



New Operation Truth International Conference



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Professor Praises Tourist Underwater Proposal

By Roberto **CAMPOS**

HAVANA.- Cuban professor and researcher José Luís Perelló praised the country's seabed as a destination for tourist trips, which will make it possible to appreciate a rich submerged heritage.

He commented on the possibilities of finding in the seabed of the Cuban archipelago a historical-cultural fortune with exceptional characteristics guaranteed by the traffic of Spanish fleets between the colonies and Europe, under siege by pirates since the 16th century, and naval battles between hegemonic powers of the time.

The Guanahacabibes Peninsula, in Cuba's westernmost end, is an authentic paradise for scuba divers. The landscape stands out for its forests and virgin beaches, with exceptional sea bottoms that blend with the Gulf of Mexico currents, on the north and the Caribbean Sea, on the south.

Las Tumbas, Playa Francés, Punta Colorada and María la Gorda excel among the sandy areas, in which the International Diving Center is located, with over 50 diving sites.

The area has some of the best underwater landscapes in the Caribbean, with coral reefs, several caves (some dangerous) and about a hundred flotsams – the latter, in the Bajo de Zambo area, where there is an authentic ship graveyard.

These sea bottoms also house the Caribbean's largest black

coral reserve and are Cuba's best known destinations among professional divers, in addition to the Punta Francés National Sea Park, in the Isla de la Juventud municipality.

Diving sites are known for their deep tunnels, underwater valleys and canals, where there is a large variety of corals such as the staghorn, black and horned, among others.

South of the Matanzas province, in the Cuban western region, the Zapata Swamp, the Caribbean's largest wetland and home to Cuba's largest crocodile farm, is located.

This area is also an important migratory bird reserve and an exceptional destination for diving lovers.

The swamp's coastal landscape stands out for the high number of flooded caves, lakes and cenotes that are connected to the sea through underground galleries, as well as for a large diversity of coral reefs.

The area's best diving sites include El Octopus (Playa Larga), Buceo Azul (Playa Girón) and El Pirata (Caleta Buena). At the Bay of Pigs' bottoms, it is also possible to find a large diversity of coral formations, sunken ships and natural pools.

In the meantime, in the waters of the Santiago de Cuba Bay – in the country's east – there is a sunken heritage that shows part of the national history and the conquest and colonization wars among the hegemonic powers of the time.

It is also possible to see the different Spanish ships – almost intact – that sank in 1898 during a naval battle with the United States for the conquest of that territory.

At the entrance-exit of the Santiago de Cuba Bay, in the area also known as Boca del Morro and at about a 10-meter depth, an unusual sunken graveyard is located. Dozens of amphora with the ashes of deceased people or thrown there after these were scattered at the sea also lie in the area, according to a lengthy article by the aforementioned researcher.



The seabed of the Cuban archipelago has an exceptional characteristics. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



Visiting Havana's colorful, colonial-era streets is the best way to get a taste of the city's long and chequered history. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

First Cultural Destination in the Americas

By THR **Editorial Staff**

HAVANA.- The National Geographic scientific magazine selected Cuba as the first cultural destination to visit in the Americas in 2024 and urged its readers to tour the Cuban capital, its squares and patrimonial buildings.

After acknowledging that Havana is a melting pot of cultures from the Spanish, African and Caribbean influences, the magazine indicated that "visiting its colorful, colonial-era streets is the best way to get a taste of the city's long and chequered history."

The prestigious publication stressed that Havana is only the beginning of the story and recommends visiting "the lush Viñales Valley, where limestone karts rise out of the earth like sleeping giants, before exploring

the eerie swamps of the Zapata Peninsula and the city of Cienfuegos, which is filled with Gallic charm and insatiable Caribbean energy."

The views the magazine stated consolidate Cuba's image as a splendid tourist destination that renews and diversifies its products and services to guarantee the satisfaction of travelers who bet for enjoying their holidays in this country, local experts affirm.

The first edition of the National Geographic Magazine, later on simply called National Geographic, came to light on September 1888 and is the official non-profitable body of the National Geographic Society of the United States.

Also known as Nat Geo, the publication exceeds four million copies in the United States alone and is characterized by excellent articles and photos on nature, science, history, travel and adventure.

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Publisher: Agencia Informativa Latinoamericana
Prensa Latina, S.A.
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Information in Favor of the Peoples

By Ivette **FERNÁNDEZ**

Photos Vladimir **MOLINA**

HAVANA.- Creating alliances between alternative media and against hegemonic powers was one of the main premises defended during the New Operation Truth International Conference, held in this capital.

Sponsored by the **Prensa Latina** Latin American News Agency, the meeting gathered over 60 media professionals and other officials linked to mass media from 30 countries.

The event's main purpose was to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution Fidel Castro made on January 1959, which was attended by 400 journalists interested in spreading Cuba's reality and counteracting a malicious media campaign.

Participants in the meeting agreed on the importance of conducting a permanent crusade against misinformation, fake news and other actions that try to justify the outrages committed against the people who fight for their sovereignty or to maintain this.

At the opening session, Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel said that wherever there is an alternative communication project against imperialist media, there is an Operation Truth.

Díaz-Canel affirmed that the initiative, headed by Fidel Castro during the Revolution's foundational days, is a momentous event because of its audacity and a challenge in current times; a source of inspiration because of its validity in times of hegemonic policies, cultural colonization and Artificial Intelligence.

The Cuban president acknowledged the work of the journalists who, putting their own lives at risk, spread the sufferings of the Palestinian people, subjugated by the Zionist government of Israel.

SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE AND CUBA

Most of the speeches to the conference dealt with the need of increasing visibility of the crimes the Palestinian population suffers today at the Gaza Strip.

"The objective of propaganda is to dehumanize the Palestinians in order to justify their elimination. In light of such a misinformation, manipulation and dehumanization campaign, our media – the Pan-Arab Al Mayadeen channel – becomes a bastion of truth and responsible journalism," stated Lebanese Information minister Ziad Makary.

Through a video message, chairman of the Al-Mayadeen Information Network Managing Board, Ghassan Ben Jeddou, urged to join together in defense of truth and against what he described as "international mafia."

Signs of support to the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Syria and Cuba were also stated, as well as against the blockade the United States has imposed on the island for over 60 years.

Director of the Algerian Press Service, Samir Gaib, urged to strengthen collaboration between the alternative mass media and against the hegemonic powers to properly deal with topics, as countries require.

Participants had talks with Deputy General Director for U.S. Affairs at the Cuban Foreign Ministry Johana Tablada, who described the U.S. policy as asphyxiating and denounced that a brutal communication campaign is also conducted to discredit the efforts the government makes in favor of a more sustainable society.

Even though the Conference debates have come to an end, a decision was taken to maintain the constant battle the alternative media conducts in favor of truth, said **Prensa Latina** president Luis Enrique González at the closing of the event.



Prensa Latina president Luis Enrique González.

The official had previously warned about the need of working "in favor of pieces of news as closer to reality as possible, more inclusive, humanist and not restricted to monopolies."

Aware of the increasing risks the misuse of digital social networks and Artificial Intelligence can represent, we are forced to avoid and counteract these through our daily work, through a decent journalistic exercise, González affirmed.

Because of that ethical work and as a result of "being a source of light for the present and future generations of journalists," the Latin American

Agency received the acknowledgment of the Spanish-American Press Congress; acknowledgement that was granted in during the event by that entity's president, Amín Cruz. Renowned intellectuals participated in the Conference panels, including Cuban Abel Prieto; Belizean former Foreign Affairs minister Godfrey Smith, and U.S. journalist David Montgomery.

The program included visits to the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center and the Fidel Castro Ruz Center, an institution that honors the legacy of the historic revolutionary leader.



A decision was taken to maintain the constant battle the alternative media conducts in favor of truth.



Deputy Secretary General of Media and Publications of Tunisia, Mohammad Bououd, during the debates.

Authorities Evaluate Priorities for 2024

By Elizabeth **BELLO**

HAVANA.- Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel started his 2024 agenda visiting provinces in the country's west and central regions, to evaluate working priorities for 2024.

The president visited economic and social centers in the Villa Clara, Ciego de Ávila, Sancti Spiritus, Artemisa, Pinar del Río and Cienfuegos provinces, as well as the Isla de la Juventud special municipality.

At a meeting with producers and citizens, Díaz-Canel spoke about the new measures adopted to eliminate distortions and boost the economy this year, and about the need for their implementation.

The head of the Cuban State explained that the socio-economic measures announced by top government authorities will be implemented when conditions are ready, taken special care of the most vulnerable people.

Díaz-Canel toured important economic centers and factories, such as the La Finísima Canning and Vegetable mini-industry; the Senior Home, and the Proxcor joint venture.

He also visited important economic and social entities in the Isla de la Juventud special municipality, where he highlighted the work of the producers and students and workers' support to food production.

