

# Cuba Revitalizes its Economy in the Face of COVID-19



P. 3

## Spotlight

## Photo Feature

## Sports

Cuba Mourns the Prominent Historian Eusebio Leal

Lanier Wetlands

María Caridad Colón:  
an Olympic Legend



P. 7



P. 11



P.15



# Tourism in Cuba: Challenges and Hard Work

By Roberto F. CAMPOS

HAVANA.- Big challenges lie ahead for the Cuban tourist industry due to the health crisis caused by COVID-19 and the pressures exerted by the U.S. government for more than 60 years, now tightened by the Trump administration, as local authorities have reiterated.

Consequently, the sector has been working hard amid the pandemic, with maintenance and restoration works at hotels and other facilities, always complying with the requirements and protocols established by the Public Health Ministry and signed by the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR).

Cuba opened up international tourism on July 1, to the keys in the central-northern region of the archipelago and Cayo Largo del Sur (key) in the south-eastern region, with the objective of protecting tourists and the Cuban population as well.

Those destinations also have available recovery packages for visitors that in the case that they get infected with the virus. While enjoying their vacations, foreign tourists can be seen by doctors, epidemiologists and nurses that now form part of working teams in each of the hotels that were allowed to reopen. The Cuban government also reopened camp sites and beaches for families to enjoy the summer season, mainly the young population that was so affected by the necessary isolation entailed by the pandemic.

In this sense, the tourist industry welcomed with joy the government's announcement to undergo three gradual stages during the post-COVID-19 recovery phase, carefully followed by local authorities.



Beautiful beaches await vacationers from all over the world. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

The leading hotel chains also opened some of their facilities, both for national tourism now and international tourism in due time.

Bookings at camp sites in the interior of the country and some hotels opened on June 18 for national tourism.

PCR tests will be conducted on all foreign tourists upon arrival in Cuba to identify possible infection. This measure

is the result of the efficient health control on the island, local authorities said.

Cuban hotel chains such as Cubanacán, Gran Caribe and Islazul, have already announced the hotels that are ready to begin operating, as did the Gaviota Group and foreign hotel chains such as Meliá.

The new promotional campaign "Suyo y Seguro" (Yours and Safety) highlights the values of the Cubanacán resorts, their safety measures and compliance with the protocols adopted by the Public Health Ministry. In the meantime, Meliá Hoteles Cuba declared that this is an ideal destination in the Caribbean, because it is safe and enjoys high levels of protection against the pandemic.

Although no statistics have been revealed yet as to specific bookings, it was announced that Cuba is one of the countries that most welcomes Russian tourists. Meanwhile, some airlines have already announced upcoming flights, such as Canada's OWG (OffWeGo), with direct flights to Cuba beginning on November 1.

The association between Hola Sun Holidays tour operator and OWG will facilitate direct flights to leading Cuban destinations such as the island Cayo Coco, the cities of Holguín and Santa Clara and the Varadero beach resort. In addition, Air Transat, Canada's third most important airline, announced the resumption of Cuba flights beginning on July 23, 2020.

All these efforts and enthusiasm over Cuban tourism could have fruitful results in the near future, depending on how the fight against COVID-19 progresses. According to local authorities, the steady control of the disease in the country may have a strong impact on the reopening of the so-called lazy industry.



Memories Paradise Hotel, in Cayo Santa María. PHOTO: Mintur.

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**Advertising:** René García  
**Circulation:** Commercial Department.

**Printing:** Imprenta Federico Engels  
**Publisher:** Agencia Informativa Latinoamericana, Prensa Latina, S.A.  
Calle E, esq. 19 No. 454, Vedado, La Habana-4, Cuba.  
Telephone: (53)7838-3496 / 7832-3578  
Fax: (53)7833-3068 E-mail: thr@prensa-latina.cu

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# Cuba Revitalizes its Economy in the Face of COVID-19

By Alberto CORONA

HAVANA.- The gradual reopening of economic and productive activities in Cuba, announced by the COVID-19 recovery phases, required the implementation of a new socioeconomic strategy aimed at palliating the impact of the world economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

Approved on July 16, during an extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers, the measures announced by the Cuban government take place in the middle of a peculiar economic situation caused by additional expenses assigned to health and people's protection, the loss of hard currency income due to the absence of tourism since March, and the tightening of the U.S. economic, commercial and financial blockade.

Amid this context, the new strategy intends to revitalize and strengthen the economy, with the objective of ensuring the people's basic rights and industrial growth by transforming the behavior of the industry with dynamism, passion and innovation, as stated by Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

"All that we are proposing is for a common good: to improve in times of crisis," the president said when presenting the plan. In this regard, Cuba's Vice Prime Minister, Alejandro Gil, who is also Minister of Economy and Planning, sustained that the country will maintain a centralized economy, which he considered a strength of the socialist system.

This, he clarified, does not mean centralized assignment of resources, as concrete steps are being made towards decentralization. Similarly, the minister described a number of key principles such as encouraging national production, diminishing the "import mentality," market control through indirect methods, and complementarity of all economic actors: state sector, private sector, self-employment and cooperatives, "because we are all Cuba," he stressed.

Gil referred to the strengthening of internal demand, which plays a revitalizing function for the economy. Therefore, he noted, it is necessary to give more autonomy to state-run enterprises, so that the socialist entity is more efficient.

Furthermore, it is essential to encourage competitiveness, efficiency, saving and motivation for work in the current context; one marked by restrictions resulting from the worsening of the U.S. hostile policy, imposed against Cuba for 60 years.

This way, the Cuban economy is getting ready to design, among other aspects, a micro, small and medium enterprise adjusted to the Cuban economic model, conceived by its income levels and not the type of property.

Another new element of great impact is the government's interest in facilitating new types of import/export management, both in the state and non-state sector.

The Cuban Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment, Rodrigo Malmierca, said equal conditions will be ensured for all that participate in these processes.

A total of 36 companies specialized in foreign trade are available already to provide those services to non-state entities, with online training courses designed to enhance their exportable products.

