

EMBASSIES OF CUBA IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



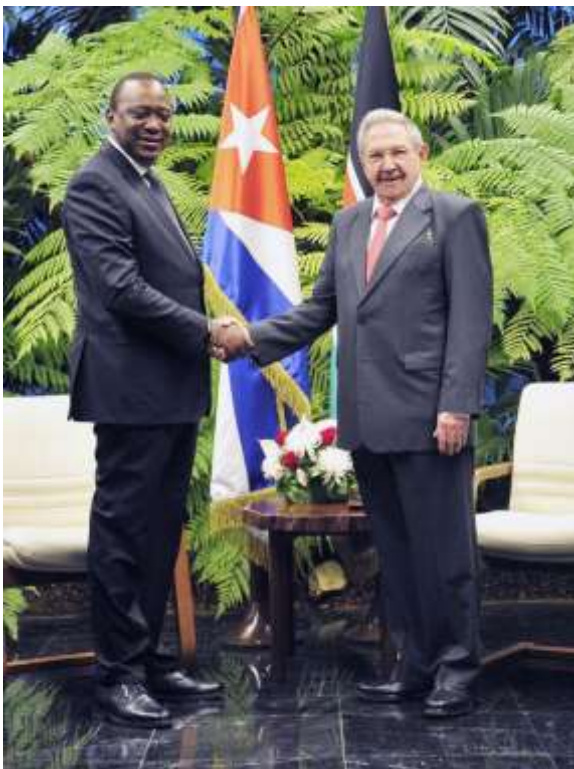
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ABSTRACT

'Last year, he made very good jumps, over eight metres, so I predicted that at some point he would explode,' coach Daniel Osorio told media as the latest Cuban athletics phenomenon confirmed his talent by crushing his gold-medal winning victory indoors at Birmingham, England by 5cm at our Rafael Fortún stadium last week — outdoors. That's our news 'kicker' this week. Maybe it's just a matter of time before he Echevarria knocks off the 1991 world record now just five cm off the magic nine metre mark — the long jump equivalent of the four-minute mile.

Then it's back to business with the Kenyans, the folk from Nauru, Brazil, China and the European Union. We get good news of conditions for Cuban rural women, good attendance at Computer Science 2018, how natural and adventure destinations are increasingly popular with tourists, an update on the National Symphony Orchestra's latest tour in the US, how Djibouti and Cuba are strengthening sports collaboration, and of course the news about Miguel Echevarria and his big jumps.

DIPLOMACY



President of Kenya visits Cuba

Kenya republic president Uhuru Kenyatta is making an official visit to Cuba and has been received by Cuban president Raúl Castro.

In an atmosphere of cordiality, the two leaders agreed on emphasising the relations of friendship that exist between their countries and their intention to strengthen political ties and cooperation

They likewise expressed their mutual satisfaction with the opening of a Kenyan embassy in Havana and discussed issues on the international agenda.

Raúl thanked the government of Kenya for the help offered to support recovery efforts in the wake of damage caused by Hurricane Irma.

Accompanying the distinguished guest were Monica K. Juma, minister of foreign relations and international trade;

Rashid Achesa Mohamud, minister of sports and culture; as well as the Kenyan

interim chargé de affaires in Havana, Anthony Mushiry; and Raphael Tuju, secretary general of the Jubileo Party.

On the Cuban side, also participating were Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, and Abel Prieto Jiménez - ministers of foreign affairs, foreign trade and investment, and culture, respectively - as well as ambassador Ernesto Gómez Díaz.

Granma, March 16

DIPLOMACY



Nauru minister of health and medical services visits Cuba's deputy minister of foreign affairs

Cuba's vice minister of foreign affairs, Ana Teresita González Fraga has received Nauru's minister of health and medical services. Charmaine Scotty is in our country on a work visit. During the meeting, which was

held in a cordial and friendly atmosphere, both sides talked about the satisfactory development of bilateral relations and the possibilities of strengthening cooperation in several fields, specifically in health matters.

Nauru's minister of thanked Cuba for its support in the training in the Pacific Islands in human resources and highlighted the development that Cuba has in the area of health and the interest of Nauru to learn from experiences in this area. She will have an official meeting with her Cuban counterpart Roberto Morales Ojeda during the visit.

For her part, the Cuban vice minister reiterated Cuba's support in the Pacific Islands, pointing out that both Islands share common challenges based on the similar insular condition.

Cuba and Nauru established diplomatic relations on May 7, 2002.

