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French Fair Promotes Quality of Life Tourism

By **Waldo MENDILUZA**

PARIS.- Nature and outdoors adventures, culture and history, were the main experiences the Cubanacán Hotel Group presented at the Paris International Tourism Fair. In statements to **The Havana Reporter** (THR), the group's Sales director, Edilber Cutiño, stated that several experiences were presented, including trips to the patrimonial cities of Viñales and Trinidad, the beautiful Soroa and Las Terrazas complexes (west of Cuba) and the Segundo Frente region, in the country's east. The Cuban stand fostered dialogue with potential and usual clients, as part of the group's interest in attracting French tourists with quality of life proposals and gaining tour operators' confidence again, as for years, they were attracted by this unique Caribbean destination. Held at the Paris Expo Porte de Versailles, from March 16 to 19, the fair promoted 400 tourist destinations from France and the rest of the world, with proposals that represent authentic national features. Cutiño commented that as the tourist campaign says, Cuba Única (Unique Cuba), the Cuban product stands out for its natural beauty, hospitality of its people, culture, history, heritage and safety.

COVID-19 changed many things and led to the search for open spaces, one of the characteristics of French and European tourists in general, a wish the group meets with facilities in almost all the island, the official noted. In that sense, he stressed that this type of tourism, healthier and wider because of the possibility of breathing fresh air while being close to history and heritage, is available in the so-called "E-hotels" – Excellence hotels – which make visitors consider that lodging is not the most important thing, but its surroundings.

We know, and have witnessed here, French tourists' interest in these destinations, which are included in their trip circuits, said Cutiño.

In the meantime, at the 26th Mediterranean Tourism Market, held in Rome (Italy), Cuba also stood out as a tourist destination, with unique and attractive products. Counselor of the Cuban Embassy in Italy and head of its tourist office, Madelén González-Pardo, indicated that every year, the island successfully promotes its offers, which attract the interest of a large group of participants to this event – one of Europe's most important tourism markets.

González-Pardo headed the Cuban delegation to the fair, which was also composed of director for cultural issues

at the diplomatic mission, Gabriela Gámez, in addition to tour operators such as Experience Travel, SoloCuba and Cubarama, among others, which presented different products of the Cuba Única campaign.

"Travel agencies and tour operators from Italy and other places receive a detailed information on the potentials and unique features the Cuban destination has, which stands out for its culture, traditions, history, nature, as well as for the kindness and the happiness of its people," González-Pardo told THR.



Cubanacán Hotel Group Sales director, Edilber Cutiño. PHOTO: Ileana Piñeiro

Santa Ifigenia, Cuba's Oldest Cemetery

By **Benjamín MICERINOS**

HAVANA.- The Santa Ifigenia cemetery, the oldest necropolis in Cuba, is a must in eastern Cuba for being the resting place of a group of patriots.

The remains of Cuban National Hero José Martí lie there, a National Monument since 1937, in addition to the ashes of historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro (1926-2016).

Located in the eastern Santiago de Cuba province, Santa Ifigenia is a place of pilgrimage for both, locals and foreigners, who visit the cemetery to pay tribute to memorable Cuban figures.

Opened on April 28, 1868, the cemetery hosts the oldest tomb, belonging to the Navarro family, which dates back to April 25, 1868.

The mortal remains of 32 generals of the Cuban Wars of Independence, of which 28 were from the eastern region – like José Maceo; Rafael Maceo; Guillermo Moncada; Flor Crombet; Luis Martí, Major General

Calixto García's assistance, and Silverio del Prado – also lie here.

Other remains include those of Ramón Leocadio Bonachea, from Sancti Spiritus; Matías Vegas Alemán, from the Canary Islands, Spain, or Canadian general William O'Ryan, whose tomb is close to that of Perucho Figueredo, the creator of the National Anthem. The most important mausoleum is dedicated to José Martí (Havana 1853-Dos Ríos, 1895), whose remains lay to rest with those of other veterans from 1947 to June 30, 1951, when the current monument – the most important in the cemetery and Cuba – was opened.

History says that Martí's final burial site was massive and confirmed the structure that keeps him, as an expression of the Cuban apostle's thought, life, work and death.

Another mausoleum also located in the cemetery is that of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Father of the Homeland, who on October 10, 1868, freed his African slaves and invited them to join the fight for independence, a date that is a landmark in the formation of Cuban nationality.



The ashes of historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro (1926-2016), are in Santa Ifigenia cemetery. PHOTOS: Manuel Muñoa.

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Cuba Voted and Won



The elections' results validate all 470 candidates proposed as members of the Cuban parliament.

PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

By Rafael **CALCINES**

HAVANA.- In spite of a strong, foreign campaign aimed at promoting abstentionism or blank ballot and an extremely difficult economic situation, the Cubans went to the polls and ratified, by a large majority, their support to the political and social model the island conducts.

Those two negative factors; the economic crisis resulting from the 60-year old blockade imposed by the United States; the effects the pandemic of COVID-19 has caused in the world, and the negative campaign that appealed to all means possible, would have been enough in other places to bring about disastrous electoral results.

However, as president of the National Electoral Council (CEN) Alina Balseiro informed on Monday, March 27, about 6,164,876 voters (75.92 percent) of the 8,120,000 summoned to go to the polls casted their vote.

Balseiro noted that attendance to the polls was higher to previous elections, as it exceeded the figure registered at the Referendum on the Families' Code (by 1.8 percent) and the municipal elections held on September 2022 (by 7.36 percent).

According to other data CEN provided, 90.28 percent of the total number of ballots casted were valid, 6.22 percent were blank and 3.50 were void.

In short, the elections' preliminary results "validate the election of all 470 candidates proposed as members of the National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban parliament), with over 50 percent of voters' valid votes," Balseiro affirmed.

In his Twitter account, Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel described the elections

as a victory of the Revolution and the Cuban people.

In reference to March 26, he said: "Since yesterday, we have been saying that: we trust our people, which went to defend the Revolution, in spite of the draconian measures imposed by the United States, in spite of the fierce campaign and calls to abstentionism, Cuba won with 75.92 percent of participation while 72.10 percent voted for everyone."

Another element that is highly important is that in most of the valid votes, voters chose the so-called "united vote," which implied supporting all candidates and only a small number chose one or several candidates proposed, which was their right too.

But the national electoral process did not finish on March 26, as its conclusion will take place on April 19, a historical date for the Cubans, as it marks the 62nd anniversary of the victory over the Bay of Pigs (Playa Girón) invasion, sponsored by the United States.

That day, the National Assembly of People's Power will be constituted and this will be responsible for electing the Council of State and the president and vice president of the Republic.

Experts consider that the new parliament, renewed by 64 percent in its X Legislature, is a reflection of the Cuban society, as almost all sectors of the country are represented there, 55.3 percent are women and one in five legislators will be under the age of 35.

But the vote of confidence the Cubans gave is a serious challenge, as all 470 members of parliament will have to face huge difficulties in order to overcome the current economic and social situation and must pay attention to public opinion and the expectations of the population when legislating.

Playa Girón, Synonym of Victory

By Milagros **PICHARDO**

HAVANA.- To say Playa Giron in Cuba is to automatically think of victory, because it was the place where 62 years ago, on April 19, a small island handed the first defeat to the United States in America. In less than 72 hours, the Cuban people was able to counteract Operation Pluto, financed and headed by Washington with the purpose to defeat the revolutionary process led by Fidel Castro.

John Kennedy, the President at the time, inherited the plans of his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, to recruit, train and equip an army of mercenaries to conduct an air-sea landing in the southwestern Bay of Pigs, with the intention of establishing a government previously approved by the U.S. administration.

The military operation was accompanied by acts of domestic subversion, armed infiltrations, sabotage and criminal actions, which lasted from April 17 to 20, 1961.

There were bloody battles and according to witnesses and publications, the bombings of the B-26 deployed against the island inflicted the death of over 150 people and hundreds of wounded.

Of the 1,500 soldiers that composed the 2506 mercenary brigade, the Cuban forces captured 1,200. The image of Fidel Castro on top of an SAU-100 tank, an example of character and courage, was etched in their mind, as well as in the minds of the world.

Even one of the members of the invading brigade, José Manuel Gutiérrez, admitted at a TV conference that "we lost

because of that, because Fidel (Castro) is with them, fighting in the front and those who were with us, those who brought us and got us involved in this, left shortly after."

A few days later, on April 24, President Kennedy acknowledged the involvement of his government in the facts; the prisoners were accused of treason, tried and after spending time in prison, they were sent back to the United States in exchange for a compensation.

