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HAVANA.- Located on the top of a hill at the entrance of the port, Havana’s Christ statue offers an ideal place to photograph the cityscape over the bay.

The historical monument was built at the entrance of the former Carenas Port, discovered in 1508-1509 by Spanish explorer Sebastián de Ocampo. Made of Carrara marble, this huge sculpture stands out among the gray stones of the ancient fortresses of Tres Reyes del Morro, San Salvador de la Punta, the Real Fuerza and San Carlos de la Cabaña, bastions for the defense of Havana against corsairs and pirates.

The Christ statue was unveiled on December 25, 1958, seven years before the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. It was built in Italy by Cuban sculptor Jilma Madera, who passed away in 2000. The sculpture depicts the figure of Jesus Christ standing tall and watching over the city, with one hand on the chest and the other in the air, as if blessing his surroundings. With this work, the sculptor showed her ideal of male beauty. About 20 meters tall above its 3-meter base and with a weight of 320 tons, the work is composed of 67 pieces. Taking into consideration the hilly area on which it is located, the sculpture is 51 meters above sea level. Sculpted in Rome, Havana’s Christ statue was blessed by Pope Pius XII. During its assembly, Madera was assisted by 20 marble masons and each piece was tied to the central structure with steel turnbuckles. Despite its legends and myths, the site is truly a sacred place. However, its wonderful view is its greatest value, as it offers a panoramic sight of an ancient but modern city.

A CUBAN PLACE OF WORSHIP

SANTIAGO DE CUBA.- In Cuba’s eastern region, there is a magical place that few travelers skip. It’s the perfect place to make a spiritual pitstop.

The arrival of visitors to the El Cobre Church, 26 kilometers from Santiago de Cuba city, was a daily routine before the spread of COVID-19; regardless of the mysticism of the site, the place is home to this red-dome church with light walls which the image of Cuba’s Patron Saint, Virgen de la Caridad de El Cobre, is treasured. The place is home to this red-dome church with light walls where the image of Cuba’s Patron Saint, Virgen de la Caridad de El Cobre, is treasured. According to a leaflet distributed by church attendants, two aboriginal men and an enslaved child found the image of the Virgin in the northeastern Bay of Nipe in 1608, with an inscription that identifies it as such. The Virgin’s altar was built of marble and faces the Sanctuary’s chapel, the entrance of which is through the “Miracles Chapel,” where parishioners make their offerings.

Regardless, most of the documents and studies agree that the rowers were named Juan and Rodrigo de Hoyos, and Juan Moreno was the name of the enslaved child. The three of them saw a big shape in the middle of the bay and when they approached, they discovered the image of the Virgin on a board with a golden cross in her right hand and Baby Jesus in her left.

On August 12, 1898, and the end of the war against Spain, Cuban General Calixto García asked its general staff to hold mass and a Te Deum on thanksgiving at El Cobre. Another important fact is that in 1915, war veterans asked Pope Benedict XV to proclaim the virgin Cuba’s Patron Saint. The opening of the current Sanctuary took place on September 8, 1927 and on December 30, 1977, Pope Paul VI sent African Cardinal Bernardín Gantin to proclaim the chapel as “Basilica Minor.” The Virgin’s altar was built of marble and faces the Sanctuary’s chapel, the entrance of which is through the back, located on the “Miracles Chapel,” where parishioners make their offerings.
CUBA

Cuban Communist Party to Hold a Momentous Congress

By Orlando ORAMAS

HAVANA.- Important issues of Cuban political, economic and social life will be addressed at the 8th Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), to be held from April 16 to 19, at a time in which the nation faces uncharted territory.

The congressional session will take place amidst the tightening of the blockade imposed by the United States for over 60 years, the impact of which has intensified due to the consequences of the world economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The session will provide an important space for analysis, leading into the construction of Cuban socialism in the present moment and predicting future conditions. Conversations will center around the development of the national economy, while continuing to fight for peace, unity and strength of character, the Granma daily (the PCC official newspaper) indicated.

The meeting will also be held at a time in which subversive plans financed by U.S. governmental agencies and executed by paid agents have been happening again. Special attention will be given to economic topics, especially those related to exports, substitution of imports, production of food, productive, mutually beneficial relationships, investments, monetary reform and sustainable resources.

The congress will likewise draft projections to strengthen ties with non-state workers, a sector that continues to increase along with other forms of production.

