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Living Life to the Full at the Zapata Swamp

By TeyunéDÍAZ

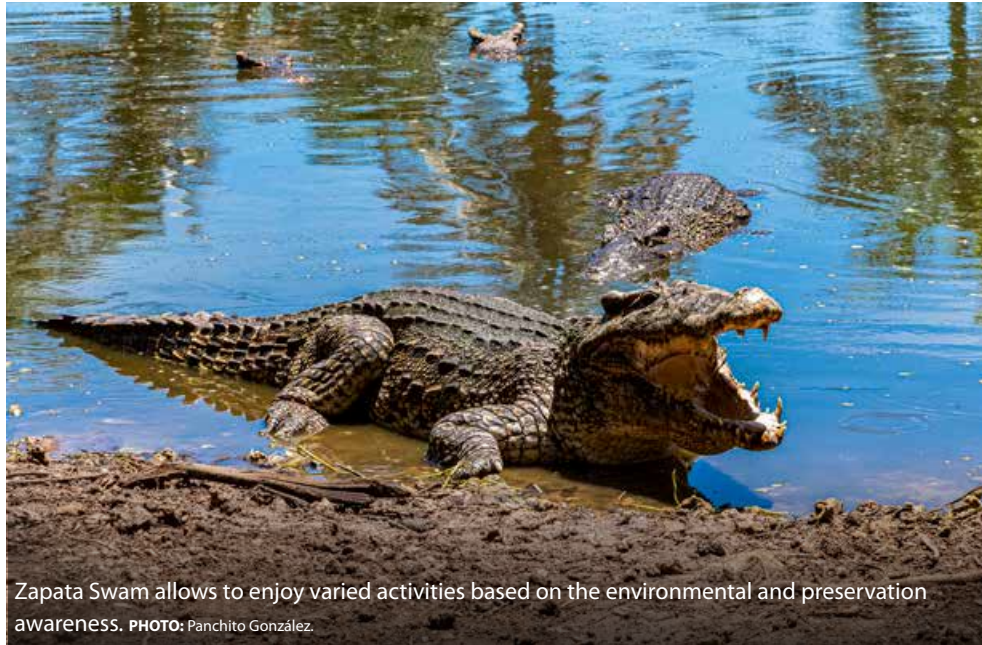
MATANZAS.- The Zapata Swamp's natural conditions are a main attraction for the practice of nature tourism in Cuba that offers visitors an unforgettable experience. Located at the southern part of the western Matanzas province, the site is considered the Caribbean's best preserved wetland and because of its extraordinary natural wealth, it is protected by three important management categories: Biosphere Reserve, Ramsar Site and National Park.

In an exclusive interview with **The Havana Reporter**, Magyury Fernández, Deputy Commercial Director of the tourist complex – managed by the Cubanacán Hoteles Hotel Chain – explained that those categories make the territory have a special peculiarity because of the high levels of preservation, the water reserves and the characteristics of the soil, the flora and fauna.

This scenario allows visitors to enjoy varied activities, such as bird watching, hiking, diving, river trips and sport fishing, all based on the environmental and preservation awareness, she said.

In order to welcome lovers of these practices, this tourist destination includes 400 rooms in five lodgings: the Batey Don Pedro, Guamá, Playa Larga and Playa Girón hotels and the Victoria de Girón popular camping site – the latter, addressed to the national tourism.

Fernández also commented that the site's historical markets include Germany, France and the United Kingdom, although in the last five years, Russia has had a sustained increase and has positioned itself in the area, especially for their nautical and fishing activities' preference.



Zapata Swam allows to enjoy varied activities based on the environmental and preservation awareness. PHOTO: Panchito González.

NEW FEATURES

Some of the territories' new tourist products are directed at nautical activities. At present, a group of proposals is being designed in the diving modality, including apnea diving, a discipline that relies on the use of the lungs and the voluntary holding of breathing in the water while swimming long distances or going into great depths. Fernández stressed that next October, the territory will host the Pan-American Freediving Championship, an initiative by Cuban record holder in that modality Pipín Ferrera. In that very scenario, the possibilities this product has beyond the competition will be presented.

Studies are also conducted to rescue the cave-diving activity, another attraction in the region following the characteristics of its soil. The Zapata Swamp has a cave system that goes from Playa Larga to Caleta Buena, for a total area of 11,700 hectares.

Other proposals include the development of nautical routes in the bay, the result of studies conducted in sea corridors that have not been implemented yet. This initiative is the result of Russian travelers' requests to live those experiences, she concluded.

National Parks and Tourism

By FranciscoMENÉNDEZ

HAVANA.- The protection of the environment in Cuba goes hand in hand with the recovery of the tourist activity, according to official statements on the topic, which stress the importance of being familiar with and preserving parks, areas and other denominations.

As a result, science, politics and tourism are part of the same equation when guaranteeing an archipelago for the future generations, as stated in the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) plans and programs.

Cuba has over 200 protected areas, important natural zones that are safeguarded and allow contributing to guaranteeing species' preservation.

The National Protected Areas Center is responsible for looking after the land or sea areas of national, regional or world interest, whose mission is to protect and preserve natural resources of the national heritage for the present and future generations and guarantee their sustainable development.

The center establishes different categories to classify protected areas: Natural Reserves, National Parks, Ecological Reserves, Floral Handling Reserves, Fauna Refuges, Outstanding Natural Elements and Protected Natural Landscapes.

Such classifications are in line with those established by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

Cuba's first area was the Pico Cristal National Park, in the Holguín province, created in 1930. After the triumph of the Revolution, in 1959, Natural Reserves were created, while the first Biosphere Reserve was established in 1985. Today's protected areas include the Viñales Valley, in the Pinar del Río province and the Alejandro de Humboldt Park, in the Guantánamo and Holguín provinces. The latter, in addition to the Desembarco del Granma National Park, were declared a World Natural Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Other areas include Sierra Cristal, one of Cuba's highest mountains located northeast of the Holguín province, which was also considered the country's first Natural Protected Area.



Cuba has over 200 protected areas, important natural zones that are safeguarded. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

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Miguel Barnet talks about Fidel Castro



Barnet considered a privilege to have shared moments of his life with the Commander in Chief.

PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

By AdisMARLEN

HAVANA.- Fidel was, above all, a man who practiced humanism, fought against evil and corruption, even against diseases, always in favor of human beings, in a global sense, recalled Cuban poet and ethnologist Miguel Barnet, who shared his valuable experiences with **The Havana Reporter**.

Perhaps the best tribute to the historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, in his 98th birthday anniversary, last August, are the verses of the person who shared his loyalty to the culture and the homeland where they were both born, in addition to their mutual admiration.

That is particularly seen in Barnet's poem "Fidel". It's true that poets capture life's moments and made them go down in history. Usually the vague and nostalgic past. Or the immediate present with its subtle fires and reverberations. But how hard it is to capture the future and put it forever in the life of all the poets, of all the people.

From the armchair in which that immense figure, blessed with a revolutionary thinking, sat down on several occasions at the intellectual's home, I carefully listen to anecdotes and praises. It is hard to find a political leader, a statesman with those features, a forerunner of Latin America's greatest emancipation movements, Barnet said.

To the author of the written word, it is a privilege to have shared moments of his life with the Commander in Chief: phone conversations early in the morning to comment on a book, travels to the United States and Spain, where they visited Fidel's family home in Lánacara.

