Spain’s agreement to renew ‘dialogue’ marks milestone in relations with Cuba

By Domingo Amuchastegui

Spain’s decision to renew political and cultural dialogue with Cuba after a four-year hiatus marks a major turning point in the two countries’ relationship after more than a decade of almost continuous clashes.

Madrid’s dramatic policy shift followed a visit to Cuba in early April by Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and meetings with Raúl Castro, Carlos Lage, Ricardo Alarcon and other top Communist Party officials.

“We have opened a new chapter in our relations, based on respect and dialogue,” Moratinos told reporters in Havana. “It’s absolutely unthinkable that the Spanish government cannot maintain defend and develop an intense, constructive and communicative policy with the Cuban authorities.”

Declared his Cuban counterpart, Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque: “Spain would not allow, as Cuba does not allow, for someone to impose or give unsolicited advice. Cuba did not accept before, as it does not accept today, the conditions previously established by the European Union for cooperation.”

Those clashes began soon after the inauguration of Spain’s conservative prime minister, José Maria Aznar, in 1996, and reached a climax in 2003, following the firing-squad execution of three ferry hijackers and the imprisonment of 75 dissidents.

In response, the Aznar government introduced in Brussels the well-known “posición común” vis-a-vis Cuba. In accordance with that position, EU member states began snubbing high-level talks with the Castro regime while inviting dissidents to events at their embassy parties and receptions, sparking the so-called “cocktail wars.”

That, in turn, led Havana to freeze ties and reject millions of euros in EU development aid — a situation that prevailed until 2005, when

Nebraska, Delaware latest states to lead trade missions to Cuba; others to follow

By Larry Luxner

From the First State to the Cornhusker State, U.S. governors, port officials and secretaries of agriculture are flocking to Cuba for lucrative food export contracts worth tens of millions of dollars.

In early March, tiny Delaware sent its first-ever trade mission to Havana, followed later in the month by a 31-member Nebraska delegation headed by Gov. Dave Heineman. At press time, Idaho Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter was in Cuba on his first overseas trip since taking office.

What is it about Cuba that makes the forbidden island such a tantalizing market for individual states — even as the White House is doing all it can to discourage such visits?

For one thing, says John Pastor, a trade official at the Delaware Office of Management and Budget, “there’s no risk of not getting paid.”

Under the 2000 Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA), U.S. companies are required to receive payment up-front and in cash from Cuban food purchasing agency Alimport before the goods can leave the dock. In some respects, that makes Cuba the least risky country on Earth to do business with.

For another thing, the Cubans are close to U.S. ports — and they’re eager to buy.

Since TSRA’s passage, Cuba has become the 34th-largest market for U.S. agricultural exports out of 227 countries, importing $341 million in food products, utility poles and other commodities in 2006.

This year, Alimport will buy over $1.6 billion worth of food from the United States and other countries, says Alimport CEO Pedro Alvarez.

Yet Alvarez said procedural rules imposed in 2005 make the U.S. an “unreliable” supplier and have driven Cuba to buy from lower-cost competitors like Brazil, Vietnam and China.

“We’ve been obliged to divert several hundreds of millions of dollars,” Alvarez told foreign reporters Mar. 28 after signing deals to buy
lower-level meetings resumed at the encouragement of Spain’s new Socialist government led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

The following year, Roque visited Madrid and held detailed discussions with Moratinos. At the same time, Spanish companies led by oil major Repsol-YPF were pushing in favor of this new relationship.

Last November, Spanish businesses spoke confidently and with increased optimism at the Havana International Trade Fair (FIHAV).

**DIALOGUE NOT AN OPTION, BUT AN OBLIGATION**

Moratinos insisted that Spain’s new policy towards Cuba is not an option, but an obligation based on the very special historical ties between Madrid and Havana.

In this case, Spain may serve the purpose of activating a dialogue and helping reshape the EU’s common stand or posición común toward Cuba.

During the Moratinos visit — the first by any EU foreign minister since the sanctions were imposed in 2003 — he and Roque signed a document creating a forum for political consultations, which calls for “the promotion and protection of all human rights for everyone and for projects like poultry, protection from discrimination and non-discriminatory treatment of the problem in international forums.”

As a result of this thaw in Spanish-Cuban relations, the following should happen soon:

- The signing of an agreement to protect and promote reciprocal investments.
- A Cuban offer dealing with a settlement of Cuba’s $1 billion debt with Spain. It seems that Spain will consider this offer seriously, and will restore a new line of official credit in support of trade operations and investments.
- A bilateral meeting, to be held shortly, aimed at increasing cultural cooperation, including the return of the Spanish Cultural Center in Havana to Spanish control.
- The center — located along the Malecón — was inaugurated in December 1997 but taken over by Cuban authorities in September 2003, following the freeze in EU-Cuba relations.

“For Spain the reopening of the Spanish Cultural Center is very important,” said Moratinos. “We have decided to open talks and we will see how they develop … naturally with all respect and according to the priorities both countries establish for a continued collaboration on cultural issues and in benefit of Spanish and Cuban culture.”

**MOST DISSIDENT LEADERS BOYCOTT MEETING**

Cuba clearly didn’t want to talk about the issue of political prisoners, which Roque insisted was not even on the agenda.

“They are mercenaries financed by a foreign power to subvert the internal order and to commit acts of violence and terrorism,” Roque told reporters in Havana. “Here there are no prisoners for thinking differently.”

While some prominent dissidents met with Moratinos, most refused out of principle.

Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo called the Moratinos visit “fantastic,” though he told the Spanish news agency EFE that “for the moment, I don’t think he’s going to get anything, not on democracy or on human rights, or on anything.”

Cuba’s best-known internal opposition leader, Oswaldo Payá, accused Spain of currying favor with the Castro regime at the expense of human rights.

“We feel that the actions of the government and the Spanish Embassy in this case have adapted themselves to the conditions of exclusion that the Cuban regime imposes with respect to the dissidents,” Payá said in a communique. “The Spanish Embassy had time to make contact with us, however, it did not make contact with us in recent months — and only when Mr. Moratinos is ending his visit does it tell us to attend a meeting it is holding — when Mr. Moratinos has already left.”

Payá, who won the EU’s 2002 Sakharov Prize for human rights, also denounced the fact that “this visit comes at a time in which the repression and the language of intolerance and the violation of civil rights is growing in Cuba, especially against the democratic opposition, which is completely peaceful.”

Added former political prisoner Vladimir Roa: “Zapatero has ignored all opposition requests to respect human rights. Moratinos came to ensure Spain’s investments in Cuba.”

Miriam Leiva of Damas en Blanco (Ladies in White) was even more outraged.

“The Spanish government has betrayed our prisoners, all those repressed since March...”

**CUBA DEMOCRACY CAUCUS MEMBERS**

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**CUBA-CHINESE RELATIONS CONFUSING**

At the end of March, Chinese and Cuban authorities met in Havana to conclude a review of current bilateral relations and sign several new agreements.

The official Chinese delegation — led by Wei Jianguo, deputy minister of foreign affairs — met with Vice President Carlos Lage Davila, ministers Yadira García (Basic Industry), Jorge Luis Sierra (Transportation) and Felipe Pérez Roque (Foreign Affairs).

Trade figures indicated an enormous leap, from roughly $900 million in 2005 to $1.8 billion in 2006, with China enjoying a substantial trade surplus.

Joint ventures are slowly expanding every year. Current projects include two biotech factories, one ophthalmology hospital and a hotel being built for the 2008 Olympics.

A more complex neuroengineering center will soon be constructed, and Chinese investments in Cuban oil exploration will increase.

