Overcoming Economic Issues with Social Support

Spotlight
Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: Symbol of Cuban Poetry

Cuba
Dialogue, Not Provocations

Another Wave of COVID-19
The Protection of Employment
Cuba Offers Health to the World

By Lourdes Pérez

HAVANA.- Health tourism and the quality of life that Cuba provides are in great demand by people from all over the world, although analysts agree that there is still potential for development.

“This practice was developed in the 1980s, when medical sciences and the formation of competent professionals in different specialties were increasing in Cuba,” said Dr Iliana Reyes Álvarez, head of Sales at the Cuban Medical Services Company (SMC).

The official added that this motivated foreign citizens – initially, diplomats’ relatives and residents of the Caribbean – to request medical attention in the country, driving clinical-surgical, neurological, addiction and rehabilitation treatments to be improved.

In light of the growing demand, SERVIMED was created, a company that later merged with SMC. The latter is an entity that at present has a higher profile and offers patients a network of units attached to the national health system at the primary, secondary and institutional level.

Reyes also commented that they conduct highly technological programs, a result of the development of Cuban biotechnology and medical sciences in general.

SMC is a company attached to the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) whose objective is to export health services in different modalities, such as medical services abroad, attention to foreign patients in Cuba, academic programs, degree or upgrading courses, and specialized events.

GROWING NEED

According to the SMC specialist, health tourism is an increasing industry on the international scale.

“Our marketing strategy has not actually been addressed to trading companies, whose only objective is to make profit,” the official said.

We have tried to develop health tourism to meet demand, and based on that, we create and adapt our services,” Reyes noted.

The income Cuba makes through specialized medical tourism is reinvested to strengthen the structure of the national health system, maintaining the right of Cuban citizens to free medical attention, as well as improving technology.

The official highlighted that new treatments are in high demand.

Patients coming from countries with little medical development require orthopedic and pediatric surgical procedures, as well as those that are more frequent. However, if they come from developed countries, they require procedures that are exclusive to Cuba.

Those procedures include treatment for diabetic foot ulcers with Heberprot, a medication created with Cuban biotechnology, treatment to lung, head and neck cancer with monoclonal antibodies, and skin cancer treatment.

Other procedures include rehabilitation programs that, even though they are not solely available in Cuba, the components of the national treatment protocol include specifications that significantly improve results.

The specialist also referred to addiction treatment, which includes a unique protocol and has been conducted for over 25 years, pediatric surgery for cardiovascular congenital disorders, and minimally invasive spinal operations, procedures that require both expertise and high-tech equipment.

Reyes stressed that the countries patients come from include Canada (mostly aesthetic surgery, rehabilitation, orthopedics and cancer treatment), Caribbean nations (with the deficit of hospital infrastructure and high-tech equipment), and Europe (treatment of head, neck and lung cancer), in addition to Angola and Turkey.

In spite of the blockade imposed by the United States and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, “Cuba provides high-quality services that compete with those of the developed countries,” the official said.

Cuba is a country that people prefer when it comes to improving their health, largely because of the great prestige of Cuban medicine at the international level, endorsed by the intention the State to foster the progress of science.

Secondly, as health tourism is not a commercial, trading career in Cuba, the prices that the medical programs offer are accessible and inclusive.

On the other hand, therapies and treatments are characteristic of our health system, as the nature, beauty and hospitality of our people are.

According to analysts in the field of health tourism, Cuba has potential that is still to be realized and expanded upon.
Overcoming Economic Issues with Social Support

By Adriana ROBREÑO

HAVANA.- One month after the monetary adjustment process began in Cuba, 16,000 vulnerable families received aid as part of the current welfare policy, a principle supporting the country as it undergoes economic changes in favor of growth.

With an interdisciplinary and transversal character, the reform includes the discontinuation of the Cuban convertible peso and the establishment of an exchange rate of reference at 24 Cuban pesos per one American dollar, both for individuals and legal entities.

In addition to the monetary and exchange rate unification, the changes also include the elimination of excessive subsidies, and a wage and pension reform, all aimed at moving the country’s economic strategy forward.

In 2020, workers got a salary advance, while pensioners and people assisted by social security were also benefited by that measure.

The objective of the salary advance was to welcome January 1st (the day when the Monetary Adjustment Task took effect) with enough funds to cope with the projected price hike that would result from the devaluation of national currency and the elimination of subsidies.

Even though it is still hard for the population to adjust to new tariffs—some of which were corrected and reduced, as was the case of the electricity charge—local authorities sustain that the changes will ultimately help increase Cubans’ quality of life.

Similar remarks were made by experts such as Ricardo Torres, from the Center on Cuban Economic Studies, who says the monetary adjustment will have positive effects in long run, but in the short term the impact on productive activity will be minimal.

In order to attain the desired results, Marino Murillo, head of the Commission for the Implementation of the Cuban Communist Party’s Guidelines, called for the entities to be more efficient by making the best use of national raw materials and finding ways to export goods and services.

The official admitted that some entities will find it hard to cope with the devaluation of the Cuban peso, because in addition to dealing with new costs, they have to finance the wage increase.

This year’s State Budget assigns 18 billion Cuban pesos to supporting the business system. However, Murillo made it clear that the amount will not cover inefficiencies nor will they allow that retail prices suffer the consequences.

