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# Archipelago International coordinates longest tourist flight to Cuba

Text and Photo Martin **HACTHOUN**

HAVANA.- In an operation that the vice president for the Americas of the Archipelago International hotel chain, Mr. Jose Luis Leonardo, describes as historic, a bridge of charter flights will bring tourists from South Korea to Cuba, starting on December 2023.

This is a coordinated project between the major South Korean tour operator Island Resort Club Tour Services & RC Hotel Click, run by Mr. Robert Choi, and the Indonesian hotel company that operates six vacation complexes in Cuba, Mr. Leonardo said in statements to **The Havana Reporter**.

Air Premia, set up in 2017 in Seoul, will operate all 12 chartered flights with a frequency of one a week, the Dominican executive pointed out.

It will be the first time that direct flights will be carried out from that distant origin to the Cuban capital, where travelers will be able to choose between the Grand Aston Havana Hotel, a comfortable 5-star exquisite luxury establishment, and the Aston Panorama Hotel, a 4-Star Superior facility, both with a privileged location in Havana, he added.

It is also unprecedented that it will be the longest route covered by tourist charter flights, from South

Korea to any other international destination. Air Premia will use a 330-seat Boeing 787-9 aircraft to cover a 12,500-kilometer route between the South Korean city of Icheon and Havana, at a cruising speed of 913 km/h, the manager explained.

Mr. Leonardo noted that travelers will be given the choice of combining their stay at the modern hotel that Archipelago International will open on September 1, the Grand Aston Varadero. This is part of the Indonesian chain's line of work to attract holidaymakers from the large and growing Asian market to Cuba.

"This operation will pave the way and serve as preparation for other projects on which we are working from Japan and China," Mr. Leonardo announced.

Archipelago International operates five hotel complexes in the island and will open a sixth one in September, the Grand Aston Varadero. In addition to two establishments in Havana, the company runs the 635-room Grand Aston Cayo Paredon, in Jardines del Rey, which has reported an excellent occupation rate during this peak tourist season in that new destination, the executive said.

The others are the 749-room Aston Costa Verde, in Playa Pesquero, Holguin, and the 727-room Grand Aston Cayo Las Brujas, on the central northern keys off Villa Clara.

The luxurious Grand Aston Havana is Archipelago

International's flagship hotel, where the company will open the Infused bar soon, equipped with the molecular mixology technique, the only one of its kind in Cuba, and will officially inaugurate the Oro restaurant, also exclusive in Cuba, Leonardo told **The Havana Reporter**.



Vice president for the Americas of the Archipelago International hotel chain, José Luis Leonardo.

## Birds' Preservation in Ciego de Ávila

By Neisa **MESA**

CIEGO DE ÁVILA.- Care and preservation of birds and their habitat is one of the premises of the Greater Wetland Park Local Development Project conducted in Morón municipality, in this central Cuban province.

Located in Ciego de Ávila's Greater Northern Wetland, specialists conduct a joint work with kids and adolescents that are part of the Ecosistema Vivo (Living Ecosystem) environmental group, directed at strengthening their love for nature and their responsibility to protect it.

Yuney Cruz, head of this project that is conducted by the Provincial Flora and Fauna Preservation Company, stated that they work in coordination with the Cayo Coco Coastal Ecosystem Research Center to raise awareness in the community on animals' illegal trade and the importance of obeying laws.

She explained that the hunting of species with an aesthetic value – for their illicit sale – is a practice that violates the legislation in force and threatens biodiversity's survival;

thus, the importance of educating younger generations to modify those habits.

Birds in great demand include parrots, indigo bunting, butterflies, Cuban and yellow-faced grassquits, Western spindalis and bullfinch, endemic species that contribute to the biodiversity needed to preserve ecosystems' balance, Cruz commented.

The specialist added that birds also favor reforestation by transporting and

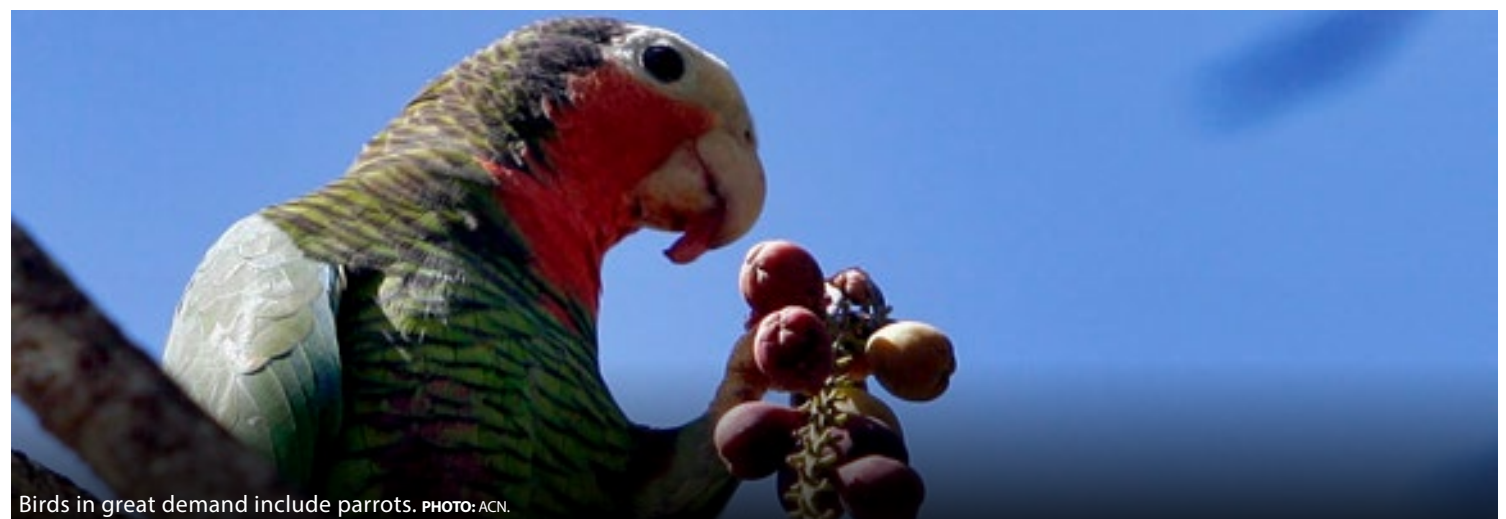
scattering seeds while looking for food. In addition, they pollinate flowers, multiply vegetable species and contribute to biological control by eating insects that are harmful to plants.

According to Cruz, monitoring actions conducted in the park allowed identifying 100 species of birds, including Cuban todies, Cuban trogons (national bird), green and Indian woodpeckers, Cuban blackbirds, great

lizard cuckoos and some species of the Cuban sandhill cranes.

The Ciego de Ávila's Greater Northern Wetland has the condition of Ramsar site and covers an area of over 226,875 hectares in the Bolivia, Primero de Enero, Morón and Chambas municipalities, including the adjacent keys.

It also includes the Cayo Coco Central and Western Ecological Reserve protected areas and the Loma de Cunagua and El Venero fauna shelters; for that reason, their protection and care guarantees safeguarding its biodiversity and human life at large.



Birds in great demand include parrots. PHOTO: ACN.

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# Solutions in Light of Economic Challenges



Díaz-Canel described as critical and free of self-satisfaction the debates recently held in 15 territories. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

By Melissa **KING**

HAVANA.- First secretary of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), Miguel Díaz-Canel, affirmed at the VI Plenary Meeting of that organization that the main challenge is to look for solutions in light of the economic difficulties the country faces.

In his speech at the meeting, held on May 23, the Cuban president also stressed that several measures and actions have been taken to face this complex situation.

However, it is necessary to be more rigorous in their political and administrative logistics, "without disregarding that for their implementation and regulation, many of these measures need components in foreign currency, which we do not have," he added.

Díaz-Canel analyzed the debates recently held by top authorities of the country in 15 territories, which he described as critical and free of self-satisfaction. He also urged to continue fostering municipal autonomy, particularly in food production.

