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Effective COVID-19 Vaccination Roadmap

Cuba
Bridges of Love

Economy
Autonomy in Entrepreneurial System

Sports
Olympic Journey Despite the Pandemic
HAVANA.-Despite the constant difficulties the Cuban economy, and tourism in particular, has been facing, authorities look for a way out—to shine a light in the middle of a dark tunnel, especially due to the health crisis caused by COVID-19. Tourism executives and workers are faced with problems of all kinds, including financial and commercial barriers reinforced from the United States, as corroborated in official statements and reports. Cuba’s Prime Minister Manuel Marrero said recently that Cuba hopes to maintain protocols against the pandemic at the country’s tourist resorts, advocating for safe tourism. He ratified the will to look for ways to increase tourism income in the middle of an adverse context, as long as they do not harm the local public’s health.

“When we see that the risk of tourist operation is greater than the capabilities to control COVID-19 outbreaks, we'll not hesitate to re-close borders,” he insisted. With the objective of keeping the pandemic under control, the Ministry of Public Health on July 15 adopted a series of measures to follow-up with travelers.

In the case of Cubans that arrive through the airports of Varadero and Cayo Coco tourist resorts, they must comply with the 14-day isolation protocol at its hotel facilities, and their luggage is limited to one checked bag. On the other hand, free movement of tourists outside of those tourist resorts is prohibited, while health protocols are maintained with medical controls at hotels, as well as COVID-19 tests.

Prime Minister Marrero said in a public address that Cuba welcomed 4.2 million tourists in 2019, 1.8 million in 2020 and some 122,000 in the first half of 2021.

Cuba’s National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI) said in its latest report that until May 2021, the country had welcomed only 11.1 percent of the number of tourists recorded in the same period of 2020. From January to May, tourists largely came from Russia, Germany, Spain, Canada, the United States, France and Ukraine, according to the source.

Cuba currently welcomes four weekly flights from Russia, with the number of Russian tourists totaling over 2,400 weekly, Cuban Tourism Minister Juan Carlos García said recently. García recalled that each traveler takes a PCR test upon arrival in Cuba, where there are many safe destinations such as Varadero, Cayo Coco, Cayo Santa María and Cayo Largo.

“The defense network joined the baroque and neoclassical style of other monuments, as well as the homogenous complex of houses with arcades, balconies, wrought iron grilles and inside patios that characterize, par excellence, the environment of the city’s oldest part.

Traces of a Fortified Havana

By Elisa Rodríguez

HAVANA. In addition to an elegant urban design, Old Havana inherited a fortress system unique to Latin America that dates back to several centuries ago, for which it has been named the “Key to the New World,” among other titles.

The network of defensive constructions, designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982, protected the Cuban capital during the period of commercial splendor along the route designed from Europe. Such a success was the result of the exceptional function of its harbor and the stop ships had to make in their sea route to the Américas, as acknowledged by the Organization of World Heritage Cities.

Some of Latin America’s oldest and largest stone fortresses were built by the time, such as La Cabaña, the Castillo de la Real Fuerza (Royal Force Castle) and the El Morro and La Punta castles. The Royal Force Castle, one of the buildings visitors admire the most, shows on top of one of its towers the La Giraldilla sculpture, a weather vane in the shape of a woman that is a symbol of the Cuban capital and that according to the legend, is looking into horizon in search of her beloved husband.

Finished in 1577, the castle served as headquarters and main defensive complex for several centuries, in addition to being used as residence of the General Captains for almost 200 years. Meanwhile, the San Salvador de la Punta Castle, by the Malecón (sea wall), was erected in a strategic position to protect the southern flank that allows entrance to the harbor, which was defended on the opposite side by the Castillo de los Tres Reyes del Morro.

During the colonial period, a huge chain tied between the San Salvador and the El Morro castles blocked the way to harbor, a majestic example of the Renaissance’s military architecture. The San Salvador de la Punta castle, whose construction started in 1589 and finished several years later, was an engineering masterpiece at the time, a work erected on stone totally exposed to the sea.

After the storming of Havana by the English (August 1762), the San Carlos de la Cabaña fortress was built, the final addition to the city’s defense system and the largest Spanish fortification in the New World. La Cabaña, built from 1763 to 1774 by the explicit order of King Charles III, has inherited colonial traditions, including the cannon ceremony.

Other constructions also protected the former San Cristóbal de La Habana village, including the Santo Domingo de Atráes and El Príncipe castles, the Cojimar tower or the Havana Wall. The defense network joined the baroque and neoclassical style of other monuments, as well as the homogenous complex of houses with arcades, balconies, wrought iron grilles and inside patios that characterize, par excellence, the environment of the city’s oldest part.
HAVANA - Media labs, robots to reproduce hashtags and messages inciting chaos from abroad flooded social media in July to encourage a "humanitarian intervention" in Cuba. The recent events intended to cause turmoil in the Caribbean nation corroborated the use of a low trick manual with the fabrication of an alleged health crisis and governability in the country, according to denunciations made by local authorities.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel noted the media pressure exerted in those spaces, which he also rated as opportunistic, given the context of the economic crisis and increase of COVID-19 cases in the country.

In a press conference with local media, the president rejected the siege orchestrated by the media and social media networks against the government’s management and the matrices that stimulate a lack of unity in the country. In the meantime, Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Bruno Rodríguez denounced the implications of the U.S. media war against the country to encourage an alleged humanitarian intervention.

The Cuban minister urged Washington to deny its link to a company settled in Florida with the SOS Cuba campaign, associated to the call to action with use foreign force. A few days ago that entity was granted a certificate by the government of Florida to act with state funds, the minister announced.

Rodríguez also demanded an explanation from Twitter for the massive reproduction of messages as part of that crusade, a resource that violates the platform's policies to flood the network. "Twitter did not enforce its own regulations even when there was incitement to assassination and violence," he added.

Among other fake news, the networks posted that the Guantánamo Naval Base, a seized Cuban territory, had welcomed warship flotillas waiting for an order to invade. Those same websites broadcast false scenarios of protests in Cuba that were denied by local media and authorities. At the same time, many calls for a national strike spread on Twitter and Facebook.

