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Tourism Continues to Recover

By Benjamín **MICERINOS**

HAVANA.- Cuban tourism continues to undergo the gradual recovery process that started in 2023 thanks to the efforts officials and staff have made, in addition to campaigns that promote the country's beauties.

Even though over two million visitors arrived in Cuba last year – 36 percent more in comparison to the same period in 2022 – experts affirm that the sector continues facing one of the most serious crisis in the last 20 years, due to competition with nearby destinations that show significant recovery indicators.

That is the case of the Dominican Republic, the Mexican Caribbean, Jamaica, the Bahamas and other small regional destinations.

Amidst that scenarios, comparative analysis with figures before the pandemic of COVID-19 – particularly 2017, 2018 or 2019 – are alarming in the case of Cuba and a lot is being published or commented on the topic these years, euphemistically called the post-pandemic period, according to analysts.

If international arrivals in Cuba from 2004 to 2013 are considered, these increased by 803,477, with a year-on-year average growth of 3.7 percent, while from 2013 to 2018, the

number of visitors increased by 1,698,000, for an average growth rate of 10.65 percent. Last December, about 400 international flights arrived in Cuba with an availability of over 70,700 seats, with visitors coming from the four main markets: Canada, Cubans resident abroad, Russia and the United States. Sources of the Ministry of Tourism indicated that in 2023, there were also increases from emerging countries such as Colombia, Turkey, Portugal, Brazil and Belarus.

PERMANENT CHALLENGE

In order to increase tourism, Cuba has several challenges and possibilities ahead. On the one side, there is a tendency to visit the island to know the Cuban culture, history and traditions, especially its music, dance and people, in spite of being mostly a Sun and Beach destination.

Data provided by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) indicated that before the pandemic of COVID-19, Cuba was placed third in relation to the number of travelers welcomed in the Caribbean, after the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. However, that higher attraction and a permanent place that helps improving positions in the Caribbean and world region go hand in hand with an efficiency increase and the revision of wrong decision making.



There is a tendency to visit the island to know the Cuban culture, history and traditions, in spite of being mostly a Sun and Beach destination. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

On the other hand, the country still faces the measures imposed by the United States against the island in the fields of cruise ships, flights and finances, which hinder the development of the industry in Cuba. In the meantime, national tourism increased by 24 percent, as well as stays in

'Campismo Popular' (camping sites), which already has 96 sites nationwide.

There are over 80,000 government-run hotel rooms in the country in about 300 hotels and more constructions are underway. In addition, there are about 18,000 lodging capacities in private places."

Saint Lucia: Best Caribbean Island

By Ivette **FERNÁNDEZ**

HAVANA.- Saint Lucia celebrates its victory as Best Caribbean Island in the prestigious Readers' Choice Awards 2023, granted following travelers' evaluations and comments.

Saint Lucian Tourism, Investment, Creative Industries, Culture and Information minister, Ernest Hilaire, stated that this recognition is a testament to the dedication of the tourist stakeholders and the warm hospitality that defines the island.

The official also expressed gratitude to the trade partners for their pivotal role in securing this recognition, which inspires them to continue their commitment to excellence, sustainable tourism practices and development of their destination.

Recent data of Tourism Analytics reveal that 748,373 people visited Saint Lucia from January to September, for a 68 percent increase in relation to the number of arrivals in 2022 (444,618).

U.S. vacationers represented 56 percent of international arrivals during the first nine months of 2023.

President of the Saint Lucia Hospitality and Tourism Association, Paul Collymore attributed part of those increasing figures to the return of events such as the Saint Lucia Jazz & Arts Festival and Carnival, which came to a stop for three years.

The increase of the shuttle service to the island also helped rising these figures, he said.

Numbers are expected to continue rising in the next years, as Saint Lucia is getting ready to add at least nine thousand new rooms by 2025.



Tourism Analytics reveal that 748,373 people visited Saint Lucia from January to September 2023. PHOTO: Internet.

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Economic Topics at the Center of Parliamentary Debates



Cuban Prime Minister Manuel Marrero announced the measures to be implemented this year.

PHOTO: Vladimir Molina.

By Milagros **PICHARDO**

HAVANA.- Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel defended the need and feasibility of the measures the country will adopt in 2024 to revitalize its economy during the Second Ordinary Period of Sessions of the National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban Parliament).

At the closing of the sessions, held from December 20 to 22, the president said that none of those measures alone will solve the complex challenges the national economy faces, but their correct, ordered and individual implementation, evaluating the impact they have, especially on the most vulnerable families.

At the debates, held in this capital, Cuban Prime Minister Manuel Marrero announced changes regarding the cost of fuels, based on the sale price in dollars in the region and taking as reference the official foreign exchange rate in Cuba.

He also informed about a 25 percent rise in the residential sector's electricity bill for high consumers who use more than 500 kilowatts-hour, while in the case of non-state management actors who conduct their activity in residencies, the non-residential sector rate will be applied.

Marrero also added that the water bill will also be increased for the population who receives non-metric water supply, while the price of liquefied gas will be modified and customs duties exemption for the import of food, cleansing products and medications by individuals will be extended.

In order to attract foreign currencies, he announced a revaluation of tax exonerations and the real impact these have in the economy for the benefit of the population and said that those that are not justified will be eliminated, guaranteeing the collection of taxes and the increase of the State Budget's incomes.

In relation to incentives to encourage production, a national goal, he referred to actions such as the use of cooperated production contracts with foreign investors and non-state actors, in addition to a 50-percent reduction of customs duties payment related to the import of raw materials and intermediate goods for all economic actors.

In relation to measures to be implemented and economic planning, the National Assembly was informed that in 2024, Cuba foresees an increase of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of about 2 percent, at constant prices.

During the sessions, the over 400 parliament members also analyzed several norms that increase and guarantee citizens' rights, such as the new Public Health, Military Attorney's Office and Attention to Complaints and Requests laws.

It was likewise informed that the country will continue conducting an intense legislative agenda, with amendments proposed and that the drafting and approval of 46 laws and 23 decree-laws are foreseen for the 2024-2027 period.

65 Years of Heroic Creation

By Lisván **LESCAILLE**

HAVANA.- On January 1st, 2024, Cuba celebrated the 65th anniversary of the triumph of the Revolution, convinced that that process of social and political changes is a work of heroic creation.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel summarized in those words the profound meaning of the six and a half decades of hard work the nation has undertaken since its final independence on that epic day of 1959.

Personalities, events and social benefits are intertwined with that date, just as leaders Fidel Castro (who passed away on November 25, 2016) and his brother, Army General Raúl Castro.

Cuba Prime Minister announced the measures to be implemented this year, lifting the ideal of a sovereign and internationalist nation against multiple pressures.

The achievement of robust health and education systems, universal and free of charge, are two arms of the immense work built against all odds, and which places the human being at the center of its concerns.

Since then, Cuba became a medical power whose scientific results reach the international community and is able to produce its own medications and vaccines,

including the necessary doses to fight COVID-19 in the nation and worldwide.

As a sign of a foreign policy attached to fair causes, the Cuban Revolution deployed highly-qualified professionals of different fields in over 100 countries from all continents.

Doctors and other health staff, aka the white-coat army, are in the vanguard of that Cuban group which saves thousands of lives every day, with solidarity as their banner.

