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Alameda de Paula, an Interesting Havana Site

Text and Photo: Francisco **MENÉNDEZ**

HAVANA.- For those who enjoy strolling through interesting places, an excellent option is Havana's Alameda de Paula and its surrounding church, located very close to the sea.

Travelers and locals alike recognize the old church of San Francisco de Paula and its Alameda (promenade) as a charming spot, adjacent to the Leather and Tobacco Warehouse on Avenida del Puerto.

The Paula Church – a concert venue at present – is a beautiful example of colonial architecture, with large stained-glass windows and a typical dome that stands out in the port, amidst ships and cargo.

Its first stone was laid on February 27, 1668. The building was reconstructed after a cyclone damaged its structure in 1730; the same storm also destroyed a nearby hospital that no longer exists.

According to scholar Joaquín E. Weiss, it has a Baroque style, with a specific schematism, rough stonework and unpretentious forms.



The Alameda (promenade) de Paula is a charming spot in Old Havana.

Some writers of the era, like Cirilo Villaverde, frequently mentioned the Paula Church in their works.

The chapel overlooks a promenade of the same name and style, offering a pleasant stroll near the sea and docks.

The church served several purposes. In 1907, due to a forced expropriation, it stopped being a religious building to become a property of a railway company, which used it as a warehouse and workshop, gradually leading to its deterioration.

By 1937, the danger of demolition was imminent, with frequent desecrations occurring amidst the legend of a hidden treasure within its walls, though the gold ounces never surfaced.

In July 2003, the Paula Church resurges as a music hall, with classy poise, amidst the sacredness of notes deeply connected to the old part of the Cuban capital.

Under the auspices of the office of the Historian of the City, this space flourished, revealing all its mystery in a wholesome way, among musical notes, concerts and with the purification of its stones and bars.

Some researchers divide the history of the site into four stages, linking them to the presence of influential bishops: foundation (1664 to 1730); reconstruction (1730 to 1799); growth (1799 to 1909), and relocation and construction of the new church and hospital (1910 onward).

After the hurricane of September 26, 1730, it was rebuilt and withstood the ravages of time and human activity so that we may have it today for the enjoyment, observation, and tourism of the quarter of the town of San Cristobal de La Habana (founded in 1519)

Pet Market Increases in 2026

By Benjamín **MICERINOS**

HAVANA.-The pet market is currently growing amidst strict regulations in various countries, following an increasingly clear upward trend. The pet trade faces a fascinating paradox in 2026: on the one hand, the sector is growing steadily, driven by the humanization of companion animals; on the other, legislators and animal welfare organizations are tightening regulations to combat illegal breeding and trafficking of living beings.

The pet care industry, which includes food, accessories, veterinary services and the sale of animals, will reach 289.17 billion dollars globally this year, with projections of nearly 500 billion in the next decade.

In the United States alone, the market for pet products and services reached 158 billion in 2025 and is expected to reach 165 billion this year. 269

The food and treats segment leads sales with 68.3 billion, followed by veterinary care (41 billion) and supplies, live animals and medications (34.4 billion).

Pet ownership is on the rise. According to the American Pet Products Association (APPA), 71 percent of U.S. households (approximately 94 million) owned at least one pet by the end of 2025, with dog ownership increasing from 51 to 53 percent of households, and cat ownership rising from 37 to 39 percent.

APPA President and CEO Pete Scott emphasizes that the pet industry remains a healthy and evolving market. Growth is stable, ownership is expanding across multiple generations and consumers are becoming increasingly intentional in their spending.



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Sovereign Transformations



The Cuban parliament approved a package of 176 reforms to boost the economy. PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.



President Díaz-Canel said that his country will not ask for permission to exist nor will it surrender its sovereignty.

By Ernesto **VERA** and Melissa **KING**

HAVANA.- President Miguel Díaz-Canel stated that Cuba sovereignly proposes the changes to be implemented to face the situation imposed by external aggression and internal shortcomings, with no permission other than that of its people.

Addressing the international community, "including the government of the United States," the head of state affirmed from the Cuban parliament that honest criticism and self-criticism have always been inseparable from revolutionary practice.

He pointed out that the economic and social transformations approved by the Cuban legislature are not related to negotiations with the United States, but are rather a sovereign decision of the country to confront the maximum pressure policy imposed by Washington on Havana.

In his remarks, Díaz-Canel reaffirmed that his country is willing to engage in respectful dialogue on all issues with the United States government, and denounced "the infamous practice of selling the world the idea of a failed state while blockading a heroic people."

"This is not how sovereign, independent international relations work, a condition we will always uphold," he stressed.

"To the United States government, we say without hatred but without fear: if you truly want to help the Cuban people, let us live."

"Let Cuba trade, let Cuba buy its medicines, let Cuba import its fuel, let Cuba receive investors, loans, financing, and engage normally with its diaspora and with the world. Let Cuba show the planet what this people is capable of when there are no obstacles to their efforts to rise up," he emphasized.

That would be something truly novel and enriching on the part of the adversary, he said.

The Cuban president also highlighted in his discourse that his country will not ask for permission to exist nor will it surrender its sovereignty; however, he reiterated the willingness to establish a civilized and respectful relationship with its northern neighbor, for the benefit of both peoples.

In his speech to the Third Extraordinary Session of Parliament, he explained that the country is not renouncing socialism, but rather debating how to build it sustainably amidst the longest and most criminal blockade in history.

He noted that the proposed transformations are not a concession to external pressures, but the result of a mature debate that began at the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC).

The Revolution, he said, has reached a point of reflection on how to preserve social justice without the external dependence that characterized previous stages.

"If we want to defend social justice, the immense work of social justice the Revolution has built, we must recognize that many times we were able to sustain it not only through political will, but also because we received a significant number of resources from other places," he mentioned.

The Cuban president insisted that "if we don't produce, if we don't generate wealth, if we don't provide quality services that are inclusive and comprehensive, what kind of social justice are we going to defend?" Díaz-Canel described the transformations as a sovereign exercise, not a reaction to Washington's pressures. "We are doing it here in a sovereign manner because we have reached a moment of maturity, of reflection," he emphasized after acknowledging that the proposals are not easy to implement under the current conditions, but he insisted that "the first thing we need to do is go out to work, to produce, to create."

Cuba Is Not an Enemy of the United States

By DeisyFRANCIS

NEW YORK.- Cuba is not, nor can it be, an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security of the United States. Cuba is deeply committed to peace, affirmed Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla in an interview with The Havana Reporter.

Rodríguez Parrilla, who made it clear that “Cuba is not an enemy of the United States, nor does it want to be,” spoke to THR at the end of two and a half days of work in New York, where he presented his country’s position at a formal session of the UN Security Council and denounced the military threat and the energy blockade.

Good evening! Here is the translation of the paragraph into English:

“He pointed out that when the Government of the United States uses “that fallacious and ridiculous argument of the supposed threat,” what it is really trying to do is manipulate public opinion in the United States, Cuba, and the rest of the world.”

What it tries to do is to justify a genocidal policy, a collective punishment, all of which are recognized under the international law.