Similarly, under the principle that “no one will be left unprotected,” this year the State will assign 700 million pesos to aid vulnerable people and families, while medicine for chronic diseases and food products for children and pregnant women will continue to be subsidized.

The first days of the year, Cuban authorities gave detailed information about the changes, particularly how to guarantee social security for those in need.

Similarly, local governments are conducting studies in every neighborhood to identify the people that will need additional support.

The recent monetary adjustment makes it necessary to work to generate income. As a result, the number of job applications increased considerably in recent days, with the main jobs available in the productive sector, which is the main source of wealth in the country.

Although there is the feeling that the situation of Cubans will be worse with the reform, the government reiterates it is not a neoliberal adjustment, because the measures were conceived with a humanist and social approach that characterizes the Revolution.

The Adjustment Task is rather new and is still undergoing changes. However, experts and authorities agree that it is the only way to attain better economic results and a greater quality of life in the long run.
HAVANA.- In last minute attempts to hurt Cuba, U.S. President Donald Trump left the White House with over 240 anti-Cuba measures.

His objective, openly flaunted in his presidential campaign, was to asphyxiate Cuba, cut its sources of funding, fuel, food and medicine, hurt the people’s standard of living, generate discontent, hopelessness and bring the revolutionary process to an end.

The Republican president reinforced the economic, commercial and financial blockade to unprecedented levels, as though the two countries were in a state of war.

Trump took diplomatic relations to the lowest possible level and undid the efforts of the Obama administration to ease the blockade; Obama's normalization process, which started in the middle of his second term.

Instead, Trump included Cuba on his unilateral list of countries that sponsor terrorism. That decision generated strong criticism in Havana, the United States itself and the world; above all, because the Caribbean island is the victim of Washington-backed terrorism and has never attacked the northern country.

This has not been the White House's only blacklist that attempts to criminalize Cuba and put its companies and officials at risk.

Trump's sequence of anti-Cuba hostile events is long and based on the memorandum he signed on June 16, 2017 in Florida, when he reversed Obama's policy and ordered new prohibitions on individual travel and trade.

On September 9, 2017, using the alleged health incidents reported by U.S. diplomats in Havana as pretext, the Department of State announced it would withdraw 60 percent of its diplomatic staff in Cuba and suspended issuing visas. Although the motivation for this and other decisions was to weaken the Cuban government, those punitive measures have mostly affected everyday citizens, as family reunions and travel were subsequently more complicated and expensive.

In November 2017, Washington announced more travel and trade restrictions, which then included 180 Cuban entities and sub-entities with which U.S. citizens cannot make transactions.

That list has been expanded several times and affects companies in charge of supplying fuel, food and other basic provisions.

On April 5, 2019, the Trump administration sanctioned ships and companies bringing crude oil to Cuba and linked with the Venezuelan oil sector, a measure that was repeated a few times.

Cuban sports were also affected by those attacks. The White House canceled a historic agreement reached between the U.S. Major League Baseball and the Cuban Baseball Federation.

On May 2, 2019, the U.S. President activated Title III of the Helms-Burton Act. The first lawsuits under the protection of that legislative chapter were immediately after filed in Florida. He had previously announced additional restrictions on non-family trips and remittances, which were finally prohibited in 2020.

On June 5, 2019, people-to-people educational group travel was suspended, and recreational and passenger ships were prohibited to go to Cuba, including cruise ships, yachts, and private and corporate jets.

Days later, the U.S. Department of States included Cuba on a list of countries that, according to Washington, infringe the minimum laws to eliminate human trafficking; when actually, Cuba practices zero tolerance against that scourge.

One month later, the United States announced visa restrictions for Cuban officials linked to the medical brigades abroad, one of the country’s most important international solidarity programs.

That was the prelude to attack, one year later, Cuba’s medical collaboration in countries that requested aid to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

For that reason and others, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel called Trump’s legacy shameful, as he not only failed to overthrow the Cuban Revolution but also failed to rule his own country successfully.
HAVANA.- January 2021 in Cuba was characterized by a noticeable increase in COVID-19 cases, but those epidemiologic figures have not discouraged local health authorities, who work hard to improve the complex situation on the Caribbean island. What is known as the pandemic peak recorded the worst moment when, for several days, the number of daily cases went from 800 up to more than 900. This is considered a hard blow after the achievements that the country attained during the pandemic. Cuba had maintained control over the SARS-CoV-2 virus in 2020, when provinces such as Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo (in the eastern region) and the special municipality of the Isle of Youth (in the west) for several months reported zero COVID-19 cases.

The country decided to open its airports in November, and the arrival of travelers increased considerably in December; many of them from countries of critical epidemiologic situations. The pandemic broke out in Cuba in March, with a low mortality rate so far. Many warnings have been made by the Public Health Ministry to prevent the disease from further spreading in the country. However, indiscipline, lack of social responsibility of people that disregard the government’s efforts to ensure free health services for all have entailed a step backwards.

A total of 18 molecular biology laboratories are currently working at full capacity in Cuba, where more than 18,000 tests are produced daily. Due to the complex situation, the Cuban government adopted new measures to reduce contagion, including the return to phase 1 and 2 of the recovery stage in several provinces, required COVID-19 testing for international passengers, and the call to comply with national health protocols.

