

EMBASSIES OF CUBA IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC NEWSLETTER



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ABSTRACT

Long-term Cuban supporter, US Democrat Patrick Leahy, continues to work for a better relationship between the neighbouring countries and has led a further deputation to further that aim. That's our lead story this week. We follow with coverage of the visit of the Palauan ministers of health and education, news of spectacular Varadero beach among the world's leaders, and a sparkling new rum in a limited edition.

There's more news of the elections, how Cuba's social justice achievements fit with the new Word Day of Social Justice, a new fibre satellite link and a Chilean merit order for Havana's historian.

Then it's back to Aotearoa New Zealand and coverage of the Aotearoa Cuban Festival — a three-day weekend of non-stop dancing and partying, taking in rumba, rueda, conga, cha-cha-cha and mambo.

Finally we have an athletics insider talking up Cuba's chances at the forthcoming Central American Games in Barranquilla: high jumper Javier Sotomayor believes Cuba has such a rush of youngsters like him coming through that results there could be sensational, better even than the 22 gold, 14 silver and 8 bronze medals Cuba got in the Mexico event.

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

President Raúl Castro receives U.S. congressional delegation

President Raúl Castro has received a delegation from the United States Congress, led by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont). Affairs of interest to both countries were discussed during the meeting.

The group also included two other Democratic senators, Ron Wyden from Oregon and Gary Peters from Michigan, and House Representatives James McGovern (D-Massachusetts) and Susan Davis (D-California).



Additionally, present on the Cuban side were foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla and Carlos Fernández de Cossío, the ministry's general director for the United States.

Granma, February 21

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY



U.S. congressional delegation reaffirms need to improve relations with Cuba

US members of Congress expressed the need to continue the process, initiated by the Obama administration, toward the normalisation of relations between Cuba and the United States, during a February 21 press conference at the U.S.

Embassy in Havana.

The group, led by Democrat Senator and Senate Appropriations Committee Vice Chairman, Patrick Leahy, arrived in Cuba last weekend, here to review — together with local authorities — changes in Washington's policy toward the island since President Donald Trump assumed office in January 2017.

During the press conference, Leahy mentioned the meeting that he and his colleagues had held with President Castro, describing the encounter as extremely frank and pleasant, during which Cuba's desire to continue improving bilateral relations, despite current circumstances, was expressed.

The senator for Vermont criticised the new direction taken by the Trump administration with regard to Cuba policy, and in particular measures related to the withdraw of diplomatic personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Havana and the expulsion of members of Cuba's diplomatic corps from its headquarters in Washington.

This had been a grave error which had harmed the interests of both governments and peoples and above all those who needed to visit either country for family or business purposes, as well as so many other things that were frozen under the pretext of the health incidents reported by U.S diplomatic staff in the Cuban capital, noted Leahy.

The senator highlighted the Cuban government's cooperation in resolving the case and stated that he believed the island's authorities had not have the slightest intention to harm U.S. citizens who visited Havana.

What is more he noted that not a single one of his colleagues had any fears about travelling to Cuba as they believe the island to be a safe place, and have travelled here with their spouses, and in Leahy's case, with his 13-year-old granddaughter. The group, which left February 21, also included senators Ron Wyden from Oregon and Gary Peters from Michigan, as well as House Representatives James McGovern (D-Massachusetts), Kathy Castor (D-Florida) who was not present during the press conference, and Susan Davis (D-California).

McGovern criticised recent steps by the Trump administration to reduce the number of staff at the U.S. and Cuban embassies as well as other changes by the White House which have had negative implications for bilateral relations, as they affect travel by Cuban and U.S. citizens to both countries.

On February 20 the Congressional delegation held a meeting with director general for the United States at the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Carlos Fernández de Cossio, who thanked them for their efforts to improve relations.

The Cuban official also reiterated that no evidence of the alleged sonic attacks against U.S. diplomatic personnel in Havana existed, as sectors intent on preventing any advance in the normalisation of relations between the two countries, were claiming.

Granma, February 21

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

Palauan ministers of health and education arrived in Cuba



The ministers of health and education of the Republic of Palau, Dr. Emais Roberts and Sinton Soalablai, respectively, in Havana, have brought an official delegation from their North Pacific Small Island State.

The delegation, which also includes attorney general Arthur Ngiraklsong, Senator Aric M. Nakamura, and Ngedikes Olai Uludong, permanent representative of Palau to the United Nations, and appointed ambassador to Cuba, is the first and most important Palauan delegation visiting the Caribbean Island, since the signing of the diplomatic relations between both countries by presidents Castro and Remengesau in September 26, 2015.

The Palauan representatives are expected to hold discussions with their Cuban counterparts of health and education, as well as officials from the foreign ministry in Havana.