In Pinar del Río, he visited the Harlem Sugar Agribusiness Company to evaluate the

progress made in the sugarcane harvest and to encourage workers to make a quality production.

Tours also included social centers, such as family doctors and nurse offices, Senior Homes, schools, homes for children without family protection and other social and local development institutions.

The Cuban president stressed the importance of daily work and popular participation in the transformation process the country conducts, as well as the need of fostering production and work for the benefit of everyone and to attain social justice.

He was also interested in workers' living conditions and the difficulties they face in the different municipalities, such as lack of transportation, public lighting and solid waste collection.

In those meetings, the head of State highlighted the importance of work, popular participation and the fair distribution of wealth to attain social justice.

Cuba's economic ordering is aimed at benefitting everyone and takes into consideration the needs of the most vulnerable people, he affirmed, while saying that the country's authorities pay attention to the population's doubts and opinion.

During these visits, the Cuban president was accompanied by Cuban Communist Party Secretary of Organization, Roberto Morales and other State and Government authorities at the national and provincial levels.



The President explained that the socio-economic measures announced will take special care of the most vulnerable people. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución..

Parliamentary Commissions in Tune with Society

By Melissa **KING**

HAVANA.- The permanent commissions of the National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban parliament) analyzed key topics for the nation in the last six meetings, held prior to the Second Ordinary Period of Sessions of the legislative power. Members of those commissions discussed last December issues of great importance for the national life and suggested potential solutions to make new progress in economic and social topics.

The parliamentarian agenda dealt with the fulfillment of the Food Sovereignty and Nutritional and Food Security laws; actions to counteract distortions in the economy; price hikes, and the housing construction program.

The state of community services; improvement of retail commerce, and the granting of subsidies to vulnerable people, were also discussed.

As informed, Cuba works on changes in the legal framework of micro, small and medium-sized companies, two years after the approval of the first norms that regulate the activity of such entities.

The process of decentralization of competences and resources in the municipalities was likewise analyzed in depth by the legislators, due to the importance of making progress in this program, aimed at fostering municipalities' autonomy and their economic development.

In this regard, first Deputy Minister of Economics and Planning, Mildrey Granadillo, informed that the Decree Law bill that authorizes to delegate competences to the municipalities will be submitted in 2024.

The parliamentarians also paid special attention to the implementation of the Policy for the Attention to Children, Adolescents and Youngsters, as well as to the Comprehensive Strategy for prevention and attention to gender violence and in the home environment.

On the latter, Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel said, in his capacity as member of parliament, that policies approved against gender violence and violence in the home environment should be included among the territorial development strategies, as that program involves women's progress and job opportunities and the formation of youngsters.

At the debates held as part of the Economic Issues Parliamentary Commission, was reiterated that the main obstacle to Cuba's development still is the blockade imposed by the Government of the United States.

It was stated that a positive step taken in 2023 was the diversification of the entrepreneurial system, with over 2,500 state entities focused on food production, manufacturing, computer programming, professional services, construction, repair and maintenance of machinery, equipment and means of transport, foreign trade and seeds production.

The main duty of the working commissions is to assist the National Assembly and the Council of State in the performance of their obligations.



The main duty of the commissions is to assist the National Assembly and the Council of State in the performance of their obligations. PHOTO: Cubadebate.

Over Two Thousand Cyberattacks in 2023

By Lourdes **NAVARRO**

HAVANA.- 2023 was marked by a surge of cyberattacks worldwide, a situation that threatened companies' security and personal data and that was also felt in Cuba.

From January to September 2023, the National Cybersecurity Center and the Security Operations Center of the Cuban Telecommunications Company (ETECSA) detected and prevented over 2,600 incidents – about 70 percent of them targeted at individuals.

These events were associated with the occurrence of denial-of-service cyber-attacks, the sending and receiving of spam, malicious traffic generated by malicious code, service scans and the exploitation of vulnerabilities that compromised websites and other IT elements.

In the meantime, in relation to individuals, there were cases of cyber-harassments, identity theft and fraud through digital social networks and electronic-payment channels, according to an article published at Ministry of Telecommunications website.

ETECSA digital business director and information system and cybersecurity expert, Daniel Ramos, commented that human error is one of the main causes of those incidents in companies, where breach of the information security policies prevails among those

responsible for their implementation and those who use such technologies.

Weak passwords are used; they are not frequently changed; people visit websites that are not safe, and systems or apps' software is not updated when needed, he said.

Another important reason that leads to cyberattacks is the use of services or devices without a security guarantee; in that context, the use of systems and devices that are not authorized to share confidential data has been detected. In addition, non-official software is installed in work devices.

According to the expert, more attention should be given this year to issues that go from continuing strengthening technological security in the bank system and critical infrastructure linked to IT, to operational technologies and automation.

Other topics include the development of the national antivirus, Segurmática; the consolidation of national platforms such as toDus, Picta and Apklis, which guarantee higher technological sovereignty, and the improvement of the model aimed at facing such incidents.

Ramos highlighted the need of a permanent update of the legal norms on this field in light of the rapid surge of new problems and technologies that have an immediate impact on cybersecurity.



The cyberattacks were associated with denial-of-service, sending and receiving of spam, malicious traffic and service scans. PHOTO: Cubadebate.

2023, Hottest Year since 1951

By Cira **RODRÍGUEZ**



HAVANA.- Cuba set 91 maximum temperature records in 2023, while July stood out for being the hottest month, which turned last year into Cuba's hottest since 1951.

According to records, the national territory experienced an average temperature that surpassed 1.38 Celsius degrees – that variable's historical average.

Experts of the Institute of Meteorology Weather Center confirmed that the number of warmer nights was the highest since 1980 in the months of July, August and November, according to most of the reference stations, while the number of warmer days prevailed

throughout the year in most of the country, particularly in July and November.

Specialist of the abovementioned institution, PhD Idelmis González, explained that such behavior is the result of global warming associated to climate change and the influence of the prevailing ENSO (El Niño/Southern Oscillation) weather event, which started in June and generated an overwarming of the sea superficial temperature in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean in December.

According to forecasts, most of the models show that this complex process of oceanic-atmospheric interaction will continue happening at least until the end of next spring, with possibilities of becoming a strong event in February and March.

The Institute of Meteorology Weather Center keeps permanent watch on the ENOS evolution, considering that its highest impact on Cuba usually happens from January to April, particularly in February and March.

Such events are characterized by an increase of rain totals over historical average values, in addition to higher impact of cold fronts and active lines of prefrontal storms.

In that sense, in December 2023, precipitations surpassed the month's normal values in the central and western regions, while in the east, they were within the usual values.

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Maestro José María Vitier's 70th Birthday

By Mario MUÑOZ



The artista was granted in 2021 the National Music Award for his long national and international career. PHOTO: Vladimir Molina.

HAVANA.- "Noche Insular" (Insular night) was the title of the most recent concert pianist and composer José María Vitier conducted with a group of friends and guests at the Avellaneda Hall of the Cuban National Theater to celebrate his 70th birthday.

It was a great night, like the ones the Maestro usually gives to his audience, whose last interpretation of the version of his work "Desde la aldea", an anthological theme that became the sound identity of the New Latin American Film Festival of Havana, still resounds in the Charles Chaplin hall of the Cuban capital.

Last January 7, Cuba celebrated the 70th birthday of the prize-winning Cuban artist and intellectual, who in 2021 was granted the National Music Award for his long national and international career.

The Cuban Film Institute, in addition to other national bodies, celebrated the birthday of an artist who is also the author of the soundtracks of some of Cuba's most relevant films in the last 30 years.

As a composer, his name is linked to the soundtrack of important Cuban television series such as *En silencio ha tenido que ser* (It has to be in silence) and *Julito el pescador* (Julito, the fisherman), in which he also collaborated with his

brother Sergio (1948-2016), National Music awardee in 2014. His signature is likewise present in the soundtrack of films such as *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and chocolate), *Techo de vidrio* (Glass ceiling) and *Un paraíso bajo las estrellas* (A paradise under the stars), among others.

The famous artist was a member of the Síntesis band since its foundation and until 1983, when he created his own band, characterized by an outstanding versatility in which chamber and popular music are combined, in addition to jazz, with a marked Cuban tone.

Vitier has participated with his work in the Montreal and Du Maurier Ltd Downtown (Toronto) jazz festivals, in Canada; the New York Latin Festival, in the United States; the Cervantino Festival, in Mexico, and the Bordeaux and Midem de Cannes festivals, in France.

Nominated to the 2000 Latin Grammy awards among the five best classical music albums for his CD *Salmo de las Américas* (Americas' psalm), he has been granted important distinctions such as the Alejo Carpentier Medal and the Félix Varela Order, both in 2004.

The majesty of his work as an author and his piano performance turn him into one of Cuba's most outstanding musicians in the last decades.