The minister added that they are trying to justify a fuel blockade that causes extraordinary humanitarian damage and are attempting to prepare public opinion to blame the Cuban government for the effects that are precisely and deliberately caused by the measures they have taken.

It is pure slander, a fable, but one that must be taken seriously because the U.S. imperialism is aggressive, and its threats must be taken seriously, and we must always prepare for the worst case, although Cuba will do everything possible to avoid a military escalation.

Once again he insisted that Cuba is not a threat to the United States government, nor to the national security or foreign policy of that country, firstly because it is a small island and the U.S. is a nuclear superpower. Secondly,

because Cuba has a profound commitment to peace.

It is part of the principles of the Cuban Revolution; it is a peaceful people. It is a country that has always contributed to preserving international, hemispheric and regional peace and security, and has made very important contributions to peace, such as the peace processes in Colombia, he emphasized.

He recalled that it was precisely in Havana where the heads of state and government of the entire region signed the proclamation of all of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace, which, he said, is one of the greatest contributions of Army General Raúl Castro Ruz to the foreign policy of the Cuban Revolution.

On the other hand, Cuba is not an enemy of the United States, nor has it ever intended to be. It does not want to be

in any way, primarily because there are deep, affectionate and fraternal ties between the Cuban people and the people of the United States, and because there is a strong presence of Cuban nationals residing in the United States.

On the other hand, the majority of U.S. citizens and Cubans residing in the United States have always supported the normalization of relations between the two countries and opposed the hostility and the economic and commercial blockade imposed on the island.

Currently, he pointed out, the majority of Americans and Cubans living in the United States oppose a military adventure against Cuba, which would have incalculable humanitarian and other consequences, and they fervently oppose the energy siege that causes extraordinary human harm, suffering, deprivation, and pain to Cuban families.”



Cuban Foreign Minister presented his country’s position at the UN Security Council and denounced the military threat and the energy blockade. PHOTO: U.N.

Progressive Press in the U.S. Condemns Trump’s Policy

By DeisyFRANCIS

WASHINGTON.- Progressive media outlets in the United States are today questioning the Trump administration’s aggressive policy toward Cuba, warning that the intensified blockade constitutes a severe humanitarian punishment against the island’s civilian population.

The criticisms come after President Donald Trump threatening remarks, that the island is in “its final moments of life,” a rhetoric that progressive sectors label as bellicose and lacking in empathy.

In the face of this triumphalism from the U.S. right, publications such as The Nation magazine and the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) have published essays and reports that dismantle the official narrative about the so-called Cuban crisis of 2026.

Both outlets argue that the tightening of the economic siege, including the cessation of operations of shipping platforms, and the asphyxiating financial blockade

function as a form of collective violence and humanitarian punishment that directly affects the civilian population, not the government.

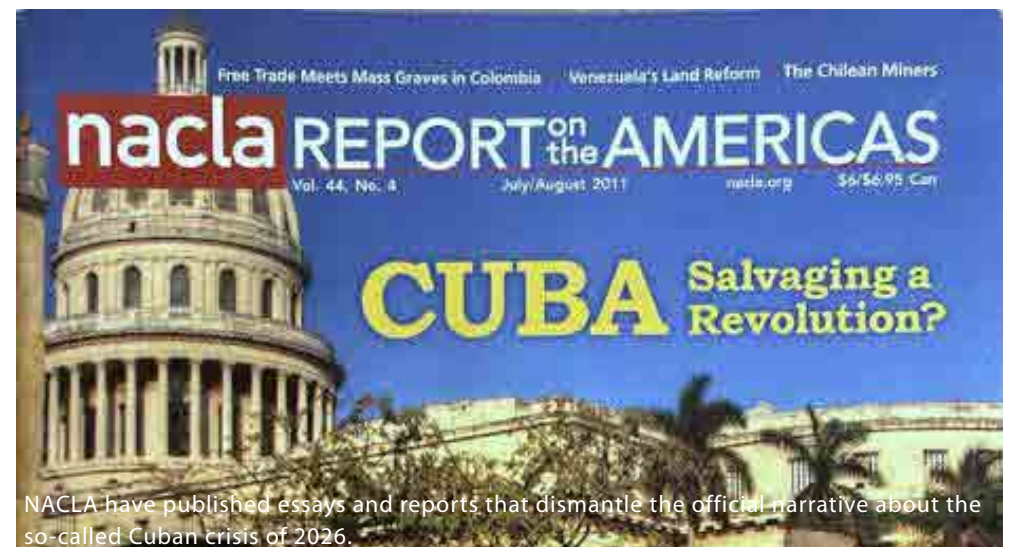
Analysts at NACLA (a leading academic journal on Latin American studies) emphasize that this maximum-pressure policy seeks to generate internal collapse through fuel and food shortages—a strategy that violates international law and turns the domestic economy into the main battlefield.

They also rigorously analyze the recent reforms announced by President Miguel Díaz-Canel, specifically the opening of the hotel sector to private management, and distance themselves from “simplistic interpretations that see it as a surrender to Washington

From the perspective of these U.S. academics, the Cuban state’s measures address the economic strangulation, although they warn that their implementation carries significant social risks for the welfare structure of the Caribbean nation.

These openings will benefit primarily foreign capital and elites connected to the international market, while the Cuban working class continues to suffer the hardships of scarcity and inflation unleashed by the unilateral coercive measures, the reports in those publications warn.

On the other side, Jacobin, another progressive publication, demands the immediate end of the Treasury Department’s sanctions and expresses solidarity with the demands of Cuban civil society, reaffirming the growing unease generated in intellectual circles with this policy of the U.S. government.



NACLA have published essays and reports that dismantle the official narrative about the so-called Cuban crisis of 2026.

Cuba and Russia Expand Scientific and Technological Cooperation

By MichelVARONA

HAVANA.- The Cuban group Biocubafarma and Russia are consolidating a joint strategy to address the health challenges affecting both nations.

According to reports, this strategic alliance aims to boost biotechnological development and innovative medicines, as well as to share knowledge and capabilities in the health sector.

In this regard, Eulogio Pimentel, first vice president of the Biocubafarma group, explained that there are five startup-type companies located on the Skólkovo technology Park, the largest in the Russian Federation.

These are projects currently in the midst of development, focused on neurodegenerative diseases and oncological ailments.

The official told the national press that three medications are formerly registered. One of them is Heberprot-p, which has already been recognized in Russia and is on the Eurasian nation's list of essential and vital drugs.

Also present there is a product called Hebermin, a cream containing growth factor as its active ingredient, which is used for ulcers caused by burns.

"We have the CIMAvax-EGF project, used in cancer therapy, especially against lung cancer, and the product Jusviza," Pimentel specified.

He also noted that there is a program known as HEBERSaVax for the control of cancer therapies, for which registration work is underway in Cuba and which

will begin its clinical development in Russia.

"We have just finished creating the first Russian-Cuban joint venture in the bio-

pharmaceutical industry field, which is intended to turn our plans into products, and these into commercial success, benefiting Russian patients," he concluded.