In general, restrictive measures were implemented in Cuban territories such as the suspension of recreational activities, limited transportation, and the discontinuation of the school year, among others. Moreover, travelers and their families have been administered Nasalferon, a nasal formula of recombinant IFN-alpha-2b-human that, thanks to the immune-modulating and antiviral properties of IFN-alpha, provides protection against the virus. The increase of cases in January required a series of new measures that were announced by President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who introduced a process to analyze the actions implemented in each territory to control the spread of the virus.

Those actions include taking international travelers to isolation centers until the PRC test comes back negative, and the reduction of commercial flights from abroad, both implemented on February 6. According to official statistics, 15,536 cases were diagnosed on the island in January, more than in the previous nine months, with a high number of children among them, partly due to violations of the protocols established for international passengers. Meanwhile, it was reported that the second phase of clinical study for Abdala vaccine, one of the four COVID-19 vaccines being developed in the country, began on February 1 in Santiago de Cuba. On the other hand, the third phase of clinical studies for the Soberana 02 vaccine will begin on March 1.

Given the complex situation Cuba is facing with the pandemic, President Díaz-Canel called for responsibility, discipline and control to overcome the challenges posed by the national increase in COVID-19 cases.
The first was founded by merchants José Gener y Guash and Antonio Font, and Francisco Ventosa Soler was its first president. The institution’s objectives were to provide medical attention, elder support and dignified burial for fellow countrymen. Documents from the period show that the society worshipped their saints and held fundraising events such as shows, bullfights, carnivals, literary contests and flower festivals. The current president of the Catalonian Charity Society, María Dolores Rosich Leal, recalled that during her childhood and youth she participated in the annual festivals where girls gave flowers to visitors in exchange for a donation because, “not all of them came to make the Americas,” she noted. "My father came to Cuba in 1921, when I was five years old, and he was a board member of both the Society and the Catalonian Center, which was dissolved in the 1960s. He died in 1973 and ten years later, I was asked if I wanted to be a member of the board. I agreed to do so in his memory. I’m the first woman to occupy this position,” she stated. That social welfare institution is currently considered the oldest in Latin America, and has over 1,000 members that, together with the members of the community, participate in the Havaneras festivals, Saint Jordi celebrations, poetry readings, concerts and the Barcelona Club at its main venue in Centro Habana, Havana. “The Autonomous Government of Catalonia helped us rebuild and renovate that house. The dance school was created later on and actions were carried out to sponsor the choir and Havaneras Quartet. Although it continues with its charity goals, we also promote cultural programming. We teach Catalan and have a historic archive with its materials digitalized in Catalonia,” said Rosich. The bibliographic materials, most of which belong to the former Catalonian Center, include several numbers of La Nueva Cataluña (The New Catalonia) magazine, where the Cuban society of the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century is described in the first pages. Similarly, the center keeps letters that the emigrants sent to relatives, as well as hundreds of books in Catalan about philosophy, religion and visual arts. According to Rosich, elders known as “war children” are still members of the Society. “Some of our members came to the country when they were very little and went in exile due to the Spanish Civil War. Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are our partners as well,” she said.
HAVANA. - Born 207 years ago, Cuban poet Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873) is one of the most outstanding figures of Cuban literature, with a legacy that went far beyond Cuban borders, extending throughout the Ibero-American region. Considered one of the greatest exponents of the romantic movement, Avellaneda broke social standards thanks to her passionate personality and markedly rebellious nature, which she reflected in her writing.

Born to a Spanish father and Cuban mother, the young lady belonged to an illustrious and wealthy family, but was disinherited because she rejected an arranged marriage when she was still very young. Her vast collection of letters and autobiographic texts revealed the influence of renowned French and British romantic writers: Byron, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Madame de Staël, George Sand.

Upon her arrival in Sevilla in 1839 and then in Cadiz, she published her works for the first time in La Aureola Daily under the pen name of La Peregrina (The Pilgrim). In 1840, she settled in Madrid, beginning a period of intensive literary activity including Poesías (Poems), the censured anti-slavery novel Sab, Dos mujeres (Two Women), Espatolino, Guatimozin and the Legends of the Baroness of Joux. Her prestige became ever greater at the famous Lyceum of Madrid, where she moved in high intellectual circles that included famous names such as Alberto Lista, Juan Nicasio, Manuel Quintana, Nicomedes Pastor, José Zorrilla and Francisco de Paula. In parallel, the celebrated and passionate "Tula" was known for a controversial love life, the loss of a daughter, several failed marriages, widowhood and loneliness at the end of her life.

From 1849 to 1853 she Premiered seven plays that were hits with the public: Saúl (1849), Flavio Recaredo (1851), La verdad vence apariencias (Truth Conquers Appearances,1852), Errores del corazón (Errors of the Heart, 1852), El donativo del diablo (The Gift of the Devil, 1852), La hija de las flores (The Daughter of Flowers, 1852) and La Aventurera (The Adventurer, 1853). She also reedited Poesías (1851) and published the historic story Dolores: Páginas de una crónica de familia (Dolores: Pages of a Family Chronicle) and two new stories, La velada del helecho (1849) and La monarca maldita (The Cursed Mountain, 1851).

Although her writing made a deep impression on her colleagues and readers, the Royal Spanish Language Academy rejected her request to enter into the famous institution, which in 1853 only allowed men. She married Spanish Colonel Domingo Verdugo and the poet maintained a steady intellectual career, but she moved to Cuba, her country of birth, where she would experience loneliness after her husband died.