According to official sources, the White House did not fully meet its commitment; however, at that time, the historical leader of the Revolution stressed the importance of the imperialism having to pay, for the first time in its history, a war compensation.

Years later, Presidential adviser Arthur M. Schlesinger wrote what no one dared to say: "The reality is that Fidel Castro was a far more formidable enemy and was in charge of a better organized country than anyone could have imagined.

"His patrols located the invasion almost since the very beginning. His planes reacted quickly and with energy. His police eliminated any possibility of rebellion behind the lines. His soldiers remained loyal and fought bravely."

Those who attacked Cuba in that April did so without weighing the great pain they caused to the families who lost their loved ones; they were not stopped by the world rejection, nor by the knowledge that they were violating human rights and the most elementary international laws, values of which their sponsor believes himself to be the champion.



Presidential adviser Arthur M. Schlesinger wrote what "The reality is that Fidel Castro was a far more formidable enemy..." PHOTO: Internet.

Constant Encouragement to Irregular Migration

By Deisy **FRANCIS**

HAVANA.- Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío stated that as long as the United States government grants asylum to aircraft hijackers, it cannot be said that its real objective is to put an end to irregular migration.

In an exclusive interview granted to **The Havana Reporter** at the seat of the Foreign Ministry, in the Cuban capital, Fernández de Cossío rejected the recent protection of a Cuban national was given last October, "simply for deciding that hijacking an aircraft was his way to migrate."

By doing so, the United States government becomes an accomplice and a participant in a hijack act, something "extremely serious that Cuba denounced and for which a vigorous protest was lodged," he noted.

As the Deputy Minister recalled, history shows that to the United States, far from meeting the needs "in the field of migration, what matters are the priorities of the subversive policy against Cuba." He also stressed that the main reason behind migration, especially of those who migrate through irregular ways, is the economic, commercial and financial blockade.

That policy is directed at depressing the Cuban population's standard of living and eroding the national economy's capacity to operate, Fernández de Cossío commented.

When referring to the current bilateral links, he noted that these are characterized by policies that carry the Donald Trump (2017-2021) stamp, as he was the one who implemented them.

Those policies "are still applied by the current U.S. government, which does not even justify why they do it," he said.

For example, "fuel supply to Cuba is subject to persecution, which could be considered a war measure; however, it is applied since 2019."

In addition, Washington insists on maintaining Cuba in the list of States that sponsor terrorism, which has an important impact on the performance of the Cuban economy and the wellbeing of the Cuban population, he stressed.

Cuba's international medical cooperation, which, "as it is known, has been acknowledged for years for its impact on the lives of millions of people in many places of the world," is also besieged, stated the Deputy Minister.

He also warned about the impact the application of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act has on the Cuban economy and about the fact that lawsuits against national,

international and U.S. entities that invest in the island can be submitted to U.S. courts.

According to Fernández de Cossío, the abovementioned fact lies on the principle that the United States "considers itself the owner of our country's resources and wealth."

However, that does not mean that we ignore that, in 2022, both countries took some steps that are important for bilateral relations, but that is far from

characterizing links between both nations, he said.

The United States tries to ask Cuba to make gestures and take steps, "an absolutely unreasonable demand or request," he commented.

How will it be up to Cuba, a country that has not taken any hostile action against the United States, to correct the current state of relations, when these are a continuity of the maximum-pressure policy adopted by Trump.



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

Antidote to the Blockade

By Ivette **FERNÁNDEZ**

HAVANA.- The multiple demonstrations of solidarity with Cuba held in the United States show that the island is not alone in its fight in favor of the lifting of the blockade, which successive U.S. governments have maintained in place for over 60 years.

The 3rd International Conference for the Normalization of Relations between both nations – held on March 11 & 12 at the Fordham University, New York – was a strong request in favor of the elimination of any restrictions on Cuba.

Speakers agreed to say that Washington's inclusion of the island on the list of countries that sponsor terrorism is a major act of injustice that prevents Cuba from having access to financial markets on equal terms.

U.S. Representative James McGovern (Mass.) urged his fellow countrymen and women to design initiatives to fight the blockade.

The Representative stated that this unilateral siege is the cause of all difficulties the Cuban people suffer.

"This conference is important. The actions we take can make a difference and inspire more people to work in that direction," he said.

Many other voices stated how the United States tries to make Cuba abandon its principles with severe prohibitions whose objective is to cause hardships to the Cuban population.

One of those voices included Cuban-American activist and leader of the Bridges of Love movement Carlos Lazo, who spoke about the endless fight his movement

conducts in favor of the lifting of the blockade and about their constant solidarity actions.

Academician William LeoGrande, who said that the next step the White House should take would be the removal of Cuba from Washington's unilateral list of States that sponsor terrorism, was also given an ovation.

For her part, Medea Benjamin, co-founder of Codepink, stressed that Cuba, far from being an aggressor country, has been the victim of several attacks on the part of the United States.

Intellectuals and artists from the host country, Canada, Puerto Rico and Cuba attended workshops, roundtables, Cuban art exhibitions and short-film festivals, which

allowed showing the efforts the island makes, in spite of a negative scenario, to have a more inclusive and fair society. The event was just the most recent example of the multiple efforts made from the United States in the fight against the blockade.

At the beginning of March, a bipartisan bill was reintroduced in the Senate to break the siege.

According to a press release published at the official site of Democratic Representative Amy Klobuchar, the Freedom to Export to Cuba Act would create new economic opportunities for U.S. companies and farmers by fostering exports and allowing Cubans to have a higher access to U.S. products.

The Conference of Bishops of the U.S. Evangelical Lutheran Church sent a letter to Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menéndez urging to normalize relations between both countries.



The Conference was a strong request in favor of the elimination of any restrictions on Cuba. PHOTO: Minrex

Hearing Treatment's Successful Results

By Lourdes PÉREZ

HAVANA.- Over 52,000 people suffering from any hearing disability in Cuba are attended by a multidisciplinary team that fosters programs going from primary health services to cochlear implants.

About 4.63 people per one thousand inhabitants have a hearing disability in the country, which represents 52,670 persons, according to statistics provided by the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP).

Coordinator of the MINSAP Disability Programs, Dr Osmara Delgado, stated that these patients' medical care is provided at the comprehensive health services, which are efficient and are focused on patients and their relatives.

The Primary Care Service, which includes the intervention of multidisciplinary teams and a network of services and highly-trained human resources at all levels, is the main scenario, the specialist said.

Cuba has 468 otolaryngologists; 62 audiologists; 708 speech, language and hearing bachelors; 42 hearing test technicians; 21 hearing molds specialists and 18 prosthesis-repair specialists, in addition to language and hearing rehabilitators, the official commented.

Specialized services include the cochlear implant program which, according to experts, is based on the use of an electronic device that turns sonorous signals into

electric signals, which are sent to the brain and interpreted as sounds.

In Cuba, from 30 to 40 children are annually selected as candidates to a high-tech hearing implant, which helps attain their linguistic rehabilitation and social inclusion.

Head of the National Cochlear Implant Group, Dr Antonio Paz, told **The Havana Reporter** that the first mono-canal, extra-cochlear implant was made in Cuba in 1987 and 10 years later, multi-canal implants started to be made at the Hermanos Ameijeiras Hospital.

The National Cochlear Implant Program has been successfully developed in the island for 25 years, giving priority to children with multiple disabilities, including the deaf and blind, he stressed.

Up to the present, 556 cochlear implants have been made in Cuba (10 of them, bilateral implants) to 543 patients, said Dr Sandra Bermejo, Otolaryngologist and head of the Specialized Cochlear Implant and Ear Surgery Service at the abovementioned hospital.

At present, 131 potential candidate kids are in process of evaluation, she said.

This MINSAP and government-endorsed program is accessible throughout the country and is totally free, including technological updating, Bermejo stressed.

Over 1.5 billion people in the world suffer from a hearing reduction in their lives, and many more risks suffering from a hearing loss due to preventable causes, according to estimates made by the World Health Organization in 2023.



Specialized services give priority to children with disabilities. PHOTO: ACN.

Challenges and Projections of an 85-year old

By Cira RODRÍGUEZ

HAVANA.- In a more globalized world, with frequent epidemics and pandemics, where new agents emerge or re-emerge, humanity needs advanced institutions that are able to face those challenges.

With a fruitful scientific and research work, conducted for more than 80 years, the Pedro Kourí Tropical Medicine Institute (IPK) is a national and international referent in the detection, diagnosis, prevention, handling, treatment and control of infectious diseases.