Embacuba Fiyi, February 23

TRAVEL & TOURISM



Cuban beach ranks among 'Best in the World'

The Cuban beach resort of Varadero ranks among the best beaches in the world for the 2018 Travelers Choice Awards posted on TripAdvisor travel website. In that list

(www.tripadvisor.es/TravelersChoice-Beaches), Varadero ranked third preceded by Grace Bay from Turks and Caicos Islands, and Baia Do Sancho in Brazil.

Varadero, about 140 kilometres east of Havana, is one of the island's largest tourist destination together with Varadero, Holguín and Jardines del Rey. The choice cor-

responds to queries made by the website to millions of travellers worldwide, enthusiastic about the beauty and comforts of this location boasting recreational boating, fishing, diving, and hotels with the most amenities of this archipelago, 52 facilities in a place that receives more than one million vacationers per year, with constant development plans.

The TripAdvisor list mentions Grace Bay (Turks and Caicos Islands), Baia do Sancho, (Fernando de Noronha, Brazil), Varadero (Cuba), Eagle Beach Palm (Eagle Beach, Aruba), and Seven Mile Beach (Grand Cayman).

La Concha Beach (San Sebastián - Donostia, Spain), Clearwater Beach (Clearwater, Florida, United States), Seven Mile Beach (Negril, Jamaica), Bávaro (Bávaro, Dominican Republic), and North Beach (Isla Mujeres, Mexico), among the main ones, in order of importance.

Prensa Latina, February 22

TRAVEL & TOURISM

Havana Club will present new rum at Habano's Festival

Havana Club Internacional S. A. (HCI) is presenting a new rum — Tributo 2018 — at the XX Festival del Habano, being held in Havana this week.

The company announced today that this is the third edition of the Havana Club Tribute Collection, which pays tribute each year to the different elements that form part of the authentic production process.

In a press release, HCI pointed out that the new delivery is the first luxury Cuban rum with a finishing in barrels of smoked whisky, and that there are only two thousand 500 bottles available to be sold worldwide.

According to the report, Tributo 2018 was made from the best rum reserves, exclusively aged in barrels of more than 60 years, safeguarded by the 'Rum Masters.'

The communiqué reads that Master Asbel Morales carefully selected and mixed the rums extracted from these barrels, and then finished the melting in smoked whiskey barrels.

Like its predecessors, Tributo 2018 is being launched as part of the Habanos Festival, which will have as its main venue the Havana Convention Centre.

This annual event offers its attendees a varied program of activities to learn about the origin, elaboration and other aspects related to the culture of Cuban cigars.

ACN, February 20





Preparations for elections go smoothly

National Electoral Commission (CEN) vice president Tomas Amaran has highlighted preparatory works for the the population to vote responsibly, 'organised and with discipline' in the national elections, slated for March 11.

That date was chosen for the Cuban electors to vote for the delegates to the 15 Provincial Assemblies of the People's Power (provincial governments) and the deputies from each territory to the National Assembly

(Parliament).

Then, the Parliament will elect the future president of Cuba, to replace Raul Castro who is ending his current mandate.

'The population needs to be well informed and it must be recalled that this time, two ballot papers will be given to each elector (for delegates and deputies), so as the process develops without inconveniences,' Amaran told Prensa Latina.

He explained that to make voting easier, polling stations will have a list of 700 voters, as the maximum number, while the general average figure will be around 400.

Amaran said the quality of the work in progress to mobilise the electors throughout the country, has led to predict a massive response by the people with the right to vote.

The CEN vice president has led a seminar for the leaders of the 13 municipal electoral commissions and those in the different districts, and the heads of the count teams in those localities.

Prensa Latina, February 23

How is the Cuban president elected?

The person who becomes the president of Cuba's Council of State is chosen through a process that entails several steps, with the people and their elected representatives participating directly.

There is no need to dig through Cuba's Election Law no.72, dated October 29, 1992, to find the answer.

It is explicit, and Dr. José Luis Toledo Santander, president of the National Assembly of People's Power Constitutional and Legal Affairs Commission, gets right to the point, as he tells Granma: "The president of Cuba's Council of State is elected in second order elections —that is, deputies elected by the people, in



representation of the people, approve the candidature and then vote, in a direct and secret fashion, for those who will make up the Council of State - that is the president, first vice president, the vice presidents, the secretary, and other members."

"At times we hear opinions, not always offered with the best of intentions, that question," says Dr. Toledo, "whether the election of the president reflects a direct expression by the people. But they are unaware that for someone to be elected to this position in Cuba, several electoral steps are required, in which the people or their elected representatives participate directly."

During his conversation with Granma, Toledo, also a professor at the University of Havana, outlined the particularities of each stage in the process, explaining that thus we can visualise the path that begins when the person "is proposed as a pre-candidate for deputy to the National Assembly, in a mass organisation leadership plenum."