Cuba and Russia have just finished creating the first joint venture in the biopharmaceutical industry fields. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Life Task, an Environmental Plan with Remarkable Results

By Joel MichelVARONA

HAVANA.- Nine years after the approval of the Cuban State plan to address climate change, known as Life Task (Tarea Vida) the country is showing tangible results in environmental care and conservation.

The gigantic project was inspired by the thinking of the historical leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, who warned at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (June 1992) that "an important biological species is at risk of disappearing due to the rapid and progressive destruction of its natural living conditions: humankind."

Life Task comprises five strategic actions and 11 chores, and constitutes a comprehensive proposal that presents an initial identification of prioritized areas and locations, their impacts and the actions to be undertaken, a plan that can be refined during its development and implementation.

This proposal involves various institutions and sectors of the society and the economy, and includes a set of activities aimed at mitigating impacts on vulnerable areas in pursuit of their populations' well-being in relation to the environment.

In recent statements to the press, Minister of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA) Armando Rodríguez



Life Task constitutes a comprehensive proposal that presents an initial identification of prioritized areas and locations. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

said that the Cuban archipelago is one of the 35 biodiversity hotspots on the planet, and these areas reflect a region with an exceptional concentration of ecosystems that form part of the country's natural heritage.

He added that 36,729 species have been identified, with the most diverse groups being insects, plants and fungi. About 40 percent of these species are endemic and the largest concentrations are found among mollusks, reptiles and amphibians.

Rodríguez emphasized that the system of protected areas in Cuba continues to expand. In 2025, 13 new areas

were approved, adding more than 80,000 hectares to the existing ones, reaching 16.37 percent of the land area and approximately 30 percent of the marine area.

The minister also stated that Cuba now has 156 protected areas approved by the Council of Ministers, including mangroves, coral reefs and mountain forests. These areas have ongoing management and monitoring plans.

Priority was given to the so-called "Sites of Hope," which are protected areas that stand out for specific coral species, such as the Guanahacabibes National Park, the Zapata Swamp National Park and the Jardines de la Reina National Park, he affirmed.

The Laguna de Maya and Santa Lucía wildlife refuges are also included. The goal is not only to guarantee their conservation but also the sustainable development of ecosystems. For example, income can be generated through recreational diving, noted the Cuban scientist.

The minister emphasized that these have been difficult months for implementing the country's environmental policy. "We cannot ignore the current situation, because today it is difficult to visit communities, ecosystems and protected areas to continue studying them.

"We also suffer from a lack of transportation to reach places where we conduct research, and there are even limitations on exchanges with international experts," Rodríguez regretted.

The Seriousness of Political Humor

By Verónica NÚÑEZ

HAVANA.- Humor and art are powerful weapons, but double-edged swords, says journalist Mirko Casale, creator of the political satire program *Ahí les va* (Here it goes), from the Russia Today (RT) television network. The show boasts over a million Spanish-speaking viewers, especially in the Caribbean.

Casale is not only the mastermind behind the idea, but also the screenwriter, actor and host.

In an interview with **The Havana Reporter** during a recent visit to Cuba, Casale shared details of the workshop on political humor he conducted at the V Patria Colloquium, where he discussed the program's discursive strategy and the communication resources that have helped him achieve popularity and the affection of its viewers.

For the interviewee, political humor is a very serious matter; the Italian writer Dario Fo and the Argentine cartoonist Joaquín "Quino" Lavado are some of his references. Casale recalled that Dario Fo (Nobel Prize in Literature in 1997) was proud to be called a joker, "because jokers, with their humor, challenged monarchical and ecclesiastical power without them even realizing it."

He pointed out that what *Ahí les va* does is allow the entire global village to witness the joke, a perspective that organically connects with the studies of Ecuadorian researcher César Ulloa, who in the magazine *Chasqui* (2008) defined political humor as "one of the best ways to denounce, warn, sanction and even reveal what political power does and fails to do."

Casale's words at the workshop only served to confirm this thesis from a practical standpoint: the program takes the missteps, contradictions and excesses of the international political class and turns them into satire without ever sacrificing information.

"I love humor and applying it to politics, but although many people think it's easy, it isn't; it requires work, finding the right approach, seeing where the limits are," he told THR.

For the Argentine host, political humor cannot be a simple mechanism for evasion or disengagement. "I don't laugh at the situation/issue to forget it; I laugh to channel it, so that it isn't so painful and doesn't paralyze me. It helps me deal with the pain," he affirmed.

During the workshop, Casale presented an "almost ten-point manifesto" that his team follows and is, to a large extent, the formula for their success.

"The creative rules, he said, can be summed up as: grab attention from the very first moment; tackle universal themes; take an alternative, original approach, with sources that can withstand scrutiny from skeptics; use accessible language and keep formality to a minimum; avoiding being preachy or moralistic, and finishing the story as well as it begins.

He recounted that some episodes have pushed black humor to the limit and admitted that there are realities that simply do not allow for humorous treatment; that caution doesn't prevent tackling the darkest of topics, but it does impose an ethical framework."

He recalled that some episodes have pushed dark humor to the limit and admitted that there are realities that simply do not allow for humorous treatment. Being cautious does not prevent addressing the darkest topics, but it does impose an ethical framework.

The recipe, he insisted, is an almost dialectical balance between "not forgetting the essence, applying humor, but ensuring that humor does not erase the political aspect, nor that these erase the humor"; a balance between uncompromising dogmatism and inconsistent pragmatism, a tension he borrowed from hero Ernesto "Che" Guevara.



Journalist Mirko Casale shared details on political humor during the V Patria Colloquium. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Rutas y Andares to Highlight Havana's Summer Culture

By Alma LABRADA

HAVANA.- A new edition of the Rutas y Andares (Routes and Walking Tours) summer project stands out as one of the cultural attractions in this capital city, for families' enjoyment during the long awaited summer season.

From July 7 to August 21, the Havana City Historian's Office (OHCH) is offering a diverse program that invites exploring together the heritage preserved in the plazas, institutions, streets and parks of Havana's Historic Center.

Guided tours, workshops, prizes, interactive tours and other activities make up the project's agenda, where history and knowledge take center stage in the community and among those who support the OHCH initiative each year.

Since its creation in 2001, the program has gained popularity among participants, who at the time requested the addition of guides to the routes to complement the information received at the temporary and permanent museum exhibitions.

As a result, guided tours emerged in 2004, which, according to the Habana Cultural website, "connected various institutions in a kind of pilgrimage through collections with specific points of contact."

These walking tours, included in the project in 2002, recognize the artistic and heritage values of the surrounding area, while "fostering an understanding of the restoration process of these assets and the significant social and cultural work being carried out in this part of the city."

Although initially focused on the heart of the Historic Center, in recent editions they have included visits to the El Vedado, Regla, Cojimar and Miramar neighborhoods.

Rutas y Andares, recipient of the third Ibero-American Prize for Education and Museums (2010), has benefited thousands of people through a program that gathers all the components of the oldest part of the city.

"External and internal audiences interact in an initiative that confirms the idea that the museum, in addition to preserving and researching, must communicate from a contemporary perspective."