In addition, a joint investment group has been established to invest in specific projects in IT, electronics and telecommunications. This results from previous talks held in Beijing by Ramiro Valdése Menéndez, Cuba’s minister of IT and communications.

Chinese funding has also been made available for projects like poultry; protection from crop diseases, new mini-hydroelectrical power plants and rice production.

Other contracts include one for the delivery of Cuban sugar to China during 2007.

Prior to this meeting in Havana, a series of high-level Chinese delegations — including military delegations — visited Cuba between December and March. Overall, bilateral relations were characterized by Wei Jianguo as “progressing very well.” He promised that those ties would be deepened and expanded.

But then, something spoiled the party.

For the first time, after several years of blurry references, Marta Lomas, Cuba’s minister of investments and cooperation, finally admitted that a promised Chinese investment of $500 million in a Holguín nickel refinery would be definitely cancelled. The project will instead be financed by Venezuela.

Not a word was said about China’s intent to become the largest investor in the San Felipe nickel project in Camagüey province, but the consensus among experts was that this too, was cancelled.

The reason wasn’t disclosed by Cuban or Chinese officials, but obviously this is bad news for Cuban authorities — especially now that nickel has become Cuba’s top source of foreign exchange.

It is an important issue that needs clarification. In the meantime, Cuba has explicitly promised to Wei that the island will continue to supply nickel to its Chinese partners.
Rent a cellphone in Cuba? If you’re a foreigner, it’s easy

BY ANDY GOLDMAN

Cuba is one of the most restrictive countries in the world regarding wireless phone usage for its own citizens, but when it comes to foreigners, getting a Cuban cellphone number is straightforward and fast.

Government-owned monopoly Cubacel has an office in the arrivals hall of Havana’s José Martí International Airport. SIM cards allowing you to use your 900 MHz (Non-U.S.) GSM phone with a Cuban phone number can be purchased for CUC 6.00 per day (SIM card not included). Phone equipment and accessories such as chargers and headphones can also be purchased from the office, and 900 MHz GSM phones can rented for CUC 6.00 per day (SIM card not included).

CHECK YOUR NETWORK FIRST

It should be pointed out that mobile phones in Cuba are not accepted dollars as payment, even though the SIM cards are priced in dollars.

Actual prices come to 3.00 convertible pesos (CUC) per day, or 110.00 CUC for the permanent card, which must be recharged at least once every 60 days or it will expire, and cannot be reactivated.

Per-minute calling between Cuba and the United States.

International calls are billed at the following per-minute rates, regardless of time of day or night: United States ($2.70); rest of North America ($2.45); South America ($3.40); Central America ($4.45); rest of the world ($5.85).

Calls dialing internationally from both mobile phones and pay phones complain that Cuban billing timers seemed to run fast, making calls even more expensive.

Domestic text messages are 16¢ each. International text messages are $1.00 each. Text messages cannot be sent to or received between Cuba and the United States.

Cubacel’s network coverage is good, even in rural areas. In addition to high usage rates, callers to Cuba need to be aware that if the person they are calling does not answer the phone after several rings the call is diverted and answered. The person who answers the call says “Hola” and then tries to keep the caller on the phone, thus incurring additional charges. One tactic is to tell the caller, “Hold on, they’ll be back” or to get the caller to hang up by saying “They asked that you call back in a few minutes.”

Likewise, European tourists often complain that they turned on their mobile phones in Cuba to receive text messages but never answered a single call. Yet when they arrived back home, they received bills of hundreds of dollars because their calls had been diverted and answered.

Washington-based Andy Goldman is a first-time contributor to CubaNews. He recently moved back to the United States after 15 years designing and administering social programs for economically disadvantaged people in Africa.

Spain — FROM PAGE 2

2003,” she said. “If Moratinos talks before the EU, he will do so on behalf of the Cuban government, and not in the name of the Cuban people ... I think the Spanish government should apologize for this humiliation and these agreements with a government which absolutely ignores human rights.”

Not everyone in Spain was happy with the Moratinos visit either. Angel Acebes, secretary-general of the opposition Popular Party, called the visit “an authentic shame” for Spain because Moratinos evaded the issue of the 300 political prisoners held in Cuban jails.

European nations led by the Czech Republic and Poland are now trying to make Germany the new anti-Castro champion within the EU — and German authorities are said to be considering a proposal of “conditional changes” if Cuba adopts certain reforms.

Cuban authorities were extremely alarmed about this new development that would take away Spanish leadership within the EU in matters concerning Cuba and Latin America at large. On the other hand, Zapatero’s government is not ready to admit this maneuvering and seeks to outsmart the Germans and Czechs.

Some analysts say Spain has taken a calculated risk by accepting current costs — alienating some of its EU partners, the U.S. and most of Cuba’s dissidents — in exchange for future prospects.

Larry Luxner contributed to this story.
Fresh produce prices at a Havana peso market.

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*prices compiled in late March by our Havana correspondent

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$60 million worth of wheat, pork and soybeans from Nebraska farmers.

“U.S. companies, which are efficient, are in many cases unreliable for us, because you don’t know when a shipment is going to be held up,” Alvarez complained.

Heineman brought along officials from Louis Dreyfus, Farmland Foods and other companies hoping to land wheat, corn and soybean contracts with Alimport.

“Despite the challenges between our countries, we hope to increase the number of Nebraskan products sold here,” said Heineman, a Republican.

“I’ve been here three times now, probably more than any of the 50 governors, I can assure you. This has been a very significant and very meaningful relationship for our state. It’s been a terrific opportunity for us to look at an expanded relationship. That’s why we’re down here again.”

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IDAHO**

A fellow Republican, Gov. Otter of Idaho, is now in Havana, accompanied by 35 agribusiness executives with similar intentions.

Both Otter and Idaho Sen. Larry Craig are outspoken in their opposition to the U.S. embargo against Cuba; in 2003, then-Rep. Otter told the Times-News of Twin Falls that the embargo was an impediment to America’s weapons of capitalism.

“If we wanted to bomb Cuba,” he said at the time, “we’d be better off dropping Sears Roebuck catalogs out of the back of a plane.”

Last year, according to the Times-News, Idaho exported $22,613 worth of frozen foods to Cuba, as a result of Otter’s initial trips to the island as a congressman.

But that was only a drop in the bucket compared to the $731.5 million worth of potatoes and other food Idaho sold to China in 2006.

“Obviously he wants to open up markets to Idaho products into that communist country,” said Otter spokesman Jon Hanian. “It’s limited, and it’s very tightly controlled. Primarily we’re looking at agricultural goods, timber products, and medical supplies — anything from bandages to generic drugs.”

**DELAWARE SENDS FIRST MISSION TO CUBA**

Delaware, the second-smallest state in the nation, wants to get in on the game too.

Alimport is interested in buying frozen poultry, apples, wheat, potatoes and soybeans from Delaware, according to Rebecca Faber, executive director of World Trade Center Delaware in Wilmington.

“We’re a small state, but we have one of the largest densities of chickens per-capita in the nation,” Faber told CubaNews. “We have a lot of small farmers, and we’d like to pull them together in a cooperative effort.”

Delaware’s 13-member delegation, which spent three days in Havana, was led by Agriculture Secretary Michael Scuse and included executives from Perdue Farms, Tyson Foods and Diamond State Port Corp., which manages the Port of Wilmington.

That port can handle shipments of 5,000 to 10,000 tons of frozen chicken a month depending on the season, according to Tom Keefer, deputy executive director of Diamond State Port Corp. It can also handle containers of wheat and other grains, and is already receiving dozens of vessels year-round from Central and South America laden with bananas, grapes and other fruits.

