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Gastronomic Services in the Tourism Sector

By Roberto **CAMPOS**

HAVANA.- In order to foster the tourism sector in different fields, Cuban gastronomy experts study the world's best culinary techniques and tendencies at present.

In a recent report issued in Havana, the sector highlighted the importance of the Meeting on Commercial, Gastronomic and Services Techniques held at Ranchón La Giraldilla, in the capital city.

The broad domain of the commercial, gastronomic and services techniques shown by specialists of different restaurants proved the potential Cuba has in this area, a key sector for the island's tourist future.

Gastronomy director of the Havana Entrepreneurial Commerce Group, Lázaro Camacho, affirmed that these meetings allow evaluating each of the contestants' techniques, as if they were exams, and are intended at finding solutions in the light of the lack of products and utensils because of the obstacles resulting from the U.S. blockade.

Representatives of different companies took part in this event in the bar, restaurant (waiter and head waiter) and cookery modalities.

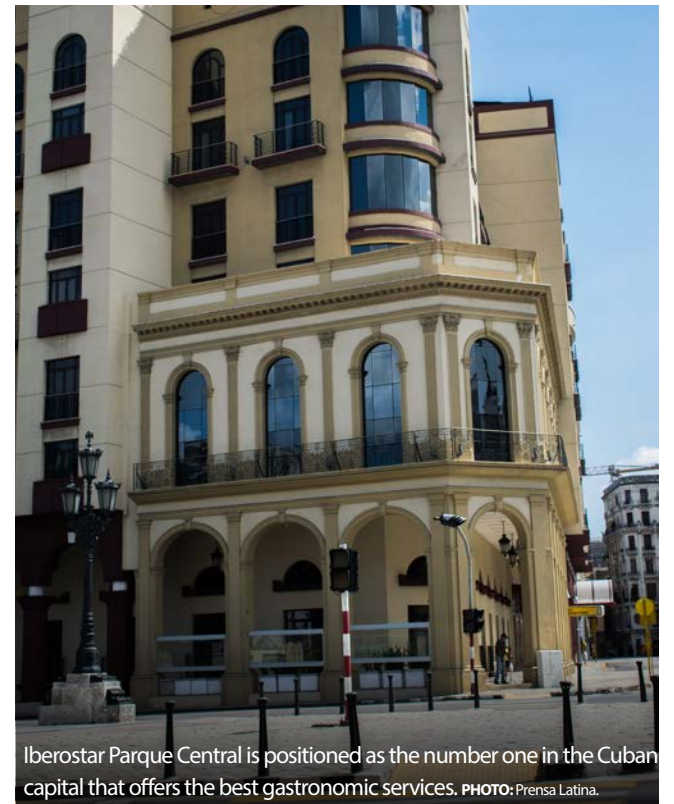
On the topic, Mornings.co.uk –a specialized British guide– highlighted at the beginning of this year the quality of the morning gastronomy of Havana's Iberostar Parque Central Hotel, awarded as the Best Breakfast.

As a result, this facility was included among the world's best 133 hotels that offer this type of service.

The Mornings' supporting document states that a top-quality hotel breakfast can be the best part of a holiday. Based on that criteria, the publication conducted a survey to identify tourists' most reviewed international breakfasts. According to the information published by that site, Iberostar Parque Central is positioned as number one in the Cuban capital that offers the best gastronomic services and the second among the capital -city's best in the Caribbean, North and Central American region– only preceded by Sandals Royal Bahamian.

With an excellent location, across from the Havana's Parque Central (Central Park) and a few steps from the Capitolio building and the Historic Center, the hotel offers a wide range of experiences in the two buildings that compose the facility.

In addition to comfortable rooms and suites, a roof-top swimming pool and facilities for events and celebrations, Iberostar Parque Central is a referent of gastronomic services in the Cuban capital.



Iberostar Parque Central is positioned as the number one in the Cuban capital that offers the best gastronomic services. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Baracoa, the First Cuban Villa



Baracoa was founded between 1511-1512 by conqueror Diego Velázquez. PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.

By Mario **ESQUIVEL**

HAVANA.- Cuba, full of nature and accompanied by historical treasures backed by centuries of development, shows traces of the presence of the Spaniards everywhere. The arrival of the in 1492 and their subsequent expansion along the archipelago left a sign in the island, particularly in places that in spite

of the passing of the years, still preserve their charm.

That is the case of Guantánamo province, in the country's east, where the city of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Baracoa was founded between 1511-1512 by conqueror Diego Velázquez. Baracoa was Cuba's first capital and first diocese.

In addition to the historic importance the city has –as Cuba's first village– Baracoa stands



Yunque de Baracoa (Baracoa's Anvil).

out for having affectionate people and for the beauty of the city, surrounded by mountains, rivers and an abundant vegetation.

Its name comes from an indigenous term that means "sea presence," in reference to the existence of the sea environment their original dwellers felt everywhere.

The natural landscape is complemented with a flat, 575 -meter- high mountain known as Yunque de Baracoa, for the resemblance this

mountain has to that piece of equipment blacksmiths used in their work.

The road to the Yunque is out of the limits of the Alejandro de Humboldt National Park, a Natural World Heritage Site in which other paths are located, including Bahía de Taco, a sea feature that shelters manatees –the only herbivorous mammal in Cuba– and rare colonies of oysters.

Different water currents go through the territory, such as the Toa, Cuba's largest river that has several waterfalls, including El Saltadero– the most famous, with 17 meters in height.

Colonial memories predominate in this environment, including the famous Vine Cross (Cruz de la Parra) the Spanish made with precious wood from the region during their first trip to the Américas, which Friar Bartolomé de las Casas used to officiate at mass.

The Spanish presence is also seen in the town's constructions, among which stone-erected buildings are included, such as the colonial El Castillo and La Punta fortresses, the Joa tower and the cemetery towers.

Access to the city is an adventure in itself, as it is done through a peculiar road that winds through the mountains and is known as La Farola, with dozens of suspension bridges. The highest point, Altos de Cotilla, is over 600 meters above sea level.

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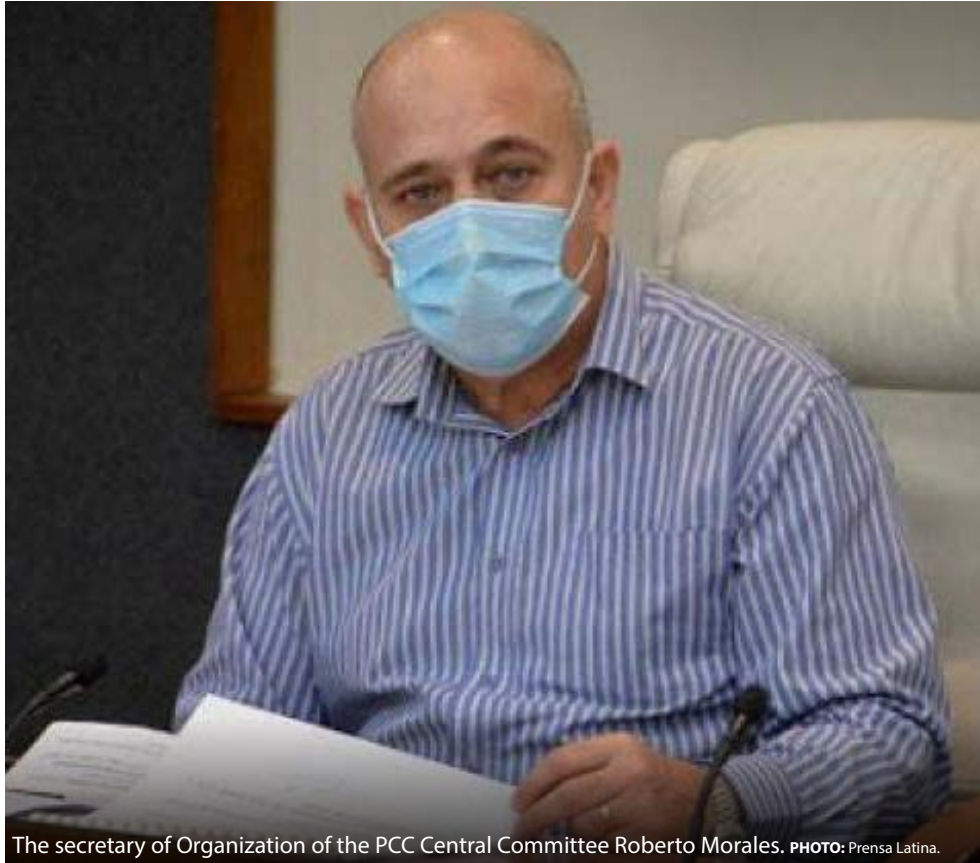
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Debates on Economy and Society Continue



The secretary of Organization of the PCC Central Committee Roberto Morales. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

By Isaura **DIEZ**

HAVANA.- Provincial leaders of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) continue analyzing this month topics of priority for the country's development, with special emphasis on the national economy.