The head of the Cuban State spoke about the measures in place to attract foreign currencies, attain electro-energy stability and manage quality and speed in foreign investment and e-trade, and stressed that the blockade imposed by the United States is the main obstacle the island faces.

The Cuban president urged to face the current challenges with the spirit of victory, effort, talent, determination and creativity and to go from speech to action, with responsibility and speed, while implementing the Plenary Meeting's proposal with efficiency.

The PCC lines of work to foster the guidelines of the economic and social policy of the Party and the Revolution were approved at this meeting.

Those guidelines foresee implementing bold measures in accordance with Cuba's economic model; evaluating ways to increase the production of goods and services; giving special attention to the improvement of central strategic planning and local development, based on each municipality's potentials.

The lines of work also establish agribusiness as a priority, especially the production of food, the transformation of the socialist state company and the substitution of imports, in addition to speeding-up the materialization of new direct foreign investment businesses.

Díaz-Canel stated that "the path is full of challenges and difficulties, which we are forced to face and overcome, with the spirit of victory, effort and talent, with determination, unity and above all, with creativity; it is not only about resisting, it is about resisting and creating at the same time."

In the meantime, the PCC Central Committee summoned the Second National Conference of that body for next October, with the purpose in analyzing the country's economic, social, political and ideological situation.

In an official statement, it was informed that in the said meeting, the fulfillment of the agreements reached at the 8th Congress of that political force and the implementation of the Ideas, Concepts and Guidelines resulting from that Congress will be evaluated with critical sense, objectivity and analytical depth.

# Better Prepared against Disasters

By Ernesto **VERA**

HAVANA.- Cuba conducted the Meteoro 2023 Popular Drill under the motto "The art of safeguarding relies on prevention," intended at reducing the risk of disasters in light of tropical cyclones and other natural, technological and health dangers.

The population, in coordination with bodies of the Central Administration of the State, the entrepreneurial system and political and mass organizations, conducted actions on May 21 and 22 to strengthen national capacities and response in the face of those phenomenon.

The drill allowed updating the documentation of the National Defense Council's Managing Center for Situations of Catastrophe and its working groups, including warning plans and procedures to respond to and recover from tropical cyclones and other extreme hydro-meteorological events.

In that sense, the composition of the commissions responsible for protecting the people and evaluating damages and needs was strengthened, as well as that of the offices that attend victims, when required.

Other actions included solutions to a potential increase of the Aedes Aegypti mosquito and bird flu's infectious levels, in addition to the spread of solutions to previous experiences, including the battle against the pandemic of COVID-19 and the catastrophes at the Saratoga

Hotel and the Matanzas Super Tanker terminal.

Plans of action against forest fires and seismic events, including their consequences for the national electricity system, were also updated.

Meteoro 2023 included industrial accident drills and buildings' constructive logistics tasks, in addition to sanitation and food collection and distribution actions, crops and animals' protection tasks, rain drain, drinking water and energy supply.

Preparation and logistics actions addressed at evacuation and vital services centers were also conducted, making emphasis on the preservation of peoples' life and the resources of the economy.

Although according to the Northern Atlantic cyclonic activity forecast for 2023 – which starts in June and ends on November 30 – this season will go from normal to slightly active, experts urge to be ready and on the alert in light of any phenomenon of this nature.

According to predictions, 11 tropical cyclones could be formed this season, of which five could reach the hurricane category, seven could develop in the Atlantic Ocean area, two in the Caribbean and two in the Gulf of Mexico.

Meteoro (Popular Drill of Actions in Situations of Disaster) is conducted in Cuba since 1986 with the purpose of evaluating the preparation of the managing and command bodies at all levels, in order to foster measures against earthquakes, high intensity hurricanes, severe droughts and sanitary-origin events.



Meteoro 2023 included industrial accident drills and buildings' constructive logistics tasks.

PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



# A Call against Biden's Deafness

By Deisy**FRANCIS**

HAVANA.- When more than half of Joe Biden's term has passed by, the president still maintains Cuba in the unilateral list of countries that allegedly sponsor terrorism, and the economic, commercial and financial blockade is still in effect.

It means that the constant calls against the current policies the United States applies against the island still fall, apparently, on deaf ears.

Although with nuances, based on the interpretation of the article congressman Jim McGovern and former Senator Patrick Leahy (democrats) published at the beginning of May in The Boston Globe.

Both officials recalled that the inclusion of Cuba in Washington's list, on the last days of the administration of Rep. Donald Trump (2017-2021), lacked merit, on which intelligence officials and diplomats of the governments of the two main parties agreed.

"For that reason President Barack Obama (2009-2017) eliminated Cuba from the list in 2015," although Biden still has done nothing to eliminate such designation, they said.

They regretted that the private industry, religious groups, NGOs, universities and

even foreign governments take the risk "of being prosecuted by the United States for almost any type of humanitarian aid, business, investment or trade with Cuban citizens.

McGovern and Leahy stressed that an honest assessment "requires acknowledgement of the ways in which the U.S. sanctions aggravate the suffering of the Cuban families."

In their report, they analyzed that as a result of the serious lack of food, medication, fuel and other basic items - due to the strengthening of the blockade - an unprecedented number of Cuban citizens decided to emigrate.

According to McGovern, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts (since 1997), and Leahy, a Senator from Vermont (from 1975 to 2023), the blockade is "a Cold War anachronism that has not attained any of its objectives" (that is, destroying the social project created as of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959).

They stated that, although putting an end to that unilateral siege "requires a Congress order, there are provisional measures that should be immediately taken."

For that reason, they reiterated that in the first place, the White House should eliminate Cuba from the list of countries

that sponsor terrorism, because "it is an open secret in Washington that Cuba does not belong in that list and that the previous, false justification of the Trump administration had political motivations."

They also requested Biden to stop application of title III of the Helms-Burton Act, which stresses the blockade's extraterritorial nature and retake

rapprochement with Cuba, in addition to allowing more U.S. people to travel to the island. When running to the presidency, the current president promised to revise and change his predecessor's approach on Cuba if he made it to the White House, but everything has remained the same and the maximum pressure policy adopted by Trump is the line that president Biden follows, in essence.



Senator Jim McGovern (right) and former Senator Patrick Leahy. PHOTOS: Internet



General director Soberón stated that the decision will come into effect on July 1st. PHOTO: Minrex

## Cuba Simplifies Consular Procedures

By Camila**MAYO**

HAVANA.- Cuba announced measures that include the extension of passports' validity, the elimination of the extension requirement and the reduction in passports' cost, in response to the criteria of Cubans resident abroad. General director for Consular Issues and Attention to Cuban Residents Abroad at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ernesto Soberón, stated that the decision will come into effect on July 1st and is part of an update of migratory policies favoring family relations.

The official added that since that date, passports will extend their validity to 10 years instead of the current six, in the case of Cuban citizens over the age of 16 and to five, in the case of minors.

The requirement to extend passports every two years is also eliminated and the cost will be reduced to 180 dollars or euros for people over the age of 16 or 140 dollars or euros for minors.

Another measure adopted is to adjust the length of stay on the island for Cubans living abroad with that of their family members and foreign spouses and children during their stay in the country.

Soberón highlighted that as of July 1st, residents outside the country will be able to stay for a longer time in Cuba, as well as their foreign relatives.

Similarly, he noted that those who emigrated before January 1st, 1971 must show their Cuban passports when entering the island, as per the regulations established in the Constitution approved in 2019 in the popular referendum.

These decisions are in line with the country's policy to strengthen ties with the overseas community, said the director, who added that at present, these ties continue to be satisfactorily developed.

Cuba has taken steps to increase the participation of Cubans resident abroad in the country's political, economic and social life, and debates on the Constitution and Families Code draft projects were in line with that, noted the diplomat.

Soberón also stated that "the number of cooperation, business and investment projects presented by Cubans resident abroad and directed at participating and contributing to the nation's economic development systematically and constantly grows."

These new measures were welcomed by Cuban residents in different parts of the world, including coordinator of the Bridges of Love project Carlos Lazo.