CubaMINREX, March 16

DIPLOMACY

World Social Forum demands end to U.S. blockade of Cuba

Over the past 60 years, the U.S. economic, financial and commercial blockade of Cuba has caused damages of almost nine billion USD to the Caribbean nation.

On March 14, representatives of social movements and trade unions gathered at the World Social Form in Brazil, and demanded an end to the economic, financial, and commercial blockade.

The call, which also included the return of the territory illegally occupied by the U.S. Naval Base in Cuba's southeastern province of Guantánamo, was made during a debate in which international solidarity was highlighted as essential "to the Cuban people's struggle."



Participating in the encounter, among others, were the President of the World Peace Council, Socorro Gómez; Pascualina Curcio, from the Venezuelan chapter of the Network of Artists and intellectuals in Defense of Humanity; Ivone Souza, president of the José Martí Cultural Society in Bahía;

and Iedo Fontes, a professor at the University of Paraíba.

Meanwhile, Yarisleidis Medina, a representative of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), commented on the state of relations between the island and the U.S. after Donald Trump was elected President.

She also expressed thanks for the demonstrations of support from parties and social organizations and reiterated that while the blockade continues to exist, solidarity will be vital to supporting the Cuban people's struggle.

For the last 60 years or so, the U.S. economic, financial and commercial blockade of Cuba has caused damages of some 822,280,000,000 dollars to the Caribbean nation, taking into account the depreciation of the USD compared to the price of gold on the international market.

As such the blockade continues to be a massive, flagrant, systematic violation of the human rights of the Cuban people and constitutes an act of genocide, as defined by the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Granma, March 15

DIPLOMACY

Cuba to develop six projects with Chinese assistance

Cuba has received a Chinese fund worth 36 million dollars to carry out six projects to benefit key sectors such as livestock, renewable energies and hydraulic infrastructure, both governments confirmed.



Cuba's first deputy minister of foreign trade and foreign investment (MINCEX), Antonio Luis Carricarte, and Chinese Ambassador Chen Xi signed the agreements.

As they explained, cooperation includes supplies of equipment for the livestock recovery program and the technological modernization of the General Customs Office of the Republic.

It also includes raw materials to make photovoltaic solar panels, rice deliveries, as well as equipment and machinery for aqueducts and sanitation projects.

The funds will also allow supplying construction equipment in order to repair and maintain hydraulic works.

Speaking to the press, Xi highlighted his country's willingness to continue working with Cuba in the political, diplomatic, economic, commercial and cultural spheres, as proof of the solid relations between the governments and peoples of the two countries.

CubaSí, March 17

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY



EU, Cuba work to reduce disaster risks on the island

Cuba and the European Union are working to ensure the recovery capacity of the affected populations and compensate for the damages caused by Hurricane Irma on the island, Virginie Andre, an official of that agency, said.

The EU Humanitarian Aid coordinator for the Caribbean told Prensa Latina that despite the damage caused by the meteorological phenomenon, a rapid response has been evident six months later.

'We are contributing about five million Euros to support the national efforts with a view to overcoming the meteorological event and we are pleased because we have been capable of verifying the progress of those actions,' Andre stated.

She also highlighted how the efforts are also focused on the training of residents for greater resilience to disasters and the social development of the areas affected by the phenomenon that hit the Cuban northern coast with maximum category in September 2017.

'We are always happy to come to Cuba and see the response capacity of the people thanks to our joint work. We are very pleased on how we work in collaboration with the European Union,' she noted.

After concluding a visit to the Sancti Spiritus province, one of the regions most affected by Irma, Andre described as positive the progress reached in sectors such as health, local production of construction materials and the reception and distribution of food.

International agencies such as the UN Development Program (UNDP), the World Food Program (WFP) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) have been implementing different recovery projects in Yaguajay municipality, about 320 kilometres east of Havana.

'Some few months after the passing of this powerful hurricane, the changes that are achieved in the local development and the recovery of the affected areas are important,' UNDP deputy resident representative in Cuba, Soledad Bauza, said.

Some of those strategies implemented here by UNDP, WFP and PAHO are the donation of food (rice, beans and oil) as well as medical equipment for health institutions and first aid.

According to figures offered by the Municipal People's Power Assembly in Yaguajay, the meteor damaged more than 10,000 homes, 43 percent of which have already been repaid.

Prensa Latina, March 16



UN highlights rights of Cuban rural women

The conditions of Cuban rural women are far from the reality that prevails in the world today and are a central issue of the debates of the Commission on the Status of Women.