In addition, there are more than 1,000 goods and services ready to be exported, while 382 non-state management have potential to export their products, according to local authorities.

Meanwhile, the non-state management will be able to import products needed to increase their productions and provide added value.

Domestic trade will undergo changes starting in the gastronomy sector, which has a large network of restaurants with deteriorated infrastructure and poor functioning.

According to Domestic Trade Minister Betsy Díaz, competitiveness among restaurant managers will increase, and there will be a more efficient use of the existing infrastructure.

In this context, the government decided to eliminate the ten-percent tax on the U.S. dollar, in place for 16 years once deposited at the national banking system, and thus increase its purchase value.

This regulation adds to other decisions such as the sale of hygiene and food products at hard currency stores, a measure aimed at collecting hard currency to protect people's access to basic goods, according to their needs and purchasing power.



The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance, Alejandro Gil. PHOTOS: Estudios Revolución.



President Miguel Díaz Canel announced new economic measures.





# The United States, Trump and Malice against Cuba

By Adriana**ROBREÑO**

HAVANA.- Donald Trump's last year as president of the United States is going by and, while the republican magnate hopes to be elected for a second term, his stance towards Cuba becomes more aggressive. In relation to this, Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla said in his Twitter account that "The government of the United States continues to vent his anger on the Cuban people."

The minister referred to the months lived amidst the pandemic of COVID-19, a period in which Washington enforced over a dozen drastic measures against the island, to the detriment of trade, bank transactions and the donation of the necessary medical support and equipment.

In his desire to asphyxiate this nation, Cuba condemns the Trump administration for promoting and financing a campaign aimed at discrediting the medical collaboration the country provides to those nations that request the assistance of the Cuban health professionals.

An example of this is the bill passed by senators Rick Scott, Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, who hope to punish the countries who request the help of the Cuban doctors.

The attacks of the Department of State to the Pan-American Health Organization for its role in the sending of Cuban doctors to the Brazilian "Más Médicos" (More Doctors) program is another example of this.

Although the U.S. government insists on accusing Cuba of an alleged "modern slavery" in what regards medical missions, such actions fail, as countries from different parts of the world acknowledge Cuba's role in the fight against COVID-19 and the work of its brigades in over 30 nations.

While campaigns against Cuba get stronger in all fronts, the White House remains silent on the terrorist attack against the Cuban embassy in Washington last April 30.

Ironically, a few days after the attack, the Department of State included Cuba in the list of countries that allegedly do not cooperate with the antiterrorist fight. According to ambassador Carlos Fernández de Cossío, director in charge of relations with the United States at the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that stance is a cynic attitude. On top of the policy aimed at tightening the siege on the island, actions are also conducted against companies from the United States – the very country that Trump says to favor with his campaign slogan "America First," although in practice this nation is also affected.

An example of this is the e-trade giant Amazon, which was heavily fined for having trade ties with the Cuban embassy in Washington.

As part of the blockade against Cuba for over 60 years, last June the White House imposed sanctions on three hotels, two diving centers, a tourist marina and a financial institution (FINCIMEX) with the excuse that these are the property of the Cuban military.

"They have wanted to clamp down on the Cuban people and dismantle the steps taken by former president (Barack) Obama," Cuban lawyer José Pertiera, a resident of Washington D.C., recently told The Havana Reporter on an exclusive interview.

Experts affirm that in practice, the Cuban families are the collateral damage of the policies enforced by president Donald Trump, whose malice against the island is aimed at pleasing an extreme right sector of Florida – a State he considers essential for his re-election aspirations.



## Long Battle for Equality in USA

PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

By Deisy**FRANCIS**

HAVANA.- The road ahead for U.S. Reverend Jesse Jackson to attain equality in his country is still long indeed, as corroborated now by the COVID-19 pandemic that is considerably affecting the Afro-American population.

The black population is the one most suffering the challenges of a disease that has left too many deaths in the United States. It is equally the most affected by unemployment and the one with the greatest number of people working in so called essential services like public transportation, thus being the most exposed to COVID-19, the reverend said in an interview with **The Havana Reporter**. The Donald Trump administration's pandemic response was wrong, which has worsened the situation, added the pastor born in Greenville, South Carolina, who is considered an example in the fight for civil rights.

The national protests that followed Afro-American George Floyd's murder by a white police officer on May 25 in Minneapolis has revived the call for social justice, noted the founder of Rainbow PUSH Coalition. Such tragedies are recurrent in the United States, but this time the incident was recorded. The world saw how a white police officer was holding Floyd's neck tight until he was out of breath, explained the reverend.

In his statements, Jackson reiterated his vocation for peace and sustained there must be another method to improve relations in

the world other than weapons, a bomb in a plane or a person shooting others.

Jackson, who was presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in 1984 and 1988, possibly cleared the road for Barack Obama to become the first black president ever in the history of the United States.

Therefore, in referring to the upcoming elections on November 3, he voiced his support for Joseph Biden, whom he considers a possible winner in a scenario where Trump is much criticized in connection with topics such as the pandemic, the economic crisis and the race issue.

The activism of the reverend, who will turn 79 years on October 8, dates back to the 1960s, when he was Martin Luther King's assistant. That fatal day of April 4, 1968, Jackson was next to Martin in the balcony of Motel Lorraine, in Memphis City, Tennessee, when he was killed.

These days mark 36 years of the reverend's first visit to Cuba, followed by others. This is perhaps the reason why he confessed to have been connected with the island for a long time. On June 26, 1984, the leader of the Cuban Revolution Fidel Castro met with him in Havana.

When praising the work of Cuban doctors in the fight against COVID-19, Jackson emphasized that Cuba takes credit for the many doctors it has trained. He also highlighted the internationalist support of Cuban fighters that helped free Angola and defeat apartheid in South Africa.

# Recovery Stages Goes Well



The Minister of Health, José Ángel Portal, offers a live, televised update. PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.