In addition to focusing on food production, the entity fosters other socio-economic projects, such as the battle against racial discrimination, the Program for Women's Growth, the strengthening of democracy and the institutional sector, and social prevention. In a recent meeting between first secretary of the PCC and President of the Republic, Miguel Díaz-Canel, and provincial party leaders, the officials analyzed topics such as the support given to neighborhoods and communities, a process enriched by the PCC Evaluation Assemblies and territorial visits. According to an official report, issues such as political attention to the cultural sector, food production, the sugarcane harvest, non-state economic actors and measures to face inflation, were also analyzed at the meeting, attended by the first secretaries of the PCC Provincial Committees.

Indicators related to the PCC functioning by the end of 2021 and actions to guarantee the family doctor and nurse program were also discussed. "These programs involve all of society at all levels, but it's in the communities, Popular Councils, neighborhoods, where actors and beneficiaries are; thus the importance of understanding these programs and of popular participation," said the secretary of Organization of the PCC Central Committee Roberto Morales.

Other aspects discussed had to do with the development of social communication and other government programs that the Party must control and promote.

The Central Committee and its auxiliary structure recently conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the fulfillment of the PCC VIII Congress agreements in Holguín province, a work method that will be extended to the other territories of the country.

For three days, PCC leaders talked to workers from 210 workplaces, visited 45 communities and had discussions with over 10,000 people.

During an evaluation held at the Santo Domingo municipality, in Villa Clara province, Cuban Vice-President Salvador Valdés urged to give priority to the food sovereignty plan and to increase investment. The Vice-President was told that 84.2 percent of the territory's extension is dedicated to the agricultural and livestock activity, with two important production centers in Cascajal and Manacas. In this sense, he stressed the value of this municipality, which has important industries linked to food production.

In this regard, he mentioned the Rum Factory, the Manacas Brewery and the scientific potential of the Tropical Root Vegetable Research Institute, whose results were described as excellent.

Since the beginning of this year, government and PCC leaders visit the Cuban provinces, hold discussions about difficulties and the foreseen goals, and exchange with the population to know about their dissatisfactions and aspirations.

Families Code for Everyone

By Orlando **ORAMAS**

HAVANA.- The draft of the Families Code that is under discussion in Cuba at present goes beyond the hopes and expectations of many people in the island, said journalist and LGBTIQ+ activist, Francisco Rodríguez Cruz.

Renowned for his blog Paquito el de Cuba (Paquito from Cuba), the journalist is a pioneer of defense rights in the island, which he promotes for more than 10 years now.

I personally think that the fact this version (number 24) of the Code is under discussion now is a result of over 12 years of activism in favor of the rights of the lesbians, gay, bisexuals, trans, which started with my blog in 2009 and slowly included these topics.

Rodríguez Cruz stated the above in an interview granted to **The Havana Reporter** at the start of a consultation process on the document in the Cuban neighborhoods, which will last until April this year and whose results will be submitted for discussion and approval to the National Assembly of People's Power, the prelude to a national referendum.

Having reached present point, many people were involved, and I must confess that we have achieved a lot more than what we expected 10 years ago, he said.

Paquito, as his press colleagues call him, cannot leave aside the personal experience that prompted his activism.

I am a father who felt fulfilled in his marriage and then accepted his homosexual orientation. I had a partner for 18 years. We could not legally recognize that stable relation, but that did not prevent us from contributing to the

education of my son and from including him in our relation, he commented.

In *Trabajadores* newspaper, which is edited by the Cuban National Trade Union, the signature of Francisco Rodríguez Cruz heads different topics, particularly on complex issues about the national economy.

For that reason, his opinions on the scope of the Family Code can be really valuable, as they go beyond his own life.

Approach from sexual diversity is just one of the issues related to the scope of the Code, which fortunately protects situations present in the Cuban society, he noted.

In this regard, he referred to topics such as family violence, senior adults' protection, the rights families have toward them, the possibilities grandparents have to communicate with and educate their grandchildren, among others.

In his opinion, the draft provides an answer to issues that must be updated, such as the possibility to have a common-law marriage or union or the separation of property, which is common and practical in other realities.

Rodríguez Cruz also praised the inclusion of different legal solutions to protect children and described the alternative to solve family conflicts through mediation, in an atmosphere of dialogue and respect, "without the difficult burden of going to court," as original.

I think that for the LGBTIQ+ people, the draft Code systematizes the text of the Constitution: the right not to be discriminated against, attacked for one's sexual orientation or genre identity; the right for all to constitute a family, to access the family institutions that legalize those bonds, such as common-law marriage or union.



Journalist and LGBTIQ+ activist, Francisco Rodríguez Cruz. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

More Bridges of Love

By IbisFRADE

HAVANA.- The caravans that call for the end of the U.S. blockade against Cuba and for friendly relations between the two countries have reached numerous regions of the world, inspired by the Bridges of Love project.

The calls made by activist Carlos Lazo, leader of the initiative, have become regular every month, and finds support in several cities of the United States but in Europe and Latin America as well, where a number of caravans and demonstrations have been held.

After vitalizing his love for his native country in a video with his students in the city of Seattle, the Cuban American teacher decided to embark on a path of solidarity that he has not stopped despite threats.

More than two years later, Bridges of Love has reaffirmed as an initiative willing to fight for a better world and to bring the peoples of Cuba and the United States together, Lazo said.

In its latest work, the project was in favor of creating a common front with other solidarity organizations such as Code Pink, The People's Forum or National Network on Cuba. Together with those groups, they coordinate shipping donations of food, medical supplies and basic items to Cuba to alleviate the impact of Washington's hostile policies.

In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic there are dignified people, not only in Cuba but in the United States as well: most people on earth want the anti-Cuba sanctions to be lifted, the activist highlighted.

Over the past few months, the caravans and demonstrations against the U.S. siege have been held in countries like France,

Belgium, Russia, Italy, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Spain, Serbia, Angola and China, among others.

Since the pandemic broke out, Bridges of Love has been fostering different initiatives calling for the end of the blockade, the resumption of consular services at the U.S. embassy in Havana, the reopening of the family reunification program and to facilitate the sending of remittances to the island.



The calls made by activist Carlos Lazo, leader of the initiative, have become regular every month. PHOTO: Internet.

The project also advocates lifting the travel bans on U.S. citizens to Cuba and that direct commercial flights to all the Cuban provinces restart as well.

Likewise, thousands of social network users have urged U.S. President Joe Biden to remove the sanctions against Cuba and establish commercial, scientific, educative and cultural links between the two countries.

All that forms part of an increasingly widespread feeling in favor of a change in the current U.S. policy toward Cuba, which is being revised for over a year with no success.

When former Republican President Donald Trump was in power (2017-2021), 243 coercive measures were adopted against Cuba. All of them continue to be in place more than a year after Biden occupied the post, with electoral promises that the failed policies of his predecessor would be changed.

Visas and Remittances, a Lengthy Wait

By ClaraLUZ

HAVANA.- Joe Biden's Cuba policy remains unchanged in a review that is taking too long for the liking of many U.S. voters who are demanding answers from the president on his unfulfilled campaign promises.

Remittances, travels and the opening of consular service at the U.S. embassy in Havana are some of the main requests made to at least let out some "slacks," after Republican Donald Trump (2017-2021) reinforced the blockade with additional measures.

The executive mansion received recommendations about remittances to Cuba, which were severely limited under the Trump administration. "We are waiting for the decision," Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols said recently.

He also told legislators that the United States would send consular officials to its representation in the Cuban capital to increase the visa application process but did not say when.

Some stories say those operations would resume in the middle of March but no official date has been announced yet.

In the meantime, all those Cubans that want to visit their relatives on the other side of the Florida straits suffer

the consequences of more expensive procedures and the risks of traveling through third countries for an interview that does not guarantee they will be granted the permission.

Johana Tablada, the General Vice Director for the U.S. Division at Cuba's Foreign Ministry, recalled that Trump made the arbitrary decision to close the embassy after "fabricating lies and science fiction ideas that the U.S. diplomats were being attacked."



Cubans wait for the opening of consular service at the U.S. embassy in Havana. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

The pretext of what Washington now calls "anomalous health incidents" was used by the Republicans to cut flights to Cuba and suspend consular services, which are among the 243 measures adopted during his term, and are still in force under the Biden administration.

Many people wonder until when they will have to suffer those inhumane policies, pointed out Tablada.

As for remittances, a U.S. official noted

in November that the White House received proposals on how to do them, but some suggestions were "sent back for more work." They don't want the money "to fall into the hands of Cuba's communist government," he said.

Nachito Herrera, a Cuban musician living in the United States, thinks that sometimes the perspective is lost if they think that those measures affect the Cuban government, when they actually affect "the Cuban families to make them react."