Barnet recalled how worried the Commander in Chief was about the nutrition of the human species, even when

he underwent delicate health conditions, and the several times he visited him in his home.

He is one of the most extraordinary persons I have met, he commented. Politically, he was a genius and intellectually, a highly educated man, because deep inside, he was an intellectual, a writer.

At times in which the world is on the edge of the abyss, his thought and actions are as necessary as it is compulsory to turn to them in dialogue.

He would be really worried about everything that is happening in the world, particularly in the Middle East and Gaza, where a brutal genocide is taking place; and in relation to Artificial Intelligence, something important and deceptive at the same time, as there is no artificial intelligence, but natural, he affirmed.

In the face of the cyberspace culture, I believe he would have stood up for what he was: a gladiator, he stressed.

He was a unique and unrepeatable person, but above all, he was a leader who advocated humanist values at times in which everyone talked and talk about massacres and genocides. He loved human beings and also supported the highest value there might ever exist: peace.

In his opinion, a peace with ethical, moral and poetic values and not conditional on the hegemonic values that empires advocate for.

Almost by the end of the interview, Barnet described Fidel Castro as the greatest humanist leader of the 20th century; a natural person, deeply rooted in ethical values. A political leader with an emancipation vocation, the real follower of José Martí.

Cuban Drugs Undergo Clinical Trial in China

By IsauraDIEZ

BEIJING.- The Cuban-Chinese Biotech Pharmaceutical Limited (BPL) joint venture is getting ready to start clinical trial at the Itolizumab monoclonal antibody, of Cuban patent, which is used against self-immune diseases.

The above information was confirmed by general deputy director and representative of the Cuban BPL vice-presidency, Yanet Borrego, to **The Havana Reporter**. The official also added that those trials will be focused on Dermatomyositis and Graft-versus-Host diseases.

"We are making the technology transfer of the Cimavax's productive process, the vaccine against lung cancer that has already undergone 30 clinical studies worldwide," she said.

The scientist commented that the joint venture should be ready to start production and clinical trials of this second drug in China from 2025 to 2026.

"The company also works in the development of nine new products in cooperation with the Cuban side, which are undergoing the research and development phase and should reach the market in about ten years," she added.

Borrego also recalled that the Nimotuzumab humanized monoclonal antibody, of Cuban origin, is BPL's leading product. The drug, which was previously used here to treat pancreas and nose

and pharynx carcinoma, was recently registered in China for the treatment of head and neck cancer.

"Nimotuzumab is part of the medical insurance since 2015 and has benefitted about 300,000 Chinese patients," Borrego affirmed.

According to Cuban Ambassador to China, Alberto Blanco, bilateral relations between both nations in the biotechnology sector make a steady and good progress since the last 20 years.

"At present, we have three joint ventures that develop new biopharmaceutical products such as Nimotuzumab, for cancer treatment; Recombinant Interferon Alfa-2b, for hepatitis B treatment, and Ateromixol, PPG, to reduce cholesterol levels in blood," he explained.

The diplomat commented that solidarity between Cuba and China fosters the growth of the biopharmaceutical industry with the purpose to develop new products and technologies for the benefit of both peoples.

In an interview with THR, BPL director Bai Xianhong highlighted that Nimotuzumab was the first humanized monoclonal antibody in China since 2008, with positive results in the fight against nose and pharynx cancer.

At present, antibodies are an important part of the pharmaceutical candidates developed at the giant Asian nation and many are available at the international market.



There are three joint ventures that develop new biopharmaceutical products; Nimotuzumab, Recombinant Interferon Alfa-2b and Ateromixol. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

U.S.-Cuba, the Difficult Path to Understanding

WASHINGTON.- Not a few people here thought that history on the United States-Cuba relations would change when the Cuban flag was raised during the reopening of its embassy in Washington, nine years ago.

On July 20, 2015, relations were officially re-established and a cycle of diplomatic relations breaking-off that lasted over half a century, on the unilateral decision of the United States, came to an end. The path to rapprochement promised to come closer, people thought.

Journalist David Montgomery witnessed the event; he then covered stories for The Washington Post and so reflected on the article he published on July 21, 2015.

"I was hopeful that the governments were finally trying to restore relations," Montgomery told The Havana Reporter with the perception that what is actually happening on July 20, 2024, is a reversion on the steps taken at the time.

"Nine years later, perception shows a reversion, because since 2021, Cuba is again included in the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism," Montgomery said from his vision as a journalist.

The decision to again have full-right embassies in Washington and Havana happened after presidents Barack Obama and

Raúl Castro simultaneously announced on December 2014, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations.

In the article Montgomery wrote for The Post, he stressed that "it was remarkable how many non-Cubans knew the Cuban national anthem well enough to sing along (...) as the flag was raised over the newly re-established embassy on NW 16th Street. Then they joined in the delirious shouts of "Viva Cuba!" "It's an amazing moment," said Phyllis Bennis, a fellow with the Institute for Policy Studies. "In the decades-long effort to normalize relations with Cuba, to stop the U.S. attacks and hostility towards Cuba (...) Suddenly we have a victory. The flag going up ... that's huge."

"For those of us who were committed to the values and the aspirations of the Cuban Revolution, the flag, as Fidel said in April 1959 when he was in this building, was a reflection of Operation Truth," stated intellectual James Early.

On July 20 that year, amidst the emotion and the feeling for witnessing a historic moment, Early highlighted that raising that flag again "is a recognition of Cuba's right to sovereignty and self-determination."

The limestone and marble mansion opened as the Cuban Embassy in 1919 and quickly established itself as a

delightful society party venue, Montgomery recalled in his article.

Two years after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution – January 1st, 1959 – the Government of the United States decided to unilaterally break-off relations with the Caribbean nation (1961).

In 1977, during the administration of president Jimmy Carter, both parties signed an agreement through which Interest Sections were established: that of the United States in Havana and that of Cuba in Washington DC.

Although experts in the topic affirm that during the Barack Obama (2009-2017) administration, the full weight of the blockade was applied, some progress was made, like the elimination of Cuba from the arbitrary list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, on May 2015. In addition, with Obama, commercial flights and cruise ships travels resumed; direct delivery of mail started, and bilateral agreements for collaboration in different topics, such as health, environment, human and drug trafficking and telecommunications, were signed.

However, Republican successor Donald Trump reverted the progress made, to the point of adopting at least 243 additional coercive measures during his term at the Oval Office (2017-2021), with the purpose to strengthen the blockade on Cuba amidst his policy of maximum pressure.

A few days before leaving the post, on January 2021, Trump again included Cuba in the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, a decision the current Democratic president Joe Biden has remained loyal to, as when his term is almost over, he has not met his campaign promise of changing his predecessor's policy on Cuba.



Historic meeting in Havana between former presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro.

PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.



For the first time in 88 years, a president of the United States visited Cuba (March 2016).

WHO Acknowledges Cuban Scientists and Professionals

By Cira **RODRÍGUEZ**

HAVANA.- Cuban health scientists and professionals' reputation was acknowledged by director of the World Health Organization Department of Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness and Prevention, María D Van Kerkhove.



Legal, medical and penal controls protect solidarity pregnancy.

PHOTO: Juventud Rebelde.

The official highlighted the efforts these specialists make to share their knowledge and their preparedness in the face of complex social, health, environmental and economic conditions.

At a meeting with Cuban minister of Public Health, José Ángel Portal, Van Kerkhove knew about Cuba's will to find the answers to the different health challenges the world faces.