By Diony**SANABIA**

HAVANA.- Cuba's second largest island Isla de la Juventud and 13 of the 15 Cuban provinces are going through the third and final phase of the COVID-19 recovery stage.

At the same time, and always focused on saving lives amid the pandemic caused by the deadly disease, Havana and the neighbor province of Mayabeque continue in the first and second phase, respectively.

Adopted by the Temporary Task Force for SARS-COV-2 Prevention and Control, the decision to activate phase 3 in the majority of the Cuban territories took effect on July 20, when the island had 2,446 COVID-19 confirmed cases.

That was the day when, for the first time after the first three cases were detected in Cuba on March 11, the island reported zero COVID-19 cases, a result very much awaited by local authorities and the Cuban people.

Havana will continue under phase 1 until health indicators of the next phase are accomplished for ten days in a row. Meanwhile, Mayabeque will advance its stage when the parameters requested by phase 3 remain stable, said Cuban Prime Minister Manuel Marrero.

The health indicators taken into account to advance the recovery stage are incidence rate of the disease, spreading



Authorities insist on the importance of the use of masks.

index, active cases, number of active cases with source of contagion identified in the last 15 days and locally transmitted events.

The third phase comprises the reestablishment of all economic and productive activities, the opening of all gastronomic and commercial establishments and of all hospital services, as well as in-person procedures. However, carnivals and other festivities that entail mass participation will remain suspended, Marrero explained.

Likewise, services at night clubs will continue to be limited, depending on their size and characteristics.

The Cuban prime minister reiterated the need to continue complying with health measures and physical isolation during all three recovery phases, including the use of face

masks in public and closed places with a high concentration of people.

Although Cuba shows favorable and encouraging results in the fight against COVID-19, local health authorities confirmed that active inquiries continue nationwide.

Epidemiologic surveillance is key in fighting the pandemic in Cuba and will be a vital element during recovery, so it will be maintained permanently, Cuba's Public Health Minister José Ángel Portal said.

Before activating the recovery stage implemented on June 18 in all Cuban provinces except Havana and Matanzas, President Miguel Díaz-Canel reiterated that all that would be done during that period would aim at saving lives, as the priority has always been.

## Science to Fight COVID-19 Advances



Dr. Ileana Morales, National Director of Science and Technological Innovation of the Ministry of Public Health. PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

By Rosmerys**BERNAL**

HAVANA.- Cuban science and health professionals are currently conducting 115 studies - including interventions and clinical trials - to face SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for COVID-19.

In line with this, 221 national and international scientific publications and 5 national magazines on medicine have been produced, many of which are included among the 100 most-quoted titles in Spanish in the Google 2020 Scholar Metrics ranking. Although in recent weeks Cuba has had a favorable situation in the fight against

the pandemic, medical researchers and specialists are absorbed in the search of a vaccine for this virus, or at least in finding the most effective treatments, in order to avoid that patients reach a state that might need intensive care.

Specialists affirm that the encouraging results reached in Cuba until present are directly related to the protocol designed for treatment of this pandemic, which relies on prevention and therapeutic procedures.

The most recent version of national protocol for the fight against COVID-19 will soon be available and will be based on surveillance, diagnosis, therapeutic procedures and the study of recovered patients.

"This version supports previous clinical findings, which were based on studies and trials, and includes the most successful interventions," said Dr. Ileana Morales, National Director of Science and Technological Innovation at the Ministry of Public Health.

Cuba's strategy in the fight against COVID-19 has been based on combining medications

produced by national biotechnology institutes – such as Itulizumab and Jusvinza or CIGB 258 – along with the care of the knowledgeable medical staff.

President of the Cuban Society of Medical Imaging Pedro Pablo González affirmed that research projects and strategies for the improvement of x-rays, ultrasounds, CT scans and other tests are being conducted in order to have a better prognosis, help predict complications and monitor patients. Eight Cuban academics of Neuroscience, Epidemiology, Biotechnology, Statistics-Mathematics, Immunology, Virology, Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence, and Social Sciences were elected as advisors in the fight against COVID-19 around the world.

On several occasions, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel has highlighted the contribution that the Cuban scientific community has made to the fight against this pandemic, and the work of the health professionals locally and internationally.

Although they work around-the-clock and have gathered valuable information on the new virus, there are still more questions than answers, for one: what is the most effective treatment for this disease?



PHOTO: Periodico Escambray.



# COVID-19 Has Brazil and Bolsonaro Out of Control

By Osvaldo**CARDOSA**

BRASILIA.- On July 15, after almost five months of underestimating the COVID-19 pandemic, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro confirmed for the second time that he has tested positive for the disease which, according to official estimates, has claimed 88 634 Brazilian lives until July 29. "The fact that I got infected proves I am a human being like anyone else," said the rightwing extremist after the first diagnostic tested positive. When he knew the results, the ex-military officer chose not to stay isolated and summoned a press meeting at Palacio de Alvorada, the official residence. When the press conference was over, just a few meters from journalists, Bolsonaro removed his face mask to show he was "perfectly fine," leaving the people close to him completely exposed to the virus. Due to his irresponsible attitude, the Brazilian Press Association announced it would file a lawsuit against the president at the Supreme Federal Court for putting the journalists at risk. Bolsonaro repeated at the press conference that he was taking Hydroxychloroquine a medicine that his government supports as an alternative to treat viral diseases. However, its effectiveness against COVID-19 is yet to be proven scientifically.

At his 65 years, the former army general is included in what experts call the COVID-19 high-risk group. Since the pandemic broke out in Brazil at the end of February, Bolsonaro has been ignoring the measures recommended by health authorities to prevent the virus, which he has compared to a cold. He opposes the closing of businesses and quarantine, measures adopted by state governments to cut the spread of the pandemic, with nearly two million cases reported so far. The increasing number of COVID-19-related deaths and infected cases in big cities like Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro reveal that the country is likely to become the new world epicenter of the pandemic. It is currently the epicenter in Latin America. Brazil will enter 2021 with an active transmission of the disease that will likely exceed 200,000 deaths, foretold by the renowned epidemiologist Dimas Covas. "We are reporting some 300 daily deaths in Sao Paulo. This could last through next year," he warned. Amid the controversial health chaos, the sociopolitical panorama in Brazil is also facing other hard blows with calls demanding Bolsonaro's dismissal, due to his irresponsible stance towards the virus and other actions that are considered antidemocratic.