Trade with Cuba would allow some of these ships, which often return to South America empty, to carry products to Cuba.

“There is more and more interest, and we believe that there are some real possibilities for some Delaware products to be sold into Cuba,” Scuse told the News Journal of Newcastle.

Scuse added that he’s talking to some farmers about sending a container of wheat to Cuba. The state sells most of its 45,000 acres of wheat to mills in Pennsylvania. But most of those mills are at capacity and farmers don’t have nearby markets to sell the wheat.

**TEXAS COULD BENEFIT FROM CUBA TRADE TIES**

If Cuba represents such big trade opportunities for Delaware, imagine what the island can do for Texas — the largest state in size (excluding Alaska) and the nation’s No. 3 state in population.

Using a share of production method, Texas exports of farm products to Cuba have come to $113 million since December 2001, according to Parr Rosson of Texas A&M University in College Station.

“Texas agribusinesses are well-positioned to respond to the expanding Cuban market due to quick delivery time from Texas ports, the availability of high-quality products, and competitive pricing,” said Rosson.

During 2006, Texas exports to Cuba were valued at $22.3 million — down from the $40 million range in 2004 and 2005.

“Two important reasons for this decrease,” said Rosson, “is that the U.S. has exported increasing amounts of soybeans and soybean products, of which Texas has an extremely small share of U.S. production, and a decrease in exports of dry milk, which is coming mainly from Texas.”

In 2005, the Lone Star State’s share of total food exports to Cuba by value was 11.46%, up from 10.17% in 2004 and 2.09% in 2003. But last year, that tumbled to 6.54%, says Rosson.

On the other hand, Texas is a major producer of chicken and rice — two of the top U.S. agricultural exports to Cuba.

Rice farmer Curt Mowery, who’s seen the area cultivated with Texas rice shrink from 500,000 acres in the mid-1970s to less than 150,000 acres today, told the Dallas Morning News he blames the decline on urban sprawl, low commodity prices, high farming costs and tighter water supplies.

“Cuba could literally buy 100% of our rice crop and part of Louisiana’s, too,” said Mowery of Sandy Point, about 40 miles south of Houston. “You just can’t lose a market, particularly nowadays.”

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LET’S GO GROCERY SHOPPING

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Fresh produce prices at a Havana peso market.
DISSIDENTS FORM NEW GROUP TO FREE PRISONERS

A newly organized dissident coalition in Cuba has launched a campaign to free political prisoners, promising to take its fight worldwide.

Agence France-Presse reported Mar. 29 that the National Constitutionalist Alliance groups 225 organizations with a total of 3,000 members.

The group’s director, Angel Polanco, told AFP the campaign would seek to gather 250,000 signatures and pass them to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

He also said that if the Cuban government rejects the request, the group would call for a day of peaceful civil disobedience across Cuba, something that has never happened in almost half a century of communist rule.

The outlawed but officially tolerated Human Rights and National Reconciliation Commission, run by dissident Elizardo Sánchez, says there were 283 political prisoners at the end of 2006 — 50 fewer than the previous year.

Since Fidel Castro’s surgery eight months ago, dissidents have become increasingly vocal, distributing statements to foreign media, politicians, governments and human rights groups.

EXPERTS QUESTION U.S. SPYING CAPABILITY

As Fidel Castro appears to be growing more active, and U.S. reports that he has cancer increasingly seem off the mark, Cuba watchers wonder just how much American spies know about what’s happening on the island, the Miami Herald reported Apr. 8.

The U.S. intelligence community — despite its spy satellites and ships — is too shellshocked from past intelligence setbacks on Cuba and the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction debacle to aggressively spy on the island.

Washington, as a result, is now largely ignorant of what is happening within Cuba’s inner circles as power is transferred from Fidel to Raúl.

Nearly a dozen people knowledgeable about U.S. intelligence on Cuba — all of whom spoke to the Herald on condition of anonymity to discuss classified materials — painted a mixed picture of the capability to spy on the island.

U.S. spy satellites and ships can monitor things like troop movements and largely civilian phone conversations, said one retired intelligence official. Occasional senior defectors can provide some insight into Cuba’s inner workings.

One person with access to U.S. intelligence materials on Cuba said Washington has a “pretty good” understanding of public sentiment in Cuba, thanks to interviews with arriving migrants and contacts with Cuban NGOs.

But there’s little credible information on events at the top levels of the government, the armed forces and security services, the person added.

Cuban counterintelligence’s tight monitoring of U.S. diplomats in Havana makes it difficult for them to meet privately with top Cuban officials.

According to the Herald, “it is impossible to know the full extent of U.S. intelligence capabilities on Cuba. Even senior government officials may not have access to details such as whether U.S. spies are operating in Havana or if Washington is listening to Fidel’s telephone chatter.”

“IT WAS PRESIDENT BUSH HIMSELF WHO HAS IGNORED THE CRIMINAL AND TERRORIST CHARACTER OF THE ACCUSED. [POSDADA] WAS PROTECTED BY CHARGING HIM ONLY WITH BREAKING IMMIGRATION LAWS. NOT A SINGLE WORD HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT HIS COUNTLESS VICTIMS, HIS BOMB ATTACKS ON TOURIST FACILITIES IN RECENT YEARS OR DOZENS OF HIS PLOTS FINANCED BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO ELIMINATE ME PHYSICALLY.”

— Fidel Castro, writing Apr. 10 in Granma, in an article implying that a decision by a U.S. judge to free militant exile and former CIA operative Luis Posada Carriles on bail could only have resulted from instructions by the White House.

“They are grabbing at straws. It is an act of desperation by the government. It’s just another attempt to keep him in jail.”

— Arturo Hernández, a defense attorney for the 79-year-old Posada. The U.S. government is trying to prevent Posada’s court-ordered release before his trial on immigration fraud charges in federal court in Texas.

“This is an individual with a long history of terrorism. He is known as the Osama bin Laden of Latin America. I cannot imagine that a U.S. judge would determine that he is not a danger to the community and release him.”

— José Pertierra, the Washington attorney representing Venezuela in its extradition case against Posada, speaking to an organization known as FreetheFive.org.

“The bill that Congressman [Charlie] Rangel has to allow travel for all Americans of any category has at this moment about 80 co-sponsors. That’s a high level of support. Our wish, of course, would be for that to pass — if not as an independent bill then at least as an amendment onto another important bill that would make it difficult for the president to veto.”

— Dagoberto Rodríguez, chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, in a lengthy interview published Apr. 7 in the Tampa Tribune.

“We couldn’t be happier. In the old apartment we had seven people with two bedrooms and it was falling down. Here, we have three bedrooms for four people, and best of all, we are still in Old Havana.”

— Belkys Collaza, 39, quoted by the Miami Herald in a Mar. 21 story on a government program to relocate residents of decaying buildings to new apartments in Old Havana, whose 66,000 people are crammed into a 1.5 sq-mile area.

“We always knew the biggest challenge of socialism is to instill in young people a communist conscience and rejection of capitalism, without having lived in it, without having seen the moral damage it produces.”

— Vice President Carlos Lage, speaking Apr. 4 at Havana’s Karl Marx Theater on the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Youth Union.

“It’s a whole new ballgame, no pun intended. This absolutely represents a new extreme. It’s beyond just smuggling for profit. This is smuggling for super profit, and I would represent to you that this is absolutely more profitable than smuggling drugs.”

— Former U.S. attorney Guy Lewis, on the trial of a sports agent accused of smuggling Cuban baseball players to Florida in speedboats piloted by a drug dealer.

