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Practice of Sustainable Tourism

By Teyuné **DÍAZ**

HAVANA.-Cuba is an important insular resort whose natural diversity and varied and complex geology positions the country as a special place for the practice of sustainable tourism.

As part of that recreational modality, visitors can participate in different outdoors activities that entail a waste of energy, senior specialist of the Ministry of Tourism Development Department, Telmo Ledo, told The Havana Reporter, who added that over 30 areas have already been identified in the country for those practices.

Bird watching, hiking, mountain climbing, bicycle tourism, camping, horse riding, cave tourism, culture and history, are some of the activities that are already commercialized by travel agencies and tour operators, although in his opinion, these require a higher boost.

The success of this initiative is linked to the presence in the country of natural zones with an important biological diversity, well preserved and with high aesthetic-landscape values, features that can be appreciated in different regions of the Cuban archipelago, specialists say.

According to Ledo, the island has a strategy for the development of nature tourism that foresees the application



Senior specialist of the Ministry of Tourism Development Department, Telmo Ledo. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

of sustainable development principles and as part of which, the potential of the activities to be conducted is determined. In order to meet that goal, Cuba has identified the places of interest "in which society shows the roots of our identity, the diversity of expressions and where the nation's cultural heritage is respected."

Activities should be in accordance with aptitude, functional complexity, mechanisms of self-regulation and

geo-ecological stability of the places, in order to guarantee nature's integrity, cycles and rhythms.

No important damage or impact should be caused, nor the integrated management of natural resources be affected. In those areas, the government, the population and the different administrative bodies should guarantee the efficient management of the place to control risks, catastrophes, disturbances and uncertainties, he added.

Because of the geographical characteristics Cuba has – a long and narrow island – natural and historic sites of interest are always close to visitors; for that reason, walking along the island is an unforgettable experience any time of the year, Ledo stressed.

On top of that, Cuba has a nice, warm weather; there are no dangerous animals, and guides are competent.

As the specialist commented, Cuba needs to diversify its tourist product beyond the sun-and-beach modality and make a better use of its renowned natural values, the warmth of its people and the quality of its service – elements that make international visitors feel pleased in the country.

Including a nature tourism package in the business portfolio would be an opportunity to offer and commercialize a more comprehensive experience abroad, he said.

The idea is to create a new model of sustainable development and that implies meeting certain guidelines that go beyond the economic and social topics; it means taking care of the public space, defending cultural values and attaining the social inclusion of women, youngsters and people with special needs.

By doing so, we could say that tourism really contributes to the country's sustainable development, he concluded.

Scuba Diving at Perdiz Point

By Roberto **CAMPOS**

HAVANA.- Cuba has many popular sea spots that are especially attractive to nature and sea lovers. Punta Perdiz (Perdiz Point), in the country's west, stands out among them.

There is a section along the country's western region where it is possible to dive from the coast and enjoy fascinating underwater landscapes. Located on the southern coast of Matanzas province, Perdiz Point is a wonderful scuba diving center at the well-known Ciénaga de Zapata (Zapata Swamp), the most important in Cuba.

The wetland site was declared a World Biosphere Reserve by the UN Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), and was also designated National Park and Ramsar Site.

It is a well preserved place with lots of endemic plant and animal species that also comprises Girón Beach (Bay of Pigs), characterized by

amazing ecological stability and spectacular limestone settings.

In addition to its ecological or environmental features, it is possible to practice open ocean scuba diving or underwater diving in caves filled with briny water, which are part of the Zapata Swamp's cave system.

Located some 172 kilometers east of Havana and 115 kilometers away from Varadero Beach Resort, the zone has hotels that are ideal to practice sea activities, such as Playa Girón or Playa Larga, as well as various international scuba diving centers.

Punta Perdiz offers excellent service to visitors, who can engage in different scuba diving courses with specialized instructors, including open water courses.

The most popular places include Cueva de los Peces, an 80-meter deep natural pool of crystal clear water, and Caleta Buena,

with natural pools and coral reef bottoms that are highly attractive to practice scuba diving in the Playa Girón area.

Promoting nature tourism such as scuba diving, fishing, bird watching, hiking, among others, stand out within the catalog at Ciénaga de Zapata, the largest wetland in the insular Caribbean and perhaps poorly promoted by tour operators.

Cuba is an ideal destination to experience scuba diving. The waters around the main island and the over 4,000 keys and small islets that make up the Cuban archipelago are warm (24 to 29 degrees Celsius) and amazingly crystal clear, with average visibility from 30 to 40 meters.

The waters of Punta Perdiz are not too deep, so scuba diving or snorkeling are attractive, with cenotes inhabited by fish species in the vicinity or underwater caves waiting to be explored.



Fascinating underwater landscapes.

PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

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PCC Members to Play Leading Role



It is necessary to speed up the implementation of measures adopted to boost the agricultural and livestock sector. PHOTO: Cubadebate.

By Rafael **CALCINES**

HAVANA.-The challenges of the Cuban economy in the middle of profound transformations, the role of the Cuban Communist Party's (PCC) members and their links with the population centered the attention of President Miguel Díaz-Canel during his recent tour of the country's central region.

Those were some of the most pressing topics addressed by the also PCC First Secretary when visiting the provinces of Sancti Spiritus, Villa Clara and Cienfuegos, where he presided over the corresponding assemblies of the political organization at those instances.

Díaz-Canel repeatedly called to develop more direct and democratic work styles within the PCC members, and stressed that they cannot just stand looking at problems when the population is waiting for their solutions.

In this regard, he noted that "the public agenda cannot take one way and the PCC another. That makes no sense. The ear must be very close to the soil; we have to talk with the people, because this is very important to continue consolidating the organization's moral authority," the president stated.

The Cuban leader insisted on the Party's leading role in terms of social justice, sovereignty, anti-imperialism, and champion of the rights of workers and the people.

In this sense, he stressed that the PCC must be the most revolutionary thing within the Revolution, with more attractive and dynamic work styles, away from the routine, focused on solving problems, with the premise that, under the current circumstances in Cuba, the leaders are political figures to serve the people.

With regards to the economy, the Cuban resident referred, among other topics, to the recovery of the sugar cane sector, to efforts aimed at obtaining higher sugar cane yield so as to make the industry and that of its byproducts sustainable, as well as to making better use of soils to produce food.

Díaz-Canel said it was necessary to speed up the implementation of the over 60 measures adopted nationwide to boost the agricultural and livestock sector, and called upon all the people involved in that task to be ready to provide solutions and immediate answers.

For the Cuban authorities, this is a more pressing issue given the difficulties the country is facing, especially due to the tightening of the economic, commercial and financial blockade by the Donald Trump administration, which current U.S. President Joe Biden has maintained intact.

Referring to this, the Cuban president said during the assembly in Santa Clara that the country "not only has been able to resist the hardship caused by the criminal policy imposed by the U.S. government and the consequences resulting from the pandemic but it has done it resourcefully, looking for alternatives to go on."

"We will face the intensification of the economic blockade and overcome it with our own efforts, based on the concept of creative resistance. This means making the best use of all our talent, intelligence and people's will to be able to continue growing," he stated.

As example of that "utmost expression" of resistance he mentioned the COVID-19 vaccines develop by Cuban scientists.

The United States and the whim of Guantánamo

By Alejandra **GARCÍA**

HAVANA.- The United States insists on keeping the Guantánamo Naval Base as a military enclave in Cuba, which legally owns the piece of land seized by Washington, regardless of requests made by the international community and the Caribbean island itself.

January marked 20 years since the then

George W. Bush administration turned that territory into a prison, after waging a war against "terrorism" in Afghanistan, in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington.

However, the U.S. occupation of the Cuban territory dates back one hundred years, connected to the so called Platt Amendment, an appendix of the Cuban Constitution of 1901.