Ballet Beyond Borders, from the World to Havana

By Daimarelys PÉREZ

HAVANA.- The International Ballet Beyond Borders (BBB) festival, a mega-show that promotes cultural and didactic exchange, was held in this capital from January 9 to 13 and included a dance contest directed at facilitating human understanding and other ways of communication.

For five days, the Cuban capital's dance stage decked out to welcome the BBB show, which brought dancers, professionals and amateurs to the island to compete in different categories.

The main topic of this edition, "BBB in the Neighborhood," was in tune with the concept this festival champions: celebrating diversity, cultures and the universal language of dance.

Categories in competition included ballet (contemporary and modern); young choreographer (up to the age of 30) and an open section that acknowledged hip-hop,

flamenco, ballroom dancing, tap and all forms of ethnic-cultural dance.

As part of the event, created by founder of the Rocky Mountain Ballet Theater, Charlene Carey, the audience was able to enjoy a Dance Challenge.

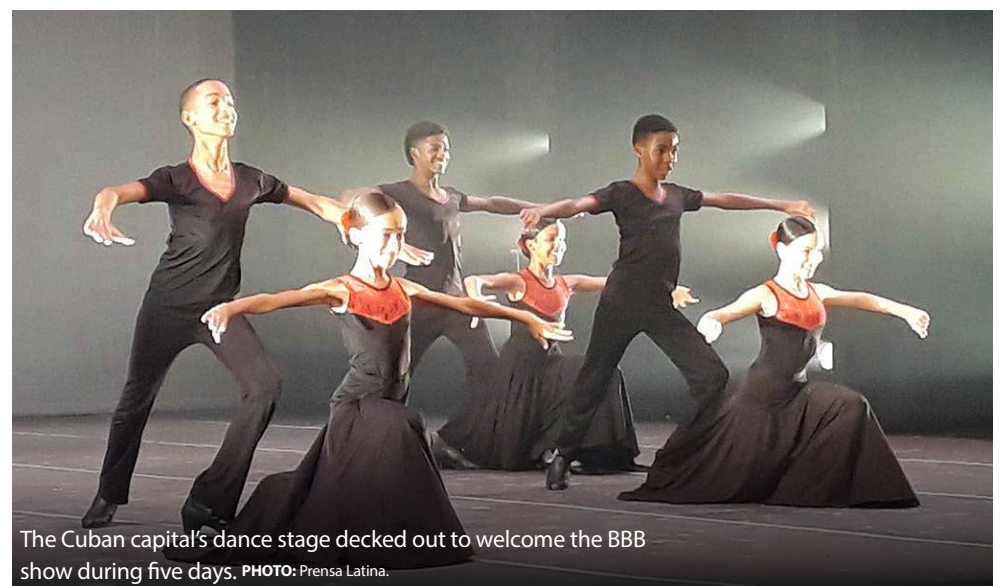
The festival, sponsored by the Litz Alfonso Dance Cuba company and the local development project this created, included in its program masterly lectures, workshops, documentary screening and a final awards gala.

Tours of the Havana's Historical Center; a visit to the Prodanza Center; activities at the Old Havana Amphitheater, and daily rehearsals, were also included in the event's program.

Every year, BBB conducts masterly lessons and workshops that are attended by guests from different countries; in this edition, teachers, dancers, choreographers and competitors from the United States, Brazil, Canada, Mexico and other nations arrived in Cuba.

The event's venues included the seat of the Litz Alfonso Dance Cuba company, the Martí Theater and Malecón ART 255, a space that decked out for the closing ceremony and offered a big farewell party

in which participants, invited guests, the jury and the Havana audience got together. BBB HAVANA 2024 is a Ballet Nation that promotes cooperation and understanding through dance to defend peace.



The Cuban capital's dance stage decked out to welcome the BBB show during five days. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



The Satisfaction of Living Acting with the Soul

By Adis**MARLÉN**

HAVANA.- My interviewee, Mirtha Ibarra, one of the most symbolic faces of the Cuban cinema, embraces the sky, the stars, passion, the satisfaction of living acting with the soul. Blessed those who shared talent, laughs, stories and anecdotes with the actress in films that have gone down in the history of Cuba and the world: La última cena (The last supper), from 1976; Hasta cierto punto (Up to a certain point), from 1983; Adorables mentiras (Adorable lies), from 1991, and Fresa y chocolate (Strawberry and chocolate), from 1993.

On the 30th anniversary of the premiere of the multiple award-winning film Fresa y chocolate, by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928-1996) – who would have been 95 last December 11 – **The Havana Reporter** interviewed the director's partner.

If anything defines her, it is her ability to unfold and organically assume the most diverse characters, as if they were born for her or implied the minimum interpretative effort. She tells an amusing anecdote about this virtue.

When I was granted the acting award, Titón – as her late husband was known as – told me: it is the biggest flattering comment an actor can get and I just heard it, Mirtha, I do not know how she got it if she does not even act, said a person.

On how she gets ready to assume each challenge, she stressed that she does a thorough research on the character and based on the costume and social stratum, she looks for that character's physical actions, "because when you feed it on those actions, it becomes more credible."

In control of an admirable acting aptitude, she was a member of the country's most important dramatic groups, such as the Teatro Estudio, Teatro Bertolt Brecht, Teatro de Arte Caribeño and Teatro El Público, in addition to her television work.



If anything defines Mirtha Ibarra is her ability to unfold and organically assume the most diverse characters. PHOTO: Panchito González.

She was granted several distinctions, such as the Acting Award for a Lifetime's Work (2019), the Lucía Honorary prize (2018), the National Culture Distinction (1996) and the Latin American International New Film Festival Coral Award to the best actress (1983) for Hasta cierto punto.

Mirtha Ibarra has also been a jury member in important international events, including the Huelva Festival (Spain, 1999), the Gramado Film Festival (Brazil, 2000), the Latin American International New Film Festival (Cuba, 2001), the Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival (United States, 2003 & 2006), among others.

FRESA Y CHOCOLATE: BEAUTIFUL AND AUTHENTIC

Although she already had a solid career in Cuba, she gained international success with this master piece, considered an all-time icon of the national filmmaking.

On the film, co-directed by Juan Carlos Tabío, she commented: Titón always said that a film is a great help to understand individuals, looking at the way they admire or criticize its reality and I believe that Fresa y chocolate was that.

"He knew the importance it had in Cuba, but was not aware of its significance, something that happened in an extraordinary way, as some of its achievements included the fact that it was the first Cuban film nominated to an Oscar Award, in 1994, in the Best Foreign Film category, in addition to the Goya Prize to the best Spanish-speaking foreign film.

Talking to Mirtha Ibarra is a travel in the life of the famous producer and although this reporter did not have the pleasure of meeting him in person, this dialogue shows her the love he felt for the seventh art, for making a quality, revolutionary film that went beyond time.



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Fourth Cuban Villa Undergoes Restauration Works

Text and Photo by Raúl **GARCÍA**

SANCTI SPÍRITUS.- The Villa of Sancti Spiritus, previously called the Espíritu Santo, undergoes several restoration works and new constructions to celebrate, next June, the 510th anniversary of its foundation by the Spanish.

The city, a National Monument, treasures one of the most representative colonial constructions built during the Spanish conquest, including squares, promenades, churches and palaces, in a network of narrow and cobbled streets.

Specialists of the City Historian Office are immersed in such works to celebrate the

occasion having restored and maintained its over one thousand edifications from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

The Havana Reporter knew that such actions will favor the historical center, which includes recreational and social institutions, and a large state and private commercial sector.

Places to be restored include the Cultural Corridor – aka the village boulevard – and a group of ancient mansions and houses from the 19th century located in the surroundings of the Serafín Sánchez Park.

A Conference Hall in the second floor of the Market Place also undergoes its final restoration work, without affecting its colonial elements, even though modern features will be introduced.

New projects include the house where the City Model is located and the former Renacer Beauty Institute, which will offer hairdressing and barber services, in addition to a beauty product shop, a gym and a massage and sauna area.

In the area the boulevard and the Central Park cover – about one thousand meters – different recreational programs and artistic activities will be conducted, at the Oscar Fernández Morera Art Gallery, the Theater House, the Rubén Martínez Villena Library and the headquarters of the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists.