In July, Biden asked the Department of the Treasury and the Department of State to further study the matter and give a report about how to allow remittances. Nichols did not say when a decision will be announced.

It seems that electoral pressure will have more weight. The midterm elections will be on November 8 and there are many chances that the Democrats may lose the control of both congressional chambers.

Many were the people that were both hopeful but at the same time cautious when Biden occupied the White House.

After four years during which all signs of progress in U.S.-Cuba ties were interrupted, it was assumed that any other option would be less bad.

COVID-19 Towards Control

By ZeusNAYA

HAVANA.- Cuba shows a tendency towards the control of COVID-19 thanks to the sanitary measures adopted, the sustained progress of the vaccination campaign and the effectiveness of its homegrown vaccines Soberana 02, Soberana Plus and Abdala, even when the Omicron variant is present on the island.

After some restrictions were lifted and the country's borders opened last November, the number of contagions began to increase by the middle of the following month. As of January 23, 2022, the country reached a peak with 3,508 cases, way below the 9,279 cases recorded on August 1, 2021.

Recent reports by the Cuban Public Health Ministry (MINSAP) corroborate a decrease in the number of patients testing positive to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, below 1,000, with a gradual reduction of hospitalized and active patients as well.

All this proves that the strategy to develop our own vaccines and immunize the population has been effective, President Miguel Díaz-Canel said recently, also calling to continue accompanying those good results with actions preventing vulnerable citizens from getting severely ill.

The president said efforts must be focused on that aspect, as the elderly with health complications account for most of the average number of deaths reported per day. "We must avoid that they run those risks," the head of State added.

VACCINATION COVERAGE

Cuba, a low-income country dealing with a strong blockade imposed by the U.S. government and in the middle of a crisis situation caused by the disease, started its vaccination campaign in May 2021. Before the year 2021 closed, its vaccination coverage index was among the highest in the world.

Having administered nearly 35 million doses, Cuba stands as the country with the highest percentage of immunized people per 100 inhabitants in the world, followed by Chile and the United Arab Emirates. In the meantime, it is ranked the number three country in the world where at least one shot has been administered for every eleven million people approximately, only preceded by the United Arab Emirates and Portugal.

In times when the World Health Organization (WHO) is encouraging member states to reach the goal of having 70 percent of their respective population immunized by the first semester of this year in order to eradicate the pandemic, Cuba already has vaccinated more than 88 percent of its 11.3 million inhabitants.

In addition, nearly six million Cubans have received the booster shot (fourth dose), accounting for over 50 percent of those identified by Cuban health authorities as vaccinable, also leading the world's statistics, according to Our World in Data website.

Internationally-renown media outlets and foreign experts have stressed that, while other countries reject or are still against children's vaccination, Cuba was the first one to begin that campaign at the beginning of September last year, and is close to complete it within the group aged 2 to 18 years.

MINSAP Pediatric Director Lissette López explained recently that more than 500 children were at intensive care units but that panorama changed in 2022 with the vaccines. "Not only their lives were saved but they were also able to return to school," she emphasized.

NEW ACE?

On the other hand, Cuba's Biotechnological and Pharmaceutical Industry Group (BioCubaFarma) is fostering COVID-19 vaccine candidates Soberana 01 (by the Finlay Institute) and Mambisa (by the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center), the first one to begin clinical trials on humans through nasal administration.


According to BioCubaFarma President Eduardo Martínez, the latter could definitely cut coronavirus transmission, because it acts directly on one of the ways through which the pathogen enters the organism, also distinguishing it from others.

The goal is to achieve sterilizing immunity, something not attained by any other previous preparation, the director explained. If that is not accomplished, new SARS-CoV-2 mutants could appear and one of them could even limit the protection provided by the vaccines, forcing it to start from scratch. Mambisa is undergoing clinical trials with very positive results and progress. Therefore, local approval for its emergency use is expected to be granted in 2022, Martínez said.

In the meantime, with its three right cards (Soberana 02, Soberana Plus and Abdala), at the beginning of March Cuba will provide WHO with the official dossier containing the information needed for its COVID-19 vaccine precertification, which would "facilitate" exporting them.

Omicron's prevalence worldwide is ten times higher than in Cuba, stressed the General Director of the Finlay Vaccine Institute, Vicente Vérez. The island survives thanks to its vaccines and helps others.

Iran, Venezuela, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Mexico and Syria are using them. Nicaragua, for instance, administered more than 3.7 million doses of Abdala among its children's population. Cuba's efforts against the disease are way bigger than those by rich countries. It's a noteworthy endeavor, it is said.



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Abdala
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Suspension for intramuscular injection

The first anti-COVID-19 vaccine
developed and produced in Latin America

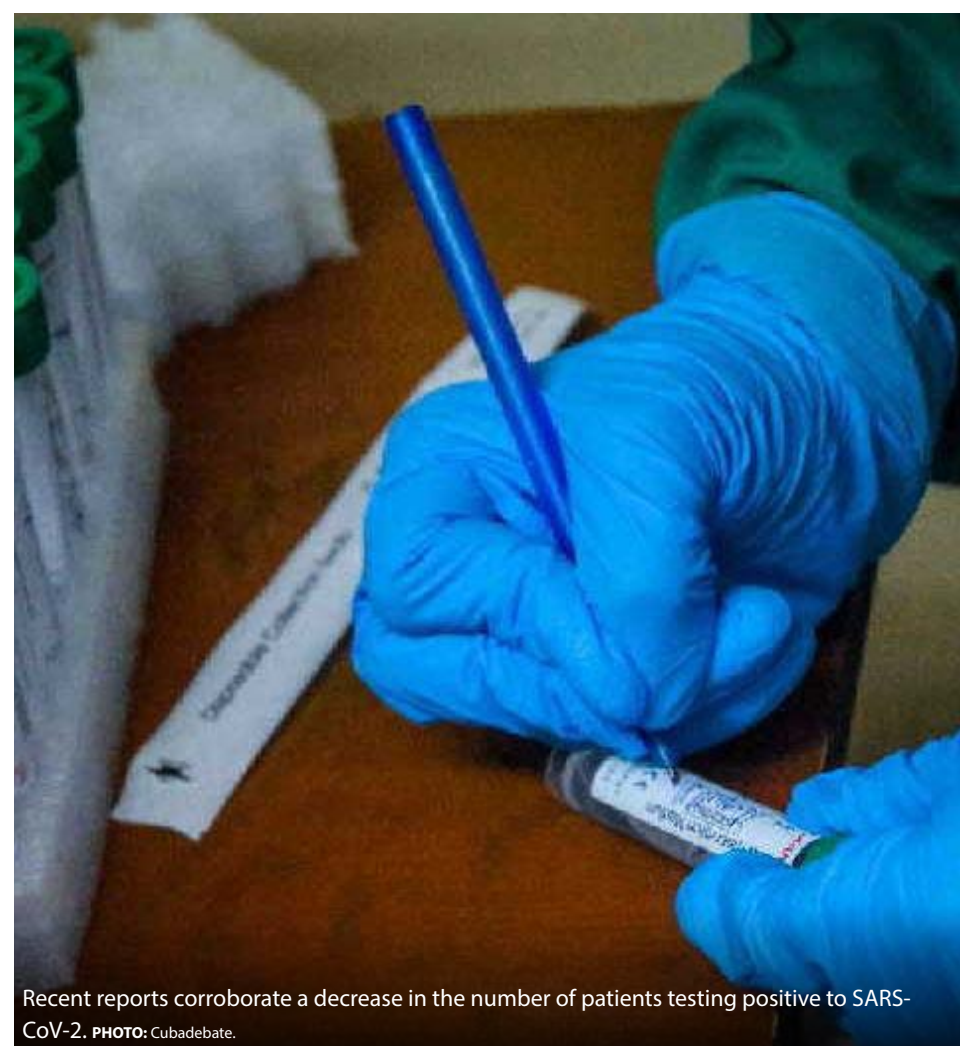
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Recent reports corroborate a decrease in the number of patients testing positive to SARS-CoV-2. PHOTO: Cubadebate.

Cuba's Ballet Has New Projects

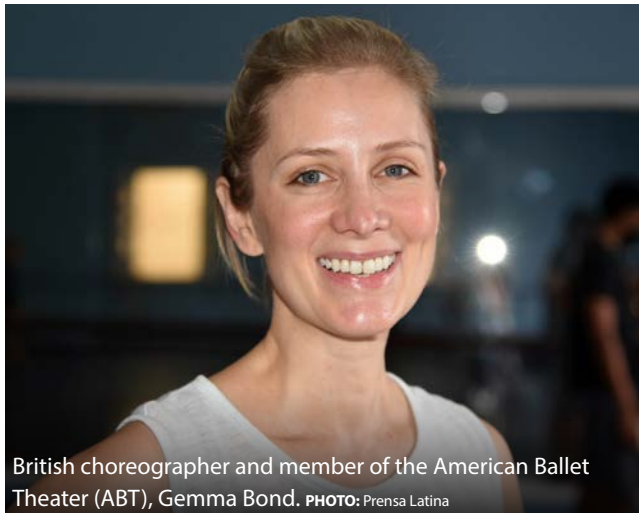
By Claudia **MADEN**

HAVANA.- In a year marked by an impasse due to the pandemic, Cuba's National Ballet Company (BNC) has new improved projects. With its return to the Havana stages, it paid off its debt with its always loyal public.