Head of the IPK Science and Innovation Department, Doctor Jorge Fraga, told **The Havana Reporter** that the center is the main authority in Microbiology, Parasitology, Tropical Medicine and Communicable Diseases' Clinical Medicine and Epidemiology.

In addition, for its large and fruitful contribution, the institution is a PAHO/WHO collaborating center for the study of dengue and its vector, as well as for the eradication of tuberculosis and diseases such as arboviruses, polioviruses,

measles, rubella, mumps, resistance to antimicrobials and zoonotic illnesses.

IPK started 2023 with ambitious projections, such as the development of basic and applied research that are part of microbiology, clinical medicine and epidemiology of communicable and chronic diseases, including other topics such as human genetics, microbiome, ecology, immunology, economy and social sciences.

The abovementioned researches are in line with the main and current health problems and strengthen the development of biomedical science in general and microbiology, parasitology, medical attention and epidemiology in particular, while guaranteeing an adequate handling of emerging diseases and health crisis.

Dr Fraga commented that this year, research on diseases transmitted by vectors will be complemented, with emphasis on dengue, chikungunya, zika and COVID-19, in addition to studies on molecular epidemiology and genetic evolution of bacteria, fungus, viruses and parasites.



The Salsa Festival was sponsored by different Cuban institutions. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Havana Danced at the Rhythm of Salsa

By Mario MUÑOZ

HAVANA.- The sixth edition of the Salsa Festival invited fans from Cuba and from about 10 countries to dance in Havana at the rhythm of 27 of the best national popular music bands.

Held at the Club 500, in the Vedado neighborhood, the Festival included dance workshops, DJs presentations, sale of publications and CDs produced by participating artists, parades and concerts, a major attraction that invited dancers to party all time.

The group of bands included Los Van Van; Pupy y los que son Son; Alexander Abreu y Havana D'Primera; Maykel Blanco y su Salsa Mayor; Adalberto Álvarez y su Son; Isaac Delgado; Paulo FG y su Élite; Lazarito Valdés y Bamboleo; Elito Revé y su Charangón; NG La Banda; Manolito Simonet y su Trabuco, and Anacaona.

Other Cuban bands also performed at the Festival, like El Niño y la Verdad; Yasser Ramos y su Tumbao; El Noro y Primera Clase; Monika Mesa; Cristian y Rey, and national and foreign DJs.

Foreign invited guests included U.S. drummer of Latin origin Roberto "Bobby" Allende and Marc Quiñones, who entertained the audience with their high-quality solos and improvisations and whose career stand out for their performances with renowned salsa musicians such as Rubén Blades, Willie Colón and Marc Anthony.

Allende and Quiñones, virtuoso instrumentalists, joined each of the night shows and offered performances together with Cuban bands.

On the participation of international musicians, the Festival's president of honor and main promoter, Maykel Blanco, said that bands from several countries stated their interest in participating, but the current economic

difficulties Cuba and the rest of the world face limited their attendance.

The Salsa Festival was sponsored by different Cuban institutions, such as Havana's Provincial Department of Culture, the Provincial Carnival Company, the ARTEX Artistic Promotion Company and its Musicalia Representation Agency, and Paradiso Cultural Tourism Agency.

ARTEX Vice-President Tania Cardó highlighted that over 200 dancers and salsa lovers came to the so-called Wonder City with the sole purpose of taking part in this party, especially from the United States, France, Colombia, Italy, Panama, Peru and Spain.

Cuban actress and music promoter Edith Massola, the festival's artistic director, commented that after a two year absence because of COVID-19, the program organized in Cuba included the country's best bands, for the delight of Cuban and foreign dancers, the *raison d'être* of this musical party.

Women's Jump in Electronic Music

By Dai LIEM

HAVANA.- The Eyeife Women Festival opened its doors in Havana last March 8th, on occasion of the International Women's Day, with the purpose of acknowledging women's role in electronic music and highlight their presence in a platform traditionally dominated by men.

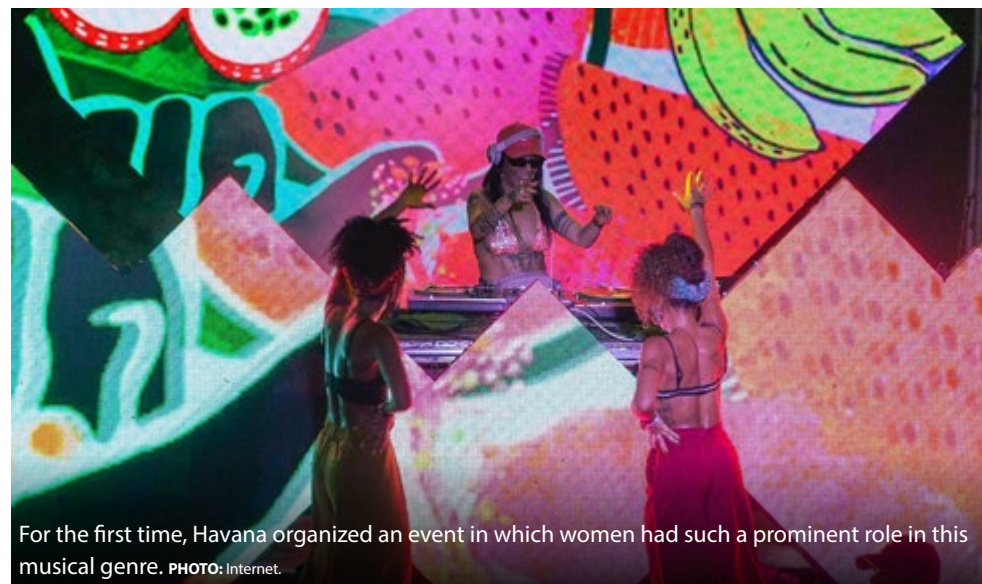
For the first time, the city organized an event in which women had such a prominent role in this musical genre, which has continued to steadily increase since the holding of this annual festival.

Eyeife Director Mario Oliva commented that such a prominent role fostered the gathering of over 13 national DJs at the facilities of Fábrica de Arte Cubano (FAC) to share their talent with rhythms and fusions that highlight the musical industry.

It was a pending topic on the part of the Eyeife organizers and one of the main dreams Suylen Milanés, founder and

president of the Cuban electronic music event, had, the director added.

This first edition of this women-centered festival is a door that opens the path to the seventh festival, to be held in December.



For the first time, Havana organized an event in which women had such a prominent role in this musical genre. PHOTO: Internet.

The Eyeife Women's first day of activities included a theoretical event on musical formation and workshops in which essential topics on the electronic genre and women's involvement were discussed.

Specialists Eva Fernández, Darsi Fernández, Rochy Ameneiro, Sandra Lopes, Eme Alfonso and DJ Laydis shared

their experiences and promoted debates on the challenges women face in this musical genre; they also dealt with topics such as the fight against women and girls' violence.

Female DJs' turn at FAC halls came on March 9, the day of the festival's closing, when they combined talent, frenzied rhythm and flavor at the stage, for the delight of the audience, in addition to several other artistic and dance expressions.

DJs such as Pauza, Madame Butterfly, Laydis, Ana Giz, Samy Afro Seven, Ikari Night, Felurian, Emy Abreu Saborr and musical bands such as Vocal Luna, Eme Alfonso, the Raíces Profundas musical-dance company and the Oralitura Habana improvisation group, also entertained the audience.

The event was a mixture of experienced and young female electronic music artists, who proved their power at the Eyeife Women platform and showed their growing artistic skills.

The Festival was sponsored by the Culture Ministry, the Cuban Music Institute, the British Council and other institutions.



Mexican Symbols and Sovereignty

By Luis ARCE

MEXICO CITY.- Many people, including historians, highlight Mexico's foundational hierophany, present in its flag and depicted in an eagle perched on a prickly pear cactus with a snake in its beak, as a myth.

Of course, this hierophany is nothing but a foundational myth, because of the legend that tells how the Mexican capital of Tenochtitlan, buried under the foundations of the present metropolitan city that resists disappearing, emerged in the rather unsolid ground of Lake Texcoco.

The underlying but passionate myth is a symbolic interpretation of a real, impressive force that narrates the Mexican odyssey, linked to the peregrination of that people from unknown Aztlán to the area where they found the exact place for the foundation of Tenochtitlan, in 1325, by order of god Huitzilopochtli.

That deity at one point in his pilgrimage would find an eagle flapping its wings, standing on a cactus and tearing a snake; when they found the place on a stone in the lake, they built Tenochtitlan, and in the Teocalli of the Sacred War, its epicenter and throne, they perpetuated the image that Huitzilopochtli.