The military enclave was institutionalized in February 1903, after the two governments of the period signed the Agreement for the Lease of Coaling and Naval Stations in Cuba, which is part of the dark history of U.S. expansionism in Latin America.

Since the revolutionary triumph on the island in 1959, the Cuban government has been rejecting that territorial leasing, which allows the United States to keep its oldest military base overseas.

According to analysts, the Cuban government considers this treaty null and qualifies the US presence in Guantánamo as an illegal occupation.

The United States has used the naval base as a springboard for military interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly against Mexico, Haiti, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, the Dominican Republic and Grenada. Cuba was one of its targets too.

Right after the 1959 revolutionary triumph, the counterrevolution considered the intervention of the troops stationed at the Guantánamo Bay as one of its plans, either ordered by the White House or simulating an attack by Cuban forces that would trigger a military response from the base.

Over the past 60 years, Cuba has made countless denunciations against the misappropriation and illegal use of its territory. Those requests are not only supported by the Cuban people but by the international community as well.

Since 2001, Washington has used the naval base to send and interrogate people allegedly linked to terrorist cells in Central Asia. The bad conditions for the prisoners in Guantánamo has been deemed "no right zone."

In 2004, Cuba wrote a text to be presented and voted at the UN Human Rights Commission with the objective of leading to an investigation into prisoner conditions in the base.

The numerous moves made by the United States and the European Union thwarted that initiative, explained Costa Rican researcher Nicolás Boeglín.

In April 2005, the island once again tried to bring a similar draft bill before the Commission but the effort was in vein. However, that demand has been growing over the years, as the humanitarian crisis lived by the prisoners at the base has been increasingly attracting the international community's attention.

Since 2002 up to date, the United States has kept 780 prisoners. Of them, only 16 have been formally charged with terrorism.

Washington currently has 39 prisoners and most of them without criminal charges for which they can actually be taken to court.

Now that the hostilities with Afghanistan are over, the White House no longer has reasons to keep war prisoners or use the territory as military base in the Caribbean Sea. U.S. lawyer Thomas Wilner told *The Havana Reporter*, "President Joe Biden has the intention of closing the naval base. It remains to see if he has the courage to make that historic decision."



January marked 20 years since the then Bush administration turned that territory into a prison. PHOTO: Internet.

History Repeats Itself

By Ibis**GRADE**

HAVANA.- After one year in office, U.S. President Joe Biden has not complied with several of his electoral promises, including those related to a change in the policy toward Cuba, as until now, he has maintained Donald Trump's tough stance.

Many of the president's voters are not happy with this topic, as revealed by recent surveys, which show that the popularity of the Democrat politician has reached its lowest levels.

In spite of the many requests the Cuban-American community has made to open consular services in the U.S. embassy in Havana, as well as to restart the family reunification program and lift sanctions on family remittances and trips – among others – Biden continues to take no action in this regard.

In the meantime, several U.S. regions witness demonstrations in rejection to the blockade Washington has imposed for over 60 years, while cities such as New York and Washington D.C. have staged caravans in solidarity with the island.

In the power circles, however, the same views that have prevailed for over six decades are still in force; views that are fostered by a small group whose personal interests are above voters' opinions and hopes, or above justice and dignity assessments.



Bob Menendez and Marco Rubio represent the same views that have prevailed for over six decades. PHOTO: Internet.

At present, the U.S. Congress hosts an important number of these figures, including Republicans Carlos Giménez, María Elvira Salazar and Nicole Malliotakis; New Jersey Democrat Albio Sires, and Republicans Mario Díaz-Balart (Florida), Alex Mooney (West Virginia) and Anthony González (Ohio).

Other figures include Republican Senators Marco Rubio (Florida) and Ted Cruz (Texas), as well as Democratic Senator Bob Menéndez (New Jersey).

Díaz-Balart's recent statements on his alleged hopes of wishing "the best" to the

Cuban people were strongly questioned.

How dare you say that you wish the best to the Cuban people? That sounds like a macabre joke. You don't care about the Cubans here or there! Hypocrite! said promoter of the Bridges of Love project Carlos Lazo.

You, Díaz-Balart, promoted and applauded the closing of the U.S. embassy in Havana. Now, hundreds of thousands of families have to make their migratory arrangements in other countries, he stressed.

Lazo also denounced the ideas promoted by the legislator to forbid the sending of

remittances to the Cubans. "Your *raison d'être* as politician is to tighten the rope on the neck of the Cuban family. You tighten the nuts of suffering amidst a pandemic," he affirmed on his Facebook account.

The Cuban families are the most affected because of the blockade the United States has imposed on Cuba for over 60 years, he said.

"Díaz-Balart, María Elvira and Marco Rubio's families are almost all in the United States. For these merchants of hate, it is easy to be the scourge of the Cuban family," Lazo commented. The activist also urged Biden to end the absurd rhetoric through which the United States justifies sanctions and hostilities toward Cuba and stressed that the argument is the same: "to deny resources to the regime, to sacrifice the family to overthrow the Cuban government, but the suffering always falls on the family."

In his opinion, the battle waged at present to lift sanctions against Cuba is the same of that of 2004, during the administration of President George W. Bush (2001-2009).

History repeats itself. Many of those who devised that cruelty 15 years ago are the same who designed and endorsed the anti-family measures of the Trump era," he recalled.

One year after Biden's arrival to office, the White House affirms that it is still revising its policy toward Cuba and maintains in effect the over 200 measures and sanctions Trump imposed, while the blockade grows stronger amidst the pandemic of COVID-19 and financial persecution to companies that trade with Cuba grow worse.

The farse of the Havana Syndrome

By Carla**FUENTES**

HAVANA.- For the first time in five years, the United States recognized that the so-called "Havana Syndrome" was a farse, after admitting that the accusations against Cuba on certain "health incidents" among the diplomatic community were not caused by a premeditated attack.

In a report spread by the middle of January, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) confirmed what Cuban scientists and those from other countries have repeated since the first alleged cases were known, in 2016: "There is no evidence that an attack of such magnitude has been planned by a government."

During a press conference, Deputy General Director of the US Division at the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX) Johana Tablada stated that such a study confirms Cuba's position, strongly defended since the first "symptoms" appeared, which include nausea, dizziness, fatigue, headaches and hearing and visual problems.

According to the CIA report, those discomforts cannot be attributed to a common cause, even less to the hypothesis of a "sonic attack."

The wrongly-called Havana Syndrome, endorsed by the Donald Trump administration and his successor, president Joe Biden, was used as a pretext to maintain Cuba in the list of countries that sponsor terrorism.

It was also used as an absurd pretext to impose over 240 sanctions and reduce the staff of both embassies.

Washington took those reprisals while the majority of experts agreed to say that for an ultrasound to be able to destroy the molecular tissue, it would have to be huge weapons.



"There is no evidence that an attack of such magnitude has been planned by a government," confirmed the CIA. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

The new CIA report says that such devices would have to be located closely enough to the target to avoid being blocked by walls, but should also remain hidden to cause such damage in an invisible way.

On January 2019, biologists expert on tropical insects suggested that the most reasonable explanation for such suffering would be the mating singing of a noisy species: short-tailed crickets.

"Although incidents have been reported in several countries, the United States has only taken draconian measures against Cuba, which has negatively affected the Cuban family," Tablada denounced.

All of the sudden, five years later, the U.S. intelligence agency admitted that most of the cases could be described as "environmental causes, undiagnosed medical conditions or stress."

This new report raises an inevitable question: Why does the U.S. discourse toward the island change now?

As Cuban-American lawyer José Pertierra told The Havana Reporter, the change of perspective on the alleged syndrome means that the U.S. could never prove that such phenomenon really exists.