Improvised cemetery in Brazil to bury the victims of COVID-19. PHOTOS: Cubadebate



PHOTO: Prensa Latina.

## Ecuador Between the New Normal and the Spread of SARS-CoV-2

By Sinay**CÉSPEDES**

QUITO.- After four months of sanitary emergency caused by COVID-19, Ecuador is torn between measures aiming for so-called new normality and the spread of the disease that has proved ruthless. The South American country is one of the most affected by the new coronavirus which, in addition to causing serious health problems for the population, has worsened the

economic crisis that existed in the country prior, resulting in corrupt networks and unscrupulous people that have taken advantage of the already devastation situation. The month of July began with 58,257 confirmed COVID-19 cases by the Public Health Ministry, which provides daily updates on the respiratory health with both national and provincial statistics. On July 1, 1,915 new cases were confirmed in only 24 hours. At the end of the month, the increase in sick people was considerable, reaching 82, 279 in July 29.

Many people agree that the incorrect handling of the sanitary crisis, poor economic decisions and social indiscipline are three elements that combined to cause a country where the 20-49 age group is the most affected by COVID-19. Although Guayas continues to experience the higher incidence of patients, the rhythm of contagion per province behaved steadily and dropped in recent weeks. However, in Pichincha, where the capital Quito is located, the effect has been just the opposite. Now the epicenter of the disease, the health system of the city is working at full capacity, including emergency and intensive care units. Other facilities have been fitted out to cope with virus spread and complaints have been made by many that do not have access to tests necessary to detect the disease. The biggest concern is that the hospital network might collapse, as has happened in Guayaquil, the second most populated city after Quito where, from March to April, hundreds of bodies filled the streets and local authorities reported nearly 10,000 deaths from respiratory issues that are not included in official records. The lack of sufficient health staff is another situation that requires proper medical attention. At the same time, different groups and indigenous communities in the Amazon region are asking the government to provide them with rapid and PCR tests, health professionals and supplies to fight the spread of COVID-19. The Ecuadorian government gives accounts of the work at the 27 hospitals assigned by the Public Health Ministry to deal with COVID-19 cases only, plus 2,100 medical centers and 133 others dedicated to other health issues.

# Cuba Mourns the Prominent Historian Eusebio Leal

By Martha**SÁNCHEZ**

The history of Cuba and Havana would have been told in a different way without the contribution of Eusebio Leal, a mediator between past, present and future that marked generations with his knowledgeable speech, humanism and love for his country. Admiration for Havana's Historian Eusebio Leal translated into endless recognition of the eminent academician, whose death on July 31 was followed by the official announcement of national mourning, decreed by Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel. The Doctor of Historical Sciences and the Professor in Archaeological Sciences will live on; as Poet Fina García Marruz writes, "even when men might forget him, the stones will still remember him." On his Twitter account, Díaz-Canel made an open invitation to celebrate Leal's marvelous path in life and work to preserve the patrimony of Cuba, the island that he loved so much and to which he dedicated his life. Mr. Eusebio when telling the history of the country we are, made us cry and made us laugh. With character and soul, he gave light to the dark corners of history. Our condolences to his relatives and friends, said the Cuban president. The researcher's work was transcendental to preserve the legacy of illustrious personalities that are examples in Cuba and Ibero-America. When thinking about Leal, one inevitably thinks of him while walking the streets of Havana, due to his notable work rescuing and preserving the patrimonial values of

the 500-year-old city as head of the Historian Office of Havana. His optimism and readiness to undertake titanic works such as the restoration of Havana's Historic District (declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982), made him an invaluable man in the history of the capital. An invitation was made by many on different social networks to hang white sheets from balconies to honor the man that taught Cubans to see Havana through an understanding of its history, with loving eyes. The song "Sábanas blancas" (White Sheets) by trova musician Gerardo Alfonso was the soundtrack of the TV Program "Andar La Habana" (Exploring Havana), where the researcher became a teacher that offered the audience the most curious details and secrets about the Cuban capital. The expert in Studies about Latin America, the Caribbean and Cuba wrote essays, prologues, and articles about Cuban history, art, restoration and other general topics. During his prolific career as a researcher, politician and academic, Leal wrote several books, including "Regresar en el tiempo," "Fiñes," "Carlos Manuel de Céspedes (I y II)," "Patria Amada," and "Legado y Memoria." Official sources announced that the funeral service of the outstanding intellectual will be held at the Capitol (one of the works he helped to restore) once the COVID-19 epidemic is controlled. It is the wish of Leal's family that his ashes are preserved so that the Cuban people can pay him due tribute for his invaluable work, preservation and promotion of the historic values of the country.



Upon receiving the title Doctor Honoris Causa in Humanities, granted by the University of Havana in 2016. PHOTOS: Prensa Latina.



Former Palace of the Captains General, today the City Museum.



Havana residents honor Leal by hanging white sheets from their balconies.



Partial view of the Havana that Leal loved until his last breath.



Capitol of Havana, restoration promoted by the Historian's Office that coincided with the celebrations of Havana's 500th anniversary of founding in 2019.



Gran Teatro Alicia Alonso (Grand Theater), another majestic building.







# Preparations Start for Havana's 2020 Film Festival

By Martha **SÁNCHEZ**

HAVANA.- President of the Latin American International New Film Festival Iván Giroud acknowledges that the pandemic of COVID-19 will alter the 42nd edition of the event, but will not alter its essence nor preference for the seventh art.

According to the expert, the new coronavirus has revealed human beings' need to socialize and get together, and in that sense, the movies become an ideal place for this sharing.