The Teocalli of the Sacred War is a Mexican monolith, called like that by Alfonso Caso, which is believed to be a scale representation of a temple or the icpalli (royal chair) of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin himself.

As stated by Ramiro Alfonso Gómez Arzapalo, of the Universidad Intercontinental, Tlalcoamolco – what would be today the place of the first stone, where the city was founded – is the geographical point.

It is also the symbolic place where the heart of Copil, the enemy of the Mexican people, was thrown and where the prickly pear cactus on which the eagle is finally perched emerged.

Mexico-Tenochtitlan was erected there, with its concentric point, the main temple, where the captives made among the enemies of the great Mexica empire were sacrificed.

The curious thing is that the story is a symbolic paradigm on which the Mexican ethnic group is founded, not in a remote pass but in the constant ritual exercise of sacrifice in which the eagle and the snake represent a strong symbolism: the bird as an expression of the sun and the sky; the reptile, a symbol of the Earth, considered sacred. And when it appears with feathers, it personifies Quetzalcóatl.

When the Spanish colonists burst into these lands with their weapons, diseases, ambitions and thirst for plunder and crimes, as if they had found beasts and not organized and hardworking human beings, they found the symbol of the eagle and the snake deeply rooted. And since their arrival, they tried to erase local images to impose theirs.

They created a shield that underwent several transformations, but they never managed to eliminate its

essential elements: the eagle, the prickly pear cactus and the snake.

And that loyalty to the reference narrated by the Mexican indigenous oral tradition and expressed in early colonial stories, was accepted by new ethnically mixed generations. Today, the eagle and the snake reign in their jurisdiction, as stipulated by Huitzilopochtli in those ancient times, when Copil's heart gave birth, in Tlalcoamolco, to the prickly pear cactus of the Mexican hierophany.



The eagle and the snake represent a strong symbolism. PHOTO: Internet.



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Food Sovereignty is the Focus of Parliamentarians

By Justo **DE ARMAS**

HAVANA.- Food production in Cuba and measures to guarantee their supply are a constant topic of attention of the National Assembly of the Peoples Power's Agricultural and Food Commission.

At a recent meeting on the topic, the legislators analyzed the fulfillment of the agreements reached at the X Ordinary Period of Sessions of the Cuban Parliament on Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security.

The meeting, headed by president of the National Assembly Esteban Lazo, was attended by MPs of other commissions, in addition to Agriculture Minister Ydael Pérez and deputy ministers of the Food Industry, Public Health, Economic and Planning, and Financing and Prices, among others.

The population's concerns and opinions about this issue, particularly about the high food prices, were discussed by the parliament members.

Chairman of the Agricultural and Food Commission Ramón Aguilar stated that controlling the fulfillment of the recommendations made by the National Assembly on the topic and evaluating the measures and projections to gradually transform the current food situation are included among the maintain worker objectives.

Lazo stressed that this Commission follows up the population's main problems, while monitoring the fulfillment of the measures taken and the progress of important social programs, in order to provide concrete solutions.

He also insisted on generalizing best practices at the municipal, provincial and national levels, and turn them into a rule in order to increase production.

The Commission's actions included the monitoring, at the municipal and provincial level, of the measures taken to increase food production and the evaluation of the agricultural products' commercialization system.

Other topics included systematic control of the state of accounts to be cashed and paid, with producers, and dialogue with farmers and cooperative members, with the purpose to socialize their results and projections, among others.

The Agriculture Minister noted that main challenges include the most efficient use of the productive forces, the land and the natural resources; a better exploitation of rented land; the elimination of obstacles in the field of production, and higher attention to rural communities, among others.

Positive aspects include a higher application of science and innovation; promotion of good practices; new agricultural areas; follow-up and improvement of hiring, and the use of bioproducts and biofertilizers.

Lazo also analyzed the strategies in place to reduce prices, eliminate intermediaries, effectively follow up hiring and commercialization process and control, from the Agriculture Ministry, of regulations established.



President of the National Assembly Esteban Lazo insisted on generalizing best practices in order to increase production. PHOTO: Internet.

Two Sisters Challenge Fire and Prejudices

By Melissa **KING**

HAVANA.- Since they were children, second lieutenants Rosmerys and Rosabel Ávila Alonso decided to assume a career traditionally performed by men: firefighting. The Cuban twins had a clear vocation, which could not be stopped neither by their mother's refusal nor by the prejudices of those who could not understand how, at such a young age, they were determined about the profession of their lives.

Those girls, 28 at present, have served 13 years of active service and stand out for the professionalism and responsibility with which they undertake their duties, aware of the fact that human lives depend on their commitment.

It all started as a result of living next to the Fire Station of the San Miguel del Padrón municipality, in Havana.

Rosmerys told **The Havana Reporter** that from their balcony, their grandfather explained to them how the station functioned and by the time, they joined a vocational club on the topic, in which they were enrolled from fourth to nine grade.

Such a dedication and path bore fruits, as at the age of 15, they joined the National Firefighter School, where they were formed in the three areas practiced in Cuba: prevention, extinction and rescue operations.

Although at the beginning of their careers they had a passion for fire extinction, at present they work in the area of prevention, as inspectors of the Special Command No. 1 that looks after the municipalities of Habana Vieja and Centro Habana, in the capital.

Their work is directed at evaluating the conditions of the socio-economic sites in view of a potential fire, in addition to analyzing the electricity system; the storage of dangerous substances; the state of fire extinguishers; the fire systems, among other duties.

People are not aware of the danger; for that reason, we must increase public awareness to avoid major disasters, they said.

Since they became mothers, they sense the risks of their profession differently; however,

they stress that being firefighters is the reason of their lives.

"We have the privilege of saying that we love what we do; people work for need or other interests but we do it because we want to," Rosabel affirmed.

They explained that their profession is considered a men's job, or at least that is how the society see it; but any woman can do it, they said.

You are surrounded by men all day, that is true, but wearing a heavy breathing apparatus is not a limitation; wearing uncomfortable shoes, using a lot of strength, are not an obstacle if you love your career, they added.

They considered that it would be beneficial for the media and other venues to give greater publicity to the ways to join the ranks of firefighters, as well as to encourage the creation of community projects to attract more women.

According to records, the first Cuban firefighters' department was created on November 13, 1696, when neighbors of the city of Santa Clara – in the central region – organized that service, which they paid for.

The Cuban firefighters showed their courage last year, when they faced the gas explosion and the subsequent collapse of the Saratoga Hotel, in Havana and the huge fire at the supertanker base, in the city of Matanzas.



The Cuban twins had a clear vocation, they were determined about the profession of their lives.

PHOTO: Panchito González.

Drum Festival Wins Award

By Jorge **LOZANO**

HAVANA.- The Guillermo Barreto in Memoriam International Drum Festival, held in Havana, won the Continental Excellence Event award, a prize granted by the Latin Music Institute (ILM).

The award, granted for the first time, acknowledges cultural events held for more than 15 years that, in addition to hosting highly popular concerts, also conduct workshops, contests and children events.

The Festival easily meets the requirements and for that reason, the night of March 5, at the closing of the 20th edition of this event – at the crowded La Piragua Square, in Havana – ILM president Daniel Martín granted the award to the Festival's leader, Gerardo Piloto, organizers said.

As stated at the ceremony, attended by renowned Cuban musicians, the award was to be granted at the end of March 2020, but the activity was postponed because of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Drum Festival, an annual event held since 2001, is a platform to show Cuban musicians' level in the performance of a wide range of percussion instruments, in addition to promoting such instruments.

On this occasion, in addition to the famous concerts by musical bands and the performance of national and foreign percussionists in different places of the Cuban capital, the Festival included the International Kettledrums and Congas Contest, at the El Sauce Cultural Center, in the Miramar neighborhood.

Contests with foreign participation were also conducted in the categories of casino dancing, conga, timba and rumba, among others, at the Salón Rosado de la Tropical, with the performance of Cuban Alain Pérez and The Drumming Wonder of Burundi.



Muñequitos de Matanzas in the Drum Festival. PHOTO: ACN.

Other initiatives included the Rumba por los Barrios (Rumba in the neighborhoods) project, which included the performance of Cuban bands such as Obini Batá and Chispa y los Cómplices, which performed concerts in the municipalities of Regla and Habana del Este.

Dedicated to Cuban musician Lázaro Ross, the Drum Festival also paid tribute to famous Cuban percussionist José Luis Quintana – aka Changuito – with a concert conducted by renowned instrumentalists Enrique Plá, Samuel Formell, Ruly Herrera and Oliver Valdés, as well as Alexander Abreu and his band, Habana D'Primera.

