Continuity of the Cuban Revolution

COVID-19 and Dangerous Confidence

Culture
Rosario Cárdenas and Her Dance Equation

Cuba
Joy and Commitment Mark May Day in Cuba

Economy
Measures to Guarantee Food Production
Russian Tourists Return to Varadero

MATANZAS.- The first group of Russian tourists welcomed to the renowned Varadero resort, in western Cuba, arrived on April 18 on board of an Azur Air plane carrying 527 passengers.

Head of the Juan Gualberto Gómez Airport Commercial Department Yarisleidy Espinosa stressed the importance that the restart of operations has for Cuba and this sun-and-beach resort in particular, one of the country’s most important destinations, where a high number of vacationers are welcomed.

“This is a way to let people know that Cuba is ready to restart tourist activity, following all required safety measures,” the specialist told the press.

As of that date, the Azur Air airline started two weekly flights to the island, while NordWind and Royal Flight started flying on March 24, also with two weekly flights, a schedule that should remain in place until next October. As informed, the TUI and Condor companies are set to start operating next May, while Aeroflot – also a Russian company – should start flying to Cuba in the coming months as well.

The Varadero Airport is certified to welcome foreign travelers under strict health and sanitary measures, with the objective of protecting the health of the passengers and staff from the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus, the agent responsible for COVID-19. This terminal, with 31 years of service, welcomes over 30 percent of the visitors who come to Cuba and most of those who decide to spend their vacations in Varadero, one of the best beaches in the world.

Located in the Hicacos peninsula, on Matanzas province’s northern coast - about 140km east of Havana – this resort has high standards of comfort and health measures. With 52 hotels and 22,000 rooms, this Cuban region has a varied network of hotel facilities that provide a wide-ranging number of recreational options, especially nautical activities.

IBEROSTAR HOTEL REOPENS IN VARADERO

The Iberostar Laguna Azul Hotel of Varadero is included among the facilities that reopened their doors to welcome the first group of Russian tourists coming from Moscow.

This five-star resort, designed especially for families, is located in the Hicacos peninsula, with a tropical garden facing the beach. It includes a Spa with a hydrotherapy area, specialized restaurants, six outdoors pools and an entertainment program for kids and adults.

According to executives, the hotel is ready to conduct antigen or PCR tests against COVID-19 and in case of positive results, Iberostar guarantees the care of its guests through free healthcare services included in all the bookings.

Selection Varadero and Taínos are two other hotels also run by Iberostar that reopened in Varadero, selected among the world’s 25 best resorts by Travel Choice (Tripadvisor).
Continuity of the Cuban Revolution

By Orlando Oramas

HAVANA.- The 8th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) marked the natural and historic reinstitution of the revolutionary process on the Caribbean island, reaffirming the continuity of its socialist socioeconomic model.

So it was corroborated with the designation of President Miguel Díaz-Canel as first secretary of Cuba’s ruling political organization during the congress held in Havana from April 16 to 19.

Previously elected by delegates of the forum, the new PCC Central Committee also chose the members of the Political Bureau and Secretariat.

Díaz-Canel assumes the position previously held by Army General Raúl Castro, exponent of the historic leadership of the Cuban Revolution led by historic leader, Fidel Castro, whose legacy prevails in the meeting.

On April 16, Raúl Castro had announced that he would not accept the proposal to “continue holding high-ranking positions within the party,” though he will continue “to be an active revolutionary member willing to make my modest contribution until my last days.”

CURRENT EFFORTS

In his inaugural speech as first secretary of the PCC, a position that makes him the highest ranking leader of Cuba, Díaz-Canel said that his country aims to deal with indispensable tasks for its development with fresh efforts.

He is hopeful to implement these objectives as soon as possible and with the least possible level of foreign dependence, especially in regards food production, as the country currently imports a significant amount of food needs.

It is also Díaz-Canel’s intention to develop tourist opportunities, efficiently investing to cope with energy challenges and demands of the internal market, while also increasing the quality of services for the population.

The Cuban political model is original and challenging, the Cuban president said, admitting that the economic results of the past five years failed to accomplish expectations. “It would be inexcusable not to correct mistakes. We have done so and it is important to continue doing so,”

Díaz-Canel added that despite the difficulties, the economy has made progress and proven its potential. Cuba has shown it is possible to attain results in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic through public policies, the government’s performance and the participation of scientists and the people, he pointed out.

“Unity is our main strength; everything that brings us together. We’ll strongly defend unity, without giving room for prejudice nor dogma,” he said.

Generational continuity is part of that unity, the President stated, and called for young people to serve as agents of the transformations taking place in the country.

BLOCKADE, TERRORISM AND SUBVERSION

In his speech, the Cuban leader condemned the U.S. blockade, which he called a crime against humanity and economic war against his people.

He also questioned statements made by White House spokespersons intended to undermine the impact of the blockade while noting that the Cuba policy is not a priority for the Joe Biden administration.

Díaz-Canel recalled that the over 200 coercive measures adopted during the government of former U.S. President Donald Trump are still in force, together with the decision to include the island on the unilateral list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

“Our country is a victim of the terrorism financed, organized and implemented by the United States in most cases,” he stressed.