In 1860, she founded and directed the weekly magazine El Almud Cubano (The Cuban Album), where she published her progressive articles about women such as La monarca maldita (The Cursed Mountain), La dama de Amboto (Amboto Lady) and La flor del ángel (The Angel’s Flower). Avellaneda increased women’s presence in the Cuban press and became famous in the Havana society for being a means for women to voice their concerns in the colonial system. She died on February 1, 1873 in Madrid, where she returned in 1864 almost exclusively to correct and edit her volume Obras literarias, dramáticas y poéticas (Literary, Dramatic and Poetic Works, 1869-1871).

Today, her life and work are in the center of numerous critical studies and researches that regard her as precursor of the feminist movement in Spain.
New Pandemic Threats

By Rosmerys Bernal

HAVANA.- The world is pinning its hopes on a massive immunization program against the COVID-19 pandemic; however, those hopes are confronted by the discovery of new and more infectious strains of the virus that cause disease. According to World Health Organization (WHO) statistics, nearly 100 million people have been diagnosed with the disease in the world, over two million of which have died. The international health organization warns the public about the possibility of the disease becoming endemic. If so, it will continue to be a threat to mankind, although to a much lesser extent if an effective world vaccination program is finally accomplished, experts say.

China, the country where the first COVID-19 cases were reported in December of 2019, is currently facing the worst situation of fresh outbreaks, making it necessary to put more than 24 million people in quarantine throughout large cities, with the number of daily cases exceeding 100. Likewise, British experts have warned that the United Kingdom is going through a very dangerous phase of the pandemic, predicting a catastrophe in the first months of the year if more severe measure are not adopted. The European country is experiencing an increase in the number of positive cases due to the spread of a new and highly infectious strain of the virus.

Although most European countries and several others decided to temporarily close their borders to British transportation and travelers, that strain of the virus spread to different territories and new others have even been identified. On January 20, the WHO announced that 60 countries had reported imported or locally-transmitted cases of the strain identified in the United Kingdom. The nations with the highest number of such cases are the United States, Russia, Brazil, India and Spain.

Some countries also reported the presence of the virus strain in South Africa and Brazil. The United States is one of the countries most affected by the pandemic (over 24 million cases), followed by India (more than 10 million), Brazil (over eight million), Russia and the United Kingdom (more than three million each). In the American region in particular, over 42 million infected people have been reported, with more than 414,000 deaths.

“If we stay diligent we will be able to control this virus, but if we become indifferent, 2021 could be much worse than 2020,” noted Carissa Etienne, Director of the Pan-American Health Organization.

Hand washing, social distancing and wearing face masks will continue to be useful measures to prevent more people from getting infected. Also, it is important to be ever more careful because the new virus strains are much more contagious. The scientific community is working against the clock in clinical essays of vaccine candidates and to develop and test medicines to avoid medical complications.

In the meantime, studies continue to provide information about this type of coronavirus, its variants and side effects of the disease. According to the WHO, all viruses mutate over time, including SARS-COV-2, so new lab studies are needed to understand mutations much better and determine how this could affect the effectiveness of diagnoses and treatments. Experts sustain that the vaccines will be an excellent tool but will not eradicate the pandemic. Therefore, it is necessary to continue adopting biosecurity measures and include immunization in an effective public health strategy.

Protect yourself and others from COVID-19

If COVID-19 is spreading in your community, stay safe by taking some simple precautions, such as physical distancing, wearing a mask, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoiding crowds, cleaning your hands, and coughing into a bent elbow or tissue. Check local advice where you live and work. Do it all!

What to do to keep yourself and others safe from COVID-19

Maintain at least a 1-metre distance between yourself and others to reduce your risk of infection when they cough, sneeze or speak. Maintain an even greater distance between yourself and others when indoors. The further away, the better.

Make wearing a mask a normal part of being around other people. The appropriate use, storage and cleaning or disposal are essential to make masks as effective as possible.

How to make your environment safer

Avoid the 3Cs: spaces that are closed, crowded or involve close contact. Outbreaks have been reported in restaurants, choir practices, fitness classes, nightclubs, offices and places of worship where people have gathered, often in crowded indoor settings where they talk loudly, shout, breathe heavily or sing.

The risks of getting COVID-19 are higher in crowded and inadequately ventilated spaces where infected people spend long periods of time together in close proximity. These environments are where the virus appears to spread by respiratory droplets or aerosols more efficiently, so taking precautions is even more important.

Meet people outside. Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor ones, particularly if indoor spaces are small and without outdoor air coming in.
HAVANA.- Cuba’s Ministry of Culture (MINCULT) reiterated its willingness to talk with the country’s honest artists and reiterated it refuses to accept provocations or talk with individuals paid by the United States, as has been corroborated.

The institution emphasized its stance in a public announcement after the incident that occurred the morning of January 27 in front of its headquarters in Havana. Staged by a small group of people and independent journalists, the objective was to sell the image of alleged political chaos in the country.

According to the release, a meeting had been scheduled that day between MINCULT officials and three spokespeople representing individuals that “have been characterized for their provocative stance and relationship with media paid by U.S. federal agencies.” However, on the meeting day nearly 30 people gathered in front of the Ministry. The institution’s authorities asked them to leave primarily due to COVID-19 protocol, but they refused to do so. Those persons, as described, were asking for an explanation about the situation of some citizens that had been detained in different parts of Havana. All of them, not just the three spokespeople, were invited to go into the building on several occasions, but once more they refused to do so, the press release stated. During the two hours that incidents lasted, the U.S.-backed media was commenting live on what was happening on social media.