Santiago Álvarez Documentary Festival

By Martha **CABRALES**

SANTIAGO DE CUBA.- U.S. participants in the 20th edition of the Santiago Álvarez in Memoriam International Documentary Festival, held in this eastern city, marked the program of activities of this event with their solidarity and admiration for Cuba.

The delegation of the U.S. independent film world, composed of 30 members, brought to Santiago de Cuba a 14-work screening that shows different topics on that country's life, history, culture, society and reality.

Scriptwriters, directors, producers, designers and filmmakers were included among the delegation, who presented an outstanding variety of social and human topics, some of which have not been widely spread in the U.S.

Particularly notable was the documentary Silvio Rodríguez: mi primera tarea (Silvio Rodríguez: my first task), by filmmaker Catherine Murphy, who evoked the talk she had with the Cuban troubadour for the 25-minute work.

In the said documentary, the singer and songwriter tells the experience he lived at the age of 14, when he joined the Literacy Campaign, the deed that started the educational and cultural transformations of the Revolution in 1961, just two years after the triumph in 1959.

Murphy appreciated Silvio for the morning he generously gave her and for his testimony about a fond memory of his life, which movie buffs could appreciate as part of the screenings presented by U.S. independent film creators.

Other works included UnionMaids, by Jim Kleine and Julia Reichert; Bakasó-Afrobeats de Cuba, by Eli Jacobs Fantauzzi; Lenguas desatadas: la experiencia del hombre gay negro, by director Marlon Riggs – a work that appeals to sexual diversity and opposes homophobia.

The four-day event also included a lecture by Puerto Rican-origin artists Bobby Sanabria and Antonio Nadal, who talked about the influence of the Cuban music in the city of New York.

They also referred to the documentary Haciendo posible lo imposible (Making impossible possible), by Pamela Sporn, on Puerto Rican students' endeavor to open a department on Puerto Rico studies at that U.S. city in the 1960s and 1970s.

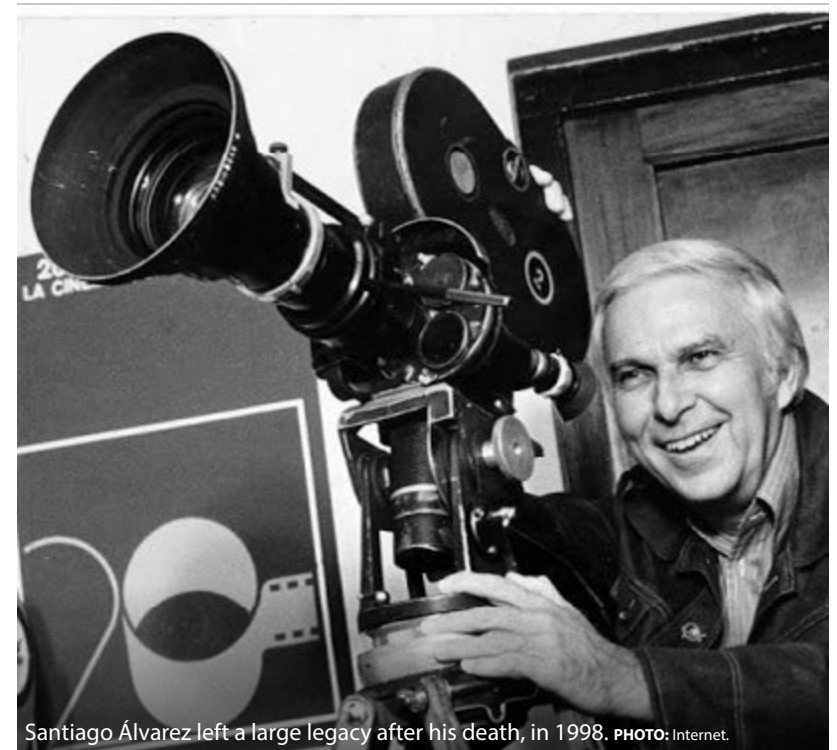
"We love Cuba" was a phrase heard among several U.S. interviewees, who appreciated the fact that the Festival was dedicated to the U.S. independent cinema, another step in favor of the rapprochement between both peoples and against the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States government against the island.

After a pause of more than two years due to COVID-19, the event, in memory of Santiago Álvarez, retook the in-situ program and included

several venues, such as those at the towns of El Cobre and El Caney, in addition to the traditional downtown Rialto movie theater.

The Universidad de Oriente, the Macubá theater and the Image Museum also welcomed some of the festival's activities, which included lectures and events on documentaries' production.

Santiago Álvarez, the architect of the ICAIC News – declared a UNESCO Memory of the World – left a large legacy after his death, in 1998, which made him stand out in the Latin American and universal cinema with works that renewed the genre and reflected the world's stark reality.



Santiago Álvarez left a large legacy after his death, in 1998. PHOTO: Internet.

Wilfredo Lam Center: Four Decades Defending Art

By Arianna **LEÓN**

HAVANA.- An institution of reference in the development of aesthetic expressions, the Wilfredo Lam Contemporary Art Center celebrated four decades in a privileged position in Cuban culture.

Founded on February 28, 1983, the institution is responsible for promoting and doing research on the work of one of the most outstanding visual artists of the 20th century, while approaching the audience to the Asian, African, Middle East, Latin American and Caribbean creations.

Poet and essayist Rafael Acosta de Arriba has described the center as an avant-garde institution in the promotion of national art, for the quality of its exhibitions and its indisputable role in the management, organization and holding of the Havana Biennials.

"Some of the most important artists of the last decades, from the so-called contemporary art, have passed through there," said the professor on the occasion of the center's anniversary, last February.

Art critic Carina Pino Santos noted that the institution is an essential place to appreciate and have an enriching and vital contact with visual arts; a place that has contributed to the existence of a highly-important bibliography on the region's aesthetic expressions.

In the lack of a Contemporary Art Museum in Cuba, the Lam Center has organized the most important theoretical and critical events, essential for the development of this discipline in Cuba; at the same time, it has established a selectivity criterion that has encouraged many creators, she added.

Art historian and curator Margarita González Lorente considers that being a part of the professionals that enroll the Lam Center was a wonderful work experience that allowed her to go into the Biennials' universe in depth, while entering into dialogue with critics, researchers and artists, in addition to enriching her work skills.

"I owe the Wilfredo Lam Center a lot. I still develop today everything I learned there, all that knowledge, the know-how the institution gives us," stated the expert, who found in the institution a reward to all the efforts made in its development.

On occasion of the center's 40th anniversary, the institution conducted a commemoration program that included the Biblioteca abierta (Open library) exhibition and book sales, while the digital platforms spread the announcement of the Wilfredo Lam Creation and Research Scholarships.

The program of activities also included the launch of the Catalog of the 14th Havana Biennial, the most important international visual arts event in Cuba, one of the center's main achievements, conducted in coordination with several local entities.

Celebrations for the center's anniversary also praised the legacy of the author of *La Jungla* (1942), on the 120th anniversary of his birth.

Renowned as a visionary and a renovator for his time, as well as a person who fought banality, Lam moved himself in the field of subjectivity, but also inspired those around and the successive generations of painters, national and internationally.



The institution, founded on February 28, 1983, promotes the work of one of the most outstanding visual artists of the 20th century. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Paisaje Interior on Exhibition at the Cuban Fine Arts Museum

By Liz **BOBADILLA**

HAVANA.- The National Fine Arts Museum will display, until next May, the personal exhibition *Paisaje interior* (Inner landscape), by renowned Cuban painter Alberto Lescaj.

The exhibition includes a selection of pieces of the most recent catalog of the 2021 National Art Award winner and leader of the Caguayo Foundation, a project dedicated to promoting culture and saving identity through monumental and applied arts.

Lescaj, an artist who is able to turn dreams, stories and figures into sculptures, engravings, paintings and drawings, has conducted over 70 personal exhibitions and a similar number of collective exhibits for almost 50 years.

Monumental sculptures aimed at attracting the audience and located outside specialized scenarios with the purpose to maintain dialogue with the pieces, stand out among his works.

As poet Rafael Acosta de Arriba has said, "Lescaj endows sculpture with a particular collective dimension," in addition to his particular vision to highlight Cuban culture

and include topics closely linked to the Cuban history in the regional context.

"I realized, at the right time, that showing Cuba's creative expressions was a



Lescaj is an artist able to turn dreams, stories and figures into sculptures, engravings, paintings and drawings. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

responsibility I had to assume and for that reason, I studied a lot; in fact, more than usual, for almost 16 years," the artist told **The Havana Reporter**.