This was said to Prensa Latina by the deputy to the National Assembly of Cuba, Yaneidis Perez, who is part of the Cuban delegation that attends

such forum at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

'In different panels I have often heard the same requests: access to water, equal pay for women and men, possibilities for a decent job ... for Cuban women, those demands were already won,' she claimed.

In her opinion, representing Cuban women in the UN brings great responsibility and also a satisfaction 'because it allows me to expose the achievements in all areas of social, economic, political and social life' she said.

Over 20,000 rural women in Cuba own their land and have the same opportunities and possibilities as men, stressed the deputy, who also owns agricultural land in the eastern province of Las Tunas.

Perez also highlighted the political will of the government and the work of organisations such as the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC).

'Every day we build the culture of gender equality, although we still have much more to do in the home and in families,' she said.

Prensa Latina, March 18

More than 20 Cuban projects in Computing Science Habana 2018

A group of 24 projects developed by Cuban companies will be presented at the event Informatica Habana 2018 (Computing Science Habana 2018), which opening this week at the Pabexpo conference centre, said organisers.

Grisel Reyes, president of the organizing committee, told the media that the event is seeking to present domestic products to foreign participants to promote Cuban image in the world.

She said that two new products developed by non-state workers (self-employed workers) will be presented; one of them is 'Bascal Pro', a system for weighing and billing products that carries the information issued by scales and manages the information and trade action.



The other product is 'Diriger', a program for the computerization of management that gathers the main systems currently implemented for that purpose.

Another product is the Electronic Government project or the People's Website, which simplifies the institutional processes of institutional support and creates paths to increase the participation of the population in the internal management of the provincial governments.

There are also more than 240 products of simulation for driving, sailing and flying with an estimated economic money-saving impact of some \$20 million USD per year.

Informatica 2018 exhibition is a sideline event to the conference Informatica 2018, held at the Havana's conference centre with lectures and workshops on the world's new technologies and the process of computerization of Cuban society.

Prensa Latina, March 16

INSIDE CUBA



Cuban tourism offers more than sun and sea

Natural and adventure destinations are increasingly popular options offered by the national tourism industry, focused on protecting the environment and supporting local development

The second most popular natural tourist destination

in Cuba is the Salto de Guayabo, an impressive vertical waterfall with two drops of 85 and 127 metres.

Those who visit the site located in the municipality of Mayarí, near Mensura-Piloto National Park, consider it fascinating, since in addition to being one of the highest in the country and boasting crystal clear waters, it provides an enjoyably cool microclimate, produced by balanced temperature and humidity

Located in the waterfall's surroundings are 36 orchid species and 33 types of ferns, reflecting the area's rich plant life, accompanied by equally prolific fauna, including many birds.

Along the path leading down to the pool formed by the impact of the water, visitors can appreciate the height of the falls and also the recently updated service facilities, as did tour operators, travel agents and nature lovers from many nations who attended the 9th International Nature Tourism Event, Turnat 2017, held last September, with activities at several locations in the provinces of Holguín and Guantánamo.

The international gathering provided an ideal opportunity to confirm that Holguín is a province with much potential in this arena, beyond the many popular beach resorts, predominate before 2015, according to Manuel Germán Menéndez Pérez, specialist at the Research, Development, Development, and Innovation Tourism Training Centre, affiliated with the Ministry of Tourism provincial office. A bit more than two years ago, the strategy for the development of nature tourism was launched in Holguín, containing as an essential element, the Sustainable

Tourism Development Program of the province's protected areas system, that includes 16 sites.'

Of these, he explained, ten can be utilized for eco-tourism (hiking, bird-watching, cycling, horseback riding, and camping), as well as adventure tourism including jeep safaris, caving, kayaking, and climbing. We also evaluated the potential of farms where it would be possible to promote and develop the possibilities of rural tourism, that would allow for interaction with the lifestyles of people in the country; as well as agro-tourism, that would involve sharing agricultural work with the farmer,' he said.

One special characteristic of Holguín is that two national parks are located adjacently to each other — the Mensura-Piloto and Pico Cristal - in addition to a portion of the Alejandro de Humboldt World Heritage Site, under the jurisdiction of Guantánamo province.

Open now, within the portion of Humboldt National Park in Holguin, is the Farallones de Moa Cave Trail, that provides access to a natural four kilometre long cavity, which has enchanted visitors with its majesty and the river that flows through it in continuous, small waterfalls.