"We've come back with premieres and consolidated pieces. All its members are eager to dance and give it all," said the company's director and main dancer Viengsay Valdés when commenting about the first performance (Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No.7), which was dedicated to the developers of the Cuban vaccines, who allowed for an unprecedented milestone on the Latin American continent. Dancing is a profession that demands strong, disciplined training, she recalled. "The cultural revival in the country is grateful to Cuban scientists," Valdés emphasized.

The Sauto Theater in Matanzas Province, one of the country's oldest and most important, was the first leg of the BNC national tour, which includes the pieces Suite generis by Alberto Méndez; Majísimo by Jorge García Oteló y Desdémona en Prólogo para una tragedia by Brian Macdonald.

Ballet enthusiasts applauded the performance of the emblematic company, which offered an exclusive program featuring Michael Descombey's La muerte de un cisne (The Death of a Swan) and Love Fear Loss, choreographed by Brazilian Ricardo Amarante and inspired on the tragic love life of French singer Édith Piaf.



British choreographer and member of the American Ballet Theater (ABT), Gemma Bond. PHOTO: Prensa Latina

The BNC performance in this tricentenary city was considered a cultural event and a much awaited gift for its residents, with excellent ballet hosts in general and from the company founded by Alicia Alonso.

DANCE COOPERATION

According to British choreographer and member of the American Ballet Theater (ABT), Gemma Bond, the BNC dancers have a passion and commitment never seen before in their solid international career.

Graduated from the Royal Ballet School, Bond is currently working on a piece that will be premiered in April, marking her choreographic debut on Cuban stages.

"Each dancer has individual talents. All of them give their heart out and are in complete harmony, the creator told **The Havana Reporter** after she arrived in the Cuban capital together with Isabella Boylston, lead dancer with the ABT.

Few people recognized in that young, smiling face the talent and choreographic experience shown since she was 13-years-old, when she competed at the Royal Ballet Sir Kenneth Macmillan Contest. She has ever since received important scholarships such as the Princess Grace 2017, as well as grants by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation.

The member of the ABT—a company with which legendary Cuban dancer Alicia Alonso reached the important category of lead dancer and is considered one of its historic glories—explained that ten dancers and two couples will perform the piece, accompanied by a very religious sound.

According to Bond, choreographic art goes beyond the mere combination of steps, which is why she focuses her method on a true body language, where the vocabulary starts with the traditional classical ballet.

This kind of cooperation provides dancers with technical, artistic versatility, noted the BNC Director Viengsay Valdés, who announced that the piece will be premiered in April and will be performed at the Alicia Alonso International Ballet Festival of Havana.

A Prize to Creative Talent

By Yanisbel **PEÑA**

HAVANA.- The novel Hija de nadie by Argentinean Javier Núñez and the collection of poems Excepcional belleza del verano by Cuban Luis Lorente won the 2022 Casa de las Américas Literature Prize.

The prize in the category of essay on historic-social issue went to the piece Moneda y malestar social en Cuba (1790-1902) by Spanish José Antonio Piqueras.

Hija de nadie, which deals with the dystopian story of two women that struggle with a harsh and cruel reality, stood out for its excellent narrative

technique and great use of dialogues, with a cinematographic tone.

The poetry jury highlighted the language, atmosphere and rhythm of Excepcional..., and recognized the way in which it deals with moments in the life of characters from Cuban history.

"As though under the shade of a lamp, the author reproduces its visions and memories, which take shape and fade away. The scene gets enhanced with the effect of a plentiful system of symbols that alludes to love issues but also to numerous chapters in the life of Cuban historical figures," the document reads. It is a thorough record recreated by a singular memory, with talented language, well attained atmospheres and excellent use of the rhythm, it added.

That category also awarded mentions to Bordando Quilkas by Peruvian Carolina O. Fernández, and Para alguna vez cuando oscurece by Bolivian Benjamín Chávez.

In the meantime, the essay Piqueras was recognized for its detailed analysis of the role of currencies and monetary relations in the historic formation of Cuba, between

the end of the 18th century and the end of the U.S. military occupation.

The jury members agreed to say that the text enlightens the Cuban economic history during the convulse times that characterize the splendor and crisis of the colonial model. Piqueras "goes deeply into the complex relation between slavery and capitalism, the class structure on the island and the discontent prevailing among different groups that opposed the foreign domination."

The juries of the three categories chose the winning pieces among 140 competing works, out of the 1,600 received after the contest was announced in April 2021.

Cuba, Argentina, Mexico and Colombia were the countries most represented. The prestigious literature prize thus consolidated its course after it had cancelled the 2021 prize-granting edition due to the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing it to find ways to continue promoting the works of Latin American and Caribbean authors.

However, in line with the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, the organizers announced the contest for the three aforementioned categories only and in Spanish language.



Cuba, Argentina, Mexico and Colombia were the countries most represented. PHOTO: Prensa Latina



Blockade Reinforced from Trump to Biden

By Deisy FRANCIS

HAVANA.- The U.S. blockade against Cuba, a policy of economic asphyxiation implemented both by Democratic and Republican presidents for 60 years, represents the longest and most far-reaching economic, commercial and financial siege ever imposed against a country.

It was Democratic John F. Kennedy, the 35th U.S. president, who made it official on February 3, 1962. Republican Donald Trump, the 45th president of the United States, reinforced it during his term in office (2017-2021) with 243 coercive measures that are still in place today, 12 months after Joe Biden occupied the White House.

The measures adopted by Trump show that the blockade has become even more aggressive, Ismara Vargas, Director of Legal Affairs and Analysis at the Cuban Foreign Ministry's US Division, said in an interview with **The Havana Reporter**.

Those actions, which further intensified their impact on the current context of the health crises resulting from COVID-19, has affected "every sector of the economy and the society, particularly Cubans' everyday life," she stressed.

A total of eleven U.S. administrations maintained and even tightened the unilateral siege that Washington insists on calling «embargo», keeping it as a unilateral issue.

MEASURES PUT INTO PRACTICE

Cuba's inclusion on the list of State sponsors of terrorism significantly affected the banking-financial sector by sowing fear among international institutions from that sector, Vargas explained when talking about the real impact of the 243 measures.

Since January 2021, dozens of banks decided to discontinue relations with Cuba, affecting the possibility of carrying out payments, deposits and other transactions, she added. Bank operations needed for the functioning of Cuban diplomatic missions abroad were hindered as well, Vargas pointed out.



The blockade has become even more aggressive. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

In addition, over the past five years the U.S. government has imposed a wide range of restrictions on travel and remittances, negatively affecting the Cuban family economy, the official commented.

The travel ban for cruise ships, the cancellation of regular and charter flights to all Cuban destinations except Havana, as well as the prohibition on money remittances through official channels and the limit imposed on the amount to be sent are some examples, Vargas added.

Those actions negatively affect the possibilities for the non-state sector to grow, and consequently mean the eradication of important sources of income, she explained. At the same time, the regulatory changes adopted by the U.S. Departments of Trade and of the Treasury led to new coercive instruments.

One of them was the List of Restricted Cuban Entities, which include 231 enterprises, Vargas warned.

Regarding this, the negative effect for the Cuban business system and commercial operations is considerable indeed, "since foreign counterparts have inferred that they cannot have relations with Cuba nor continue operating with entities subject to punitive actions," the official stressed.

When providing details of the over 240 measures implemented by Trump, the Director of Legal Affairs and Analysis at the Cuban Foreign Ministry's US Division mentioned the strategy used to prevent fuel supply into the island.

"The inclusion of 53 ships and 27 companies on a black list announced by the Department of the Treasury made it difficult to get a resource that is essential for the country's functioning," the diplomat pointed out.

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Sinecio Cuétara explores Contemporary Pictorial Labyrinths

By Liz **BOBADILLA**

HAVANA.- Able to go into the hidden labyrinths of a white canvas and find a way out full of color, light, shapes and dreams, Sinecio Cuétara moves today in the paths of Cuban painting with great mastery.

Since he was a child, he set the course for a journey focused on the exploration of senses, aesthetics and identity, which allowed him to discover his interests amidst landscapes and abstraction, with its chiaroscuros and a diversity of shapes.

As he told **The Havana Reporter**, being born in a town (Palenque) of the Consolación del Sur municipality, in the westernmost province of Pinar del Río, became an essential element to tour the creative world, first by building his own toys and then by picturing scenarios from his own house, surrounded by vegetation.