During her participation in the 18th International Workshop on Dengue and other Emerging Arboviruses, held from August 19 to 30 in this capital, the official knew about the Cuban health staff's commitment to dengue and other arboviruses' study, clinical handling and control in the region and the world.

The Cuban minister ratified the determination of the medical and scientific staff to share their knowledge and forge alliances, in order to continue reaching consensus and doing joint projects in favor of life.

Portal highlighted the presence of the WHO official in Havana, whom he told that amidst such a complex context, that agency and PAHO have become a support to overcome the different health challenges and foster policies and programs focused on the preservation of the lives of all the people.

We appreciate the support received from both organizations to materialize strategies that truly lead to equity in universal

health access and coverage, especially at a time in which social perception on that right and a healthy life, has changed a lot.

"In the present scenario, everyone's sensitive support and collaboration are essential to strengthen community participation and the responsibility of the people and the health systems as a whole, under the approach of 'One Health,' which can also lead to higher coverage and access to essential medications, specially vaccines," said Dr Maria D Van Kerkhove.

Accompanied by Dr Andrea Vicari, head of PAHO Unit for Infectious Threats Management, Van Kerkhove appreciated the invitation to attend the 18th International Workshop on Dengue and other Emerging Arboviruses, held at the Pedro Kourí Tropical Medicine Institute (IPK), a center of reference for infectious diseases' research, diagnosis, handling and treatment. At the meeting, PAHO representative in Cuba, Dr Mario Cruz Peñate, praised the close collaboration the Cuban professionals provide in the health field, as a sign of medicine's real essence.

He also highlighted the work and the talent of the specialists and scientists formed in the island and ratified the challenge of defending the role the Cuban health staff play in the programs directed at diseases' prevention and cure, worldwide.

"We will continue looking for spaces to consolidate the health progress and achievements reached in favor of life," stated Cruz Peñate.

High-Tech Neonatal Screening System

By Alfredo **BOADA**

HAVANA.- Specialists of the Cuban Neurosciences Center (CNEURO) developed a neonatal screening system to early detect hearing and sight disorders among newborn babies.

The device, called Infantix, is the first technology of its type in the world and is able to differentiate between conductive losses and those caused by neural damages, the local press indicated.

Head of the CNEURO project, Telecommunications and Electronics engineer Ernesto Velarde, commented that this scientific tool also has a system designed to connect different modules, depending on the test and sign records.

To conduct the otoacoustic emissions, the module is equipped with a device that includes microphones and receivers, as the clinical test consists in the emission of a sound and the reception of the echo, he stressed.

That allows obtaining information on the functioning of the middle and inner ear, and based on that data, the equipment makes the required analysis and emits a result.

In case of a potential sight problem, the patient receives a visual stimulus and

the sifting or screening system evaluates the response of the brain. That allows evaluating features such as the state of the retina and the optic nerve or the part of the brain cortex responsible for visual processing.

These screenings make it easy to detect different visual disorders such as congenital cataracts and optic nerve neuropathies.

The importance of this means of diagnosis lies on the fact that it allows detecting, as soon as possible, any hearing or sight disorder newborn babies might have, through a universal examination and before discharging babies from maternity hospitals.

International and national investigations show that babies that are born deaf or suffer a partial hearing loss but receive adequate treatment in the first six months acquire the same cognitive skills when they reach the age of five as children who do not suffer from hypoacusia (the world's most frequent congenital disorder), and even have a normal life.

In 2019, Infantix was granted the sanitation license by the Center for the State Control of Medication, Medical Equipment and Devices for hearing screenings, and in 2020, for sight screenings.

A clinical trial was recently conducted at the Ramón González Coro Maternity Hospital in Havana, with 300 babies of more than 48 hours of birth, to evaluate the system's performance, with excellent results, Velarde indicated.

As part of the Adelante 2 international project, Infantix is part of the technology of the Mexico National Autonomous University (Querétaro) Neurodevelopment Unit and the Mexican Children and Women Hospital.

Marine Biodiversity

By Lourdes **PÉREZ**

HAVANA.- Cuba fosters a study in collaboration with international bodies to know the state of marine resources and guarantee a profitable and sustainable fishing exploitation in its southeastern platform.

Actions are addressed at strengthening capacities of the Fishing Research Center and the technical departments attached to fishing entities located in the Guacanayabo Gulf, indicated the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) representation in the island.

The Cuban Ministry of Food Industry also receives FAO technical assistance and the financing of the World Environment Fund.

The initiative is part of the CONPESCAS Guacanayabo project, which contributes to marine biodiversity conservation through the management of the southeastern platform's fishing resources in the municipalities of Amancio Rodríguez, Las Tunas province; Manzanillo, Granma province, and Santa Cruz del Sur, Camagüey province.

With a total of about 1.3 million dollars, CONPESCAS Guacanayabo is in tune with the Fishing Law approved in 2019 and the Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutritional Security Law.

To study fishing resources in this area, georeferencing, positioning and observation, physical-chemical measuring and oceanographic devices are used, in addition to diving tools and equipment that guarantee a systematic evaluation of the populations and habitats submitted to fishing exploitation.

Information technologies and means of transportation that facilitate the management of processes linked to the Santa Cruz del Sur Fishing Company, in Camagüey; the Industrial Fishing Company, in Granma, and the Guayabal Entrepreneurial Base Company, in Las Tunas, are also used.

Under the principle of blue transformation, FAO fosters the adoption of measures that strengthen aquatic food systems' efficiency, inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability to face food insecurity.



Areas with favorable conditions were mostly identified in the north and central-eastern coast.

PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Thais Valdés Returns to the Big Screen

By: Ibis**GRADE**

HAVANA.- Actress Thais Valdés, a well-known face in the Cuban cinema, always responds with pleasure to Gerardo Chijona's call, and that is what she did in *La fiesta* (The party), a film that is undergoing the shooting stage. After a long absence from the big screen, this has been a happy reunion, the artist

told **The Havana Reporter** in an exclusive interview in which she also offered details about the character she plays in this new production: Maritza.

I cannot say no to Chijona because there will always be good results, a nice working environment and a lot of learning. For that reason, when he first told me about the project, in 2019, I immediately told him: you know I will always say yes, she stressed.

These days of shooting, I have had a wonderful time; I once again had the chance of shooting scenes with Isabel Santos, working with Osvaldo Doimeadiós, Héctor Noas and my endless partner Vladimir Cruz, the actress said. Returning to the cinema has been a huge joy; sometimes, reunions can have a sad tone or be nostalgic, but this has been really nice; it totally changed my life, she added. "Reunion with the cinema, with Cuba, its beauty, the sea, my family, friends, neighbors, has been a party."

I assumed Maritza with great maturity, in spite of having been away from the world of films, because in Mexico, I have only worked in the theater; but there is something that stays in you, that cannot be cured nor go away; when you learn something well, you never forget it," the actress stressed.

If Carla Pérez, in the film *Nada* (Nothing), was easy to me because it had a lot to do with me, Maritza has practically nothing to do with me, and in spite of that, I could quickly find the resources and elements to be in the shoes of that character and I have enjoyed it a lot, she affirmed.

"That is the advantage of age; it gives us the physical and psychological maturity that

allows us to play characters peacefully and it is a pleasure to return to the cinema again with Chijona, whom I know since the beginning of the 1990s and love a lot."