In a message posted on Facebook, Lazo commented that "for a Cuban emigrant living in the United States, for example, the cost of a passport with all its extensions is now almost \$800 and has a useful life of six years. As of July 1st, fees will amount to 180 dollars and passports will be valid for 10 years, without the need of extensions."

Others described these measures as fair and addressed at strengthening relations among Cubans from all over the world; hopes for better relations between relatives living in Cuba and the United States were also highlighted, in addition to satisfaction for what it is considered "the elimination of traces from the past."

People agreed to say that "with patience and determination, the obstacles that prevent the construction of the longed-for bridges are gradually eliminated."



# Dengue Vaccine Undergoes Pre-Clinical Trials

By Cira **RODRÍGUEZ**

HAVANA.- Cuban scientists started pre-clinical trials with two formulations of the vaccine candidate against dengue, a process conducted by the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB).

Researchers of that institution explained that the future immunogen is undergoing the research-development stage to determine which variant will undergo clinical studies.

The vaccine candidate against dengue developed by Cuba has a safe technological platform and is based on recombinant proteins: a really safe technological platform, CIGB affirmed in a message.

It is a tetravalent candidate based on proteins of the four dengue viruses, which are being evaluated at present.

Authorities of the aforementioned research center consider that if the dengue virus infection level drops – that is, the viral load – severity condition can be avoided, even symptoms, either sub-clinical or light.

Having a vaccine is a complex process, because dengue, a disease transmitted by the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito, has four serotypes and immunization is needed against each of them at the same time, for the product to be effective.

On this process, president of the Biotechnological and Pharmaceutical Industries Entrepreneurial Group (BioCubaFarma) Eduardo Martínez affirmed that if the vaccine candidate is available this year, clinical trials in humans could start in 2024.

CIGB dynamic development has allowed the center reaching a high level in biotechnological products' research, development, production and commercialization, particularly vaccines. Those products include HeberNasvac, against hepatitis B – approved for its use in Cuba eight years ago and effectively applied as the only vaccine against an infectious disease in South Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, Australia, the Philippines, Chinese Taipei, Thailand and Hong Kong.

The said product is able to reduce the evolution of that pathology to serious and chronic states, as well as cirrhosis of the liver and primary hepatocarcinoma.

Other products include the liquid pentavalent vaccine (Heberpenta), with antigens against five diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenza type B, in addition to immunizers against meningitis B and C.

The list of products that have to be mentioned include Abdala, the first immunogen against COVID-19 in Latin America and Mambisa, a vaccine candidate.



The CIGB explained that the future immunogen is undergoing the research-development stage.

PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

# Biotechnology for Food Sovereignty

By Joe **VARONA**

HAVANA.-The Cuban biotechnology industry bets for the increase of agricultural production through the introduction of science, technology and innovation, in order to make progress in food sustainability and independence.

According to the Ministry of Sciences, Technology and Environment (CITMA), Cuban scientists created genetically modified corn and soy hybrids, while authorities look after

their safe use after the start of the commercial phase.

With the rise of food prices in the international market, it was essential for the country to increase the production of corn and soy crops, which are an important source of energy and proteins for animal fodder.

Due to the challenges resulting from climate change and the growth of the world

population, agricultural biotechnology is a valid option to make progress in food security and the planet's sustainable development.

Studies indicate that genetically modified crops have contributed to mitigate the lack-of-food crisis resulting from the growth of the world population and the climate change effect, and this technology is the fastest in the history of agriculture. In order to adapt crops that produce food to the constant changes of climate – such as the rise of temperatures, the decrease of water availability, the increase of salinity and plagues – it was necessary to obtain resistant and high-yielding varieties.

“The benefits of a plant's genome modification include the incorporation of the desired features, with a higher resistance to plagues and diseases or tolerance to herbicides,” stated CITMA.

The development of agro-biotechnology in Cuba dates back to the 1990s, and in 1996 in particular, specialists of the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB) obtained the first lab transgenic plants, which paved the way for the manipulation of genes able to give certain properties.

Cuba annually imports over 1,8 billion dollars in food, of which corn, soy and rice exceed 30 percent.



Agricultural biotechnology is a valid option to make progress in food security and sustainable development. PHOTO: ACN.



# Verónica Lynn, Cuba's Iconic Actress

By Adis**MORERA**

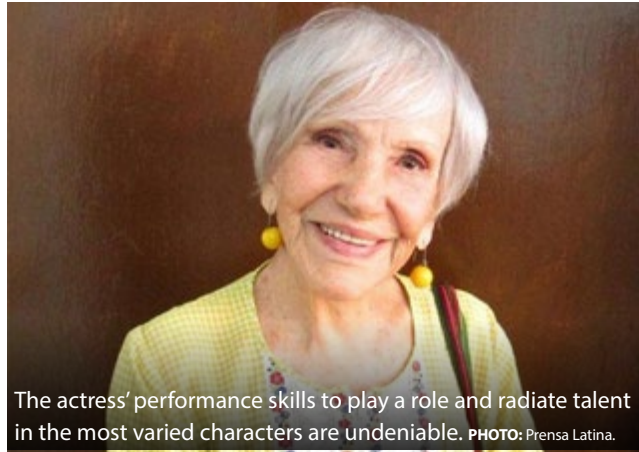
HAVANA.- People usually want to escape from reality or live in someone else's bodies to have sublime experiences. Those are precisely the feelings we have when we watch Cuban actress Verónica Lynn abandon her skin to become art.

I could appeal to memory through a genuine Santa Camila de La Habana Vieja or a masterly-performed Doña Teresa in the Sol de batey soap opera, but mentioning her name is more than enough: Verónica Lynn, Cuba's iconic actress.

As a child, she was a movie buff and although she was not familiar with the theater, writing her own plays while imitating great actresses such as Bette Davis or Betty Harford was her main passion. To many people's luck, fate also wanted Verónica to be a famous actress.

When I was six years old, I was fascinated by a Shirley Temple film and decided that I wanted to be like her; since that time, acting was no doubts important to me, the actress told **The Havana Reporter** in an exclusive interview.

At 23 and with a talent that started to be noticed, she got a place in the cast of Teatro Azul, a live program that was then broadcasted by the Cuban Television Four Studio under the direction of Gaspar Pumarejo.



The actress' performance skills to play a role and radiate talent in the most varied characters are undeniable. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Her performance in that program was a showcase for new projects to come, including the theater.

The first time I was in front of the audience was with the piece Amok. The theater has a special charm, as you are on spectators' sigh, which does not happen in the cinema nor the television; there you actually are on the stage. I love it, she said.

Verónica considers herself a loyal disciple of Russian maestro Konstantin Stanislavski's acting method, which she learnt thanks to Andrés Castro. That method, in her opinion, opened her the doors, as it allowed her to develop even more her performance skills.

## AN ARTIST IN CAPITAL LETTERS

The actress' performance skills to play a role and radiate talent in the most varied characters are undeniable. How does she do it? No one knows. It is a special gift that has accompanied her throughout her 92 years of life, which she celebrated last May 7 and for which she has won Cuba's love: an artist in capital letters.

Verónica is pleased with the roles she played during her acting career, and even though she loves them all, she is especially fond of Camila; Luz Marina, in the play Aire Frío; Martha, in ¿Quién teme a Virginia Woolf? and Fortunata, in Fortunata y Jacinta.

In addition to acting, teaching is another passion she has. Together with her husband, late actor Pedro Álvarez, she directed the national amateur theater movement for 25 years.

The artist confessed that she is terrified at the idea of directing and acting at the same time. Apparently, with her current play, Los frijoles colorados, she overcame that fear to wholeheartedly dedicate herself to an expression that captivated her since the very beginning.

It is a production by the Trotamundos company, which her husband and her founded in 1989 and which was on showing throughout the month of May at the El Sótano hall, in Havana.

## Mexico at the Center of the Next Caribbean Festival

By Marcelo**GARCÍA**

HAVANA.- The 42nd edition of the Caribbean Festival, to be held from July 3-9 at the eastern Santiago de Cuba

province, is dedicated to Mexico's life and death celebrations, commented Orlando Vergés, director of Casa del Caribe in that city.