Mensura-Piloto National Park features the Sabina trail, which attracts hiking enthusiasts who enjoy observing plant and animal life, as they make their way over the rolling hills to the Poza Rafael, where a refreshing dip in cool waters awaits them.

Another trail facilitates exploration of the Fría Cave, notable for its creation by the Chivera river that flowed over the rock for years, producing one of the area's most interesting geological formations.

The Nature, Adventure, and Rural Tourism technical sub-group is the multi-disciplinary entity currently working on the preparation of a portfolio outlining potential projects in Pico Cristal National Park, which contains Cuba's fifth highest mountain peak.

'This area is the main headwaters of the province's northwestern network of rivers. Here ground-covering vegetation can be observed — that is woods, pine forests, and charrascos — with abundant wildlife, and the potential to promote bird-watching. There are also signs showing that the area is inhabited by the almiquí, a living fossil," Menéndez explains.

The holding of Turnat 2017 in the region led to the launching of a tour route entitled the Holguin Countryside Grand Adventure, departing from the province's beach resorts (Pesquero, Yuraguanal, Esmeralda and Guardalavaca), to rural settlements and farms, the shady coffee plantations of Pinares de Mayarí, with a final stop at coffee and cacao farming areas in Farallones de Moa.

The event also led to the organization of the Columbus route, a seven-day tour to sites identified by the admiral in his diary, crossing the current province of Holguín during his first journey to Cuba.

Other tempting offers on the flatlands exist, as well. Among outstanding natural elements in protected areas are the Karst Hills of Maniabón, near the camping site of La Silla de Gibara, where the Tinajitas trail is found; while located within the Naranjo Bay protected area are the Rocazul ecological park and two trails, the Loma del Templo and Las Guana.

Among the ideal areas for adventure tourism is the Caletones Ecological Preserve, in the municipality of Gibara, with its star attraction, cave diving at the Tanque Azul, a flooded cavity often called a cenote.

To date, nature tourism options have been offered as additional activities to those enjoying the beach at resorts along the province's coastline, Menéndez said. He noted that this implies the challenge of stabilizing this type of commercialization,

taking action to make these activities regular options for clients, nature lovers, and environmentalists, and marketing them directly to tour operators and travel agents specializing in nature tourism.

Norelis Peña Peña, environmental management specialist with the Ministry of Science, Environment and Technology, Citma, in Holguín, and leader of a research project on the development of sustainable tourism in protected areas in the province, has identified complex challenges like those that appear in the sales process, for which the leisure industry is responsible.

Among the weaknesses she identified were the under-utilization of natural and cultural assets; insufficient eco-tourism offerings; limited availability of infrastructure; poor supervision of visitors and their environmental impact; low levels of investment in improving quality of life for local communities; as well as inadequate conservation and maintenance of sites.

Needed is a comprehensive approach that facilitates coordinated work by all persons and entities involved in promoting the enjoyment of beautiful natural areas which have become attractive tourist destinations, she noted.

MINISTRY EFFORTS

With the goal of expanding extra-hotel activity in Cuba, the Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR) has included new projects in its portfolio of foreign investment opportunities, to develop entertainment, recreational activities, and adventure tourism. Included for the first time in this portfolio are the construction of two natural adventure parks, one located in Canasí (near Santa Cruz del Norte, in Mayabeque province), and another in Bahía de Naranjo (Holguín).

Among MINTUR's priorities is diversifying tourist offerings beyond sun and sand vacations at resort hotels, positioning Cuba as a destination in the international market to accelerate the development of tourism, the national economy's second most important source of income.

Foreign investment is fundamental to the country's socio-economic progress, and the most recently updated portfolio of opportunities for investors includes 140 tourism projects.

Granma, March 16

ART & MUSIC

Cuban orchestra 'happy to be here again'

After a six-year absence, the National Symphony Orchestra of Cuba has returned in its second U.S. tour to perform at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall as part of the Troy Chromatic Concerts series. The orchestra last performed at Proctors in 2012.

'We're very happy to be here again,' said music director Enrique Perez Mesa through a translator. 'We have many cultural links here.'

The orchestra, which numbers 63 musicians, landed in Florida early this month and headed up the East Coast to play 20 concerts in various states. The tour ends March 26. Many of the venues are return visits; others are completely new.



'There are quite a few musicians who have been on other tours, including the first U.S. tour, while for others this tour is totally new,' Mesa said.