Voces del Sur Global
Voices of the Global South



Heritage, Wine Tourism and the History of Chile

By Carmen **ESQUIVEL**



The museum has around three thousand archaeological and ethnographic pieces from the pre-Columbian peoples who inhabited the national territory. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

national territory are exhibited in this museum, founded in 2006.

Pitchers, bowls, cups, goldwork and other pieces from the Arica, Atacameño, Diaguita, Inca and Mapuche cultures can be admired in this 1,500-square-meter museum.

One of its most valuable collections is housed in the Gold Room, which, despite recently suffering the theft of more than 60 pre-Columbian pieces, still preserves a large number of gilded objects, such as funerary masks, nose ornaments, necklaces and pendants.

These are original pieces from all the cultures that inhabited Chile, Elena Carretero, director of corporate affairs and sustainability at Viña Santa Rita, told **The Havana Reporter**.

Ricardo Claro and María Luisa Vial, who acquired the vineyard in 1980, donated the pieces to a museum open to the public.

VIÑA SANTA RITA

Viña Santa Rita was founded in 1880 by Domingo Fernández Concha, who introduced French grape varieties and achieved results far superior to those obtained in Chile at that time.

It has been rightly said that the vineyard boasts five heritages: viticultural, historical, cultural, gastronomic and natural.

Its history is closely linked to that of the country. It is well known that in 1818, after the defeat of the patriots at the Battle of Cancha Rayada, 120 soldiers led by José de San Martín found refuge in the home of the patriot Doña Paula Jaraquemada, which is now the vineyard's restaurant.

This episode inspired the creation of the renowned 120 wine line.

Poet Vicente Huidobro, who along with Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda and Pablo de Rokha, is considered one of the four great figures of Chilean poetry. He spent long periods at the property as he was the grandson of the winery's founder.

Santa Rita also became a meeting point for leading Chilean art and intellectual figures, including Violeta Parra, which consolidated its role as a cultural heart.

In the last 15 years, the winery has gone from receiving 4,000 annual visitors to 160,000, Elena Carretero said during a tour of the place, organized by the Imagen de Chile Foundation and attended by the foreign press.

Carretero also noted that wine tourism generates many related services and offers opportunities for local development.

Chile is the world's fourth-largest wine exporter and the leading exporter in the New World, following the three major exporting countries: Italy, France and Spain, she affirmed.

SANTIAGO DE CHILE.-The Andean Museum of Chile, located at the Viña Santa Rita (winery), offers a unique experience combining the preservation of its valuable collection with the prestige of a vineyard chosen in 2025 as the best for its history and heritage.

Around three thousand archaeological and ethnographic pieces from the pre-Columbian peoples who inhabited the





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Condemnation of the Anti-Cuban Resolution Approved by the European Parliament

By Antonio **RONDÓN**

BRUSSELS.- Cuba condemned the arrogant and disgraceful attitude of the European Parliament for passing a resolution characterized by its double standards against the island in a divided vote on a proposal from that body's right wing.

At the plenary session, the right-wing European People's Party, which holds a majority in the European Parliament, prevailed in order to obstruct ties between Cuba and the European Union as much as possible, a situation that solidarity groups with the island had warned about.

A statement from the Cuban diplomatic mission in this capital indicates that the resolution against Cuba was passed with the support of the right wing and its extremist factions in a plenary session held in the French city of Strasbourg.

It is "another exercise of political manipulation, double standards and subordination to the most extremist and hostile political agendas of the United States against the Island," the reproving text adds.

"Those who present themselves as champions of democracy and human rights are the same who, 24 hours earlier, in the same chamber, approved and celebrated with xenophobic slogans the expulsion of migrant families, including children, and instituted a European ICE emulating that of Donald Trump," the text states.

The approved resolution again insists on requesting the suspension of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) between Cuba and the European Union, the denunciation emphasizes.

Such an action deliberately ignores the legal nature of this instrument, as well as the institutional competencies within the European Union (EU) itself, the document underlines.

The PDCA is not a trade agreement, recalls the Caribbean diplomatic mission in its disapproving text.

It is a comprehensive, bilateral political agreement that covers the areas of political dialogue and cooperation, which protects the ties between Cuba, the EU and its member states, based on the principles of sovereign equality, reciprocity and mutual respect, added the communiqué.

Precisely because of its EU foreign policy nature, the

European Parliament has no competence whatsoever over this agreement, the text clarifies.

That body "is once again placing itself at odds with European citizens and acting in lockstep with the policies of economic stifling promoted by the United States against the Cuban people," the statement emphasizes.

It is particularly serious that European political sectors are subordinating the EU's sovereign interests to Washington's aggressive agenda and to campaigns driven by anti-Cuban extremist groups, the statement notes.

Faced with the difficulties caused by a renewed U.S. blockade, the European Parliament has once again opted for confrontation, political manipulation, and hostility, rather than defending dialogue, mutual understanding, and international law, the statement notes.



Cuba said the resolution is aimed to obstruct ties between the island and the European Union as much as possible. PHOTO: Internet.

U.S. Blockade Prevents Access to Surgical Procedures

By **The Havana Report Staff**

HAVANA.- The government of U.S. President Donald Trump is preventing more than 100,000 Cubans in need of improved health from accessing surgical procedures, denounced Deputy Minister of Public Health Carilda Peña.

Appearing on Cuban television, the official reported that as of mid-June, 95,555 patients remained awaiting general surgery, while another 5,152 were waiting for oncological procedures.

"Truthfully, we cannot say that we are at zero because we are making enormous efforts, but all these patients are waiting for surgery," Peña stated.

"It is truly distressing for a person to know that they need to access treatment and cannot do so, and that is a reality that undermines their quality of life," she added.

Likewise, the deputy minister stressed that guaranteeing hemodialysis is currently a challenge, hence the necessity of hospitalizing patients who live far from healthcare centers due to a lack of transportation to get there.

She specified that at present, 2,888 Cubans are receiving hemodialysis treatment, a therapy that is highly dependent on supplies, water, and specialized equipment.

Among the measures adopted to guarantee treatment is increasing the reuse of dialyzers, although she clarified that this is a complex

procedure requiring additional resources and a high level of technical training.

"Added to supply limitations are the effects caused by power outages, difficulties with water supply, and other essential elements needed to ensure the functioning of hemodialysis units," Peña argued.

The official also noted that from March 2024 to February 2025, economic losses in the health sector exceeded 288 million dollars, a figure that is part of the more than 4.183 billion dollars accumulated by the national system as a consequence of the U.S. blockade, which has been in effect for over six decades.



More than 100,000 Cubans are waiting access to surgical procedures. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Four New Bills Published

By Alfredo **BOADA**

HAVANA.- The National Assembly of People's Power of the Republic of Cuba recently published four new bills: the Labor Code; the Agricultural and Forestry Land Code; the Housing Code; and the Central State Administration Organization Code.

The Cuban Parliament's website includes an email address set up to encourage citizen participation in this legislative process and to contribute to the public's legal culture.

The first of these bills updates and improves the rules that guarantee the protection of rights and the fulfillment of duties arising from the individual legal labor relationship established between workers and employers, regardless of the sector in which they work.