Festivities are a mixture of Mexico's spirituality, magic, cultural diversity, history

and tangible culture, declared in 2003 an oral and intangible heritage of humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

As part of the academic program, specialized workshops will be conducted on popular religions in Cuba and Caribbean; visual arts, with over 20 exhibitions; dance and percussion, and popular theater.

Book launches; meetings with popular culture and tradition groups, poets and oral narrators; film screenings, archeology events, and exchanges with educators and youngsters of the region, will also be conducted.

The event, aka Fiesta del Fuego (The Fire Party) and sponsored by the Cuban ministry of Culture and government authorities from that province, will host the 2nd edition of the World Congress on Death.

As indicated in the event's summon, meetings will be conducted those days at the Santiago de Cuba province to deal with

Mexican studies on this celebration, while specialists from other countries will share their research on death from different perspectives.

Mexico's celebrations of life and death, aka Day of the Dead, are a regional festivity that is worldwide celebrated by the Mexican people.

This celebration also shows the special relation Latin American and Caribbean people have with death and its festivities, when people's cultural resistance is also stated.

The Caribbean Festival is the largest event of gathering and popular, cultural and traditional diversity of the peoples of the region, where exchange and defense of their identities is also present.

Its large artistic program includes over 20 scenarios, with activities all seven days of the event. Music, shows and the culture of each nation intertwine those days turning Santiago de Cuba into the capital of the Caribbean.



The Festival is dedicated to Mexico's life and death celebrations. PHOTO: Internet.

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# Prensa Latina at the Service of Truth

By Ernesto **VERA**

HAVANA.- The register of Prensa Latina's Constitutive Act, about three months after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, marked the birth of this agency, created with the purpose to break large corporations' media monopoly. The signing of the legal instrument, on April 16, 1959, paved the way for the defense of peoples' struggles and their right to independence, sovereignty and self-determination.

Such an irreverent boldness was predicted to last one month; the media hegemony of large information transnationals was so overpowering that the intention of amplifying the voice of popular causes seemed, to some, a challenge doomed to failure.

However, two months after that unique action, Prensa Latina – a news agency Latin American journalists then described as "the agency that was needed" – broadcasted its first newswire to the world under the acronym of PL, and with that motivation, next June 16, it will celebrate its 64th anniversary.

At present, PL has offices in about 40 countries, mostly in Latin America and broadcasts about 400 daily dispatches that are mainly included in the world news service in Spanish, English, Portuguese, Italian, Russian and Turkish. It also reaches readers through publications such as Cuba

Internacional, Orbe, Negocios en Cuba, **The Havana Reporter** and Correos de Cuba. On top of that, it avails of the possibilities of information technologies from a multimedia perspective.

Its close links and work agreements with several news agencies and international news networks contribute in breaking the media siege and spread the reality of Latin America and the rest of the world from the vision of its peoples and their aspirations. That endeavor, in addition to the prestige of the Cuban Revolution and the commitment of its founders and those who carry on its work – outstanding Latin American and Cuban intellectuals – foster the present work of the Prensa Latina staff, under the principle of serving truth.

## FACING MEDIA WAR

The triumph of the Cuban Revolution, on January 1, 1959, marked the need and specially the opportunity of breaking the seizure of truth by large media networks and facing the media war organized and directed from the United States against Cuba and its process of changes.

Fallacies and distortion of information by large news corporations, an action that started even before the rebels' triumph over the tyranny of dictator Fulgencio Batista (1952-1959), increased during the trials against war criminals and torturers, henchmen of the regime that was responsible for dreadful violence crimes.

In that context, the Revolutionary Government summoned over 400 journalists of the continent to travel to Havana to witness the defamation and lying campaigns about the Cuban reality – an action that was known as Operación Verdad (Operation Truth).

During that meeting, historic leader of the Revolution, Fidel Castro, stated that it was crucial for the Latin American peoples to have a news agency to spread their reality, manipulated, silenced and defamed by large news transnationals.



Prensa Latina Office in the United States. Bent down, from left to right, Colombian journalist Gabriel García Márquez, correspondent. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



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# Economy at Parliament's Debates

By Milagros **PICHARDO**

HAVANA.- The second extraordinary session of the National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban Parliament) focused on the country's economic situation and the role communication should play as a pillar of the State's governmental management.

In the preparation meetings, President Miguel Díaz-Canel highlighted that the Parliament has to be more demanding in relation to the fulfillment of the decisions taken, and added that this issue is essential for the population to trust in the application of each of the guidelines.

The Cuban legislative body approved the Social Communication Law, the first of its type in the island, which will govern the communication system for the strategic management integrated to the organizational, media and community fields, with political, organizational and commercial objectives, for the good of the people in all public spaces, physical and digital.

In this regard, the President stated that the norm represents the first step and is the result of a deep process of debate. He also referred to the huge challenges its implementation entails in the changing scenario of the so-called information and knowledge society.

As part of an update addressed to Parliament members, Cuban Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economics and Planning Alejandro Gil commented that agricultural production and inflation are two of the main challenges the national economy faces.

When referring to the sector's situation, he stressed that the country urgently needs to face the deficit of agricultural productions, which have systematically decreased in recent years.

He explained that work is conducted to link production to sales in foreign currencies, to generate incomes that allow its development.

The Deputy Prime Minister reiterated that Cuba's priority is to attend situations of social vulnerability and acknowledged that the inequality gaps have widened.

In his speech, he commented that the island has possibilities to meet the 2023 economic plans, although for that, agricultural production must increase and inflation must be tackled.

At the end of April, the export of goods and services reached 866 million dollars – 23.6 million less than the figure foreseen for this stage, he added.

In the case of tourism – one of the main sectors that generate foreign currencies in the country – only 28 percent of the annual plan was attained in that period, he stressed.

On the complex context the island faces, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez stressed that the main obstacle to Cuba's economic development is still the blockade imposed by the United States.

The National Assembly also set up the 11 permanent working commissions and the 109 parliamentary groups of solidarity. It was also announced that during the next five years, 52 new laws and 29 decree-laws are expected to be analyzed.

The first ordinary session of the Cuban Parliament, to take place next July, will hold intense debates on issues of popular interest.



The Cuban legislative body approved the Social Communication Law. PHOTO: Miguel Guzmán.

## Sancti Spíritus' Anniversary

By Mayra **PARDILLO**

SANCTI SPÍRITUS.- Narrow streets, iron and stained-glass windows, eaves and red-tile roofs characterize Sancti Spíritus, a city in Cuba's central region that celebrates its 509th anniversary and is a symbol of the country's heritage.

About 360 kilometers east of Havana, Sancti Spíritus' urban historical center, declared a National Monument in 1978, stands out for the decorative elements of ancient ceilings, made of precious wood.

In the book Monumentos Nacionales y Locales de Sancti Spíritus (Sancti Spíritus' National and Local Monuments), the city historian, María Antonieta Jiménez, mentions examples of great value located at the historical center, such as the Major Parrish Church (1680) and the bridge over the Yayabo River, the only of its type in Cuba.

In that area, the city safeguards buildings from the XVIII and XIX centuries, including the Colonial Art Museum – aka the One Hundred Door Home – and the Natural History Museum.

Other outstanding buildings are the Mayor General Serafín Sánchez Valdivia's Museum – home of the Hero of the Three Wars of Independence against the Spanish colonialism, among others.



Touring the old part of the city in the XXI century allows seeing the architectonic values. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

In the meantime, the piece entitled Rostros de una ciudad añeja (Faces of an old city), written by architect and master of Restoration María Silvia Arruebo, provides interesting data about the architecture of the fourth of the seven villages the Spanish founded in Cuba. Thanks to the protection of the Sancti Spíritus heritage, exponents of the

woodwork and the creativity of the XVII and XVIII century artisans are still preserved.

One feature of this city' home ceilings is that the name of the owners of such places appear there, even the names of the carpenters who built them and the date of construction.