Cuba is also considered a world and continental power in sports, in which an important number of medals have been won in almost all disciplines; the result of a policy focused on mass participation.

In the field of education, the nation enjoys great prestige not only for the declaration of Cuba as "a territory free from illiteracy" – on December 1961, after an epic Literacy Campaign – but also for guaranteeing schools and universities for everyone.

Education, sport and culture – another field that has also been largely developed in the nation – were at the disposal of those less favored in the world.

This year's anniversary means vindicating those and other achievements for which thousands of Cubans of different generations have given their lives since 1868.



This anniversary means vindicating the achievements for which thousands of Cubans have given their lives since 1868. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

Interests in Increasing Scientific Cooperation

By The Havana Reporter **Editorial Staff**

HAVANA.- U.S. scientists stated in this capital their satisfaction with Cuba's progress on medical research and their wishes to increase collaboration in the field, an intention president Miguel Díaz-Canel endorsed.

Last December, the president welcomed a delegation of senior officials from the Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center from the United States on occasion of the fifth anniversary of the setting-up of the biotech joint venture Innovative Immunotherapy Alliance SA (IIA), the only of its type between both nations.

On this relation, Díaz-Canel affirmed that possibilities of scientific, technological, academic and cultural exchange between both peoples have enormous potential, as proven by IIA – an entity established between the prestigious U.S. hospital and the Cuban Molecular Immunology Center.

We celebrate the fifth anniversary of the joint venture, “a company that has a major importance to us and has a lot to do with what we hope to attain from relations between our peoples, and that we can always share everything that can unite us, what can build bridges,” he said.

The delegation of scientists was headed by Dr Thomas Schwaab, Roswell Park Strategic Development director, who at a meeting with the Board of Directors affirmed that “we analyzed the progress made in the last five years and are surprised of how much we have collaborated from the scientific point of view.”

The Cuban president noted that having shares in this company and this development with one of the most important U.S. entities in the scientific field, particularly in the world of health, fills us with pride and stressed that Cuba has always kept up to date with the results of the clinical trials made in that country.

Shwaab added that results reached between both parties include, from the point of view of publications, patents submitted to registration and also the topic of value, “the value we have harvested with this joint venture; in fact, we have doubled that value.”



President Díaz-Canel with senior officials from the Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, from the United States.
PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

He also made reference to the way they have reached patients' life, not only U.S. patients who have benefitted from the Cuban biotechnology, but also Cuban patients. We have changed their lives, highlighted the scientist, who affirmed that this has been essential to establish communication with three different governments in the United States.

The Cuban president acknowledged the dedication of the U.S. counterpart and their willingness to cooperate and work together, and added that in addition to a

cooperation relationship, a complementary relationship has also been established.

He said he was convinced that, in the present and the future, “we can do a lot more. We can work with other medications and conduct joint developments.”

On September 26th, 2018, the BioCubaFarma Entrepreneurial Group announced the setting-up of the IIA joint venture, settled at the Mariel Special Development Zone, a historic step in scientific collaboration between both nations.

Love without Blockade

Text and Photo: Deisy **FRANCIS**



The solidarity movement is opposed to the United States' genocide policy against Cuba.

WASHINGTON.- Unlike relations between the United States and Cuba, which in 2023 showed no signs of progress, solidarity with the island from that country proved last year its vitality and expansion.

An example of the increase of such solidarity movement is the National Network on Cuba (NNOC), whose number of member organizations went from 50 to 70 in 2023.

That figure is the result of the incorporation, in October, of other 13 groups, including the Hatuey Project, the Antiimperialist Action Committee, the José Martí Alliance Coalition and the Hands Off Cuba Committee, from Cleveland, which gave NNOC a diverse nature.

During the annual meeting held at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, young Joshua Parks said that the mere existence of NNOC is a clear evidence that “there is opposition to the United States' genocide policy against Cuba.”

That opposition increased in 2023, as well as calls to lift the blockade the Cuban people suffers for over six decades and to remove the island from the arbitrary list of countries that sponsor terrorism – a unilateral selection drafted in Washington.

For that reason, presence of solidarity people in the U.S. Congress was strong, and was one of the actions that concluded with a large demonstration and gathering in front of the White House, last June.

Cheryl LaBash, the Network's co-president, told **The Havana Reporter** that 2024 cannot be different and the wave of support will continue, with those two objectives in mind.

It is also important to mention caravans against the blockade, whose center was Miami but were also conducted at the end of every month in multiple cities in the United States and the world, in demand for the lifting of that policy.

The Bridges of Love movement, one of the promoters of such caravans, is also one of the most active groups in the field of solidarity with Cuba in the United States. In coordination with CodePink, this movement sent several

shipments of powdered milk, medication and medical supplies for pediatric hospitals and other institutions.

They also visited nursing homes and orphanages, oncology halls and other places of social interest to “bring a little bit of happiness and solidarity” and make another gap in the blockade, as Bridges of Love coordinator, Carlos Lazo, said.

The Cuban-American professor, resident in Seattle, is of the opinion that “no one can stop this,” and with that spirit, 2023 concluded and 2024 will start.

During a visit to New York on occasion of the high-level segment of the 78th ordinary period of sessions of the UN General Assembly, Cuban president Miguel Díaz Canel denounced that the blockade is an extraterritorial, cruel and silent economic war that is accompanied by a powerful political destabilization machinery.

Then, at a mass solidarity event, he thanked those who support Cuba in its call to end the blockade and said: “receive a fraternal hug...from the people of Cuba, a message of friendship for the people of the United States.”

Cuba for Life at COP28

By Cira **RODRÍGUEZ**

HAVANA.- Cuba defended at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP28, from its position as head of the Group of 77 and China, the right of the countries of the South not to be forced to choose between development and climate action, because both factors are inextricably linked.

In one of his speeches at the event held in Doha, Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel said that the distance that separates the irrationally opulent North from the ever-poor South is larger, with high human costs, while the resources nature puts at our disposal are wasted.

Cuban minister of Sciences, Technology and Environment (CITMA), Elba Rosa Pérez Montoya, also ratified at COP28 that Cuba not only acknowledges the effects of climate change but also has the political will to face it with efforts and resources; that is the reason why the national plan to fight climate change is called Tarea Vida (Life's Task).

In order to prove what we can do in relation to the environment, the island presented the IRES project, dedicated to climate resilience in rural communities.



Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP28, as head of the Group of 77 and China. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Created in 2021 and financed by the Green Climate Fund, IRES works in the rehabilitation of productive landscapes in seven vulnerable municipalities to increase resilience to agricultural production and guarantee food security through the improvement of eco-systemic services in agroforestry and silvopastoral systems.

The Circular Agro-sugar Climate Alliance, which hopes to attain a resilient and carbon-low sugarcane agribusiness that contributes to face climate change with economic, social and environmental approaches, was also presented in Doha.

An original proposal was the Adaptation Plan of Havana's coastal area, a project to be implemented in 4-5 years with a financing of three million dollars that will benefit over 700,000 inhabitants of six municipalities of the Cuban capital's northern coast, who are vulnerable to the increase of the sea level and extreme weather phenomena.

On top of that comes the IRIS Foundation, United for Climate, the first of its type with projections aimed at searching for financing to contribute to national strategies against climate change.