The Cuban president denounced subversion plans sponsored by U.S. government agencies to slander the revolution, confuse the public and increase internal conflict. He also condemned the existence of laws that seek to rule Cuba’s fate and condition its relations with the rest of the world, such as the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts.

Cuba’s aspiration is to live in peace and “have relations with the northern neighbor” based on equality, mutual respect and without interferences, he emphasized.

SOCIALISM PREVAILS

The congress approved several resolutions that define the Party’s courses of action for the 2021-2026 period, while also setting guidelines to cope with the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the intensification of the blockade imposed by the United States for six decades.

The resolutions approved include updates to the concept of Cuba’s Socioeconomic Growth Model of Socialist Society, which ratifies the vision to build an independent, socialist, democratic, prosperous and sustainable nation.

Although it recognizes socialist property of the entire population over the means of production as the main form of property of the socioeconomic system, it supports diversifying different forms of property and management.

The congress also approved 201 guidelines about the main course of action up to 2026, with the objective of channeling economic priorities. Resolutions on PCC functioning, ideological work, membership selection policy, and the training and promotion of party officials were agreed upon as well.

The PCC Central Committee elected by the 300 delegates of the forum was made up of 115 members –27 less members than in the previous committee. As part of the recent changes, 54 of those members are newcomers.

For its part, the Secretariat was made up of six members, most of them occupying their positions for the first time but highly-trained and competent.

The 8th PCC Congress closed on the day that marked the 60th anniversary of the Cuban deed that defeated the mercenary invasion in Playa Giron (Bay of Pigs), which had been equipped, funded and organized by the United States.
Changes Pending

HAVANA- U.S. President Joe Biden’s electoral promises about Cuba are still pending, while different sectors insist that better bilateral relations would benefit both countries.

On his way to the White House, which he occupied on January 20, Biden said he would lift some of the U.S travel and trade restrictions between the two countries.

Far beyond his publicly announced intentions, a change with US-Cuba relations continue to be outside of Biden’s foreign policy priorities, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki reiterated on April 16, after she was asked about the 8th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba during her daily press conference.

According to Psaki, the Biden administration will closely follow changes in the Caribbean country’s leadership and added that the U.S. policy towards Cuba will be based on what Washington considers support for democracy and human rights.

The United States has imposed numerous sanctions against Cuba and insists on maintaining its almost 60-year-old economic, commercial and financial blockade alleging human rights violations on the island.

Strongly rejected by the majority of the international community, that siege was unprecedentedly reinforced during the administration of Donald Trump (2017-2021), Biden’s predecessor.

The Republican government imposed over 240 new measures intended to hurt Cuba, destabilize its internal order, create a situation of ungovernability and overthrow the Revolution that became victorious on January 1, 1959.

The drastic restriction of travel and remittances, multiple obstacles to get fuel and substantial fines to foreign banks that trade with Cuba were among the punitive actions.

In addition, the U.S. Department of State withdrew most of its staff at the embassy in Havana after health incidents were reported by its diplomats, suspending the visa issuing process.

Another anti-Cuba action was the activation of Title III of the controversial Helms-Burton Act, which allows for lawsuits against individuals or companies that invested in properties that the island nationalized.

Enforced on February 3, 1962 following an executive order by then U.S. President John F. Kennedy, the blockade represents the main obstacle to Cuban development, and no Cuban citizen or socioeconomic sector go unaffected.

Amid this context, 80 House of Representatives Democrats sent a letter to Biden in March, requesting a change of policy and of the restrictions imposed by the United States over the past four years.

The legislators asked to resume productive dialogue with the Cuban government to, “help families in difficult situations and promote a more constructive approach by rapidly renewing engagement in the process for normalizing relations.”

According to the signatories on the letter, the initiative brought forward by lawmakers Bobby Rush, Gwen Moore and Barbara Lee, the executive orders implemented by the Trump administration that reinforced sanctions to levels not seen in decades.

They urged Biden to resume diplomatic commitment to engage in fields of mutual interest such as health and security and reverse the decision made by Trump on his last days as president, when he once again included Cuba on the unilateral list of State Sponsors of Terrorism.

However, in early April, Juan González, the National Security Council Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, stressed that approaching Cuba would be a gradual process and that former President Barack Obama’s (2009-2017) policy would not be retaken. At the end of 2014, he had announced the beginning of a process to normalize bilateral links.

“Joe Biden is not Barack Obama with regards to the Cuba policy,” he said in an interview with CNN, justifying his assertion that the political landscape has changed significantly, as Washington is focused on several world crises and its complex domestic situation.

By Dionys SANABIA

Prensa Latina

You can now get up to date news headlines from the Prensa Latina News Agency by sending an SMS with the letters PL to 8100.

Once confirmed, you will receive 4 x 250 spaced message updates per day.
A 30 day subscription costs only 25CUP deducted from your balance and which should be renewed before your expiry date.

If you encounter any problems with the service, you can call our Helpline on 72047397

For further details see http://www.entravestida.com, www.prensa-latina.cu or call the Desoft Customer Care Line at 7 832 3501

For 4 News Headlines per day for just $25.00 CUP / month, Send an SMS with the letters PL to 8100
COVID-19 and Dangerous Confidence

By Rosmerys BERNAL

HAVANA.- In April, Cuba reported a daily average of 1,025 COVID-19 patients and a record figure of up to 18 deaths in one day due to complications related to the disease, which corroborates the country’s complex epidemiological situation. Last year those figures were inconceivable in the Caribbean country, when 100 confirmed cases or a death made headlines and was cause for alarm among the population. Cuban Public Health Minister José Ángel Portal warned recently that more than a risk, the most recent COVID-19 outbreak in Cuba is of great danger.

