

EMBASSIES OF CUBA IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



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ABSTRACT

The US diplomats scared off by the so-called 'sonic attacks' are confirmed to be staying away and Havana will now become an 'unaccompanied post.'

Better news comes from OPEC which will contribute to financing a major solar energy development project in Cuba; Cuba and Bolivia are to expand economic cooperation; Cuba has made a pledge at the UN to further promote and protect human rights and her cigars hit a record USD.5m in 2017.

The new power station at Cienfuegos is on schedule for inauguration in November; some 1 500 delegates are currently attending a convention of science, technology and innovation; cruise lines keep on sending their ships to Cuba and 24 000 polling stations all over the country are being readied for the general polls up next week.

Coming up is a meeting of international teachers and students of ballet, and finally news of success for two Cuban athletes at the World Indoor Athletics Championship — a gold in the long jump and bronze in the pentathlon.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS



U.S. makes cuts to embassy staff in Havana

A wire from Associated Press highlights that the announcement makes the U.S. decision last year to withdraw 60 percent of its diplomats from its embassy in Cuba, under the pretext of supposed "sonic attacks" against its personnel, practically permanent.

From March 5, the United States Embassy in Havana operates as an "unac-

companied post," according to an official media note from the U.S. Department of State, published March 2.

The document explains that "The U.S. Embassy in Havana has operated under ordered departure status since September 29, 2017, due to health attacks affecting U.S. Embassy Havana employees. It will reach the maximum allowable days in departure status on March 4."

Meanwhile, a wire from Associated Press highlights that the announcement makes the U.S. decision last year to withdraw 60 percent of its diplomats from its embassy

in Cuba, under the pretext of supposed “sonic attacks” against its personnel, practically permanent.

However, after months of investigations by Cuban and U.S. authorities, no evidence explaining the cause or origin of the alleged health issues suffered by U.S. diplomats has been found.

AP adds that by law, the State department can only order diplomats to leave temporarily for six months before either sending them back or making the reductions permanent.

Meanwhile, the State Department noted that “The embassy will continue to operate with the minimum personnel necessary to perform core diplomatic and consular functions.”

This is exactly how the Embassy has been functioning since September 2017, when the U.S. government withdrew the majority of its staff, paralyzing consular services for Cubans and only maintaining core diplomatic services and functions relating to emergencies.

The measure comes amidst growing calls from different sectors in the U.S. to normalize operations at both embassies and rescind travel warnings to Cuba.

A bicameral delegation of U.S. Congress people which visited the island last week described the withdrawal of diplomatic personnel as “a mistake,” noting that the decision affects people on both sides of the Florida Straits and puts collaboration initiatives between both countries since December 17, 2014, at risk.

Meanwhile, on March 1, around twenty four operators demanded that Washington eliminate travel alerts regarding Cuba, noting that the island is recognised as one of the safest destinations for international travellers by specialist tour agencies and international bodies.

STATE DEPARTMENT RECEIVES HARSH CRITICISM

The U.S government’s decision to permanently cut staff at its embassy in Havana was immediately met with criticism.

Congress woman Barbara Lee tweeted: “This decision from the State Department undermines years of progress towards normalizing relations with Cuba. Our diplomats should be allowed to do their jobs and return to their posts there.”

Meanwhile, in a statement from James Williams, president of the bipartisan coalition Engage Cuba working to end the U.S. blockade against the island, said that “It is deeply disappointing that secretary Tillerson chose not to return U.S. diplomats to their assigned posts in Havana.

“Perhaps the biggest losers will be the hundreds of thousands of Cubans and Cuban Americans, who travel back and forth to see family, celebrate milestones, and attend to sick relatives, since we are unable to properly process visas and facilitate travel,” noted Williams, adding that “We implore secretary Tillerson not to abandon the Cuban people during this critical time.”

Granma, March 2

Cuba signs agreement with OPEC fund

Cuba and the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) has signed an agreement through which the organisation will contribute to the financing of the Solar Energy Development Project in that country.



The chargé d'affaires of Cuba in Austria, Marieta García Jordán, and Cuba's general director, Suleiman Jasir Al-Herbish, signed the document.

The OFID head reiterated the support of that organisation to Cuba and explained that the soft loan granted, of \$45 million USD, is aimed to contribute to the modernisation and diversification of the Cuban energy matrix, by increasing the installed capacity of renewable energy sources, in this case, solar energy.