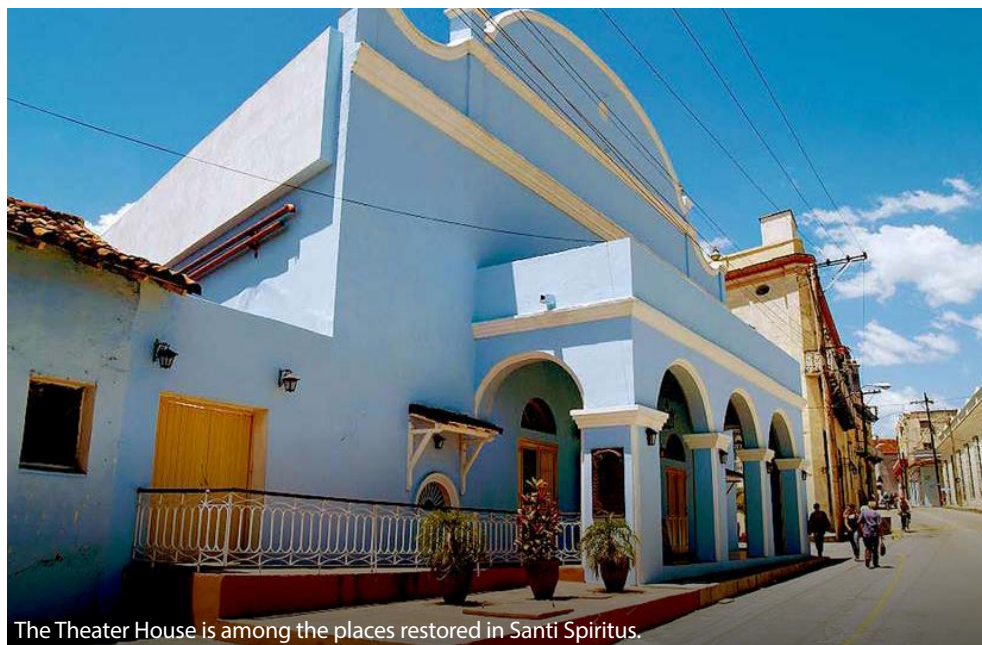
Director of the Palmares Extra-hotel Division in the Sancti Spiritus province, Freddy Rendueles, said that the Tourism Ministry-attached entity will make an important contribution to the improvement of its facilities and the creation of other services.

He explained that seating capacities of the Taberna Yayabo will be increased and two new facilities will be opened: a recreational center at the former Lina Bar, next to the Plaza Hotel and a franchise of the Havana's El Gato Tuerto Night Club, near the Mesón de la Plaza.

The city's historical center starts at a small hill in which the Major Parish Church is located; going south, the Main Theater and the bridge over the Yayabo River – the only of its type in Cuba, with five red-brick arches fixed with a mixture of female donkey milk, as the legend goes – are found.

The bridge was built in 1825, while the nearby Cathedral was made in 1680 and the theater – a copy of Havana's famous Tacón Theater – on July 15, 1839.

Such edifications also include a magnificent small palace that belonged to the wealthy Valle-Iznaga family and is called the One Hundred Door House or Valle Palace – at present, the seat of the Colonial Art Museum.



The Theater House is among the places restored in Santi Spiritus.

Initiatives of Bartender Club in 2024

By Francisco **MENÉNDEZ**

HAVANA.-The Bartender Club of the Republic of Cuba (CCRC) announced a varied program of activities in 2024, including celebrations for its 100th anniversary, to take place from June 23 to 28.

Chairman of the Cuban Bartender Association, Eddis Naranjo, commented that activities will start on June 23 with a classic cocktail welcome toast, in a place still to be determined.

The presentation and tasting of new author cocktails, created and made by International Champions of the Cuban Association, will also be conducted.

Other activities include the opening of the Bartender Association venue, in the Vedado neighborhood (Havana) and the placing of a Commemorative Plaque in the façade of the CCRC foundation site, in Paseo del Prado, in Old Havana.

The program includes a lecture on mixology, on June 25, by chairman of the Madrid Bartender Association Sergio Freile and presentations of free and flair bartending.

Naranjo affirmed that as part of that day's activities, Cuban and foreign participants will be able to taste the Classic Saoco Cocktail and the famous Guarajil Cocktail.

On June 26, the qualification rounds of the 2024 Fabio Delgado in Memoriam National Cocktail Competition will be conducted, as

well as a lecture on Tiki Cocktail Culture in Cuba.

The following day, Cuban and foreign members will be able to participate in the International Cocktail Competition.

As Hilario Alonso Sánchez (1951) wrote in Memorias 25 Años de Labor del Club de Cantineros (Memories, 25 years of the Bartender Club work), this is the oldest bartender association in the world, according to official records.

The Cuban association was officially founded on June 27, 1924, on the City Governor's approval and following a meeting of a group of interested people who endorsed the creation of an exclusive sport and social association of bartenders, one month earlier.

The Club was first domiciled in the upper floor of a building located in the Bernaza and Obrapia corner, in Old Havana and was then moved to Malecón No. 15 (upper floor) and afterwards to the Avenida de la República street (San Lázaro) No. 69 (ground floor).

As Cuban researcher and writer José Alfonso Castro wrote in his book Ron, cocteles y cantineros de Cuba (Rum, cocktails and Cuban bartenders), published in 2009, the Club carries on its history under the form of an association, which was officially registered as such on February 6, 1998.

Benefits of Black Soldier Fly to the Test

By Alfredo **BOADA**

HAVANA.- Cuban researchers test for the first time in the country the benefits of the black soldier fly, a biological agent that controls common flies and are an ally to reduce different types of agricultural wastes.

The 'Technology of black soldier flies' raising and the use of its by-products in the agricultural sector' project started the field stage at the La Candelaria farm – a 100-hectare plantation of custard apple, cherries, "cotorrera" guava, peach, avocado, tangerine, mango, soursop, cashew, lemon, mamey and papaya – in the Ciego de Ávila province, the local media indicated.

Agriculturist Miguel Ángel Iparraguirre, a Plant Safety specialist, said that the black soldier fly (*hermetia illucens*) could become a national referent for circular economy through the use of science and technology, to develop economically sustainable agro-ecological plantations. "We are undergoing the phase of exploration to see how that fly species can process different wastes, which would be beneficial for environmental health and growing crops," noted Iparraguirre, a master of Agricultural Sciences and PhD in Biological Sciences. At present, efforts are focused on the intensive raising of the fly, which feeds on mini-industries' wastes, rotten fruits and dining halls' wastes, in addition to being

a pollination insect and a biological agent that controls common flies.

The scientist explained that the *hermetia illucens* larvae can be used as animal food, either in its natural or flour form, for cats, dogs, pigs and hens.

According to studies, the larva can have from 40 to 60 percent of protein and is a powerful organic fertilizer.

Farmer Alexander Ramírez, who believes that organic agriculture can attain sustainable productivity without the use of artificial external supplies such as fertilizers and chemical pesticides, chose that insect as a biological control agent and an ally to reduce different wastes.

The black soldier fly is enjoying popularity in the world because its larvae are capable of recycling several organic substrata, such as manure, food and crops' wastes. In addition, the biomass produced can be used to feed pigs, hens and fishes.

A native to tropical, subtropical and temperate regions of the Américas, it has currently spread to the world and can be found in Europe, Africa, Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) and Asia (Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan and Sri Lanka).

Female black soldier flies lay their eggs in cracks near decomposing organic matter such as manure, carrion, trash and organic wastes. They lay about 500 oval shape, one-millimeter, pale yellow or cream white eggs that become larvae in four days.

Jazz Plaza: A Miracle in Cuban Music



Singer and trumpet player Bobby Carcassés, one of the main architects of the Jazz Plaza International Festival. PHOTO: Panchito González.

By Alma **LABRADA**

HAVANA.- Beautiful harmonies embraced Cuba during the 39th edition of the Jazz Plaza International Festival, an event considered a miracle in Cuba's music, as singer and trumpet player Bobby Carcassés, one of its main architects, said.

From January 21 to 28, Havana and Santiago de Cuba provinces decked out with the most outstanding exponents of the genre; their stages gathered the talent of 66 international bands and over 150 artists from 21 countries

– 92 of them from the United States – who performed 258 concerts.

Maestro Joaquín Betancourt opened the festival in this capital with the recital *Amada Música* (Beloved music), a performance that celebrated the 15th anniversary of his Jazz Band and the 50 years of artistic life of this creator, a National Music awardee in 2019.

In the meantime, in Santiago de Cuba, Cuban pianist living in the United States Nachito Herrera, together with the province's Symphonic Orchestra, offered their art accompanied by guests from several regions of Cuba's east.

A special occasion was the performance, for the first time in the country, of the *Estrellas de Buena Vista y más* band, a group created by founding members of the prestigious format that conquered the musical world in the middle of the 1990s.

Another important harmonic meeting was the show *Noche Insular* (Insular night), which highlighted the virtuosity of Cuban pianist José María Vitier, accompanied by his compatriots, flutist Niurka González, soprano Bárbara Llanes, double bassist Abel Acosta and percussionist Yaroldy Abreu. Under the artistic direction of Dominique Roland, the gala included a visual, digital and romantic technique inspired by the Cubanness present in Vitier's work, going from baroque to nostalgia.