When he invited me to shoot the film *Adorables mentiras* (Adorable lies), he already had a solid cast, including Isabel Santos and Luis Alberto García, Jorge Cao, Alicia Bustamante...

I was then the young actress who was beginning her career and we created a mutual trust, she recalled.

After that experience, the film *Un paraíso bajo las estrellas* (A paradise under the stars) was shot, in which Chijona proposed her to act in 1994, when they were in New York, attending a film exhibition.

That project was paused for a while, waiting for financing and I thought that maybe in that period, he could look for a better actress for the film, someone who could sing and dance, like Beatriz Valdés, the artist recalled. He went with me every day to the Tropicana Cabaret for me to take my lessons, to rehearsals and a great complicity and affection was born between us."

Then, I got away from the cinema and went to Mexico, where I have worked in the theater and retook my passion for teaching, Valdés commented.



Actress Thais Valdés and director Gerardo Chijona . PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Modo Van Van, Musical Connection with the Dancing Audience

By Danay**GALLETTI**

HAVANA.- The popular Cuban band Los Van Van again made a musical connection with the dancing audience with its most recent record production, *Modo Van Van*, present in digital platforms and national and foreign scenarios.

The band's director, Samuel Formell, told **The Havana Reporter** that this album is "varied, lively and can be danced" and added that during its six-month tour, its themes were included among the first places in the radio stations or among the most heard on the Internet.

The instrumentalist – the son of famous composer, bassist, arranger and founder of the band, Juan Formell – commented that even though there is "so much music" at present, the reception of this phonogram by lovers of this type of sounds is undeniable.

According to Formell, promotion in television programs also allowed the audience to prefer themes such as *Bla, bla, bla*; *Tienes que parar*, and *Perfectamente imperfecta*, the latter, played by his sister Vanessa Formell.

"I have read several opinions by the Van Van followers on the social media and they say that this is a record to be danced. Mixing and mastering was done in California (the United States). It is an album that is heard well," he affirmed.

He added that during the band's recent tour of Europe, those who went to the shows already knew the record and asked for certain songs; "in six months, it has made a good progress." After a three-year pause the band made, *Modo Van Van* is the result of the "environment, the liveliness and the street slang," which is especially present in the choirs of songs such as *Tienes que parar*.

The album, promoted after about two years of work, includes nine themes by Samuel Formell, Abdel Rasalps, Jorge Leliebre, Juan Formell, Roberto Hernández, Marlon Pijuan, Efraín Chibás and Calixto Cayava – eight of which are new and one is a version of a 1980s song.

Specialists affirm that this is an original and modern proposal, an "exquisite and well-recorded album" that does not abandon one of its distinctive features: the inclusion of typical expressions, the charm and the humor that characterize the national idiosyncrasy, in an impressive balance of music, text, orchestration and recording.

The work shows the evolution of the song, a rhythm derived from the son montuno and created by this band as of the 1970s, and includes the electronic pads that Formell used in the 1980s, "a mixture that is part of the Van Van and its innovative sonority."

The creation of the lyrics is another essential element of each of the band's proposals; "it cannot be vulgar nor aggressive,

nor we use words that can lead to violence; we are very careful about that."

Modo Van Van, produced for the national market by the Bis Music Record Company and for the international market by Amboss Media, was made in memory of guitarist, bassist and composer Juan Carlos Formell (1964-2023).



Director Samuel Formell said that it is an album that is heard well. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.



Voces del Sur Global
Voices of the Global South



Hotels Full of Mystery, Stories and Charm

By JeanD'LUX

HAVANA.- Several hotels in the city are full of stories and legends linked to characters that, trapped in time, arouse great interest.

Such stories on the Havana hotels are part of the strategies authorities use to benefit from the splendor those establishments had in the yesteryear and arouse the curiosity of travelers attracted to the country's history and culture.

One of those places is the Capri Hotel, a facility that reopened its doors on December 2013 and is a special attraction for those who met Cuba in ancient times or simply prefer to enjoy a downtown building, which is also the case of the Nacional, Sevilla or Riviera hotels.

All four facilities have an initial bond with the mafia, which took possession of Havana in the 1940s and 1950s, to the point that in one of The Godfather sagas, the Cuban Hotel Nacional and a mafia meeting there, in 1946, is mentioned.

The Sevilla Biltmore Hotel, next to the Prado promenade, was then known as the Gran Hotel Sevilla, which was opened on March 22, 1908 and was the first luxury establishment Havana had. Italian tenor Enrico Caruso or U.S. diva Josephine Baker were some of the celebrities that stayed there.



The project of Capri Hotel was run by Meyer Lansky.

PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

In addition to its charms, the Sevilla Hotel was also the headquarters of an undercover mafia boss, Don Amleto Battisti y Lora, who took control of the hotel's administration as of 1939 and reigned in a world of vice and shady businesses, such as horse races, casinos, organized prostitution, bank companies and connections with the international mafia.

The hotel was also run by the family of Calabrian Don Amadeo Barletta Barletta, who helped white-collar delinquency

take roots in Cuba and even represented Benito Mussolini's interests in the Americas, in addition to being considered a double intelligence agent by historians.

The Capri Hotel, for its part, was linked to a law signed in 1955 by president Fulgencio Batista (Hotel Law 2070) which favored fiscal incentives, government loans and casino licenses. That project was run by Meyer Lansky, another gangster who established his headquarters at the Riviera Hotel.

The Capri opened its doors on November 1957 to become one of the first hotels located in Havana's modern zone, just two blocks from the Hotel Nacional, with an attractive casino and a peculiar rooftop pool.

Santo Trafficante Jr., from Tampa, Florida, was its owner and the casino was run by Nicolás Di Costanzo and Charles Turín (aka Carlos Tourine and Charley The Blade).

Perhaps one of the most important mafia cores was the Riviera Hotel, run by the bloody hand of Meyer Lansky, who had a record of victims and crimes.

Those hotels would belong to a larger chain the Italian-U.S. mafia was planning to build as of the 1950s, along the Havana seawall.

Such plans included the Deauville Hotel and the very Hemingway Marine, the latter, in the capital's west, with a series of private clubs in that area. However, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution thwarted such project.



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Ecotur, 28 Years of Work

By Benjamín **MICERINOS**

HAVANA.- The Ecotur S.A. Travel Agency celebrated 28 years of work with operations that include the most important nature and adventure tourism activities in the Cuban archipelago.

The agency, founded on August 13, 1996, promotes nature tourism and offers

specialized services nationwide, addressed at an ecological-responsible segment of the tourist market.

The company offers trips and programs in several tourist modalities, based on the specific characteristics of the natural, social, historical and cultural resources of each Cuban region.

It also provides stays and visits to Natural Protected Areas, National Parks and Ramsar

Sites, in addition to hiking activities, visits to exotic animal farms or reservoirs, birdwatching, horseback riding, boat trips to protected keys, diving activities, snorkeling, sport fishing and sport hunting in specially controlled areas.

Ecotur offers Jeep tours in almost all trips, allowing visitors to live an adventure in which natural, historical and cultural values are shared in exceptional areas.

Several farms and establishments provide rural lodging, with the comfort and services needed to have a nice stay and with the possibility of having exchanges with the rural people on life in these areas. These facilities are managed by the National Company for Flora and Fauna Preservation. The agency has a staff of highly-qualified tourist guides who speak several languages, in addition to specialists on different tourist modalities who can fully meet the needs of this type of service, which allows the entity to be a leader in nature tourism in Cuba.