The project, she said, will increase energy generation and optimise the country's electricity system, through the use of domestic photovoltaic elements and solar water heaters for industrial and household use.

Garcia Jordan thanked and highly appreciated the support received from this international organisation during two decades of close cooperation relations.

Thanks to these links, she remarked, thirteen loan agreements were adopted for projects of economic and social impact in the sectors of agriculture, the rehabilitation of electrical networks and of the aqueduct, sewerage systems, and renewable energies, in several provinces of Cuba.

Prensa Latina, March 1



Cuba and Bolivia expanding economic cooperation

Agreements linked to various sectors were negotiated during the first meeting of the Cuba-Bolivia Working Group for Economic Complementarity

Agreements linked to health, rural development, trade, civil aviation, as well as imports and exports, were negotiated during the first meeting of the Cuba-Bolivia Working Group for Economic Complementarity.

The event also saw discussions on the use of trade finance instruments and studies for collaborative projects, according to information from the Cuban Foreign Ministry.

The meeting was attended by a Cuban delegation led by deputy minister of foreign trade and investment, Ileana Núñez Mordoche, on an official visit to La Paz, where the group undertook a program which included meetings with representatives of Bolivia's production and business sectors, as well as public institutions linked to trade.

According to the Bolivian foreign ministry, efforts come after a directive on the promotion of bilateral trade was issued following a meeting between vice presidents of Bolivia and Cuba, Álvaro García Linera, and Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, respectively, in May 2017, during a visit by the Cuban official to La Paz.

Meanwhile, the two parties also agreed to strengthen commercial exchanges after a meeting in Havana between Cuban foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla and his Bolivian counterpart, Fernando Huanacuni; resulting in the creation of the Cuba-Bolivia working group, which has drawn up a six-point action plan for economic collaboration in the fields of goods, services, finance, logistics, trade promotion, investments and joint ventures.

Granma, March 1

INTERNATIONAL NEWS



Cuba reiterates her commitment to human rights at UN-Geneva

Cuba's ambassador to the UN Office in Geneva, Pedro Luis Pedroso, has reiterated his country's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, diplomatic sources informed today.

After addressing the General Segment of the 37th regular session of the Human Rights Council, the diplomat highlighted the priority attention to issues such as access to health services and higher quality education, greater protection and social assistance, food security and sustainable access to drinking water, among others.

'Achieving greater social justice and well-being for all our people, in the exercise of the broadest freedoms recognised by the Constitution and laws, is one of the objectives of the updating of the Cuban economic and social development model,' he said.

Pedroso recalled that the country reached the lowest infant mortality rate in its history in 2017, four per 1,000 live births, a higher result to that registered by many developed countries and 'it has been possible thanks to the work of the Revolution.'

The ambassador said that to achieve these results, Cuba has had to 'overcome the negative consequences of the genocidal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States.'

'The blockade, which continues to be in force and intensifies, is the main obstacle to the development of the country, is a flagrant violation of the human rights of the Cuban people and undermines the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and International Law,' he said.

He stressed that Havana maintains its cooperation and interaction with the United Nations human rights procedures and mechanisms that have universal application, on non-discriminatory basis.

'Cuba will continue advocating for dialogue and cooperation in the field of human rights, and for recognition and respect to differences,' he stated.

The ambassador also stressed that his country is committed 'to the efforts to build a world order where respect for the independence and sovereignty of each State prevails, and in which the war and the threat or use of force are banished.'

Juventud Rebelde, March 2

EXPORTS

Cuban cigars, making their mark in the global market

Cuban cigars, the best in the world and one of the island's traditional exports, along with sugar and rum, are making their mark in the global market, with a record 500,000,000 USD - at constant exchange rates - in sales at the end of 2017, as was announced during the 20th Habano Festival, which took place February 26 through March 2 in Havana.



Other launches held during the festival dedicated to Cuban habanos, a term which refers to premium quality hand-rolled cigars from the island, included those by brands Hoyo de Monterrey Le Hoyo Río Seco and Vegueros Centrofinos

During the festival's inaugural press conference in Havana's International Convention Center, Leopoldo Cintras González, commercial vice president of Habanos S.A., the exclusive distributor of all Cuban cigar brands throughout the world, noted that the figure represents a 12% increase as compared to 2016.

He stated that the company sold 450 million cigars last year, with a market share of 70% in units and 80% in value.