Other priorities of the 8th Congress of the PCC will include adopting a strategy linked to better leadership in policy management. The meeting is aimed at endowing the Party’s leadership with a systemic work design in order to reach higher results in the 2021-2026 period.

With that in mind, the strategic objectives include ratifying the governing role that the party has, from the grassroots level, in the management of Top Officials’ Policy, as well as the responsibility leaders have in its implementation.

The session hopes to articulate a single system for the preparation and reappointment of leaders, based on a policy designed to strengthen its social image.

Political and ideological work will be a priority for the PCC, “because if something must characterize these people, it is their fidelity to the Revolution and a guarantee of its continuity,” Granma stated.

In that sense, work relations will be taken into consideration in the formation of future political leaders.

A gradual renewal of leaders demands updating parameters related to the period and ages approved for their positions, in order to avoid standstills, the document stresses.

The newspaper also highlights that the updating process demands designing marketing for transitioning political, administrative and governmental structures, bearing in mind professional profile and individual characteristics.

Keeping with the present time, the preparation of leaders will include the effective use of information technology and social communication, in addition to the “use of innovative and scientific methods in the management and defense of the Revolution,” the newspaper adds.

The PCC document emphasizes that leaders must better their ties with the public, while having the capacity to mobilize, defend values, be open to discourse and be resolute.

To conclude, it stresses that fight against corruption and other negative behaviors will continue to be a priority, as the Cuban Communist Party considers these to be national security issues.
World Rallies to End the Blockade

By Ibis FRANDE

HAVANA.- Around the world, Cuban people and those who support the island joined an international protest last March to demand the end of the blockade imposed by the United States.

The streets of Canada, the United States, Russia, and France witnessed this initiative, held on March 27 and 28 in more than 20 countries.

The coordinator of the Europe for Cuba channel, José Antonio Toledo, explained that in a context marked by COVID-19, different activities addressed the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by Washington against Cuba.

Those activities included caravans of vehicles and bicycles, marches and outdoor demonstrations. Social media also played an important role, because they allowed spreading this and other similar actions across the internet, Toledo said.

In his opinion, international efforts protesting the blockade on Cuba is just a starting point, as other global initiatives will be added to this battle against an aggressive policy that became stronger during the Trump administration (2017-2021).

In the meantime, calls continue to grow on digital platforms urging U.S. President Joe Biden to lift the economic, commercial and financial blockade on Cuba.

In this sense, a new digital platform now unites those who, both inside and outside the United States, call for the end of this mechanism and urge President Biden to put an end to this siege.

Sponsored by the American Coalition against the Embargo, the platform— which is not attached to any organization or individual— is a space that brings together all that share a similar stance on the blockade, regardless of their political and ideological differences.

According to the information provided by that website, the blockade only benefits a small group of Cuban exiles, who annually receive economic assistance from the government of the United States to allegedly promote the opposition.

They have totally failed in that task for over 60 years and the only thing they do is cause damage, increasing the suffering of their own people.

Most Cubans on the island and abroad, including Cuban-American and U.S. citizens, are in favor of lifting the blockade, the platform says.

The majority of the international community and the United Nations also call for the end of that siege.

Anyone can access this digital space both in English (noembargocuba.com) and Spanish (nobloqueocuba.com).

The term ‘embargo’ is used on the platform because that’s the word the people are familiar with in the United States when referring to the U.S. blockade.

The site includes detailed information about the damages caused by the U.S. blockade, in addition to a gallery with thousands of photos of people who, from different parts of the world— such as Cuba, the United States, Canada, Mexico and Spain— urge for the siege to be lifted.

There are also links to Facebook groups that support the end of the blockade and videos of different demonstrations in several cities of the world.

This international campaign joins the efforts of the Bridge of Love project, Caravans for the Cuban family and other endeavors to put an end to the U.S. blockade.
SANTIAGO DE CUBA.- Phase III of the Abdala vaccine candidate clinical trials in April will provide residents from the eastern Cuban territories of Santiago de Cuba, Guantanamo and Bayamo with a defensive barrier against COVID-19, as part of the Cuban endeavor to fight the pandemic.

A total of 48,000 volunteers will participate in the trials, following its first two phases last December at Santiago de Cuba’s General Saturnino Lora Hospital. Those phases brought satisfactory results, especially in terms of safety and immunogenicity.