“We are compelled to reduce the high number of infected people, otherwise this situation will have the health system scrambling and spoil the efforts made,” he insisted.

Over 20,000 samples are analyzed daily by the 26 Molecular Biology Labs in all fifteen Cuban provinces to detect SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Another laboratory of that kind began operating recently in the special municipality of Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth).

Equipped with excellent technology, those institutions also have highly qualified staff, trained by specialist of Havana’s Pedro Kouri Tropical Medicine Institute (IPK), to process quick PCR tests. Almost four million samples have been analyzed since 2020, with over 100,000 testing positive for COVID-19.

In April, Cuba reported the death of two minors for the first time, and that of a mother that had just delivered a healthy baby.

The country also registered an increase of cases among pregnant women and of those that had just given birth, which is alarming for the National Health System due to the complications they might develop.

Since March 11, 2020, when the first COVID-19 cases were confirmed in the country, until December of that year, the number of infected pregnant women and new mothers totaled 110. However, that figure reached more than 700 in the first four months of 2021, according to official statistics. Cuba’s COVID-19 health protocols put special emphasis on the mother-child population, with detailed information about prevention, treatment and even handling of patients recovering from the disease at the primary healthcare level.

On the other hand, IPK Research Director María Guadalupe Guzmán explained that a gradual increase of virus strains first detected in South Africa, California (United States) and the United Kingdom has been reported on the island.

Cuba continues with clinical trial phase III of Soberana 02 and Abdala vaccine candidates, now with the administration of the second dose on volunteers from several provinces, together with intervention studies on people at high risk of contracting the disease such as scientists and health personnel.

The Caribbean island also has three other vaccine candidates currently undergoing different clinical trial phases: Soberana 01, Soberana PLUS and Mambisa.

The Vice President of the Biotechnological and Pharmaceutical Industries Business Group (BioCubaFarma), Eduardo Martínez, explained that “just one shot of any of the vaccine candidates does not provide the protection needed against COVID-19.” Therefore, it is necessary to wait until the vaccination trials are complete to prove that a person is fully immunized and does not transmit the virus.”

As the popular saying goes in Cuba, “confidence may be dangerous,” and the fight against COVID-19 demands ever greater responsibility from all of us.

Meanwhile, massive intervention with vaccine candidates Soberana 02 and Abdala will begin in May in seven municipalities of Havana that were not included in clinical trial phase III of Soberana 02. That operation will then continue in the remaining eight municipalities of the capital, reaching up to 1,700,000 residents.

In order to carry out this massive action, MINSAP experts and specialists with the Finlay Vaccine Institute (IFV) and the Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Center (CIGB) trained the health staff and clinical centers in charge of this task.
Havana.- On its 62nd anniversary, Casa de las Américas archives history, academia and sociopolitical processes in Latin America and the Caribbean.

With its headquarters in Havana, the institution began sharing political thinking of the continent on April 28, 1959, led by Cuban heroin and guerrilla fighter Haydee Santamaría.

Located in Havana’s neighborhood of Vedado, the famous building, which was declared National Monument in 2010, was first built as residential property. In 1947, when it was bought by the Association of American Writers and Artists, a third story was added to the original construction. Almost a decade later, Cuban architect Ramón del Busto added the well-known tower.

In conversation with a group of workers on June 4, 1974, which was published by the institution’s news portal La Ventana, Santamaría said that when she arrived at the building in 1959, “it was a piece of house that looked like a church.” “Those of us close to people in this country that knew what could happen, especially Fidel (Castro), were aware that a break in relations with Latin America was approaching, and that big conflicts would follow (…)”, she noted.

That possibility made the heroin begin to consider that, “when we are isolated from our continent, it is important not to be isolated from Latin American culture.” Shortly after it was founded, the entity fought the blockade against the island through literature and art. “When almost no country in our continent could hear anything about Cuba, Casa de las Américas provided a voice, and when Latin American writers came to Cuba, what we care about the most is that…they leave with a fair vision of what our Revolution stands for,” she said.

The current Director of the Research Center and of Casa de las Américas Magazine, Jorge Fornet, recalled that one of the institution’s goals has always been knowledge and to spread regional thinking, through three basic working elements: awards, the magazine and the publishing house. “With regards to literature and publications, the work was fast, especially to compile key themes and authors, ideas and proposals made by Casa, serving as a starting point for reflection on the continent.”

One of the first awards in essay writing was granted to Argentine writer, poet and literary critic Ezequiel Martínez Estrada in 1960, he told The Havana Reporter. According to the academic, “if we analyze the collections, awards and books edited over the last 60+ years, we can understand the region’s trajectory, testimony and documentary value, together with the feeling of intellectuals such as Guatemalan playwright and politician Manuel Galich (1913-1984) and Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti (1920-2009).”

“Casa de las Américas treasures the work of great thinkers of the 19th century such as Puerto Rican Eugenio María de Hostos and Cuban José Martí, but also of contemporary authors. It is an unusual institution, as it is very loyal to its first days of founding but very different as well,” he noted.