In Palenque, Cuétara found “love for three-dimensional objects and taste for nature’s wonderful colors and aromas at dawn,” while his journeys to the city offered him a different perspective and expanded his horizons.

“That’s how my first squibbles started, as a childhood play, drawing on the earth and about imaginary worlds on the sand; my home’s backyard became the scenario of my magic, imaginary world in which everything is in harmony,” said the painter and sculptor, who was born in 1967.

A Bachelor of Artistic Education at the Enrique José Varona Higher Pedagogical Institute, Cuétara has a prolific career, endorsed by over 15 personal exhibitions and dozens of collective exhibits in Spain, the United States, South Korea, Panama, Mexico and Colombia, among other countries. In addition, his work is part of private collections in several countries.



Since he was a child, Cuétara focused on the exploration of senses, aesthetics and identity. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

The path followed from the student time and until the present was marked by “discoveries and knowledge, utopian ideas, love and families,” recalled the creator, who also highlighted the irreplaceable presence of his traveling companion, Alicia de la Campa Pak.

An adventure ally in life and creation, “we started sowing and then germinating projects that map the imprints left during our journey through this difficult but irreplaceable path of visual arts creation and its labyrinths, which compose the work.”

The 20th century was a window to new styles; the landscape work mutated into other forms to integrate into literary collections of great importance in the island, such

as La pintura Abstracta en Cuba: 100 Artistas Abstractos Cubanos (Abstract painting in Cuba: 100 Cuban abstract artists) and La Abstracción en la Pintura Cubana: 126 Pintores Cubanos Abstractos, no figurativos, no objetuales: Tomo II (Abstraction in the Cuban painting: 126 Cuban abstract, non-figurative, non-objective painters: Volume II), by Luis García Peraza.

In effect, “my beginning was linked to landscape, a genre I still develop; abstraction started organically in my canvases as a result of a trip for an exhibition in Mexico in 2003.” Then, he drew sustenance from his own work, from exchanges with creators and with other artistic expressions, such as cinema, theater, literature and dance.

“You get into the depths of a dream; it is a daily dawn; you connect with the rhythm of life, which you discover along that path, in that delicious battle that creation represents, all that with the company of my accomplice: Alicia.”

That exploration journey has precisely taken his canvases to important contemporary art scenarios in Cuba, such as half a dozen editions of the Havana Biennial –which is taking place until April 30.

Cuétara defines himself as a loyal champion of Cuban identity. His hallmark is present in every stroke, because “I am Cuban and live in Cuba, because of my origins, for being part of the wealth of this city (Havana), which welcomed me as a son; who we are, depends on where we come from and our roots are there: a rainbow of colors.”

In that sense, his personal exhibitions Constructos imaginarios (Imaginary constructs), Ciudad Reinventada (Reinvented city), Un lugar en el mundo (A place in the world) or Contrapunto (Counterpoint), conducted in the last decade, stand out, as well as Para alzar el vuelo (To fly away); Encuentro (Meeting); Ars longa, vita brevis; Huellas sobre la Ciudad (Marks over the city), and 500 x 500, dedicated to the Cuban capital, a source of inspiration for different projects.

From Havana, a city that welcomed him and captivates him with the crashing of the waves at the Malecón (seawall), Cuétara continues his journey and keeps showing the hidden labyrinths in a white canvas.

San Remo Music Awards in Havana

By Yelena **RODRÍGUEZ**

HAVANA.- In spite of attempts to boycott the San Remo Music Awards Festival, the event is set to be held April 5-10 in Cuba, something that has generated diverse opinions in the world.

During a press conference in Havana, it’s organizers said that, since it was first held, the event has had the objective of strengthening cultural relations between Italy and Cuba, as the music from that European country has been historically heard on the island.

The festival aims at making the talent of young professional and amateur artists known in the world though the contest, which was designed by Nicola Convertino, the president of the Italian side, taking the famous San Remo Italian Song Festival as event of reference, artistic director Jorge Luis Robaina reiterated.

“Cuba has earned it to be the host, and the event will be completely free. San Remo is a duty-free franchise for Cuba. All we had to do was to work and so we did. I believe in culture and that is precisely what motivates the event, which aims at making young talents known in the world, whether professional or not,” he said.

With more than ten years experience in the Spanish music scene, Robaina was in charge of bringing the proposal forward, together with MusiCuba record label of the Enterprise of Recordings and Musical Editions (EGREM).



Artistic director of the San Remo Music Awards Festival, Jorge Luis Robaina, during the press conference in Havana. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

The idea to bring the event to Cuba was conceived during meetings in the European country, through the initiative A Bridge to Havana, which has allowed for exchanges between many foreign and national artists, Robaina commented.

“We’ve seen a lot of talent all over Cuba and many artists will come out of this contest,”

he stressed. The contestants at the San Remo Music Awards Festival are divided between professional and amateur and will be representing nine provinces.

EGREM musicologist Heidi González referred to the process for selecting the 16 final contestants, out of nearly 800 works presented, a proof that there is great young talent in Cuba. As a platform that opens space to the Cuban music on the international market, it allows to know cultural agents and promoters, who expressed their interest in boosting these relations with Cuba and its musicians.

Due to those common interests, the arrangements needed to bring the San Remo event to Cuba and Ibero-America for the first time started two years ago, with not few professional and commercial opportunities.

Regarding this, the event with headquarters in Havana is organizing various business meetings, fashion shows and culinary art fairs at Hotel Nacional de Cuba, as well as concerts that will be held at Club 500 and the José Antonio Echeverría Club.

Far beyond the script orchestrated on the social networks to boycott this music event, it will offer several luxury gala nights to the Cuban people, who deserve these kinds of festivals, in which national and foreign artists will participate. Their names will be made known at a later date.

Zero Tolerance Policy in the Fight against Drugs

By Melissa **KING**

HAVANA.- Despite the existence of nearby drug trafficking routes, the Cuban government maintains a zero tolerance policy against this evil.

That is the main policy in the fight against drug-trafficking in Cuba, and to do so, specialized bodies, the mass media, health and educational systems, and mass organizations, work together.

Cuba also implements other actions to limit the entry of illicit substances to the national territory, including international cooperation.

In addition, there is a program addressed at the reintegration into the society of people sanctioned for the use or illegal sale of narcotics. Vigilance, persecution and confrontation to those who commit these criminal acts are some of the actions the police authorities conduct.

In addition, the Penal Code includes a series of articles that severely sanction the possession, consumption and distribution of narcotics.

The sentence imposed for international trafficking is one of the toughest and can go from 15 to 30 years in prison.

According to reports on a recent meeting of the Council of Ministers, the main acts of narcotics were caused by



Vigilance, persecution and confrontation are some of the actions the police authorities conduct. PHOTO: Internet.

Cubans and foreigners who tried to encourage criminal chains in and outside the national territory.

For that reason, Cuban Prime Minister Manuel Marrero stated that the fight against drug trafficking is a national security issue and urged to analyze the conditions and causes of illicit substances' consumption in the island.

He also indicated to strengthen control in the distribution of medications, to conduct a communication campaign with direct messages about the zero tolerance policy on drugs and to reinforce the protocols of control of the General Customs of the Republic.

FIGURES ON THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS

Every year, Cuba's figures show the effectiveness of the anti-narcotics policy, as well as the political will to eradicate the consumption of prohibited substances.

In 2021, the authorities confiscated 4,162 kilograms of drugs, of which 2,338 were seized in 295 coastal arrivals – higher than the 153 seized in 2020.

Meanwhile, at the José Martí International Airport of Havana, 21 drug trafficking operations were dismantled, 67 kg of narcotics were seized and 41 persons –including both foreigners and nationals– were arrested, according to the Ministry of Interior (MININT).

Specialized forces also dismantled criminal networks organized from nearby countries with the intention of introducing marihuana, cocaine and methamphetamines in the island.

From these operations, 303.37 kg of drugs were seized, 26 individuals were arrested and motorboats and other naval vehicles were confiscated.

Cuba is not alien to the world fight against drug trafficking; however, the policies and measures the country takes for its prevention allow safeguarding the air and sea space and stopping attempts to commercialize and consume narcotics in the country, authorities say.

The present and future University

By Lissy **RODRÍGUEZ**

HAVANA.- The International Congress on Higher Education focused its attention on the challenges posed to contemporary universities, with the participation of more than 200 delegates from 42 countries.

Survival strategies in a sector affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the fulfilment of the 2030 sustainable development goals, the relation between science and national growth programs and professional training were some of the topics debated from February 7 to 11 in Havana.

The event was attended by Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who gave the conference

“Government Management Based on Science and Innovation: Progress and Challenges,” welcomed the participating delegations and was present at the closing session.

The relation between experts and the government is strong, respectful and harmonious, stated the Cuban president at the Havana Conference Center, the event's headquarters. The challenge in this sense is that scientific and technological capabilities allow for prosperous, sustainable and fair development.