The history of the orchestra is a long one. In its current formation, it was founded in 1959, but its antecedents date to the 18th century. Cathedrals in Havana and Santiago always had a musical chapel made up of singers and instru-

mentalists. Later in the century, Cuban priest/composer Esteban Salas expanded the chapel to a small orchestra.

It took until the 1930s, however, before the first full-scale symphonic orchestras became part of the country's cultural experience. Two were based in Havana. The Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1922 by Gonzalo Roig, now considered one of Cuba's greatest composers. One of his pieces will be performed Monday. The other was the Philharmonic Orchestra founded in 1924 and led by Spanish musician Pedro Sanjuan.

Over the next few decades, the orchestras maintained a relatively steady level of concerts, but by 1958 only the Philharmonic Orchestra survived. The next year, this orchestra evolved into the NSO, dedicated to bringing the music of Cuba to the world along with performances of the traditional symphonic repertoire.

Currently, the orchestra's season runs from January to July and September to December, with a 44-concert schedule that includes regular concerts, kids' concerts and outreach.

'We do a lot of Cuban music,' Mesa said.

The orchestra tours about every two years, often to Germany, Spain and to music festivals in Mexico and other Central American countries. Most of the musicians also teach and many have studied in Europe. For example, this concert's soloist, principal clarinetist Antonio Dorta Lazo, studied in Germany and played with several German orchestras before returning to Cuba to join the NSO 20 years ago. Besides touring with his woodwind quintet, he teaches at Cuba's Institute of the Arts.

The orchestra also garnered a 2014 Latin Grammy nomination for its "Recordando a Antonio C. Jobim" disc.

Mesa, who started out as a violinist studying at Cuba's National School of the Arts before deciding to become a conductor, has established an international career and won several honorary awards, including the Pilgrim of the Millennium from the Mayor of Jerusalem and the Shield of the City of Sabaudia, Italy.

Monday's program will include Mozart's Clarinet Concerto with Antonio Dorta Lazo; DeFalla's "The Three-Cornered Hat Suite No. 2"; Guido Lopez's (1944-) "Guaguanco"; a piece by Gonzalo Roig (1890-1970); and Dvorak's "Symphony No. 9 (New World).

'I chose the Dvorak because it is one of the most romantic pieces and it is always welcomed by the public,' Mesa said. The rest of the program might entice audience members to get up and dance because of the rumba rhythms and all the great Cuban percussion instruments they'll use.

'It will get pretty lively,' he said.

CubaSí, March 16

Cuba and Djibouti strengthen sports collaboration

Djibouti secretary of state of for youth and sports Hassan Mohammad Kamil and the president of Cuba's National Institute for Sports, Physical Education and Recreation Antonio Becali have signed a collaboration agreement according to the Cuban website JIT.



'We have signed an agreement in the sports sector. I want to congratulate all those people who have received us so well in Havana,' said the former Djibouti soccer player who has been the director of the national soccer federation.

'I have visited many places and I am really amazed. I have talked to sports personalities and I am sure that we'll go forward in the sector,' Kamil stated.

The agreement reflects the will of both countries in exchanging in several disciplines and includes aspects such as infrastructure, investigation, medicine, fighting the use of drugs and technical assistance.

'I must return to Cuba because of two reasons: first, because of the security and second, because of the sport. I have felt secure in the places where I have been, and I've seen you have many places for practicing sports,' Kamil concluded.

Prensa Latina, March 13



Cuban long-jumper confirms his quality with 8.40-metre record

Cuban long-jumper Juan Miguel Echevarría proved that his 8.40-metre jump at the World Indoor Athletic Championships was not a fluke.

The 19-year-old athlete set the record in the outdoor season at the Rafael Fortún stadium on this

central Cuban track and ratified his excellent physical fitness after competing in the British city of Birmingham, where he won the gold medal with an 8.46-metre jump.

However, his coach Daniel Osorio, who took over his training a few months ago, noted that Echevarría's results are not a surprise.

'He has an ideal physique, I had seen him years ago, when he was still in Camagüey, and I followed his evolution closely,' he told Prensa Latina.

'Last year, he made very good jumps, over eight metres, so I predicted that at some point he would explode,' the coach of the national team noted. After concluding his career in the junior category with a discreet performance at the World Championships in London last summer, Echevarria went on under Osorio's supervision in the senior category and his training focused on the psychological aspect.

Prensa Latina, March 17

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

<http://misiones.minrex.gob.cu/en/new-zealand>