It is a complete absurd, a pretext used to punish Cuba, but a farse that can no longer be maintain, the lawyer affirmed. The new discourse does not mean that the White House will leave Cuba in peace; in fact, the CIA affirmed that even though it is not a "deliberate act," they will continue analyzing concrete cases, Pertierra added.

The United States will maintain a rhetoric that allows them encouraging the anti-Cuban extreme right in Florida, key voters for the new administration that is heading toward the midterm elections.

Vaccines, Omicron and COVID-19

By ZeusNAYA

HAVANA.- Cuba bet on its own vaccines to fight SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, and had three of its five vaccine candidates approved in 2021, the first ones produced in Latin America.

Before the year 2021 closed, the country detected the first case infected with the new Omicron variant, first identified in South Africa and rated as worrying by the World Health Organization. It soon spread to the rest of the national territory and became dominant.

Cuba's competent authorities have been forced to update health protocols on several occasions and to adopt regulations related to that strain of the virus. In the meantime, they speeded up the process for the administration of a fourth dose in the light of the new wave, which has recently accounted for a maximum of over 3,000 cases daily.

As many as 87.6 percent of the Cuban population –out of 11.3 million inhabitants– already completed the vaccination scheme with one of the three vaccines, while 45.6 percent has been administered the booster shot so far. According to experts, the country is once again witnessing signs of a plateau and the number of contagions is likely to decline in coming months.

Cuba, which leads the world index of anti-COVID doses per 100 inhabitants, shows better conditions to fight such a highly contagious coronavirus as SARS-CoV-2, which mutates constantly. However, the main challenge for the country is to keep enforcing the approved health measures strictly.

Experts recommend active surveillance, humbleness, discipline, individual responsibility and solidarity... not to get self-confident at all.

BIOPHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

The resounding success of the biopharmaceutical industry, encouraged by the government's leadership, came in the middle of a tense panorama marked by an increase in the number of infections and an alarming situation in the capital, epicenter of the disease.

The mass vaccination campaign began on April 24, 2021 with Abdala, developed by the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center, to then continue with Soberana 02 and Soberana Plus, by the Finlay Institute. Their 90 percent-plus efficacy is comparable to those of the U.S. vaccines Pfizer and Moderna.

Regardless of the efforts made to have the vaccines ready, on August 1 the country reported 9,279 positive cases, over 94,000 hospitalizations and 68 COVID-related deaths. The highest peak was recorded on August 20, with 9,320 confirmed cases.

The increase of cases largely owed to the presence of the Delta variant, first identified in India, María Guadalupe Guzmán, expert with the Pedro Kourí Tropical Medicine Institute told press at the time.

Meanwhile, the Public Health Ministry's Head of the Science and Innovation Department, Ileana Morales, explained that the quality of the locally produced COVID-19 vaccines, together with the implementation of a well-organized strategy allowed the number of cases to become stable in September.

With the sustained progress of the vaccination campaign in October and November the numbers dropped in general from 4,873 to 130, while reports by the Public Health Ministry showed a decrease of confirmed cases nationwide.

That sustained tendency toward disease control allowed the school year to be resumed under the in-person learning modality on November 15. The Cuban borders, airports and tourist facilities reopened as well.

Analysts warn about the unequal distribution of vaccines in the world, which is why the pandemic is not over yet. In the meantime, international concern over COVID-19 continues.



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María Guadalupe Guzmán, expert with the Pedro Kourí Tropical Medicine Institute. PHOTO: ACN.

Successful Jazz Plaza Festival

By Yanisbel PEÑA

HAVANA.- The International Jazz Plaza Festival is reaffirmed as one of the most important events of its kind in the world, with due recognition of the work carried out by its organizers along almost four decades of existence and of Cubans as a strong jazz platform.

The 37th International Jazz Plaza Festival held at the end of January in the capital came to a successful end after five days of memorable musical pieces performed by the most outstanding figures in the world of jazz.

Sponsored by the Cuban Music Institute and the National Popular Music Center, the event brought together first-class jazz musicians such as pianist and composer Ignacio "Nachito" Herrera, who resides in the United States, Argentina's several-time laureate bassist Javier Malosetti, and saxophonist Donald Harrison and guitarist Dominic Miller, both from the United States, just to mention a few.



Pianist and composer Ignacio "Nachito" Herrera. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Havana also welcomed multi-instrumentalist Ray Lama of the People's Democratic Republic of Congo, who performed together with the much applauded French pianist and composer, Laurent de Wilde. Instrumentalists from Finland and Holland, among other countries, attended the festival as well.

Other jazz musicians that performed during the Cuban festival included Mike del Ferro,

Pekka Pylkkanen, Swedish pianist Jacob Karl Anders and U.S. singer Haley Grey.

This time the festival was inaugurated by Nachito Herrera who, together with his Habana Jazz band, demonstrated he feels much identified with the land where he was trained and took over the stage with an impressive repertoire.

Herrera, two-time Grammy Award winner, returned to the country to honor the tradition

of rhythms and genres that have earned him the nickname "island of music," with a repertoire that combines classical music and jazz.

Among the artists that performed for Cuba were saxophonists Germán Velazco, César López and Carlos Miyares, flutist Orlando "Maraca" Valle, singer Alain Pérez, pianist Ernán López-Nussa, and showman Bobby Carcasses, founder of the event.

It's worth mentioning the performances of Ruy López-Nussa and his Academia band, one of the country's most successful percussion projects, among the most memorable concerts of the event.

Also brilliant were the performances by young jazz musicians who, like in previous editions, played a leading role in all of them. As usual, the "Leonardo Acosta in memoriam" International Jazz Colloquium was part of the festival program, which this time marked the 100th birth anniversary of César Portillo de la Luz, the 95th anniversary of pianist Numidia Vaillant and the 85th of percussionist and singer Oscar Valdés.

Once more, Cuba's National Theater, America Theater and the Bertolt Brecht Cultural Center served as venues for the concerts and jam sessions. As it is the tradition now, the youngest artists were the most enthusiast protagonists.

Santiago Feliú, from Trova Music to Bel Canto

By Claudia MADEN

HAVANA.- Under the name Santiago Feliú Bel Canto, members of Cuba's contemporary lyrical movement paid tribute to the unforgettable artist and famous voice of the Nueva Trova Music Movement on what would have been his 60th birthday. Like in previous years, the former Saint Francis of Assisi Convent was filled to capacity during the homage paid to the left-handed guitarist, who was able to connect the founders of the well-known Cuban song movement with other voices such as those of Gerardo Alfonso, Carlos Varela and Frank Delgado.

The youngest member of the Feliú family, who died at the age of 51 in Havana, shared the stage with Fito Páez, Luis Eduardo Aute, Luis Pastor, León Gieco, Silvio Rodríguez and his brother Vicente, among other singer-songwriters. He also performed together with Noel Nicola and became the spearhead of an avant-garde within the then new trova movement.

The multi-instrumentalist inspired new composers - Rosa García Oropesa, Ricardo Fabelo, Simón Ibáñez, Josué Tacoronte and



The youngest member of the Feliú family died at the age of 51 in Havana. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Yaliev Álvarez- who made versions of 15 of his most applauded pieces, under the artistic direction of Helson Hernández.

The following essential topics were listened to including Vida, Generación and Para Bárbara were sung by sopranos Yoslainy Derrick, Dayri Llanes and Johana Simón; while mezzo sopranos Dayamí Pérez and Giselle Polanco performed De escudo and Balada. From different chamber formats, the young generation provided Feliú's work with new sound touches during a unique

concert that largely favored duets for voice and piano or voice and guitar, also featuring trios for voice, guitar and lute, as well ensemble with piano and string and wind instruments.

Mexican artist Lily Noguera joined the project for the second time. Accompanied by arranger and guitarist Josué Tacoronte and new tenor Erick Durán they interpreted the pieces Otra canción and Ángeles sobre mí.