False news about speedboats departing from the United States for all Cubans interested in leaving the country illegally, as well as fleets positioned near the territorial waters and waiting to invade the country also added to the virtual script conceived to generate chaos. However, those messages do not mention the looting of commercial establishments or acts of vandalism on police cars on July 11 as part of the call to incite an uprising, which was denounced by President Díaz-Canel. They also avoided mentioning that the U.S. blockade is the main obstacle to Cuba's economic growth and to fighting the pandemic, or that the United States has failed to comply with the current migratory agreements with Cuba, as denounced by the Head of State.

That day, after touring San Antonio de los Baños town in the western Province of Artemisa, the Cuban president admitted that the current scenario in the country gives ground for concern.

A group of people gathered in that town to, "protest in one of the city's most central parks," the Head of State said. Among the crowd there were peaceful protestors in need and with doubts that acted differently than those that hope to provoke a social outbreak, he stated.

"The latter do not want health to be a common good in Cuba; on the contrary, their principles are based on the neoliberal model, the privatization of medical services and education," he sustained.

President Díaz-Canel and Army General Raúl Castro led the event in Havana.
Cuba Denounces USA for Encouraging Protests and Tightening Blockade

HAVANA.- Cuba condemned the United States for its complicity in the July 11 protests, where technological tools were used to create an image of popular unrest on the island, where tranquility and social security have been some of the achievements attained by its revolutionary process.

Cuban Foreign Affairs Minister Bruno Rodríguez denounced that even though messages had been posted from the island, they seem like they were in Cuba. Their intention was to make it appear, “the Minister stressed. It was a big manipulation and incitement of violence, irregular migration, public unrest and even assassination started on social media. What happened on July 11 was not a popular movement as they want to make it appear;” the Minister stressed. It was a big media operation that began in the middle of June funded by the U.S. government, he explained.

Proactivo Miami Foundation Inc is at the center of all that, as the company was organized with in order to attack the Caribbean island, such as ADN Cuba, and grouping the most prolific users of #SOSCuba, which they artificially turned into a global trend. For this, they used robots that posted millions of messages in a short period of time, explained the Cuban minister of foreign affairs, who exemplified that one account from Spain posted over a million tweets, at a rate of five per second.

They also pressed influencers to promote the hashtag, as well as real people to have them change their location and make it seem like they were in Cuba. Their intention was to make belief that 60 percent of the messages had been posted from the island. Rodríguez denounced that even though Twitter had been warned of violations of its terms and conditions, the company did not activate its anti-spam policies nor block accounts, a stance that the minister called disgraceful and conspiratorial.

Irresponsible was another term used by the Cuban minister to refer to U.S. politicians that support sending naval means to the island and mentioned the relationships among people that acted as Foreign Service agents and diplomats. We hope the current U.S. government does not go on with the policies of its predecessors and acts with ethical sense, he sustained. However, he admitted to be shocked by the impunity with which migratory incidents are being encouraged. If the U.S. president was truly concerned about Cuba, he would adopt executive decisions and substantially change aspects of the economic blockade, including those related to fighting the pandemic, such as the ones that prevent Cuba from buying pulmonary ventilators, the minister stated. Nevertheless, incidents like the one on July 11 will not allow Cuba to reach its goals; to fight the pandemic, solve problems, increase dialogues with the people, discuss their concerns and involve people in the search for solutions. We count on international solidarity and the island will always act with autonomy, he stressed.

U.S. GOVERNMENT’S CONTINUOUS INTERFERENCE

On July 22, the Cuban foreign minister denounced the U.S. government’s continuous interference in Cuba’s internal affairs, as it pressures European and Latin American governments to sign a declaration condemning the Caribbean island for alleged repression after the July 11 protests. Washington has no legal, political or moral authority to sanction anyone, stressed the minister, who advised U.S. authorities to mind their own business. Rodríguez denied that there were missing or tortured people in the country or that trials would be held without guaranteeing due processes, urging the U.S. administration to prove those accusations. He pointed out that rather, the United States was responsible for the violent acts in Cuba, because it was in complicity with the political operation the media carried out on social media to provoke those acts. Also, virtual spaces and the media posted fake news as part of that crusade, where cyberattacks were held against Cuban websites.

In a press conference, the Cuban minister warned the U.S. government of preparations to send a fleet that on July 23 would approach Cuba’s territorial waters, a violation of international law and sign of an open provocation. The fleet finally involved only four of the 100 motorboats that were supposed to participate in the operation. The minister also disclosed the double standard of the release the White House issued on July 22, where they say they want to help the Cuban people but never mention the economic blockade imposed by the U.S. administration against the country for six decades. Rodríguez recalled it is not the Cuban government that bans family remittances from U.S. territory, nor it is responsible for the closure of the U.S. consulate, which the U.S. administration closed alleging attacks against diplomats that has failed to be proven after four years.
Unprecedented Cases in July

By Giselle HERNÁNDEZ

HAVANA.- The spread of the Delta and Beta variants of SARS-CoV-2 has been worsening the epidemiologic scenario in Cuba over the past few months, especially in July, when unprecedented numbers of cases and deaths were reported. The National Director of Epidemiology, Francisco Durán, also stressed that the Delta variant –first detected in India– has been the most contagious so far and the hit the Cuban population in July.

The director also referred to the behavior of the pandemic so far in 2021, putting an emphasis on the noticeable difference in the number of confirmed cases between January (15,536) and the seventh month of the year (over 155,000).

“The July statistics tripled those of June (50,622) and what is even more regrettable is the death toll, with over a thousand, when last month was at 337. This shows that the transmission phase is complex; variants are very contagious and have been detected in various provinces of the country,” explained Durán.

Beta, first detected in the country in February, poses a greater risk of severity and death. According to the expert, its presence in the country has been responsible for the reduction of asymptomatic cases in the past months, as severe symptoms appeared in the early stages of the disease.

On the other hand, the average of daily cases that month reached over 5,000, and of daily deaths exceeded 40. Meanwhile, the incidence rate in the country was ever increasing, with more than 900 positive cases per 100,000 inhabitants in the last 15 days, as of July 27.