The high rates of SARS-COV2 in Guantánamo and Granma made it necessary to extend the trials to those provinces as well as Havana.

Developed by the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center (CIGB), Abdala, a name that refers to a dramatic poem by Cuba’s National Hero José Martí is, leading the results of the Cuban science in fighting the pandemic, alongside the Soberana 02 vaccine.

The antigen-based vaccine candidate has come to this decisive moment with very promising results. Its good indicators prove it to be effective, with the immune response at least four times higher than before vaccination, while antibodies neutralize the virus and prevent cells from being affected.

The chief researcher of the trial in Santiago de Cuba, Dr. María del Carmen Ricardo, stressed its broad scope in the community with 13 vaccination sites, where dozens of doctors, nurses and health technicians perform specific tasks.

Excited, committed and pleased with their important roles, local university and medical students received the first shot at the start of phase III. The other two shots will be administered every 14 days over a month-long period.

The role of these youth has also extended to the sacrifices they’ve made performing daily inquiries and working at isolation centers. They’ve proved to be national warriors reminiscent of Marti’s character, as they represent life and hope in this time of crisis.

On March 27 was approved the execution of an intervention trial with the vaccine candidate Abdala in the provinces of Granma, Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo. The trial began on 29, with the inclusion of 120 thousand volunteers belonging to the risk group of health workers, the biopharmaceutical sector and other segments defined by the Ministry of Public Health.

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Documentary on Caregivers

By Danay GALLETTI

HAVANA.-“Ellas… sus cuidados y cuidadoras” (Them… Their Care and Caregivers) is the title of the new documentary produced by Proyecto Palomas, which brings to light the uncertainties, emptiness and lack of recognition, both in public and private spaces, of its leading characters, who also suffer the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Proyecto Palomas, an audiovisual production company in Cuba, develops sociocultural and humanist initiatives that promote peace, diversity and changes in lifestyle.

“The interviews of the audiovisual materials are accompanied by images, both moving and still. The idea is to give the sensation of sensitivity, emotion and constant search for visual messages that connect images with social and human topics,” he stressed.

Japanese Migration, Art and Cuisine

By Marlene SAAVEDRA

HAVANA. - Japanese migrant workers came to Cuba during the sugarcane economic boom during World War I. A close link through the arts still exists today between the two archipelagos.

The artist also talked about the current phenomenon in Cuba generated by Manga or comic books which, according to her, covers a variety of genres and themes – adventures, horror, costume and crime.

In her drawings, she recreates the art of the Heian period (794-1185) in a rich and colorful representation of costumes; while the ukiyo-e style is manifested in ‘clear lines,’ the use of color and common themes. On the other hand, the use of flat gold backgrounds giving the impression of abstract depth alludes to the Rinpa School. “Havana, My Dream City”

This is the title of this epigraph project by Japanese dancer, Singer and percussionist Yuko Fong. First attracted to Latin idiosyncrasy, she studied Spanish in Japan and then came to Cuba to take an intensive course on contemporary Cuban dance.

“I was mesmerized by the sound of drums and traveled to Cuba several times to take folkloric dance lessons. I belong to a highly organized, traditional and millenary culture, almost incompatible with Cuban culture, and that was what actually captivated me,” she described.

Fong has been living in Cuba since 2000. At first, she came to study Folkloric Art at the Higher Arts Institute, but then she joined several professional bands like Cuba’s National Folkloric Band and Obini Bata Female Band.

In addition to family and friends, what she misses the most from Japan is the food; although she has added typical Cuban dishes to her diet, such as beans and tostones (fried plantains).
Joe Biden’s Cuba Policy Still to be Defined

By Roberto García

HAVANA.- Global calls urging the United States to lift the economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba for over 60 years have increased in recent weeks, while U.S. President Joe Biden remains inactive in regards to the Caribbean island.

International governments, human rights institutions, international organizations and a large number of social sectors in solidarity with Cuba demand the President Biden to do everything within his power to eliminate the U.S. sanctions.

One of the most recent examples of the rejection of the anti-Cuban siege was the anti-blockade caravan demonstrations held in more than 60 cities around the world under the slogan “Bridges of Love,” in solidarity with Cuba.

On several occasions, Cuban authorities have denounced that those coercive measures are the main obstacle in national development and a violation of human rights.

It is in this context that most U.S. citizens and large sectors of international public opinion hope that President Biden keeps the promise made during his electoral campaign: to change the anti-Cuba measures adopted by his predecessor Donald Trump (2017-2021).