On this occasion, the 605 candidates for national deputy, to be elected this coming March 11 - and from amongst whom the president will emerge - were chosen from 12,000 proposals made in 970 plenums held across the entire country. And among these candidates, 47.7% were constituency delegates, elected by their neighbours in the first stage of the general elections, in October of 2017.

"The National Assembly nominations are the responsibility of the Municipal Assembly of People's Power," says Toledo, a process that was in no way a formality.

"This is where the candidature commissions at this level present the pre-candidates, and these are the assemblies that decide, via a direct, public vote, if they approve of someone or not." In fact, to be approved every one of the proposals must have more than half of the yes votes, cast by the delegates present.

In the event that the candidature slate, or any one of the proposed candidates, is not approved, the commission is required to present another proposal, which will be subjected to the same procedure.

"Once nominated as a candidate for deputy, we see another electoral episode take place, that is the people exercising their free, direct, secret vote, be it within a constituency or district, where the deputies are elected."

This moment, described by Toledo, is scheduled for March 11, when Cuban men and women will also elect delegates to Provincial Assemblies.

It should be emphasised, he said, that in accordance with law, "a deputy is elected for every 20,000 residents or fraction of more than 10,000, and even in municipalities that have fewer than 30,000 inhabitants, two deputies are always elected. Thus, the National Assembly has representation from the entire people."

He explains, "After being elected and once the delegates have taken their seats in the National Assembly, the National Candidature Commission calls every one of those elected for consultation, and all have the right to propose those who should be, in their opinion, the members of the Council of State, that is, suggest 31 persons, among whom, obviously, one will be the president.

"Later, this commission presents for the National Assembly's consideration, in an open vote, a candidature slate that is the product of the proposals made, and deputies have the right to modify it, totally or partially. After being approved, the candidates are submitted to free, direct, and secret vote by deputies. This is when the president of the Council of State is finally elected."

In accordance with the spirit of the electoral law, if the president ceases to perform this duty, the vice president assumes the role.

The path taken to complete the process, in Toledo's words, is "the clearest reflection of the participation of the people and the representatives elected by the people. Cuba is not the only country that elects its head of state in second order elections. There are many nations that hold this type of election, which does not limit, in any way, its legitimacy or democratic foundation."

Granma, February 21



INSIDE CUBA

Cuba's achievements mark 'World Day of Social Justice'

Cuba celebrated the World Day of Social Justice with important achievements in health and education and dedicating a large amount of resources to develop these and other sectors according to minister of finance and prices Lina Pedraza (pictured). She told

media that about 55 percent of the state budget plan for 2018 covered progress in those areas.

Pedraza told 10th Ordinary Sessions of the Eighth Legislature of the National People's Power Assembly, held in December 2017, that the Cuban government allocated millions of pesos to guarantee enrolment in general and higher education, free education being one of the main achievements of the 1959 Revolution. Education minister Ena Elsa Velázquez said that more than 1,740,000 students attended classes at several education levels, and speaking at the 11th International Congress of Higher Education, Universidad 2018, held on February 12-16, she noted that Cuba has more than 10,600 educational centres.

Instituted in 2007 by the UN General Assembly, the World Day of Social Justice supports the work of the international community to eradicate poverty and promote full employment and decent work, as well as gender equality.

Prensa Latina, February 20

INSIDE CUBA



ETECSA and SES Networks sign agreement for satellite services

The Empresa de Telecomunicaciones de Cuba S. A. (Etecsa) and SES Networks of Luxembourg have signed an agreement for satellite capacity services.

The bilateral agreement will make it possible to diversify the island of Cuba's connectivity, complementing the existing one by means of optical fibre, through a medium-orbit satellite service, according to Etecsa's Directorate of Institutional Communication.

This is a high capacity service and very similar in some quality parameters to fiber, guaranteeing additional capacities that support the internet service to national users.

SES Networks is one of the world's market leaders in satellite communications services and a pioneer in many important aspects of the development of this industry.

The Luxembourg company provides satellite communications services to content providers, internet, fixed and mobile network operators, governments and institutions.

ACN, February 21

INSIDE CUBA



Havana historian granted Chile's merit order

Dr. Eusebio Leal Spengler, Havana's official historian has been granted on the Chilean Merit Order by its ambassador Ricardo Herrera.

The official declaration was expedited and signed on February 2nd at the Moneda Palace by Chilean president

Michelle Bachelet; sealed with the republic's coat of arms and endorsed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In the official communique, the Chilean head of state said: "the action awaits that this piece, example of our esteem and appreciation, encourages him to repeat praiseworthy virtues and noble friendship towards Chile".