This initiative includes 16 projects on climate risks, circular economy, social dimension,

vulnerable communities, that are conducted in coordination with other organizations of the Cuban civil society and the collaboration of Mexico, Panama and the Dominican Republic.

IRIS was also promoted as the entity that will execute the Caribbean Biological Corridor initiative, which avails of the scientific potential of allied institutions to contribute to national efforts.

Also interesting was the presentation of BioCubaCafé, an agroforestry joint venture composed of the Lavazza Foundation, from Italy and CubaCafé, dedicated to process and commercialize the organic coffee cultivated in Cuba's east.

Produced in 22 municipalities of the Granma, Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo provinces, this product is obtained from the mixture of fermented Arabica and Robusta coffee, which is threshed by women – for whom this initiative has become a source of employment.

According to International Relations director at the Ministry of Sciences, Technology and Environment (CITMA), Ulises Fernández, the country presented its proposals at COP28 to answer the questions of how we will live, feed ourselves and move around in the new environmental conditions.

Civil Defense: Between Acclaim and Efficacy

By Joel Miche **VARONA**

HAVANA.- The XI International Congress on Disaster Prevention and the VII International Firefighter Conference, held in this capital, were the perfect scenarios to show Cuba's progress in the field of Civil Defense, whose work was praised by the United Nations System for its renowned efficacy.

"It is not an exaggeration to say that Cuba has become a school in the field of Civil Defense," said resident coordinator of that international body, Francisco Pichón.

Cuba is internationally renowned and its strategy to reduce the risk of disasters is a real strength for the country, said the official at Havana's Conference Center.

We have witnessed the Civil Defense's successful performance in events such as the explosion at the Saratoga Hotel, in the capital city; the supertanker base, in the eastern province of Matanzas, and the destructive hurricane Ian, he added.

Countries such as Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana and the Dominican Republic, among others, already have a

disaster management center with the advice of Cuban experts.

One of Cuba's achievements is the Early Warning System (SAT) for tropical cyclones, which guarantees an early track and forecast of the potential path and intensity of any natural phenomenon of the type that can represent a danger.

SAT is an essential tool that provides the Civil Defense with the information needed to take timely decisions, focused on the protection of human lives and the resources of the economy. At present, Cuba implements a group of actions to strengthen its seismological warning system, as a premise to improve management of disaster risks' reduction because of this type of natural event.

Those actions include finishing and modernizing station networks in the country's central-western region, with the purpose of creating the basis for the conduction of paleo-seismic studies.

Cuba also has a map of tsunamis danger, another tool that strengthens the scheme of disaster risks' reduction in the island.

Marvin Bowser: The Art of Taking Images

Text and Photo: DeisyFRANCIS

WASHINGTON.- Marvin Bowser came to art after 34 years on other paths, although he did have one important connection: a camera that since 1984 anticipated concerns and, perhaps, the renowned photographer he is today.

Bowser granted an interview to **The Havana Reporter** at the Embassy Row's Venn Gallery, in this capital, surrounded by his work, an incredible visual present that recreates the identity of the African diaspora with special emphasis, through impressive photographs that invite thinking.

How is his beginning in this world explained? His experience in the Defense Intelligence industry and his degrees from the American and the George Washington universities give him "a perspective and a set of unique skills that I include in my photographic work." Because of that, he is always looking for opportunities and challenges to go beyond creative boundaries, he confessed.

The artist also commented that he inherited his love for photography from his father, who introduced him in that form of art through his own passion and who still takes pictures with a Nikon, an activity he learnt using his father's camera.

Before becoming a photographer and an actor, he was an active member of

the Air Force, for ten years. "I worked for the U.S. Navy for six years as a civilian and then as a Defense contractor for 18 years."

When I left corporate life, I had some time to think on what I wanted to do next and I knew that creative arts and photography were what I wanted, because they have



Marvin Bowser's work is an incredible visual present that recreates the identity of the African diaspora.

been close to me since I bought my real camera, he added.

That "real camera" that still accompanies him took him from the path of the hobby to become a sense of life and it was then "with the advent of Facebook that I started to post a lot on that social network".

Then, there was a time in which Bowser started reconsidering why he was putting all his effort in Facebook when he "should benefit from his works. Then, I created my photography company and Marvin Bowser Photography was born."

Black Hair is one of his most recent projects. "I started thinking on what I wanted to do and I had an introspective process," he said.

He knew he was interested in "doing something in relation to the black culture, something positive, taking photographs of black people doing attractive activities. And I kind of join all that. That is how I came up with the idea of Black Hair, a powerful exploration, he commented.

As a photographer, Marvin Bowser is moved by his "love for photographing the interaction of lights, shadows, colors and textures, and for using images to tell a story." His premise is to capture the essence of a moment without interfering in that.

Bolero Declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

By MarioMUÑOZ

HAVANA.- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the Bolero in Cuba and Mexico an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, based on a binational candidacy entitled "Bolero: identity, emotion and poetry turned into song," presented by the Mexican Culture Secretariat and the Cuban Ministry of Culture.

The decision was taken last December 5 at the 18th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding

of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held in the city of Kasane, Botswana.

The meeting acknowledged the bolero as an essential element for the cultural identity of both nations' peoples and the inscription shows both governments' interest in safeguarding this vocal, instrumental and dance genre created in 1833 in the city of Santiago de Cuba, which is very popular in Cuba and Mexico.

The Bolero combines European and African cultural elements and expresses the most varied feelings of love, amidst the daily difficulties of our peoples. This practice has spread to all the Ibero-American region and its popularity goes beyond our mother tongue.

The essential foundation of this candidacy, in which both countries worked together for years, included the design of a safeguarding plan focused on education, promotion and sensibility on the genre, with emphasis on younger generations, the Cuban Ministry of Culture indicated.

The proposal will allow strengthening capacities for its understanding and assimilation, in addition to acknowledgement of its bearers through the design and execution of different programs and projects that have a community reach.

With this inscription, the first binational proposal Cuba submits, there are six Cuban cultural expressions already included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

According to Cuban authorities, the bolero's approval is a higher commitment in what regards the safeguarding and managing of this cultural identity expression, as endorsed in the recently approved General Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection Law, to enter into force on March 7th, 2024.

In his X social media account, Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel said he was pleased at the decision and stressed that Cuba and Mexico, proud of their cultural links, celebrate this declaration.

In a joint press conference at the Los Pinos complex, in Bosque de Chapultepec, Mexico City, Culture secretary Alejandra Frausto and ambassador Marcos Rodríguez made reference to this historic event and agreed that this was the result of the work both governments conducted with the support of Cuban and Mexican artists, poets, composers and intellectuals.

Frausto highlighted the hard work Mexicans and Cubans did during the drafting of the file and the related materials, including an important audiovisual on the topic, which UNESCO analyzed and approved.

For his part, the Cuban ambassador offered a brief explanation on the birth of the bolero, in the Cuban eastern region and stressed that this is one of the main expressions of Cuba's musical wealth, because it tells who we are, where we come from and what we feel, which through the sea, conquered the Mexican soul.



Bolero was acknowledged as an essential element for the cultural identity of Cuba and Mexico peoples.