The Congress also provided room for the country's higher education institutions to present their main scientific and productive results, when about a dozen cooperation agreements were signed.



Cuba's Higher Education Minister José Ramón Saborido. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Among them are those reached with Mexico, Rumania, Russia, Panama and the Arab Emirates. But in fact, agreements were signed with the majority of the countries represented, Cuba's Higher Education Minister José Ramón Saborido told **The Havana Reporter**.

Another positive result was the decision to take up again the bilateral meetings of university rectors, with the first edition to take place in May in Russia, he noted.

The congress agenda included seven symposiums, 25 collateral events, several forums, specialized visits to scientific and sociocultural institutions and over 1,600 presentations, among others.

It's worth stressing the participation of 173 personalities, five ministers, six presidents of associations of rectors, and 126 university rectors. “This was a meeting point in the light of the World Higher Education Congress, also serving as a right space to continue strengthening the historic alliances between Cuba and Venezuela,” said Venezuela's Deputy Higher Education Minister David Silva.

Meanwhile, Francesc Pedró, Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, pointed out that the meeting gave a very positive sign of the use of technology to increase debates at the universities and among academicians.

The upcoming congress in Havana will be held February 5-9, 2024, during the 14th World Higher Education Congress.



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My Coast Project, Expression of a Green Policy

By Joel Michel**VARONA**

HAVANA.- The project known as “Mi Costa” (My Coast) denotes higher level of attention to the climate issue, as compared to previous programs, and at the same time, it is an expression of the State policy in Cuba, where the environmental plan entitled “Tarea Vida” (Life Task) continues to attain progress.

It does not seem to be an ambitious plan but it actually is, because it is expected to recover some 11,000 hectares of mangrove, 3,000 hectares of swamp forest, 9,000 hectares of seagrass and 134 kilometers of coral reefs.

If the projected goals are accomplished, it will benefit the generation of protective barriers against heavy swell events, while some 1.3 million people would be safer.

According to opinions made by experts with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, which are contained in the UN System in Cuba, everything in Mi Costa Project goes around a local vision, since it is a program built from the lowest to the upper levels that puts all the elements together.

It is necessary to ensure that the interventions meet the interests and expectations of the people, who must be informed that their economic activities could change or that their community could be moved.

It is not about imposing things, but showing with facts that they will be benefited social

and economically once the coastline is more protected.

The project is implemented nationwide by the Environment Agency, with the support of the Ocean Sciences Institute and the Green Climate Fund, institutions that are also in charge of developing information technology systems and applications that show how to use climate data to make decisions.

The director of the Ocean Sciences Institute, Roberto Núñez, considers that a community approach prevails, working with the problems created from the ground to the sea.

“The mangrove is a natural barrier that protects us from hurricane swell, but in the case of the coastline, we refer to coral reef systems,” he pointed out.

When the mangrove area is recovered, the red mangrove proliferates -the most resistant to all climatic processes. Hence, the seagrass area where many fish species live gets recovered as well.

Such benefit –in its conceptual form– would improve fishing and the ecosystem. So, the actions done on the ground will also have a positive impact in the ocean.

He recalled that fishing communities are very vulnerable to climate change and depend on that environment to survive. But, one way or another, “the results of “Mi Costa” will contribute to create jobs for the community, which will have to learn how to monitor its environment using the information we will share,” Núñez noted.



Mi Costa is an expression of the State policy in Cuba. PHOTO: ACN.

By Wilfredo**ALAYÓN**

Bacunayagua Bridge

MATANZAS.- Considered one of the seven wonders of the Cuban civil engineering because of its length, height and conception, the Bacunayagua Bridge is a must passage between the Mayabeque and Matanzas provinces, in the country’s west.

At about 18 kilometers from the 300-year old city of Matanzas, the bridge was built by Cuban civil engineers headed by Luis Sáenz Duplace. This was the first time in which structural concrete was used for the semi-arches of the Melan system.

The use of this type of arch was original for the time, as it was built with laminated steel that was assembled in two parts and was later joined through turns, until the definite position.

The girders were placed with a “shooting” framework without which the execution would have not been possible. At the time (1956-1960), technicians of the sector in Cuba only used 30-ton cranes.

The Bacunayagua Bridge, opened on September 26, 1959, is Cuba’s longest and highest bridge – 3.14 meters long and 110 meters high. It is erected over a vast gorge formed by the Bacunayagua River.

A stop at the viewpoint located on the west side of this iconic runway represents an exclusive contact with a landscape in which the sea, the gorge formed by the abovementioned fluvial current, palm trees and other botanical species can be seen.

Birds fly below the level of vehicles and road surface; for that reason, it is often impossible to know the real size of the animals. Houses, for their part, seem tiny and people are almost unnoticeable.

The splendor of the Yumurí Valley, an internationally known landscape gem that adorns the city of Matanzas – the capital of this homonymous province, located at about 100 kilometers east of Havana – can also be appreciated from the Bacunayagua Bridge



Bacunayagua Bridge was built by Cuban civil engineers headed by Luis Sáenz Duplace. PHOTO: Wilfredo Alayon.

A Temple of Arts

By Francisco G. NAVARRO

CIENFUEGOS.- The Tomás Terry Theater, located in the heart of this central southern Cuban city and considered a temple of arts on the island, marked its 132nd anniversary. Built with the money bequeathed by the Venezuelan-born local aristocrat after which the theater was named, the building is regarded as the main cultural institution of a city with a historic district designated Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005. The Tomás Terry Theater is among those classified as Italian-style auditorium (horseshoe-shaped structure), which was representative of the 19th century in Cuba. Together with the Sauto Theater in Matanzas Province (west) and La Caridad Theater in Santa Clara (center), they are the three institutions from that century that have survived the passing of time on the Caribbean island. The cultural history of its stage, together with its architecture, and the paintings and sculptures kept inside make it a singular sanctuary of the fine arts. The aforementioned U-shaped structure, French window blinds, Art Nouveau style, Egyptian touches, canvases by Philippine-Spanish painter Camilo Salaya and U.S.

furniture are elements of eclecticism that goes in perfect harmony and captivates visitors at the same time. A theater is like a dream box, says writer Miguel Cañellas, who has been managing the "Terry", as it is popularly known by residents of Cienfuegos, for almost three decades. Cienfuegos' Tomás Terry Theater was built for the everyday life of its city dwellers, so that they could enjoy and excel themselves, he noted. It was the most luxurious building in the city and the best erected at the time; a space that always welcomed everyone but in accord with the social class division that existed at the time. It has always been at the service of the audiences since it was founded in 1890. It's a place that combines classical with common elements, exquisite professionalism with very talented amateur art, with a multipurpose character, always open to the best of every artistic genre, its director sustained. In normal circumstances, one out of two local families (the city has around 150,000 inhabitants) goes to the theater once a year on average, as the building serves as headquarters of four professional companies and one children's troupe.



PHOTOS: Idelfonso Igarra.

Elections in Honduras and Costa Rica

By Lourdes **NAVARRO**

HAVANA.- Central America started 2022 with elections and challenges. Honduras established a government headed by Xiomara Castro, the first woman president in the history of the country, while Costa Rica is holding a ballot after the first electoral round in which the ruling party suffered a crushing defeat and abstention was the undisputed winner.



Xiomara Castro, the first woman president in the history of Honduras. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Since January 27, when the representative of the Libertad and Refundación (Libre) party was sworn in for the 2022-2026 term after the elections of November, the Hondurans who voted for Castro –over 1,700,000– are waiting for the electoral promises to be met.

During her first speech as head of State, Castro mentioned the core issues of her executive: education, health, safety and employment, in addition to approval of laws on citizen participation and consultation, exoneration of the electricity rates to a million families and a reduction in oil prices.

After referring to topics such as the foreign debt and poverty –whose figures increased by 700 and 74 percent, respectively– she established about 20 points for the country's re-foundation on sovereign values, including prohibition on the granting of licenses for the exploitation of minerals, rivers, natural parks and forests.

Castro also informed that her executive will adopt a democratic socialism and a sovereign and solidary policy towards Latin America, and added that she will fight hard to close the inequality gap, put an end to genre violence and promote the defense of women's rights.

In a ceremony held at the Tegucigalpa National Stadium, in which 57 international delegations and over 12,000 people participated, she concluded her speech with the emblematic phrase 'Ever onward toward victory!', made

popular by Cuban leader Fidel Castro and Argentinean doctor Ernesto Che Guevara.

UNCERTAINTY IN COSTA RICA

In the case of Costa Rica, even though they are still to decide who their next president will be, the results of the first electoral round held last February 6 were conclusive: it will not be Carlos Alvarado, from the ruling Acción Ciudadana (PAC) party, as according to a preliminary vote count, he only got 0.66 percent of the votes valid and zero candidate.

Over 3,541,908 voters were called to the 2022 elections to elect the president, two vice-presidents and all 57 members of the Legislative Assembly.