Ecotur provides specialized attention to VIP tourists, FAM groups, prospection trips, incentive groups, as well as assistance and representation services to tour operators and travel agencies.

With headquarters in Havana, the agency has 14 offices nationwide, including seven territorial entities in the main tourist destinations, which are managed by experienced tourist specialists and professionals.

Ecotur also has contractual relations with haulage contractors, hotels, restaurants, museums and other entities that allow commercializing all modalities.

In addition, it is also the official body responsible for the organization and reception of participants in the Turnat International Nature Tourism Event, held every two years in Cuba, whose next edition will take place from September 24 to 29 in Cuba's eastern region.

The event is an opportunity to show, exchange and share opinions and experiences on nature tourism and know about the products and destinations Cuba will offer for the new season.



Ecotur, promotes nature tourism and offers specialized services nationwide. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Over 1,300 Photovoltaic Pumping Equipment

By Manuel B. **HUDSON**

HAVANA.-Cuba announced the installment of 1,312 photovoltaic solar energy water pumping equipment with a power of 10 kilowatts (kW), to move forward toward the change of energy matrix in the country, official sources indicated.

Aqueduct, Sewer and Pluvial Drain director at the Higher Water and Sanitation Entrepreneurial Organization, Annalie Labrada, told the local press that the project foresees the installation of three lots in consecutive years.

The first of these, which started in 2023, already totals 658 equipment installed, which are directed at the Pinar del Río, Artemisa, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spíritus, Ciego de Ávila, Holguín and Las Tunas provinces.

Until August 14, 625 equipment were already providing their services, benefiting over 347,000 people, the director added.

These systems generate small expenses and are usually located in remote places or even provincial capitals where they supply water to facilities such as daycare centers, hospitals or schools, including a whole town.

At present, Cuba has about 3,600 water pumping equipment of different power and the intention is to foster, later on, the assembly of devices of up to 30 kW. The change in the energy matrix potentially saves 17 gigawatts per year, which means 10,000 tons of diesel.



The first 658 equipment installed are in eight Cuban provinces. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Gibara Film Festival's Successful Celebration

By Alma **LABRADA**

HOLGUÍN.- La mujer salvaje again won another award after winning the Lucía Prize for Best Feature Fiction Film in the 28th edition of the Gibara's International Film Festival, recently held in this eastern Cuban province.

In addition to this film, produced by Alán González in 2023, Lapso (Brazil, 2023), by Caroline Cavalcanti, also won the Best Short Fiction Film.

Los océanos son los verdaderos continentes (Cuba-Italy, 2023), by Tommaso Santombrogio, ran off with the special prize, in addition to being previously considered as the Best Feature Fiction Film by the Cuban Film Press Association.

A special mention was also granted to Si alguna vez (Cuba, 2023), by Annia Quesada; Sin papeles (Canada, 2023), by Christian de la Cortina, and Saudade (Cuba-Portugal, 2023), by Sandra Ramy, Sandra Lopes, Inti Herrera and X Alfonso.

The Documentary and Animation Jury granted the Best Documentary Prize to Un hogar sin armario (Spain-Argentina, 2023), by Eduardo Cubillo, while the Best Animation award went to Amapolas en mi ventana (Colombia, 2023), by Grettel Melissa Quintana.

In this category, a mention was also granted to Jíbaro (short documentary film, Cuba, 2023), by Osmanys Sánchez; Assum Preto, un grito desde el margen (short documentary film, Brazil, 2023), by Cícero Fraga; and Techo de cristal (short animation film, Argentina, 2022), by Liliana Romero.

In this edition, the Gibara's International Film Festival again held the Cine en Construcción (Cinema in construction) section, which awarded Boxeo Habana Social Club (Feature documentary in construction, Italy-Spain-Cuba), by Cristiano Regina.

This work will receive support for its translation, subtitle, delivery, promotion in international festivals and distribution management by Magale.

El día del cobro (short fiction film in construction, Cuba), by Luis Lago, and Reportaje (feature fiction film in construction, Mexico), by Nicolás Gutiérrez Wenhammar, were granted a mention. The first of these two proposals will also count on Magale's support, while the second one will receive editing guidance by Estudios Churubusco SA. Sergio Benvenuto, director of the Gibara Film Festival, announced that as of 2025, the event will be named Gibara's International Low Budget Cinema Festival, according to Humberto Solás' foundational basis. In addition, its original date, in the month of April, will be retaken.



La mujer salvaje won Lucía Prize for Best Feature Fiction Film. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Acosta Danza Yunior International Debut in the United Kingdom

By The Havana Reporter **EDITORIAL STAFF**

LONDON.-Acosta Danza Yunior will have its international debut at MAST Mayflower Studios, in the British city of Southampton, with a program that celebrates Cuba's rich folklore traditions.

The group, composed of young dancers of the famous Cuban dancer Carlos Acosta's academy, will perform from September 19 to 21, stated its director.

From September 19 to 21, our talented young dancers will go on the stage to present Green Shoots, Acosta said in his official Facebook account.

"I am proud to have seen these dancers grow and prepare to showcase their artistry on an international stage," he added.

A few months ago, in February this year, Acosta Danza Yunior presented that very performance at the Martí Theater, in Havana and won the recognition of the audience and the specialized critics with choreographies by Norge Cedeño, Susana Pous and Raúl Reinoso, among others.

Green Shoots shows maestro Carlos Acosta's usual style, which includes contemporary dance and classical ballet styles.

Founded in 2023, Acosta Danza Yunior's objective is to develop the next generation of dancers that serve as reserve for Carlos Acosta's company.



Acosta Danza Yunior will have its international debut at MAST Mayflower Studios, from September 19 to 21. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

ALBA-TCP Ratifies Stance against Interference

By Yolaidy **MARTÍNEZ**

CARACAS.- The 11th Extraordinary Summit of ALBA-TCP leaders concluded with a joint declaration that ratified commitment with the principles of integrity, non-interference and respect to its member states' domestic issues.

In the nine-point text, the heads of State and Government of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) condemned any coup or attempted coup against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, considering that these are a violent, illegal and unconstitutional method and a threat to democracy, peace and life itself.

They also rejected destabilizing plans and actions fostered by foreign actors in their eagerness to disregard the will of the Latin American and Caribbean nations, democratically and legitimately stated at the polls.

The ALBA-TCP leaders rejected the communicational war "full of hatred, intolerance, discrimination and disdain in the social media, strategically directed at the younger generations of the Venezuelan society" to foster violence and barbarity.

They declared themselves against vandalistic attacks and acts directed at the people, the public infrastructure, religious and native symbols that are part of the Venezuelan

idiosyncrasy, trying to give an impression of chaos, when the July 28 elections were held in peace and democracy.

The leaders denounced disregard for the electoral result by a "fascist and violent sector" of the Venezuelan opposition, which openly called for intervention and more sanctions on the country, to the detriment of the people.

The ALBA-TCP leaders urged the international community to respect the Venezuelan's right to sovereignty and self-determination and regretted that some governments question the Bolivarian Republic's electoral results and release communiques and statements against the reality of such territory.

"It is essential that all States recognize the principle of non-interference in domestic issues and work together to foster dialogue and constructive cooperation instead of division," they stressed in the document.

Among other issues, the leaders welcomed the re-election of president Nicolas Maduro; acknowledged Venezuela's sovereign right to solve its own issues and reaffirmed Latin America and the Caribbean's proclamation as a zone of peace.