According to Fornet, the entity always ventured into the creation of new departments, programs and contest categories. Many regional authors became known thanks to this cultural space in Havana. That is the case of Uruguayan journalist and writer Eduardo Galeano, whose work “Las venas abiertas de América Latina” (Open Veins of Latin America) received recognition during the 1971 Casa de las Américas award ceremony. Today, it is one of the political literature classics of the continent.

Over the years, studies on women, indigenous people, Latinos in the United States, African roots in the region, structuralism, the role of universities, ecology, and most recently, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have joined the analysis and promotion of literature, music, theater and visual arts.

The Colloquium on studies of native cultures is one of the initiatives fostered by Casa to make known the realities and challenges of ancestral communities.
Rosario Cárdenas and Her Dance Equation

By Liz BOBADILLA

HAVANA.- Cuban choreographer Rosario Cárdenas formulates new equations in the dancing scene, adding new ingredients and combining science and art like an experiment that arouses all the feels.

Inspired by the poetic art of Cuban intellectual José Lezama Lima, which includes humor, movement and sensuality – characteristic elements of the Cuban identity – in addition to permutations, commutations and other mathematic calculations, Cárdenas stages a work full of emotion and provocation.

With the foundation of Danza Contemporánea (Contemporary Dance), the dancer introduced a body movement methodology and different method in the formation of dancers that marked the development of this expression on the island.

“I needed a conceptual platform in which I could think, create and work,” the 68-year-old dancer told The Havana Reporter in an exclusive interview. Cárdenas added that in the analysis of mathematical movement, she found the turning point of her career, as a tool for choreographic construction and physical preparation.

“I felt that I needed a different design in relation to how I wanted to work. I had to rebuild the Cuban technique, increase the level of science, study therapeutic methods and the human body, and search for ways to protect dancers, in order to avoid injuries as much as possible,” she commented.

“Permutations, combinations and variations remained as the foundations of that structure,” which nurtured the image and universality of Cuban culture, while making “reference to our greatest writers, musicians and poets,” said the Master of Dance at the Paris VIII University, in France.

At the beginning, she had the support of Professor Ana Isabel Matos, who helped introduce her to physical preparation in dance.

“Life showed me that we were not crazy; many followed the example later on,” she noted.

With great skill, Cárdenas translates emotions into movement and articulates rhythm as if she were adding, subtracting or multiplying it, creating new equations for national arts.

“Defending and appreciating the body in all of its dimensions, with elegance, delicacy and poetic art, gave us a mark of authenticity that I like; we represent diversity and the dancers identify with that,” she stressed.

“In regard to the language of movement, my creations are characterized by displacements in space and compositions, the relationships among dancers and their ability to represent the variety of human relations, regardless of gender expression or sexual orientation,” the dancer said.

With more than 90 choreographies, Cárdenas stated her pleasure to be able to work with dancers, support them along their path and witness their individual discoveries.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic represents many challenges for the arts, Rosario saw this time as an opportunity to settle debts with herself, watch films, read books, paint – another art form she loves – teach and prepare her PhD dissertation, which she will present at the Cuban University of Arts.

With that study, she hopes to archive her methodology, endorsed by over 30 years of hard work and based on the analysis of the staging in one of her works, which will serve as bibliographic material for artistic education.

“With the passing of the years, I have been able to combine different elements. I have incorporated Lezama’s concepts while building my system. Perhaps it can apply to others, that’s why I want to leave it in writing,” concluded Cárdenas, National Dance award recipient in 2013.

The dancer also participated in the recent production of the film “The Power Upon Us,” by Cuban Carolina Romillo, in which she plays the role of the moon in relation to the sun and the planets.

A look at current issues under the lens of in-depth and investigative journalism.

www.prensa-latina.cu
SANTIAGO DE CUBA.- Thousands of Cuban professionals are grateful to the University of Oriente (UO) for their education, with fond memories of student life, buildings and different areas of the institution. This has been the case for almost 75 years, after the university that largely welcomes students from the provinces of Ciego de Ávila and Guantánamo was the second to be founded in the country, after the University of Havana.

After the revolutionary triumph in January 1959, it was possible to fill the classrooms with the children of humble workers and farmers, without race or class distinctions, thanks to the changes in higher education.

The creation of new Cuban universities benefited from the teaching experience and academic knowledge of this institution of higher education, which currently takes on the technical training of the qualified workforce in that eastern Cuban region.

But its impact has gone beyond borders: it has trained thousands of students from developing countries and, at the same time, lent a hand to higher education institutions in other parts of the world.

Due to its social and national importance, it was natural that the patrimonial group of the University of Oriente, which comprises nine buildings and one of the oldest outdoor spaces, were designated a National Monument.

The announcement made by the National Commission of Monuments, which is attached to the Cultural Heritage Council, made it the third Cuban university to be granted such an extraordinary designation, after the bicentennial University of Havana and the Marta Abreu Central University of Las Villas.

Dr. Frank Josué Solar, head of the Department of History and Patrimony, stressed the value of the Francisco Martínez Central Library, where the revolutionary government was established on January 3, 1959, two days after the revolutionary victory.

The Museums of Natural History and Archaeology, together with the valuable art collection of Spanish-born professor Francisco Prat, make up the symbolic environment presented by the expert, who is one of its almost 70,000 graduates.