Sentences against the güijes or black goblins that according to legend live in rivers, lakes and ponds can also be read, or against witches or any other spell or curse. Facades built in the colonial period do not stay behind and according to the specialist, in the XIX century, Sancti Spíritus' architecture stood out for its undeniable Moorish influence.

Eaves, decorated with floral motifs such as garlands or with marble imitations, are also common, as well as the Spanish double doors with shutters on the right had.

Ironwork, introduced in the same period, transforms the face of Sancti Spíritus, a city that celebrates its 509th anniversary this month.

Touring the old part of the city in the XXI century allows seeing the architectonic values and the majesty of the buildings that are still preserved in a village formerly known as Holy Spirit, the most medieval of the Cuban cities, experts say.



# Gloria Rolando's Hermanas del Corazón

By Mario MUÑOZ

HAVANA.- Hermanas del corazón (Heart sisters) is the title of Cuban filmmaker Gloria Rolando's documentary miniseries, a work that deals with the link the Oblate Sisters of Providence religious congregation had with Cuba since its foundation and which was recently premiered in Havana.

The said congregation was the first to be composed of black nuns in the United States and from 1900 to 1961 – the latter, the year in which they returned to their headquarters, in Baltimore – they created several schools in four Cuban provinces, for African-descendant girls and youngsters.

"In some bibliographies, I realized that there was pain. A pain and an injustice when telling this story: Fidel Castro came in, closed schools and that's it. Everything is over."

"It was not at all like that. It was a time in 1961 in which we read in the papers that Cuba is defending itself. It was the time of Girón, of the Literacy Campaign, of those phalanx priests. It was a difficult time, of clashes between the church and the State," Rolando affirmed.

The filmmaker, who has also made documentaries such as the trilogy 1912. Voces para un silencio (2010-2013); Reembarque (2014), and Diálogo con mi abuela (2016), among others, talked about the importance of protecting memory.

"We are talking about the nation's heritage, its history," she told the Cubarte website.

Eight years went by since the filmmaker first started shooting, in the cities of Baltimore, Havana, Cárdenas, Camagüey and Santiago de Cuba, and the work's premiere, at the beginning of last May.



The filmmaker Gloria Rolando talked about the importance of protecting memory. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

First, she had to work alone, until she received the support of the Cuban Film Industry and other institutions and people who helped her overcome several obstacles, including the pandemic of COVID-19.

The documentary series' soundtrack includes the participation of musicians Tony Ávila, Emilio Núñez, Magaly Rolando and the Vocal Baobab group.

The first chapter, entitled El Colegio San José (The San José School), includes the testimony of those who studied at

the congregation's headquarters in the city of Cárdenas. The second one, Las novias de Dios (God's girlfriends), includes interviews granted by some of those nuns and former students in other provinces.

Ángeles de la memoria (Angels of memory), the third chapter, is the metaphoric way the artist used, "because black angels are supposed to be the ones who keep blacks' memories in this world. That happens over and over again on several occasions."

## Cuban Items on World Memory

By Mendi RODRÍGUEZ

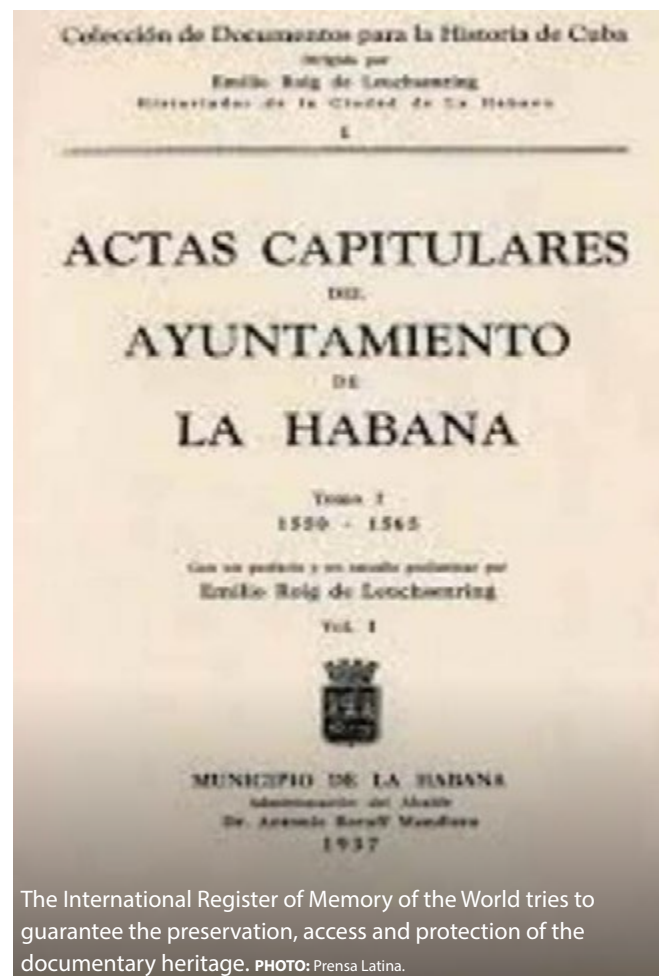
PARIS.- The Cuban film poster collection and the Havana City Council Chapter Acts were inscribed on the International Register of Memory of the World following UNESCO's approval of their patrimonial value.

The multilateral body made the decision during the holding of the Foreign Relations and Program Commission meeting of its 216 Executive Council, on May 18, that examined 64 proposals.

The International Register of Memory of the World tries to guarantee the preservation, access and protection of the documentary heritage of humanity.

On the decision, Cuban ambassador to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Yahima Esquivel, appreciated the approval and reaffirmed Cuba's commitment to protect and manage documentary heritage, as well as to promote access to it.

The official also acknowledged the teams that worked in the preparation of the files of the Cuban Film Poster Collection and the Havana Chapter Acts that were submitted to candidature.



The International Register of Memory of the World tries to guarantee the preservation, access and protection of the documentary heritage. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.





# Alejandro de Humboldt Park International Project

By The Havana Reporter **EDITORIAL STAFF**

GUANTÁNAMO.- A multinational project to be conducted until 2027 will favor reforestation, ecosystems and communities located in the Alejandro de Humboldt National Park, official sources indicated.

The international plan, entitled Adaptation and addressed at reforestation and ecosystems, is implemented in Haiti and the Dominican Republic since 2020.

Spokespersons of the Ministry of Sciences, Technology and Environment (CITMA) in this easternmost Cuban province informed that Adaptation will benefit five areas of that national park, which will help improve the quality of life of those who live in the zone, in addition to resilience and adaptability in the light of climate change. The project is financed by the CITMA delegation in Guantánamo, the International Climate Initiative and the Green Gold and Action against Hunger non-governmental organizations to the tune of one million euros and 1.35 million Cuban pesos.

Experts affirm that improvements will be made in the medium and long term in family economy, reduction of climate

change negative effects and constant water supply.

It would also be possible to strengthen control against forest fires and increase multinational cooperation to protect biological biodiversity.

Strategic plans are expected to contribute to a more efficient management of protected areas and preserve the region's rare and endemic species, according to specialists.

This project will also be implemented in the Baconao Biosphere Reserve, located in an area between the Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo provinces, and will include actions addressed at reforestation and

soils' protection, indicated the project's sources.

The production of food, in harmony with the environment and rural women's empowerment are likewise included among such actions.

The objective of Adaptation is to foster reforestation and ecosystems in vulnerable rural communities that are part of the Caribbean's Biological Corridor.



Adaptation will benefit five areas of the Alejandro de Humboldt National Park. PHOTO: ACN.

## Timbalaye International Forum in Italy

By Oscar **REDONDO**

ROME.- The VI Timbalaye International Forum, held in Italy, was described as "a signing to culture" by outstanding Cuban intellectual Miguel Barnet, who attended the event as invited guest of honor.

Barnet, a poet, a narrator, an essayist and an ethnologist and president of the Fernando Ortiz Foundation, stated at the opening ceremony of this event – held until May 25 – that Timbalaye is a noble and healthy project "that enriches spirituality, which is so much needed."