The ALBA-TCP extraordinary summit, virtually held, was headed by Maduro and was attended by presidents Miguel Díaz-Canel (Cuba), Luis Arce (Bolivia) and Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), in addition to prime ministers Ralph Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), Dickon Mitchell (Grenada), Roosevelt Skerit (Dominica), Terrance

Drew (Saint Kitts and Nevis) and Philip J. Pierre (Saint Lucia). Honduras ambassador to Venezuela Scarleth Romero also attended the summit as guest.

According to Venezuelan minister of Foreign Affairs Yvan Gil, the purpose of the event was to establish a position in solidarity with the Venezuelan government and its people, against the interference of the United States and European Union nations.



Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel attended the 11th Extraordinary Summit of ALBA-TCP leaders. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

Negative Impact of Coercive Measures in Progress

By Livia **RODRÍGUEZ**

NEW DELHI.- Cuban minister of Foreign Affairs Bruno Rodríguez denounced that coercive measures such as the U.S. blockade on Cuba are a serious obstacle to the nation's full economic and social development.

In his speech at the 3rd Voice of Global South Summit, organized by India in virtual format, the Cuban minister urged to multiply solidarity and cooperation in the face of coercion, unilateralism and selfishness.

Rodríguez recalled that for over 60 years, his people has suffered the serious and negative impact of the asphyxiating economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States, which has intensified since 2019.

He also added that the arbitrary and fraudulent inclusion of Cuba in the Department of State's unilateral list of nations that allegedly sponsor terrorism, which cannot be proved, strengthens even more the effects of that inhumane policy.

The minister availed the occasion to thank the international community for the signs of solidarity with Cuba and for their rejection of the unilateral coercive measure systems imposed against the island.

Similarly, he stated his country's gratitude for being invited to participate in this event, which is a forum to debate and channel developing nations' efforts to face huge

challenges amidst a complex international context, he said.

In that sense, the Cuban minister stressed that if we really hope to move forward toward the development of all these nations, it is essential to articulate a new international economic order and reformulate the present financial architecture, upon the basis of equity, sovereign equality, mutual benefit and cooperation.

We urgently need to implement, without delay, the environment agenda that was internationally approved, in accordance with the principles of equity, common but different responsibilities according to the respective capacities of each nation, he underlined.

The Cuban minister added that facing climate change must not become an additional burden the countries of the South cannot bear; thus, new support to cooperation and financing to those nations is essential in that endeavor, he commented.

The head of the Cuban diplomacy also highlighted that the South's demand for development is part of the battle for life preservation in the planet.

In this regard, he pointed out that those values and principles, in addition to the South's decisive unity, marked Cuba's presidency of the Group of 77 plus China in 2023 and showed the possibility developing countries have to become a relevant actor and an influential interlocutor in favor of the interests of the peoples.

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Jardines del Rey: A Tourist Pillar in Cuba

By Roberto F. CAMPOS

HAVANA- The Jardines del Rey region, in Cuba, remains one of the most attractive tourist locations, with its natural environment and plenty of comfort.

Located in the Cuban north-center zone, it includes a key area with great tourist development, because of the natural beauty that turns this site into a worldwide famous scenario.

This region is the country's fourth recreational site as regards its hotel capacity, after Havana, Varadero and Holguín. It includes several keys with tourist potential, at the Sabana-Camagüey archipelago.

The area's name is linked to Spanish explorer Diego Velázquez, who, in 1513-14, wanted to render tribute to King Ferdinand the Catholic.

The place, an abandoned site that was frequented at the time by coalmen and fishermen with temporary settlement in the area, has become an ideal place for perfect holidays.

The area was immortalized by U.S. writer Ernest Hemingway in his book *Islands in the Stream*. The biggest of these islands, Cayo Coco – the fourth largest in the Cuban archipelago – is the most important in the region.

Tourist development plans also include the Guillermo, Cruz and Paredón Grande keys, with a potential of up to 22,000 rooms.



Colombia: Change, Challenges

By Ivette **FERNÁNDEZ**

BOGOTÁ.- The arrival of former rebel guerrilla Gustavo Petro to Casa de Nariño marked the beginning of a new period for Colombia, which offered thousands of hopes to those who until then had nothing or almost nothing.

August 7, 2022, opened a new chapter for the South American nation, which would

finally seek the recognition workers, farmers and the majority of the population, of humble origin, urgently needed in a country considered one of the most unequal in the Americas.

The leader of the Colombia Humana Political Party had so promised in his passionate campaign discourses, which ultimately earned him the highest support ever received by a presidential candidate, with 11,281,000 votes.

Two years after such a milestone, at the very half of his term, Petro considers that his main accomplishment is having got 1,600,000 people out of poverty last year, in comparison to 2022, which represents 10 percent less of the population affected by that scourge.

HALF-OF-TERM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

According to political scientist, professor and political analyst Federico García, the president's best decision has been in the social policy field, and the change of priority in order to reduce inequality breaches.

Secondly, he focused on international relations, in which an independent, sovereign policy has been built, based on Colombia's interests and those of the region. In the meantime, in the economic field, the specialist affirmed that even though the model is still the same, there are a series of state interventions that are important.

He added that in particular, there has been debate on the need to overcome the hegemony of the neoliberal, ideological economic model and the importance of moving to scenarios of social justice and the construction of a social state of right.

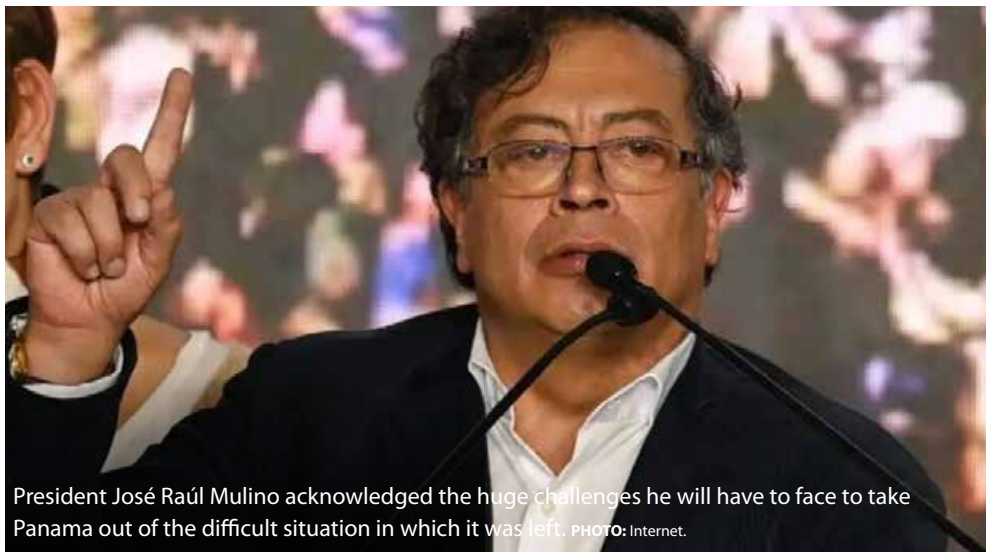
"The government's policies clearly have a social-democratic tone, which seek to change

that approach from the private to the public and open debate on the outdated, individualist neoliberal model and move to solidarity, collective and mutual assistance forms of relations," he told **The Havana Reporter**.