The festival, conducted under the slogan *Pa'que flujazz a nuestro ritmo*, also included the XIX International Leonardo Acosta in Memoriam Colloquium, held from January 22 to 27 at *Fábrica de Arte Cubano*, a space that gathered specialists, students, jazz professionals and others in panels, workshops and masterly lessons, under a main topic: piano in jazz.

Other activities conducted as part of the Jazz Plaza were the 'Havana Jazz Portrait' photographic exhibition, a visual chronicle made by journalist and photographer Lilien Trujillo on the Havana jazz stage last year, which included its main figures and spaces.

To close the event in style, famous Cuban pianist Roberto Fonseca joined the Cuban National Ballet to celebrate the 75th anniversary of this company, an event that once again showed the musician's skills and those of the dancers and the prima ballerina and general director of that company, Viengsay Valdés.

In spite of the passing of the years, the Jazz Plaza Festival maintains its vitality and power of summon and has become one of the most important events in Latin America and Cuba, Carcassés said.

In Favor of a Mural City

Text and Photo by Yugdani **VICET**

SANTIAGO DE CUBA.- The collective project Cuban and foreign visual artists conduct as part of the "Internos" Mural Painting Biennial invades, since 1993 and every two years, this city's walls, parks and buildings, leaving a colorful imprint that already characterizes this area as the Mural City of Cuba's east.

"Internos," endorsed by the Provincial Visual Arts Council, the Office of the City Historian, the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists in the province and the Caguayo Foundation, is a project directed at painting murals with high aesthetic, cultural and human values that can last in time and be attractive to people, in addition to fostering exchange through artistic communication.

The event also foresees to develop mural activity in the city with the objective of turning it into an important referent in the genre, capable of consolidating higher tourist interest as a result of collaboration with cultural institutions and the voluntary work its creators made in favor of sociocultural development in the communities.

"Internos" favors intercultural relations between Cuban and foreign artists, while involving art students – particularly visual art students – fans and children linked to vocational clubs, in a work of creation that revitalizes the Santiago society.

The Luis Díaz Oduardo Cultural Workshop is considered today a meeting point for those who gather as part of the event, which promotes theoretical

spaces for exchange among creators and an updating on the main mural painting trends in Cuba and abroad.

The "Internos" International Mural Painting meeting has gradually gone beyond our borders and already includes participants from Germany, Turkey, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Haiti, Brazil, Martinique, Denmark and Mexico.

Topics presented in each edition are as varied as the participating countries and are mostly related to Identity and transculturation; Human beings, art and society; Chaos and humanity; Local action for a global thinking; Marvelous real, and Energy and future.

The XVI edition of the "Internos" 2024 Mural Painting Biennial, recently closed in this city, was dedicated to the 65th anniversary of the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution and left five works that complement the over 155 previously made, including pictorial and sculptural works.

Shops; hotels; school; public buildings; health, sport or governmental institutions' facades... no space is vetoed when it comes about welcoming an "Internos" imprint in the capital of Cuba's east, including those municipalities this large format art has reached.

"Internos" remains an example of resistance and is already becoming a local tradition in the field of visual arts, as endorsed by its 31 years of permanence in Santiago de Cuba.



"Internos" foresees to develop mural activity in Santiago de Cuba with the objective of turning it into an important referent in the genre.

Job Creation and Youth Protection Take Priority

By Ernesto **VERA**

HAVANA.- Cuba gives top priority to the development of actions that foster job creation and attention to youngsters who either study or work and live with families in vulnerable situations.

Minister of Labor and Social Security Marta Elena Feitó indicated that those efforts are part of the Policy for the Comprehensive Attention to Children, Adolescents and Youngsters in Cuba, approved last July by the National Assembly of People's Power (Cuban Parliament).

In statements to the press, on occasion of a meeting held in January and headed by president Miguel Díaz-Canel, the minister stated that the search for change and non-assistance prevail among those actions.

She stressed that over 60 percent of the people who accessed job offers last year were youngsters, a trend that characterized attendance to training courses, in which over 62 percent of Cubans of those ages registered.

This is a modality that we will continue developing and fostering during the next period, she said at the meeting held at the Revolution Palace (seat of the Executive).

According to an information published by the Cuban President's Office in its website, Feitó highlighted the work the University Student Federation has conducted in higher education institutions to identify youngsters living with families in vulnerable situation and rescue those who have dropped out of school.

Other actions to be implemented are also focused on students who look for alternatives to make economic incomes during the time they study, mostly in fields that are not related to their area of study, she added.

Feitó also commented that the strategy should be addressed to conducting different actions to incorporate that workforce in jobs related to their area of study, so that they can use their talent and formation in higher qualification tasks.

In relation to the Maternity Decree Law for working women, approved last year, she



Minister of Labor and Social Security Marta Elena Feitó. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

explained that this includes protection to young mothers who are still studying and foresees the right they have to enjoy all the benefits provided for in the legal norm.

In addition, the minister commented that dealing with the topic of informal jobs among the youth also takes priority, as the exercise of the tasks they conduct are

not always given all the protection and guarantees; for this reason, it is essential to continue going into this topic in depth, which includes employers too, she said.

In this regards, Feitó added that all the people involved in this type of job should demand a formalization of their work situation.

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Challenges of the XIX Non Aligned Summit

By Francisco **VILLANUEVA**

HAVANA.- Cuba presented four top priority topics on the Palestinian issue, already turned into a massacre because of Zionist invasion on Gaza, at the XIX Non-Aligned Movement (MNOAL) Summit.

I still have fresh in my memory the clamor of the delegates to the Sixth Non Aligned Summit in Havana (1979), when the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, in replying to the then Egyptian Foreign Minister and later UN Secretary General (1994-96), Boutros Boutros Boutros-Ghali, expressed energetically "you have exchanged Jerusalem for a handful of sand".

Arafat then referred to the controversial Camp Davis agreements (1978), when the government of El Cairo recognized Israel in exchange for the return of the Sinai Peninsula, which the Zionists had occupied since 1967, during the so-called Six-Day war.

At the recent event, held in Kampala, Cuba urged the Movement to firmly demand an immediate ceasefire and the urgent dispatch of an international protection mission to the Gaza Strip, authorized by the UN General Assembly, to safeguard civilians and facilitate the delivery of emergency humanitarian aid.

The Cuban delegation also proposed to hold a General Assembly special emergency session to summon an international peace conference addressed at protecting the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, including the establishment of an independent State within the borders existing prior to 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Headed by Cuban Deputy President Salvador Valdés Mesa, the island urged the Movement

of Non Aligned Countries to intensify efforts for the Palestinian State to become the 194 UN member nation in the shortest term possible.

Maintaining the Movement's unity and fighting for a fairer world economic order were also included among the topics dealt with in Kampala, in addition to demand to lift the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba.

The XIX Summit of the MNOAL, whose presidency for the next four years will be assumed by Ugandan head of State Yoweri Museveni, also dealt with other urgent topics such as climate change, sustainable development, global peace and security and human rights.

The Movement member nations stated their firm commitment to continue making progress in their consolidation and strengthening, in order to be a relevant actor in the international arena.

Director of Multilateral Issues and International Law at the Cuban Foreign Affairs ministry, Rodolfo Benítez, informed the press that the Summit's Final Declaration includes a section in which Washington's blockade on the Cuban people and the inclusion of the island in the Department of State's unilateral list of countries that allegedly sponsor terrorism, were strongly condemned.

As in previous documents, the Non-Aligned Movement countries rejected the illegal occupation of the Guantánamo territory in which a U.S. Naval Base is located since 1898. Another topic included in the Declaration states appreciation to Cuba for its excellent presidency of the Group of 77 and China in 2023 and the successful holding in Havana of the Summit, on September 2023.

Elegance on the Seashore

By Sabdiel **BATISTA**

CIENFUEGOS. The Cienfuegos Club combines natural beauty with elegance and luxury. Located in Cuba's southern coast, it offers a unique experience to water sports and sea lovers.

One of the main attractions of the former Cienfuegos Yacht Club is its amazing location. Surrounded by crystal-clear water and situated in a beautiful and peaceful residential area, it offers breathtaking panoramic views.

On top of that, its proximity to Cienfuegos' historical center turns it into an ideal place to explore the city and enjoy its rich culture, in which its elegant building, opened on August 28, 1920 with the purpose to favor sport practice and recreation among the city's rich families, is included.