The provinces with the highest COVID-19 rates in the country were Matanzas, Ciego de Ávila and Cienfuegos, displacing Havana, which occupied the seventh position that same day.

Commenting on pediatric cases, Dr. Durán said in press conference that over 17,000 confirmed cases had been reported in the past 15 days, with the daily average over 1,000.

“It is imperative that the population behaves more responsibly, because if the population is not aware of the biosafety actions to be adopted, it will be very difficult to control this situation, no matter the measures and restrictions adopted or the adjustments made to protocols,” the expert stated recently.

In the meantime, Dr. Raúl Guinovart, the Dean of the University of Havana’s Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Sciences, said in a television address that, according to predictions made by specialists, the number of cases would continue to increase until the end of July. A peak was also predicted for the last days of the month or the first days of August, with over 9,000 cases likely to be confirmed in one day.

“The greatest impact of the vaccination campaign is expected to be perceived in August, which will be decisive,” the scientist stated.

Effective COVID-19 Vaccination Roadmap

By Ana Laura ARBESÚ

HAVANA.- Committed to immunize 60 percent of its population against SARS-CoV-2 by the end of August, Cuban health authorities spare no efforts to achieve that goal, amid a delicate epidemiologic scenario due to the autochthonous transmission of the virus.

Havana, the epicenter of the disease for several consecutive weeks, was pioneer of clinical trials with vaccine candidates developed in the country, and later on joined a number of studies. At the end of July, all residents of its 15 municipalities over 19 years old had been vaccinated.

With over 11 million inhabitants in the country, seven of the 15 Cuban provinces are fully engaged in the vaccination program; with 30 municipalities making progress in the use of the vaccines: Matanzas, Mayabeque and Artemisa, Ciego de Ávila and Santiago de Cuba, Camagüey and Holguín.

Local health authorities also informed that the vaccination campaign has been successfully carried out in another 17 municipalities of the country since July 29, largely in the provincial capitals of Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Tunas, Granma, Santi Spiritus, Mayabeque, Guantánamo and Pinar del Río, as well as in the localities of San Antonio de los Baños in Artemisa, and Nuevitas in Camagüey.

The western province of Matanzas, now undergoing a difficult situation with high tolls of infected people; will complete the vaccination program in the localities of Jagüey Grande, Calimete, Martí, Pedro Betancourt, Unión de Reyes, Jovellanos and Punto. But the route designed in Cuba for the vaccination program goes far beyond: vulnerable groups including 10,000 patients, at psychiatric hospitals, homes, psycho-pedagogical medical centers, as well as more than 3,000 patients with hemodialysis treatment are being vaccinated these days to complete the cycle by mid-August.

Also part of that scheme are clinical trials on children and adolescents between three and eleven years from the provinces of Havana and Camagüey.

Priority is being given to pregnant women, while those that are two and three months pregnant and women that have just given birth will be administered the shot gradually.

According to the scientific community, the vaccination is essential to fight COVID-19, together with the well-known preventive measures.

Members of the Cuban scientific community are not only immersed in producing vaccines but also in developing their own tools to detect the virus, providing the country with technological sovereignty.

The first batch of a Cuban-made COVID-19 antigen test, baptized as Umelisa SARS-CoV-2, is used in the protocols implemented by the national health system.

Developed by the Center for Immunology Clinical Trials (InmunoEnsayo), the test detects the presence of the virus in asymptomatic patients with suspected COVID-19 within four hours. This way, it adds to three other kits to determine IgM, total antibodies (IgG, IgM and IgA –the latter present in the mucosa).

Until the end of July, the vaccination program in Cuba had administered 9.1 million doses of Soberana 02 and Soberana Plus vaccine candidates developed by the Finlay Vaccine Institute (IFV); as well as of the Abdala vaccine produced by the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB).

In total, 2 536 149 Cubans have received all COVID-19 doses on 27th of July, while up to that date 3 500 505 have been administered the first.

Cuba is the only Latin American country with its own COVID-19 vaccine and three immunization programs, exceeding the limit set by the World Health Organization (50 percent) to be recognized as vaccines.

Abdala proved to be 92.28 percent effective against symptomatic disease and 100 percent effective against severe disease and death. In the meantime, the combination of Soberana 02 and Soberana Plus showed 91.2 percent protection against symptomatic discomfort and the same number as Abdala against serious condition and death.

The other Cuban vaccine candidates are Soberana 01, (developed by IFV, which recently began its clinical trial phase II in Cienfuegos Province) and Mambisa, by CIGB, administered nasally for patients recovering from the disease.
Cuban Art Goes Beyond Borders

(MINREX) with the support of the La Rueda Films production company. The gathering, entitled Cuba Va Conmigo (Cuba goes with me), was attended by 88 artists settled in 15 countries, including guitarist and composer Joaquín Clerch; violinist Ilmar López Gavilán; pianists Nachito Herrera, Arturo O’Farrill and Marcos Madrigal, and cellist Douglas Vistel, among other exponents of the musical industry. Internationally-renowned artists from the world of literature, visual and stage arts also participated in the event, like choreographer Pepe Hevia, settled in Peru; dancer Carlos Acosta, current director of the British Birmingham Royal Ballet, and film director Luis Ernesto Doñas.

Intended to connect the Cuban community settled abroad back to Cuba’s everyday life, the event promoted an organic relationship to art and opened the path for future editions beyond the virtual world. Cuban Culture Minister Alpidio Alonso highlighted on Twitter the importance of this event as a space for gathering, while Foreign Affairs minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla stressed the significance of this initiative, which serves as a tribute to Cuba’s history and roots. MINCULT Deputy Minister Fernando León-Jacomin recapped the validity of the speech known as Palabras a los intelectuales (Speech to Intellectuals), delivered by historical leader of the Cuban Revolution Fidel Castro 60 years ago, who established the guidelines of the cultural policy. In that sense, León-Jacomin ratified the need to strengthen ties with the community settled in other countries, in addition to consolidating the existing bonds and promoting these artists’ attitudes as a form to articulate Cuban art.