History, sounds and identity: through the path of cultural and historical acknowledgement of African presence in Cuba, the Caribbean and Latin America, was the main topic of the event.

The objective was to vindicate and appreciate that heritage as part of the Timbalaye 2023 Agenda, mostly through rumba, recognized as an Intangible Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The presentation of this new edition of the forum was headed by Cuban ambassador to Italy, Mirta Granda and attended by Marco Papacci, president of the Cuba-Italy National Friendship Association (ANAIC), as well as Ulises Mora and Irma Castillo, Timbalaye managers and promoters.

Granda appreciated Barnet's presence, which she described as a privilege and highlighted Mora and Castillo's work in this project, directed at rescuing Cuban traditions in the world, as members of the Cuban community settled in Italy that "gives its support to the revolutionary process the island conducts."

At the event, held at the ANAIC headquarters in Rome, the Cuban official appreciated that solidarity organization for "its permanent accompaniment" and its particular support to this initiative. She also highlighted the cultural work of the Cuban Revolution and the Italian artists' contribution, "which joins both countries forever."

Papacci also appreciated Barnet's presence in this event in his capacity as honorary president of the Cuban Writers and Artists Association. He stressed that the VI Timbalaye

Forum showed the values of the cultural revolution the island started in 1959, which "opened new paths."

ANAIC president availed of the occasion to express, on behalf of the members of this association, their rejection to the recent harassment and pressure actions against the Cuban group Buena Fe in Spain by enemies of the Cuban Revolution, in cities such as Salamanca and Zamora, to force their concerts to be canceled.

The Forum, which lasted a week, toured the cities of Tarquinia, Genoa and Rome. It was conducted by ANAIC under the auspices of the Cuban Embassy in Italy, in tune with the African Legacy Heritage Objective, adopted by Timbalaye on January 2019.



History, sounds, identity and historical acknowledgement of African presence was the main topic of the event. PHOTO: Emilio Herrera.



# Cienfuegos' Colonial Charm

By **Sabdiel BATISTA**

**CIENFUEGOS.-** Cienfuegos's colonial architecture attracts thousands of visitors each year, as its buildings are included among the most beautiful in the region, with impressive wrought iron balconies, fine decorative details and multicolor brick walls.

This popular tourist destination, located in Cuba's central-south region, offers a varied historic and architectonic heritage that goes from the imposing Purísima Concepción Cathedral to the colorful neoclassical buildings surrounding Plaza de Armas.

Those who visit this city, aka La Perla del Sur, are surprised by the beauty of its buildings, a testimony of local history, an essential part of the cultural heritage and citizens' pride.

In these grounds, travelers can see neoclassical, neo-baroque, baroque and art deco constructions, some of which date back to the city's origin and are still well preserved.

French, Spanish, Italian and Caribbean influence prevails in this splendid city, in addition to features of the Cuban architecture.

Founded in 1819, Cienfuegos preserves its colonial charm and stands out for its houses, parks, gardens, Victorian bridges, historic monuments, large doorways and unique vaulted ceilings.

With a mixture of architectonic styles, its most distinctive buildings and monuments include the iconic Valle Chalet or Palace, which was built in 1917 and is an example of the Spanish, French and Italian influence.

Other outstanding buildings include the Tomás Terry Theater – opened in 1890 and a place of cultural gathering – and Casa de los Leones, which was the home of the British Consul at the beginning of the 20th century and still preserves the distinctive bronze lion sculptures after which the building was named.

The Government Palace, the San Lorenzo Convent, the Diocese, the Ferrer Palace, the former Club and some mansions also stand out among the city's buildings.





# Ecuador to Elect President in Early Elections

By Adriana VALDÉS

QUITO.- Ecuador is preparing to elect a president and legislators in August in a process of early elections, after President Guillermo Lasso decreed the cross death, a resource considered fraudulent, but at the same time hopeful.

Sociologist Agustín Burbano so affirmed in statements to **The Havana Reporter**. The

analyst added that, in the end, the country wins with such a decision, by overcoming clashes between the Executive and the Legislative powers.

Knowing that in three months the National Assembly and a new president will be elected means peace for the society, which hopes that the present political situation is solved through the electoral process, Burbano said.

The expected transition, in case Lasso's dismissal due to the political trial proceeds,

did not offer a real possibility of solving the country's problems, as vice president Alfredo Borrero would assume the post.

In light of the forthcoming elections, tentatively foreseen for August 20, Burbano affirmed that the Revolución Ciudadana movement (RC) is the political force in better conditions.

He said that that organization's representative quality - whose leader is former president Rafael Correa (2007-2017) - started to go up since the adoption of a political strategy aimed at questioning Lasso.

At present, RC is the better organized movement in the territories, with better communication deployment in alternative media. All that, on top of the electoral results of February 5, places RC on the top for these extraordinary elections, he stressed.

However, these elections are organized by the same National Electoral Council (CNE), the same Contentious Electoral Court, the same press and other institutions that proscribed RC leaders.

Without his illegal interventions, Lasso would have had more difficulties to win in 2021; there is no room for innocence, warned the sociologist.

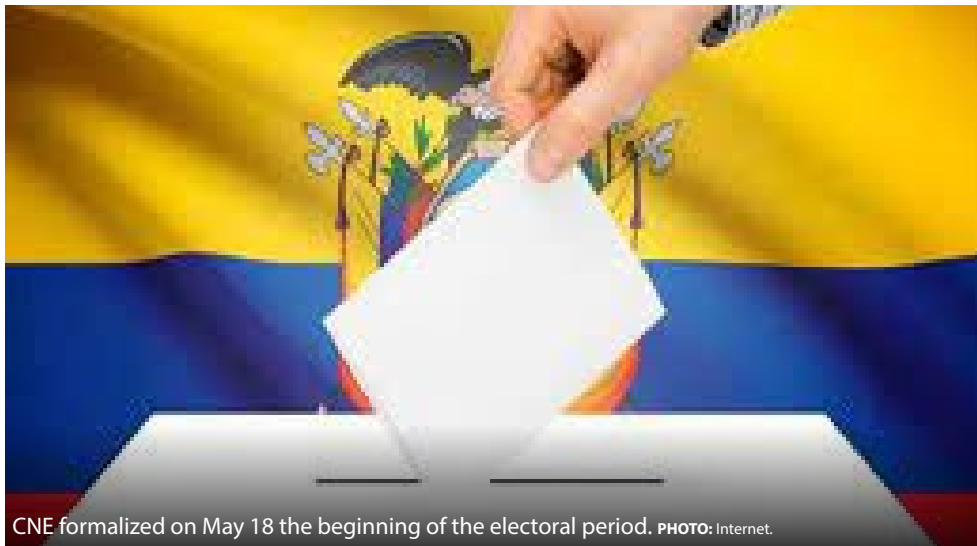
Burbano told **THR** that in spite of the political turbulence. society is in calm now, because a large sector, in spite of being the victim of neoliberal measures and cuts, believes that the system is trapped in its own problems.

Another highly politicized group, with opinions in favor or against the president, does not go to the streets because it considers "crossed death" as the solution to guarantee, in 90 days, a new Assembly and Lasso's definite removal from power, the specialist added.

Even the president's followers like that measure, because they believe that the RC majority would thus leave the Assembly and they hope to have a favorable electoral result. Some even promote the reelection of Lasso, the most unpopular president in the history of the country.

CNE formalized on May 18 the beginning of the electoral period, as a result of which it can start organizing the elections in which over 13 million Ecuadorians will elect the president, vice president and 137 Parliament members, who will be in office for only one year and a half, until May 2025.

Lasso announced that he will not run in the elections.



CNE formalized on May 18 the beginning of the electoral period. PHOTO: Internet.