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Maya Train: A Trip to its Origin

By Luis Manuel ARCE

MEXICO CITY.- Mexicans will travel back to their origin with the Maya Train as a time machine to tour ancient Moctezuma and Cuauhtémoc kingdoms – the latter, the last Tlatoani (emperor) burnt at the stake, like indigenous leader Hatuey in Cuba.

The train's first departure, last December 15, can be considered an appetizer, as it was limited to only one section – from Campeche to Cancun, 473 kilometers long. This distance, although long, is only less than one third of the tour through all five Mayan states, which total 1,554 kilometers of living history, full of emotions.

Two simultaneous caravans including five to seven wagons, with a length of 150 meters, departed on that first occasion – one, at 7.00 a.m. and the other one, at 11.00 hours. They initially toured the section at a moderate speed of 120 kilometers per hour, but will soon reach a standard cruising speed of 160 kilometers.

Their engines will now use ultra-low sulfur diesel, until the arrival of hybrid trains on February 2024.

This is an impressive work and engineering deed considering the length of the railroad tracks, the complexity of the lines, the high bridges and tunnels, the thousands of millions of crossings and tons of special ballast, the environment's extreme archeological care, the extremely difficult processes to save Maya sites and the detours made to preserve them.

Works for the construction of the Maya train started on June 2022, during the pandemic of COVID-19, and finished in December last year. It is considered the largest railroad work in the world in recent years. Its construction was torpedoed since the beginning because of political motivations, but it was impossible for promoters to break the charm and the influence the work won since it was a project full of romanticism and magic.

The objective of this work is to show to the world Mexico's depth and amazing cultural, architectonic and mathematical development, as well as the natural processes that turned the Maya civilization (1800 BC to the Spanish conquest, in 1697, when the last city was taken) into one of the most advanced of its time.

This civilization did not know about the existence of Europe nor this knew about them; however, their constructions and aqueducts had nothing to envy those of the Europeans, nor their predictions in relation to the weather, time, the rotation of seasons and the Sun and the Moon's orbital routines.

The train's tour will also be a resounding denunciation of the great wealth the Spanish colonizers pretended to destroy, but this was so big and solid that they could not wipe it out, as they could not exterminate either all the ethnic groups and 68 languages that are kept alive.

The Maya Train ruins all plans and debunks the myths the modern entrepreneurial society has in relation to railroad megaprojects, considered initiatives that require large investments, perhaps influenced by other attempts that either failed or ended up being subsidized by governments. In this case, it was necessary for president Andrés Manuel López Obrador to declare the work as a national security issue in order to continue with its execution, because of the opposition of political forces allied to entrepreneurial sectors. Actually, the regrettable elimination of railroads should not happen because of another strong reason: the Mexican Revolution was conducted in train and on horseback, and that is how railroads went down in history.



Works for the construction of the Maya train started on June 2022, during the pandemic of COVID-19. PHOTO: Internet.



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44th Latin American Film Festival

By DaiLIEM

HAVANA.- The 44th edition of the International Film Festival of New Latin American Cinema came to an end in this capital last December after successful days and the contest of 199 films from 19 countries.

The event, founded in 1979, is included among the most important in the promotion of the continent's films.

According to data published, over 85,000 spectators attended movie theaters and public screenings nationwide this year, to enjoy films that offered an inclusive, decolonizing and emancipating approach and dealt with

topics such as violence, discrimination, sexual diversity, genre, youth and adolescence in Latin America.

Tributes were paid to French actor Max Linder; Spanish-Mexican filmmaker Luis Buñuel, and Cubans Julio García Espinosa and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea – the latter, on occasion of the 30 years of the premiere of his film *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate).

In addition, the Coral of Honor was granted to iconic Cuban actress Eslinda Núñez; a tribute was paid to Televisión Serrana and its founder, late Daniel Diez, and collateral awards were given.

The festival also included the first Juan Padrón Animation Forum, a tribute to the creator of the popular character Elpidio Valdés.

Celebrations included the 37 years of the San Antonio de los Baños International Film School and the foundation of the Cuban Film Poster Center, a guardian of a collection registered as Memory of the World by UNESCO.

International guests who attended this festival included María Novaro, filmmaker and president of the Mexican Film Institute; Agnès Jaoui, French filmmaker, scriptwriter and actress, and Spanish actor Sergi López.

The granting of the Coral awards, the festival's highest prize, took place on December 15 at the Charles Chaplin movie theater, where the region's strongest film making – Brazil, Argentina and Mexico – reaffirmed their leadership.

The Mexican film *Tótem* received the Coral to the Best Script, Best Fiction Feature Film and Best Artistic Direction, while Argentinean *Los delincuentes* (The Delinquents), by Rodrigo Moreno, won the Best Direction, Best Photography and Best Editing awards.

Brazil, with eight awards – including Corals and special prizes – was the festival's overall winner and consolidated its power with awards in several categories, such as Original Music, Best Opera Prima, Best Short Fiction Film and Special Jury Coral to an Animated Film.

The Colombian drama *El otro hijo* (The other son), by Juan Sebastián Quebrada, won the Best Actor and Actress awards, which went to Miguel González and Ilona Almansa, respectively.

El viento que arrasa (A ravaging wind), by Paula Hernández (Argentina-Uruguay), received the Fripresci award, while the Coral to Best Documentary went to *El juicio* (The trial), by Ulises de la Orden, also from Argentina.

La mujer salvaje (Wild woman), by Cuban Alán González, won three awards: Special Jury Coral, Signis and Don Quixote – the latter, granted by the International Federation of Film Societies.



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Alicia Alonso and Gisselle: magic turns eight decades old

By DaiLAFÁ

HAVANA.-Cuba remembered with tributes the 80th anniversary of the debut of prima ballerina assoluta Alicia Alonso in the role of Gisselle, a classic that opened the doors of dance and gave entrance to a legend.

It was in November 1943 and Alicia was just over 20 years old when she replaced Alicia Markova in this leading role during the American Ballet Theatre's season at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. She made a successful debut, and later the world would realize that that night marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the character and the work, due to the transcendence of what the Cuban artist contributed as a dancer and choreographer to the famous romantic ballet.

Alicia astonished the public and critics with her virtuosity on stage, and perhaps she herself never imagined then that her name and that of the young German peasant girl Gisselle would be forever linked by threads of magic, pampered by the gods of dance.

Over the years, critics have recognized that there is a before and after Alicia Alonso in the history of ballet, given the symbiosis forged between artist and character that takes the aesthetic experience of this classic par excellence to ecstatic levels.

The triumph of the Cuban dancer in Gisselle not only founded a great path for dance in her country, but also spread light throughout Latin America, according to specialists.

They point out that Alicia's non-negotiable determination to keep her Latin name at a time when Slavic or Anglo-Saxon surnames seemed to determine success at the box office, not only evidenced her conviction to maintain her identity, but also validated Latin American culture in the art of ballet.

For this reason Alicia Alonso is not only the legendary dancer of the Cubans, but her symbolic dimension, her art and work, belong to the entire continent and the whole world.

According to the critics, Alicia (1920-2019) demonstrated in interpreting for half a century the role of Gisselle the presence of a deep work of dramaturgy, of theatrical justification, of fresh return of pantomime, in a truly exemplary work of how to work a classic.v



Alicia Alonso astonished the public and critics with her virtuosity on stage. PHOTO: BNC

Tour of the Middle East Strengthened Bilateral Ties



The Cuban head of State paid official visits to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Iran. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

Several agreements and memorandums of understanding were signed in the countries visited, which open new commercial possibilities.