“When I arrived, this street was empty. Now the flavor is completely Chinese. I could be in my own country.”

— Tao Jin Rong, 66, who came to Cuba from Shanghai in 1995, the year Fidel Castro first visited China. Tao was quoted in an Apr. 3 story by Reuters on Havana’s bustling Chinatown.

“As members of the new majority in the United States Congress, we write today to express our concern with the recent expulsion of three veteran foreign journalists from Cuba, as well as the continued restriction and abuse of native journalists in Cuba.”

— Mar. 28 letter to the Cuban Interests Section signed by 13 Democrats, including several House members who oppose the embargo, following the expulsion of Chicago Tribune correspondent Gary Marx, César González Calero of Mexico’s El Universal and BBC’s Stephen Gibbs.
Cuba sees wind power as potential key energy source

**BY PATRICIA GROGGS / INTER PRESS SERVICE**

Cuba is interested in developing wind power and other renewable energy sources to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels for generating electricity, without setting aside its hopes for new oil finds.

“The main thing is to diversify energy sources. There is no single solution,” said wind energy expert Conrado Moreno, of the Renewable Energy Technologies Study Center at the José Antonio Echevarría Higher Polytechnic Institute in Havana.

Wind power could become the 2nd-most important energy source in the country, Moreno said, although he preferred not to describe its potential in precise figures, as it is still the subject of research.

Until the 1990s, hardly anyone in Cuba was talking about wind energy, except academic circles and a few professionals. “They called us dreamers, and ... the prevailing opinion was that there wasn’t enough wind here to generate electricity,” Moreno said.

But high oil prices and the power crisis of 2004, which caused frequent and extensive blackouts, brought about a comprehensive assessment which led to a change of focus that opened the way to designing a strategy for harnessing wind power.

The virtual collapse of the power grid was due to obsolescence and deterioration of the thermoelectric power stations, and a total breakdown at the Guiteras plant, the main electricity station in the country.

The wind prospecting program began in 1991, and a map of the island was produced showing the most promising sites for wind farms. Anemometers (wind speed indicators) have been placed at these sites to measure and record their potential.

A model wind farm producing 0.45 MW of electricity was installed in 1999, in Turiguano, in the province of Ciego de Ávila, 434 kms east of Havana. This February, a larger wind farm was inaugurated on Isla de la Juventud.

The six French-made wind turbines that are now part of the landscape on the Isle of Youth has a capacity of 1.65 MW of electricity, close to 10% of peak hour demand in this municipality southwest of Cuba.

A third wind farm, with six wind turbines and a capacity of 5.1 MW, is expected to come onstream in the first half of this year in Gibara, located on the coast north of Holguin, 689 kms east of the capital.

Another wind farm is planned for the same area, which will raise the total capacity at Gibara to 9.5 MW. This output will be fed into the national grid on an experimental basis.

One of the greatest advantages of windpower (apart from its fuel being cost-free) is that it’s non-polluting. According to the experts, each kw generated by wind power, rather than by a thermal power station, saves one kg of carbon dioxide emissions from being released-house gases that cause global warming.

However, environmentalists are concerned that the wind turbines could harm migrating birds. “The environmental impact studies carried out before a wind farm is installed include analysis of this and many other aspects. For instance, it’s important not to interfere with communications,” Moreno said.

Other experts have pointed out the advantage that wind turbines can be placed on land unsuitable for other purposes, like deserts, along the coastline, or arid slopes too steep for agriculture. They can also occupy land in productive use, such as pastures or low-growing crops like wheat, maize, potatoes or beetroot.

Wind energy is shaping up as one of the fastest growing energy sources in the world today. According to statistics from the World Wind Energy Association (WWEA), installed wind power capacity grew 10-fold between 1997 and 2006.

The WWEA said that Brazil was the country where wind power grew most rapidly during 2006. By adding 208 MW of installed capacity, Brazil increased its wind energy capacity seven-fold in just one year.

Germany is the largest wind power producer in the world, with a capacity of 20,622 MW, followed by Spain and the United States, with over 11,000 MW each.

Havana will be hosting a May 22–25 international conference on renewable energy, at which the possibilities for cooperation in this field will be analyzed.

Cuba also generates electricity from sugarcane biomass (bagasse), from small hydroelectric stations, and from photovoltaic cells which use light from the sun. But power generation remains primarily dependent on fossil fuels.

In 2007, 39 new wells will be drilled in areas of Cuba where oil has already been found. Crude production is expected to climb by 100,000 tons. Cuba produced about 3.9 million tons of oil and gas in 2006, equivalent to nearly half of its domestic consumption needs. The rest is imported.

A substantial increase in the quantity and quality of crude depends on future finds in the Cuban sector of the Gulf of Mexico, where 59 blocks have been put out to tender. So far only 16 blocks have been taken up, and negotiations are under way for another eight.
‘True Believer’ leaves many questions unanswered

BY PHILIP PETERS

The 16-year career of Ana Belén Montés as a Cuban intelligence agent came to a prosaic end the morning of Sept. 21, 2001. Her supervisor at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), where she was the top Cuba analyst, directed her to a conference room to discuss a fictitious problem involving one of her subordinates.

FBI agents were waiting there. Within 20 minutes, Montés was departing in handcuffs after hearing her Miranda rights and declining to divulge any part of her story until she saw a lawyer.

In time, she did tell her story to the government, unrepentantly. She pleaded guilty in 2002 to a single count of conspiracy to commit espionage, agreed to cooperate with investigators, and received a 25-year prison sentence.

She told the judge that she worked for Cuba — without compensation — out of a sense of obligation “to help the island defend itself from our efforts to impose our values and our political system on it … I did what I thought right to counter a grave injustice.”

Happily for the government, there was no trial and no spilling of secrets that could further harm U.S. security or embarrass DIA.

Unhappily for those of us who knew her and wanted to know how she was recruited and how she served the Cubans, that story is known only to the U.S. investigators who compiled a classified study of this major intelligence debacle.

Scott W. Carmichael, the DIA investigator who pursued the Montés case from initial suspicion to arrest, has now written the first account of the Ana Montés story from within the government.

“True Believer: Inside the Investigation and Capture of Ana Montés, Cuba’s Master Spy” (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 2007, 179 pages) puts the reader inside the disquieted mind of the professional counter-intelligence officer, someone paid to suspect the worst about his colleagues.

Carmichael writes breezily, with humor and a good dose of self-deprecation. He evinces a deep patriotism, dedication to his profession, and great fairness in carrying it out.

Carmichael first interviewed Montés in 1996 after one of her colleagues reported suspicious behavior to him. The interview came to naught, but Carmichael’s suspicions were revived in 2000 when he learned that the FBI was seeking to identify a Cuban agent in the U.S. government. At that time, agents and electronic surveillance directed at Cuba were being thwarted so consistently that it seemed that someone was tipping the Cubans off.

Carmichael examined the FBI’s profile of the unknown Cuban mole and found, bit by bit, that Montés fit the profile. But frustratingly, this turning point in his narrative lacks detail. Both the FBI profile and Carmichael’s clues remain secret.

“True Believer” goes on to describe Carmichael’s ultimately successful effort to convince the FBI to focus on Montés. Here again, readers learn about Carmichael’s meetings, phone calls, memos, and personal worries — but nothing about their substance.

With the FBI on board for a full investigation, Carmichael played a key role. He ensured that Montés’ colleagues were kept in the dark, thwarted her temporary assignment to another agency, and choreographed a series of diversions of Montés and her colleagues that allowed investigators to pluck her tote bag from her workstation and search it. Inside was an investigative prize: the codes she used to communicate with her Cuban handlers.