In light of their repeated refusal to hold a dialogue under favorable conditions and “the clear intention to stage a show,” the ministry workers broke up the group.

The institution ratified in the release they are willing to hold a dialogue with honest journalists about any topic related to the Cuban Revolution’s policies but reiterated it will not accept provocations nor talk with those backed by the U.S.

The National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, the Hermanos Saiz Association, and many other Cuban institutions commented on the new attempt to get media attention.

Those two organizations denounced that the incident in front of the Ministry of Culture aims to damage the Cuban Revolution and stressed that, in spite of the serious fresh outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, writers, artists and authorities advocate better results in cultural management and promotion.

Furthermore, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel denounced the actions against State entities, a stance inciting provocations as the island faces the hostile policy of the blockade imposed by the United States for six decades.

“A person that uses art as a shield to provoke besieging institutions and government employees is not honest, in times when the country fights hand in hand against the blockade, the pandemic and its consequences. Our ministries are not stages for media shows. They work hard there,” the president wrote on his Twitter account.

A similar event took place last November, when a large group of individuals, mostly young artists and journalists, gathered in front of the MINCULT building, as several Cuban press reports documented.

That time, MINCULT officials and members of organizations grouping Cuban artists and creators talked with them, but they equally rejected impositions and a program contrary to the Cuban Revolution’s policy.

**Dialogue, Not Provocations**

By Karina Marrón

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HAVANA.- Amidst a tense political atmosphere and the unprecedented deployment of security officers in Washington DC, Joe Biden finally took up his post as President of the United States and now faces the complex scenario left by his predecessor, Donald Trump.

The swearing-in ceremony, last January 20, required a large contingent of security officers because of the threats posed after the attack on the Capitol building. The deployment of such officers actually started on January 6 and included the magnate's followers. In his opening speech, Biden highlighted the huge challenges his administration will have to face and urged the nation to be united to push the country forward.

He also referenced the huge domestic crisis and asked for the support of all U.S. people in order to face it. Dozens of millions of television viewers in the United States and throughout the world followed the ceremony, a show in which Lady Gaga sang the national anthem and Jennifer López, of Puerto Rican descent, also performed.

During his first two days as president, he signed 29 executive orders, the first of them, to face the crisis caused by COVID-19, avoiding the U.S. from leaving the World Health Organization and returning to the Paris Agreement.

He also ordered the transformation of some migration policies and the cancelation of funds to build the wall at the US-Mexico border, and urged to put an end to the so-called “travel ban on Muslims” imposed by Trump.

Other orders are focused on alleviating the economic crisis caused by COVID-19 in the United States, the world’s most affected nation by this pandemic, with the highest number of infections.

In fact, the new president has already presented a plan to fight COVID-19 that, among other topics, is expected to improve the conduction of tests to detect the disease and boost the vaccination campaign.

However, the team that the Democrat president created to fight the pandemic revealed a lack of communication on the part of the Trump administration during the transition process, as they are hardly starting to understand the present state of the vaccination program.

Action against the pandemic has been a dismal failure so far,” Biden said in relation to the Trump administration. In fact, Trump never set up any strategy whatsoever at the national level to face the health crisis.
Cuba’s Port of the Prince Villa

By Fidel Alejandro MANZANARES

CAMAGÜEY.- According to a plan of the General Archive of the Indies, the first settlement on record of Santa María del Puerto del Príncipe (Saint Mary of Port of the Prince) Villa was located in Guincho Peninsula, in Nuevitas, north of the current location of Camagüey, a city in eastern Cuba. Legend has it that on February 2, 1541, the important event connected with the Virgin of Candelaria (Lady of the Candle) took place. The current location, formerly Cacicazgo de Camaguebax, was recognized on January 6, 1528, after a revolt of natives from the northern islands destroyed the community, according to researchers. The Port of Prince town was founded as ordered by Spanish Conquistador Diego Velázquez, but it was not until 1817 that it was designated under the category of a city. That settlement was situated around the Arms Square, today the Agramonte Park, adjoining the Metropolitan Cathedral and the City Hall.

The current city of Camagüey was established following an irregular urban design that still characterizes it, with a layout that features the church as the distinctive element of the town and is surrounded by one-story buildings, a typical feature of Camagüey’s urban design. Its network of narrow and winding streets and alleys distinguishes it from the rest of the first towns founded by the Spanish in Cuba and even in the Caribbean.

The diverse architecture, largely influenced by European styles, calls the visitor’s attention. The city’s landmark names and urban design were marked by the style of its six catholic temples. Camagüey, an emblematic symbol of the religious culture, is currently known as the “City of Churches.” Its Dioceses was created in December 1912 and Pope John Paul II elevated it to the rank of Archdioceses when he visited the city in 1998. Its historic district was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO over a decade ago.

Its ecclesiastical sector is included among the three most important of its kind in Cuba, together with those of Havana and Santiago de Cuba, thanks to its architectural, artistic and cultural assets. Today, over 320,000 people live in Camagüey, a city known for its pleasant, well-structured and coherent urban plan, located some 540 kilometers east of Havana, the Cuban capital.