Also worth mentioning is the participation for the first time of Variaciones Habana Symphonic Orchestra, conducted by maestro Jorge Félix Leyva.

Bolero, Marionetas de Cupido and De la reencarnación completed the successful repertoire that also included Créeme, an anthem of the Cuban song that reminded of late Vicente Feliú, trova musician and Santiago's brother.

The fact that voices identified with the so called concert music committed to honor singer songwriters such as Silvio Rodríguez, Pablo Milanés, Amaury Pérez or Feliú himself corroborates that his repertoire has a strong impact of the national stage.



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40th Anniversary of the Malvinas War

By Maylin VIDAL

BUENOS AIRES.- After 40 years of a war that claimed the lives of 650 nationals and 255 British fighters, Argentina will carry out an intense agenda this year to show its continuing and relentless fight for the independence of Las Malvinas Islands. With great impulse since he began serving as president, Alberto Fernández and his cabinet have been given priority to the topic connected with the national territory appropriated by the United Kingdom in 1833, which led to the 1982 war conflict. The efforts will be even greater this year, with several initiatives calling upon Argentines to bring their own projects to a program that each month will develop different activities all over the country and in other parts of the world.

"The Malvinas Bring Us Together" is the slogan of the campaign launched on January 3, which coincides with the 189th anniversary of the territorial appropriation. It includes a huge virtual platform with over 150 activities intended to once again bring the battle for national rights to light.

When presenting the proposal, Foreign Minister Santiago Cafiero pointed out that the plundered insular and maritime territories unite Argentines, which is why there is due recognition in every locality.

When recalling that the president ordered the creation of the National Council on Affairs Relative to Las Malvinas Islands, Cafiero stressed that the different political groups joined it and are part of the agenda. The council, he explained, will entail lots of reflection and recognition.



The war claimed the lives of 650 nationals and 255 British fighters. PHOTO: Internet.

That is the reason why the initiative was conceived with the participation of all national, provincial and municipal organizations, as well as educational entities. It has become a virtual platform that has audiovisual materials and even a section for the people to send their own proposals and include them in the program.

The Argentinean foreign minister highlighted that the Malvinas must unite and guide the nation. In this agenda, every sector can openly say the locality from where it wants to recognize the fallen in action and their relatives, and link the topic not only with the past and present but with the future as well.

The main objectives of what is known as the "Malvinas 40 Years Agenda" is for the Argentinean people to recognize and honor the fallen in action, their relatives and war veterans, as well as to make the sovereign rights over those lands even more visible in the country and the world.

In addition to recalling the anniversary of the event, the date coincides with the 40th anniversary of the approval of

Resolution 37/9 adopted by the UN General Assembly, which recognized that the South Atlantic conflict did not alter the nature of the dispute between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the sovereignty of the Malvinas.

The country also marks the 10th anniversary of the Ushuaia Declaration, which was unanimously approved by the National Congress to reaffirm the State's policy over the Malvinas issue. A message of unity concerning this national topic will be conveyed by all the different initiatives to be held this year, and the Malvinas and South Atlantic Islands Museum in the capital will play a leading role in this sense.

In remarks to *The Havana Reporter*, its director, journalist, writer and former fighter Edgardo Esteban stressed that the Malvinas also marks that process of identity in the Argentinean history.

"We are developing an agenda with over 150 projects. One of the epicenters to think about and highlight the consensual opinion we Argentines have about the topic will be on April 2 (Day of the Veterans and Fallen in Action of the Malvinas War), he said.

A big meeting with former fighters is expected to be held this year in coordination with the State and the provinces.

The objective is to show the world that Argentina stands as one and will not give up upon this request, Esteban noted. "When we refer to the Malvinas, we mean that military base the British have in the southern hemisphere, on our islands," he stressed.

"We are also talking about the need for a deep water port to control those 2,400,000 square kilometers of the continental platform, an area that is ten times larger than the British islands," Esteban added.

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Corina Mestre Receives 2022 National Theater Award

By Ilsa **RODRÍGUEZ**

HAVANA.- Corina Mestre has just received the 2022 National Theater Award, a well-deserved acknowledgement to this renowned actress who, during her long career, has shined in the theater, the cinema, the television, the radio and the teaching field.

The numerous awards received throughout her career include the 2015 Artistic Teaching Prize; the Neighborhood award, granted last year by the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR); the Youth Teacher Prize (2017), and the Alejo Carpentier Medal (2021). Born in Havana in 1954, the artist started her career in 1981, when she joined the Teatro Estudio group, headed by the emblematic Raquel Revuelta and considered one of the most important in Cuba.

Mestre, the current vice-president of the Stage Artists Association of the Cuban National Writers and Artists Association (UNEAC), started to be known in the 1970s, when she recited poems and songs with the Nueva Trova Movement and for her performances with the Students Theater.

A graduate of Stage Arts (1981) at the Higher Institute of Arts (ISA), during her long career she has combined her talent on the stage with the teaching profession,

as a result of which she has formed several generations of actors.

Her experience also includes children's theater; she stands out for her performances in television series and soap operas and her work in the radio and the cinema.

In relation to her teaching career, she was an ISA assistant professor from 1984 to 1989 and head of the Acting Department from 1998 to 2005. She has also conducted workshops on actor and stage direction at the San Antonio de los Baños International School of Film and TV.

In addition to standing out for the promotion of socio-cultural projects in rural areas of the country, Mestre has also conducted master courses on performance in Mexico and Santiago de Compostela, Spain, and has participated in international events such as the Cervantino Festival, in Sitges and the Moscow Stage Festival.

Her art is likewise known in Angola, Spain, Italy, the United States, Mexico, Nicaragua, Portugal, Switzerland and Venezuela.

Considered one of the most hard-working teachers in Cuba in the field of arts and always committed to the stage and the Cuban Revolution, the artist has been congratulated by several people, including Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

In his Twitter social account, the President sent his congratulations to this stage art teacher for a well-deserved award, and



During her career has shined in the theater, the cinema, the television, the radio and the teaching field.

PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

his love to a person "who defends the Revolution with the professionalism and passion of her authentic commitment."

For his part, UNEAC President Luis Morlote praised Mestre's work, commitment and dedication and celebrated the granting of this award to a talented and popular actress who is also the vice-president of the organization.

The jury that granted the award was headed by Dagoberto Gainzan, winner of this prize in 2021, and intellectuals and creators Marilyn Garbey, Eduardo Arrocha, Fátima Pattersson and Eugenio Hernández. The National Theater Award was set up in 1999 by the National Stage Arts Council to acknowledge Cuba's most representative stage figures for their life's work.

Cuba's First Digital Art Collection on Exhibition

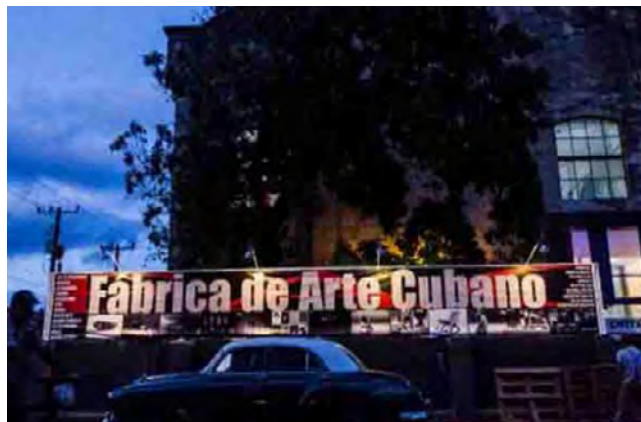
By Liz **BOBADILLA**

HAVANA.- Since the end of January, Fábrica de Arte Cubano, (Cuban Art Factory), (FAC) displays the exhibition Rostros de otra dimensión (Faces from another dimension), a proposal that for the first time takes NFT (non-fungible token) works of 34 Cuban creators to the digital stage.