Díaz-Canel affirmed that it is up to Cuba now to meet the interests stated during the tour, addressed at starting a new stage in cooperation; for that, we must have the capacity to present strong projects that meet Cuba's priorities and are of interest to the counterparts. During his stay in the Middle East, the Cuban president witnessed a wide support for the Palestinian cause and acknowledgement to Cuba's role in denunciation of the genocide the people of the Gaza Strip is subjected to.

In the president's opinion, those were fruitful and intense days in which meetings and official talks were held with different sectors of the society, Cubans resident in those countries and business executives.

As part of his agenda in the United Arab Emirates, the first stop of his tour, the Cuban president attended the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP28) and presided over the first Summit of the Group of 77 and China held as part of that world forum.

In that regards, he stressed Cuba's role in its capacity as pro tempore president of that bloc in the search for consensus among the countries of the South on climate crisis topics.

In Qatar, Díaz-Canel witnessed that Persian nation's will to strengthen working relations in the bank and financial sector, and to increase cooperation in health and invest in several field in Cuba, such as tourism, biotechnology, hydraulics resources and others.

For its part, in Iran he witnessed interest in making progress in the design of a "creative strategy" that avails of the economic potentials both nations have, using the foundations of compensated trade.

By Melissa **KING**

HAVANA.- Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel's tour of the Middle East opened new doors to diplomatic relations and allowed building a new economic-commercial dynamics. The Cuban head of State paid official visits to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Iran from November 28th to December 7th, where he witnessed those nations' interest in strengthening relations and creating mutually beneficial business opportunities.

Investment opportunity in the island was a recurring topic among the counterparts, who stated their will to increase collaboration in areas such as tourism, science, technology and innovation and biotechnology.

"There is a great willingness in all these countries to make progress in economic and trade relations with Cuba, and I believe that we now have to have all the capacity to take advantage of the existing potential," said the president in recent statements to the press.

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Canary Islands Immigrants' Legacy Still Present.

By Raúl GARCÍA

SANCTI SPÍRITUS.- This central Cuban province still remains the territory in which the highest number of immigrants from the Canary Islands and their descendants is present in the agricultural sector's workforce. According to specialists of the Agriculture Ministry, the knowledge of the community of Canary Islands is still important in the development of traditional tobacco plantations and contribute to the covered tobacco plantations with new technologies that provide layer to export cigars.

Most of the Canary Islands descendants are located in Cuba's central region, mainly in the territories of Cabaiguán, Taguasco y Zaza del Medio, in the Sancti Spíritus province. These lands were and still are fertile, especially Cabaiguán, for its black soil with excellent properties and its enviable microclimate, which also attracted immigrants from other islands.

Their labor was also important in the start of commercial businesses and the cattle-raising sector, a privileged field in a municipality that is surrounded by roads and railroads. Statistic data confirm that about 80 percent of the Cabaiguán population originally

comes from the Canary Islands. Immigrants were the driving force of the tobacco development and the sugarcane industry, later on.

The Canary Islands community also preserves the traditions of their ancestors, a sign of the cultural mixing of the Danza Portadora de Pozas (Poza's Dance) and other related groups.

In his study *Isleños en Cuba* (Canary Islands immigrants in Cuba), chronicler Manuel Hernández affirms that over 3.5 million Spanish people arrived in the American continent after 1882, a third of which were welcomed in Cuba.

The majority of them settled in Havana, while others decided to try their luck in the central region, particularly in the tobacco zones of Remedios, Santa Clara and Sancti Spíritus.

The presence of the Canary Islands immigrants in the east was very limited, except for Camagüey – former Puerto Príncipe village, founded by the Spaniards in 1514 – where cattle-raising development was benefitted.

Data of the time also reveal that in the first half of the 18th century, about 50 percent of the colonizers came from the Canary Islands. In 1913-1914, Cuba welcomed over 85 percent of those who left through the La Palma port.

The "guanches," the name given to the people from the Canary Islands, arrived in the Americas with their traditions and their devotion to the Virgin of Candelaria, whose origin dates back to Tenerife in the 14th century.

At present, after getting familiar with the national traditions, they feel

acknowledged when people called them "guajiros," a term used to refer to the Cuban rural people.

Most of the Cuban population is proud of carrying a Canary Islands' surname, of being the descendants of the first Canary Islands people who arrived in Cuba in the 17th century.



Canary Islands. Immigrants (Cabaiguán, 1924) were the driving force of the tobacco development.

PHOTO: Archives.

XIV International Higher Education Congress

By Milagros PICHARDO

HAVANA.-The XIV International Higher Education Congress, to be held in this capital from February 5-9, will analyze the role this sector plays in social transformation, upon the principles of quality, sustainability and relevance.

Summoned by the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education (MES), the event will take place at the Havana's Conference Center and will become a space to hold debates about the responsibilities that teaching level has in countries' evolution, mainly in the economic, sociocultural and environmental sectors.

According to the summon, the congress' scientific program will include forums on the Sustainable Development Goals and their relation to higher education.

It will also deal with the future of higher education in the Latin American and Caribbean context, as well as topics related to knowledge, innovation and sustainable territorial development.

Under the slogan "Higher education of the future: social transformation, quality, relevance and sustainability," the congress also foresees the holding of meetings among ministers and authorities of the sector.