Some of Biden’s assessors reiterated the president’s wish to do so and pointed out that Cuba-related actions would aim to bring back some of the regulations implemented by the Barack Obama administration (2009-2017).

In this regard, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said, “changing Cuba Policy is not among Biden’s priorities right now but we are committed to making human rights a core pillar of our U.S. foreign policy.”

Various U.S. newspapers have broadcast similar reports saying it is the democrat government’s intentions to resume services at the U.S. embassy in Havana, normalize money sending and reactivate flights to the interior of the island, among first measures.

Amid this complex context, many U.S. politicians say that anti-Cuba sanctions must be eliminated, in accordance with the clamor of large sectors of the U.S. society in general.

A total of 80 democratic members of the House of Representatives recently signed a letter urging Biden to remove Trump’s “cruel” sanctions against Cuba, and to resume the rapprochement policies encouraged by Barack Obama.

However, Bob Menéndez, Chairman of the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee, poses an obstacle to that possibility. He, together with other anti-Cuba figures, insist on saying that previous conditions must be enforced before any possible bilateral negotiations, something that Cuba’s authorities reject.

Long before Biden took office on January 20, 2021, U.S. representatives of religious and political circles, businessmen, scientists and activists asked the President to take actions to lift the unilateral sanctions against the island.

However, many of them feel frustrated because President Biden has not yet defined his administration’s Cuba policy.

Meanwhile, the unilateral coercive measures and controversial actions adopted by Trump continue to harm Cuban people, more than ever as the country wages a hard battle against the pandemic.
HAVANA.- Artex S.A. is not only Cuba's leading company for the commercialization of cultural products and services, but also its main advertising agent on the island and abroad, thanks to the systematic work in different fields throughout its 30 years of existence.

The noticeable presence in artistic and literary creation has made this company one of the most important in Cuba. Founded in 1989, the institution has been occupying spaces and assuming responsibility for making Cuban art known in times when high quality is needed to be able to compete on the market.

Little by little, the specialized company got ever stronger and became more confident in its cultural products, from their conception to their consumption.

In music, for instance, it serves as the label of internationally renowned artists, having established agencies and mechanisms to produce, promote and commercialize musical products.

The list of composers and singers that work with Artex’s Clave Cubana and Musicalia agencies include the bands Los Van Van, Charanga Habanera, Manolito Simonet y su Trabuco, Paulo FG, Adalberto Álvarez y su Son, Elito Revé y su Charangón, David Blanco, Pupy y los que Son Son, Bamboleo, José Luis Cortés and NG La Banda.

The commitment is higher considering the role played by its record company, BisMusic, one of the country’s best, with international prestige.

It is worth noting that this was the first Cuban record company to win a Latin Grammy Award with its album La rumba soy yo, which opened the path to success for other Cuban groups in the following years.

Another strength of this entity is Comercial Lauros, a branch that is appreciated for the items it commercializes, such as handicrafts, souvenirs, and musical instruments.

An example of these is Arte en Casa, a popular project addressed to meeting the demands of utilitarian and decorative home products, with the added value of showcasing Cuba’s most famous works in the visual arts.

Artex also stands out in the book market through the Ediciones Cubanas publishing company, an entity that annually publishes dozens of titles by contemporary authors, in addition to reprints of the Cuban literary classics.

Similarly, its presence is extensive through a network of cultural centers, in addition to a programming that includes top Cuban musicians.

Also notable are the links this entity has with international companies of the field through D’Arte agency, the “exporter” par excellence of the local talent.

It’s almost impossible to think about Cuban culture without mentioning Artex, a company that takes typical Cuban cultural products to audiences around the world.
The group deals with integrated technological solutions.
Cohiba Behike: A Premium Cuban Cigar

By Tino Manuel

HAVANA.- Behike (an aboriginal priest) is the name of one of the best and most exclusive Habanos (Cuban cigars), a favorite of cigar aficionados around the world.

In these days of social confinement due to COVID-19, and when many people spend many hours at home, smokers can indulge in premium cigars made by the Cuban tobacco industry.

Representatives of the Cuban tobacco industry explained the characteristics of this product, which came to the international market in 2010.

Habanos S.A. International Corporation explained that Behike cigars are especially sold at La Casa del Habano franchise, with over 140 shops in the world.