"I think the pandemic has shown individuals' spiritual need to go to the movies, the theater, to share that experience which is unique and different," Giroud told The Havana Reporter in an exclusive interview.

The president is working with his team in the design of several strategies to hold the 42nd edition of the Festival in Havana from December 3-13, and the measures established by health authorities will evidently be followed to the letter.

The promotional image of the Festival makes reference to medical and health staff, in appreciation of their work in the fight against COVID-19. As the official said, they will make social gathering possible again and the pandemic marks a particular moment in the history of humankind.

Founded in 1979, the festival has been characterized by expressing the current reality of the world, and the continent in particular, no matter how harsh it is.

"COVID-19 is not only a problem Cuba faces, but the whole world;

for that reason, we will hold a different kind of Festival, in tune with the possibilities and the conditions of the time," Giroud commented. As usual, the event will not abandon the theme proposed since the closing of the previous edition: Latin America's young cinema. The idea is to go in depth in the production of the younger generation in relation to what is going on in Latin American cinema today, and other topics.

As part of its tradition, the Latin American International New Film Festival fosters unions of the work, the author and the audience; thus, the organizers are studying the ways to maintain that line through a highest use of the virtual space for presentations, forums and press conferences.

"We have to take a technological step; for that, we count on the full support of the Ministry of Culture, the Cuban Film Institute (ICAI) and the country's leadership. We have to look for more alternatives in that sense," he added.

Because of the current context, Giroud considers it logical to restrict the program; that is, to include less titles in the board in order to have more screenings in the theaters.

"The future scenario is still unpredictable, but very probably the theaters will not be able to be filled at one hundred percent capacity. That forces us to make a selection with more restrictions, always looking for better quality," Giroud explained. The open call for work for the Festival will close on August 30, and although the situation in Latin America is a concern for the organizing committee, the festival has never been suspended and filmmakers are trying to defend its continuity.



## Cuba's First Live-action Animated Series

By María **MARTÍNEZ**

HAVANA.- The Latin Music Institute (ILM) will expand in Havana its animated film 'Tito reacciona' (Tito reacts) with a collection of short films that include real characters – the first piece of the type developed in Cuba.

In the cinema, the modality of turning persons or real objects into cartoons is called live-action, a pioneering experience in Cuba that ILM chairman Daniel Martín is pleased with. Martín has made huge efforts for the Mexican character to know no bounds. 'Tito reacciona' was initially created to render tribute to several ambassadors of the

continent's culture and to highlight the values of the Latin artistic patrimony through the 2D animation language.

Tito is a Mexican kid who connects more and more with his roots and shares Latin America's cultural treasures with the world.

"I think that we have to look inside, to our ancestors and be proud of that," Martín told The Havana Reporter.

Because of the threat the pandemic of COVID-19 poses to the human race, the producer of this film and ILM chairman decided to make several spots with the character in order to spread advices on how to face the new coronavirus in these difficult times.

It did not take long for the series to jump from the cinema to the television and the radio in several Latin American countries since its creation in 2019. Produced by Cuba, Argentina, the United States and Mexico, the animated audiovisual product tried to link the past of renowned artists with the present generations.

A version of 'Tito reacciona' has already been produced for the radio and the theater by Cuban playwright and broadcaster Maikel Chávez, a specialist in children works.

According to Martín, the new collection of live-action short films will focus on messages for the good of the people.

The series will be directed by Amanda Díaz Ibarra, with the support of the Pinar del Río province's Cinema Center. Héctor Marimón Mir, a 9-year old Cuban kid, will play the role of Tito. Presently, Martín is organizing a tour to all the municipalities of Cuba's westernmost province of Pinar del Río, where he intends to take the cinema to the remotest communities of the region.

With this series, the ILM hopes to contribute to the celebrations for the 61st anniversary of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), whose main activity was postponed due to the need of closing the national cinemas because of the threat of the pandemic..

# Lanier Wetlands

Text & Photos Roberto F. **CAMPOS**

HAVANA.- Cuba has many special places, but this article will focus on two important swamps that highly captivate both scientists and tourists alike: Lanier and Zapata Wetlands.

Lanier Wetland is located in the Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth) and Zapata Wetland in Matanzas Province, both in the western Cuban region.

Initially named Treasure Isle and Pine Tree Isle, the Isle of Youth is one of Cuba's most interesting territories, but above all, it is just the perfect setting for ecotourism.

It is Cuba's second largest isle with 3,056 square kilometers and joins the over 600 keys and small islands that make up the Canarreos Archipelago in Cuba's south-western territory, together with the Gulf of Batabanó, some 162 kilometers from Havana.

The Isle of Youth was discovered on June 13, 1494 by Christopher Columbus during his

second voyage to the New World, and he baptized it as The Evangelist.

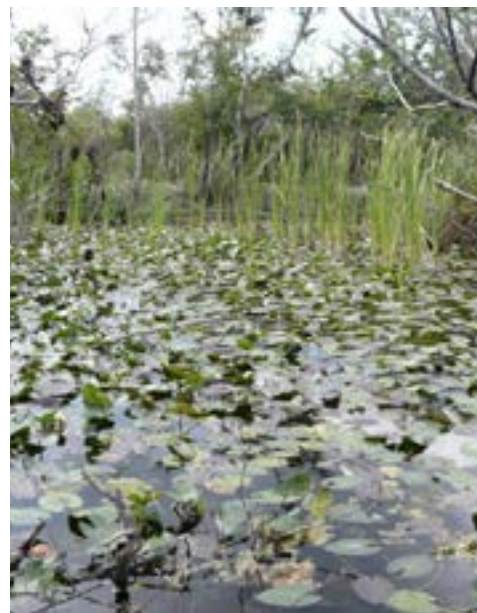
Over the years it was known under different names: Parrot Isle, Queen Amelia Colony, Pirate Isle and even Treasure Isle.

It was finally named Isle of Youth in 1978, due to the thousand young people from different parts of the world that studied there back then.