To García, the main obstacle Petro faces is the opposition of a right used to exercise domination in a unilateral way, without rendering accounts and which considers the country as its estate.

Such traditional elites are the owners of the land, the mass media, the industry and they form a destructive and intolerable opposition with which it is difficult to have talks to and find paths for conflict resolution, he stressed. Teacher and trade union leader José Arnulfo Bayona, for his part, stated that in addition to those elements on international policy, the proposal of replacing fossil fuels by clean energies should be added as points of reference in these two years.

He also mentioned other aspects, such as the proposal of total peace, the increase of the education budget, the purge of the military and police forces leaders and the allocation of resources seized from drug dealers to farmers robbed by paramilitaries and its business and para-political allies.



President José Raúl Mulino acknowledged the huge challenges he will have to face to take Panama out of the difficult situation in which it was left. PHOTO: Internet.

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Opportunities for PYMES Bulevar

By Mima **GONZÁLEZ**

HAVANA.- The Cuban PYMES Bulevar enterprise, an experience that gathers the national business sector in a platform that allows entities having their own website and showing their products in the electronic market, celebrated its second anniversary.

PYMES Bulevar Marketplace director, Yuli Massiá, told **The Havana Reporter** that they are an online store platform that allows private businesspeople, state companies and self-employed workers to coexist in an environment that facilitates wholesale and retail scheme options to the public in different currencies.

It is a hundred-percent Cuban software, developed by Guajiritos S.R.L., which allows about 60 suppliers to make payments from Cuba or abroad – in foreign, national and freely convertible currencies – in a safe environment, in addition to having their own online store, she said.

According to the director, a business per se is important, but understanding the relevance of existing in an online world also is.

Massiá added that the platform provides payment facilities to clients, in addition to being in tune with the country's policies and bank discounts in place to foster

bankarization, and is connected to national and foreign payment methods.

On payments in national currency, she commented that they endorse bankarization

and computerization of the society, so that clients can benefit from the e-commerce facilities and get the six-percent discount in that respect in all stores.

In the future, PYMES Bulevar hopes to expand its work nationwide, with the initial projection of going from the Pinar del Río province – with all its municipalities – to Matanzas province, always based on the premise of being an interface that represents each of its suppliers, she affirmed.

This two years, the company has been really successful, thus the tribute to those who trusted in us and are part of the business family that offers its products and services here, Massiá said.

An acknowledgment to those who devised the best communication and expansion strategies, the best presence; to those who trusted in the project since the very beginning, as this is still undergoing development.

The acknowledgements PYMES Bulevar granted to its suppliers include the Permanence Award to Dorian Cuba; the Growth Award to Mercado Montequín; the Collaboration Award to Ke Detalles; the Productive Connection Award to the Gran Comercial state company, and the Best Commercial Strategy Award to Mercatinis.



PYMES Bulevar Marketplace director, Yuli Massiá. PHOTO: Panchito González.

ECLAC Predicts Increase of Low Productivity Jobs

By Carmen **ESQUIVEL**

SANTIAGO DE CHILE.- The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) warned that the region's low growth trap generates low productivity jobs and the increase of informal employment.

During the release of the "Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean 2024" in this Chilean capital,

Executive Secretary of this UN body, José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, stated that in the 2015-2024 period, the area only showed a 0.9 percent growth, below the level seen in the Lost Decade (1980s).

Leaving domestic problems aside, our countries are under the influence of global issues, such as the fall of the world's economy, the contraction of the international trade and geopolitical pressures that cause high levels of uncertainty, he said.

According to the senior official, this situation has a direct impact on the capacity to generate quality jobs, especially in the formal sector.

From 2013 to 2023, the creation of new jobs in the region barely averaged 1.3 percent, significantly smaller than the 3.9 percent recorded in the 1970s or the 2.3 percent in the 1990s.

There is another finding, though, which is much more worrying, because an evil structural change has happened, as most of the placements are directed at sectors of lower productivity, instead of going in the opposite direction, Salazar-Xirinachs said.

In this regard, he mentioned what happened in the services sector, which went from 28.5 to 75 percent of total employment in 70 years, though with a high level of informality and a low economic productivity.

Agricultural activity, on the contrary, concentrated over 50 percent of the labor force in 1950 and today barely reaches 15 percent.

Another disturbing issue ECLAC mentioned is the increase of informal employment, with over half of the people employed – a number that, instead of reducing, has increased in the last ten years.

The report indicates that being a woman increases the risk of falling in that sector and if other people are dependent on them, probability is a lot higher.

Groups such as the young, the elderly or those living in rural areas and with a low educational level are more prone to suffer this problem, while those who have a technical or university formation usually access higher-quality jobs.

This shows the importance of a significant increase of public and private investment in structural reforms, to make progress in current and future workers' qualification, stated ECLAC Executive Secretary.



From 2013 to 2023, the creation of new jobs in the region barely averaged 1.3 percent. PHOTO: Internet.

Update of Economic Actors' Norms

By MaríaJULIA

HAVANA.- The Cuban government published new norms to regulate the activity of non-state economic actors, with the purpose to foster goods and services production in the nation.

The Gaceta Oficial No.78, published on August 19, includes the regulations in question in six Decree-Laws, two Decrees and several Resolutions by different bodies.

According to the documents, the new norms are related to the exercise of self-employment; micro, small and medium-sized companies (MIPYMES), and non-agricultural cooperatives. They deal with issues such as social security special payment system and tax requests; procedures for the creation, merge, division and termination of such entities; economic hiring issues, and public tender procedures.

These legal norms enter into force 30 days after their publication in the Gaceta Oficial.

In statements to **The Havana Reporter**, president of the National Institute of Non-State Economic Actors, Mercedes López, explained that the legal body is the result of an extensive analysis process that started in 2023 with the purpose to update several legislations, in force since 2021.

She added that all bodies of the State Central Administration, territorial governments, Municipal Administration Councils and a representation of economic actors, were consulted.



The new norms are related to the exercise of self-employment, MIPYMES, and non-agricultural cooperatives. PHOTO: Prensa Latina

Water and Mine Studies' Updating

By CamilaMENDIETA

HAVANA.- Ongoing scientific studies will allow Cuba to have new maps on ground water resources and geological features, including mine potential, specialists told the local press.

According to statements of Geology director at the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MINEM), Enrique Castellanos, experts of different entities attached to the Land Water Management Entrepreneurial Group work on the drafting of a hydro-geological map on a scale of 1:100 000.

As soon as studies finish in a particular area, their results start being implemented immediately in local land water

management with different purposes, said Castellanos, a doctor of Technical Sciences.

The expert explained that the new map will have 97 pages, 15 of which have already been drafted and 18 are undergoing writing stage. He added that this work is conducted within a general timetable, which is foreseen to conclude on 2032.

The main purpose is to provide researchers and decision-makers with an efficient consultation tool, in order to plan the use of the country's ground water resources, which are more and more limited, in a rational and sustainable way, he stressed.

Information on the national potential is expected to be updated as well, in order to meet the economy and the population's most pressing needs.

In addition to being an important scientific contribution for permanent and renewed knowledge on ground water reserves, each paper includes detailed information on the technical aspects of the area's hydro-geology, the official said.

The expert also commented that in addition to the printed version, the map is available on a digital medium and that information is part of Cuba's geological data bank.

Castellanos also affirmed that professionals and technicians of the GEOMINSAL Group work on the drafting of Cuba's Geological Map, on a scale of 1:50 000, at MINEM's request.