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# Strengthening the Economy through Strategic Ties

By Antonio **RONDÓN**

HAVANA.- Cuba and Russia strengthened their commercial relations with the reinforcement of their strategic alliance by holding sessions of their Business Committee and the Intergovernmental Economic-Commercial and Scientific-Technical Commission in Havana. Fourteen agreements, contracts and memorandum of understanding were signed

as part of the works both entities conducted, showing both nations' common will to enter a new stage in their commercial relations. Cooperation in the field of energy, construction, tourism, agriculture and agribusiness, among others, found solid ground in the talks between business executives and government officials. Since the holding of the X Entrepreneurial Committee meeting – in Moscow, on September 2019 – the international scenario,

characterized by western powers' increased hostilities, has changed for both countries, which now suffer unilateral punitive measures.

Commercial exchange between both nations exceeded 452 million dollars in 2022.

However, Cuba has a modest participation in that balance; for that reason, Cuban Deputy Prime Minister Ricardo Cabrisas urged to overcome that unbalance with a substantial increase of exports to Russia.

Investments are an important part of this new boost to commercial ties, with 10 projects already approved.

In addition, in order to materialize the creation of a Russia-Cuba Commercial House on the island, an agreement of intent was signed with the purpose to develop the Rusmarket Joint Venture.

In the tourism industry, the idea is to develop corporate and health tourism, while regular and charter flights experienced a substantial increase since the end of May, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Chernyshenko stated.

Rossiya, a subsidiary company of the Aeroflot airline, will be responsible for connecting both countries, which is expected to contribute to the recovering of

the flow of Russian tourists, who will now have the possibility of using the Mir card, whose use is expected to be universal this year, Chernyshenko said.

The deputy head of the Russian government highlighted in this sense the development of the process to start making mutual payments in national currencies.

With that purpose in mind, the Cuban Central Bank foresees the registry of subsidiaries of three Russian banks, chairman of the Russian side of the Entrepreneurial Committee, Boris Titov, told **The Havana Reporter**.

Chernyshenko also stated the intention of establishing productions in Cuba starting from zero, with Russian technology, as it happened with the modernization of the Antillana de Acero factory.

In both forums, the need of establishing a safe logistics for the maritime flow of goods was also reaffirmed.

Our country can be a bridge for Eurasia's entrance to Latin America and the Caribbean, stated Cabrisas, who is also the head of the Foreign Trade and Investment Ministry.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel attended the closing of the XI bilateral Entrepreneurial Committee Meeting.



Fourteen agreements, contracts and memorandum of understanding were signed during the bilateral Commission in Havana. PHOTO: Vladimir Molina.

## Minister Denounces Impact of the Blockade in Bank System

By Carmen **ESQUIVEL**

SANTIAGO DE CHILE.- Cuban Minister of Finances and Prices Vladimir Regueiro stated that the Cuban bank sector is one of the most affected by the blockade imposed by the United States.

The economic, commercial and financial siege, intensified during COVID-19, and the inclusion of the island on the illegitimate U.S. list of countries that allegedly sponsor terrorism, prevent access to credits and limit financial relations, the Minister told **The Havana Reporter** (THR).

Regueiro granted an interview to **THR** after participating at a meeting of Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Finances of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), held at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the XXXV Regional Seminar on Fiscal Policy.

The official appreciated CELAC's solidarity not only with Cuba but also with other countries, such as Venezuela and Nicaragua, which also suffer the measures of the United States that have an impact on their economies.

Regueiro stressed CELAC's will to increase the fiscal space to face common challenges such as low economic growth, climate change, the debt's high interest rates, attention to vulnerable people and increase of investment in health and education.

A solid approach was presented on the need of higher integration of our economies, he said.

On the fiscal policy seminar, he stated that it was an interesting space of debate to know other countries' experiences, with a deep academic analysis about best international and regional practices.

Some of the opinions stated dealt with the fact that even with the low economic growth, it is essential to increase tax incomes and revise rates, taxes and tax bases, with specific treatments to certain productive sectors.

The Minister mentioned that other topics dealt with how the debt's high interest rates compromise governments' capacity to invest and meet the Sustainable Development Goals. This requires a rapprochement between debtor countries and their creditors in order to come up with solutions that alleviate, slow down or cancel the debt, he affirmed.

Other issues were also discussed in the meeting, such as environment protection, use of electricity to replace traditional means of transportation, investments in health and development of education, because of the contributions an educated population can make.

The Minister added that topics on gender, protection to African descendants and indigenous people were also discussed in the meeting.

The Cuban Minister of Finances and Prices finally noted that challenges are huge, but there is also a higher will to meet the objectives foreseen by the countries of the region.



Cuban Minister of Finances and Prices Vladimir Regueiro. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



# Food Security at the Core

By Moisés **PÉREZ**

HANOI.- Making progress towards food security was the main purpose of the tour Deputy Agriculture Minister (MINAG) Maury Hechavarría recently paid to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

This visit allowed us to reach important agreements on rice production development and coffee growing, the deputy minister told **The Havana Reporter**, while adding that the Cuban delegation was composed of business executives of the sector and representatives of MINAG scientific centers.

In the case of rice, we agreed to extend the cooperation project with Vietnam, which is undergoing its fifth stage, until 2025 and add a new component: the admission of foreign investment in the sector for this to be sustainable, the official said. Potential investors were already identified, he added.

The main objective of this type of cooperation is to guarantee the supply of rice to the Cuban population, as large amounts of this product are still imported at present, he stressed.

In relation to coffee, Hechavarría explained that there is a cooperation project by virtue of which the Vietnamese Robusta variety was introduced in Cuba, with encouraging results.

We used to harvest about 250 kilograms per hectare and production has now increased to two tons, he stressed.

This cultivation's strategy foresees the start of a second stage, in which foreign investment will be promoted in order to increase production volumes and meet not only national demand but export too, noted the official. Other potential areas of cooperation were also explored during the Cuban delegation's visit to Vietnam, including the development of potato seeds in Cuba, which are mostly imported at present.

The deputy minister also stated satisfaction for the next operation of a plant in the island, with Vietnamese investment, to produce animal fodder and the project to build another one, with higher capacity (about 360,000 tons) – both, essential for pork and poultry raising development.

Hechavarría also highlighted the signing of a memorandum of understanding with a Vietnamese company for the production, exchange and commercialization of veterinary medication and the decision to summon an Entrepreneurial Forum in Hanoi, next October, to promote businesses and investments in the Cuban agricultural sector.

Prior to the MINAG visit, a delegation headed by member of the Political Bureau of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), Roberto Morales, also visited this country. On that occasion, at a theoretical seminar between the parties of both nations, Morales stressed that the main objective of the Cuban organization is focused on the economic challenge, in order to solve the main problems that cause dissatisfaction and unease among the population.

Morales, the PCC secretary for Organization, said that above all, everything is based on the construction of socialism, which "the majority of the Cubans hope for and want, and which should also be prosperous and sustainable, in order to improve the people's quality of life."

At a meeting with members of the Cuban mission in this country, Morales explained that the tour of China, Laos and Vietnam allowed fostering political dialogue to the highest level and multiplying links between the parties, the cornerstone for the strengthening of economic, commercial and financial relations with those countries.



This visit allowed us to reach important agreements on rice production development and coffee growing, said the deputy minister Hechavarría. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

## French Agency Accompanies Socio-economic Development

By Waldo **MENDILUZA**

PARIS.- France and Cuba proudly show 120 years of relations, ties that as of 2016 acquired a new dimension with the opening on the island of an office of the French Development Agency

(AFD), an entity that maintains close ties in Latin America.

Water, sanitation, healthcare, energy and transportation are included among the cooperation sectors with Cuba, a country that needs assistance because of the severe impact resulting from the economic, commercial and

financial blockade imposed by the United States for over 60 years.

In an interview with **The Havana Reporter** in Paris, AFD Deputy Director for Latin America, Alain Humen, appreciated the links and financial support Cuba has received through different social and economic benefit projects.

We work in the areas requested by the Cuban government and maintain contacts with the authorities involved in them, a mission that responds to a mandate from the French government, he explained.

According to Humen, the vision of the joint work in the island is the same as the one that characterizes the agency's work with other countries of the region: the so-called green transition; that is, initiatives focused on the fight against climate change and support to topics about social-gap reduction.

Throughout these about seven years, the operation portfolio in Cuba amounts to 280 million euros, including over 40 million in donations and subventions, he stressed.