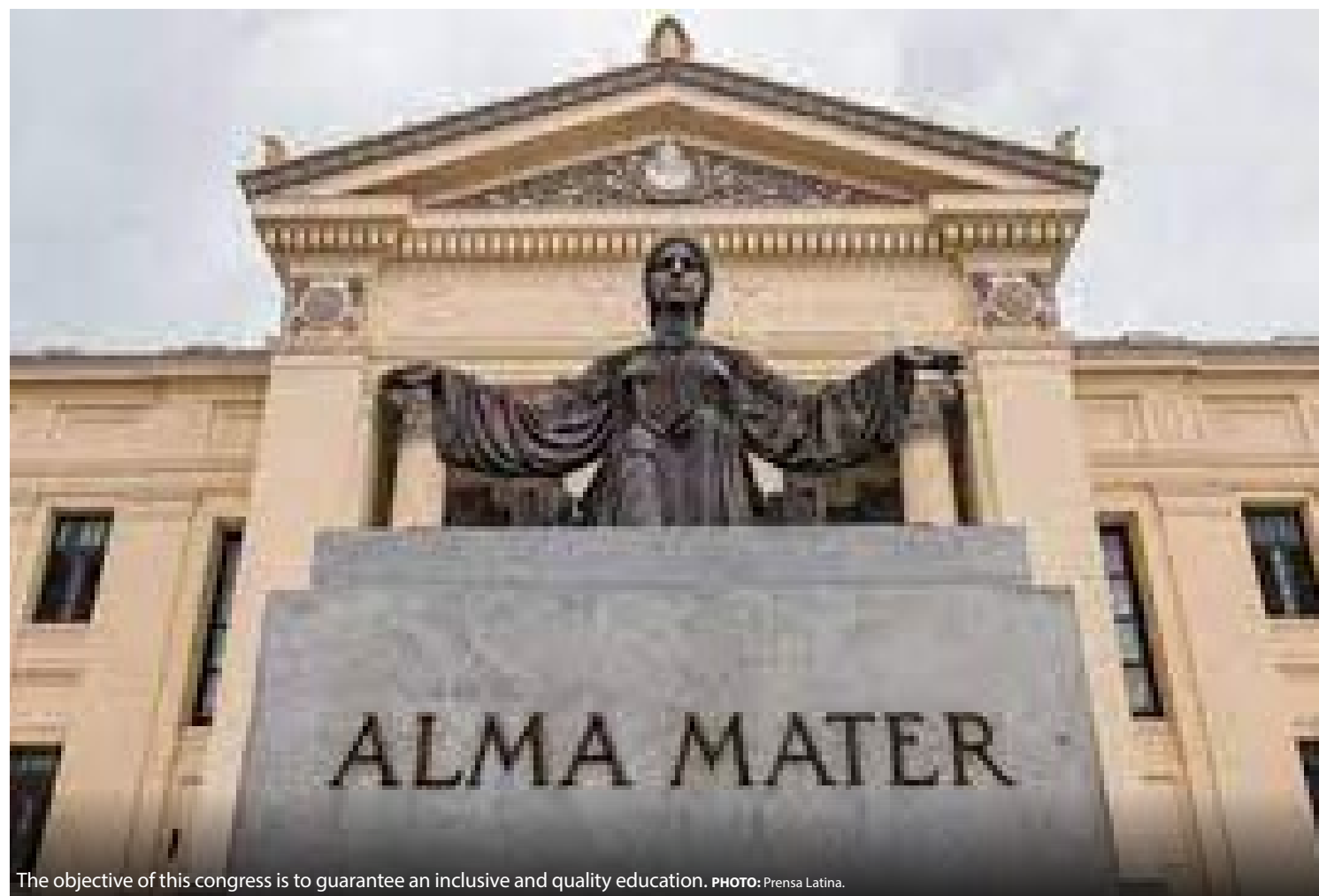
Presentation of works will be organized in seven symposiums, in which workshops and special activities are included.

According to the organizers, the meeting will be an opportunity to strengthen ties

with the society, in order to find more effective and innovative solutions to the problems each country has.

The objective of this congress is to guarantee an inclusive and quality education, promoting learning opportunities for everyone, they said.

The summon endorses higher education as a public and social right, a universal human right and a duty on the part of the States.



The objective of this congress is to guarantee an inclusive and quality education. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

The Cathedral and Its Surroundings

Text and photos by Roberto **CAMPOS**

HAVANA.- Strolling around Havana means visiting the Cathedral Square, a virtuous cobblestone space, full of beauty and senses visited by thousands of people from all over the world every month.

Originally known as Cienaga Square, later named "Cathedral Square", it is a place that has a lot to do with the origins of the Capital City, which was definitively settled on November 16, 1519 on the shores of Puerto Carenas, or Havana Bay.

The square was named after the impressive cathedral whose first stone was placed in 1748 and which was initially built as an oratory for the Sons of Saint Ignatius, of the Jesuit Order. Three decades later, the oratory was rebuilt and the cathedral was in operation; then,

from 1802 to 1832, important modifications were made, including a beautiful decoration, relevant works and reproductions by French Jean Baptiste Vermay.

The chapel of Our Lady of Loreto, dedicated to bishop Morell de Santa Cruz in 1755, is located there.

From January 21 to 25, 1998, during the visit Pope John Paul II paid to Cuba – the first a Supreme Pontiff ever made to the island – a mass was held at the Havana Cathedral.

As a distinctive touch, since 1994 and on the initiative of the Habaguanex S.A. tourist company, dinners and recreational and official galas are held at the square.

The view of a well-preserved architecture; the richness of Cuba's culture; the kindness of its inhabitants, and the excellent gastronomy the surrounding restaurants offer, are an attraction that is hard to ignore.



A Year After Lula's Return

By Osvaldo **CARDOSA**

BRASILIA.- Former trade unionist Luis Inácio Lula da Silva has served his first year (January 1, 2024) as president number 39 of Brazil and in his own words, there is only one reason for his return: "for the people to dream again." For the third time, Lula, a candidate of the Workers Party, was elected on October 30, 2022 to rule again the country after having left the post.

With the energy of a 30-year old man, as he describes himself, the former mechanical lathe operator faced another balloting for the sixth occasion (in the second round). He did it in 1989, 1994 and 1998 and only won in 2002, 2006 and 2022.

He won the second round with 50.90 percent of the valid votes, after defeating extreme right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro, who hoped to be reelected in representation of the Liberal Party and won with 49.10 percent. Both leaders fought for the election after being unable to win absolute majority in the first round; that is, for being unable to win more than half of the valid votes (excluding blank and void ballots), as established in the legislation.

The electoral result was considered the closest presidential vote in the recent history of the South American nation and Bolsonaro was the first acting head of State that could not reelect himself.

GOVERNMENT APPROVAL

According to data provided by the Datafolha Institute, revealed on December 7, Lula still has a stable positive approval

among the Brazilians, as 38 percent of his fellow country people considers his government as positive/good, while 30 percent thinks his administration is regular and the same number describes it as poor. As a result, 68 percent of the Brazilians approve to certain extent the current federal management. In spite of what studies reveal, at the Speaking with the President program, Lula made an assessment of his first months

in power after his return to the Planalto Palace and made reference to the resumption of basic programs for the population and the recovery of Brazil's image in the world.

In 2023, the president visited 24 countries and recently traveled to Berlin, the capital of Germany, where he signed about 20 bilateral agreements, mostly on environment and inequality. That was his international trip number 15 since he took power.

As part of his renovated international presence, on December 1st, Brazil assumed the pro-tempore presidency of the G20 (until 2024), a group that gathers the 19 top economies in the world and the European Union. In addition, the country also joined the African Union.

In its role as head of the G20, Brazil will organize over 100 working group meetings, to be held virtually and in-situ, and about 20 ministerial meetings, to end up with the Summit of Heads of Government.

Lula also stated that in 2024, he will tour the nation to talk to the people and invest in education, health, creation of jobs and culture. "We put the house in order. It is now the time to work for the people to turn Brazil again in the country of dreams and hopes of 200 million Brazilians," he stressed.



Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, was elected on October 30, 2022 to rule again the country. PHOTO: Internet.

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2024 Budget to Give Priority to Key Sectors

By Milagros **PICHARDO**

HAVANA.- The 2024 Cuban State Budget, in spite of the difficult economic conditions, will guarantee the continuity of the social programs addressed to the population's universal access to basic services, minister of Finances and Prices Vladimir Requeiro announced to the parliament.

During the Second Ordinary Period of Sessions of the National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban parliament), the minister affirmed that in view of that intention, the maximum total expenditure is expected to reach 480,707,000 pesos – a 37 percent increase.

Requeiro explained that such a projection not only guarantees key sectors and social programs – such as public health, education, culture, sport, social care and security – but also the entrepreneurial sector's financing needs and the public health-related expenditure.

Sixty-three percent of the total expenditure will be addressed to those key sectors, which shows the budget's marked social nature and the efforts Cuba makes in exceptionally difficult conditions.