Herrera also shared the letter sent by Bachelet, highlighting the pride that the award represents for such illustrious historian who constitutes one of the major architects of the conscious of Latin American heritage.

The Chilean President characterised the moment as "an act of justice for a man, which, for decades has fought to preserve the historic memory of our peoples".

She recalled that Chile has granted Eusebio Leal with the Doctrine Award of the Central University of Santiago de Chile; the Pablo Neruda Presidential Honor Medal; and the Key to the City of Valparaiso, World Heritage Site.

Leal expressed gratitude in receiving the high distinction and above all, receiving the medal at the Flag Salon of the Captain General Palace.

The City Historian recalled and thanked the illustrious Chilean people and recalled when Salvador Allende presented him a Flag from that South American nation in the same Palace.

"The Homeland is a poem, it is a desire, it's an expression of feeling from the heart; the country is a singular territory that forms our character; among volcanoes, between mountains and palm trees; here at the shore of the sea which is the ocean that does not divide us, but unites us", concluded Eusebio Leal.

The official ceremony included the presence of the diplomat corps accredited in Cuba, members of the Foreign Ministry and guests from both countries.

The Merit Order is the oldest distinction in the country, created in 1817 by the Supreme Liberator Director Bernardo O'Higgins and has the objective of awarding foreign citizens for their outstanding civil services given by the Republic of Chile.

ACN, February 22

INSIDE CUBA



Aotearoa Cuban Festival sees Rotorua dance the weekend away

From the rumba to the rueda, from conga to cha-cha-cha and mambo, Latin dance enthusiasts descended on Rotorua for the annual Aotearoa Cuban Festi-

val.

Held last weekend, about 200 participants from New Zealand, Australia and New Caledonia danced their way through the three-day programme in the Lakes Performing Arts Company studios.

The weekend also included workshops about the dances' Afro-Cuban roots, and after-parties each night.

Creative artistic director and festival trustee, Greydis Montero Liranza, was born and raised in Cuba and travelled the world with Lady Salsa dance company.

During an Australasian tour, Liranza became fascinated with New Zealand and took up an offer to stay here and teach.

She moved to Rotorua in 2014 and started Greydis Dance School the next year.

The Cuban Festival has been held annually in Rotorua ever since.

Liranza said she has seen an "amazingly big growth" in Latin dance in Rotorua.

Ahead of the festival from Friday to Sunday, she spent the week visiting local schools, giving free classes and helping with school assessments.

The school also performed at the Night Market.

She said during the festival she saw "a transformation from when dancers arrive to when they leave".

"They come to dance and progress and learn the cultural side. It's not just about dancing a step, there's a whole culture behind it."

She said it cost about \$9000 to travel to Cuba and back so the festival was the next best option.

International instructor, and specialist in Afro-Cuban folklore, Christina Monneron was invited from the Gold Coast to lead some of the workshop. This year was her fifth time coming to the festival in Rotorua.

She loved the "strong Maori influence in the festival — a lot of the local Cuban dancers are Maori. There are cross-cultural links and similarities that we embrace here, and that keeps me coming back."

Tauranga teacher Kate Maguire was another instructor.

She started as a student under Greydis Montero Liranza, became "super enthusiastic", then progressed to becoming a teacher.

She now has her own studio "Salsa Agua!".

Liranza said the annual festival was for all ages and abilities: "There's no need to get a babysitter, you can bring the whole family."

NZ Herald, February 25

SPORT

Javier Sotomayor highlights potential of Cuban track and field

Young Cuban athlete Javier Sotomayor has highlighted the potential of Cuban track and field in the face of new international competition, including the Central American Games in Barranquilla, Colombia this year.



Sotomayor told media about the exciting inrush of new and young Cuban athletes in track and field activities such as long jump, discus, pole-vault, shot put and others during 2017.

Sotomayor mentioned male triple jumper Jordan Diaz — winner of the 2017 world junior title in Nairobi, Kenya, with 17.30 metres — who is a man with the highest triple-jump record ever for athletes under 18 years of age.

Other young athletes he mentioned were male long jumper Maikel Masso and female javelin thrower Marisleisys Duarthe.

He praised the good work of Cuban coaches to improve the performance of the young athletes.

Diaz told media he reached the personal best in the third test of the Cuban national team against Kenya, with 17.32 metres and looked forward to being a member of the Cuban representation to the Central American Games.

He regarded his training as ideal to face the challenge in Barranquilla and expressed his wish to bring a gold medal for the people of Cuba if he gets to participate in the 2020 Olympic Games in Japan.

Cuba got 22 gold, 14 silver and 8 bronze medals in the last Central American games in Veracruz, Mexico, what gave it the first place in the medal position list.

Prensa Latina, February 20

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>