The participants reaffirmed Cuba’s inevitable influence on their works through messages sent from Italy, Spain, Germany, the United States, France, South Africa, England, the Netherlands, Costa Rica, Belgium, Turkey, Canada, Switzerland, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, United Arab Emirates and Slovakia. Broadcast through the Streaming Cuba platform, its related websites and the official sites of MINCULT and Nación y Emigración, one of the outstanding performances included that of singer Aymée Núñola, who made a version of the classic Chan Chan, by Cuban composer Francisco Repilado, aka “Compay Segundo”. Similarly, Madrigal performed a work for piano in G minor, Opus 15, by Czech composer Bedrich Smetana, with U.S. Tai Murray and Russian Nikolay Shugaev, while drummer Dafnis Prieto entertained the audience with the piece Blah Blah.

Havana. - Creative discourse went beyond geographical borders and created new paths for art with the celebration of the first Cultural Festival of Cubans Residents Abroad, held for three days. Roots, history, findings, personalities and promising youth gathered at this event, an idea developed by the Cuban ministries of Culture (MINCULT) and Foreign Affairs (MINREX) with the support of the La Rueda Films production company. The gathering, entitled Cuba Va Conmigo (Cuba goes with me), was attended by 88 artists settled in 15 countries, including guitarist and composer Joaquín Clerch; violinist Ilmar López Gavilán; pianists Nachito Herrera, Arturo O’Farrill and Marcos Madrigal, and cellist Douglas Vistel, among other exponents of the musical industry. Internationally-renowned artists from the world of literature, visual and stage arts also participated in the event, like choreographer Pepe Hevia, settled in Peru; dancer Carlos Acosta, current director of the British Birmingham Royal Ballet, and film director Luis Ernesto Doñas.

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Ernest Hemingway’s Adopted Homeland

Havana. - After U.S. writer Ernest Hemingway died on July 2, 1961, Cuban leader Fidel Castro went to his Finca Vigía estate to read his will in front of his ex-wife Mary Welsh. Nobody knows for sure when the intellectual became an avid supporter of the revolutionary leader. However, essayist Ciro Bianchi believes it could have started in the 1950s, by the time Fidel was in the Sierra Maestra mountain range. The first time the two of them met was during the International Billfishing Contest on May 5, 1960, when Hemingway set sail aboard his Yacht the Pilar and Fidel, accompanied by Argentinean Dr. Ernesto Che Guevara, aboard the Yacht the Cristal.

“At the end of the day, they met at the pier. It is unknown whether he ever visited him at Finca Vigía, but some people say the intellectual would warn Fidel about American policy,” Bianchi told The Havana Reporter in an exclusive interview.

His famous novel “For Whom the Bell Tolls”, published in 1940, represents his first link with the Cuban Revolution. In 1975, during a talk Fidel Castro had with U.S. citizens Kirby Jones and Frank Mankiewicz, which would later on become the book “With Fidel: A Portrait of Castro and Cuba”, the lawyer and politician said: “Of all the North American authors, Hemingway is one of my favorite ones… I was familiar with his work before the Revolution… it was about the rearguard of a guerrilla group that was fighting a conventional army… That novel was one of the works that helped me devise tactics to fight the Batista army.”

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The digital scenario also welcomed singer and songwriter Israel de la Torre, who played the theme Ay, Aurora (Oh, Aurora), written by Manuel Corona, in addition to Yoerlancy García, who danced at the rhythm of Je reviendrai à Montréal, by Robert Charlebois, and musicians Roy Cabrera, Rosario Portuondo and Hakely Nakao. Another fascinating moment of the Festival arrived with Arturo O’Farrill, who played the theme Manteca, a song chosen as the soundtrack of this unprecedented event because of the importance it has had in the history of music in Cuba since its première in 1947 – thanks to the mastery of composers Dizzy Gillespie, “Chano” Pozo and Gil Fuller. The collaboration entitled Eee Taa, by Ramón Valle and Dutch instrument players and singers, as part of the Boundless Forces project, aimed to break down musical and artistic barriers in a context marked by social distancing because of COVID-19. The piece Cecilia, by choreographer Pepe Hevia – performed by first dancer of the Cuban National Ballet Gretel Morejón, with musical accompaniment of X Alfonso – also stood out, as well as the presentation of fragments of productions performed by Carlos Acosta.
HAVANA’s Focsa Building

By Orlando ORAMAS

HAVANA.- The Focsa building, 121 meters tall, is one of the unavoidable landscapes of the Cuban capital that was once included among the tallest concrete constructions in the world.

Errected in the Vedado neighborhood, the 39-floor building was built in 28 months, a milestone for the time, as well as the fact that it was selected as one of the seven wonders of Cuban architecture.

This building, which recently celebrated its 65th anniversary, was a great real estate operation; the largest and most profitable property selling operation conducted in Cuba in all times, chronicler Ciro Bianchi said.

When construction finished, on June 28, 1956, some rooms had already been sold for one million pesos and about three million had been recovered for the selling of apartments.

On October 1957, 16 months after the conclusion of the building, all rooms for offices and stores had already been sold, as well as all the apartments.

There were many voices against such a tall building. People said that its vibrations and oscillations could be negative for human health and that its concrete structure could make it anti-economic as of the 18th floor; neither one nor the other, Bianchi affirms. Studies prove that if winds of more than 240 km/h hit Focsa, its upper part would move no more than 10 centimeters, which was not significant for health nor the building’s infrastructure.

In relation to prices, five percent was saved on the lower floors and 18 on the upper ones.

DETAILS

The Focsa building has a ‘Y’ shape and three main components.

In the first of these, the ground floor, stores, TV studios, bank and advertising agencies, offices, restaurants, cafeterias, a pharmacy, a theater and a night club – closed at present because of the COVID-19 pandemic - are located.

The second part includes a 29-floor tower. Twenty-eight of these floors are used as three or four-room apartments, including a room for service staff. On the 29th floor, there are seven pent-houses, which complement the 373 apartments of the building.