It also highlights work as a fundamental value, a right, a social duty, a source of pride for all people who are able to work, and the main means of meeting their material, personal and spiritual needs.

In addition, it establishes workers' rights and the judicial, institutional and union mechanisms for their recognition, while addressing

labor relations through the active participation of the workforce and collective bargaining.

The second bill proposes updating the system of ownership, possession, inheritance upon death, and use of land and agricultural assets, as well as their systemic unification.

Its goal is the proper regulation, management and administration of land as a fundamental means of production, based on agrarian development as the foundation for food sovereignty, the reevaluation of rural life and the social justice of the Cuban socialist economic and social development model.

The Housing bill aims to establish and regulate how the State guarantees the right of individuals to adequate housing and a safe, healthy living environment, based on criteria of climate resilience and energy efficiency.

Meanwhile, the proposed regulation on the Organization of the Central State Administration governs the general framework of this entity and establishes the number, names, mission and functions of the ministries and other related agencies.

MALPAÍS, Painting as Threshold and Transition

By Adis Marlén **MORERA**

HAVANA.- Painting as a threshold gains force in Cuban artist Alejandro Campins' exhibition MALPAÍS, on display until August 30 at the Cuban Art building of the National Fine Arts Museum, in Havana.

Far from a conventional exhibit, the show invites viewers to inhabit art as a state of consciousness. Campins, whose career explores memory and landscape, presents a collection of works where

representation gives way to perceptual experience, according to a press release.

The series giving life to this proposal is inspired by the Desierto Pintado de Arizona (Arizona Painted Desert), geological formations marked by layers of time and color that serve as a trigger for a pictorial investigation where the visible and the intangible coexist in tension.

In this exhibition, images seem to oppose the present, and rather propose a slower, more introspective temporality, the text highlights.

The formats range from intimate scale to large canvases, while painting becomes both immersion and transit.

The idea is to evoke an inner geography where light, matter and space silently balance each other.

In MALPAÍS, "the desert appears simultaneously as inhospitable territory and refuge, resistance and revelation."

"Faced with the dynamics of acceleration and visual saturation of the present, the proposal advocates another way of connecting with image and time."



MALPAÍS invites viewers to inhabit art as a state of consciousness. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Lizt Alfonso Receives International Award in Mexico

By Martha **SÁNCHEZ**

HAVANA.-Cuban dancer, dance teacher, and choreographer Lizt Alfonso was distinguished with the International Gaviota Award during a recent ceremony held in Mexico City.

A statement from the company led by this singular creator noted that an inscription on the laurel highlights the brilliant career of the artist, who in her native Havana founded Lizt Alfonso Dance Cuba 35 years ago, and one year later, the homonymous academy. Lizt Alfonso's career includes her roles as choreographer, director, and academic, as well as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and "winner of various productions in several countries."

According to Daniel Martín, president of the Latin Institute of Music, the laurel belonging to the Latin Awards Academy — has recognized since 1995 the social commitment, talent, perseverance, results, and career trajectory of prominent personalities.

Among its most notable recipients are His Holiness John Paul II and, from Cuba, such

beloved figures as historian Eusebio Leal and artists Edesio Alejandro, Daniel Martín, and Carlos Alberto "Tin" Cremata.

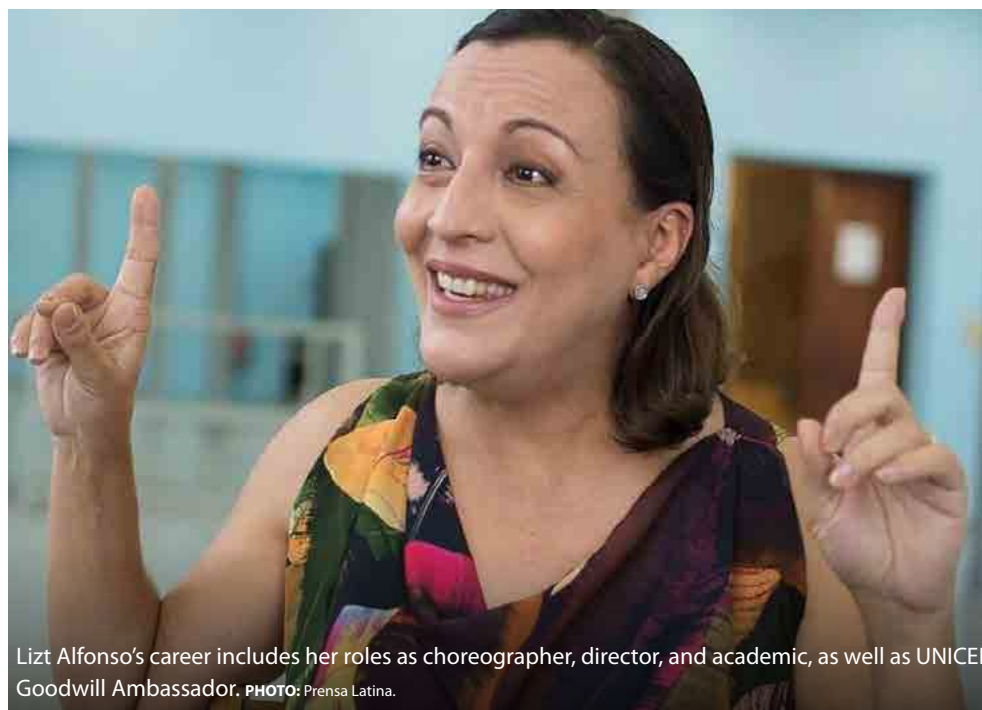
Two Cuban women have just received it

in 2026 for their successful careers: the extraordinary actress Esclinda Núñez and Lizt Alfonso, who received it with deep gratitude for highlighting the impact of her work,

which embraces dance in its entirety as a bridge of identity, hope, and beauty.

During a recent visit to Havana, the distinguished Mexican-American musician Arturo O'Farril stated that the art of Lizt Alfonso Dance Cuba is a treasure for the world.

These dancers, he said, are like a ray of hope for the planet, after enjoying a demonstration in the company's main rehearsal hall of fragments of Fuerza y Compás (Force and Beat), with music by Reynier Mariño; Alas para volar (Wings to Fly), with music by Denis Peralta, Yuniel Rascón, Damián Nueva, Yordanis O'Reilly, and Juan Pablo Salas; and Almas en procesión (Souls in Procession — from the show Latido / Heartbeat), with music by César López. All of these choreographies are the work of Lizt Alfonso. During the visit to the dance company's headquarters, located in the heart of Old Havana, the well known pianist, composer, and orchestra conductor — winner of multiple Grammy Awards — confessed that the performance by the children and young people conveyed hope to him, which he compared with a ray of love.



Lizt Alfonso's career includes her roles as choreographer, director, and academic, as well as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

An Act of Political Aggression

By Oscar **REDONDO**

ROME.-The National Association of Friendship Between Italy and Cuba (ANAIC) condemned the resolution against the Caribbean nation approved by the European Parliament, calling it an act of political aggression.

In a statement, ANAIC explained that the resolution is a sign of the European right-wing forces' submissiveness to the United States' dictates, an action that contravenes the most basic norms of international law, which prohibit interference in the internal affairs of nations.