Cintras González went on to explain that a good tobacco harvest is expected this 2018 given that "The sector was not affected by the passing of hurricane Irma along the island; while our strategy is geared toward maximizing yields and the quality of tobacco for export."

In this regard, Justo Luis Fuentes Díaz, president of the Tabacuba Tobacco Group, speaking exclusively with Granma International, stated that the tobacco planting campaign in the country is advancing positively.

"We planted around 28,000 hectares of the aromatic leaf during the last campaign and plan to reach 29,000 for this 2017-2018 harvest, with planting still going on," he stated, noting that this increase is part of a development program drawn up by

the entity which became a Central Organization of Enterprise Management (OSDE) in March 2016.

In this regard, Fuentes noted that so far prospects look good, and that the company is working to continue increasing yields, key to raising tobacco production in Cuba. This 20th edition of the Habano Festival, dedicated to prestigious cigar brands like Cohiba with its Robusto Reserva 2014 Harvest vitola; and Partagás, with its No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 Mature lines; saw the participation of over 2,000 delegates from more than 70 countries, in excess of 200 journalists as well as 184 expositors from 114 nations in the associated Trade Fair including Italy; Canada; Germany; Spain; France; Brazil; China; Mexico; El Salvador; Costa Rica; Colombia; Bolivia; and Cuba; with the largest number of international attendees to date.

Other launches held during the Festival dedicated to Cuban habanos, a term which refers to premium quality hand-rolled cigars from the island, included those by brands Hoyo de Monterrey Le Hoyo Río Seco and Vegueros Centrofinos, as well as limited edition Romeo y Julieta Tacos, Bolívar Soberano, H. Upmann Propios, Hoyo de Monterrey Escogidos and San Cristóbal Prado cigars.

For a week, participants have been enjoying Cuban culinary and cultural offers, visits to tobacco farms in the western province of Pinar del Río and cigar factories, seminars on the history of tobacco, a cigar rolling master class and the 17th edition of the International Habanosommelier contest, during which four competitors from Italy, the UK, Russia and Cuba saw their knowledge put to the test as they were tasked with pairing habanos to different beverages and dishes.

The 20th Habano Festival, the most famous event dedicated to Premium hand-rolled cigars in the world, was also a moment to promote this exclusive product whose top markets include Spain; France; China, including Hong Kong and Macao; Germany; Cuba – the birthplace of the habano –; Switzerland; Lebanon; the United Arab Emirates; the UK; and Canada, in that order.

Habanos S.A., founded in 1994, operates as a joint venture between Imperial Tobacco Group plc and Cuban state enterprise Cubatabaco, and is present in 165 countries across five continents, while over 90% of global revenue comes from international sales.

Granma, March 2

TECHNOLOGY



Construction of Cuba's largest power station underway

The new plant in Cienfuegos is scheduled to be inaugurated in November this year, with work already 68 percent complete by the end of February

Construction of the largest diesel power station in Cuba, located in Cienfuegos, is advancing at a satisfactory pace, according to the work sched-

ule.

Using German technology and the most modern of its kind in the country, a total of 40 engines are being installed at the site, which will be responsible for generating 84 Mwh, enough to guarantee 60% percent of local power demand.

Eight of the plant's diesel engines have already been installed and are ready to generate power, noted Jesús Rey Pérez Crespo, director of the Provincial Electric Company, in charge of investment at the site. Completing the works are construction enterprises supported by local industries. The plant is located close to the Camilo Cienfuegos Oil Refinery, in order to receive diesel through a pipeline from the refinery, a decision that avoids the further costs of transportation.

In addition to the installation of the pipeline, other projects such as a water conductor, the 110kv transmission line linking the generators to the National Electric Power System, and the expansion of the 220/110 kv substation in Cantarrana, where a 35-hectare plant is being installed, are included in the overall project.

The plant in Cienfuegos is scheduled to be inaugurated in November this year, with works already 68 percent complete by the end of February.

This project is part of a national program through 2023, aimed at installing 200Mwh of power generation in the provinces of Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Matanzas and Pinar del Río.

Granma, March 2

TECHNOLOGY

Foreign researchers to participate in technology convention in Cuba

Some 1,500 researchers and specialists from all regions in the world will participate in the International Convention on Science, Technology and Innovation, which will open here on March 5th, said organisers.