A humidor of this product may well cost some 15,000 Euros.

Behike is the most exclusive line of the already famous Cohiba brand, and it comes in three formats: BHK 52, BHK 54 and BHK 56.

Its production is very limited as all three vitolas (specific size and shape of a cigar) include a category of tobacco leaf known as medio tiempo (only the two uppermost leaves of a sun-grown plant) that affords unique flavor and appeal. In addition, it has a ring with two security holograms.

Local authorities comment that this cigar has become the best kept secret of Cohiba, a brand created in 1966 and the first one on the market after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

The brand is not only representative but the most prestigious along with Habanos S.A. Corporation. The name Cohiba comes from an aboriginal instrument used by Cuba’s native people to light up tobacco leaves, something that Spanish explorers witnessed in 1492.

Behike is made with the best leaves from the western Cuban regions of San Juan y Martinez and San Luis, in Pinar del Rio Province, and are produced at El Laguito Factory in Havana.

Cuba is famous for its hand-rolled premium cigars, which are considered the best in the world thanks to the triple condition of soil, weather and producers’ expertise.
Colonial Hotel to Shine again

By Wilfredo ALAYON

MATANZAS.- Cuba’s Louvre Hotel, a 19th-century colonial building in Matanzas Province, is going through a second renovation phase that will bring its good taste, splendor and exquisite services again in the near future.

Located in the historic district of the 300-year-old western Cuban city, the building was inaugurated in 1879. Once fully refurbished, it is expected to reopen at the end of 2021. Architect Iván Cou, technical chief of the project, told The Havana Reporter that as part of this phase, nine rooms are being built in a nearby building from the same century. There will be a spa on the ground floor, while the recreational area, a night club and a snack bar will overlook La Libertad Park and be located on the third floor.

The project’s first phase included the construction of a three-story building that connects with the 15 rooms of the original hotel. The new building has 26 rooms, a multifunctional hall, a cafe and a shop, the specialist said. The restoration actions have maintained the original architectonic patterns, respecting its patrimonial values; hence, the façade and inner courtyards have been preserved, the expert stressed. “The work done has respected and restored the original design,” noted Cou. Together with Velasco Hotel, located around the central square, Louvre Hotel forms part of a complex operated by Cubanacán Hotel Chain under the brand E (Encanto). It is an urban tourist destination with great cultural, landscape and patrimonial values.
Lula’s Political Return

By Osvaldo CARDOSA

BRASILIA—A recent trial at the Federal Supreme Court (STF) determined that former judge Sérgio Moro’s ruling on Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was biased, thus validating that injustice against the former president was a real threat to Brazilian society.

The historical decision, made on March 23, also affirmed Lula’s statement of innocence and that he was a victim of an unprecedented political persecution by Moro.

With 3 votes in favor and 2 against, the STF considered that the former magistrate was arbitrary in the first sentence ruled against Lula for the alleged acts of corruption.

The second chamber of the Supreme Court adopted that decision after an expected change of heart by judge Carmen Lúcia, who initially rejected the lawsuit filed by Lula’s attorneys. In 2018, when trial started, Lúcia rejected the action, but she now followed the reasoning of her colleagues Gilmar Mendes and Ricardo Lewandowski.

She admitted that new elements proved Moro’s biased performance, which favored the accusation and resulted in an irregular trial.

The sentence in question was also repealed by another ruling by minister Edson Fachin, who referred to the incompetence of the southern state of Paraná’s Federal Justice to analyze the processes against Lula.

The decision also cancels out sentences related to the “Car Wash” operation in Curitiba.

With this historical ruling, the second chamber of the Supreme Court invalidated the hearing of the so-called Guarujá’s triplex case, which investigators should now have to restart.

This was the result of the trial brought forward because of a lawsuit filed in 2018 by the legal team of the former metallurgic leader.

In this new scenario, Moro is only suspect of bias in relation to the Guarujá file.

However, the new magistrate who takes on the cause—filed to the Federal District Justice by Fachin—will be able to either validate the acts of evidence or retry them.

A potential arbitrariness acknowledgment will depend on a concrete petition by other attorneys who share the same nullity in their indictments.

Clearly, Lula’s defense or that of other “Car Wash” defendants can request extending the decision to the rest of the cases in which Moro acted as a judge.

The former Justice minister was not punished for the verdict in question; he was just considered a suspect and cannot be punished as a judge unless a crime is attributed to him.