The solidarity association regretted the anti-Cuban stance adopted by the European

Parliament, "precisely while the U.S. administration is tightening the criminal economic, commercial and financial blockade that has been illegally strangling the Cuban people for more than sixty years." They consider it "an intolerable act of hypocrisy" that the right-wing European MPs ignore in their resolution that the economic hardships the Cuban population suffer today are the direct result of a ruthless and asymmetric economic war waged by the United States against that country. With its most recent measures, the U.S. government "is expanding secondary sanctions to affect even European companies that trade with the island," emphasized the document, entitled "Don't Touch Cuba."

By calling for a review of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement with Cuba (PDCA), which establishes the legal framework for bilateral relations, the resolution "chooses to align itself with the dictates of the White House instead of defending the economic autonomy of our continent and international law," the text stresses.

"The Europe that today tries to lecture on democracy and calls for the end of the PDCA is the same Europe that forgets Cuba's extraordinary international solidarity," the document reads, while mentioning the example of the Cuban medical brigades that supported Italy during the darkest months of the

COVID-19 pandemic, and those now serving in Calabria.

ANAIC reiterates in the statement that "Cuba's sovereignty, self-determination and social model belong exclusively to the Cuban people" and that no foreign parliament has the right to interfere in the internal political processes of a sovereign state.

In this regard, it urges "the Italian government and the European Union to reject the sanctioning measures contained in that resolution, as well as to maintain their firm commitment to bilateral dialogue and mutual respect, and demand the immediate end to the U.S. blockade, the true and only cause of the Cuban people's suffering."



DIVEP strengthen the industrial and agricultural sectors of Cuba's eastern province. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Tractors Assembled for the Agricultural Sector

By Mady **GUILLÉN**

HOLGUÍN.- DIVEP Commercial Enterprise is importing components for a batch of tractors to be assembled and commercialized in Holguín, in order to strengthen the industrial and agricultural sectors of Cuba's eastern province."

Yunia Ordoño, DIVEP Foreign Trade specialist, commented that the operation is part of the services the company offers.

The products will be distributed to cooperatives, small businesses, private farmers and self-employed workers.

Ramón Pifferrer, commercial director of the Héroses del 26 de Julio Mechanical Company (HOLMECA), stated that the components will be assembled at the factory once the operators are trained.

The equipment acquired includes tillage machinery, engine kits, harrows, rice harvesters and equipment geared toward industrial production, all vital for the social and economic development of the eastern region.

Nutrition Programs Boosted in Holguín

By Daimy **PEÑA**

HAVANA.-The World Food Program's (WFP) international Nutrivida project is improving the nutrition of pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children in the Cuban province of Holguín, with financial support from the Government of Canada. The initiative, implemented in the provincial capital of this northeastern region and in the towns of Mayarí and Moa, focuses its efforts on assisting social protection institutions.

The project's general coordinator in the province, Alberto Reyes, explained that resources such as solar panels, refrigerators, and various kitchen utensils will be provided.

These measures will mend hygiene, sanitation, and food preparation conditions for the benefit of patients, students, and staff at special schools and maternity homes.

In the agricultural sphere, priorities are focused on training production

forces in efficient practices and supplying inputs to cooperatives to ensure a stable supply for vulnerable groups.

Likewise, the specialist, who also works at the Provincial Center for Hygiene and Epidemiology, specified that the goal is to boost urban and suburban agriculture, as well as to reactivate the potential of the Mayarí Valley.

To achieve these goals, the Public Health, Agriculture, Water Resources, and Education sectors are working together in a coordinated manner, an integration also aimed at promoting gender equality in rural areas.

With more than six decades of work in the Caribbean nation, the WFP promotes food security through agroecological resilience and the strengthening of community protection networks.



More than 100,000 Cubans are waiting access to surgical procedures. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Cuba's Beaches, Forever

By Roberto F. CAMPOS

HAVANA.- Much is said about Cuba's beaches, and despite the repetition and countless images, another facet always emerges, reaching almost to the infinity of intimacy, beauty, and colour provided by such settings.

With 5,746 kilometers of coastline and an archipelago that surpasses

four thousand keys and islands, this Caribbean nation is a paradise for those seeking the perfect conjunction of sun, sand, and sea.

Some 430 natural beaches — around 50 of which have the development and infrastructure necessary for international tourism — display the perfect combination of warm waters, fine sand, coral reefs, and a privileged geographical position, making it a world-class sun destination.



Strategic Ties Between China and Latin America

By Isaura **DIEZ**

BEIJING.- Chinese experts and officials highlighted the historical, cultural, and strategic ties that drive cooperation between China and Latin America.

Song Junying, director of the Department of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, stated that exchanges between the two sides possess a strong internal driving force. Song noted that both regions share historical experiences marked by colonial and imperialist oppression and face similar challenges in their development and modernization processes.

The academic noted that China and Latin America seek to break free from structures of dependency and share cultural traditions that promote harmony, respect for differences, and mutual understanding.

He also emphasized that the collective rise of the Global South creates new opportunities to strengthen cooperation among developing countries.

On the other side, Zhang Run, director of the Department of Latin American Affairs at China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

recalled that one year ago, President Xi Jinping proposed the joint construction of a community with a shared future between China and Latin America.

Zhang assured that, since then, Beijing has released its third policy toward Latin

America and the Caribbean, which includes specific measures to advance the so-called five major cooperation projects.

The diplomat noted that, regardless of changes in the international situation, China will maintain close cooperation

with the region to deepen bilateral relations and contribute to Latin America's socioeconomic development.

Shi Yi, vice president of the China Foreign Affairs University, highlighted the growing exchange between Chinese and Latin American youth interested in learning about the customs and cultures of both regions.

She affirmed that these contacts help build a deeper and more enduring social foundation for relations between China and Latin America. The scholar also emphasized that building a community with a shared future for humanity is a central tenet of Chinese diplomacy.

China and Latin America are engaged in growing cooperation in areas such as trade, infrastructure, education, technological innovation, and connectivity, as part of initiatives aimed at strengthening ties among the countries of the Global South.

Since 2008, China has published three documents on its policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean that reflect the evolution of cooperation: from lists of areas of collaboration to comprehensive strategic projects, as well as the strengthening of political, economic, and cultural ties



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Parliament Approves Economic and Social Transformations

By EverMELLADO

HAVANA.- Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power (parliament) approved the transformation of the current economic and social model to ensure the preservation of its socialist system in the face of the aggressive policies of the United States.

During the Third Extraordinary Session of the legislative body in its 10th Legislature, held on June 18, the deputies gave the green light to 176 proposals, grouped into 23 key areas, aimed at revitalizing the economy amid the complex situation caused by the unprecedented intensification of Washington's blockade, including the energy siege and the military threat.

The transformations impact forms of ownership, business management, foreign investment, foreign trade, tourism, the productive and service sectors, among other areas, all vital to rescuing and preserving the social achievements of the Revolution and ensuring the country's self-determination, sovereignty and independence.