Even though PAC won 10 seats in the Legislative Assembly four years ago, in the assembly to be set up next May 1, it will not have a single representative, a clear sign of its complete failure in the country's management– as shown in the polls.

The provisional vote count showed the need for an election, scheduled for April 3, between former president José María Figueres (1994-1998) –from the Liberación Nacional Party, with 27.28 percent of the votes valid– and Rodrigo Chaves –from the Progreso Social Democrático Party, with 16.64 votes– in order to elect the person who will lead Costa Rica's destiny from May 8, 2022 to May 8, 2026.

Many consider that abstention was the major winner in the polls, with a preliminary record of 40.09 percent, higher than the 35.3 percent reached in the 1958 electoral process, the 34.8 percent of 2006 and the 34.3 percent of 2018– the highest reached in the Central American country's electoral history.

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Global Crisis and Domestic Challenges

By Teyuné **DÍAZ**

HAVANA.- The Cuban economy undergoes a difficult time, but there are better conditions to get through it than in the 1990s (special period) crisis, said economist José Luis Rodríguez.

In an interview to **The Havana Reporter**, the 2019 National Economy Award laureate

stated that the country's performance is badly affected by foreign phenomena such as the blockade imposed by the United States for over 60 years, in addition to domestic problems and the pandemic of COVID-19.

It is the perfect storm, a global economic and health crisis, in addition to a domestic economic situation with unsolved structural problems –three serious factors

that, when combined, have a negative impact– explained Rodríguez, advisor to the Center for World Economics Research.

The expert affirmed that the crisis of the so-called special period was bigger and now we are in better condition as a result of the measures that were then applied to overcome that negative situation, and also because of other decisions taken in subsequent years. Today, we rely on the progress made in the biotechnology sector and its future potentials, on tourism, incomes for the export of professional services, remittances, the results obtained in strong sectors such as tobacco and nickel and the possibilities of foreign investment offers.

However, according to the recent National Social and Humanities Sciences winner (2021), there are four elements that have top priority in 2022.

These elements include the renegotiation of the foreign debt; the implementation of an anti-inflationary program centered on solving the causes of inflation and not on merely attacking its consequences, and attention to food problem, which is a national security issue.

The former minister of Economy (1995-2009) said that priority must also be given to solving deficiencies in the energy

sector, a situation that not only has an impact on the economy but also causes social tensions, which can be used by the counterrevolution as it happened on August 5, 1994 and July 11, 2021.

Rodríguez also referred to the difficulties of the Cuban scenario at present, marked by a drop of the economy of 13% since 2019 and until the first semester of 2021, as a result of which, even though growth predictions for 2022 (four percent) are met, it will take about two to three years to reach the pre-pandemic levels.

That does not take into account the fact that the blockade against Cuba has never been so strong as today, an impact proven by numbers, he added.

During the first 30 years of the Revolution, the blockade caused losses amounting to about 30 billion dollars –about one billion annually on average– while at the end of 2020, damages rose to over 147 billion dollars and now losses exceed 5 billion dollars per year.

In that context, channeling the Ordering Task is another challenge, which according to the economist, has an impact on the population above predictions, due to problems on its design and implementation.



2019 National Economy Award laureate, José Luis Rodríguez.. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

To the last grain of sugar

By Roberto **SALOMÓN**

HAVANA.- Extracting as much sugar as possible from sugarcane plants is vital for the 2021-2022 harvest in Cuba, a country that is currently coping with a number of difficulties and the risk of failing to accomplish the projected production plan.

Although the season will be short and modest in its results, authorities from the government and the sector have stressed it is important to process the last plant of sugarcane.

According to official sources, some 900,000 tons of sugarcane are expected to be produced, of which 500,000 tons would be for local consumption and the rest for exporting.

Despite the good weather conditions, the desired levels have not been attained neither during the crop, nor in the transportation of raw material to the sugarcane mills or in making the best use of industrial capacities.

According to the President of Azcuba Sugarcane Business Group, Julio Andrés García, discipline is the first problem the harvest faces, as some eight or nine percent more could be supplied (80,000 tons of sugar per day), which has not been accomplished yet.

"We need an answer from the harvest," Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel stressed recently as he chaired a meeting where a detailed analysis of the sugarcane season in the country's 13 sugar-producing provinces was made. The president also

called to increase work spirit to move forward and make greater contributions.

In an interview with **The Havana Reporter**, Azcuba Director of Information Technology and Communications Dionis Pérez emphasized the importance of being efficient in aspects like starting the process at sugarcane mills on time.

In this regard, he admitted that most of the 35 sugarcane mills involved in the current

harvest had a late start, which affects efficiency and compromises the activity, which is scheduled to close in April.

For that reason, a significant number of factories will have to delay the milling process until May, running the risk of coping with the rainy season that month.

Pérez said that frequent breakdown of harvesters and equipment at the sugarcane mills due to lack of spare parts was the main reason for the delay in the start time, and the poor results in the cutting and milling processes.

There is 20 percent less of the over 200 first-class harvesters available and the transportation of sugarcane and raw material has been limited due to the lack of trucks in operation, he added.

The director stressed the need to, in parallel to the harvest, accomplish with the production of energy, animal food, alcohol and rum, sorbitol, wax, bagasse boards and other byproducts, as well as to ensure the sugarcane needed for future harvests.



According to official sources, some 900,000 tons of sugarcane are expected to be produced. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Transforming the Economy with Social a Vision

By Cira**RODRÍGUEZ**

HAVANA.- In 2021 Cuba was able to stop the economic decline registered in 2019 and in 2020 it maintains a growth projection of four percent of its Gross Domestic Product this year.

That gradual recovery was not by chance nor a miracle, but resulted from the measures adopted after the monetary reform implemented in the country on January 1, 2021. That



The agricultural production recorded 30,000 tons more than in the previous year. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

process ended with the dual currency and exchange rate system, setting the official value at 1 USD at 24 CUP (Cuban Pesos), instead of the previous one-to-one exchange rate.

To maintain this pace in the economy, said recently the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Planning, Alejandro Gil, is faced with objectivity and bold, innovative actions, and above all, with social justice.

Having stopped the economic decline for three consecutive trimesters, the country does not give up upon any of its plans. In fact, and regardless of the tense and exceptional situation, the results attained in January and predictions for February and March suggest that the ongoing recovery is likely to be consolidated.

However, Cuba is going through a very tense moment, with all the complexities entailed by the reinforced U.S. blockade and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, stressed Gil when assessing the progress of the economy at the beginning of the year.

The fact that agricultural production recorded 30,000 tons more than in the previous year is one of the signs showing a more favorable panorama and which resulted from the measures adopted, including the 43 approved for the agricultural and livestock sector in January.

A total of 86,000 tourists visited the Caribbean island in the first month of the year, compared to the 22,000 recorded in the same period of 2021.

Actions have also been carried out to give more autonomy to state-run enterprises, which are the main protagonist of the Cuban economy. In this regard, it's worth saying

that 200 entities are implementing the new wage reform, benefiting 275,000 workers.

It is an unprecedented and very daring measure that is being enforced gradually and will be further spread in 2022, as long as the enterprises comply with the official parameters, the Minister of Economy said. "It's a formula that generates greater autonomy and responsibility," he sustained.

In the middle of a situation marked by economic limitations, over 200,000 jobs were created, which will be one of the main 3 challenges as long as the recovery advances.

Progress was also attained in enlarging and improving the private sector with the approval of new economic actors, with the total number of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) approved totaling almost 2,000.

The presence of these new economic actors will have a greater impact in 2022, as they are now involved in the registration process and creating all the necessary conditions.

According to statistics by the Cuban Ministry of Economy and Planning, those new organizations, together with the non-agricultural cooperatives, have generated over 30,000 jobs already.

The decision to allow the creation of non-state forms of management point to an increase in the offer of goods and services, even in the middle of material limitations, which is precisely what makes economic growth more complex.

It's worth recalling that Cuba lost 13 percent of its GDP in a short period of time, accounting for over three billion USD. Nonetheless, it never neglected social spending, which it keeps even without having the income required.

Foreign Investment under permanent threat

By Karina**MARRÓN**

HAVANA.- The number of companies that have wanted to invest in Cuba and have not been able to because of the U.S. economic blockade, which until now has cost thousands of millions of dollar, will never be known. The Director of Trade Policy with North America at the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment (MINCEX), Mariluz B'Hammel, told The Havana Reporter that all the measures taken as part of the U.S. siege have an influence on the entry of foreign capital in Cuba. In order to run a business in the island, investors have to face challenges such as difficulties in the import of consumables and the fact that the dollar cannot be used in the international markets, with the additional costs that currency exchange entails, she explained.

"We have had the opportunity of exchanging with business executives from other countries, including the United States, and many of them are surprised when any of the measures related to the blockade and its extraterritorial reach affect them," the official stressed.