His professional formation includes degrees on artistic teaching in the discipline of painting, in 1968; sculpture, at the National Art School, in 1973, and Master of Art, at the Repin Sculpture, Architecture, Painting and Graphic Academy, in Saint Petersburg in 1979.

One of his main contributions to the national culture is the Caguayo Foundation, founded 25 years ago, which "fosters integration between the art, design and architecture schools, as a meeting point where theoretical spaces and production come together."

He has developed most of his work at the eastern province of Santiago de Cuba, his hometown, and his signature is seen in works such as the architectonic group of the Antonio Maceo Revolution Square; the Cimarrón (Runaway slave) memorial and the Mariana Grajales monument, among others.

His catalog includes small-format sculptures and pictorial series that have been exhibited in prestigious galleries and museums in Cuba and other countries, such as Mexico, the United States, Canada, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Jamaica, Brazil and Russia.

El Cobre, A Veneration Site

By Francisco **MENÉNDEZ**

SANTIAGO DE CUBA.- The El Cobre Church, in eastern Santiago de Cuba, is an almost magical place between mountains with a legend of sailors, rough seas, encounters and misunderstandings.

This red-dome and light-wall church has treasured, for years, the image of Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (Our Lady of Charity), Cuba's Patron Saint.

The story goes that in 1608, two indigenous men and a black slave boy found, in the northeastern Bay of Nipe, the image of the Virgin with an inscription that identified it as such.

However, some historians add other versions that question the exact date of the discovery.

They affirm that the descriptions of elderly Juan Moreno, one of the three protagonists – who was then 10 years old – are kept in the India's Archive in Seville, Spain, since 1687. For that reason, it is deduced that the event should have happened in 1606.

Anyway, most of the documents and research agree on the fact that the rowers were named Juan and Rodrigo de Hoyos and the black boy Juan Moreno and that,

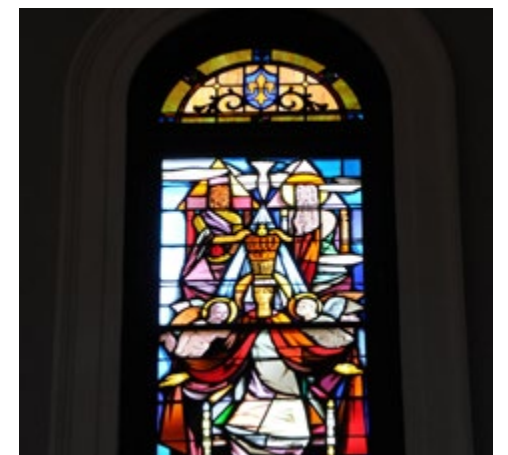
on their way to collect salt, they spotted a big shape in the middle of the Bay.

When they drew closer, they discovered the image of the Virgin fixed to a board, with a gold cross in her right hand and Baby Jesus in the left.

On August 12, 1898, when the Cuban independence war against the Spanish colonization was over, Cuban General Calixto García sent his staff to celebrate a solemn mass and a thanksgiving Te Deum in the site. Other important events include the request war veterans made to Pope Benedict XV in 1915 to proclaim the virgin as Cuba's Patron Saint, in addition to the opening of the current Sanctuary, on September 8, 1927 and the arrival, on December 30, 1977, of African Cardinal Bernardín Gantin as the Pope's emissary – by order of Pope Paul VI – to proclaim the Church as Minor Basilica.

The Sanctuary, 19 kilometers from the city of Santiago de Cuba, is a rectangular building with cream-colored walls and red dome, in marked contrast with the mountains' green.

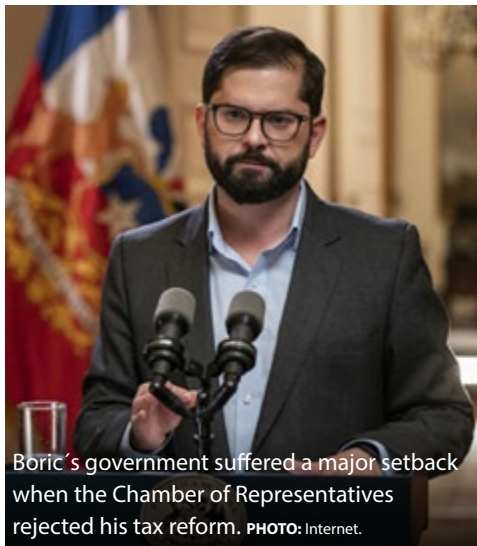
The altar of the Virgin was built in marble and is located above the Chapel of Miracles, where the offerings of thousands of parishioners rest.



Boric's First Year in Office: Economic Recovery and Fiscal Setback

By Carmen **ESQUIVEL**

SANTIAGO DE CHILE.- Chilean President Gabriel Boric's first year in office is marked by economic recovery and a light inflationary fall, but also by a legislative setback in relation to the tax reform, which would allow him to implement his government program.



Boric's government suffered a major setback when the Chamber of Representatives rejected his tax reform. PHOTO: Internet.

After four consecutive falls, the Monthly Economic Activity Index grew last January by 0.4 percent, contrary to experts' predictions about a decrease from 1.5 to 0.1 percent. The inflationary index, for its part, fell last February by 0.1 – the first registered since November 2020.

However, prior to his first year in office, on March 11, the government suffered a major setback when the Chamber of Representatives rejected his tax reform, a project that foresaw an increase on income tax, including wealth tax and new regulations against tax avoidance and evasion.

"When the country starts showing signs of recovery, when we start getting out of a long crisis, again there is a sector trying to prevent things from changing and leave them as they are," the president regretted.

Another hard blow for the Executive, without doubt, was the rejection, on the referendum held on September 4th, of a proposal on a new Constitution that would replace the Magna Carta in place since the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990), on which the current neoliberal model is based.

"There is a before and after in relation to that plebiscite, because many of the structural issues the government wanted to foster were based on the approval of the constitutional text," associate professor of the Santiago de Chile University, René Jara, told **The Havana Reporter (THR)**.

In Jara's opinion, there was a lot of expectation in relation to the results of the popular consultation, whose approval was expected in order to start the legislative agenda.

FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE

Interviewed about Boric's first year in office, Jara said that it has been a slow and difficult period, partly because the leftist Apruebo Dignidad coalition is a new formation that had never ruled before.

In that period, the Executive's center forces increased; that is, the promotion of the Democratic Socialism that also supported candidate Boric during the second electoral round, and that caused frictions between both alliances.

On the difficulties the Congress has faced to make laws progress, he noted

that not only the opposition action is to be blamed but also a kind of a late implementation on the part of the government, with delays in the arrangement of bills.

On the contrary, MP Boris Barrera, of the Communist Party, affirms that the Executive faced an obstructionist right willing to attack and prevent all projects within the parliament.

The legislator told **THR** that they received a country that was getting out of the pandemic, with a lot of recession, high unemployment and sky-high inflation, and although predictions for this year were pretty pessimistic, the 0.4 percent rise, which is a sign of hope, was a surprise.

In spite of negative conditions, important steps were taken in the first year, among which the increase of the minimum salary from 422 to 444 dollars per month is included – the most important in the last 30 years, with projections to increase it even more – the parliamentarian commented.

Measures were also taken to support vulnerable people, including stabilization of the electricity cost, free access to National Health Fund services and payment of bonuses to alleviate families.

Jara stated that progress has been made in the topic of security, Boric's commitment in the second electoral round.

"I think that it is finally bearing fruits," he said.

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India's Possibilities of Investment in Cuba

By Alfredo **BOADA**

NEW DELHI.- Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment Rodrigo Malmierca highlighted possibilities to do businesses and make investments in Cuba at an entrepreneurial forum held at the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, an entity created in 1927 by Mahatma Gandhi.

During the visit of a Cuban delegation headed by Malmierca and composed of representatives of agriculture, renewable energy and biopharmaceutical sectors,

India and Cuba agreed on the potential to increase bilateral trade.

At the meeting with Indian Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, held in this capital, the Cuban official stated the will to favor Indian capital investment in Cuban, in addition to joint projects in different fields.

The Cuban delegation that visited this densely-populated South Asian nation attended the Summit of Associations, organized by the Indian Confederation of Industry and the Commerce and Industry Ministry, with the participation of 67 nations.

The Cuban delegation, which was welcomed by Indian Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, also visited Bangalore, India's High-Tech Industry Center and met minister Karnataka Basavaraj Bommai.

Malmierca and the rest of the delegation attended a business forum organized by the Indian Economic Trade Organization; visited the Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and the International Manyata Tech Park. They also held talks with the board of directors of the Biocon Biopharmaceutical Company, founded in 1978 by Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw.