Among other historical moments, Solar mentioned the visit of Commander Ernesto Guevara and the soccer game where he played together with his Argentinean friend Alberto Granados, founder of the local School of Medicine. The patrimonial complex is made up of the current rector’s office building, with its modern architecture, foundational building that houses the Department of Law, and the Department of Mechanical Engineering, where that specialty was taught for the first time in Cuba.

Orgullo UO (UO Pride), a label that symbolizes a true sense of belonging to an outstanding “lineage,” was felt by COVID-19 patients among its most recent actions, with the support of its students and professors, among others.
HAVANA.- Cuba's mining industry hopes to increase the production of fertilizers made of zeolite byproducts and establish mutually beneficial relations with research centers and farmers, in order to enhance that product's added value.

The Deputy Director of the Geo-mining and Salt Business Group, GEOMINSAL, Esperanza del Pozo, told The Havana Reporter that of the 50,000 tons of zeolite produced in 2020, 10,330 tons were used to make zeo-fertilizers. Of them, 10,000 tons were assigned to produce Agromenas and 330 to make Nereas, which are compounds used in agriculture, made with different formulations and for different purposes to replace various imports, Esperanza del Pozo explained.

In the case of Nereas, its production is expected to increase by 5,000 tons in 2021. Zeolite is the main raw material used to make this fertilizer, and its processing depends on the characteristics of the crops where it will be applied. On the other hand, 2,200 tons of natural zeolite were exported to different clients in Latin America and Europe. Zeolite-based fertilizers are the fruit of Cuban science, through the work of universities, producers and final clients. All this responds to the call made by the country’s leadership that science goes beyond research centers to reach final destinations, said Esperanza del Pozo.

The official also noted that Agromenas fertilizer is produced in three active plants but Nereas in just one; therefore, its small-scale production fails to meet the Ministry of Agriculture’s demand.

Hence, it is necessary to modernize, industrialize and extend Nereas production throughout the country. Traditional methods are used to produce it, so, careful procedures are necessary in order to ensure its quality, she sustained.

Del Pozo pointed out that the goal is to extend Nereas and Agromenas production to all Cuban geo-mining companies, because transportation costs would decrease as a result.

Cuba has four zeolite deposits which, given the current production rate, account for more than 150 years of exploitation. Three of them have plants operating in San Andrés (Eastern Province of Holguín), Najasa (Camagüey Province) and in Tasajera (central Province of Villa Clara). The other deposit is located in San Ignacio, in the western Province of Mayabeque, with the peculiarity that the zeolite is white, which allows for a greater variety of uses.

Most zeolite deposits in Cuba were studied in the 1980s and 1990s, determining their precise locations and establishing processing plants. That process was led by the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro, Esperanza recalled. It is necessary to continue those studies, because Cuba’s industry and science need to develop mutually beneficial relations to provide all Cuban minerals with greater added value, she stressed.

GEOMINSAL is the business group in charge of producing all metallic and nonmetallic minerals (excluding nickel), as well as salt.
HAVANA.- Cuba celebrated May Day with sights set on the panorama of the 8th Congress of the Communist Party, which defined economy and societal trajectories. Traditional parades and demonstrations in public plazas once again were replaced by initiatives on social networks, in homes and at workplaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual nature and reality intermingled under the slogan “Together We Make Cuba.” The messages, photos and videos posted on different digital platforms joined the substantial effort of those that contribute to Cubans’ wellbeing with their work.

Recognizing the decisive role of workers in the production of goods and services, increasing exports, saving resources and putting science and technology in function of economic development were all present. The General Secretary of Cuba’s Union of Workers (CTC), Ulises Guilarte, referenced those topics when inviting the public to mark the day. He also stressed the need to foster, from this organization, updating the socioeconomic growth model of a socialist society.

The leader insisted on the importance of trade union work in a challenging context marked by the intensification of the U.S. economic, commercial and financial blockade against the Caribbean island and the COVID-19 pandemic, which not only has affected human health but the economy as well. This time the celebrations made special recognition of workers from the scientific and public health sectors, thanking all those that fight SARS-COV2, as well as those that work in primary economic sectors.

Positive relations between the two countries and the rejection of the U.S. blockade against Cuba also found room in those festivities through the International Meeting of Solidarity with Cuba, which was organized by geographical regions and held online on April 30 and May 1. The Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People (ICAP) and CTC joined hands to hold the event, in which Cuba reiterated its support for workers’ struggles in other countries, where workers deal with the consequences of neoliberal policies.

May Day was a day of joy, as the CTC general secretary had predicted, but it was also a moment when the Cuban trade union movement ratified its commitment to help solve the country’s most serious problem: how to make the economy efficient. That was precisely one of the topics most debated by the delegates during the recent congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), where the Guidelines of the Socioeconomic Policy were updated.

The projected initiatives add to other transformations in the Cuban work environment, with the implementation of 43 measures aimed at giving more autonomy to the state-run enterprise, the monetary reform and policies to improve the private sector.

Getting ready to make contributions in all of those processes is part of the challenges ahead for Cuban workers and trade union leaders, as they connect to the wellbeing of society and responses to some of the agreements reached by the 21st CTC Congress.