He could eventually be prosecuted for the damages and prejudices caused to the parties, if fraud is proven.

With the invalidation of the sentences, the former president vindicates his political rights and could participate in the 2022 elections.

With a clean file, Lula is now a key candidate in the Brazilian political scenario.
HAVANA. The Mariel Special Development Zone (ZEDM) offers the iron and mechanics industry ways to boost development and productivity, substitute imports and foster exports.

In statements to The Havana Reporter, Senior Vice President of the Iron and Mechanics Entrepreneurial Group (GESIME) Carlos Estrada affirmed that ZEDM holds major importance due to its contributions to foreign investment, a solvent market that allows for new technologies, productive stability and innovative products.

This entrepreneurial group is present in the industrial area since 2012, when it turned over the equivalent of about $165,000 with an increase in 2020 to about $416,500.

This year, GESIME predicts to exceed $625,000 as “we are determined to promote ZEDM products that substitute imports,” the official stressed.

The group’s involvement in the industrial area continues to increase. In 2012, it only had five companies and 20 products, while by the end of last year, 22 entities were present with 53 products.

Estrada noted that recent results are the scissor lifts, which were imported until 2020. This year, they expect to build 20 of these lifts for lease at the Mariel zone, which will substitute the import of machineries whose international value ranges from 30,000 to 35,000 dollars.

The 17, 12 and 9-meter posts are the other element they included last year. Oxidation-resistant, something important because of the site’s natural conditions, these posts were previously bought abroad.

Something similar happened with the 18 and 21-meter electricity pylons. The group already planned the production of 300 of these pylons – pending validation – that would represent about $2,000 in savings for each 21-meter unit and from $1,500 to $2,000 for each 18-meter unit.

The official added that according to data provided by the electricity company, the country’s demand rises to about 3,000 pylons annually, which would mean saving over 6 million dollars with only one product – a benefit that would also contribute to the development of the Cuban industry.

Estrada highlighted that all GESIME products substitute imports and stressed that exceeding the annual quota has great significance.

In relation to industrial connections, he noted that the iron and mechanics industry complements other domestic entities because of its own characteristics.

GESIME values its presence at ZEDM and has three main goals: having all 53 companies of the group present, increasing business in any form and increasing connections with users.

The strategy to increase profits at ZEDM is divided in two modalities: working with infrastructure and using part of the income in foreign currencies to acquire raw materials and develop technology in each industry.

The results reached at the Mariel zone led the group to create a GESIME Representation at the industrial area, upon the basis of an import, export and marketing modality that will facilitate management and sustainability of businesses with clients, as well as provide a quick answer to goods supply.

GESIME hopes to prove its capacity to innovate, grow and adapt itself to new circumstances, as the Cuban iron and mechanics industry’s goal is to meet the present demands while strengthening the economy and providing greater quality of life.
ECONOMY

HAVANA.- Cuba’s chemical industry recorded some seven million dollars in savings in 2020 by replacing imports, which is a key element of the country’s socioeconomic strategy, an official source revealed. Together with that result, an additional 15 percent in savings is anticipated for 2021. Changes will include the enhancement of six pesticide formulations, both for the sugarcane and non-sugarcane agricultural sector, previously bought on the international market, Vice President of the Chemical Industry’s Business Group (QEIQ) Lissette Alonso told The Havana Reporter.

In 2020, the country did not have to buy chlorine, caustic soda or hydrochloric acid abroad because of the investment in local production at the electrochemical plant of Sagua –in the central Cuban Province of Villa Clara. The Cuban plant made the stable production of those products possible, she exemplified.

These efforts are a significant contribution to fight the COVID-19 pandemic because, she noted, their production has increased parallel to their demand, both by state-run health institutions and the population. Those solutions are used to disinfect, clean and sanitize. The products made by the chemical industry are essential for different sectors of the economy, and almost all of them are included in Cuba’s priority programs, Alonso said.

They group six key sectors: industrial and medicinal gases, electrochemical products, paper, tires, fertilizers and glass, she explained. They interact directly with agriculture, the sugarcane agroindustry and its by-products, tourism, health, construction, and foreign and domestic trade, the GEIQ Vice President stressed.