Other activities included meetings with Indian Minister of Energy and New and Renewable Energies Raj Kumar Singh; general director of the International Solar Alliance Ajay Mathur, and chairman of the National Thermal Power Corporation Gurdeep Singh.

The Cuban delegation highlighted the advantages of selecting the island as an investment site, including its political, social and legal stability; its geographical location; the atmosphere of safety, and the high indexes of education, social security and health.

They also stressed the presence of highly-qualified labor force and the government policy, which gives priority to research and technological innovation, and added that main areas of interest to invest in Cuba include food production, tourism, development of renewable sources of energy and biotechnology.

Malmierca told **The Havana Reporter** that the objective of this visit was to strengthen relations with India, particularly in the economic sector and said that there is a strong potential in the fields of renewable sources of energy, biotechnology and pharmaceutical industry, in which India has state-of-the-art technology.

The Cuban minister and the accompanying delegation arrived in New Delhi after visiting Doha, where they attended, on behalf of the Group of 77 + China, the 5th United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries.



The Cuban delegation highlighted the advantages of selecting the island as an investment site. PHOTO: Internet.

Project Contributes to Productive Development

By Angel **DARIÁN**

MATANZAS.- With funding from the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), the CubaFruta project in the western province of Matanzas contributes to productive development for food sovereignty.

The project's director, José Pérez, told **The Havana Reporter** that the main idea of the program is to improve the offer of products such as avocado and pineapple in the national market and contribute to reduce the loss of crops and the import of consumables.

The municipalities of Colón, Calimete and Los Arabos, in this western province, are an important pineapple-producing area, whose productions are intended for fresh and industrial consumption. With the implementation of CubaFruta, the capacity of the cooperatives to produce, manufacture and commercialize that fresh fruit are

expected to increase, on a sustainable basis, the official commented.

Pérez also stated that the program will have an approximate duration of 30 months, in which new crops will be introduced in demonstrative plots and with producers as responsible for assessing the progress, according to the conditions of the fields in the different municipalities.

The director added that avocado producers from the Vicente Ponce and Wilfredo Díaz Credit and Services Cooperatives, in Jagüey Grande – who will also benefit from CubaFruta – recently received the work tools, such as handsaws.

The project's expected results include the strengthening of local and national capacities to strategically diagnose, plan and manage the production of fruits with a joint approach, sources indicated.

AICS is the Government of the Republic of Italy's public agency responsible for promoting international progress in tune with the 2030 Agenda and the European Union's cooperation and development policy.



The main idea of the program is to improve the offer of products such as avocado and pineapple.

PHOTO: CubaFruta.

Cigar Festival: Recovery of the Tobacco Industry

By Roberto **CAMPOS**

HAVANA.- The famous Cigar Festival returned to the Cuban capital with all its splendor, after two years of suspension because of COVID-19. The event was attended by about 2,000 participants from 110 countries,



The Cigar Festival was attended by about 2,000 participants from 110 countries. PHOTO: Tito Meriño.

in addition to 140 journalists from 20 nations and 260 exhibitors.

The festival concluded with a dinner, the traditional humidors' auction and the granting of the 2022 Cigar Awards.

The auction of hand-made humidors, with Premium cigar's special collections – held at the Havana's PABEXPO fairground – collected 11.2 million euros, which will be allocated to the Cuban public health sector, as traditionally done for years, sources indicated.

One of the Cohiba humidors was signed by President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who attended this activity accompanied by Prime Minister Manuel Marrero and other leaders.

The Festival's closing included a new line, Maestra, of the Partagás brand, as protagonist and the presentation of the three cigar shapes that represent it: Origen, Rito and Maestro.

At the Cigar Festival, over one thousand participants gathered at the PABEXPO halls to enjoy a pairing of the renowned Cuban cigars, haute cuisine dishes and artistic presentations.

Other activities included an international seminar, visits to tobacco plantations, tour of the Partagás and La Corona factories and a commercial fair.

The event allowed showing that the Cuban tobacco industry is undergoing a rising and recovery tendency, in spite of difficulties.

Officials of the sector stated their optimism about the strategies foreseen to face difficulties and maintain the rhythm of this luxury-product industry, in spite of the economic, commercial and financial obstacles imposed by the United States on Cuba, which hinder the development of this industry.

They also referred to the disaster caused by hurricane Ian, which crossed the tobacco region of the Pinar del Río province, in the country's west – where the best leaves are produced and where about 80 percent of all the Tobacco Drying Houses were destroyed.

About 33,000 tons of tobacco were lost in Pinar del Río, particularly 50 tons of shade tobacco, the officials added.

They also explained that the recovery tasks had a positive result and stressed their optimism about the production and commercialization of cigars.

Vice-presidents of the Habanos S.A. entity, Jorge Pérez (Commercial director) and José María López Inchaurre (Development director), highlighted that the main markets of the Cuban Premium cigars are Spain, France, Germany, China and Switzerland. In 2022, the entity's income rose to 545 million dollars, a two percent increase in comparison to 2021, they added.

Cuba has 157 Casa del Habano (Cigar Houses) in the world; 17 Cohiba Atmosphere establishments; 1,264 Habanos Specialists; 587 Habanos Terraces, and 2,744 Habanos Points, which grew by nine percent, they said.

Some Key Aspects for Territorial Development

By Ania **TERRERO**

HAVANA.- The Articulated Platform for Comprehensive Territorial Development (PADIT) accompanies the implementation of the policy that is at the core of municipal and provincial governments' public agendas in Cuba. Supporting the strengthening of public management and institutionalized practices at all levels is the main objective of the said platform, which was created in 2014 as an international cooperation project and later on became the main entity responsible for the Territorial Development Policy. PADIT National Coordinator Aizel Llanes explained that the platform not only accompanied the design and approval of this rule, but also resulted in the implementation of 98 socio-economic development initiatives, with emphasis on food production. Sixty percent of those initiatives foster articulation between the public and private sector; 51 percent contribute to increase gender equality, and 44 percent include innovation actions, said Llanes, who is also the director of the National Economic Research Institute.

In tune with this, 6,660 jobs were created, of which 60 percent are performed by women and 54 percent by youngsters. In addition, the capacity

of 16,884 government actors from all provinces was strengthened as part of their articulated management of territorial development.

As part of the work PADIT has conducted, a set of tools was institutionalized to plan and support government management, while communication in favor of development was improved and 155 municipal governments received support to strengthen their Internet communication systems, Llanes added.

Specific guidelines in accordance with territorial development and the empowerment of local governments within the National Economic and Social Development Plan for 2030, in addition to the Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy and the new Constitution, favored the platform's articulation and coordination with different national institutions.

Llanes also stated that at present, the platform has two strategic priorities and six working areas. The first of these priorities, dedicated to multiple-level institutional governability and management, foresees the strengthening of capacities; support to public policies and decentralization; development of citizens' participation and territorialization, and promotion of open and smart governments.

The second one, focused on financing of local economic and productive development, makes emphasis on social inclusion and sustainability, she said.

Working areas support financing to local economic development by public and private actors, in addition to the creation, implementation and

functioning of micro, small and medium-sized companies (MIPYMES), which are accompanied by local governments and local development centers.

Main, future challenges include the promotion of the competences' decentralization process; accompaniment of national program to strengthen capacities; promotion of association between municipalities and the Strategy in favor of the Society's Computerization.



PADIT National Coordinator Aizel Llanes. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

“Team Asere”, Cuba’s Pride

By Jhonah **DÍAZ**

MIAMI.- The V World Baseball Classic was left behind, but feelings about the so-called “Team Asere” and the peculiar journey that made millions of Cubans dream of success are indescribable.

After several setbacks in international tournaments, the Cuban team aroused a passion that was almost forgotten: a good deal of chauvinism flooded the social media; endless adjectives were used and the wishes of victory positioned the team as the primus inter pares (first among equals). The journey went from a critical phase to that of absolute normality and fans still congratulate a team that promised dedication, met its promise in spite of defeats and enchanted supporters in their path to a long-awaited glory.

The whole country was waiting for his performance, because where there was no faith at the beginning, the green light was turned on to the fantasies and a devotion grew that infected the masses, so much so that the reception became a national celebration, with an indescribable uproar in Havana.

The main strengths of the Cuban squad’s strategy included its teamwork, with

phrases such as “we are a family” and “this was my dream,” amidst music, dance, smiles, party...and pure Caribbean taste.

With risks along the way and not without mistakes, manager Armando Johnson and the technical staff faced for the nth time a challenge in the diamonds and reached the fourth place, which tastes to glory, in spite of the crushing defeat against the U.S. team (2-14) in the semifinal stage.