According to Prime Minister Manuel Marrero, these transformations will be carried out under the guiding principle of "doing what is necessary to preserve what is essential," with the purpose of strengthening the revolutionary process and rescuing and maintaining its social achievements, based on the country's economic strengthening.

These transformations include leases, the granting of usufruct rights for a fee,



Prime Minister Marrero said the purpose of this transformation is strengthening the Revolution and rescuing its social achievements. PHOTO: Vladimir Molina.

concessions of areas with assets or under development in different regions of the country, and the sale of real estate, with the aim of strengthening tourism, one of the activities affected the most by the U.S. blockade.

Another proposal includes expanding the powers of the state-owned enterprise system and the participation of different forms of economic management in activities that are vital to the nation's development.

They also authorize the private sector to import and sell fuel, even at the retail

level, in the face of the energy blockade with which the current U.S. administration intends to strangle the economy.

According to Prime Minister Manuel Marrero, this proposal was preceded by a consultation process that included an in-depth analysis within the Political Bureau and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, as well as in parliament, which enriched the document. These measures aim to address the consequences of the United States' policy of economic strangulation, Marrero stated,

adding that they will be implemented under the guiding principle of "doing what is necessary to preserve what is essential."

The implementation of the reforms will also impact 148 provisions of the Cuban legal system, with 15 regulations to be rescinded, 22 to be completely modified, 79 to be partially modified and more than 50 complementary regulations.

Marrero clarified that these transformations do not imply renouncing the State's social responsibility, but rather recognize market mechanisms as efficient instruments for resource allocation.

He added that 76 percent of the measures are fully aligned with the 2026 Government Program.

Another agreement authorizes the direct, non-commercial importation of a 100 percent electric car by individuals, in line with the shift in the energy matrix focused on the use of renewable sources and the elimination of restrictions on vehicle acquisition by various economic actors and individuals.

Regarding commerce, it was agreed to reorganize wholesale trade, prioritizing the creation of supply markets with direct access for individuals and legal entities without placing limits on the actors engaged in this activity.

It was also proposed to go from regulated family food basket to controlled sales without subsidies in the retail network, creating chains of stores, restaurants and a network of light gastronomy establishments with recognized brands and others that would extend throughout the country.



This proposal was preceded by a consultation process within the Political Bureau and the Central Committee of the Communist Party. PHOTO: Estudios Revolución.

A 180-Degree Turn

By Mary Luz **BORREGO**

SANCTI SPÍRITUS.— In San Narciso and El Palenque, just as in 18 other communities tucked away deep in the Cuban hinterlands, life has taken a 180-degree turn for the better thanks to the “Renewable Energy Sources as Support for Local Development” project, known as FRE Local. The plan, which began in 2019, was just completed in May. It was brought to completion by researchers from the Center for Energy Studies and Industrial Processes

(CEEPI) at the University of Sancti Spíritus, along with specialists and technicians from the Electricity Union and many other collaborators.

This initiative, financed with eight million euros by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has boosted progress in these remote places through access to clean energy sources. Residents of those remote areas have praised the benefits of this project — always in relation to local productive capacities — which in this central province covered four small settlements: Yaguá, Alazanes, Cuarto Congreso, and Guaranal.

That last community, small and almost forgotten on the map of Sancti Spíritus, has been brought back to life thanks to FRE Local. Before, they had electricity for just a few hours using diesel generators. Now, they have electric power all day.

The research covered demographic, socio-productive, electro-energy, and environmental aspects of these localities, in order to develop a methodology for social intervention as a contribution to the country’s rural electrification strategy.

The researchers designed training programs at different levels, from technical education all the way to those who operate the equipment installed in those remote places — a decisive factor in ensuring the sustainability of this technology.

They also identified gender gaps, such as unequal access to employment and pay, and the unequal distribution of domestic tasks — issues the project has helped to ease through female empowerment.

They also succeeded in designing a Technician degree program for short-cycle higher education in renewable energy sources and energy efficiency, which is already up and running at three universities in the country: Sancti Spíritus, Moa, and Granma.

This development benefits not only rural electrification, but the entire process of Cuba’s energy transition, by training young students to operate renewable energy sources in the broadest sense.

The project reached remote, diverse, and widely scattered places, from Matanzas all the way to Guantánamo, where electricity used to arrive almost by miracle, carried over rustic, poor-quality power lines.

The veteran researcher María del Carmen Echevarría, who poured all her energy into this endeavor, highlighted the leading role played by the Social Sciences in what is essentially a technical matter.

“We started from the principle of giving the main role not only to the farmers, but also to territorial leaders and local governments, so that they could recognize the needs of their people and understand the new technology being installed,” she affirmed.



The plan, completed in May, was financed with eight million euros by the European Union and implemented by the UNDP. PHOTO: Prensa Latina

Urban Resilience Project Highlighted

By Wilfredo **CAMERO**

HAVANA.— The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Cuba has highlighted the implementation in this country of the Urban Resilience project, focused on promoting the technical diagnosis of buildings to improve disaster response.

The initiative carried out has facilitated specialized equipment for conducting assessments, as well as construction interventions to prevent the risk of building collapses, according to the organization, which is part of the United Nations system. In the Cuban capital, the program incorporated a risk-based approach into the Strategic Housing Plan for the Habana Vieja municipality—one of the areas most affected in terms of infrastructure—with a focus on the structural vulnerabilities of the housing stock.

According to the data released, the project was funded by the European Union’s Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection and received methodological support from Cuba’s National Civil Defense General Staff.

As a result, the Specialized Construction Enterprise benefited from the acquisition of a 30-ton crane, which made possible 639 emergency interventions to prevent collapses.

As part of the training actions, 216 firefighters and 66 Cuban Red Cross volunteers were trained.

The sources added that in the province of Pinar del Río, the project benefited eight local enterprises dedicated to the production of housing construction materials.



Urban Resilience project, focused on promoting the technical diagnosis of buildings to improve disaster response. PHOTO: Prensa Latina

Cuba Takes off on the Track Towards Santo Domingo 2026

By Boris Luis **CABRERA**

HAVANA.-Cuban athletics is experiencing flashes of world-class performance this year, as well as signs of renewal and a clear objective: the Santo Domingo 2026 Central American and Caribbean Games.

The Cuban delegation hopes to surpass the medals reached in San Salvador 2023 (9 golds, 11 silvers and 8 bronzes), but mostly break the 10-title barrier, a demonstration of sustained ambition and competitive rebuilding.

In a year where track and field has served as both a barometer and a mirror, Cuba has found in its traditional disciplines the foundation for maintaining its athletic identity, while new figures are leading the charge with internationally impactful results.

The country maintains its most recognizable signature in the jumping events. Triple jumper Leyanis Pérez reaffirmed her status as a world-class athlete in Doha, with a jump of 14.93 meters that placed her on the Diamond League podium, in a season that has solidified her position as a pillar of the sport.

Liadagmis Povea also continues to expand her competitive reach in this discipline, with jumps exceeding 14.50 meters, maintaining the strength of a school that remains a national hallmark. From the men's side, Lázaro Martínez, Cristian Nápoles and Andy Echeverría also stand out.