Available in the virtual platform @oncyber, the initiative shows the work of exponents of this tendency included in the nftFAC project, which supports and spreads cryptoart among exponents of the different disciplines in Cuba, with the purpose to join new cultural dynamics associated to digital art.

Some of the artists involved in the exhibition include Evelyn Sosa, Ophelia's Death, Adriana Mugia, Juan Blanco Lozano, Massiel Tessa, Kamila Aguavives, Renato Arza, Alejandro Buján, Enrique Rottenberg, Alexandra Álvarez, Alien Maleta, Forming 3D, Nelson Ponce and Irian Carballosa.

Rostros de otra dimensión makes reference to faces' distinctive features, "which characterize a human being or way of being," while combining "poetics, approximations, languages, styles and discourses that are characteristic of the NFT world" to give metaverse an image, reads the exhibition's text.



"Anatomically speaking, (faces) are a vehicle to relax emotions and as slaves of this condition, constantly and unconsciously, we all pretend being readers of foreign feelings," says the document, while praising the value of the existence of a hidden face as an opportunity to discover a new universe.

The FAC project, developed by way of an experiment, tries to provide guidance and facilitate the use of this revolutionary and developing technique, while exhibiting Cuban art files previously hosted and then generated in NFT.

As the website of this initiative reads, the institution undertakes to accompany the authors of each piece in the generation of NFTs and in all procedures related to visualization, promotion and potential commercialization. The project's catalogue includes, until now, the names of about thirty creators of this growing expression that is validated by authenticity certificates and copyrights; the website will provide a virtual gallery with traveling exhibitions.



Tighten the Blockade

By José **FERNÁNDEZ**

HAVANA.- The U.S. government used COVID-19 as an ally to reinforce its blockade against Cuba, with moves ranging from financial persecution to placing obstacles to acquire medical supplies.

After more than 60 decades since its implementation, that was made official by US President John F. Kennedy on 3th of February 1962, the group of unilateral coercive measures included new methods during the fight against the new Sars-CoV 2 coronavirus; some of them with unprecedented levels, making economic war even more aggressive.

Of the 243 measures adopted against Cuba over the past five years, 55 went into effect in 2020 –the period of the worst pandemic peak in the country. None of them have been eased by the current administration of Joe Biden, despite being one of his campaign promises.

Cuba currently has one of the world's highest vaccination rates, supported by locally produced vaccines. However, it could not get more than 30 equipment and supplies needed to produce its COVID-19 vaccine candidates during the period, because over ten percent of their components had been made in the United States.

Those measures were tightened with the increased persecution of financial transactions from Cuba, making it impossible to pay supply providers or make donations with those goals.

The Cuban battle against COVID-19 and the U.S. blockade posed other obstacles when the Caribbean island made efforts to increase the availability of ventilators, which are considered indispensable to treat critically ill Sars-CoV 2 patients.

In the light of all those obstacles, Cuba developed five models of respiratory ventilators, with the joint participation of several electronics companies, the Neuroscience Center and Havana's Scientific-technological Park.



Cuba developed five models of respiratory ventilators. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Those openly harmful moves were combined with unconventional war strategies and the increase of punitive measures against the economy, which mainly affected the Cuban families.

While thousands of Cuban health professionals were supporting the fight against the pandemic in other countries, mostly developing nations, the U.S. mainstream media carried out an international distortion campaign that even tried to prevent other countries from getting access to Cuban treatments and medicines.

Campaigns inciting violence and degrading the Cuban health system were encouraged from news platforms, in times when the country was registering the highest number of infected people. At the same time, measures were implemented to cut, at all costs, the entry of hard currencies into the country, to thus limit the government's performance to cope with the health and economic crisis.

Those were also the months when the only way to send remittances to the country were discontinued, the family reunification program was brought to a halt, consular services in Havana stopped and flights between the two countries were reduced.

By then, Cuba had been included on the spurious List of State Sponsors of Terrorism, unilaterally drawn up by the United States and with profound negative consequences for Cuba's trade and finances.

José Martí's Legacy Recalled

By Ernesto **MELLADO**

HAVANA.- On January 28, Cuba celebrated the 169th birth anniversary of National Hero José Martí (1853-1895), with activities that marked the beginning of a yearlong campaign aimed at recalling the legacy of who is considered an advocate for independence on the island. Cuban students and authorities held the traditional March of the Torches on January 27 from the historic staircase of the University of Havana until the monument known as the Fragua Martiana, where the young Martí served a sentence of forced labor because of his opposition to the Spanish colonial regime.

Workplaces, schools and institutions joined the tribute which, according to the director of the Office for Studies on Martí, Eduardo Torres Cuevas, shows the importance of the Cuban writer and revolutionary man's thinking, while consolidating national and patriotic awareness.

The tribute paid to the Cuban National Hero has the objective of affirming, both in Cuba and the rest of the world, the principles of good, unity, rejection of hatred and support for the creation of an international society based on love and plurality, Cuevas, who is also the president of the José Martí Cultural Society, said recently. The day marking the world thinker's anniversary of birth closed with the decision to hold the 5th International Conference for World Equilibrium from January 24 to 28 next year.

Based at Havana's Convention Center, the event will be marked by a plural and multidisciplinary thinking aimed at raising public awareness of scourges that affect humanity.

According to its organizers, the conference's key topics will include the dialogue of civilizations, cultural diversity, the need for solidarity, sustainable development, the role of youth and people's right to self-determination.

The goal of the series of tributes will be to further spread the value and meaning of Martí's ideas in the context of Cuba's history, as a way to understand national resistance and identity, as well as the Revolution's origin and strongly humanist principles.

This year will witness initiatives intended to honor the educator not only in Cuba but also abroad, especially at foreign universities that have a department on José Martí's studies, friendship with Cuba movements, associations of Cuban residents abroad and other institutions.

The famous Cuban patriot was born on January 28, 1853 in Havana. With only 16 years of age, he was imprisoned, carried shackles and was forced to work at the San Lázaro Quarry, near the current Malecón seaside drive.



Traditional March of the Torches in homage to José Martí. PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.



Historian Eduardo Torres Cuevas during a tribute to the National Hero on the Memorial that bears his name.

Cuba's Vaccines in the World.

By **PL** Correspondents and **THR WRITING STAFF**

HAVANA.- COVID-19 vaccines produced by Cuban scientists have reached different parts of the world to prevent and relieve the consequences of the pandemic, which is seriously affecting humanity.

The success of Abdala and Soberana vaccines, both on adults and children 2 to 17 years of age, has been confirmed in countries such as Mexico, Nicaragua, and Vietnam, while others have received them as donations to fight the epidemic.

Vietnam was the first country to get the vaccines, and it was an ever greater honor that they were transported by the plane that took President Nguyen Xuan Phuc back to his country after he concluded an official visit to the island. A total of 150,000 vials arrived in Vietnam as donation in that same plane.

The batch, which consisted of 900,000 doses out of the five million agreed, underwent strict tests and was later distributed in 14 Vietnamese provinces.

When President Xuan Phuc visited the country last September, Cuba said it was willing to supply another five million doses to Vietnam, as well as the technology for it to produce it itself.

One of the provinces where the Cuban vaccine was administered was Nghe An, the birthplace of Ho Chi Minh, the promoter of national independence. Many locals recalled there that if in the past Cubans expressed, on behalf of Fidel Castro, that they were ready to give their own blood for Vietnam, this time they were also saving Vietnamese lives with the Cuban-made vaccines.

At the end of December 2021 in Mexico, the Federal Committee for Protection from Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS) approved Abdala COVID-19 vaccines for emergency use, a transcendental decision for the island because its approval was made by a country with an internationally renowned experience and high scientific level.