By Karina Marrón

PHOTO: Prensa Latina
HAVANA.- Havana’s streetlamps not only captivate tourists but also exemplify many people's interest in the relation between art, history and culture in the Cuban capital.

Erected among trees and at historical parks, these lamps protect passers-by and attract the curious look of all those carrying a camera.

Both, old and modern streetlights, have a peculiar meaning for all those that visit the city that was founded on November 16, 1519.

The history of street lighting is very well represented in Havana with the illumination of public highways, parks and other public spaces.

Archaeologists have found terracotta lamps from the years 7,000 to 8,000 B.C. in Mesopotamian plains, as well as others made of copper and bronze around the year 2,700 in Egypt and Persia.

Gas was first used in street lighting back in 1807, when Frederick Albert Winsor illuminated one side of London's Pall Mall Street after having enhanced the system French Philippe Lebon had studied years earlier.

At the beginning, lamplighters used to light gas streetlamps at nightfall. Years later, automatic devices were used, as was the case in Havana.

Many of those artifacts can be seen on the streets of the Cuban capital, like a living museum. Although they are electric now, their original structure and materials have been preserved.
Conservative Guillermo Lasso, Ecuador’s New President

By Sinay CÉSPEDES

QUITO- Guillermo Lasso, conservative candidate of the Ecuadorian presidency, was officially declared as the newly-elected president after the count of ballots of the presidential elections’ runoff, held on April 11.

The ballots, validated by the National Electoral Council (CNE) in a Public Hearing held on Sunday, April 18, gave the victory to Lasso, a businessman and representative of the center-right alliance 21-6 CREO-Social Christian Party, with 4,656,426 votes (52.36%).

The progressive coalition Union for Hope (UNES), represented in the presidential elections by young economist Andrés Arauz, won 4,236,515 votes (47.64 % of the votes).

However, on April 11, when the preliminary results were informed, the parties accepted the CNE results, taking political scientists, social organizations and citizens by surprise, as they had bet on the leftist progressive party in search of a change in the nation, severely affected by the economic and health crisis.

The results did not match the predictions made by the polls, the majority of which had given Andrés Arauz a significant edge over his adversary in the elections. According to former deputy foreign minister Kintto Lucas, several factors influenced the results, including stigmatization, media campaigns and persecution against the members of the Union for Hope couple, which included Carlos Rabascall as candidate to the vice presidency and Correístas (followers or former officials of the Rafael Correa presidential period).

In his opinion, void votes – 1,761,433 (12.26%) – were another factor that favored the right wing and finally affected the so-called left sectors, because “all progressive options are defeated when neoliberalism wins.”

UNES was able to establish a full alternative on different sides and consolidate the alliance between the Correístas and other key sectors of the indigenous and left movement, which were progressive but were not totally in favor of the Correístas movement, Lucas added.

As for Lasso’s victory, he stressed that not only the banker won, but the Social Christian Party too, an entity that represents one of the most repressive governments in the history of Ecuador: that of León Febres Cordero.

Even though UNES did not win the second electoral round, it was still significant for the movement, receiving more than 4 million votes amidst all of the obstacles imposed and the negative conditions in which the electoral campaigns were held, Lucas affirmed.

With the future in mind, he considered consolidating the Strength Social Commitment Movement essential – of which Rafael Correa is an active member – attached to Union for Hope and heading progressivism and anti-neoliberalism.

In that sense, he recommends strengthening necessary political and social structures to gather everyone in a big movement.
HAVANA.- Cuba recently approved 63 measures to increase agribusiness production and thus meet the needs of the population. Thirty of those measures are top priority and some will be effective immediately.

Maximizing agricultural land, essential for development to ensure food for the population and a national security issue, is considered the key solution to solving one of the major shortages: agribusiness products.

The idea is to solve structural, organizational, productive, economic, financial and social problems related to the use and possession of land, which have prevented reaching high levels of productivity and yield in the agribusiness sector.

“This situation has prevented us from meeting the needs of the people in terms of food,” Deputy Prime Minister Jorge Luis Tapia said in a recent television statement.

Tapia explained that all 63 measures are the result of an analysis of the Cuban agricultural yield in the last 10 years, with the objective of eliminating obstacles and fostering the sector’s productive capacities as soon as possible.

In order to do so, implementing these regulations with rigor, discipline and control is essential, as well as honoring the contracts that farmers have signed with the entrepreneurial sector, which will allow for the improvement of productive indicators and the active participation of all farmers and growers.

The said measures are adopted amidst a complex national and international scenario and are part of Cuban development strategies to slow down the impact of the pandemic, the strengthening of the U.S. blockade and the implementation of the recent monetary reform.

According to official data, Cuba has more than 10,400,000 hectares of land, of which 6,400,755 are agricultural (58%). However, only 3,120,926 are cultivated.

In addition to that, only seven percent of the cultivated area has irrigation, another element that affects the development of the agricultural sector and prevents the necessary yield.

In relation to land management, the cooperative and private sector gathers 4,672,551 hectares, while the state sector comprises 1,728,204 hectares – a sign of the need to strengthen state socialist companies in this sector.

For that reason, decisions address food production and growers’ costs, such as the reduction of electricity and water rates for all agribusiness activities – which will be fixed throughout the year, regardless of the fluctuation of oil prices in the international market.