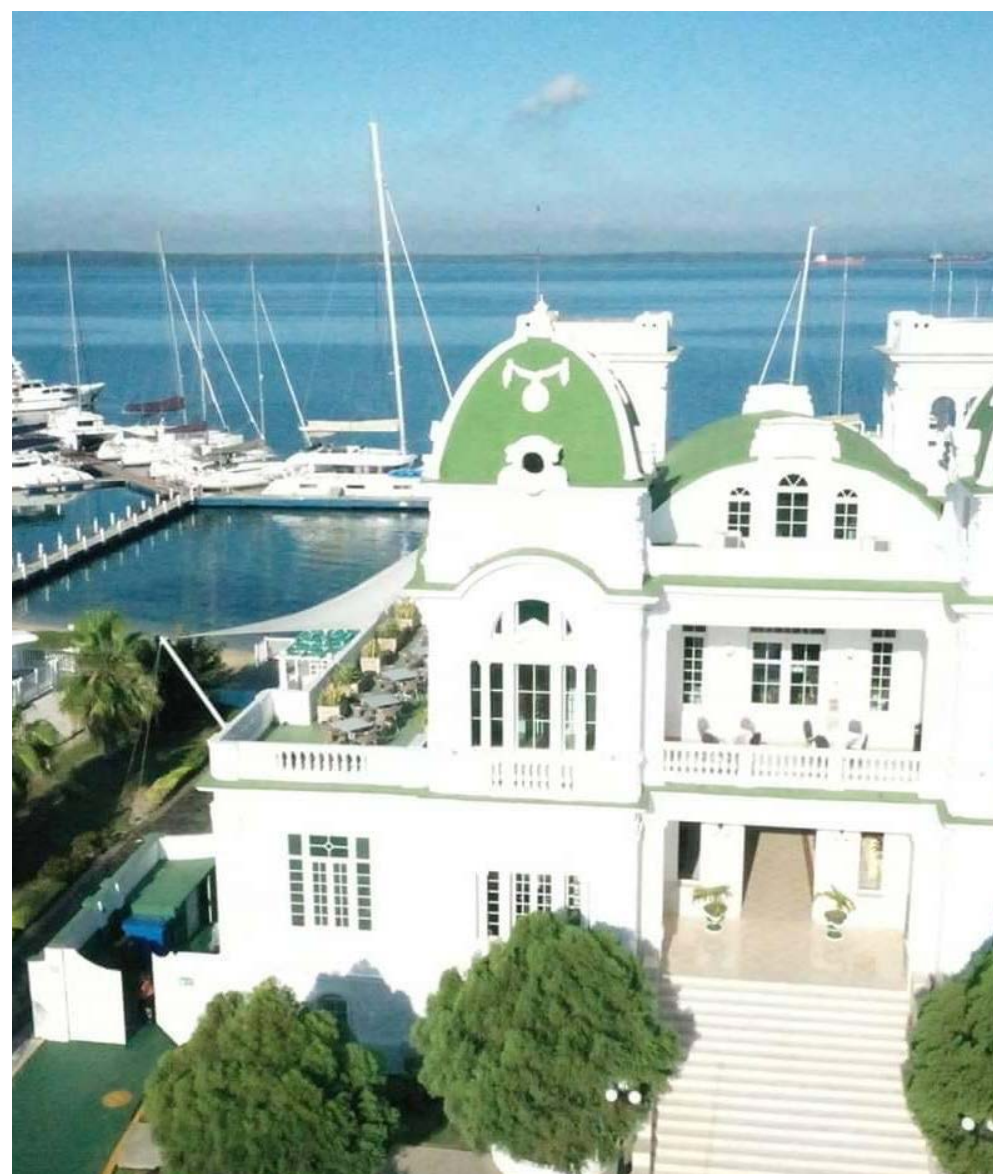
Rowing regattas, sponsored by the then-founded Cienfuegos Yacht Club, turned this place into an important venue among those built in the Punta Gorda residential area, consolidating the city – aka Perla del Sur (the Pearl of the South) – as a perfect scenario for the development of water sports.

Currently known as the Cienfuegos Club, it is also famous for its excellent infrastructure and high-quality services. The Club also has a sport harbor in which a high number of ships can dock, either small motorboats or luxury yachts.

In addition, it offers ship and equipment rental services, allowing visitors to enjoy activities such as fishing, scuba diving and snorkeling, as well as the purchase of nautical and sport goods, car and motorcycle rental and the enjoyment of outdoor games and pool swimming.

The Club's relaxing and warm environment turns it into a perfect place to enjoy special occasions with friends and relatives, for which it is a wonderful destination for those who look for a unique experience in an amazing sea environment.

Either to explore the crystal-clear water, enjoy a delicious local dish or simply relax in an exclusive environment, the Cienfuegos Club offers visitors everything they need to spend a wonderful vacation.



Ecuador: A Country at War?

By Adriana **ROBREÑO**

QUITO.- Prison riots, breakouts, kidnapped prison guards, explosions, live broadcast of an attack on a TV station all in less than 48 hours, led the Ecuadorian government to declare the State of Emergency and acknowledge the existence of a domestic armed conflict.

President Daniel Noboa affirmed that the Ecuadorian nation is at war against narcoterrorist gangs and ratified that his government will not give in to criminals.

We are facing a non-international armed conflict; we are fighting for national peace; we are also fighting against terrorist gangs, which today add up to over 20,000 people, stressed the president in an interview with a local media.

Until the present, over 2,000 operations have been conducted in all 24 provinces of the country by the Armed Forces and the National Police, and thousands of people have been arrested for their connections with criminal gangs.

Although the escalation of insecurity has been a real fact in the last six years, with a



The Ecuadorian government declared the State of Emergency after prison riots and an attack on a TV station. PHOTO: Xinhua.

sad record of over 7,800 people murdered in 2023, there are questions about what really lies behind the Executive's war stance against drug trafficking.

Analysts consider that the security crisis Ecuador faces could be a chance for the United States to strengthen its military presence in the South American nation.

Although the U.S. Department of State ruled out the sending of troops, the presence of the Head of the Southern Command, General Laura Richardson and other top antinarcotic and diplomatic officials makes people think about

Washington's real intentions in the current context.

Ecuador is, at present, the nation that receives more military aid from the United States in the region, according to a study of the Latin American Strategic Center of Geopolitics (CELAG).

The research, that quotes official data of the U.S. government, indicates that from 2021 to 2022, during the Guillermo Lasso government, Ecuador received military aid from the United States for a total of 172 million dollars.

On top of that, in October – two weeks before the presidential elections in which

Noboa achieved victory – Lasso signed a cooperation agreement in the field of defense with the Joe Biden administration of which not many details are known.

However, what it is known is that the agreement grants privileges, immunity and guarantees to the U.S. military and civil staff of the Department of Defense and contractors, while guaranteeing U.S. aircrafts, ships and vehicles free movement in the Ecuadorian territory.

The seriousness of the situation Ecuador faces has led all political forces and most of the population to support the declaration of domestic armed conflict and the use of the Armed Forces to fight terrorism, with little room for criticism, even in light of the danger of eventual human rights violations.

As part of the official narrative of a country at war, measures are pretended to be approved to finance military operations, such as a tax increase, a proposal that has been the object of a lot of criticism by political, trade union and indigenous organizations for its impact on the lower and middle class pocket, while the bank sector and large companies have been awarded with tax exemptions.

Bolivia Gives Priority to Industry's Human Resources

By Jorge **PETINAUD**

LA PAZ.- With the opening of the Industrial Technological Institute in Santa Cruz and the allocation of four places to start training in technical fields, Bolivia ratified the will to train the human resources needed as part of its intensive industrialization process.

"In coordination with the Planning Ministry, we are being aggressive in the topic of encouraging science and technology in universities (...)," affirmed Bolivian president Luis Arce at the opening speech, on January 13.

The head of State added that meetings will be held in public and private higher education centers in order to foster a higher use of science and technology in the formation of the human resources needed in the industrialization process, to substitute imports.

The president recalled that as part of that policy, over 150 plants are being built all over the Amazonian nation with the purpose to avail of and process the potential natural resources have.

Hestressed that those centers' administration, management and operation will demand specialized human resources and for that reason, the Government tries to foster their proper technical-professional formation.

"We are also worried about the management resources and the workforce that will operate those factories; that will also force the private sector to modernize processes and require qualified resources in the industrial sector, and improvement remuneration," the president affirmed.

In that context, the Plurinational Public Management School, directed by Iván Iporre, implemented courses aimed at the formation of managers for public industries. Simultaneously, the Executive Body summoned 200 postgraduate scholarships abroad for Bolivian professionals to specialize in production-applied science and technology fields.

Arce highlighted the importance of institutions such as the one opened in Santa Cruz, which is added to similar centers in the departments of Cochabamba and Oruro, for Bolivia to increase productivity in agricultural and industrial sectors.

"We need industrial engineers, specialists on industrial security; we need a lot of knowledge to take a qualitative leap to development in the nation and create sustainable jobs for the Bolivian people," stressed Arce, who is also a professor

and co-author of the Community, Productive Economic and Social Model with late professor Carlos Villega.

The institute, located in the fifth beltway of the Santa Cruz department, demanded an investment of over 740,000 dollars and will benefit about 360 students each academic course.

The facility has two floors and includes workshops, labs, service and administrative areas and a ramp, among other spaces.



The Industrial Technological Institute in Santa Cruz. PHOTO: Internet.