The tallest part hosts the La Torre restaurant, which offers a renowned gastronomic and cocktail proposal, in addition to a unique view of the city and its shoreline. The facility also includes a swimming pool, indoor parks and gardens, as well as underground parking garages.

The Focsa building was conceived to house about five thousand people, including dwellers and workers. This building was Havana’s first exponent of a city within a city; an inhabited and self-sufficient island, equipped with all social services—a pioneer of its time.
ROME.- A new report issued by five United Nations organizations raised alarm over the daily increase of over one million hungry people in 2020. In just 24 months, the number of men, women, children and elderly people suffering from chronic hunger went from 650 million to 811 million, not including an additional number of 135 million who also seriously suffered that scourge, which represents another 396 million chronic and serious hungry people in a year. Executive Director of the World Food Program David Beasley disclosed these details at a high-level political forum in which the report “State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World” was presented, which attributes this increase, to a large extent, to the repercussion of the COVID-19 pandemic. “One million people per day,” Beasley said, while warning that “we are obviously going in the wrong direction.” If we do not deal with these issues seriously, nations will be disrupted and we will have mass immigrations. He also urged to respond quickly and make the world understand that those figures are a “call for alert.”

The report estimates that about a tenth of the world population was underfed in 2020, a situation he described as critical, because the zero-hunger goal for 2030 is dramatically moving away, ever more. Current trends indicate that the UN Sustainable Development Goal will not be met by a margin of about 660 million hungry people, over 30 million of them because of COVID-19 lasting effects, the report indicated. Of the total of human beings in urgent need of food last year, more than half (418 million) were from Asia, over a third (282 million) from Africa and about 60 million from Latin America and the Caribbean. More than 2.3 billion people in the world – equivalent to 30 percent of the population – did not have access to adequate food last year. Meanwhile, malnutrition, in all its forms, showed no mercy with a record of over 149 million minors under the age of five with stunted growth; over 45 million with emaciation, and about 39 million overweight. In addition, not less than 3 billion adults and children were still unable to access healthy diets, mostly because of the excessive cost of food. Paradoxically, thousands of millions of people suffer hunger in all its forms while the world produces enough food for everyone. COVID-19 catapulted figures and turned the situation of hunger in the world into a bigger drama, slowly started to give signs of increase and the idea of an “irreversible decrease.” We have the expertise, the experience, we need funds and political will to make sure that we give priority to our children and to the future of our planet, was one of the many opinions stated about the situation. Hope to foster actions, raise awareness and reach agreements are pinned on the UN summits on Food Systems and Nutrition, in addition to the 26th Conference on Climate Change.

By Silvia MARTÍNEZ

PHOTO: UNICEF

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HAVANA. “Cuba Yes, Blockade No,” was the unanimous call made by those at the white house, who urged U.S. President Joseph Biden to lift the unilateral blockade that has been trying to asphyxiate the Cuban people for more than 60 years.

An emblematic sit-in on July 25 at Lafayette Park in the U.S. capital brought to a successful end the unprecedented 2,000-kilometer-long walk made by members of the Bridges of Love solidarity project.

Its coordinator Carlos Lazo, a Cuban-American professor, headed the group that went to Washington DC, taking them almost one month to walk through the States of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia.

Along the pilgrimage, “we talked to many people, to U.S. citizens with different ideological beliefs and no one supports the blockade,” the activist told The Havana Reporter.

“We walked demanding that unlimited remittances can be sent to our people, that the consular services reopen in Havana, that flights are resumed to all Cuban provinces, that the family reunification program is reestablished and that U.S. citizens can freely travel to Cuba,” he stressed.

The objective, he reiterated, is to have the sanctions against the Cuban family lifted. “We do not respond to provocations, we’ll never act with violence; we build bridges of love,” Lazo warned.

While in Washington DC, Lazo personally asked Republican Senator Ted Cruz, one of the anti-Cuba lobbyists, to end his hostile and aggressive U.S. policy against the Caribbean island.

“We want prosperity for the two countries, without intervention, without bombings,” Lazo, who is also an Iraq war veteran, told the legislator.

On July 20, six months after Biden occupied the White House, the Solidarity with Cuba Movement in the United States ratified its decision to intensify its actions against the blockade.

In recent days, car and bicycle caravans were held in the cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle, among others. Meanwhile, The New York Times published an open letter to the president entitled Let Cuba Live, which was signed by more than 400 personalities, not only from the United States. Likewise, the message Let Cuba Live was lit up in Union Square in New York, as a ship was arriving at the Mariel Port –some 45 kilometers west of Havana- with the first batch of six million syringes for the COVID-19 vaccination program on the island, thus challenging the blockade regulations.

In order to buy supplies, the Cuba friends raised some $500,000 nationwide.

The ever increasing anti-blockade wave urges Biden to make the promised change in the U.S. policy towards Cuba, and annul the 243 coercive measures adopted by his Republican predecessor Donald Trump.

Since 1992, the majority of the international community has supported Cuba’s fair battle at the UN general Assembly for the end of the economic, financial and commercial blockade.

On June 23, 184 of the 192 UN member countries voted in favor of lifting the blockade. Brazil, Colombia and Ukraine abstained and, as usual, the United States and its ally Israel were isolated by voting against the Cuban resolution.

“If 184 countries support us and a few do not see us, what does that tell you? We are not in the wrong,” a Cuban-American said when praising the Lafayette sit-in.
Solidarity with Cuba During Difficult Times

By The Havana Reporter

HAVANA.- Various countries around the world have expressed their solidarity with Cuba by sending aid through donations of food, medicine and supplies to fight COVID-19 and accompanying economic crisis it’s created. Bolivia, Mexico and Nicaragua were among the first Latin America countries to do so, sending donations as the country faces a complex epidemiological situation and campaign of hatred, stimulated by the United States.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said: “Instead of a block, we should all support,” now that the health situation in Cuba has worsened. At the same time, he authorized two Navy ships to travel to the island with food, medicine and oxygen, a donation that arrived in Cuba already. Moreover, as pro tempore president of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Mexico donated 800,000 syringes and needles to help Cuba fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the meantime, Bolivian President Luis Arce voiced his government’s support for the island on social media and added that his country has benefited from Cuban solidarity, especially in education and health. “Love is reciprocated by love,” he stressed.

