is a member. However, it is necessary to diversify the means to obtain those financial resources, she stressed.

Salas, also holds a PhD in Economics and noted that currently the nation basically

has access to commercial suppliers and in this case "the poor quality and high cost of the financing we receive is par excellence". In her opinion, the country should adopt economic decisions in order to attain more attractive investments, amidst a complex context characterized by a low growth rate and the strengthening of the financial, economic and commercial blockade imposed by the United States.

This situation triggers the country risk and we are currently at the limit of reaching a lower category in which specialized agencies propose not to invest due to the danger of placing capital in a nation with

probabilities of default, the researcher explained.

For this reason, a priority policy should be in place to honor international commitments, to which the creation of a fund addressed to paying the foreign debt is needed, Salas stressed.

If you do not pay the debts, you do not receive loans, and if you receive them, it would be in more onerous conditions. Then, there would be no growth and thus the possibility of non-payment would be higher. It is a vicious circle in terms of debts...

The expert stressed that Cuba needs to design an economic policy strategy that turns the island into an attractive destination for investors, and highlighted the importance of directing foreign investment to more varied paths, with access to financing of different magnitudes, either small or medium size.

In this sense, she talked about the opportunities created by new economic actors, such as the Micro, Small and Medium-sized Companies (MIPYMES), given the possibility of establishing direct links with international capital, she noted.

All these dynamics need a transparent environment, well-designed and proactive economic policies and connections among all the domestic economic actors, in addition to a proposal for international capital.

In a context characterized by the strengthening of the U.S. economic blockade, it is possible to find the prevailing potential through a well-designed, articulated and attractive policy, as investors run many risks on the island, she concluded.



Chemical Industry Makes Progress

By Teyuné **DÍAZ**

HAVANA.- Import substitution in Cuba's Chemical Industry Business Group (GEIQ) exceeded half a million dollars in the first quarter of this year, informed the entity's vice-president, Lissette Alonso.

The official told **The Havana Reporter** that this result only included two products: the ammonium nitrate fertilizer and the Glufosinate-ammonium herbicide, both of great value for the agricultural sector.

One of GEIQ's strategy is aimed at fostering productions destined for the food and agricultural area, one of the pillars of the Business Meeting held last May, Alonso commented.

For her part, GEIQ Sales and Exports Director Mysora López added that the entity managed to export products for a value of about 2.5 million dollars in the first four months of this year.

This is not a pleasing result, thus actions are conducted to materialize other possibilities with the main productions of other two entities: the Sagua Electrochemistry Company and the Revolución de Octubre Company, López stressed.

The objective of foreign sales, she added, is to bring in cash that will allow the sustainability of GEIQ's plants and contribute to the production of other consumer goods for the population in local currency.

The official also stated that the abovementioned allows the group to be present in both, the convertible currency shops and the Mariel Special Development Zone.

GEIQ is composed of companies that are highly committed to manufacturing basic need products for both, the population and the industry. In this sense, the chemical industry produces consumer goods and services that are essential for the development of the economy and the life of the population, López affirmed.

The industry's products include medicinal oxygen, industrial gasses, fertilizers, multilayered sacks and products for water purification, in addition to bleach –

essential at present, in times of the COVID-19 pandemic – and sulfuric acid – needed for electricity generation.

During GEIQ business meeting, discussions were held on the possibility of making a better use of the industry's capabilities, some of which are undergoing investment processes at present. The industry's potentials were also highlighted.

The meeting also allowed presenting new products that are undergoing development, such as herbicides for sugarcane, rice, bean, tomato, garlic and vegetable crops and insecticides for the tobacco, corn and potato plantations.

Alliances and connections with other sectors were also identified in order to benefit from the integration of all economic actors, know mechanisms of financing and create technological packages.



Cuba Returns to the Caribbean Series

By Jhonah **DÍAZ**

HAVANA.- Once again the weight of history and the countless feats of Cuban baseball found light and the island will return to the Caribbean Series (CS) in the Venezuela 2023 edition, scheduled for next February. The Caribbean Professional Baseball Confederation (CBPC) announced the good news in a virtual meeting, and baseball fans are still jumping for joy with the return -as an invited country- of one of the founding nations of the so-called "regional classic." After weeks of discussions and negotiation, CBPC commissioner Juan Francisco Puello and representatives of the participating circuits -Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Panama and Colombia- agreed to expand the event, which will also include Curacao. For the first time in its over seven-decade history, SC will include eight teams in its program, the 65th and the 13th to be held in Venezuela.

According to records, Cuba was the main winner of the first stage of this event (from 1940 to 1960), after obtaining the trophy in seven of the 12 editions, the last five of them, in a row. However, the island stopped participating in this event when professionalism was eliminated in Cuba. More than 50 years later, in 2014, the Azucareros de Villa Clara team marked the return of Cuba's champion teams to this competition, although without having the status of full member of this body, as the rest of the countries.

Azucareros, Vegueros de Pinar del Río, Tigres de Ciego de Ávila, Alazanes de Granma and Leñadores de Las Tunas represented Cuba as winners of the National Series. In the case of Vegueros, the team won first place in 2015, a success that ratified the quality of

the Cuban baseball players.

However, Cuba's participation in this competition was almost ephemeral, as three years ago, the island was left out due to alleged difficulties with the time available to arrange the U.S. visas, needed to travel to Puerto Rico, the Cuban Baseball Federation (FCB) stated on January 2020.

"The CBPC decision is the result of giving in to the arbitrary pressures of the government of the United States and comes on top of other deceitful actions by its commissioner, who has also hindered Cuba's full affiliation to that genuinely Caribbean organization," added the FCB note.