Abdala, developed by scientists of the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center, is one of the three vaccines –out of the five made at Cuban labs- approved for emergency use. It was accepted by Mexico's New Molecules Committee on August 30, 2021, becoming the first Latin American shot to be assessed by that institution. Four months later, COFEPRIS gave the green light for its use in the country.

In Nicaragua, the national vaccination campaign for pediatric age groups began last October, then spread to the population group ages 2 to 17, with 1,200,000 doses of the Cuban Soberana

02 (produced by the Finlay Institute) and one million doses of Abdala.

The Regulatory Health Authority of the Nicaraguan Health Ministry approved the two vaccines for emergency use, with which Nicaragua joined the list of countries where the population is being immunized with Cuban-made vaccines.

VENEZUELA, CARIBBEAN AND DONATIONS

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Cuba offered Venezuela its best doctors and scientists with the purpose to contribute to contain and control de coronavirus disease and reduce the impact of the health emergency to a minimum.

The important work of about 20,000 Cuban collaborators is added to the abovementioned tasks. Official sources indicate that in recent months, the island has sent millions of doses of the Abdala and Soberana 02 vaccines to the Venezuelan health system to support the national immunization program.

By the middle of 2021, the governments of Venezuela and Cuba signed an agreement for the provision of 12 million doses of Abdala, which showed an efficacy of over 92 percent against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, according to clinical trials' results.

Since its arrival to Venezuela, this vaccine has been particularly administered to the adult population – in its complete three-application cycle – as part of the vaccination campaign that initially included Sputnik V and Sinopharm, developed by Russia and China, respectively.

Another chapter in the fight against the epidemic started in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, a small insular state that received 300 doses of Abdala from Cuba.

That nation became the first Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member country to approve and administer the said vaccine to its citizens.

With a population of about 111 thousand inhabitants, this eastern Caribbean archipelago has used the Russian Sputnik V and Sputnik Light vaccines, the U.S. Pfizer, the British AstraZeneca and now Abdala – a three dose immunizer administered in a period of two weeks between each dose.

The presence of the Cuban vaccine in that nation's epidemiological context grew in importance when the local health authorities approved its use in children over the age of five.

On the other hand, in January this year, Cuba donated 240,000 doses of the Abdala, Soberana 02 and Soberana Plus vaccines to Syria, thus ratifying its historical position: share what you have and not what is left over. On behalf of his government and people, Syrian ambassador Idris Mayya appreciated the Cuban authorities and its people for making a solidarity contribution in spite of the difficulties resulting from the U.S. blockade, which has been in place for over 60 years and has gotten stronger.

Cuba, he said, "is one of the richest countries in the world in what regards dignity and generosity, which has always been willing to help other countries in the most difficult times."



Vietnam was the first country to get the Cuban vaccines. PHOTO: Minrex.



Since the beginning of the pandemic, Cuba offered Venezuela its best doctors and scientists. PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.



Cuba donated 240,000 doses of the Abdala, Soberana 02 and Soberana Plus vaccines to Syria.

Emilio Bacardi Museum



By Marta **CABRALES**

SANTIAGO DE CUBA.- For a little over a century, the Emilio Bacardi Museum, the first one founded in Cuba, has symbolized the yearning for knowledge, part of which can be met by visiting its halls.

Initially located on different parts of the city such as Santo Tomás, San Francisco and Enramadas Streets, the important cultural center was finally established on the central intersection of Aguilera and Carnicería Streets. We must thank the first Republican mayor whose name the institution bears for his efforts to provide the city with these sources of wisdom and culture.

In this effort, he had the direct support of his wife Elvira Cape, who was also the main promoter behind the creation of the first public library.

The impressive image of the building designed by architect Carlos Segrera is one of the visual representations that identifies Cuba's second most important city, and is one of the reasons why its inhabitants feel so proud.

The museum keeps valuable collections that range in topics from national history to

anthropology, Cuban and universal culture to the magnetism of an Egyptian mummy that Bacardi and Elvira brought to the city after one of their trips to that region of the world.

Among the over 23,000 cultural assets preserved at the institution are items connected to the history of the archipelago, with personal objects and documents dating back to the independence wars.

Particularly important are the personal objects of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes (known in Cuba as the Father of the Homeland), and National Hero José Martí, together with many others that played leading roles in the independence wars waged since October 10, 1868.

Other impressive items visitors feel much identified with are related to political proselytizing periods and the campaign life of independence heroes, together with personal effects they had or were wearing just minutes before they were killed in combat by Spanish colonial troops.

The items that evoke the funeral services of Céspedes and Martí, and the humbleness of their feats on their final days are especially moving as well.

When touring the Emilio Bacardi Museum, visitors not only can appreciate the Roman style of its front columns, but enjoy an imaginary and symbolic trip to Cuba's essence as well.



Violence Marks Beginning of 2022 in Colombia

By OdalysTROYA

BOGOTA.- Two attacks, one resulting in one dead and several wounded and another failed; the sum of 10 massacres and nine murdered social leaders was the toll of violence in Colombia at the beginning of 2022 as the country prepares for congressional elections.

On Wednesday, January 19, a car bomb exploded in Saravena Municipality, Arauca Department, damaging the Transportation buildings and other institutions and killing a security guard.

The explosion also damaged the Héctor Arilo Building, which seemed to be the main target of the attack, as leaders of different social organizations were there, five of whom were injured.

Only two days later, the police confirmed a bomb was ready to be activated at Casa Alternativa, a business in Bogota headed by signatories of the peace agreement.

The explosive artifact was found in one of the restrooms of the building, where there is a restaurant used by progressive political forces such as Pacto Histórico (The Historic Pact) and Partido Comunes (the Common People's Party) to hold political activities with views to the new legislative elections set for March 13.

That incident was condemned by members and followers of that political faction during an act in that place. They voiced their commitment to peace in Colombia and their rejection of acts that perpetuate the state of war and also aim at sawing fear among the population as the elections approach.

On the other hand, the number of massacres against the Colombian people totaled ten and that of social leaders nine in the first three weeks only of the new year, which corroborates the increasing violence situation in the South American country. Arauca, which shares border with Venezuela, is one of the departments where the violence situation is more serious, due to clashes between so called dissident groups of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and fronts of the National Liberation Army.

In the light of this panorama, which has worsened since the first days of 2022, the Integral System for Peace recently urged the Colombian government to favor or facilitate humanitarian talks between the armed groups involved in the intensification of the conflict in Arauca.



The number of massacres corroborates the increasing violence situation in Colombia. PHOTO: Internet.

It stressed in a release that at least 34 homicides were informed in the first 20 days of 2022, together with 269 statements on forced displacement -about 1,000 displaced people.

In addition, there were denunciations of general threats to social leaders and presidents of Community Action Boards, while people in the social reincorporation process fear for their lives, the entity noted.

The damage to social leaders has been increasing, and having them as direct targets seems to be a specific characteristic of the new cycle of violence, the text warned.

There is this feeling that the region is beginning to experience a panorama similar to the one lived between 2005 and 2011. The worsening of this situation makes people think about the reasons and conditions that have allowed the armed confrontation to go on, the document highlighted.

"Government negligence, corruption, land issues and territorial problems, illegal economies and weakened democracy are factors that keep violent situations alive," it noted.

According to Sonia López, representative of the Joel Sierra Human Rights Foundation, Arauca is a strongly militarized territory where there are over 9,000 soldiers and officers, in addition to the police and the navy. However, violence in that zone continues.

"That militarization has failed to defend the Arauca population's life, integrity, goods and projects, but has rather served the interests of national and foreign capital, largely protecting oil infrastructure. If militarization were the solution to the humanitarian crisis in the territory, it would have been solved already," she stressed.