Steps to Revive the Economy

By Teyuné **DÍAZ**

HAVANA.- Cuba started 2024 with the implementation of measures aimed at reviving the national economy and correcting structural mistakes that hinder its performance, a long path of alternatives in light of its sustainability.

Such actions mark the beginning of a new era amidst the impact caused by a crisis in international economic relations, domestic mistakes and the maximum-pressure asphyxiation policy designed and applied by the United States against Cuba, stated Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel.

One of the premises of the new measures Prime Minister Manuel Marrero announced lies on their gradual implementation and as informed, the first of these will be linked to taxes and price increases in the sectors of fuel, liquefied gas and electricity.

As of January 1st, exonerations to tax payments, approved for the newly-created economic actors – be it non-agricultural cooperatives of MIPYMES (micro, small and medium-sized companies) – are suspended.

Following their creation, if they were set-up as a result of a reconversion of a previous activity, such actors could benefit from a six-month tax exemption; but if they were

totally new, they could benefit from such exemption for one year. Such benefits were granted upon the basis of a temporary criteria, as the tax system is based on general tax principles, explained minister of Finances and Prices Vladimir Requeiro.

Newly-created actors will pay taxes under the same rules, including sales, services and capital gains taxes; meanwhile, in the case of MIPYMES, the application of sales and services taxes will be extended to all marketing operations.

A tax increase from 15 to 30 percent for the import of goods the country produces – such as cigarettes, rum and cigars – was also established, with the objective of protecting national production, said the minister of Finances and Prices.

Tax payment exemption on the import of toiletries, food, medicines and some medical devices, as well as on their quantities, was also extended until March 31st for individuals, via their accompanied and non-accompanied luggage.

Measures that aroused higher interest among the population include the increase of fuel prices (February 1st), as well as those of liquefied gas and electricity (March). These norms are directed at creating the conditions to revive the national economic performance and updating goods and products' price value, Requeiro added.

On the objectives of those increases, minister of Energy and Mines, Vicente de la O, commented that in the case of fuel, it is to eliminate subsidies on the tourism sector, in addition to control its commercialization and allocate incomes generated as a result of its sale to its acquisition.

In relation to the 25-percent electricity price increase for consumers who use more than 500 kilowatts per hour, the objective is to encourage energy saving as a way

to foster the National Electricity System's sustainability and reduce power cuts.

In this sense, De la O stated that electricity consumption increased by 10.8 percent in 2023 in comparison to 2022 and added that the residential sector was the highest consumer, with 61 percent, while the non-residential sector consumed 39 percent.

He mentioned that 107,570 residential clients of the 4,078,909 the country has exceeded 500 kilowatts per hour every month.

When referring to the rise of the liquefied gas price, he noted that the objective is to eliminate subsidies.

In relation to the fuel price hike, the minister of Finances and Prices explained that in order to define wholesale prices, work is conducted to update the entrepreneurial system economic-financial plans and public services rates, including transportation services. In the case of retail prices, objectives were focused on the supply and demand conditions.

However, in spite of the recent decisions, the effectiveness of the measures to be implemented in 2024 to make rapid progress in the economic recovery will depend on how much is made in order to generate more wealth, with job incentives and a more adequate distribution of resources, said the Cuban president.

The success of their implementation will be dependent on the progress made to eliminate the main mistakes that currently threaten the country's possibilities of economic growth and development at the short, medium and long terms.

In this regards, Díaz-Canel stressed that none of these measures alone will solve all the challenges and warned that, in the beginning, they can increase certain problems.



Prime Minister Manuel Marrero announced the gradual implementation of the new measures. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



The procedures announced in Parliament include the increase in the prices of fuel, liquefied gas and electricity. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

2024 Budget Norms

By Raquel **DÍAZ**

HAVANA.- Cuba announced 10 additional norms that will allow regulating the 2024 Budget Law, some related to its own operation and other adaptations to fiscal exercise. In recent statements to the press, minister of Finances and Prices Vladimir Regueiro explained that the norm published in the Gaceta Oficial Ordinaria (Official Ordinary Gazette) No. 5 regulates rule 164 on "The 2024 State Budget."

Regueiro recalled that the implementation of tax measures supports growth in the income levels the State Budget endorses and added that all economic actors of the society are involved on that, as the Cuban entrepreneurial system is unique. The tax system will allow fostering the collection of incomes in tune with each taxpayer's economic capacity, in order to consolidate tax implementation under the principles of tax equity. Tax amendments for the 2024 fiscal exercise include, among others, the elimination of tax exemptions to non-

state economic actors (from zero month to one year) following their constitution, the minister said.

He added that there are 9,652 private micro, small and medium-sized companies (MIPYMES), 464 non-agricultural cooperatives (CNA) and over 596,000 self-employed workers, which shows the importance of their role as a complement to the national economic development.

Regueiro also commented that the implementation of the Personal Incomes Tax and the Social Security Special Contribution on the part of MIPYME and CNA-hired staff are standardized so that these operate under the same rules as those in force for the rest of the workers – a breakthrough in terms of tax equity.

The staff hired in Local Development projects also have to pay the Social Security Special Contribution and are likewise considered subjects to whom the Social Security System financing is acknowledged, in addition to being the beneficiaries of the protection through the foreseen financial benefits.

Such actions are the expression of the protection workers receive in case of work-related risks and death and retirement, Regueiro explained.

Calculation and payment of additional return on Personal Incomes Tax are also adapted through affidavit on incomes received in 2023 for bonuses.

This favors the levels of small inflow of currencies and mitigates progressiveness, in addition to guaranteeing a high level of taxes to extraordinary incomes.

In relation to the agricultural sector, Personal Incomes Tax by individual producers is reduced from 5.0 to 2.0 percent – a tax incentive aimed at fostering production, which shows its particular and top-priority treatment.

Tax on unused agricultural and forestry land is also updated and its goal is not directed at collecting taxes per se but at encouraging those who own the land to make an efficient use of this resource.



Minister of Finances and Prices Vladimir Regueiro. PHOTO: Cubadebate.

Cuba and Eurasian Economic Union strengthen Ties

By María **MAYORAL**

HAVANA.- Cuba and the Eurasian Economic Union reaffirmed their will to promote a higher expansion of their commercial and economic relations and foster investment projects in sectors of major importance for both parties.

In that sense, mutual interest in consolidating current integration ties in the fields of medication and medical devices circulation, agribusiness and entrepreneurial activities, stood out.

Key sectors include, among others, agribusiness, tourism, biotechnology, health and agriculture, with emphasis on opportunities that favor infrastructure investment.

Talks between the parties were held on occasion of the III Cuba-Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) meeting that took place in this capital and was headed by Cuban Deputy Prime Minister and minister of Foreign Trade and Investment Ricardo Cabrisas and EEC minister of Integration and Macro-economy, Serguei Y. Glaziev.

Both ministers stressed their full agreement on the topics dealt with and urged to speed up the execution of plans.

According to the Cuban official, there are important landmarks in the promotion

of contacts, such as participation in the Havana's International Trade Fair and visits from Eurasian Economic Union delegations to the Mariel Special Development Zone, in the country's west, with the purpose to build an industrial park in that area.

Visits from delegations of Cuban bodies and institutions to Russia and the Republic of Belarus, to identify new joint collaboration opportunities, also stand out.

However, "the work done is insufficient and we are not happy with that," affirmed Cabrisas, who urged to turn written commitments into "joint, profitable and sustainable projects, so as to build, that way, solid ties that allow us to avail current opportunities for mutual growth."

He also urged to increase contacts in key fields such as industry, biotechnology, food production, energy, transportation and logistics.

Our proposal is focused at concentrating efforts in those projects of common interests and with real perspectives of growth, profitability and sustainability, so as to contribute to exports, productive transformation and technological innovation, Cabrisas stated.

To round off the event, Cabrisas and Glaziev signed the Protocol of the III meeting,

which gathers the common will to make progress in different fields of bilateral and multilateral relations.

Since December 2020, Cuba is a Eurasian Economic Union Observer State and

Cuban president of the Republic Miguel Díaz-Canel and Prime Minister Manuel Marrero have both actively and alternately attended the organization's Supreme and Intergovernmental Councils, respectively.



Cuban President received the Minister of Integration and Macroeconomics of the Eurasian Economic Commission, Serguei Glaziev. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

Frederich Cepeda: Honor and Glory

By Boris **CABRERA**

HAVANA.- The Cuban Winter Baseball League came to an end and a man who did not reach the top of the podium carries a backpack full of honor and glory: Frederich Cepeda.