It is considered a historic, economic and social referent in the country and is the birthplace of transcendental figures such as National Poet Nicolás Guillén and Carlos J. Finlay, who discovered the agent that transmits yellow fever. Its network of narrow and winding streets and alleys distinguishes it from the rest of the first towns founded by the Spanish in Cuba and even in the Caribbean.
The Strength of the Green Tide

By Maylín VIDAL

BUENOS AIRES.- After decades of fighting for women’s rights, Argentineans joined forces and won a battle that made history: the Congress approved, once and for all, the right to legal, safe and free abortion.

A tsunami painted green – the color of a scarf in 2017 that grew to represent the movement and is reproduced today across the continent– Argentine women again established a model and paved the way with their example for many Latin American sisters that still fight for the same right.

This new rule, endorsed after long and intense sessions held at the end of 2020, will soon be published in the Official Bulletin, thus allowing Argentina to enter the select list of six countries that legally allow abortion in the region, including Cuba, Uruguay and Puerto Rico.

Emotion is high; tears of joy for a battle that gained strength 17 years ago and that women have been fighting for since the establishment of democracy over 30 years ago.

“We finally did it; after a difficult year, we are now a little bit freer,” a young woman told The Havana Reporter after the historic decision, made on December 30, 2020, a date that will go down in the history of this nation for the 65 Senate votes in favor of legal abortion.

Illegal abortions are no longer necessary, and thus the practice that over 500,000 Argentine women underwent every year, to the point of losing their lives with risky, primitive procedures in the middle of the 21st century.

For those who died, for the future generations, for the girls without a choice as of 2021, Argentine women will be able to freely and legally access abortion until they are 14 weeks pregnant.

“Safe, legal and free abortion is a law. I promised that during the days of my campaign. Today, we are a better society that increases women rights and guarantees public health. Let’s be as good as our word. That’s a commitment of our politics,” said President Alberto Fernández after the approval of the law.

The president also noted that the law will be in force without objection, except a part of the text in which the word “comprehensive” in the reasons of abortion beyond 14 weeks.

Continuing the struggle to gain more rights, Argentine feminist groups, which are stronger than ever, made this law a reality.

Now, the importance lies in guaranteeing comprehensive sexual healthcare with accessible forms of contraception, so that no woman ever dies because of an abortion.

“Sexual education, contraceptives to prevent needing an abortion, and legal abortion to not die,” is the phrase coined in this southern nation and the reason most Argentinean women will continue fighting for it.

Obstacles of New Chilean Constitution

By Rafael CALCINES

SANTIAGO DE CHILE.- The upcoming elections on April 11 are already the center of attention in Chile as everyone, regardless of political beliefs, is aware that the country’s future is at stake.

Over 14,900,000 voters have been called to participate in an electoral marathon that day, when they will elect 16 regional governors, 345 mayors and 2,252 councilors. However, all eyes are on the election of the 155 members of the convention that will draw up the new constitution.

The deadline for the candidates to register at the Electoral Service closed on January 11. In the meantime, some 1,300 applications were submitted for the Constitutional Convention, of which 155 will be elected constituent members.

The majority of Chileans hope that a substantial change in the role of the State be one of the main topics included in the new constitution, so that the government has a more social and responsive function rather than subsidiary.

Chileans hope that the Constitution recognizes the following issues as rights: high-quality healthcare and education for all, decent pensions, access to drinking water as a public asset, decent housing, environmental preservation, the recovery of main natural resources and non-discrimination for all.

Many hope that a more democratic and participatory system prevails over the government that exists currently in Chile, and that a plurinational State is established, allowing native people to participate in decision-making.

In short, it is the people’s desire that the new constitution ends the neoliberal basis of the current Chilean development strategy, giving way to a social model that provides opportunities of growth for all.

Many are convinced that the sessions of the Constitutional Convention, which will have one year to write the constitutional text, will be a battlefield between those who fight for a new Chile, those that openly want to maintain the outdated Constitution of 1980 and the moderate group that just hopes for some reform.

In order to cope with that challenge, the ruling parties reached an agreement with the extreme rightwing represented by the Republican Party and presented a unitary list.

According to the agreed voting mechanism, it will enough for them to win a little over one third of the total number of constituent members to avoid that the most profound changes requested since the social outbreak in October 2019 are included in the constitution.

In turn, the leftist and anti-neoliberal forces agree that the aspirations of millions of Chileans are reflected in the constitutional text.

The multicolored opposition once more failed to reach unity, with the consequent presentation of several lists that, according to experts in electoral matters, will only result in what is called rightwing “hyper-representation” in the 155 constituent seats.

Given this serious obstacle, they will emerge victorious only if the opposition forces leave their little differences aside and reach consensual stances on the main points of the debates.