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More Possibilities for MSMEs (Mipymes)

By Cira**RODRÍGUEZ**

HAVANA.- With the announcement that applications are open to create micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and non-agricultural cooperatives in gastronomic services, Cuba ratified the importance granted to these new forms of management. That category is top priority for the country, due to the shortfall in food offers and because there is huge dependence on food imports –it accounted for nearly \$1.8 billion in recent years.

With that decision, the Cuban Ministry of Economy and Planning further increased the number of activities that can be carried out by MSMEs and those cooperatives, which had so far been limited to food production, exports and businesses at scientific and technological parks.

Also included are businesses related to technology, circular economy and recycling, manufacture, information technology, logistics and transport activities and construction services.

Local development projects –there are over 400- are of great interest as well. They are

defined as the combination of resources, efforts and actions with their own identity aimed at transforming a reality with an impact on the people's quality of life.

The first 35 MSMEs were given the green light on September 29, 2021, precisely nine days after the regulations that legally protect the creation of those organizations, which aim at making the national economy more dynamic, took effect.

These new entities have been designed with the objective of acting as effective organizations in harmony with the guidelines of the Cuban socioeconomic model, with a list of activities also authorized for non-agricultural cooperatives.

In this sense, Cuba's Vice Prime Minister Alejandro Gil, who is also Minister of Economy, has stressed that Cuba has the challenge of developing an efficient

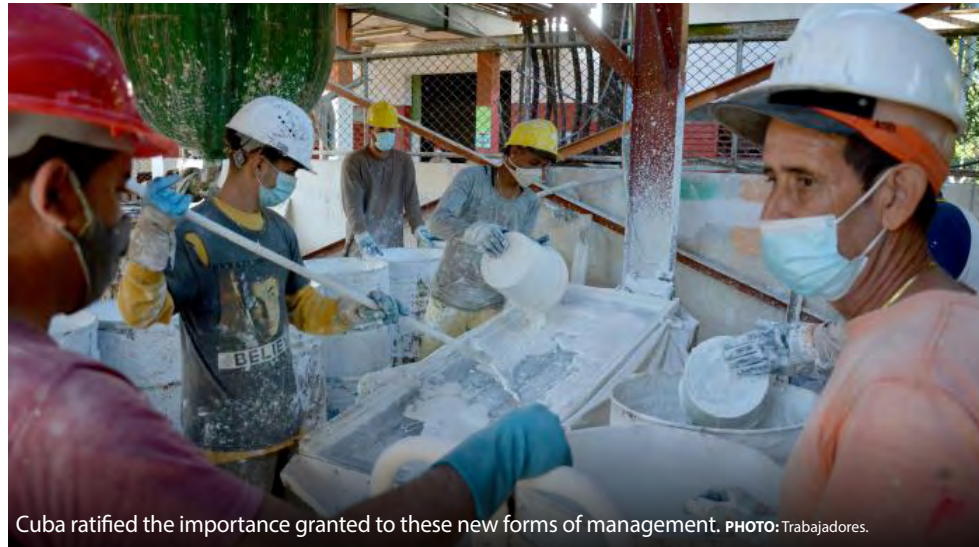
economy and, in the middle of the obstacles imposed by the U.S. blockade and the complex international situation, generating goods and wealth that support an inclusive social project.

That, he highlighted, entails resources we have to create with the participation of all the economic actors and under the principles of solidarity, social justice and equality.

In fact, 1,422 private MSMEs, 27 state-run and 22 non-agricultural cooperatives already exist in the country, as result of a process that goes well. However, Deputy Economy and Finance Minister Johana Odriozola noted that some mechanisms need to be improved.

In this regard, she reiterated that the most important thing is not the authorization itself but that these entities are coherently inserted in the national economy and can contribute to Cuba's growth.

The official praised the over 23,000 jobs created with the MSMEs and cooperatives, noting that the biggest number of newly created businesses are in Havana, followed by the provinces of Granma (in the eastern region) and Matanzas (in the western zone).



Cuba ratified the importance granted to these new forms of management. PHOTO: Trabajadores.

Budget Priorities Aim at Development

By Tino**MANUEL**

HAVANA.-Several measures adopted by the Cuban government, such as the recent approval of the 2022 Budget, aim at attaining development and using limited material and financial resources in accordance with the country's priorities.

This year's expenses amount to 224,580,000,000 pesos, of which 73% will be directed to health, education and social assistance and security, a sign of the importance given to social justice and the wellbeing of its citizens, specialists say. When presenting the budget at the Cuban parliament, last December, Minister of Finances and Prices Meisi Bolaños stated that the pandemic showed the importance of having a solid health and science system, with a human capital that saves lives.

The Minister added that it represents a commitment to continue defending the Socialist Revolution's most sacred achievements from the State Budget.

In 2021 – the year in which Monetary Ordering started – it was essential to plan and execute a budget whose restructuring had no precedent before, with 16,000,000,000 pesos to face COVID-19, the Minister explained.

This year, expenses include an additional 800,000,000 pesos to finance works in 65 neighborhoods of the capital that have complex social situations, with the purpose to respond to people's concerns.

Support to the gradual recovery of the economy is also included in the budget, although our economy will not be free of the negative impact resulting from the world economic crisis and the limitations imposed by the U.S. economic blockade on Cuba, Bolaños explained.

In spite of the above, basic services and social programs have a higher participation in the Budget, an expression of its marked social concept, she stressed.

According to projections, 56,503,000,000 pesos will be addressed to public health; 55,373,000,000 to education; 36,602,000,000 to Social Security, and 600,000,000,000 to social assistance, which will cover municipal budgets.

The list also includes Cultural activities (6,780,000,000), sport activities (4,000,000,000) and science, technology and innovation (10,000,000,000), as well as a 48% financing to the entrepreneurial sector.

Special attention is also given to Micro, Small and Medium-sized Companies (MIPYME) and state entities for the important role they play in the country's economic development in the medium and long terms.



Minister of Finances and Prices Meisi Bolaños. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



The budget include an additional 800,000,000 pesos to finance works in neighborhoods. PHOTO: ACN.

Agenda in Favor of Economic Advancement

By Karina **MARRÓN**

HAVANA.- Cuba undertook the battle of the global economic crisis due to Covid-19, with its own strategy based on its National Plan for Social Economic Development until 2030, since its intention is not only to overcome the moment, but to move forward.

The country, subjected to the U.S. blockade for over 60 years and to over 240 additional coercive measures, has faced higher difficulties in this period as a result

of limitations to access financing, goods and medications, among others.

For that reason, the measures that have come into effect are aimed at fostering national production and particularly strengthening the socialist state companies, considered the mainstay of the Cuban economy.

With that purpose in mind, a number of measures were implemented in 2021 to transform their structure and performance, including decentralization in the allocation of foreign currencies, widening of social objectives, elimination of obstacles in order to attain an effective connection with the different

economic actors, and elimination of limits in the distribution of profits, among others.

Paying attention to those changes, evaluating their impact on productivity's increase and efficiency, are some of the priorities the government has this year, in which commitment will be focused on reducing the number of entities with losses – about 500 in the last calendar year.

Similarly, Cuba implements a package of 63 provisions to foster food production, which according to a report by Minister of Agriculture Ydael Pérez presented at the Parliament, already shows the first results, as

some lines have increased their presence in the national market.

Some of those actions include the creation of the agricultural promotion banking, with a capital of 1.8 billion pesos (75 million dollars), addressed at pork, cattle raising and rice, banana, yuca (cassava) and guava production. Insurance for livestock production, reduction of the water and electricity bills and those of some consumables – such as bio-products – are also included in those actions, in addition to a reduction of tax rates on personal incomes (from five to two percent).