Maria Luisa Zamora, member of the organising committee, told the Prensa Latina news agency that, with the motto 'Innovation for sustainable development', the event will be attended by some 1,200 Cuban delegates and 200 foreign ones from 39 countries, including China, Vietnam and Russia.

She said that the event, which has 10 side events, seeks to boost analysis of progress and achievements in research and innovation in various thematic areas.

'The program of the Convention, which will run until March 9th, includes the financing of science and the role of young people and women in creative activity,' said Zamora.

She said that other issues will be tackled, as information and communication technologies, local development and design, renewable energy sources, biotechnology, pharmaceutical industry and climate change.

She said that an exhibition fair will also be held during the event, to display the main scientific and technological results of domestic and foreign companies.



The event, organized by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment and the Agency for Nuclear Energy and Advanced Technologies, will be held at the Havana Conference Centre.

Prensa Latina, March 2

Cuba continues to attract cruise lines despite tightening of the U.S. blockade

U.S. company Carnival Cruise Line announced that in 2019 it will offer 17 new trips to Cuba on board the Carnival Sensation, with five-day trips departing from South Florida



The culture, security and natural beauty of Cuba continue to attract the cruise industry, despite the measures of the current U.S. administration that reinforce the blockade.

U.S. company Carnival Cruise Line announced that in 2019 it will offer 17 new trips to Cuba on board the Carnival Sensation, with five-day trips departing from South Florida.

According to a statement from the firm, cited by Prensa Latina, the trips will include a day in Havana, as well as stops at popular ports in the Caribbean and the Bahamas, including Grand Turk Island, Grand Cayman, Nassau and the private destinations of Half Moon Cay and Princess Cays.

According to surveys conducted with visitors, Cuba stands among their favorite destinations of the Caribbean, a region with high international standards for this industry.

Christine Duffy, president of Carnival Cruise Line, noted that Cuba is a sought-after destination and the firm is delighted to offer its customers even more opportunities to experience and explore this “fascinating island.”

All cruise trips organized from the United States to Cuba must comply with strict U.S. Treasury Department regulations.

The Republican administration headed by President Donald Trump announced last June a series of measures that restrict travel between the two countries and reinforce the economic blockade applied against Cuba for more than half a century.

U.S. cruise companies have had to adapt their itineraries to the travel categories approved by Washington, as Cuba remains the only destination to which U.S. visitors are forbidden by law to travel as tourists.

In the same way and using excuses without any scientific basis, the State Department issued a level 3 (of 4) travel warning on Cuba with the recommendation to “reconsider travel” to the island.

These attacks contrast with the international recognition of Cuba’s safety as a tourist destination and the level of satisfaction shown by more than four million visitors to the country last year.

Despite Washington’s new regulations, Cuba received almost 620,000 U.S. visitors in 2017, more than twice as many as in the previous year.

The interest in visiting Cuba does not seem to be subsiding. The announcement by Carnival Cruise Line appeared just a few days after the U.S. companies Regent

Seven Seas Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line also announced an increase in trips to the Caribbean island.

Despite the restrictions imposed by the U.S. blockade to advance bilateral relations and especially maritime-port activity, and the new measures announced by the Trump administration, Cuban authorities have stated that the country plans to implement a broad program of port infrastructure development, aimed at boosting cruise tourism in the different ports of the country, taking into account that the arrival of cruise passengers is increasing year on year.

Granma, March 1

INSIDE CUBA



Cuba prepares for general elections drill

The National Electoral Commission (CEN) continues today its preparations for the drill for general polls on the 11th of this month, checking to be done on March 4, in the over 24 thousand polling stations of the country.

According to CEN Vicepresident, Tomas Amaran, it is a traditional exercise, as it was done in the previous stage of the electoral process, when the district delegates were elected to the municipal assemblies of People's Power.

This dynamic test was conceived to verify, check and to the point in everything related to voting, said the official to reporters.

According to Amaran, Sunday's test will develop in two moments. From 7:30 to 8:30, local time, the instruments and resources will be checked, the personnel, communication media and computers to be used on March 11.

Only the children who will guard the ballot boxes and the voters (students of primary and secondary schools), he explained.

After that, there will be a closing -whose results will not be reported until the end- and there will be a second moment when all election structures at all levels, from the tables to the nation, he added.

Amaran then said that at that moment they would work with situations and simulated reports as a test to processing the reports, counting votes, sending the results from the polling stations to the districts and from there to the higher levels.