This decision means that the State will have to make an additional expenditure of 240-400 million pesos (10-16 million dollars) from the national budget in regard to subsidy; however, the objective is to favor and foster farmers to meet their agreements with the State and commercialize surpluses.

Another important topic is the need to boost national products, science and innovation due to the deficit of foreign currencies and restrictions in the import of resources, consumables and bio-products because of serious financial problems resulting from the blockade imposed by the United States.

The State Budget also includes 1.8 billion pesos (75 million dollars) of promotional funds to boost agricultural production through the granting of loans, which will foster the substitution of imports.
LatAm Condemns First World Selfishness During Pandemic

By Eduardo RODRÍGUEZ

MADRID.- During the 27th Ibero-American Summit, countries from Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula requested universal access to COVID-19 vaccines, as big powers are hoarding them. That was one of the main requests contained in the final declaration of the Summit of Heads of State and Government held on April 21 in a semi-online format in the Principality of Andorra, a tiny state located between Spain and France. In the agreement, the 22-country members (19 from Latin America, plus Spain, Portugal and Andorra) asked that vaccines be accessible, purchasable and distributed to the entire world, not monopolized by developed countries. It is necessary to avoid vaccine hoarding by countries that “have greater economic power or influence, to thus prevent that financial interests prevail over public health,” the final agreement reads.

The diplomats called to strengthen multilateralism and urged the international community and pharmaceutical industry to fight SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, more equitably.

“The devastating effects of the pandemic require a global, coordinated, friendly response in the face of big challenges like rebuilding our economies in an inclusive and resilient way, and strengthening sustainable development, in particular, the fight against poverty and inequity.” The declaration insists on the urgent and equal distribution of safe and effective vaccines amid efforts by the COVAX Alliance, which involves 190 countries sponsored by the World Health Organization.

During the plenary videoconference session, most Latin American leaders agreed that the vaccines that have reached the region are not enough although they are essential to the eradication of the pandemic and economic recovery. Industrialized nations “have adopted stockpiling policies, which is inconsistent with human solidarity,” said Dominican President Luis Abinader.

“Rich countries, which represent 16 percent of the (global) population, have held onto 54 percent of vaccines, more than they really need. It’s necessary that we join together to denounce this situation,” Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado added.

“We’ll succeed as one or be defeated separately; it’s our call,” warned the Dominican President Luis Abinader, who assumed the bloc’s pro tempore secretariat in Andorra, organizing the 2022 summit to be held in that country. Given the unequal distribution of vaccines against the deadly virus, Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard proposed giving priority to COVID-19 preparations in Latin America so that the region “never again” is affected by drug stockpiling.

Ebrard praised vaccine developments in Latin America and mentioned those of Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Regarding this, he invited Spain, Portugal and Andorra to join that effort.

Vaccines bring hope but they will be useless if not all people around the world are immunized, warned Andorra’s Head of Government Xavier Espot, who hosted the meeting.

In that forum, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel reiterated Cuba’s willingness to share the results of its scientific experiences and innovation with humanity, in an international context marked by the effects of the pandemic.

The Cuban leader said his country sticks to its policy of solidarity and cooperation for the benefit of the human race.

Among the country’s strengths, he mentioned there are 229 national entities committed to scientific development. That strong system, with its cutting-edge and efficient biotechnological and pharmaceutical industry, is a key ally in the fight against COVID-19, he stressed.

All of that has enabled Cuba to currently have five vaccine candidates in different phases of human clinical trials, the President added.

Also, its alliance with the universal, free of charge and high-quality health system, plus highly-trained human resources, has made it possible to give an effective response during the pandemic.

However, in the middle of the health emergency, the United States brutally tightened its economic, commercial and financial blockade. The Cuban people responded, further multiplying its well-known resistance and resourcefulness, Diaz-Canel emphasized.

The President mentioned how Washington held campaigns to discredit and sabotage the Cuban medical cooperation, while 57 brigades of the Henry Reeve Contingent helped fight the pandemic in 40 countries and territories.

The Cuban head of State thanked the Ibero-American community for its longstanding support in asking for the end of the U.S. siege and for its rejection of the island’s inclusion on the list of State...
Table Tennis Star Achieves Olympic Dream

By Maylini VIDAL

BUENOS AIRES.- In Argentina, Cuban Daniela Fonseca performed brilliantly and celebrated her double qualification for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, a childhood dream she will make a reality in a discipline she loves: table tennis.

The city of Rosario was a stroke of luck for the 18-year-old girl, who won the first Olympic qualification for Cuba in this modality after more than 20 years of absence (since Sydney 2000). As if that were not enough, she repeated the deed with her partner Jorge Moisés Campos in mixed doubles.

“It was a unique experience after having competed in only four international tournaments. I cannot believe it; I have been dreaming about participating in Olympic Games since I was 12,” Fonseca said in an exclusive interview with The Havana Reporter right after her victory last April.

The motivation of her individual win after defeating Cuban-born Mexican Yadira Silva 4-3 required her best efforts in a very intense game. They first defeated the Brazilian pair 4-0 in the Latin American qualification tournament, and then the Chilean couple in the final.

It was not an easy feat. Like the other members of the Cuban delegation, Daniella had made a 60-hour trip with layovers in four countries before arriving in Argentina. But that was just one example only of everything she has gone through lately.