The sugarcane sector, highly depressed at present, is another key area. Since the end of last year, it was included in the national recovery strategy after the approval of 93 measures aimed at implementing a radical and comprehensive change, which according to President Miguel Díaz-Canel, implies transforming not only the way in working the sector but also – and mostly – the way of thinking.

Areas such as sugar production and generation of electricity and its by-products are also part of these provisions, as well as financial and bank actions, science, technology and innovation.

The variety and complexity of all these tasks are complemented with the creation of new economic actors that, since September last year, include over 1,600 non-agricultural cooperatives and micro, small and medium-sized companies, which should contribute to the diversification of productions and should foster higher connections within the national economic field.



Cuba implements a package of 63 provisions to foster food production. PHOTO: ACN.

Tax Obligations Support Social Programs

By Miriam **CÉSAR**

HAVANA.- In spite of a complex 2021, the Cuban people did not stop meeting their tax obligations, aimed at supporting and guaranteeing social programs that depend on the budget.

The strengthening of the U.S. blockade and the pandemic of COVID-19 caused a contraction of budgets related to taxes due to the suspension and the stoppage of many productive and service activities, which affected the economy of both, the country and the people involved.

For that reason, a modification was made in the budget plan of the National Tax Administration Office (ONAT), set last year on 245,900,000,000 pesos (about 10,245,000,000 dollars), said Mary Blanca Ortega, head of the abovementioned entity.

Tax contributions in Cuba have a social character, as these are addressed to municipalities' local development in the form of social works; restoration of schools, hospitals and health centers; improvement of vulnerable neighborhoods, and construction of houses for people attended by the social assistance, among others, the official added.

Ortega also stressed that in spite of the difficulties faced in 2021, the office exceeded tax collection, which allowed

covering the necessary expenses linked to the fight against COVID-19, amounting to about 16,000,000,000 pesos – including 3,300,000,000 connected to the vaccination process of the Cuban population.

Such contribution was the result of taxes on personal incomes, profits, land transportation and state investment performance, in addition to taxes on boat property or possession.

Main contributions to the State budget are linked to duties on profits (legal entities) and state investment performance, which companies, societies, agricultural and non-agricultural cooperatives, and credit and services cooperatives are obliged to pay.

Amidst these changes, the country speeded up the computerization of all processes, keeping taxpayers in mind, so that they can meet their obligations from any place and through any channel they decide.

Thus, through the use of the information technologies, Cuba has today a central database that allowed starting the path toward the digital transformation of tax administration.

In this sense, ONAT deputy director Reinaldo Alemán stressed that one of the main results achieved include the strengthening of the Citizens Tax Web Portal (www.onat.gob.cu) – in operation since December 2020, which already has about 50,500 users.



Mary Blanca Ortega, head of the National Tax Administration Office. PHOTO: ONAT.

All this technological structure allowed the entity to develop its mission and meet its obligations in 2021, in addition to designing and implementing this year's tax campaign – which started on January 10 with the affidavit and tax payment corresponding to 2022.

It also allowed meeting the obligations of all the economic actors of the country, which include 61,000 private workers; 22 new non-agricultural cooperatives, and over 1,400 private and 27 state micro, small and medium-sized companies (MIPYMES).

Another achievement attained in 2021 was the implementation of the digital signature in the Cuban tax administration, a facility that over one hundred taxpayers already enjoy.

Record Number of Athletes Contracted

By Yodeni **MASÓ**

HAVANA.- With the recent hiring of athletics, basketball and softball players, Cuban sports has over 135 athletes inserted in tournaments of foreign clubs as part of a foreign hiring policy established in 2013.

During the present season, five track and field players will join the Playas de Castellón Club (Spain) to participate in the winter circuit, while three basketball players – two men and one woman – will play in Argentina and Portugal. In addition, three softball players will play in Guatemala, thus increasing the number of countries in which Cuban athletes are signed up to 25. According to a recent update provided by the High Performance and International Relations departments of the Cuban Institute of Sports (INDER), volleyball and baseball were the disciplines that exhibited the highest number of hired athletes in international circuits in 2021, with 38 and 37, respectively.

With the present hiring, basketball and softball increased the number of signed-up players to 15 and 14, in that order, while handball (10), soccer (10), water polo (6), athletics (5) and cycling (1) contributed with their main exponents.

The data provided shows that 41 women and 84 men signed up last season with clubs from 25 countries, among which Mexico (20), Italy (16), Spain (15), France (13) and Portugal (8) are included.

According to the provisions stipulated in the agreement, the hiring of athletes abroad

is essentially aimed at increasing players' technical-tactical quality, in addition to favoring top-level exchange for the benefit of national teams and athletes' living conditions. INDER Legal Department stated that hiring contracts include three main elements: the activity or service to be provided, the dependence and subordination relation between the parties, and remuneration.

Working relations between an athlete and the club is established for one or several seasons, not years. However, the possibility to agree extensions in the light of the expiration of the original term is not excluded.

In this sense, a professional player's salary is agreed on the individual contract or through previous collective agreements endorsed by athletes and clubs' representatives.

Salary is paid monthly, although the option of receiving incentives for teams' qualification, time of permanence in the club, sponsorships and other benefits related to athletes' performance, is also in effect.

The responsibility of the athletes include, among others, training under the club technicians' command; looking after their physical condition in order to guarantee both, their best performance possible and the results foreseen, and playing in all games the team considers appropriate, either official or friendly matches.

Hired athletes also have the obligation of representing Cuba in official competitions.

In spite of the pandemic of COVID-19 and the strengthening of the U.S. blockade, the hiring process has shown positive results in the 2020-2021 period, with an increase in the number of sign-ups and countries.

Capablanca Memorial, Example of Cuban Chess

By Adrián **MENGANA**



The competition will return with an Elite Group lineup of ten players. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

HAVANA.- Expectation grows each day among chess lovers in Cuba with the announced return of the emblematic Capablanca Memorial Chess Tournament, which will be held April 18-28 at Havana's Hotel Nacional de Cuba, where they will enjoy brilliant openings, effective defenses and checkmates with a king or queen.

After three years without being held with participants in attendance due to the impact of COVID-19, the competition will return with an Elite Group lineup of ten players (five guests and an equal number of local competitors), enlivened by higher level figures and with a second group called Premier, attended by ten women only.

The competition will include its regular Open Group with Swiss-system format. As something new, the event will be completed with a fourth key called Senior that involves over 60 year old players.

Children will also retake the popular competition known as "Looking for Capablanca," while the regular section of conferences and courses taught by well-known masters will be maintained.

The Grandmasters Sandro Mareco (Argentina), Surya Shekhar Ganguly (India) and Miguel Santos Ruiz (Spain) have so far confirmed their attendance for the Elite group.

Mareco, ranked 105th in the world, is leading his country's ranking with 2,643

Elo points and stands as the favorite to win the competition, together with Ganguly, who is ranked 152nd in the world (2,627 Elo).

Meanwhile, Ruiz (2,596 Elo) occupies seventh place for Spain, according to updated information posted last January 1.

The President of the Cuban Federation, Carlos Rivero, said that the organizers brought the traditional date in May forward because it coincided with the American Continental Chess Championships, to be held May 1-11 in San Salvador.

In order to know the names of the Cuban players in the Elite and Premier Groups, it will be necessary to wait until the national events running from late January to early March close.

Polish-born Argentinean Miguel Najdorf was the first champion of the Capablanca chess tournaments in 1962 with 16.5 out of 21 possible points. Meanwhile, Ukrainian Vassily Ivanchuk was the winner of the last in-person event held in May 2019, totaling eight titles –record holder.

The Memorial Capablanca event is one of the most important chess tournaments in Latin America, as it is attended by the majority of the best chess players in this region of the world.



41 women and 84 men signed up last season with clubs from 25 countries. PHOTO: Jit.



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