Johnson praised players’ unity, dedication and commitment, as well as that of coaches, and stressed the tough training sessions conducted to be on the threshold of the final match after 17 years.

He also said that managing such a diverse team, composed of players from different leagues, including Major League Baseball (MLB) players – who joined the squad just a few days before the start of the tournament – was a unique and incredible experience.

Those athletes joined the group very well, to make the deed of being the first to qualify for the second round, after starting in a way which was not that good, he affirmed. He also praised the work of the team captain, Alfredo Despaigne, who cheered the squad during the two weeks the adventure lasted. Enthusiasm was so big that “Team Asere” also became a song, thanks to the talent of

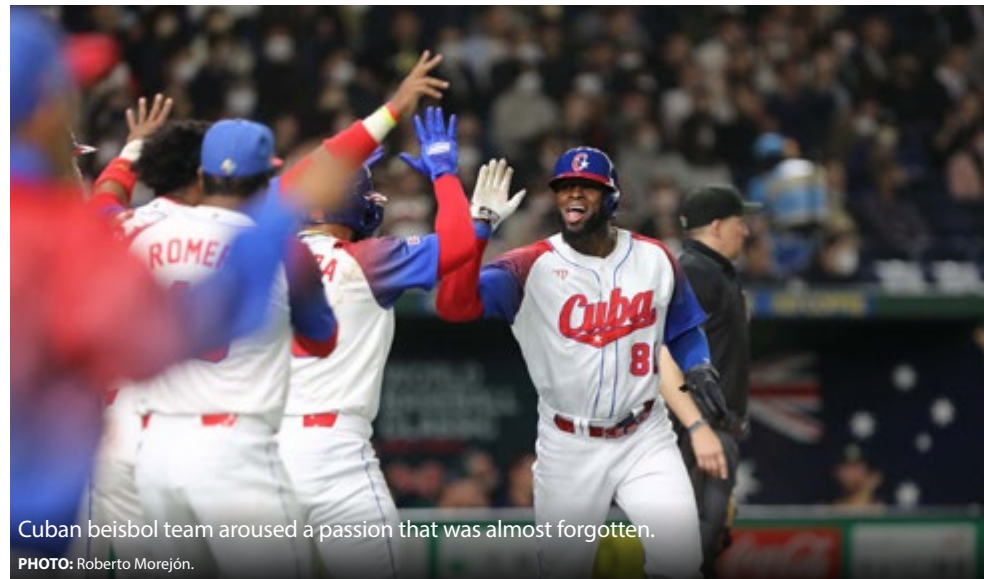
Alexander Abreu and his orchestra, Havana D’Primera, with other famous artists of the national music scene.

Big screens were located in squares, parks and institutions to create another mass show and support the team in spite of the distance, without obviating the difficult atmosphere faced at loanDepot Park, the venue of the decisive round, in the U.S. city of Miami.

The result of the Cuban team is a great motivation that will for sure contribute to

improve the practice of baseball, by adding children, players and professors and helping to fill stadiums and bateyes (areas in rural places), said President of the Cuban Baseball Federation Juan Reynaldo Pérez – an additional example of the meaning this discipline has, considered a National Cultural Heritage.

The podium of the V edition of the WBC included champion Japan, the United States and Mexico.



Cuban beisbol team aroused a passion that was almost forgotten.

PHOTO: Roberto Morejón.

Varadero to Host Open Water Masters’ Event

By Adrián **MENGANA**

HAVANA.- Masters athletes are dreaming of a new option to enjoy the blue waters of Cuba’s main beach resort of Varadero, when that emblematic tourist city hosts the first open-water competition next August.

The above was informed by PanAm Aquatics Master president, Mel E. Goldstein, during a four-day visit to the island.

“Cuba is beautiful and its people are friendly,” stated Goldstein, who is also a manager, leader, organizer, coach, international competition director, and national and world record holder.

“I do not know much about the Cuban sport, but the athletes I have met are very enthusiastic about this discipline” he said. The official met the Cuban master athletes at the Pan-American championship organized in the Colombian city of Medellín, and decided to support them. At that event, where the Cuban athletes made their debut, the island reached over a dozen titles and the idea to hold an event in the island was born.

With that purpose in mind, Goldstein visited Matanzas, where Varadero is

located. His first stop was at the Victoria de Girón Stadium, where he talked to provincial director of the National Institute of Sports (INDER) José Luis Gándara.

The U.S. official indicated that, if expectations are met, Cuba would join the world circuit in 2024, and could then start holding championships in different disciplines under the PanAm Aquatics Master umbrella.

He also showed interest in Cuban baseball and knew about the preparations for the 62nd National Baseball Series – which started on March 29 – and the team of Matanzas’ aspirations to defend the champion’s title.

Goldstein also visited Playita del Tenis, where he knew about the possibility of holding water polo matches in the sea and enjoyed triathlon and open water swimming exhibition events, headed by the Cocodrilos del Tenis Club and its president, Rogelio Luis Valdés.

In Varadero, he visited the pool located in 36th street, which is managed by INDER and could be used by competitors for their training prior to entering the sea. He

also toured the starting and finishing line locations for open water swimming.

A special moment of his visit was his meeting with two-time Olympic champion in Montreal 1976 Alberto Juantorena, who was organizing there the IV Varadero 2023 International Marathon, held on April 2.

In Havana, the U.S. delegation met the President of the Cuban Olympic Committee Roberto León Richards, who shared Goldstein’s views about the

possibility of organizing an international open water event in Varadero.

“Cuba has the conditions, especially Varadero, to host a master swimmers’ event,” acknowledged Goldstein, who also held talks with INDER Vice President Omar Venegas and INDER Logistics Director Lázaro Green.

As part of his visit to Cuba, the official toured the Giraldo Córdova Cardín High Performance Training Center and the Baraguá Swimming Pool Complex, the seat of the National Swimming School.



Goldstein with the Cuban master athletes. PHOTO: J.T.

Tarzan, Hippos and the New Ivory Fever

By Moisés SAAB

HAVANA.- Born in the United States, Edgar Rice Burroughs only traveled to Hawaii in his life, but that did not stop him from creating a character that marked an era: Tarzan of the Apes.

White, handsome and Anglo-Saxon, Tarzan was raised by a loving primate after the deadly airplane accident his parents suffered. Chita, a nice chimpanzee which, according to the species' canons, was good-looking and with which he had an ambiguous relation – to say the least – was his best friend.

Tarzan found love after the also accidental arrival of Jane, a white and attractive girl. That relationship was not of the liking of Chita, who until then had no opponent for the attention the man-monkey gave her and with whom she shared the awakening of hormones in adolescence, a link that was not a pastoral novel at all. Many of the Tarzan-related plots involved ambitious and evil Europeans who, by their own nature, tried to find a kind of an

African El Dorado: the cemetery to which elephants go to die, with their tusks and everything, according to legend.

Finding such a place was a synonym of immediate fortune in what ivory is concerned, as there was no need of hunting the pachyderms, a dangerous act that takes time. Tarzan, a forerunner of fauna protection,

prevented aggressors from getting their goals, by all means.

Unfortunately, the comic character is no longer present. Governments now use more effective means against poachers and there is an international act against elephant ivory trade.

However, protection measures have a negative side, as the descendants of those evil Europeans are omnipresent and have found a new victim to their greed: hippos, whose teeth are also unfortunately in high demand because of their ivory.

The cry of alarm came from the Born Free Foundation, an NGO that

has indicated that the number of Hippopotamus decreases at a steady and dangerous pace partly because of the measures taken against the ivory trade of pachyderms such as Tantor, the elephant the Tarzan family used as a means of transportation.

In a report entitled A tooth for a tooth? the entity recalls that the artiodactyl mammal appears in the list of species vulnerable to extinction since 1989, when the world prohibition against ivory trade was approved.

However, the legislation is violated, particularly in the United Kingdom, where the teeth trade of the mammal is on the increase due to its use to make handicraft objects whose prices are sky-high, according to the report – written by Frankie Osuch, one of the NGO's specialists.

Thus, after the massacre of elephants, ivory traders started killing hippos, which are slow and although known as aggressive animals, are defenseless against poachers' powerful riffles.

The worst is that there is no Tarzan now to protect them, because the original – the one the Rumanian-born Olympic champion and world record holder, Johnny Weismuller, once portrayed – died at an advanced age in a senior adult home, without even remembering his African reign.



Hippopotamus appears in the list of species vulnerable to extinction since 1989. PHOTO: Internet.



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