Carmichael examined Montés’ desk one night during the investigation and found that it matched her taciturn personality: It was orderly and devoid of personal items with the exception of a Shakespeare couplet, written in script and pinned to the wall:

“The king hath note of all that they intend by interceptions which they dream not of.”

To Montés’ colleagues, this citation from Henry V might have indicated pride in their profession; to Montés, it seems the king was Fidel Castro and the “interceptions” her own.

This delicious detail and a few others are overshadowed, however, by Carmichael’s apparent decision not to address — or his inability to do so, due to DIA restrictions — the burning questions that remain in the Ana Montés case.

How did Montés come to spy for Cuba? Carmichael provides just one sentence indicating that she was recruited before her DIA career, while she was working at the Justice Department and attending graduate school at night.

What about the damage Montés caused to U.S. national security? Here, except for a brief indication that Montés raided a database shared by U.S. intelligence agencies and passed information to Cuba, Carmichael provides less information than is already in the public domain.

In a court affidavit, the FBI affirmed that Montés alerted Cuba to the arrival of a U.S. agent, and a message from Cuban state security found on her laptop reported that when the agent arrived, “we were waiting here for him with open arms.” She also told Cuba when U.S. intelligence spotted weapons in Cuba, and relayed details of a 1996 war game exercise.

Carmichael lists cases where Montés, with her wide access to secrets, could have betrayed classified information of military value: the 1990 U.S. military action in Panama, the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua, a 1987 guerrilla attack on a Salvadoran military base in which an American soldier was killed, the liberation of Kuwait. But Carmichael writes that he does not know if she did so.

Finally, did Montés disinform U.S. policymakers by skewing her analysis of Cuban capabilities and intentions?

Here, Carmichael provides only conjecture. He writes that he conducted no formal interviews for his book, but he might have profited from interviewing the CIA’s former top Latin America analyst, Brian Latell.

Montés, Latell writes in his book “After Fidel,” accepted Cuba’s explanation that the conviction of senior military officers in 1989 was due to drug trafficking. Latell believed it was a purge of political rivals.

Latell also writes that in 1993, contrary to evidence available at the time, Montés argued that the Cuban military desired closer relations with the United States.

As for Cuban capabilities, the U.S. government seems to have answered the question with regard to two key issues: Cuba’s military strength and its possible development of biological weapons. Montés worked on a famous 1998 unclassified Pentagon report that called Cuba’s military capability “residual” and “defensive” and its threat “negligible.”

That report has not been updated, even though a less benign assessment would suit the Bush administration’s political interests.

And U.S. intelligence agencies have downgraded their assessment of bioweapons activity in Cuba, concluding unanimously in 2005 that it is “unclear whether Cuba has an active offensive biological warfare effort now, or even had one in the past.”

The full story of how Ana Montés betrayed her country remains to be told, either through declassification of the intelligence community’s own damage assessment, or through publication of a book other than the personal investigative story contained in “True Believer.”

Philip Peters is vice-president of the Lexington Institute in Arlington, Va., and a prominent analyst on Cuban affairs who was profiled in the November 2006 issue of CubaNews. He wrote this book review exclusively for CubaNews.

Note new mailing address!

Luxner News Inc., which publishes this newsletter, has a new mailing address: PO Box 1345, Wheaton, MD 20915. Our phone numbers are (301) 452-1105 and (301) 933-3552, and the new fax number is (301) 949-0965. Our e-mail address is still larry@cubanews.com. Please make a note of these changes for your files.
Sgt. Carlos Lazo: A soldier’s struggle to lift travel ban

BY LARRY LUXNER

Carlos Lazo never expected to become a war hero — or, for that matter, a symbol in the battle to end the travel ban to Cuba.

But he did, and now the Iraqi War veteran has dedicated virtually all his free time to fixing what he calls a monumental injustice.

“I’m fighting for the right of all Americans to go to Cuba,” Lazo told CubaNews during a two-hour interview in Washington last month.

“I would be very ungrateful if I said, ‘please make a bill for Cuban-Americans to go there whenever we want, but no one else,’ I’m not in a position to deny the people who welcomed me here that right.”

Born in 1965 to a housewife and a cigarmaker, Lazo was raised like any other Cuban child, growing up in the Havana suburb of Playa. In fact, nothing much exciting happened in Lazo’s life until the moonless night in 1988 when he and a friend attempted to flee Cuba in a rickety wooden boat.

“We spent three days in the water,” the 42-year-old recalled as if it happened yesterday. “Actually, we were dying and were saved by the Cuban Coast Guard. They delivered us to the police, and they sent me to jail for a year.”

In 1992, Lazo tried again — using a stronger boat rigged with the engine of a 1951 Champlain and a friend attempted to flee Cuba in a rickety wooden boat.

“All of them were rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard and allowed to stay in South Florida. Lazo lived in Hialeah with his mother until 1998, when he resettled in Seattle and joined the National Guard out of a sense of obligation.

“I was already 35 and working as a counselor for the mentally disabled in Washington state,” he said. “I learned more English in six months in Seattle than I did in six years in Miami.”

NASTY SURPRISE AT MIAMI AIRPORT

During this period, Lazo would visit Cuba once a year — sometimes more than that — spending as much time as possible with his two sons from a previous marriage, Carlos Manuel and Carlos Rafael.

“I visited Cuba frequently, and had a very good relationship with my ex-wife’s family,” he said. “I was sending about $100 a month, and the whole family was eating with that $100. At that time, $100 there was like $1,000 here.”

Lazo’s last visit to Cuba was in April 2003. In November of that year, his Washington National Guard unit was deployed to Iraq, and he was sent to Camp Anaconda, a military base 40 miles north of Baghdad.

Lazo, who had been trained as a combat medic, got a job taking care of wounded Iraqis — both civilians and captured insurgents. In time, he learned to speak Arabic fluently.

Lazo’s two-week leave finally came in June 2004.

“I returned to the U.S., and the first thing I wanted to do was go to Cuba. I was in a war zone and wanted to see my sons, and the kids wanted to see me. But I knew that new restrictions were about to take effect on July 1, so two or three days before they went into effect, I flew to Miami for my flight to Havana.”

The soldier was in for a rude awakening.

“When I got to Miami Airport, I found out the Bush administration was not letting passengers board the plane because they were afraid the people wouldn’t come back on time,” he said. “It wasn’t just me, it was everybody. I asked what happened, and was told ‘Treasury is not letting people board the plane. The flight is leaving empty and they’ll be picking up passengers in Havana.’

“I was so upset,” Lazo recalled. “There was a TV reporter from Channel 51, so I took out my ID showing I was in the army. I told them that because of the politics of this administration, I couldn’t embrace my children, and that I would never vote for George Bush.”

When he got back to Iraq in July, Lazo made a videotape complaining about his predicament and sent to members of Congress. It eventually made its way onto MSNBC, and from there, his story quickly spread.

Lazo appeared on TV many times — from talk shows to news programs — and was interviewed by the Miami Herald, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times.

BRAVERY DIDN’T HELP WIN TRAVEL WAIVER

In late 2004, Lazo and 12 other medics were sent to Fallujah to support a contingent of Marines battling insurgents.

“We were so close that our own mortars were killing Marines. I was in the ambulance, driving around dead kids in the street, picking up soldiers. The first day, we had 56 casualties,” he said. “We rescued people under fire while being attacked by RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades]. I remember crying in that ambulance, driving and in tears while holding the hand of a dying soldier the age of my son.”