It is home to the natural reserve known as Lanier Wetland, where touring the inlets, enjoying the landscape and sharing with locals can be part of a perfect vacation plan.

One of Cuba's two crocodile farms is located there, after the one in the Zapata Wetland, which was created over 30 years ago. Today it has 21 workers that look after 80 crocodiles held in captivity, together with 27 female and seven male breeding species, mostly of the Rhombifer family, which is typically Cuban.

Lanier is a marshland that resulted from man's action: peat mining for citrus fruit farming. Later on, it was used to introduce that animal species, which had existed there during the 1950s.



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# A Different Electoral Year in the U.S.

By Martha**ANDRÉS**

The United States is living an unprecedented electoral year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic recession caused by the sanitary crisis, demonstrations demanding racial justice and a president whose answer to those problems has been largely rated as negative. Donald Trump, the “outsider” who won the presidential elections four years ago and whose administration has been characterized by scandal and controversy, hope to be reelected in the November 3 elections, when he will face off with former Vice President Joe Biden. Unlike previous electoral races, both candidates are now involved in very different dynamics marked by the pandemic. As a result, electoral events had to be suspended for several months, but Trump retook them despite the risks still posed by the increasing spread of SARS-Cov-2 Coronavirus in the country. Even in the middle of the complex situation in the country, where more than 140,000 people have died already from COVID-19, Trump continues with his sights set on the elections over the rest of the issues. The republican president has constantly advocated rapid economic reopening,



disregarding health workers’ warnings not to rush into lifting restrictions. The thing is that one of Trump’s strengths for the November elections was the economy, which recorded its highest growth last February. But then came the first recession in the country since 2008, bringing to light something that experts and analysts had been stating already: the previous prosperity mostly benefited the richest. Low-income people, on the contrary, have remained in a situation of vulnerability during the current crisis, with 40 percent of those families affected by unemployment. Already criticized by his response to the



health emergency that has left over 3.7 million people infected in the country, the White House chief came up with a new challenge that has also put him in a difficult situation: the multitudinous protests that followed the killing of black citizen George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25. Those demonstrations were not only the reaction to that incident but to systemic racism still present in the U.S., with African-Americans being the group most affected by COVID-19 and the loss of jobs, which adds to a long history of exclusion in the most diverse fields. However, when referring to the protests,

Trump avoided talking about racism and, instead, he attacked the participants, defended the police and threatened to take the army to the streets. According to various polls, most U.S. citizens reacted negatively to his answers to the pandemic and the demonstrations, with a consequent decrease in both his approval rating and his support for the presidential elections. Polls conducted by RealClearPolitics website by the middle of July revealed that 56.1 percent of U.S. citizens disapprove of Trump’s performance. With regards to people’s voting intentions, Biden had an advantage of 8.6 percent points (48.7 against 40.1 percent). So far the numbers seem to be against the republican candidate, who on July 15, less than four months from the elections, aggressively replaced his campaign manager. However, a lot could still change from now until the November 3 elections for a president that has received sustained, solid support from conservatives; especially if there were to be an economic recovery, which would undoubtedly benefit him. Foreseeing the results of the upcoming elections is difficult, maybe as difficult as the storm being faced by a society hit by a deadly pandemic, racist foundation and a president whom his niece Mary Trump called cruel and incompetent in a recently published memoir.

# Parliamentary Elections Scheduled in Venezuela



By William**URQUIJO**

Venezuela’s main political forces sharpen electoral technology in light of the parliamentary elections to take place this December, amidst a political scenario characterized by aggressions against the country and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The national negotiation process between the Venezuelan government and democratic sectors of the opposition, fostered since September 2019, led the Supreme Electoral Court (TSE) to declare the renovation of the National Electoral Council (CNE). Supported by most of the political actors of the country, CNE opened the doors to the elections with the purpose of renovating the National Assembly – whose majority, mostly from the opposition, was charged with contempt of court by TSJ due to repeated attacks against the constitutional order. Calls for parliamentary elections were also supported by most of the population, thus acknowledging the will of the main political forces to resolve differences by democratic ways, in the face of the pro-coup plots by the most radical wings of the Venezuelan right. A recent survey by International Consulting Services (ICS) revealed that 44.7 percent of

voters showed absolute willingness and full certainty to exercise their right to vote – compared to 16.2 percent that “probably would not vote” in the December elections. In addition, 55.9 percent of those polled considered candidates of the ruling Venezuelan Socialist United Party and its allies as potential winners, against the 23.1 percent who said that the opposition candidates might receive their vote. In a ceremonial promotion of Bolivarian National Armed Forces officials, President Nicolás Maduro ratified the support of the National Executive of the decisions made by the National Electoral Council. In this sense, he highlighted that Venezuela has a renovated electoral body that constantly works for democracy in order to decide the nation’s future. The Head of State also condemned international media campaigns intending to undermine the legitimacy of the new electoral authorities, appointed by the TSJ Constitutional Hall resulting from the lack of consensus in the parliamentary body. The CNE authorities, with the support of the Bolivarian Government, implemented a series of health measures to continue developing the electoral schedule amidst the increase of COVID-19 cases, although Venezuela shows a favorable scenario in comparison to the catastrophic health situation other countries of the region face. Although Venezuela insists on using democratic practices to solve differences, the government of the United States and its international allies – especially the European Union – did not recognize the legitimacy of the new CNE, in tune with the change-of-regime policy dictated by Washington. The fact that Washington does not recognize the electoral authorities legitimately appointed ratifies the marked hostility of the U.S. government against the South American nation - a policy that intensified this year with the implementation of a strong economic blockade and the support of coup and assassination plans, as the Bolivarian Executive has denounced.