On the other hand, Nicaragua announced it would send food and medicine to help Cuba cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, a gesture that the Caribbean island thanked to the Sandinista government.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro stated Cuba will always have his country’s support, and demanded that the criminal measures imposed by the Yankee empire against the sister nation are lifted immediately.

Referring to the current situation on the island, he stressed that the Cuban people have been subjected to an incomparable experiment of social, collective and economic torture. “Imperialism will never colonize Cuba nor Venezuela, because they will never give in nor be brought to their knees,” Maduro stated.

On the other side of the world, Russia sent two planes to Cuba with 88 tons of food and safety equipment, including one million face masks. Meanwhile, Vietnam donated 12,000 tons of rice that are expected to arrive soon and will help with the food shortage caused by the blockade and the pandemic.

RAPID DISTRIBUTION OF DONATIONS

Local authorities organized a mechanism for the efficient distribution of those international donations in order to guarantee that the population receive those products as soon as possible. Involved in that endeavor are the Ministries of Domestic Trade, Transport and Foreign Trade and Investment (MINCEX), the latter being in charge of supervising and facilitating international cooperation actions and donations.

The gradual and free distribution of food and other products for the population began on July 30. Transportation, storage and distribution expenses will be covered by the State budget. The aid sent by different countries and institutions will be provided until December 31 and benefit both the 3.8 million families in Cuba which are subjected to an incomparable economic torture and the 31 and benefit both the 3.8 million families in Cuba which are subjected to an incomparable economic torture.

A History Marked by Migration

By Claudia GONZÁLEZ

HAVANA.- The memory of a five-year-old boy alone in the ocean, tied to a tire, burnt by the sun and barely conscious, revives old ghosts in the topic of migration between Cuba and the United States.

The story of young Elián González, a native of the western province of Matanzas, is perhaps the most familiar among the consequences of the 90 miles that separates two nations. Last March, at about three nautical miles from Cay Sal, the Bahamas, 12 out of 24 people traveling on a boat – including two children – died in an attempt to turn to the Cuban Adjustment Act, which since 1966 encourages Cubans to risk their lives in order to get to the United States.

More recently, in May, two Cuban immigrants died and 10 went missing south of Florida, in pursuit of permanent residence in the U.S. territory.

Washington uses this migratory policy as a tool of hostility towards Cuba with the intention of destabilizing the country, discrediting the government and stealing its technical and professional resources, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX) has indicated.

The White House cuts off the regular flow of people and develops a fierce media campaign against the island, sources said.

MINREX General Director for Consular Affairs and Attention to Cubans Residing Abroad, Ernesto Soberón, has stated that, in addition to breaching its commitments on the topic, the United States has also approved all-time regulations to encourage illegal migration from Cuba.

Although the alleged privileges the Cubans receive have reduced in recent years, these have created the prevailing perception that if someone gets to the United States, s/he has the right to stay there, Soberón added.

In addition to campaigns dramatized by the media to discredit the island, the context is now more complex due to the closure of consular services in Havana – a politically-motivated measure – and travel restrictions, he commented. The obligation of traveling to third countries to apply for a visa – which means more expenses for Cubans and no guarantee of approval – and the non-fulfillment of migratory agreements, make this panorama even more outlandish.

In this sense, the diplomat mentioned that even though Washington agreed to grant at least 20,000 visas per year, about 80,000 were not granted in recent years. Soberón also denounced that irregular flows through third countries take place with the participation of traffickers dedicated to this business. For that reason, going from Guyana, Panama or Colombia to the U.S. territory usually implies becoming a victim of those criminal gangs, the official stressed.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior announced the return to Cuba of 574 illegal immigrants found at the sea – over 400 of them from the United States. The gradual and free distribution of food and other products for the population began on July 30. Transportation, storage and distribution expenses will be covered by the State budget. The aid sent by different countries and institutions will be provided until December 31 and benefit both the 3.8 million families in Cuba which are subjected to an incomparable economic torture.

The U.S. administration is the main responsible entity for the illegal movement of people from Cuba, because of the application of its migratory policy, a political decision that costs human lives, Soberón highlighted.

In light of this scenario, the diplomat urged Washington to meet its commitments and guarantee an ordered, regular and safe flow of people between both nations.
SANCTI SPIRITUS.- Popularly known as the One-Hundred-Door Home, the former Valle-Iznaga family Palace is a majestic building located in this central Cuban city, today the Colonial Art Museum.

Some people say that it actually has over one hundred openings – 110 to be precise – including porticos, windows and doors.

This architectural jewel, considered the first two-floor building in the village of Sancti Spiritus, was erected in the city’s central area a few steps from the Major Parish Church, the emblematic bridge over the Yayabo River and the Main Theater.

This palace preserves valuable decorative arts collections from different places, in addition to pieces of furniture made of precious wood, marble sculptures, screens, half-point, stained glass windows, thick beam ceilings, artistic gates, and a delicate fountain in the center of the patio.

The palace’s oldest piece of furniture has four drawers with silver handles, including a fifth, secret drawer hidden in the frame.

According to reports, the piano placed in the music room was bought for the young lady of the family, who never touched its keys, even though it took enslaved Africans’ blood, sweat and tears to carry it on shoulder from the port of Casilda, in Trinidad.

Not even the bedrooms escape exquisite detail, in line with the people who rested there.

The splendid house also has a big dining room that treasures fine china, biscuit jars, tea and coffee sets and a beautiful dinner service.

The building is a mixture of architectural features from the XVIII and XIX centuries, experts say.

The mansion was turned into the Colonial Art Museum on October 10, 1967.

By Mayra PARDILLO

PHOTOS: Raúl García
Bolsonaro: Trapped Between COVID-19 and Corruption

BRASILIA.- Calls for the removal of Jair Bolsonaro, a president that faces two crises in Brazil: the health crisis caused by COVID-19 and the political crisis, with new dimensions since the spread of the pandemic.