Once the constituent members write the new constitution in 2022 (the date has not been set yet), it will be voted in a plebiscite. In the meantime, it’s still too early to know what will happen at the polls on April 11.
HAVANA.- With the implementation of the monetary adjustment process in Cuba on January 1, it is clear that employment holds high priority among people's priorities, as it stands as the main source of income and wealth. Governmental authorities have recognized that this is one of the first beneficial steps of the ongoing complex process for updating the Cuban economic model, which is indispensable for bringing forward other tasks of the economic and social strategy designed by the country's leadership. This process entails profound changes: the eradication of the Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC), a new and singular exchange rate at 24 Cuban Pesos (CUP) per one American dollar, both for individuals and the state-owned sector, the elimination of unnecessary subsidies, and a change in the distribution of income. Employment plays a key role in the monetary adjustment, in addition to salary reform, as the way to cope with the elimination of state subsidies for certain products and the corresponding increase in prices intrinsic to the devaluation of national currency. Getting involved in the labor market is a necessity entailed by the monetary adjustment, and its implications go far beyond the economic issue, making it necessary for people to prioritize in their lives. So was corroborated by the over 34,000 job applications made by the middle of January to the Municipal Labor and Social Security Offices. Some people get jobs that meet their interests, others do not, but the situation today is different and it is imperative to work, as many of the better paid jobs depend on level of education.

Cuban Minister of Labor and Social Security, Marta Elena Feitó, explained that the jobs are in function of local development and the needs of each territory. “The Monetary Adjustment Task encourages people to work, because the main guarantee in the social sphere is the right to work, as it is the cornerstone of the entire social security system,” she said. It is convenient for the country to generate more jobs in the production sector, both in the state-run sector and in other forms of management, because they are connected with the creation of wealth. More than 17,000 of those jobs are already available in the Cuban capital. Also, getting involved in the labor market is very important for a population that gets older each day, as is the case with the Cuban population, where life expectancy is ever higher and the burden on those who work is ever increasing. Today, there are nearly 1,400,000 people in the non-state-owned sector (27 percent of the economically active population). Of them, some 618,000 are self-employed. In the meantime, a little over 3.1 million work in the state sector, 48 percent of them in the budgetary system and 52 percent in the business sector. Increasing those numbers and attaining fruitful production results will determine the economy because, even though the increase in salaries encourages people to work, it’s easier said than done. Far beyond economic compensation, employment generates security, protects maternity and contributes to society until years of gratifying retirement.

PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.
Cuba-Australia Mining Contract

By Teyuné Díaz

HAVANA.- The Australian Caribe Metals Corporation Pty Limited Company signed an International Economic Association (IEA) contract in Cuba for the exploration and future mining of nickel, cobalt, iron, chrome and other metals that have commercial value.

The Cuban Commercial Caribbean Nickel S.A. (CCN) Trading Company and the Australian counterpart will study the feasibility of the mining project “Cajálbana,” located in La Palma, in the Cuban westernmost province of Pinar del Río.

In statements to The Havana Reporter, CCN General Manager Alexis Góngora explained that the IEA contract foresees, in its first stage, to conclude the feasibility studies to determine the viability of the project and the creation of a future joint venture.

This stage also includes the design of the technology to be used taking finances and environmental sustainability into account. Then, negotiations would be made to start the construction and exploitation of the plant, the official commented.

He also affirmed that the project envisions the rational use of natural resources and added that its exploitation would benefit the territory economically, as it would create jobs based on the relationships to be made.

With a capital of about 4 million dollars, the agreement’s objectives include pre-investment studies on the economic use of the abovementioned minerals and other metals in the “Cajálbana I” Geological Research Concession area, which belongs to CCN.

About 51 million tons of nickel and cobalt deposits are located in that area. Because of their characteristics and according to research, once processed, they could be commercialized, as could other metals found in the deposit.

If the mining project is feasible, negotiations would be made to set up a Joint Venture, which would be responsible for the detailed engineering tasks, as well as for the construction and operation of the factory.

The technology to be used would also be determined in accordance with Cuban norms on environmental protection. The project also foresees the recovery of the mined areas and the adequate treatment of waste generated in the future factory, following Cuban norms and the guidelines of international practice in this field.

Caribe Metals Corporation Pty Limited is a private company that has been run business in Cuba for more than 25 years.

Impact of the Pandemic on the World Economy

By Raquel Díaz

HAVANA.- COVID-19 has had an impact on all socio-economic indicators of the world economy, on top of the significant deceleration process going on after 12 years of an unresolved crisis that started in 2008.

Unemployment grows in the world.

Director of the Center for Research on the World Economy Ramón Pichs told The Havana Reporter that in some regions, such as Latin America, contraction reached the lowest levels and the low growth previously shown was stunted because of the pandemic.

“The crisis of the world economy caused a decrease in the main growth indicators of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020, and although some international institutions predict a recovery in 2021, it is actually in question,” the expert noted.

He also added that how the disease develops in the near future is still to be seen, and recalled that there is a fresh outbreak of COVID-19 at present in the United States, Europe and some Asian regions.

Pichs highlighted that despite the global impact of the pandemic, vulnerable economies are the most affected, especially the poor and workers of the informal and services sectors, who have been hit by the reduction of mobility, closing of establishments and confinement.

In relation to labor, a significant number of jobs were lost, which is significant when considering the total number of hours those jobs would amount to. The expert added that poverty and abject poverty also increased and this year, another 90 million people are expected to join the ranks of the poor and the destitute.

Another important topic is the fall in remittances, which are essential for the economic activity of many underdeveloped countries that are highly dependent on that flow of money, such as Central American and Caribbean nations, the researcher explained.

On top of that, direct foreign investment suffered a contraction and foreign debt increased.

DEBT AND THE PANDEMIC

At the end of 2020, global debt totaled 277 billion dollars, about 365 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) –four times the world’s GDP.