PHOTOS: Telesur

# 60 Years of U.S. Hostility

By Ernesto**VERA**

HAVANA.-Upon the revolutionary triumph in Cuba in January of 1959, the United States began a long course of the islands’ development in an attempt to foil the success of its independent social project. Since the very beginning, the island began promulgating the first revolutionary laws, which received an immediate response from Washington. As part of those actions, in 1960 the Dwight Eisenhower Administration ordered its companies, which were monopolizing the energy sector in Cuba, to cut imports and distribution and ban refining oil from other markets to cause an artificial shortage and make the Cuban economy collapse. The U.S. threat to eliminate sugar cane import quotas –Cuba’s main export back then- after the island announced its legitimate right to nationalize those foreign companies and trade with other oil providers. But, thankfully that never happened. “They may deprive us of the quotas, but once they do, they will finally have to remove their masks as exploiters and enemies of humanity, losing the Cuban people’s sympathy forever,” so stated Commander in Chief Fidel Castro in response to the U.S. threat. On August 6, 1960, the leader of the Cuban Revolution announced the nationalization of more than 20 U.S. companies, including three oil refineries and 36 sugar cane mills. U.S. electricity and telephone companies, among other assets, were confiscated as well.



Cubana de Electricidad, one of the first American companies intervened by the revolutionary government. PHOTOS: Archivo Granma.



US sugar mills also became the property of the Cuban State.

The ESSO and Shell companies in Havana, and the Texaco plant in Santiago de Cuba had been nationalized in June of that same year. The then Soviet Union’s decision to provide Cuba with oil in return for sugar was an economic relief for the island and helped foil Washington’s hostility in response to Cuban nationalizations, which were in line with international law and supported by a wide majority of the people. During that period, U.S. companies refused to receive compensation, hoping that the revolution would not last long. Despite permanent and progressive measures adopted under the U.S. economic, commercial and financial blockade and all kinds of aggressions, the revolution lives on. With the arrival of Donald Trump at the White House in

2017, that hostile policy has exerted ever more pressure by trying to revive those foreign companies that the Cuban population symbolically buried six decades ago. The activation of Title III of the Helms Burton Law adds to financial persecution and against ships, as well as shipping and companies that bring oil to Cuba. That title opens the possibility for U.S. citizens to bring lawsuits against entities which, according to them, deal with properties that were nationalized in 1959. Those actions once more unmask the criminal nature of a policy that goes to any length to weaken economic life in Cuba to deprive it of money and supplies in order to cut its financial resources and real wages, to cause hunger, despair and to overthrow the government.

# Where is Cuba’s Coffee Production Headed?



By Samuel**ROBERTS**

HAVANA.- Increasing the annual coffee production to 30,000 tons by 2030 is one of the main challenges for this Cuban sector, which is committed to recovering one of the island’s traditional exports. In order to attain that goal, major activities and investments have been carried out in recent years to revive a sector affected by the severity of the climate, such as intense droughts and hurricanes. Coffee production in Cuba has been experiencing a noticeable recovery thanks to measures adopted over the past few years, such as the use of clones that result in higher productivity. The use of scions and modernized nurseries has yielded very positive results, described Elexis Legrá, the director of Coffee, Cocoa

and Coconut of the Agriculture Ministry’s Agro-Forestry Group (GAF). Legrá told Prensa Latina that the use of biotechnology and other modern techniques, together with enhanced varieties and seeds, also helped increase coffee production in 2019 by 1,400 tons. The fact that Cuba both imports and exports coffee has made it set an ambitious growth plan by 2030 that allows it meet the domestic demand. GAF’s main productions are intended for the international market with the export of coffee, cocoa, coconut, honey –the group’s main source of income today- pine tree resin and eventually henequen byproducts. **BACKGROUND** Since coffee was first introduced to Cuba in 1748 up until 1958, the history of this crop was

characterized by major fluctuations: in 1833, Cuba was Europe’s main coffee exporting country with 29,500 tons but in 1920, it ended up importing more than 20,000 tons. In 1955, the island recovered its role as an exporting country, which it had gained and lost several times between 1927 and 1954. At the end of 1958, coffee production was in the hands of 29,000 families, comprising 168,600 hectares (an average of 5.8 hectare per family). A total of 60,300 tons of coffee (historic record) were obtained during the 1961-1962 harvest, but the production then began to decline in the coming years, totaling only 16,100 tons in 1978. The socio-economic changes that took place in the country beginning in 1959 led to a reduction of the population in farmlands. Many migrated to the city, where there were new sources of employment together with education options for younger generations. Hence, coffee plantations were neglected and production suffered setbacks due to the lack of workforce. The sector began recovering in the 1970s with the enhancement of the existing infrastructure and the introduction of a high-performance contingent and some 150 agronomist engineers, among other factors. Those efforts were part of a future program aimed to guarantee a stable workforce in rural areas, which would include boosting the production of forests, vegetables, starches and livestock for local self-sufficiency. However, the arrival of the so-called special period (economic crisis that started when Cuba lost its main trading partners upon the

collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR) was a hard blow to those goals. **CURRENT GROWTH** Cuban coffee is in high demand, particularly the Arabic variety due to its special aroma. Increasing exports and reducing imports, a key goal of the Cuban government’s policy, is an incentive for this sector’s development. The goal set for 2020 is to produce 10,000 tons of coffee, which would represent new increase, especially in the eastern mountainous region – which has suffered the severity of the climate, including storms. It is possible to attain high production levels in Cuba, said Legrá, who praised the importance of Vietnam’s cooperation in this field for the past five years. The results of this project speak for themselves: some producers have obtained more than one ton per hectare in demonstrative areas. Beginning to grow coffee in plain areas also stands out as part of a program that already comprises nine provinces. The idea of Cuba being self-sufficient in local consumption again largely depends on that program. In order to produce 30,000 tons of coffee as of 2030 and export 5,500 of that, it will be necessary to work harder and increase training efforts, the director noted. Coffee exports are estimated to contribute some \$35 million by 2030, compared to the \$10 million envisaged for this year, when 2,000 tons are expected to be exported. Cuba has the conditions to produce a more competitive and higher-quality coffee with higher outputs, but this entails greater innovation and stricter control in the use of new technologies.