The South American nation is the second country in the world – after the United States – in which more deaths have occurred (about 550,000), and is listed third in relation to the number of infections (over 19 million), after the United States and India.

COVID-19 has found the Brazilian population in a situation of abject vulnerability, with high unemployment rates and huge reductions in social policy. The country also faces unfortunate living conditions because of the current degree of inequality seen in the high population density that characterizes poor neighborhoods and outskirts.

On top of that, Bolsonaro despises this disease, which he has repeatedly described as a cold or minor flu and disregards isolation and the use of masks, in addition to challenging necessary health measures such as avoiding crowds.

The former military man has been strongly criticized for his stance. At the beginning of May, the British scientific journal, The Lancet – one of the most renowned in the world – described him as “the biggest threat to Brazil’s relief from COVID-19.”

All these elements support an increase in the number of requests calling for an opening of a dismissal process against Bolsonaro, who is also facing the involvement of members of his government in alleged irregularities in the purchase of vaccines against COVID-19 – members, under investigation by a Senate Commission (CPI).

According to the Public Agency, 1,556 people and over 550 organizations have signed a petition to remove the former Army captain.

Until the present, 126 lawsuits have been filed at the Deputy Chamber: 73 original requests, 7 additions and 46 duplicate requests. Only six were filed or rejected. The other 119 are pending analysis.

On June 30, political parties, MPs, social movements and entities of the civil society filed a so-called impeachment super-request against Bolsonaro.

The document, signed by 45 persons, puts forward the arguments presented in other 123 requests filed at the lower Chamber. The text holds the president responsible for 23 crimes.

The name of Bolsonaro is also involved in suspicions of public resources embezzlement through what is known in Brazil as rachadinha; that is, when legislators appropriate part of their employees’ salaries.

In addition, the president is also undergoing an investigation to determine whether he committed the crime of malfeasance, after MP Luis Miranda denounced him about an alleged case of corruption in the negotiations to buy Covaxin, the Indian vaccine against COVID-19.

A survey of the Datafolha Institute, spread by the Folha de Sao Paulo journal on July 10, indicated that for the first time, most of the Brazilian people (54 percent) call for opening an exoneration process for the former federal parliamentarian.

For the Workers Party, the initiatives filed at the Deputy Chamber summarize the atmosphere present in the society and the dissatisfaction seen on the streets under the motto “the president is worse than the virus” in the three major demonstrations held under the cry of Fora Bolsonaro (Bolsonaro Out).
HAVANA- Cuba took another step toward the reorganization of the national economy after endorsing the gradual elimination of the salary scale in state-run companies, which will improve the pay system.

Cuban Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economics and Planning Alejandro Gil stressed the importance of favoring actions that attain maximum efficiency in state-run companies through a higher administrative autonomy.

Since the approval of the improvement process for state and privately-run economic actors, on May 26, measures adopted to make progress in Cuba’s most important economic and social process—monetary ordering—have been viewed favorably.

As part of the updating of the Cuban socialist model, important steps have been taken to release productive forces, remove obstacles, encourage social and economic responsibility, and make a use of national potential.

The report of the 8th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party stated the need of shaking the socialist state-run company off its lethargy so that this is felt in the economy as what it is: the key actor.

One of those actions is related to the recently announced gradual elimination in a group of entities of the requirement to use the salary scale in the state-run companies, as part of enhancing the pay system per work done. Limits on the amount of money to be paid as salary were previously removed and distribution of profits was relaxed in order to foster a closer relation between the fruits of work, the wealth produced and the salary earned.

Gil affirmed that this “is an essential measure which gives state-run companies greater autonomy in their administration, and higher responsibility.”

“It is not the same to pay a salary according to a scale than having a fund to distribute it according to the different positions, jobs, activities and professions performed by the company’s staff,” he added.

This measure would be possible in entities with good account, organization, development of human resources management and adequate internal control, based on the principle that the more wealth is created, the more efficient a person is and the more a person contributes to the State, the more money will earned.

The minister highlighted that this is bold transformation aimed at paying attention to the socialist, state-run company, to put it in better conditions from the economic point of view and to make it move on in parallel to the privately-run sector.

The objective is to contribute to increase efficiency and labor productivity upon the basis of a more efficient administration of human resources in the entrepreneurial system.

A NEW ACTOR: MIPYMES

In relation to micro, small and medium-size companies (MIPYMES) – whose legal foundations are currently being designed and drafted – this are defined as entities adapted to the characteristics of the Cuban economy, under the state and privately-run format, with the same management model although with tax and legal differences.

As for implementation in the state sector, one of the alternatives proposed is that higher entrepreneurial management organizations, companies, scientific centers and universities act as owners or partners of the budgeted units, under the concept of division of duties between property and management.

According to specialists, this will allow those structures to foster innovation and have a higher capacity of adaptation and flexibility when including the results of scientific research.

“Our conception of the micro, small and medium-size company is not about survival but about a company with a really high added value and professional potential. We conceive the state-run sector under those premises,” Gil concluded.
**Biopesticides: Effective Way to Increase Food Production**

By Roberto SALOMÓN

HAVANA.- Increasing food production is a Cuban priority in agriculture today, where phytosanitary measures for the protection of crops play a major role. The biological control of plagues that attack crops is essential to ensuring plant health, Yordano Alambares, an expert of the Ministry of Agriculture’s Plant Health Department, told The Havana Reporter.

The use of biopesticides and other biological control agents play a key role in properly dealing with plagues by allowing a favorable equilibrium in agro-ecosystems, he stated.

Among those agents he mentioned entomopathogenic and antagonistic fungi, entomopathogenic bacteria, viruses, entomopathogenic nematodes, parasitoids and predators, which are natural elements in the environment. In this regard, Alambares highlighted that one of the Cuban Revolution’s achievements in agriculture is the National Biological Control Program, which is led by the Plant Health Department and involves 208 centers that produce biological control agents.

They include the Centers for the Reproduction of Entomophagus and Entomopathogenics (CREE), where solid productions and beneficial arthropods are obtained, as well as various industrial plants for liquid productions and pilot facilities intended to increase those results.