According to the doctor of Sciences, this is a highly valuable work for the search and evaluation of mineral deposits, as well as for territorial planning, risk of disasters' reduction and major engineering works' design, to mention just a few of their main uses.



Experts attached to the Land Water Management Entrepreneurial Group work on the drafting of a hydro-geological map on a scale of 1:100 000.

Satisfactory Performance in Olympic Games

By Fausto**TRIANA**, SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PARIS.- The Cuban delegation showed its satisfaction with its performance in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, where two gold medals, one silver and six bronzes were reached.

"The delegation that represented Cuba in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games returns to the Homeland with the satisfaction of having played with dignity and in attachment to the values of our sport, inspired by the legacy of Commander in Chief Fidel Castro..., although not always results turned out as expected," stated an official note.

The text added that in relation to results, an obvious and well-deserved ovation to great Mijaín (López), a classic style wrestler "who allowed us to share a unique moment by winning his fifth title in these scenarios."

The document praised young boxer Erislandy Álvarez (24), "the protagonist of an exciting gold debut, as well as the rest of the medal holders, stressing that Yusneylis Guzmán (silver) and Yarisleidis Cirilo (bronze) represented our female wrestlers and canoeists, respectively, in the podium."

Arlen López (bronze) became Cuba's second boxer to win a medal in three divisions; Luis

Alberto Orta (bronze) raised the number of wrestlers with more than one medal in this level to four; Rafael Alba (bronze) went down in history as the first taekwondo player to win two Olympic medals, and Gabriel

Rosillo (bronze) and Milaimy Marín (bronze) completed the important contribution wrestling made, the text stressed.

The note indicated that Cuba is "grateful for the many signs of support received from the

Island, where the people to whom we owe it all, carefully followed what happened during those intense and demanding days, with the main leaders of the Revolution following every detail."

"With presence in 53 of the 329 discipline in competition, winning two gold medals, one silver and six bronzes allowed Cuba being placed 32 by country (...)," the note said.

"(...) it is appropriate to say that even though the number is smaller than that of Tokyo 2020, when there were 69, having 61 qualified athletes was again a merit to a country without the possibilities of major powers and subjected to the strengthening of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the government of the United States," the text read.

In this sense, it stressed the dedication with which athletes and coaches overcame limitations and highlighted "the increase of alliances in the field of science and innovation, and the contribution of supportive friends who guaranteed important stays in several French towns."

The Cuban athletes had an ethical behavior and received encouraging signs of warmth in all scenarios, the text stressed.



Well-deserved ovation to Mijaín López by winning his fifth title in these scenarios. PHOTO: Roberto Morejón.



The closing ceremony was held at the Stade de France. PHOTO: Internet.

Sensational Paris 2024 Games

By Julio**MEJÍAS**

PARIS.- President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Thomas Bach hailed the XXXIII edition of the Paris 2024 Games as sensational during the closing ceremony held at the Stade de France.

Bach praised the enormous work the

organizing committee headed by Tony Estanguet conducted, as well as the French government authorities, particularly president Emmanuel Macron.

The IOC president was accompanied by Estanguet and five sport stars, in representation of each continent: French judoka Teddy Riner, Kenyan runner Eliud Kipchoge, Chinese table tennis player Sun Yingsha, Australian swimmer Emma McKeon and Cuban wrestler Mijaín López, in addition to boxer Cindy Ngamba on behalf of the refugee Olympic team.

Estanguet appreciated all those involved in the organization and support during the games, including the security and police bodies, firemen, volunteers and all participants and fans.

As part of this ceremony, Bach previously awarded winner of the women's marathon, Dutch Sifan Hassan, who set an Olympic record (2:22:25 hours) and silver and bronze medalists, Ethiopian Tigst Assefa (2:22:58) and Kenyan Hellen Obiri (2:23:10), respectively.

He finally thanked Paris, France and cheered for the games and the host nation.

French swimming star Leon Marchand was the protagonist of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games' closing ceremony, under the strains of *Sous le ciel de Paris*.

Marchand carried the Olympic flame in a lantern from the Jardins de Tuileries, where it was placed in a balloon that was lifted to the sky every night and then stop lighting, with the said background music, written

by Hubert Giraud and Jean Dréjac and originally recorded by Jean Bretonnière, but played by icons such as Édith Piaf.

About 75,000 spectators followed from the grandstands of the Saint Denis stadium and through big screens, a video that recalled the opening ceremony's best moments.

The stadium exploded into a loud applause when Marchand took the flame in the lantern, while French singer Zaho Sagazan played Giraud and Dréjac's song, accompanied by the choir of the Haendel-Hendrix Academy.

The games, opened on July 26 and closed on August 11, granted medals to 91 of the 206 participating countries. The next edition will be hosted in the Los Angeles, the United States, where the Olympic flag was taken thanks to the journey of actor Tom Cruise...

Santa Elena Fishermen Party

Text and Photos Raúl GARCÍA

SANCTI SPÍRITUS.- The tradition celebrated by fishermen and families who share the sound of the waves and dress up themselves with salt residue again returned to the Casilda community, five kilometers south of Trinidad.

This religious tradition celebrates the Santa Elena sea party, which according to historical data, started on August 18, 1849, preceded by the consecration of a small church that carries the same name and welcomed white and black devotees of God, as one of the party's slogans read.

The festivity was the perfect occasion to welcome absentees and emigrants living in nearby areas, especially those looking for prosperity in the third village the Spanish founded in Cuba: Trinidad, a UNESCO Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

With the passing of the years, the party suffered changes and social transformations, declined and was barely remembered among neighbors, who lit candles in honor of the patron saint and attended catholic worships at daybreak.

As a result of people's request in 1990 and after the creation of the Casilda



The festivity started with prayers, ringing of bells, songs and the religious pilgrimage.

Popular Council, the festivity started to be celebrated on August 17 and 18, with prayers, ringing of bells, songs and the religious pilgrimage.

On its creation, 175 years ago, the local press stated that on the 17th, the Union Society and the Black People Society also

hosted dances until August 18 at daybreak, when the people went to Mass, christening and religious ceremonies...

This part of the Sancti Spíritus geography is bathed in the waters of the Caribbean Sea, in the Gulf of Ana María, one of the most important trade gulfs in the 17th and 18th

centuries. Sugar, honey and other products were exported to Europe from here at that time.

Testimonies of happiness are recalled, but also of agony and suffering because of pirates, corsairs and bandits' plunders, as well as the arrival of slavers and their provisions of slaves, who were sold to landowners for sugarcane development.

One of the major attacks, in 1702, was carried out by pirate Carlos Gant with 300 men, who took ships, slaves and the wealth of the Trinidad local people, in addition to stealing the Parrish Church's sacred vases.

According to history, in 1870, during the wars for the independence of Cuba, a sea expedition headed by Colonel Fernando López de Queraltá that carried military equipment for the central region's rebels was defeated, resulting in the death of a group of Cubans and foreign crew members.

In 1889, several U.S. ships were also defeated after opening fire on two small gunboats that patrolled the Casilda port: the Pontón Fernando el Católico and Pontón Dependiente boats. On that occasion, the invaders gave up taking the port.

At present, Casilda is an important fishing center that stands out for oyster production, while the mouth of the Agabama river – one of the Cuba's largest – stands out for the reproduction and growth of the Japanese oyster variety *crassostrea gigas*.



CUBA
MEDICAL TOURISM DESTINATION