About 26 percent of the social activity expenditure will be allocated to health and to endorsing the registration of over 1,388,000 students in the pre-school, elementary, high,

technical and professional education, plus about 389,392 in the higher education.

The social security budget grows by 3,075,000 pesos, which will be allocated to

over 1,824,000 retired people and pensioners and to increasing working mothers' salary protection in compensation for maternity leave from 12 to 15 months.

Protection through Social Care is also foreseen for 186,783 families and 339,754 beneficiaries in vulnerable situations, in addition to financing the the Civil Defense System.

The island also foresees an increase in culture and sport-related expenditures to guarantee the training of athletes participating in the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Other topics include increasing the level of budgeted subsidies to cover differences between prices and rates in a number of basic services and consumables, with an approximate growth of 38,000,472 pesos in comparison to 2023.

In order to support the fields of science, technology and innovation, 2,184 million pesos are planned, in addition to 525 million for the National Science and Innovation Fund and 100 million for the National Environment Fund.

Requeiro stated that as a result of the balance of incomes and expenditures, the fiscal deficit is estimated at 147,391 million pesos, higher than the 49,027 million foreseen – which represents 18.5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product at current prices.



Minister of Finances and Prices Vladimir Requeiro. PHOTO: Vladimir Molina, Prensa Latina

Agreements with Russia in the Biotechnology Sector

Text and Photo: Odette **DÍAZ**

MOSCOW.- Representatives of the state BioCubaFarma Group and the Labiofam Company signed agreements with the Russian Phitovit Public Corporation to cooperate in the biotechnological and pharmaceutical sectors.

Director of the BioCubaFarma office in this capital, Idania Caballero, told **The Havana Reporter** that the agreement is aimed at a complete cooperation in all phases of the veterinarian drugs' development cycle and foresees joint development, production and commercialization.

According to the official, the agreement will allow expanding bilateral relations in the scientific-technical field, especially in projects on recombinant vaccines for their use not only in domestic animals but also in those that are of economic interest.

For his part, business and export director of the Cuban Labiofam entrepreneurial group, Alejandro González, also signed an agreement with Phitovit to establish a cooperative production.

"We will share with the Russians different technologies we have developed, in order to reach their market and come to an agreement with a cooperative production, both here and in Cuba."

The ultimate goal is to encourage joint developments and innovations to reach a higher degree of science and technology, he stressed.

General director of the Phitovit Public Corporation, Tusupov Omarzhan, highlighted the growth the Cuban biotechnology sector has had in the last 30 years and said that the island has a huge potential to enter into associations and establish technology transfer.

The signing of these agreements took place during the Moscow 2023 Health Fair, which until December 8th

gathered representatives from 15 nations, with the support of the Russian Government and authorities and the endorsement of the legislative, federal and regional bodies responsible for the healthcare sector, the manufacturing industry and the tourist sector.

Cuba was represented by a large group of scientists and technology developers from entities attached to the Cuban Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Industry Group. Caballero also commented that in this Fair, Cuba exhibited its leading products in the biotechnological and pharmaceutical

sector, in order to allow Russian entities to know about the potentials the country has in the production of drugs for the treatment of diseases such as diabetes or cancer, drugs that have been developed by the Cuban scientific centers.

In this regard, the BioFarmaCuba representative made reference to Heberprot-p, an original and unique medication based on the human growth factor that is registered in Russia as part of its basic medication group and which is prescribed for the treatment of foot ulcers in diabetic patients.



The agreements will allow expanding bilateral relations in the scientific-technical field.

San Cristóbal Opens Doors

By María **JULIA**

HAVANA.- The San Cristóbal Travel Agency has a bunch of keys to open the doors to the Historical Center's tangible heritage and spirituality in this and other Cuban patrimonial cities.

As a national recipient entity, it has the power to sale in situ and commercialize abroad a wide-ranging number of products in any of the tourism modalities, in addition to providing transportation, lodging and boarding services.

The agency's offers include specialized visits, thematic trips, patrimonial programs, tailor-made packages and events' organization.

The Havana Reporter spoke to the president of this tourist entity, Antonio Guerrero, who heads the efforts the San Cristóbal team makes to recover the tourism industry in Havana after the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Progress is gradual, but there is a systematic recovery in the country's tourist activity, in the number of airlines and the frequency of the flights that bring visitors to Cuba, he said. If it were not for "the policy of strangulation the Northern neighbor" applies through the economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba, the speed of recovery would be higher, the civil engineer indicated. He added that tourism does not escape the policy of harassment and asphyxiation: "I, who lived there, in Key West, a small island south of Florida with an active tourist activity, used to tell myself: how would it be like if they let those tourists go to Cuba!

with the safety and all the good things we have to offer."

As president of the San Cristóbal Agency for the last two years, he knows from his own experience that "that strangulation has a price," because U.S. tourism has an important role worldwide, especially in the Latin American and Caribbean region, he stressed. "It gives us no pleasure to justify things nor we ignore that there are things we have to do to attract more tourists, but the situation would be very different if the policy of the U.S. government, that monster José

Martí spoke about, had a sign of opening," affirmed the Hero of the Republic of Cuba. During the last years of the Obama administration (2009-2017), there was a slight easing of restrictions and in that time, the Agency "did not stop" due to the avalanche of U.S. tourists, noted the business executive, who shares his executive duties with his role as president of the Cuban National Architects and Construction Engineers Union.

"But in spite of everything, there has been an increase in the flow of foreign visitors in recent months," he stressed.

In addition to that, "we are starting an important season in the year, in which winter gets worse in some places of the world and Cuba, with its endless summer, its endless love and solidarity, becomes an important attraction for international tourism."

For the San Cristóbal Travel Agency, "it is a huge responsibility." In the face of this challenge, "our team works hard, with enthusiasm and in control of incomes," in times in which we again registered "a rapid increase in sales," he concluded.



San Cristóbal organizes tours of colonial Havana. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

New Investment Opportunities in the Health Sector

By Joel **MICHEL**



President of the Cuban Medical Services Trading Company S.A. Yamila de Armas. PHOTO: Servicios Médicos.

HAVANA.- Cuba fosters new investment opportunities in the health sector that will benefit foreign investors, stated president of the Cuban Medical Services Trading Company S.A. Yamila de Armas.

At a recent investment opportunity forum on the health export sector, held in this capital, the official recalled that Cuba has an investment opportunity portfolio and is still open to new proposals.

We bet for foreign investment in Cuba, but we are ready to accompany those business executives when they decide to do it in their own countries, De Armas said.

Investing in Cuba in the sphere of health is an extraordinary wealth, the Caribbean island has more than a thousand suggestions with thermal mineral waters, which gush with a great volume per minutes, he said.

The official pointed out that there are spas in Cuba to invest in, we have enough for this endeavor taking into account the success of this business in other latitudes based on nature, sustainability and quality of life.

The country also has experience in the production of orthopedic prosthesis, in addition to medical devices manufacturing and repair, thanks to its highly-qualified human capital, and this is another opportunity for foreign investment.

The future of health in the world is related to personalized medicine and Cuba has prepared the ground in the field of medical genetics.

At the forum, three initial proposals for foreign investment were presented: the El Yarey International Health Center, the San Diego de los Baños Thermal Center and the El Quinqué International Health Center, all complemented with Welfare Tourism offers.