Projects undergo different levels of execution and in addition to funds by the French State, resources from the European Union (EU) are also included in some cases, based on the financing mechanisms, noted the AFD official.

One of the ongoing actions is related to the increase of the capacity to produce the vaccine against meningitis at the Finlay Institute, for the benefit of the Cuban population and that of the African nations, where distribution will be conducted by the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

In this regard, Humen referred to a financing agreed upon in 2021 for a five-year period and over 30 million euros – 8 million of which are provided by the EU.

### LATIN AMERICA

AFD links with Latin America started more than five years before the institution reached Cuba and already show notable results and financing amounts.

At present, we have links with Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru, in addition to Cuba, in sectors that go from water, sanitation and agriculture to energy, healthcare and education, he commented.

In relation to figures, Humen told **The Havana Reporter** that cooperation with Latin America amounts to about 1.3 billion euros annually and over 8 billion in the last decade.

According to the official, it is important to mention that the French Agency works directly with governments, which issue an invitation to tender to companies interested in the execution of the different programs, based on the financing available.



Fourteen agreements contracts and memorandum were signed PHOTO: Ileana Piñeiro.



# One Step from the Central American Games



By Luis **BEATÓN**

SAN SALVADOR.- Sport authorities and foreign experts who visited El Salvador prior to XXIV edition of the Central American and Caribbean Games, to be held from June 23 to July 8, highlighted that this nation has proven its capacity to organize this event.

In the last days of May, water polo International Technical representative Manuel de Jesús Benítez visited the Ciudad Merliot Sport Complex, La Libertad, and offered his impression for the progress made last year.

"I am really impressed; I visited Merliot's facility last year and the difference is huge," said the Puerto Rican official.

Other persons who visited the center in recent last weeks, like President of the Centro Caribe Sports (CCS), Dominican Luis Mejías, also expressed their satisfaction for the progress made.

These games, the world's oldest regional event, will grant direct quotas for the Santiago 2023 Pan-American Games in 13 disciplines.

In addition to satisfaction for becoming champions, athletes from the different

countries will also have the possibility of qualifying for the main event of the American continent, to be held in Chile from October 20 to November 5, 2023.

As announced, competitors winning first place in track and field individual and relay events – except walk and half marathon – will automatically qualify for the Santiago 2023 Pan-American Games.

In the meantime, when sports that qualify upon the basis of ranking – like track and field and swimming – had not closed qualification yet, Cuba announced the qualification of 416 athletes in 26 disciplines for these Central American games.

That figure includes 18 Greco-Roman and Free Style wrestles – of which, a minimum of ten are expected to win medals, according to experts – and 11 swimmers (6 women and 5 men), with hopes of winning medals in women's 4x100 and 4x200 meters freestyle relay.

The Organizing Committee of the XXIV San Salvador 2023 Central American and Caribbean Games launched two mascots: Maqui, which embodies a Maquilishuat (El Salvador's national tree) and Volco, which represents a volcano, typical in this nation.

## On the Road to the 2026 World Cup

By José **REINOSO**

HAVANA.- The Gold Cup, the main tournament of the Northern, Central American and Caribbean Confederation (CONCACAF), will grant quotas to the region's squads for the 2026 World Cup, to be held in the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Until 1963, competitions were held in all three regions mentioned before, but as of that year, those areas were unified to hold the CONCACAF Nations Championship, until 1991, when the Gold Cup was created. Since then and until the present, an attractive format is conducted with the presence of an invited country.

The next Gold Cup will take place from June 26 to July 16, 2023 with 16 teams divided into four groups: A (the United States, Jamaica, Nicaragua, TBD); B (Mexico, Honduras, Haiti and Qatar); C (Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador, TBD), and D (Canada, Guatemala, Cuba, TBD).

About 15 stadiums in the United States, Canada and Mexico will welcome the region's best soccer players, who will work on their tactical preparation some, and on their potential, strengths and

weaknesses others, in view of the World Cup.

Among the latter, Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, Jamaica, Guatemala, Haiti, El Salvador, Cuba and Nicaragua are included. These squads will compete for the other three quotas allocated to CONCACAF and the two places reserved for the repechage matches, with opponents from other Confederations. Although there is still plenty of time for the start of the next qualification tournaments for the FIFA Cup, there is no doubt that the Gold Cup will be the initial indicator of each teams' real options.

In principle, the Costa Ricans, Panamanians and Hondurans start as clear favorite, but the Jamaicans, Haitians, Guatemalans and Salvadorians are to be considered too, while the Cubans, unlike other occasions, also have possibilities as a result of having players inserted in foreign leagues.

A priori, Cuba's handicap is its elite tournament, which is characterized by its low competitive development in relation to its organization and number of matches, in spite of its opening and closing structure – very different to that of the rest of the countries.

The Nicaraguans, for their part, will compete in the Gold Cup – their sixth participation in this event – after a brilliant performance in the Nations League, and their National Federation foresees a serious and organized work, with lots of perspectives.

Battles at the technical direction level also seem to be interesting, as with the exception of the Cubans, the Salvadorians and the Trinidadians, the rest of the squads have foreign coaches: Costa Rica (a Colombian), Panama (a Danish/Spanish), Honduras (an Argentinean), Jamaica (and Icelander), Guatemala (a Mexican) and Nicaragua (a Chilean).

A great team that is absent from the next Gold Cup and has future pretensions and projections is the Dominican Republic, which recently hired an Argentinean coach; however, qualifying for the next World Cup will be a difficult task for this squad.

This is the region's panorama as the 26th edition of the Gold Cup comes closer, whose current champion is the United States and whose main winner include Mexico (10 occasions), the United States (7), Costa Rica (3), Canada (2) and Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras, with one each.





# Africa, Legacy and Future

By MaríaMAYORAL

LUANDA.- Africa maintains a low economic performance in 2023, a year marked by the worsening of social asymmetries; however, the continent could get more benefit from its resources in light of the current context and global tendencies.

World Bank (WB) Chief Economist for Africa, Andrew Dabalen, considers that "weak growth, combined with debt vulnerabilities and dismal investment growth risks a lost decade in poverty reduction."

According to the WB analysis, all the Sub-Saharan region "remains sluggish, dragged down by uncertainty in the global economy, the underperformance of the continent's largest economies, high inflation and a sharp deceleration of investment growth."

At the end of last year, 22 out of the 54 African States were at high risk of external debt distress or already in that condition, the financial body revealed.

It is not a temporary problem at all. On July 1987, the then Burkina Faso president, Thomas Sankara, stated at the Organization of African Unity that "the origins of debt come from the origins of colonialism. Those who lend us money are those who had colonized us before."

Considering the current dynamics, the WB acknowledged the worsening of conditions in 2023 due to rise in financing and debt service costs in Africa, "diverting money from badly needed development investments," affirmed the Bretton Woods institution.

During the course of this year, inflation will maintain its upward trend, above central banks' target bands for most countries, and low investment growth will continue to constrain economies in this region of the world.

Investment growth in Sub-Saharan Africa fell from 6.8 percent in 2010-2013 to 1.6 percent in 2021, with a sharper slowdown in Eastern and Southern Africa than in Western and Central Africa, according to WB data.

WB Vice President Indermit Gill stated that the very financial entity affirmed that "the golden era of development appears to be coming to an end due to the fracture of the global economy," with serious consequences to "tackle the challenges of our times: stubborn poverty, diverging incomes and climate change."

International Monetary Fund (IMF) general director Kristalina Georgieva, for her part, said on April 2023 that middle term perspectives are not favorable either because "uncertainties are exceptionally high due to risks of geo-economic fragmentation which could mean a world split into two rival economic blocs."

In other words, both Bretton Woods institutions acknowledge the process of breakdown of the unfair international economic and financial order they helped creating at the end of World War II (1939-1945) and the inevitable struggle to establish a multipolar power, without the United States at the head.



The WB acknowledged the worsening of conditions in 2023 due to rise in financing and debt service costs in Africa. PHOTO: Internet.

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