The panorama has again done an about-turn and the country that won the first tournament will return to the competition in a few months, for the approval of true baseball lovers, who will watch closely the program scheduled for La Guaira and Caracas.

BASEBALL MAP BECOMES LARGER

Cuba's return and Curacao's debut trace a new route for the Caribbean Series, which doubled the number of participating countries in just a couple of years. In addition to Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela - traditional countries Panama and Colombia were then added, with Cuba's second return from 2014 to 2019.

Full of expectations, CBPC hopes to increase the relevance of the event, reach a varied audience and consolidate itself among the millions of followers the discipline has worldwide.

In spite of Cuba's inclusion, the news is not free of controversy, as not few specialists and fans consider that Nicaragua should be in Curacao's position, thus the topic continues.



Cuba was the main winner of the first stage of this event (from 1940 to 1960). PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Erick Hernández: A Ball Emperor

By Adrián **MENGANA**



Erick Hernández has over 45 world records in ball touches. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

HAVANA.- Armed with a great technical arsenal and mental concentration, Cuban Erick Hernandez has a unique appointment with records, a soccer ball and the conquest of the unattainable by dominating the ball.

Hernández has over 45 world records in ball touches with almost all the parts of the body: thighs, knees, feet, head, running 100 meters and the marathon. He proudly shows his first two records in the Guinness Book of Records, a work of reference that is annually published and includes a collection of world records by both, humans and the natural world. In his latest attempt, the Cuban player - aka Dominador (Master) - touched the ball with the head 351 times in minute, thus surpassing by 10 touches the number Chinese Gao Chong had scored.

According to Hernández, he conducted an intense preparation in a complex context marked by the impact of COVID-19 and worked on the fundamental parts: the lower limbs - calf muscle, femoral biceps and quadriceps - and the upper limbs - trapezius, sternocleidomastoid, pectorals, brachial biceps, brachial triceps and deltoids.

Nine years ago, Hernández set his own record of 350 ball touches with the head at the Copacabana Hotel, but this record was not registered in the Guinness Book. However, his 319 ball touches with the head in one minute and the ball touches with the thighs in one hour and 28 minutes were registered in the Book.

After breaking the Asian player's record, the Cuban commented that he will now take a break and will then start his preparation to smash another record: touching the ball with the feet in 10 hours and nine minutes. A fan of the Real Madrid team, Hernández was born in Havana on May 6, 1966. His passion for sport, particularly for soccer, started when he was ten years old. His first official match was with the Boyeros municipality team.

He then participated in seven National championships, defending the Ciudad Habana club T-shirt, in which he faced historic national legends such as Jorge Massó, Eugenio Ruiz and Carlos González. Inspired by the example of his brother, Douglas Hernández - a forerunner of ball touches in Cuba - he started getting involved in this modality in 1994, with the assistance of coach Luis Olmasa, the architect of most of his deeds.

At present, he tries to motivate youngsters such as Luis Carlos García, Jhoen Lefont and Lázaro Curbelo, who compete in the differently-abled modality, to keep alive love for this discipline and encourage them to make sacrifices in order to give Cuba more world records.

ERICK HERNÁNDEZ'S MAIN WORLD RECORDS:

- Hectometer in 17.83 seconds
- Marathon in 7.17 hours
- More time touching the ball with all the body in 19.10 hours
- Ball touches with the feet in the seated position in 3.03.14 hours.

Promoting Citizen Participation

By Ivette **FERNÁNDEZ**

HAVANA.- Preliminary ideas for the drafting of both, the Policy for Digital Transformation in Cuba and the 2030 Digital Agenda, were recently analyzed by members of the National Innovation Council.

The said consultative body of the Cuban State, which advises the President of the Republic, agreed to submit both documents to the decision-making entities of the Party and the Government for their approval.

Fostering citizen participation, increasing dialogue between the people and the government, defending values and national sovereignty, are some of the objectives included in the process of digital transformation in Cuba.

The objective also seeks to strengthen the services provided by companies, government entities and the public administration, among others.

The abovementioned idea was stated by Deputy Prime Minister Jorge Luis Perdomo, who recently stressed that in order to attain a successful transit to digital transformation, it is necessary to make progress in the assimilation of the characteristics of this sector.

Amidst an unfavorable scenario, characterized by the strengthening of the blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba and an economic crisis resulting from the pandemic of COVID-19, Cuba's access to Internet is higher than that of the world average. Progress is made on the use of wireless technology and landline access is developed, he affirmed.

He also pointed out that, by being used as a tool for political manipulation where monopolistic information tendencies are harbored and destabilization is urged, the function of the network to provide well-being is currently being undermined.



Deputy Prime Minister stressed the importance of a successful transit to digital transformation. PHOTO: Cubadebate.

In this scenario, he highlighted the importance of fostering our own platforms and generating contents for the defense of our idiosyncrasy, our culture and our national identity. Our goals in this regards require the creation of new capacities, the diversification of technological actors in the industry and the strengthening of the electronic government programs in the different municipalities, he said.

According to Minister of Communications, Mayra Arech, designing a policy for the digital transformation of the country allows enriching and updating regulations in place for the improvement of the computerization of the society.

In accordance with the country's program documents, such as the National Economic and Social Development Plan for 2030, this new tool represents a higher stage in which, based on what we have achieved, the human factor is at the center of attention, he added.

Cuba will continue developing the process of computerization of the society and making progress toward digital transformation, in order to guarantee the construction of an inclusive, solidary digital society, without social gaps and with the purpose of contributing to the development of the people and the most authentic values of the Cuban Revolution, he concluded.

Up to the present and according to ministerial sources, over seven million people are subscribed to the mobile telephone system in the island, of which over five million access the Internet through the use of mobile data.

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