In that sense, she commented that one of the most vivid experiences they undergo is when any bank transaction is to be conducted and the financial entity where they have their accounts in and with which they have always worked, tell them that it is not possible to make the operation to Cuba.

B'Hammel also mentioned the obstacles resulting from the prohibition of importing products whose content has more than 10 percent of U.S. origin. "In today's globalized world, where any product has elements of different origin, either raw materials, consumables, components... it is almost impossible to meet that requirement, which limits the market area that Cuba has access to, both for imports and exports," she added. The Mincex specialist pointed out that this is a permanent obstacle for purchases, because in order to export to the island a product with more than one percent approved, it is necessary to have a license from a U.S. government agency, and the intention is that this does not happen.

On top of that comes the Helms-Burton Act, a law set up in 1996 –after the approval of the Cuban Foreign Investment Law– that is implemented in every sense and is aimed at

preventing, even more, the entry of foreign capital.

The official particularly referred to Title III of the abovementioned legal body, which was in moratorium until 2019 and makes it possible to file lawsuits against those who "deal" in properties nationalized by Cuba, "a deceitful term, far from any law criteria" that also has a dissuasive effect.

She affirmed that, in spite of all that, Cuba has not remained arms crossed and now, more than ever, is determined to attract higher flows of foreign investment, with several initiatives and looking for solutions to the domestic difficulties that affect the process.

In this regard she highlighted that the country's portfolio of business opportunities shows the growth the sector has attained. At present, there are 678 projects in key areas of the economy –175 more than in 2020– and over 12 billion dollars for investment.

As MINCEX Minister Rodrigo Malmierca informed last December at the Cuban parliament, there are 302 businesses with foreign capital in Cuba at this moment, of which 104 are joint ventures, 54 are totally foreign-funded entities and 144 are contracts of economic association in the tourism, energy and food industry fields.



The Director of Trade Policy with North America at the MINCEX, Mariluz B'Hammel. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Passion for Baseball

By Jhonah **GONZÁLEZ**

HAVANA.- Cuba vibrates at the rhythm of balls and strikes. The National Baseball Series (SNB) is again the main protagonist and one of the greatest news is that the audience fills every stadium with its passion, after having been interrupted for over a year due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.

That could be the most important news of the 61st edition of the abovementioned Cuban tournament. The 'play ball' command is daily heard, while collective whisper helps fans regain their power, after being away from the facilities since January 2020.

Although at 50 percent capacity, the most popular sport in Cuba recovered its folklore in an environment that reached well-known dimensions but almost forgotten because of the sanitary context that does not seem to end.

Even though its return is marked by social distancing and the use of masks, those necessary measures does not damp people's enthusiasm. Yet, there is a huge difference between playing without fans

on the grandstands and being able to feel their support.

Notwithstanding the fact that baseball is not at its peak, baseball ratifies the local saying that it is Cuba's athletic lung, scoring a huge success without having to handle a bat or get a hit.

Cuban baseball thus responds to the trust placed on it when declared a National Cultural Heritage last October, which with it will be forever regarded as a very important sport discipline.

It all happens in a season in which the structure of the previous series is repeated, with 16 teams playing 75 matches under the "all against all" classification in the qualifying stage.

The eight best placed teams only will then go to the play-offs whose start will begin in April during the quarter final round – without backups. Then, the outlook will be clear and it will be possible to know if Granma team will again be the winner or whether another team will vibrate with emotion as a sign of victory.

However, no major international baseball tournament event (neither Pan-American, Caribbean nor Central American Games)

will be held this year. Thus, fans will have to wait until 2023 to enjoy the new versions of the World Baseball Classic, the Premier tournament and the abovementioned international event.

Cuban baseball will not participate either in the next Under-18 world tournament, to be held in the cities of Sarasota and Bradenton, the United States, from September 9-18. The island was also absent from the Caribbean Series organized in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, in which the Colombian Caimanes de Barranquilla team unexpectedly became the champions.



Cuban baseball was declared a National Cultural Heritage last October. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

FIDE Bets on Chess Development

By Adrián **MENGANA**

HAVANA.- The International Chess Federation (FIDE) is in favor of further stimulating the development of chess in Cuba, and that was precisely the objective of the visit of its President, Russian Arkady Dvorkovich to the island last February.

Accompanied by FIDE Vice President Dana Reizniece-Ozola of Lithuania, and Executive Director Viktor Bologan of Moldavia, Dvorkovich had firsthand information about the actions Cuba is developing to stimulate that sport discipline. Cooperation agreements were signed to encourage the practice of chess on the island and strengthen friendship ties.

The 49-year-old top director, an economist by profession, praised the efforts made by the Cuban authorities and the National Chess Federation to bring the practice of chess all over the country.

Accompanied by members of his work team, he visited the Fidel Castro Ruz Center, a senior center, and the recently inaugurated Che Guevara Specialized Chess Classroom. Moreover, he learned about the development of the project

entitled "Dreaming of Capablanca," which is intended to stimulate the training of talented children.

According to FIDE president, in a country like Cuba, where there is a strong chess tradition, the first step is to develop that sport in schools. The second one is that youth can develop a professional career and the third that the new figures have the support needed to participate in international tournaments.

In particular, he stressed the importance in promoting this science game among women and at prisons in the face of people's reintegration into society, as well as among the elderly, people with special needs and children. The Russian official also met with Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, with INDER President Osvaldo Vento, and with the President of the Cuban Olympic Committee, Roberto León Richards.

"The most important thing is that this is a very good moment for chess. You have political support to develop it; there are new technologies that speed up children's learning process and we are willing to support you in this endeavor," said Dvorkovich.

According to him, the Capablanca Memorial Tournament is the most important event developed in Latin America, and his entity will help it have great players, not only from the region.

In this regard, Dvorkovich said to be optimistic about the future celebration of international events in Cuba, and noted it is necessary to hold more online tournaments due to the impact of COVID-19.

Cuba already received equipment from FIDE that included clocks, chess sets, smart boards for live broadcasting of world competitions and bibliographic teaching material.

The Russian representative became FIDE president in October 2018, when he replaced his fellow countryman Kirsan Iliumzhinov. He will seek to be reelected during the FIDE Congress in July, which will be held as part of the World Chess Olympiad in Moscow.



President of FIDE praised the efforts made to bring the practice of chess all over the country. PHOTO: J.T.

Ambitious Cooperation with Cuba

By Waldo MENDILUZA



The Director of Trade Policy with North America at the MINCEX, Mariluz B'Hammel. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

PARIS.- The Administration Council of the Cuba Coopération France Association (CubaCoop) approved an ambitious agenda to support socio-economic development projects in Cuba in the 2022-2024 period.

In statements to **The Havana Reporter**, CubaCoop President Víctor Fernández said that the French organization, created in 1995, aims to strengthen the fight against the U.S. blockade for being the main obstacle to Cuba's development, in addition to spreading the Cuban reality and boosting economic collaboration with concrete actions.

An important element of the agenda is to continue increasing local socio-economic development through decentralized cooperation, particularly in provinces such as Havana, Cienfuegos and Santiago de Cuba, based on initiatives agreed upon with the authorities, Fernández commented. In his opinion, the over 20 years of work experience in the island ratifies CubaCoop vision that in order to attain such a rapprochement, it is necessary to listen to the needs and proposals of local actors.

Some of the project's goals include the opening of a new collaboration chapter with Havana, which would facilitate joint work between all 15 municipalities of the capital city and French territories upon the basis of agreements that are already in effect and other new initiatives, such as one between the cities of Havana and Marseille, he added.

CubaCoop president also highlighted that the priority sectors of the 2022-2024 agenda include water, cleaning-up, food sovereignty, agriculture, renewable energies, culture and sports.

In light of the impact of the U.S. blockade, we particularly value activities that can arise interest of French businesspeople in investment opportunities launched in Cuba, he explained.

In that sense, he announced the holding, this year, of events that will help making business opportunities in the island visible in France and Europe, in addition to accompanying their progress.

Fernández stated that the traditional annual CubaCoop gala, foreseen to take place in May, will include a space dedicated to cooperation, with the view of focusing on boosting projects in the hydraulic sector, in addition to its political space and its strong condemnation to Washington's aggressiveness.

As part of the Humanities Festival –a mass political and cultural event held in September– we decided to organize the First European Gathering against the Blockade and for Cooperation with Cuba, to gather both solidarity and economic actors willing to participate in development projects, Fernández noted.

In relation to the objective of spreading the reality of the island and the different cooperation initiatives, he referred to the improvement of the association's website and its weekly magazine La Lettre Électronique Hebdo.

We hope to significantly increase our number of readers –estimated at about 18,000– and for that, we have the intention that each of the CubaCoop members (about 500) contributes with five new receivers of La Lettre, he stressed.

Fernández insisted on the French organization's commitment to boost development of Cuba and its people, who have resisted U.S. hostility, he acknowledged.

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