Pichs said that at present, the debt of developing countries and emerging economies all together is a lot higher and reaches 11 billion dollars.

The most interesting thing is, however, that in terms of services of the debt – that is, interest payments and amortizations – about 30 trillion dollars were paid from 2012 and 2020 alone.

Creditors’ main business is not the payment of the debt but the handling of this in a way that service yields interests. For that reason, they constantly get higher amounts from the income generated by those economies, said Pichs, a PhD in Economic Sciences.

That is one of the issues that affect Latin America, in reference to those services and foreign debt interests. In 2020, the region addressed about 57 percent of income generated by the trade of goods and services to pay foreign debt; that is, more than half of income earned, the expert commented.

Something interesting is that since the 1980s, historical leader of the Cuban Revolution Fidel Castro warned of the irrecoverable nature of the foreign debt and the obstacle this poses to the development of the poorest countries, he stressed.
National Judo’s Poor Start to the Olympic Year

By Adrián MENGANA

HAVANA.- The Cuban Judo Team finished the Qatar Masters empty-handed, a poor performance at the start of a competitive calendar leading up to the Tokyo Olympic Games next summer.

Maylin del Toro and Kaliema Antomarchi, seventh in the 63 and 78 kg divisions, respectively, achieved Cuba’s best performances at the Lusail Multipurpose Sports Arena.

Del Toro, a player from the Santiago de Cuba province who was the champion of the Lima 2019 Pan-American Games, added 468 points to her world ranking and went up to the sixth place, with 4470 points.

Antomarchi, bronze medalist at the Budapest 2017 World Championship, won 468 points and went from eighth to fifth place in the world ranking, with 4700 points.

With such results, both players met their goals: being included in the top rankings for the Tokyo Games, to be held from July 23 to August 8.

Two of Cuba’s best judokas, Idalis Ortiz – leader of the world ranking in the -78 kg division and Olympic champion in London 2012 – and Iván Silva –second in the world in the 90 kg division – let their fans down after being defeated in their first appearances.

Ortiz was defeated by Ippon by French judoka Romane Dicko, a 21-year-old athlete who has had an excellent career, with 56 victories and only nine defeats in high-performance events.


Silva, world runner-up in Baku 2018, lost his first bout against German Eduard Trippel, whom he had defeated in 2019 at the Hohhot Grand Prix, in China.

The other two Cuban athletes that participated in the Arab event, Magdiel Estrada (73 kg) and Andy Granda (+100 kg), also lost in their first bouts against Italian Fabio Basile and Georgian Gela Zaalishvili, respectively.

The Glory of José Gómez

By Reinaldo WOSSAERT

HAVANA.- Reaching Olympic glory is every athlete’s dream; however, in order to reach the podium, training hours are countless and as a boxer, life is spent between the gym and the ring.

In the history of the Olympic Games, which spans over 124 years, several boxers have filled the Cuban people with pride thanks to their virtuosity and excellence. One of those boxers is José Gómez, who was as powerful as Teófilo Stevenson himself, during his athletic career.

In those years, Gómez told The Havana Reporter that when he was an adolescent, he got involved in a fight in which he defeated his opponent with only one blow, and because of that, his friends encouraged him to approach a sport center in his native province.

Since then, his progress was fast: he won national junior matches and in 1997, he made his debut in the senior competitions, at the Playa Girón tournament held in the Santiago de Cuba province. In those games, he defeated all of his opponents and got to the finals of the 71 kg division, in which he lost to Olympic champion in Montreal 1976 Emilio Correa.

“I will never forget that fight. Correa was my idol and I was fighting him. It was a great experience. Then, I was promoted to the national draft team, where Sarvelio Fuentes welcomed me and with whom I reached my main victories,” said the champion of the San Juan (Puerto Rico) 1979 Pan-American Games.

Even though in his first international appearance – at the 1977 Friendly Army Spartakiads – he lost to Russian Leonid Shapornikov, that same year he won the Central American Boxing Championship and the Cuba-U.S. bilateral match, which marked the beginning of a short but successful career. His fans still remember the spectacular way in which he finished his bouts well before the allotted time.

“Natural strength helps, but training and technique are essential to develop a good punch. Hard work with my coaches also helped. Finishing bouts quickly was my thing,” Gómez added.

The boxer reached several victories by TKO, but he particularly remembers two of them: one against U.S. boxer Alex Ramos in a bilateral match against the United States, and another against South Korean Mung Jan Bong, at the Moscow 1980 Olympic Games.

Gómez, winner of the Montreal 1981 World Cup in the 75 kg division, recalled that the match against Ramos took place in the United States – before the holding of the Moscow games – in an arena that was favorable for his opponent, who knocked him down twice before he knocked him out.

“The other victory happened during my second appearance in Moscow, where I was still recovering from a car accident and was not feeling well. The South Korean was making things difficult for me, to the point that he knocked me down twice, but when he tried to round off...he had to be taken out on a stretcher,” he said.

His bouts against Finnish Tamuz Usivirta at the Belgrade 1978 World Championship and Soviet Viktor Savchenko at the Moscow Olympic Games are also etched in the memory of this boxer, a native of the Las Tunas province.

“I will take those memories with me to the grave, as the greatest victories of my career. I fought against Usivirta on several occasions, but that bout was memorable. We hit each other hard; I hit him badly and he still did not fall, but I won,” he concluded.
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