# Rice Leads Cuban Agricultural Investment

By Roberto **SALOMÓN**

With a total budget valued at \$889.5 million, the Integral Rice Program approved in 2011 stands in the lead of agricultural investments in Cuba.

Of that figure, \$448 million had been assigned to the 2012-2019 period. At the end of December 2019, 85 percent of that plan had been implemented with \$383 million, the director of the Agricultural Group's Rice Department, Lázaro Díaz, said in an interview with The Havana Reporter. Completing ongoing investments in agriculture is one of the country's top priorities, not only with the objective of reducing food imports but also to cope with the impact of the international economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Above all, the intention is to face the shortage of fuel and supplies resulting from the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed against the island for over 60 years and noticeably tightened by the current U.S. administration. Rice is in much demand in Cuba as it is one of the cultural staples; hence, increasing its production on the island is very important.

When providing details of the investments, Díaz explained that of the \$383 million spent by December of last year, \$161 million were used to import equipment.



PHOTO: Periódico La Jirafeta

The remaining amount –some \$228 million– will be part of the 2030 plan. Of that, \$92 million has been assigned to equipment and \$136 million to the program's sustainability. The investments made so far in agricultural machinery, drying and milling processes and transportation, together with ongoing investments, support the harvest plans designed to produce more than 550,000 tons of rice for local consumption.



PHOTO: Cubadebate

Concerning the water needed for this crop, the director noted that if the country does not experience a similar drought situation as was recorded at the end of 2014 and 2015, water supply will be guaranteed until at least for the coming ten years.

Cuba hopes to cover 85 percent of internal demand by 2030, with 700,000 tons of rice.

# María Caridad Colón: an Olympic Legend

By Jhonah **DÍAZ**

Cuban María Caridad Colón, 62, has received wonderful news: the International Olympic Committee (IOC) elected her as one of its members, and the appointment takes us back to the time she achieved immortality in javelin throwing in Moscow 1980.

A lot could be said about Colón, but what is clear is that her career has been linked to the Olympic Games, and the month of July deserves an important place in her life story.

Dates do not lie: on July 25, she threw the javelin at a distance of 68.40 meters and rose to the Olympic podium; this year, on July 17, she returned to sports news with a different vision, maintaining her same commitment the Olympic Games.

"That gold medal changed the meaning of everything," said Colón, who was born in the easternmost province of Guantánamo. "It all started 40 years ago and it always brings me new joy," she told The Havana Reporter.

In a state of agitation, the first Latin American and Caribbean woman to win a gold medal in the history of the Olympic Games acknowledged that it is an honor to join the IOC, after her election at the 136 session of the IOC Assembly – held online. "It is a dream come true, one you feel is almost impossible to attain, but it is



PHOTO: Prensa Latina

the result of decades' worth of work in athletics," added Colón, who was wearing a blue T-shirt with a Cuban flag embroidered on the right side.

Colón has always been a trailblazer, from when she reached glory in Moscow to now, starting the list of Cuban women who join the IOC.

Colón will follow in the steps of her fellow countrymen who held a post in the world's main sport governing body: Porfirio Franca y Álvarez de Campa (1923-1938);

Miguel Ángel Moenck (1938-1969); Manuel González (1973-1993), and Reynaldo González (1995-2015).

Immediately after her appointment, the former javelin thrower defined her new approach. One of her priorities will be to support the Latin American region, a task that is close to her heart because of Cuba's work in a dozen of nations in the area. "I will keep that objective and will defend the interests of our people, which I carry with me," she said.

She also noted that she is hoping to be an active protagonist in the fight for gender equality, a mission that the IOC undertakes and she is familiar with because of her participation in several national and international projects and events.

"This is a critical present-day topic and one of the key objectives for my election was precisely the possibility of increasing women's presence. That is one of my goals; I will defend women's rights as I have always done," Colón stated.

Now as an IOC member, Colón is an official voice in tackling issues related to the delay of the Tokyo 2020 Games. "It is too soon to give a definite assessment. The IOC is determined to realize the Tokyo games and it would be something major, even with a different organizational system. It is my wish that the Games can be held," she mentioned.

The former athlete and two-time Pan-American champion (in San Juan 1979 and Caracas 1983) is aware of the current global context. "The world is living in a difficult time. We do not know what will happen tomorrow after everything that has happened in the year of the Olympic Games. However, what matters is the health of the athletes and the population, and that we can defeat this pandemic," she concluded.

Colón concludes by giving thanks for so many unforgettable moments throughout her career.

## Cuba Hopes to Take 80 Athletes to Tokyo

By Alexis **RÚA**

Cuba aspires to take at least 80 athletes to the 32nd Olympic Games in Tokyo, after the event was rescheduled for the summer of 2021 due to the new Coronavirus pandemic, explained Ariel Saínz, Vice President of the Cuban Institute of Sports.

Saínz described that it is likely that the number of registered Cuban competitors will exceed 100, taking into consideration that baseball and beach volleyball could potentially make the cut as well.

A total of 41 Cuban athletes have qualified so far, in eight sports: 14 in track and field, 12 in wrestling, five in shooting, four in canoeing, two in pentathlon and gymnastics each, and one in cycling and taekwondo, respectively.

That number, the official noted, is likely to increase once the judo ranking table is announced and the Olympic qualifying competitions in boxing and wrestling are completed. Cuba's wrestling is expected to add another three names to the list of competitors.

Efforts are being made to guarantee the best sanitary conditions for the return of athletes to their training. It is also the intention that they can retake the calendar of their competitions abroad as conditions allow, Saíz added.

The interruption of all sport activities in Cuba due to COVID-19 stopped the rhythm of training within many

sport disciplines in which competitors that had qualified already.

However, all Cuban athletes looked for training alternatives in their homes to stay physically fit, and are now focused on getting back to the top of their game.

The remaining Olympic qualifying competitions are scheduled from February to June 2021, thus giving athletes some time to train harder in hopes of accomplishing their goals.



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