Cuba has facilities with capacity to obtain more than 2,000 tons of fungus and entomopathogenic bacteria, which are part of the strategies to guarantee plant health.

Cuba is building another two biopesticide plants that belong to Labiofam (Pharmaceutical Labs) Business Group, and are expected to be operating by 2022. Those plants are located in the provinces of Havana and Villa Clara (some 450 kilometers east the capital), with the capacity to ferment up to six million liters that are enough to treat about four million hectares of crops.

One of the advantages of producing and using biological control agents is that they are natural organisms that do not harm the environment, offer food sovereignty and safety and are produced in the country, which allows the replacement of imports, the expert noted.

**Sugarcane Diversification**

By Samuel ROBERTS

HAVANA.- Cuba’s top priority for the sugarcane sector is the production of byproducts, convinced that by making the best use of those byproducts the economic potential will be much stronger.

Experts agree that there is no other crop in the world with so many advantages as sugarcane, from which, according to estimates, more than a hundred different products can be obtained.

Commenting about prospects of this agroindustry in Cuba, the Azcuba Sugarcane Business Group considers its main goal not only to produce more sugarcane but increase the variety of byproducts as well.

The entity has traditionally produced energy, animal food, different kinds of alcohol and rum, fructose, glucose, sorbitol, bagasse boards and wax, among other products.

However, given the pressing need for the country to develop sectors that help increase agricultural production nationwide, the institution has intensified its research work for the production of byproducts (biostimulators, biofertilizers and bioherbicides.)

The Business Manager of the Cuban Institute of Sugarcane Byproducts (ICIDCA), Bárbara Rodríguez, mentioned Lebame bioproduction among their newest achievements. Microorganisms are the active component of that product, which contribute to crop growth, quality and productivity, she told The Havana Reporter.

Moreover, they benefit photosynthetic capacity by increasing plant foliage, while enhancing flowering, fruiting and ripening processes thanks to its hormonal effects in meristematic tissues.

The institution, which belongs to Azcuba, has also developed two new biofertilizers using bacteria, which are expected to be produced this year. Among ICIDCA’s achievements for agricultural use, Rodríguez praised the development and production of Phytopmas-EC, a concentrated biostimulant that is beneficial for different crops including sugarcane, bean, corn, tomato and others. She also mentioned Nitrofix, a nitrogen-fixing biofertilizer that stimulates plant growth and has proven to benefit sugarcane and other crops.

In addition, the manager referred to Bioenraíz stimulant, a product that contains indoleacetic acid and others with a positive action on root formation and germination. It is used in reproduction nurseries as phytohormone for rooting processes.

According to the experts, because the 2020/21 harvest noticeably failed to accomplish its sugarcane production goals –due to a harvest with the lowest results in the past ten years- Azcuba is faced with the challenge of restoring the current state of the agroindustry and its administration with sights set on producing more sucrose and boosting diversification.
Olympic Journey Despite the Pandemic

By Jhonah DIAZ SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

TOKYO.- Emotions were high during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, where silence reigned in the grandstands, winners and losers shed tears and the call for resilience was seen as a message of hope for humanity.

After a year of uncertainty, the games came to fruition and a mixture of emotions created emphasized the flame’s iridescence in the Olympic cauldron. Joy prevailed at the opening ceremony, as well as a real mixture of lights and musical effects, though marked by sobriety. Still, as a culmination of these events, the audience was able to watch the silhouette of the world created with 1,824 drones. The technological advancements in the hosting country were then proven.

That was the official start of the most complex and atypical multiple sport event in history, which, despite everything, provided a room for the world’s best athletes to show their potential under the Olympic motto, which reads “Faster, Higher, Stronger - Together.”

In its first week, the award-winning podium was full of adolescents in women’s skateboarding, with Japanese Momiji Nishiya (13 years, gold) and Funa Nakayama (16 years, bronze), and Brazilian Rayssa Leal (13 years, silver). The age of all three winners together add up to 42, which contrasts with the 46 of artistic gymnastics’ “grandma,” Uzbek Oksana Chusovitina, who said goodbye to her career under the Olympic rings.

With tears in her eyes, Argentinean judoka Paula Pareto – one of Latin America’s best athletes – also put an end to her career, while the host country regretted the elimination of its tennis star Naomi Osaka, who was chosen to light the cauldron at the new Tokyo National Stadium, amidst a complete silence.

Under a shining sun and high temperatures of about 38-Celsius degrees, Ecuadorian Richard Carapaz climbed the Olympus in bicycle, with his gold medal in road cycling, while Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Cuba also won medals to their fans’ delight.

The victory of Flora Duffy in women’s triathlon was a fantastic “madness.” The triathlete gave Bermuda its first gold medal ever, thus making the country of just 65,000 inhabitants vibrate with emotion. In fact, the people of this territory could easily fill several facilities in Japan, a nation that hosted the Olympic competitions against all odds.

Passion ran high with the withdrawal of U.S. Simone Biles from the competition. The rigor of having no other option but winning and the fact of being a media figure led the best U.S. gymnast ever to take time to care about her mental health. This was not in keeping with the slight Olympic atmosphere prevailing in the megacity, impressive from any angle but silenced by the pandemic of COVID-19, which ruined the dreams of some individual athletes at a time when testing positive was a collective fear.

It happens that PCR tests were part of the daily routine and being vaccinated was not a carte blanche to break the health regulations and protocols outlined in illustrated guides for athletes and other participants.

The disease put people’s nerves on edge: it was not easy to assume that the slightest mistake could trigger off the point of no return for a team or the impasse of any event.

Although infections occurred, the organizers of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games ran a real steeplechase and adjusted details, under crossfire, in search of the light at the end of the tunnel for people’s hope, at the rhythm of amazing events that happen even in the most glamorous sport games.

At the close of this edition, Cuba had placed 14th in the medal table of the Tokyo Olympic Games with 4 gold, 3 silver and 4 bronze.
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Medicamentos tradicionales y novedosos del CIGB conforman los protocolos cubanos de tratamiento a la COVID-19, además de dos candidatos vacunales, Abdala y Mambisa

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