For his bravery, Lazo was awarded a Bronze Star. But it didn’t bring the soldier any closer to his goal of visiting his boys in Havana.

“The administration refused to give me a waiver, not even to go to Cuba for 24 hours. Then some congressmen started suggesting that to resolve the problem, I could bring the kids over here. They talked to the State Department, and then my kids were called to the U.S. Interests Section in Havana.”

In July 2005, the State Department took the unusual step of granting Lazo’s sons expedited U.S. visas so the boys could join their father in Seattle. They eventually did, but if the White House’s intent was to shut Lazo up, as many critics have charged, the attempt didn’t work.

SOLDIER CONTINUES LOBBYING ON THE HILL

Lazo has since met with more than 50 members of Congress — Democrats and Republicans, lawmakers who favor relaxing the travel ban and those who want to keep the ban in place. He’s been encouraged in this effort by such groups as the Center for International Policy and the Center for Democracy in the Americas’ Freedom to Travel campaign.

“I left Cuba for various reasons, first of all because I had been a prisoner,” he said. “When I came out of jail, I couldn’t find a job. I felt discriminated against, but there were other reasons as well. I wanted to have a better life, to live in freedom, and in better economic conditions. But that didn’t mean I would forget about my family.”

He added: “They say this is a way to keep dollars from the dictatorship, to bring down Fidel, but it won’t. Of course not. It won’t modify Cuban society or bring down the Cuban government at all. But I don’t think the people who implemented this cruelty even believe it themselves.”

Orlando bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the U.S. Bishops’ committee on international relations, praised lawmakers like Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ), Bill Delahunt (D-MA) and Char-
escaped with Batista. These people don't want to go back. They were professionals, businessmen, people with money who lost everything in Cuba. When I was born, the revolution was already there. I was the son of a cigarmaker.”

Yet Lazo says the Díaz-Balart brothers and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) can't change their minds now “because they don’t want to look like losers.”

“They made a mistake implementing this cruelty. The majority of people in Miami say they are against it. Even people supporting the travel ban for all other Americans say this family restriction is wrong.”

In fact, he told us, “older people come up to me in the street and say to me, ‘I hate Castro, but this thing with the family [restrictions] es una mierda.’”

Lazo adds: “You cannot forget the Miami radio factor. This small, vocal group of fanatics intimidate people. They control the media. People are afraid to speak out. It’s hard for me the Cuban government. If they say they’re for democracy, I’m for that too. I cannot be concerned about what other people think.”

Yet Lazo — who plans to return to Iraq when his unit is redeployed there, probably in 2008 or 2009 — declined to give his own opinions on the embargo itself.

“Some people try to drag me into supporting the lifting of the embargo against Cuba. I don’t even want to comment on that. I don’t want the cause of love which I’m fighting for to be contaminated with any other cause.”

—— SGT. CARLOS LAZO

Sgt. Carlos Lazo takes photos while peering from the top of an armored personnel carrier in Fallujah (upper left); receives a Bronze Star from Congressman Jim McDermott in Seattle (lower left); poses in Balad, Iraq, with army truck sporting a Cuban flag (above).
Cuba's natural wonders: The marine terraces at Maisí

BY ARMANDO H. PORTELA

It took us a while — three hungry Cuban geographers well used to exploring the island — to understand what we were reading at that small eatery’s menu board: “Mabinga con fongo o bacón herido.” “What!” we said incredulously, trying to decipher the meaning of the sign. Then a local lady came to the rescue.

“It’s shredded horse meat garnished with mashed green bananas, or with boiled ripe red banana,” she said.

We were at La Asunción, in Maisí, at the eastern tip of Cuba — 1,250 kms from Cuba’s western tip at Pinar del Río province, and the closest you can get to another world within the island, except for the tourist enclaves at Varadero or Cayo Coco.

Maisí is an exotic land of dense rainforest and exuberant coffee plantations in the fresh highlands, transitioning to dry brushes and cactus in the lowland flats. Besides the different landscapes, the people of Maisí have their own accent when speaking Spanish, and as we learned, their own habits and foods.

We came to that remote corner in the early 1980s to measure and sample one of the world’s most unusual geological features: the spectacular and relatively unknown marine terraces of Maisí.

Geographers and geologists, zoologists and botanists, anthropologists and archaeologists have visited the region for decades to explore and collect samples.

Maisí has consistently yielded new species of plants and animals (the endangered Polymita picta, a colorful snail, being one of the better known), abundant aborigine artifacts and an extraordinary blueprint of the unstable earth’s crust at one of its most dynamic places.

Carved out in hard limestone from Middle to Upper Miocene closest to the sea level and Cretaceous marble in the highlands, the terraces at Maisí result from millions of years of marine abrasion over a constantly changing coastline on a background of an oscillating sea level and powerful tectonic upraises.

At least two dozen terraces can be delineated as a gigantic stairway rising northwest from the sea level between Punta Negra and the Ovando Bay to nearly 500 meters (1,640 feet) at the villages of El Diamante and Los Llanos.

The entire staircase leans to the north, as the tectonic uplifts are more intense closer to the Caribbean Sea. In consequence, the number of terraces and their altitude diminish in the direction to the Atlantic Ocean. There are 14 steps west of Maisí point and fewer close to the mouth of the Yumurí river.

The terraces are not smooth, however. Some are broken by recent faults, others show colossal scars probably resulting from ancient earthquakes; still others are carved by deep river canyons that expose their internal structure. Lithology and climate combine to preserve the upper and older steps — probably as old as Early Pliocene — as fairly flat surfaces bordered by high step cliffs, while the lower terraces look more like ample flat plains.

The 35,000 people of Maisí are dispersed throughout small villages peppered in the highest, freshest and more exuberant terraces devoted to coffee plantations. The town of La Máquina, with some 3,000 souls, is the administrative center.

Ironically, Maisí is not listed as a preserved landscape in the extensive Cuban system of protected territories, although it deserves to be eventually guarded as a unique place in the island’s geography.

This is the first in a series of occasional articles on Cuba’s natural wonders by Miami-based cartographer Armando H. Portela, who has a Ph.D. in geography from the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Havana.

Energas generates 15% of Cuba’s power

Energas, a joint venture between Canada’s Sherritt International and two Cuban state entities, is using the natural gas collected during the extraction of petroleum to generate 15% of the electricity consumed by Cuba, to provide energy for cooking to 1 million people and to reduce environmental pollution, reports the Spanish news agency EFE.

Top project officials told reporters about the effort during a Mar. 14 tour through Cuba’s northwest exploration and oil production zone. Energas, created in 1998, is owned one-third each by Sherritt, Cuba’s Unión Electrica and Cubapetroleo (CUPET), which handles gas production and distributor to consumers.

The entity processes the gas extracted along with crude oil, removing sulfur and naphtha, and then burns the now-clean and non-polluting gas in turbines to produce electricity.

Energas has three gas production plants in Cuba’s so-called Northern Heavy Crude Strip, which runs for some 150 kms (93 miles) along the coast between Havana and Matanzas, said deputy general manager Alberto Villalonga.

The project includes investment of $200 million, and the three plants generate 400 MW of electricity, with production set to reach 525 MW by the end of 2008 during its final development phase.

Villalonga told reporters that the process allows Cuba to use the gas issuing from the oil wellheads as an alternative source of energy, with the goal of reducing so-called greenhouse gases resulting from the burning of petroleum and its associated products.