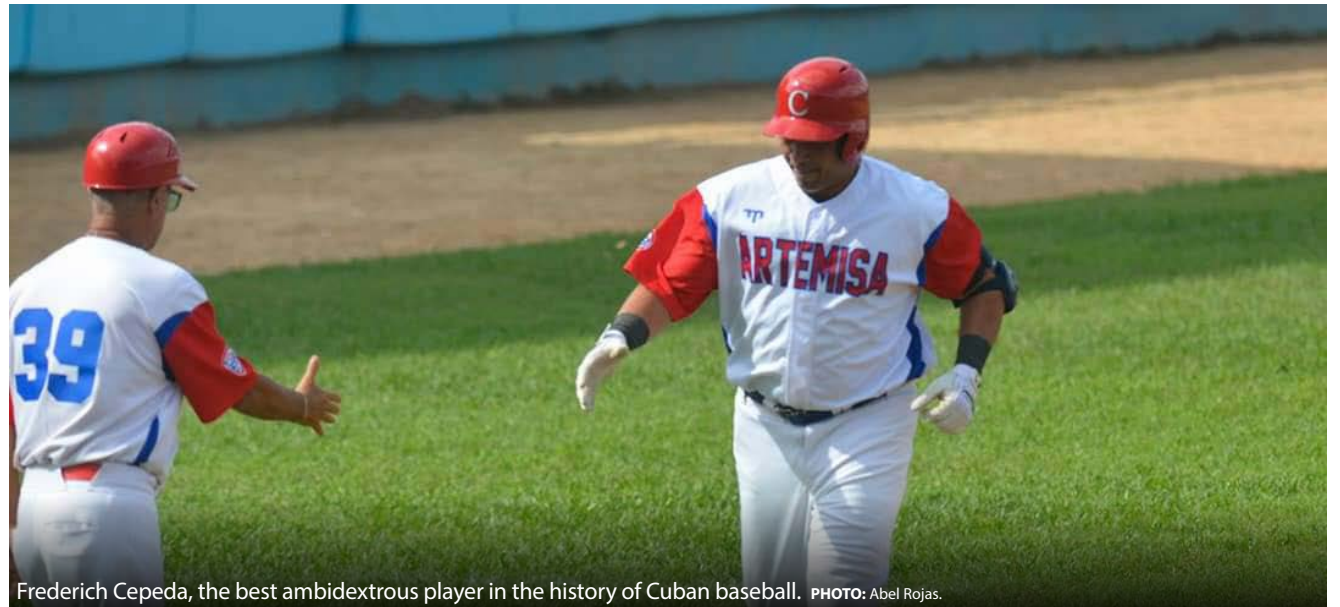
The best switch hitter in the history of Cuban baseball could not win the crown with the Cazadores de Artemisa team; however, he wrote another glorious chapter among the many he has written throughout his sports career by playing, risking his health, with a sprained ankle that barely allowed him to walk.

Neither his age (43) nor the latent threat of leaving the field forever mattered. To increase his merit, "El Gallo Mayor" (The Greater Rooster), as he is known for, was defending the colors of another, province; still, he proved why he is considered a living legend of baseball in the island.

In those conditions, he went to the batting cage in game five of the final playoff and scored a home run – his 360 in national championships – that got fans excited and shocked those who once decided he was not ready to attend what would be his fifth World Baseball Classic.

Cepeda is a symbol and an example of dedication to younger generations, which he has proven for years, and although he is not taken into consideration to enroll the national squad – who knows why – he still performs well in the tournaments he participates in.

On January 23, in the last match of the league in which the Cocodrilos de Matanzas team became the champions, the



Frederich Cepeda, the best ambidextrous player in the history of Cuban baseball. PHOTO: Abel Rojas.

outstanding player could not go to the Victoria de Girón field because he had fluid and blood in the affected area and risked torn ligament.

During the post-season, Cepeda, who could be enshrined in the Hall of Fame in any corner of the world, recorded about a dozen hits 33 times at bat, to average 364, with a couple of doubles, three home runs and seven runs batted in.

In the events he has participated in – 25 National Series, 3 Super Leagues and 2 Elite Leagues – he averages 337 at the

offensive, has recorded 2,420 hits, 456 doubles, 360 home runs and 1,416 runs batted in.

A native of the Sancti Spiritus province, Cepeda has covered the Cuban team in glory and treasures an Olympic gold medal (Athens 2004) and several world and Pan-American medals, leaving an imprint and records that will be impossible to forget. His story has not ended yet, cause as he told **The Havana Reporter**, he will try to recover as soon as possible to go back to the fields in the next national series, scheduled for next March.

New Guinness Records in Sight

By Ángel **DARIÁN**

MATANZAS.- The search for three new Guinness records will be at the heart of the work Jhoen Lefont, Cuba's main exponent in ball control in the water and one of the best in the world, will undertake in 2024.

Popularly known as the "Cuban Soccer Dolphin" because of his extraordinary skills in the water, Lefont commented that he foresees to attempt three new Guinness records this year.

During the first three months of the year, he will make the first two attempts, aimed at breaking the record of 167 touches with

the head in one minute, while the third attempt will be aimed at breaking the number of touches (1,958) – records that are currently in his power.

Lefont added that he will make the third attempt during the second three-month period of the year, while participating in the movement-in-the-water modality, with the

hope of exceeding 600 meters – although this will be the first time he will make this attempt in open waters, at the Hemingway Marine, in Havana or in some beach area in Varadero, which would be an extra challenge. A native of Matanzas, Lefont explained that setting a Guinness record in his province would be an honor and a great joy, as up to the present, he has not made any attempt in the place in which he grew up as an athlete. I do not rule out the possibility of trying to set another record by the end of the year, although in that case in ballast modalities, said the former member of the National Water Polo team and the one who set a world record in that modality while holding a soccer ball in balance in the head, with a five-kilogram ballast in the waist (7.02.10 minutes). The athlete, 35, commented that 2023 was a successful year, with four world records, two in process of homologation and other two in new requests – achievements that would be impossible without the help of his coach, Jorge del Valle, the Cuban water polo team, the Cuban National Aquarium camera crews and many other people who support his career.

Until the present, Jhoen Lefont has set 20 world records, nine of which have been officially recognized and homologated by the Guinness World Records organization in three different categories: more consecutive touches to a soccer ball with the head, more consecutive touches to a soccer ball with the head in one minute and longer time holding a soccer ball in balance in the head.



Jhoen Lefont is searching for three new Guinness records. PHOTO: ACN.

African Friends Gathered in South Africa

By Manuel **VÁZQUEZ**

PRETORIA.- January 2024 witnessed a particular event: about 250 delegates from 28 countries who gathered in Cuba in the past and now met in South Africa, shared their passion for the island at the 7th African Continental Meeting of Solidarity with Cuba, held for three days in the outskirts of White River.

Members of political parties and solidarity groups from the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (Polisario), South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, China, Russia, the United States, Canada, Iran, Mozambique, Botswana, among others, attended the event.

Participants included South African Vice President and Deputy President of the African National Congress (ANC, Government party), Paul Mashatile; Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic Prime Minister, Buchraya Beyoun; South African International Relations and Cooperation minister, Naledi Pandor, and South African Communist Party Secretary General, Solly Mapaila.

During the meeting, several participants – many of whom had conducted free studies in Cuba years ago – stressed the reasons the peoples of the Global South have, particularly the African nations, to show



Delegates from 28 countries met in South Africa at the 7th African Continental Meeting of Solidarity with Cuba. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

their appreciation and solidarity with the Cuban people.

At the closing of the event, a plan of action and a final declaration were adopted, with concrete proposals to strengthen collaboration with the island in the fields of Education, Health, Science and Technology, Pan-African Solidarity, Economic Cooperation and People to People Solidarity. Initiatives related to Government to Government and diplomatic ties, in addition

to Culture, Women and Youth, were also adopted.

Participants urged to conduct peaceful, political demonstrations directed at the U.S. embassies in their countries denouncing the unfair and illegal blockade imposed on Cuba and the occupation of the Guantánamo naval base, and demanding the removal of the island from Washington's unilateral list of countries that allegedly sponsor terrorism.

In the Final Declaration, a call was made to collaborate with the BRICS countries in the search of international, alternative monetary and payment systems, including bank exchanges with Cuba.

At the closing of the event, Cuban ambassador to South Africa, Enrique Orta, recalled the historical ties between Africa and Cuba, which will continue being strong for future generations, he affirmed.

Hero of the Republic of Cuba and president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, Fernando González Llort, granted the posthumous Solidarity Order to Christopher Matlhako.

The distinction was granted to Matlhako, a former member of the Communist Party's Central Committee and secretary of its International Relations department, as well as secretary general of the Friends of Cuba Society (FOCUS), by decree of Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel and at the suggestion of González Llort.

Llort also granted the Solidarity Medal to FOCUS for its prolific and important contribution to the holding of regional events of solidarity with Cuba.

On behalf of FOCUS, the distinction was received by Hope Papo, Moeketsi Sekjokoane and Father Michael Lapsley, outstanding anti-apartheid leader and Honorary President of the Friends of Cuba Society.



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