Cuban wrestler Luis Orta, world, Central American and Pan-American champion in 2023. PHOTO: JIT.

Yulimar, Orta and Fluminense Team Best in 2023

By Julio César **MEJÍAS**

HAVANA.- Venezuelan triple jumper Yulimar Rojas; Cuban wrestler Luis Orta and Brazilian Fluminense Soccer team were selected as Latin American and the Caribbean's best in 2023 during the 59th edition of the **Prensa Latina** Latin American News Agency's sport poll.

Rojas was selected as the best female athlete with 35 votes, including those casted last-minute by the Colombian website Notipacocol and Cuban CMHW, a prestigious radio station known as the Center's Radio Queen in reference to its location in the city of Santa Clara, the capital of the central Villa Clara province.

The world champion and record holder in triple jump was way ahead of Cuban canoe athlete Yarisleidis Cirilo (seven votes), Dominican sprinter Marileidy Paulino (four) and Peruvian walker Kimberly García (three), while other seven athletes got at least one vote.

Orta, a Greco-Roman wrestler; world, Central American and Pan-American champion in 2023, won the preference of 36 news media – an unassailable lead over Venezuelan baseball player Ronald Acuña (seven) and Argentinean soccer star Leo Messi (three), in addition to over 12 athletes also included in the list who won at least one vote.

Orta's acknowledgement comes after his selection as Cuba's Best Athlete of the Year and the World's Best Greco-Roman

Wrestler in 2023, while Venezuelan triple jumper was selected as the World's Best Field Event (jumps and throws) Athlete of the Year by World Athletics.

The Fluminense Club was selected as Latin American and Caribbean's best team in 2023 with 30 votes – three times more than the Argentinean Soccer team (10), in a list in which other 12 sport teams were also acknowledged by at least one of the 57 participating news media.

Overall historic winners, up to the present, are Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt in the men's category, while in the women's category, Venezuelan Yulimar Rojas tied with Colombian triple jumper Caterine Ibargüen.

Bolt, the current world record holder in 100 meters (9.58 seconds) and 200 meters (19.19 seconds), won this poll on six occasions (2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016), while Ibargüen did it in five (2011, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018) – the same number of editions Rojas has now won (2017, 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023).

In the case of team sports, the Argentinean soccer team is the overall winner, with six (1986, 1990, 2001, 2008, 2014 y 2022).

The traditional **Prensa Latina** Poll started in 1964, when Cuban Enrique Figuerola – Tokyo Olympic runner-up in 100 meters – won the highest number of votes. In 1980, it was decided to include the Best Team of the Year category and since 1988, male and female athletes have been individually selected.

A Science and Sport Party

By Boris **CABRERA**

HAVANA.- The X International Convention on Physical Activity and Sports (AFIDE 2023), held in this capital, was a big party in which sport-applied sciences were the protagonists.

About 600 delegates from Cuba and from 25 nations met for four days at the Havana's Conference Center to exchange experiences and debate about the results of physical activity and sport researches.

Over 400 scientific works – including 44 lectures, 355 presentations, 17 papers and three round tables – were presented at the convention, which for the first time was conducted under a hybrid format (in-situ and online).

Under the motto "Science to Win," prestigious researchers, academicians, doctors and psychologists spoke about different topics related to the elimination of barriers that prevent the practice of sport and the impact of these on the population's quality of life.

"It was a great event. We were able to listen to new proposals on sport training

and artificial intelligence, which people speak about a lot at present. We learnt several things that can be applied to the world of sport," main coach of the Cuban Men Volleyball Team, Jesús Cruz, told **The Havana Reporter**.

"This edition was superior to previous editions. Lectures and topics had a high scientific level. I am really pleased and hope for 2025 to arrive to continue exchanging and learning about the different sport disciplines," president of the Cuban Weightlifting Federation Jorge Luis Barcelán commented.

At the closing ceremony, in addition to the granting of the annual science awards sponsored by the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER), the World Council of Academicians and Researchers granted the distinction of full member to INDER president Osvaldo Vento Montiller and PhD Mélix Ilisástegui.

The said distinction was also granted to two-time volleyball Olympic champion Yumilka Ruiz, who defended her PhD thesis at the convention – something unusual in this kind of events.



The president of Inder, Osvaldo Vento Montiller, gave a keynote address PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Operation Truth: Valid for the Global South

By Jorge LUNA

HAVANA.- Operation Truth, presided over in 1959 by then-Prime Minister Fidel Castro to face U.S. media hostility, is completely valid today, 65 years later, according to **Prensa Latina**'s call for an international forum on the challenges of the present media world. This Latin American news agency invited dozens of journalists, personalities, media executives and information ministers to discuss these issues from January 21 to 23 at a meeting entitled "New Operation Truth, from Cuba to the World".

Participants will cover topics such as fake news, communication in these times and the construction of a New International Information Order, among others.

The original Operation Truth, which took place just three weeks after the triumph of the Revolution, on January 1, 1959, is considered the first information battle of Cuba's nascent political process, as well as the world's largest press conference, since some 400 journalists attended.

The meeting faced media attacks from U.S. agencies UPI and AP, as well as major



The original Operation Truth, in January 1959, gathered about 400 journalists. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

magazines, such as Life, Time Newsweek and U.S News and World Report, promoted, among others, by the Inter American Press Association (IAPA).

During the meeting, preceded by a mass rally in front of the Presidential Palace, professionals from 20 U.S. cities, including outlets such as the Washington Daily News, The Baltimore Sun, Miami News and the Cincinnati Enquirer, as well as Canada, the United Kingdom, France

and Latin America, verified the reality of the country.

At a massive meeting at the Habana Riviera Hotel, Fidel Castro stressed the need for Latin America and the Caribbean to have its own voice in an information scenario dominated by large foreign journalistic monopolies. This is how **Prensa Latina** was born, on June 16, 1959, soon to celebrate its 65th anniversary. But, in reality, the anti-Cuban campaigns began before 1959, when the guerrilla

struggle against Fulgencio Batista's regime was taking place, as confirmed by several journalistic testimonies.

For example, Herbert Matthews, U.S. correspondent for The New York Times, climbed the Sierra Maestra mountains, in Eastern Cuba, in February 1957 -almost two years before the triumph of the Revolution- and interviewed Fidel Castro, whom the mainstream media assured had been killed.

The spectacular denial had great impact in Cuba and the United States and, it also served to make known Fidel Castro's political objectives in the midst of fake news, which Matthews denounced in the sense that "Cubans deserve better luck than what the U.S. press and public opinion are giving them now".

Besides Matthews, Jorge Ricardo Masetti, from Argentina, Carlos Maria Gutierrez, from Uruguay and Carlos Bastidas, from Ecuador (later murdered in Havana in 1958) arrived at the guerrilla camps during that period.

Masetti -later founder and first general director of **Prensa Latina**- had to climb the Sierra Maestra twice because his first recordings, for some reason, never reached El Mundo, in Buenos Aires, where he worked, and had to repeat the reports, reproduced in his book "Those who fight and those who cry".

With all this background, this agency will commemorate the 65th anniversary of Operation Truth in January under the slogan "**Prensa Latina**, Voice of the Global South".



ELGUEA



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LAGOS DE MAYAJIGUA

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