The same will be done in the districts and municipal commissions where counting will be checked and the process will be concluded with the validation of results, added the CEN vice-president.

Once ended the validation of the process of deputies to the People's Power National Assembly, the validation by provincial delegates will then take place.

At the end, electoral commissions in districts and municipalities will then resume what happened in the day and report the incidents and problems detected.

'We will then be sure we are in a condition to face elections on March 11 with the required discipline and organization', said Amaran. From the drill, there will still be a week to solve detected problems. 'Many of the situations will be solved the same day of the drill and others in need of specific resources, will have the support of all organizations and the people that always cooperates in an active way in these processes', said the official.

'We are confident that the 11th the process will have the required quality, discipline, organisation, transparency and professionalism that characterises our electoral authorities', he concluded.

Prensa Latina, March 2

INSIDE CUBA



International Meeting in Cuba of Teachers and Students of Ballet

Students and ballet teachers from several countries will exchange in Cuba about artistic education, from March 25 to April 7, the event's president, Ramona de Saa has announced.

The International Meeting of Academies for the teaching of ballet is a unique event of its kind in the world and the 24th edition

will take place in this capital, at the Fernando Alonso National Ballet School.

The event will be inaugurated with a gala at the National Theatre and will be dedicated to one of the founders of the National Ballet of Cuba (BNC), the great choreographer Alberto Alonso, who passed away in 2007.

This year, participants come from nations such as Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica, Brazil, the United States, Spain, Canada, Peru and Puerto Rico, which is coming for the first time to the event and promises a delegation of 61 members.

For 10 days, apprentices enrolled in the event can take lessons in physical preparation, tips, repertoire, choreographic composition, character dances and classical duo, among several subjects.

The director of the meeting of academies, Ramona de Saa, confirmed that she will give keynote speeches on methodology of the teaching of the Cuban school of ballet, accompanied by the physical trainer Jose Candia, and the historian of the BNC, Miguel Cabrera.

As usual, the optional workshops include complementary disciplines for any artistic profession such as acting, makeup, dance criticism, folklore, physical preparation, Pilates in the context of ballet, Spanish dance and character dances.

The current event includes galas dedicated to Margarita de Saa (March 29), Francisco Salgado (March 30), Elfrida Maller (March 31), Lorna Burdsal (April 1), all in the National Theater.

Within the event, from April 3 to 6, two contests will be held: one for children and one for choreography, presided over by De Saa and Alberto Mendez, respectively.

The juries will also be composed of the first dancers of the BNC, Viengsay Valdes and Anette Delgado; and teachers Roberto Machado and Diana Farias from Mexico; Tom Bosma from Holland; Liana Tosin from Colombia; Carlos Paolillo from Venezuela; and Víctor Alexander from the United States.

In addition, the courts are integrated by Gino Labate from Italy; Alfa Rodriguez from the Dominican Republic; Idania Wambrug and Jorge Abril from Cuba.

Prensa Latina, March 4

SPORT

Rodriguez and Echevarria win medals for Cuba

Cuban Yorgelis Rodriguez won the bronze medal of the pentathlon at the World Indoor Athletics Championship in Birmingham, England, and gave the first medal to Latin America.

Rodriguez achieved a score of 4,637 points, national record, and escorted British Katarina Johnson-Thompson, winner of gold with 4,750 units, and the Austrian Ivona Dacic (silver / 4,700).

The Caribbean won 1,002 points in the 60 metres with hurdles, 1,080 in the high jump, 804 in the bullet drive, 896 in the high jump and 885 in the 800 metres.

Fourth in the World Championship of London-2017 and Pan-American Champion in Toronto-2015, Rodriguez will be one of the main cards of the Cuban delegation in the Central American and Caribbean Games of Barranquilla, from July 19 to August 3.

Meanwhile, Cuban male long jumper Juan Miguel Echevarría won today the title of the World Indoor Championship, with personal record and best record of the year of 8.46 metres.

Echevarría, 19, gave his country and Latin America the first gold medal of the British event to follow the trail of his fellow countryman Ivan Pedroso, who won six crowns in world indoor events.

This Friday the Cuban jumper beat South African Luvo Manyonga, who won the silver medal with 8.44 metres, and US Marquis Dendy (bronze / 8.42).

Prensa Latina, March 2



Text edited by David Reade (www.netmedianz.com), on behalf of the Cuban Embassy, Wellington, from Cuban news agency sources.

Embassy of Cuba in New Zealand

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