The training was tough, first interrupted for almost nine months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and then she had to work in overdrive since February 5 to make it to Rosario, Fonseca commented.

“I find this all very hard to believe. I made this promise in Cuba that I would qualify for Tokyo and it now came true in Argentina,” stated the young athlete.

Clearly overcome by emotion, the table tennis player was very happy for her performance and that of Campos as well, who made it to all three finals. “We finally made it, the two of us together; I’m very pleased with this tournament,” she said. Pleased with her double qualification, Fonseca returned home together with the Cuban delegation after another long trip, content and already thinking about her first performance in the Olympic Games, where she hopes to bring her best to every game.

Cuban Boxer Takes Gold at Youth World Championship

By Yodeni MASÓ

HAVANA.- Jorge Luis Felimón’s golden fists headed Cuba and Latin America in the Youth World Boxing Championship held last April in Kielce, Poland, with the participation of 52 countries.

Felimón, the only finalist from Latin America, did not let his fans down, winning the title of the 91kg division against local Jakub Straszewski 5-0.

The boxer received widespread praises at the Hala Legionów Sport Center because of his victories in the ring against Armenian Henrik Tshghrikyan, Macedonian Ardijan Azemi, Ukrainian Mykyta Gorbatenko and Russian Ramazan Dadaev, who he fought in the semifinals in the last bout of an unfavorable match.

Winning gold in that event, Cuba stood out in Kielce among the Latin American representatives with three medals and ranking sixth place as a nation.

The Cuban delegation participated in the Polish championship with nine boxers, winning 29 victories and suffering 20 defeats. In addition to Felimón’s gold medal, the nation also won two bronzes – by welterweight Dany Landys Lafó and super heavyweight Fernando Arzola.

After 10 days of competition, India ranked as the country at the top of the podium, with eight gold and three bronze medals – including seven in female categories.

Russia placed second with three gold, five silver and three bronzes medals, followed by Uzbekistan (3-1-6), Kazakhstan (2-4-4) and Ukraine (1-3-2), which completed Kielce’s “top five.”

The Youth World Championship held in Poland gathered over 400 boxers from different countries, including Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua and Venezuela.
MATANZAS.- The city of Matanzas, also known as the Athens of Cuba since the 19th century, will celebrate its 328th anniversary on October 12, 2021. The city was founded by about 30 families from the Canary Islands, Spain, who were specially sent by the crown to settle in the area. Historical records indicate that the Guanima Bay – the Matanzas Bay at present – was first sketched in 1532, although it was not until 1693 that the Spanish king decided to send the first families to colonize the area by the bay.

On January 25, 1693, Cuban Acting Governor, Severino de Manzaneda, visited the area of the future city of Matanzas with scribes, military and other personnel, according to records. Their mission was to take the first measurements for the emerging settlement. During the 11-day stay, they drew up the town, the fortress and the pieces of land the people from the Canary Island would occupy, historian Arnaldo Jiménez de la Cal described.

"The site of foundation could not be better, not even considering what it is stated in the Indians Laws in relation to its waters, features and land…," wrote Manzaneda.

More than 300 years later, this Cuban city stands out for its urban design, which includes a regular layout of streets and domestic architecture, says Alicia García Santana, Doctor of Art Sciences and National Cultural Heritage awardee.

"Style, design and shape characterize Matanzas, a city in western Cuba that also exhibits a perfect relation with its rivers (three fluvial currents flow through its geography), its bay and its hills, the specialist commented.

"Unity between typology and scale, design and shape, characterize the area's infrastructure, still strong today due to the preservation of the early architecture of the 19th century," she added.

According to García, Matanzas falls in the general category of neoclassicism and is renowned as Cuba's first modern city.

"The foundation of a city follows the most advanced ideas of the time, with a rectangular block and an octagonal layout, with two squares separated from each other and another interesting feature: a church facing one of the squares," García explained.

In her opinion, "Matanzas is beautiful just because… just by walking down its streets, appreciating its buildings, the feelings you experience when you walk around, the presence of its bay, its culture, which fills its spaces one way or the other."

Another detail of Matanzas' urbanization is that the municipality has several street stairs, which offer another unique feature to its environment. Streets with these characteristics are a natural result of a hilly landscape, something that often forces people to go uphill.

As part of its urban development, Matanzas could not avoid the hills; thus, when walking around the city, strollers have to go up moderate to steep hills whether they like it or not.

"Unity between typology and scale, design and shape, characterize the area's infrastructure, still strong today due to the preservation of the early architecture of the 19th century," she added.

According to García, Matanzas falls in the general category of neoclassicism and is renowned as Cuba's first modern city.

"The foundation of a city follows the most advanced ideas of the time, with a rectangular block and an octagonal layout, with two squares separated from each other and another interesting feature: a church facing one of the squares," García explained.

In her opinion, "Matanzas is beautiful just because… just by walking down its streets, appreciating its buildings, the feelings you experience when you walk around, the presence of its bay, its culture, which fills its spaces one way or the other."

Another detail of Matanzas' urbanization is that the municipality has several street stairs, which offer another unique feature to its environment. Streets with these characteristics are a natural result of a hilly landscape, something that often forces people to go uphill.

As part of its urban development, Matanzas could not avoid the hills; thus, when walking around the city, strollers have to go up moderate to steep hills whether they like it or not.