The three plants are located at Boca de Jaruco, Puerto Escondido and the beach resort of Varadero. After the gas is cleaned, it’s prepared for two purposes: burning it to generate power and providing 300,000 cubic meters (33.5 million cubic feet) a day of natural gas to be used for cooking by 250,000 households in Havana.
A list of 42 recently published scholarly articles on Cuba

As a service to our readers, CubaNews offers you this list of recent scholarly articles on Cuba—in no particular order. Each listing includes title, author, name of periodical, date of publication and page numbers:


Cuba-Polisario link analyzed

A report by the University of Miami’s Cuba Transition Project probed the alleged link between al-Qaeda and Cuban support of guerrillas in the Western Sahara.

The report, which warns of Islamic terror groups in North Africa, looks at Castro’s backing of the Polisario Front, which Morocco accuses of working with a group calling itself “al-Qaeda in the Maghreb.” The Polisario, whose aim is to wrest control of the Spanish Sahara from Morocco, has long maintained close ties with Cuba.

The full report can be downloaded at: http://ctp.iccas.miami.edu/main.htm.
BUSINESS BRIEFS

CUBA EXPLORES INVESTMENT IN GOLD MINING

Gold prices have recovered in the international market since 2002 and with it the profitability of gold mining worldwide, including Cuba. A study conducted by three Cuban engineers says the market price for gold, around $500/oz, makes it the right moment to invest in gold mining.

According to the geologists, there's good potential in Camagüey and Las Tunas provinces. Deposits have been detected in Golden Hill, Florecia y Jacinto with reserves estimated at over 500,000 oz.

The experts proposed a mining strategy in the short, medium and long terms, starting with the opening of the Golden Hill mine at a cost of $10 million per year.

This would enable exploration of the Florecia and the Jobabo fields and the continuation of mining in the Golden Hill plant. Exploration along the veins of Sur Elena and El Limón and prospecting in the surroundings of Jacinto would meanwhile guarantee gold-mining activity in that zone.

CAMAGÜEY CHROME DEPOSITS PROMISING

A research paper presented at the Earth Sciences Congress in Havana last month discusses a chrome deposit discovered in 1942 in the province of Camagüey.

The Camagüey fields began to be exploited back in the 1920s by several U.S. and Cuban companies. Chrome extraction reached its peak during World War II, reaching nearly 1.4 million tons in the period from 1940 to 1945. Mining in the area ended in 1985 with the Mamina deposit.

It seems the field discovered by the Juragua Iron Co., a unit of Bethlehem Steel, was left unexploited because it was near another mine where chrome was being extracted under more favorable conditions.

Between 1962 and 1964, this mine whose reserves have been estimated at 700,000 tons of refractory chrome, was explored once more. But it was not until the 1980s that the reserves estimate was reached, and only now is the area being evaluated for exploitation.

FINCA VIGIA RESTORATION TO FINISH IN 2009

Work to restore Ernest Hemingway's Cuban hideaway probably won't be finished until the end of 2009 — held up in part by efforts to build a garage to house the author's long-lost Chevrolet convertible, the Miami Herald reported Mar. 21.

Hemingway lived at Finca Vigia, on Havana's southeastern edge, from 1939 to 1960. Following his suicide in 1961, the novelist's widow turned the property over to the Castro regime, which made it a museum in 1962.

Efforts began in 2005 to repair the deteriorating Finca Vigia and restore its grounds along with the papers, furniture and other objects inside.

Museum director Ada Rosa Alfonso would not say how much restoration has cost to date, or how much was needed to finish it, only that “it's a process that requires dedication and time.”

The budget for the restoration comes from the Cuban government, she said, adding that the museum is “open to accepting any kind of donation or support” but she said that Washington’s embargo has blocked willing American donors.

Six U.S. experts have obtained permission to travel to Cuba and aid in restoration. Alfonso said that the last American came in August.

Isabel Ferreiro, the museum's deputy director, said officials recently tracked down a 1955 Chevrolet convertible Hemingway had once owned, and are negotiating with its Cuban owner to buy it.

Finca Vigia was placed on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of most endangered places in 2005. Originally chartered by Congress, the Washington-based trust is now privately funded.

CUBA AIMS TO BOOST FOOD-STORAGE CAPACITY

More than 100 refrigerated silos for storing wheat, corn, soy, beans, rice and other grains are now in use as Cuba seeks to increase its food storage capacity, according to a Mar. 15 article in Granma.

The goal is to have another similar amount in operation by the middle of this year.

“We can't forget the ups and downs we've had in the national production of eggs due to the lack of chicken feed; now, our reserves are greater with the increased storage capacity,” said Brig. Gen. Moises Sio Wong, chief of the National Institute of State Reserves.

Wong, who showed Raúl Castro around a grain storage facility in the western province of Pinar del Río, said grain storage is fundamental to guaranteeing stability in the delivery of basic foodstuffs for the population.

He noted that Cuba must also increase readiness for emergency situations like hurricanes that could affect the island or producing and exporting countries that sell to Cuba.

San Cristóbal has two silos operating and a modern grain mill with a packing plant administered by the Food Industry.

A team of economists, anthropologists and philosophers will study the issue of property rights in Cuba.

The multidisciplinary effort — the first of its kind ever in Cuba — will examine the issue from the perspective of how to limit inefficiency, theft, poor service and corruption, according to official media.

“Finding new methods to improve economic efficiency and stop corruption are the main objectives of the large group of professionals, who for the first time began a project analyzing property in the country,” said the official newspaper Juventud Rebelde in a report quoted Apr. 9 by Reuters.

The team, led by Jesús García of Havana’s Instituto de Filosofía, is expected to produce a report within three years.

Granma said “families are already seeing the benefits of the investment as to date 354,000 bags of corn flour in 500 gram packages have been distributed.”

Olga Lidia Tapa, first secretary of the Communist Party in Pinar del Río, said the product is distributed in the 14 municipalities of Pinar del Río at 123 different sales points.

Besides the new modern refrigerated silos, Wong noted that the conventional silos and refrigerated warehouses as well as transport vehicles and port facilities are under repair.

He told Raúl Castro that the Ministries of Construction, Agriculture and Sugar are in charge of building the foundations for the silos throughout Cuba. He said 25 of those will have adjacent grain processing plants.

In his May Day 2006 speech, Fidel Castro said the initial phase of investment in 120 silos would have a capacity of 240,000 metric tons of grain. This, he said, would be followed by a second phase of 130 silos and a third that should add 500,000 tons of storage capacity.

HERZFELD CLOSED-END FUNDS HIT NEW HIGHS

Thomas J. Herzfeld Advisors, Inc. said Apr. 9 that the firm's Managed Account Programs, which invest exclusively in closed-end funds, made a new all-time high at $3,316,407 (per unit) vs. $600,000 at inception.

The program consists of a total of six managed portfolios, each of which was funded with $100,000 at inception. Performance for one unit in each program was ahead 2.75% year-to-date and 452.73%, from inception, after all fees and commissions.

Performance got a boost from a 5.1% share price increase in Tri-Continental Corp. (TY), which in early April announced plans to adopt a managed payout policy.

TY is the largest holding of Herzfeld Advisors’ discretionary accounts. Herzfeld operates the Herzfeld Caribbean Basin Fund Inc., which trades on Nasdaq SmallCap Exchange under the symbol CUBA.

Details: Thomas J. Herzfeld Advisors, PO Box 161465, Miami, FL 33116. Tel: (305) 271-1900. E-mail: herzfeld@bellsouth.net.
Cuban Klezmer mixes two great musical traditions into one

BY LARRY LUXNER

Klezmer music, rooted in the Jewish shtetl of 19th-century Eastern Europe, is making an unprecedented comeback. So is Cuban salsa, whose Afro-Caribbean rhythms are enjoying a wave of global popularity.