As for long jump, it has produced one of the year's most resounding chapters with Jorge Hodelín's impact, author of a world U20 record of 8.46 meters. This mark shook the international scene and confirmed the

emergence of a new generation with elite ambitions.

In the sprint sector, Roxana Gómez has maintained her competitive edge with a season of consistent times around 50 seconds. Her 50.20 in Ostrava and the bronze in Doha (50.23) confirm her status as a regional benchmark in the 400 meters, where consistency has become the main feature for competitiveness.

Middle-distance running also shows signs of improvement with Daily Cooper, a winner on the European circuit with a personal best that projects her as one of the fastest-rising figures of the cycle, extending Cuba's competitive range into distances where every progress has a strategic value for Santo Domingo.

The throwing events maintain their traditional structural importance. Discus thrower Silinda Morales has reaffirmed her international performance with victories over 62 meters, maintaining a level of stability that is key to the team's overall performance. Meanwhile, hammer throwing, with Ronald Mencía and shot put continue to contribute competitive volume with a sustained presence on the continental circuit.

High jump and other disciplines have also shown positive signs, with outstanding results such as those of Dacsy Brisón on the European circuit.

Overall, the season has not been uniform, but it has been revealing: Cuba combines peaks of world-class excellence, such as Hodelín's record and the podium finishes of Leyanis Pérez, Roxana Gómez and many others at European meetings, with an expanding base that is beginning to consolidate its replacement in several disciplines.



Triple jumper Leyanis Pérez reaffirmed her status as a world-class athlete in Doha, with a jump of 14.93 meters. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

Combat Sports at Central American and Caribbean Games

By Adrián **MENGANA**

HAVANA.- Although not yet at the strength of previous editions, combat sports will carry the best chances of success for the Cuban delegation at the Santo Domingo 2026 Central American and Caribbean Games, as they seek to reaffirm their place in the medal

standings of the world's oldest regional sporting event.

Among the disciplines included are wrestling, judo, boxing, taekwondo, fencing, and karate, with the first three expected to carry the most weight in the medal pull for the largest of the Antilles, as Cuba aims to follow Mexico and Colombia in the medal table and improve upon its

performance at the San Salvador 2023 Games.

Olympic champion of Tokyo 2021 and world champion of Belgrade 2023, Luis Orta, will lead the men's wrestling representation, joined by world champion of Belgrade 2023, Gabriel Rosillo, while Milaimys Marín, Olympic bronze medalist of Paris 2024, will lead the women's squad.

Three years ago in the Salvadoran capital, Cuban wrestling achieved a historic tally of 18 medals, distributed as 15 gold and three bronze, led by the Greco-Roman representatives, who captured all six available titles; the women won five golds, and the freestyle men won four.

Meanwhile, on the tatami mats, Cuba's main cards will be Iván Silva, silver medalist at the 2018 Baku World Championships, and Andy Granda, world champion of Tashkent 2022. In the boxing rings, standouts include Julio César La Cruz, Olympic champion of Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2021; Erislandy Lara, champion at the Paris 2024 Summer Games; and Lázaro Álvarez, world champion of Almaty 2013 and Doha 2015.

Judo dominated the nation competition with nine golds, three silvers, and two bronzes, while boxing fell short of expectations, totaling nine medals — two gold, two silver, and five bronze. Cuban taekwondo will center its hopes on Yoikel Daniel Goicochea, champion of the Asunción 2025 Junior Pan American Games, and on experienced athletes Arletis Acosta and Tamara Roble, gold and bronze medalists, respectively, at the San Salvador Games.

The discipline contributed to the Caribbean nation's coffers in San Salvador 2023 with two titles, one silver, and four bronzes.

Another sport with a rich history for the Island in regional competitions is fencing, which will place its ambitions on saber fencer Adeimis Torres and épée fencer Diorlan Ramos, who competed at the Junior and Cadet World Championships in Rio 2026. Meanwhile, Karate will make Cuban fans dream with Baurelis Torres, captain of the national team and an obligatory reference point for the sport in her country.

Torres won a silver at the Santiago 2023 Pan American Games and a bronze in Lima 2019, in addition to a Central American and Caribbean gold in San Salvador.



Olympic champion and world champion, Luis Orta, will lead the men's wrestling representation.

PHOTO: JIT.

Lleida: Snails and Other Beauties

By Fausto **TRIANA**

LLEIDA, SPAIN.- In many Caribbean countries, snails are part of Santería rituals, but in Lleida, Catalonia, snails themselves are the stars of a popular festival in which their presence is indispensable at the table. Throwing shells is the most common expression used in Santería to tell the present and future, like fortune tellers. However, far from this practice, "L Aplec del Caragol" (in Catalan) is a culinary story, a festivity with a significant social impact. The inhabitants of Lleida, an ancient Catalan city in northeast Spain, dedicate themselves to this unique celebration for three days each May, a miraculous synthesis of harmony, cultural performances and festive spirit, filled with admirable civic pride.

Although visitors usually know some details of the event beforehand, as a journalist I could not help but notice other beauties that adorn a city easy to love.

From the imposing hilltop, people can appreciate La Seu Vella, a Gothic relic that offers as many interpretations as a UNESCO World Heritage candidate can. Also astonishing are the historical remains of



During three days L Aplec del Caragol receives more than 200,000 visitors and the consumption is of 14 tons of snails. PHOTO: Prensa Latina...

the King's Castle (La Suda) or the old town, where the Baroque-style New Cathedral stands in stark contrast.

Guide Xavier Eritja speaks with great enthusiasm about all these Lleida wonders, and when I suggest that every piece of stone hides a story, he acknowledges that there is much work to be done.

"It's a matter of time and investment; we are full of treasures, and in a kind of contest with other World Heritage candidates, this should become a strategic objective.

The more we excavate, the more surprises from the past we will find," Eritja told **The Havana Reporter**.

SHELLFISHS' PROTAGONISTS

In a relative shadow, with Rafa Gimena, journalist, communications consultant and expert in wine and gastronomy, we find all the space to answer questions.

While Lleida's culinary art is much more encompassing, the presence of gastropod mollusks takes center stage.

So much so, Jesús Gimeno, owner and chef of the L'Espurna restaurant, has managed to reinvent himself with an exquisite menu, introducing snails in a tasting dish prepared in different ways.

He offered the oldest recipe, the grutesca, which consists of charring the snail with vine shoots and straw on a base of salt, on a brick, the traditional llauna, and other personal versions such as the Bourguignon, in a glass dish, or the small snail (la caracolina).

The El Celler del Roser, owned by Montse Guardiola, had previously paved the way for Paradiso, the novel by Lezama Lima that made its "Lezama-inspired meals" famous.

Then we have another essential figure, Ferrán Perdrix, president of the Lleida L'Aplec del Caragol Federation. He displays enthusiasm and pride as he shares the details of this celebration with THR.

In figures, the outlook is already showing signs of even greater success. The consumption of 14 tons of snails over these three days, along with 95,000 liters of beer, 17,000 direct participants and more than 200,000 visitors, will generate profits of around six million euros to be reinvested in the next event.



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