According to Alonso, productive collaboration among state-owned entities is another strategy carried out by the Business Group. Most of that collaboration occurs within the chemical industry. The company Oxicuba, for instance, supplies medicinal and industrial oxygen to the Industrial Gas Enterprise which, in turn, supplies oxygen, nitrogen, argon, acetylene, and carbon dioxide to the entire entrepreneurial system and Public Health Ministry.

In the case of oxygen, Alonso commented, it was necessary to increase its production in a short period of time due to the increasing number of isolation centers and hospital services as result of the sudden escalation of COVID-19 patients. But GEIQ is also interconnected with other important institutions such as the Raw Material Recycling Group. Its materials are used to produce egg trays, toilet paper and paper products for hospital use. It is also connected with GEOMINSAL (Geo-Mining and Salt Production Group), which is in charge of supplying salt, a raw material that is essential to the production of chlorine, hypochlorite acid and caustic soda, as well as zeolite to produce fertilizers, and silica sand and calcium carbonate to produce glass.

In the meantime, the AZCUBA Sugarcane Business Group supplies alcohol to make insecticide, cologne and other light chemical formulations that are essential for wholesale and retail productions. For its part, GEIQ provides over 30 products to ensure the sugarcane industry’s sustainability, including fertilizers, pesticides, chemicals, gases, tires and services.

The chemical industry is directly connected to the production of food, which is one of the country’s strategic programs, Alonso emphasized. In turn, GEIQ makes products that are indispensable for other companies to manufacture their goods, which are equally necessary for the national economy. As for non-state forms of management, she stressed that for many years they have maintained associations with licensed welders that can acquire industrial gases. Those relationships are expected to increase with the new regulations adopted by the Cuban State, Alonso added.

The GEIG Vice President stressed the importance of the investments made in recent years and added that others included in the country’s Growth Plan and economic recovery strategy are yet to come.

Footnotes
- GEIQ supplies over 30 products to ensure the sugarcane industry’s sustainability
- Enlargement of the chlorine factory in Sagua la Grande
- Oxicuba supplies medicinal and industrial gas to the Industrial Gas Enterprise

By Raquel DÍAZ
Stars in European Handball

By Yodeni MASÓ

HAVANA.- While few sporting exchanges have been held at the national level, Cuban handball talents currently train in Europe, where about 20 players have scored goals in the Spanish, French, Portuguese and Slovakian leagues. Immersed in the second round of their respective competitions, Cuba presently has the highest number of signed athletes in Spain, with 13 in different levels of competition.

Experienced athlete Guillermo Corzo (Fertiberia Puerto Sagunto) and rookies Ángel Jesús Rivero (Bm. Benidorm) and Daniel García (Bm. Guadalajara) play in the Asobal League’s Honor Division, while six other handball players are enrolled in the Silver Honor and National Men category. Corzo heads the Puerto Sagunto team while Rivero is an offensive pillar for the Benidorm squad, just as García is for the Guadalajara team.

Cuban Hopefuls for Tokyo 2021

By Jhonal DÍAZ

HAVANA.- Cuba hopes to exhibit its athletic talents in Tokyo 2021, and track and field is one of its strongest areas. The spirit of the Olympic Games is so contagious that Cuba’s most promising athletes train hard every day with that goal in mind.

Outstanding Cuban figures from several sport disciplines have stood out in recent years, with outstanding combinations of youth, talent and experience. However, all of them have one same goal in mind.

Having analyzed the context, it is evident that women play a leading role. Yaimé Pérez and Denia Caballero have been among the top female discus throwers for years, while pole-vaulter Yarisley Silva is hoping to close out her athletic career on a high note, to leave a legacy that will withstand the passing of time.

Pérez and Caballero, gold and silver medalist in Doha 2019, respectively, may well repeat those excellent performances in the Japanese capital; nonetheless, they will face a strong rival: Croatian Sandra Perkovic, bronze medalist of that world event.

The three athletes should not have any problem filling the medal board; so, the big question will be in what order. All three of these athletes throw over 67 meters frequently, something that few discus throwers have done during this Olympic cycle.

Meanwhile, Silva, silver medalist in London 2012, has the challenge of closing out her career at 33-years-old, which is not an easy thing to do, according to other athletes. However, the pole-vaulter seems to be pushing for that last victory to top off her athletic success.

On the road to the Olympic Games, long jumper Juan Miguel Echevarría has become the star of the Cuban delegation. Despite his young age of 22, many are focusing their attention on him.

Even experts have said again and again that he is the right athlete to break the nine-meter barrier in that modality. It’s worth mentioning that Echevarría showed his talent and won the 2021 World Athletics Indoor Tour, undefeated.

His three performances were victorious: 8.18 in Karlsruhe, Germany, 8.25 in Lievin, France, and 8.14 in Madrid, Spain. The Cuban athlete thus repeated his victory of 2020 at the world circuit after taking the lead over Greek Miltiadis Tentoglou and German Thobias Montler, who came in second and third, respectively.

The international champion in Birmingham 2018 trained throughout the winter to enhance some of his technical skills. Together with his coach Daniel Osojo, the Cuban is training to perfection to go to the Olympic Games in tip-top shape.

Although chances are fewer, Cuba also relies on other top athletes: high jumper Luis Enrique Zayas, triple jumpers Liadagmis Povea and Jordan Díaz, and long jumper Maikel Massó, whose youth and talent maintain fans’ high hopes.

Five years ago in Rio de Janeiro 2016, Cuba was rather far from its goals, with only Caballero placing third. This is one of the reasons why it is determined to return to the Olympic stadium stronger than ever.
HAVANA.- The mercenary invasion of Cuba, defeated on April 19, 1961, was not only one of the most ambitious projects plotted by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) but one of the most resounding defeats as well. Cuba remembers that event as the “first great defeat of imperialism in the Americas.”

Code-named Operation Pluto, the plan had been approved by U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower on March 17, 1960 with the objective of overthrowing the emerging Cuban Revolution, with the active participation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. Armed Forces.

An army of exiles, including ex-figures of Dictator Fulgencio Batista (some of them responsible for crimes against the Cuban people) was recruited, trained and equipped in Guatemala. The invasion was conducted by sea and air in an effort to conquer the coast in the southern Bay of Pigs, and establish a government previously appointed by Washington and confined at a military base of the Pentagon.

That act of war was accompanied by internal subversion, armed infiltrations, sabotage and criminal actions. It was also characterized by quite an armory of psychological and advertising moves on the radio, in the newspaper, the television and literature with the objective of creating the ideal scenario for the invasion.

On October 7, 1960, Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa announced at the UN that preparations were being taken for an invasion of Cuba, and that the participants were being trained at Helvetia Farm in western Guatemala.

**BOMBING OF CUBAN AIRPORTS**

On April 15, 1961 war planes with false Cuban banners simultaneously attacked the San Antonio de los Baños Air Base, the Ciudad Libertad runway and the Santiago de Cuba Airport. It was the prelude to the invasion in an attempt to destroy the poor and old revolutionary Air Force.

Strongly repelled by Cuban artillery, the invasion left seven people dead and many others injured, mostly civilians. During the burial ceremony, Fidel Castro proclaimed the socialist character of the Revolution.

Cuba was at the same time waging a diplomatic battle at the UN. Its foreign minister denounced the air raid and blamed U.S. authorities for it. Washington’s representative, Adlai Stevenson made himself look dumb, deceived by the reports provided by his own government.

On April 17, the debates would go on at the world organization, while Cuba was receiving countless signs of support. Further south, the mercenary disembarkation began on Playa Larga beach.

**THE INVASION**

At dawn, militiaman José Ramón González Suco alerted from Playa Larga that lights and movement at sea had been spotted. Battalion 339 from Cienfuegos Province was sent to the zone and prepared for the enemy attack.

Operation Pluto was thus being materialized, inherited by President John F. Kennedy. Brigade 2506, made up of 1,500 members, had left Cabezas Port, Nicaragua, aboard five U.S. ships escorted by the Navy.

The battles were bloody and the air raids of the B-26 planes were criminal, as they even used napalm bombs, leaving more than 150 dead and hundreds injured.

However, Washington failed in its attempt to establish a warhead, because the invaders were defeated in less than three days by the Cuban militia, the National Revolutionary Police and the Rebel Army, led by Fidel.

The puppet government never landed in Cuba and the United States never got to invade it militarily in support for its mercenary troops, although aircraft carriers and destroyers were deployed around the Cuban coastline.

As the sun was going down on April 19, 1961, Fidel Castro, who commanded the battles and even fired canons at the invading ship the Houston, announced “forces of the Rebel Army and the National Revolutionary Militias took by storm the last strongholds occupied by the mercenary forces in national territory.”

Playa Girón beach was the last spot to be retaken by Cuban forces, at 5:30pm that day.