It was only a matter of time before some enterprising musician came along and combined the two.

That someone is Havana-born drummer Roberto Juan Rodriguez, founder of the five-piece jazz band Cuban Klezmer.

“People ask me if I’m Jewish,” said Rodriguez, 45, who lives in New York and disseminates his music through the Tzadik record label. “I say no, but I’m getting closer.”

Listening to Cuban Klezmer, it’s often hard to tell whether you’re hearing Cuban music, or Jewish music — or something entirely new and different.

“My father says this is music you’ve never heard before, but you feel you have,” Rodriguez explained. “There’s the minor keys, the sadness in the melodies, the joyfulness of it.”

MUSICIAN BEGAN BY PLAYING BAR-MITZVAHS

The Washington Post gives the composer rave reviews. Richard Harrington, the paper’s music critic, said his instrumental pieces “have plenty of festive rhythmic energy, but the Afro-Cuban element is somewhat downplayed. With rich, complex arrangements, the music has a stately, chamber music feel more played. With rich, complex arrangements, the music has a stately, chamber music feel more

Rodriguez, who was raised Catholic, left his native Havana at the age of 9, by which time he was already playing violin, piano and trumpet. His family, escaping communism under Fidel Castro, fled to Mexico, later crossing the border into the United States and eventually settling in South Florida.

“My father [trumpet player and bandleader Roberto Luis Rodriguez] had a lot of Jewish friends in Cuba, so when we got to Miami, we parachuted right into the Jewish community. At the age of 11, I became a drummer, and I started to play at bar-mitzvahs and Jewish weddings,” he said. “In 1974, I began playing for the Miami Beach Yiddish Theatre.

“I learned a lot about Jewish culture and history through the immigrants and Holocaust survivors I met in Miami. It seeped into my DNA,” said Rodriguez, who studied at Havana’s Catura Conservatory of Music and at the University of Miami. “It was a lesson that you don’t get unless you’re Jewish or you study Judaism. But it was through music that I became aware of Jewish culture.

Interestingly, Rodriguez’s wife — Susie Ibarra, also a musician — is a Philippine-born, Hebrew-speaking Catholic who was previously married to an Israeli.

“It’s not the latino but the Jewish community that’s supporting me,” he said. “I didn’t do this project to get famous or make money, but because the opportunity came up. I was already working with Jewish musicians who were part of this label and had CDs on Tzadik.”

Rodriguez’s quintet, formed in 2000, includes two Israelis — clarinet player Gilad Harel and violinist Jonathan Keren — as well as New York’s Rob Curto on accordion and Bernie Mimoso on base. Mimoso, who is half-Cuban and half-Puerto Rican, played with legendary Puerto Rican bandleader Tito Puente, who died six years ago.

“Tito told me I should write my own music,” said Rodriguez. “I give him credit for that in one of my records.”

Thanks to his friendship with composer and alto saxophonist John Zorn, whose Tzadik label specializes in “radical Jewish music,” Rodriguez went on to produce three CDs.

“I would never have done a record if it was not for John, who I think is one of the best modern composers now,” he said, adding that “this kind of music is radical because we break the rules.”

Rodríguez’s first CD, released in January 2002, was “El Danzón de Moisés” (The Dance of Moses). Its cover is emblazoned with the distinctive red, white and blue flag of Cuba — except with a Star of David where the regular star should be. Rodriguez calls his second CD “Baila! Gitano Baila!” a celebration of Cuba’s elusive Jewish community.

“Cuban music has always been popular, and the Jews especially loved it. When I was a kid in Miami, my grandfather would take me to Wolfe’s Deli on Collins Avenue, and we’d see the old Jews dancing the cha-cha and the rumba,” he recalled. “It’s in the gene pool. All you have to do is put on a record of old Cuban music, and you’ll get a Jewish couple in their 80s starting to dance.”

Rodriguez has worked with Ruben Blades, Paquito D’Rivera, Celia Cruz, Joe Jackson, Paul Simon, Julio Iglesias and the Miami Sound Machine, among others.

“I’ve been through the gamut,” said Rodriguez, though he rarely performs other people’s compositions — which is why you won’t hear him playing “Guantanamera,” “Como Fue” or “Mi Yiddische Mama.”

“I’m not a lyricist, I’m a drummer and a composer,” he explained. “I could play other people’s songs, but that takes me away from being original. I express an emotion just through musical sound, without lyrics.”

STILL ON THE TO-DO LIST: MIAMI AND HAVANA

Rodriguez said there’s a long tradition of Jewish musicians turning to Latin music.

“Before Stan Getz was playing bossa nova, he played klezmer in the Catskills,” he said. “Gershwin even went to Cuba. In Miami, I remember the Latin thing was Irving Fields and his Bagels and Bongos.”

Rodriguez has played his unique fusion of klezmer and salsa in San Francisco, Toronto, New York and Washington. He’s toured all over Europe and is supposed to play soon at the Barbican Theater in London.

BBC-3 has nominated Rodriguez for a cross-cultural jazz project, and in Montreal, his latest CD, “Descarga Oriental: Maurice el Medioni Meets Roberto Rodriguez” recently won acclaim as “Best CD of the Year in World Music.”

But the two places Rodriguez has never played are Miami and Havana. “My music is too political,” he said about Miami. “I’m already mixing Jewish and Cuban. We tried to put something together last year, but it fell apart.”

Rodriguez has been back to Cuba only once since emigrating — in 1999, to visit his grandparents, who still live in the crumbling Havana suburb of Marianao.

“That’s one of my dreams, to play in Cuba, but not for any political reason,” he said. “I’d only play for the Jewish community there.”

B’nai B’rith plans mission

A recent article in the New York Times about Jewish life in Cuba has generated enormous interest in B’nai B’rith.

Stanley Cohen, international chairman of the group’s Cuba Jewish Relief Project, said a Feb. 4 article by Caren Osten Gerszberg — entitled “In Cuba, Finding a Tiny Corner of Jewish Life” — resulted in at least 1,200 phone calls to his office.

“Talk about the power of the press. We’re still getting calls,” he said. “There’s a lot of interest in Cuba, and most people genuinely want to help the community.”

It’s too late to join B’nai B’rith’s Jun. 6-14 mission to Cuba, but space is still left for a Dec. 6-14 mission to Havana, Cienfuegos and Santa Clara. Under U.S. law, the trip is open only to B’nai B’rith members.

Details: Stan Cohen, B’nai B’rith Cuba Jewish Relief Project, Pittsburgh. Tel: (412) 521-2390. E-mail: bbrelief@earthlink.net.
Cienfuegos is a relatively new province. It was created in 1976 when the old province of Las Villas was split to form three new jurisdictions, including the neighboring provinces of Villa Clara and Sancti Spiritus.

Excluding the City of Havana, Cienfuegos is the smallest province in Cuba, with an area of only 4,180 sq kms (1,615 sq miles), or 3.8% of Cuba’s land area. The territory is made up of fertile, flat and cultivated plains occupying 73% of the area, and by sparsely populated mountains covered with forests and coffee plantations in the remaining 27%.

The mountains of Escambray rise in southeastern Cienfuegos province to an altitude of 1,140 meters (3,740 feet) at Pico San Juan (also known as Pico La Cuca), which is the highest point west of the Sierra Maestra mountain range in eastern Cuba.

Population
Cienfuegos currently has 400,976 inhabitants, or 3.6% of Cuba’s total population. Its population is virtually stagnant, with annual growth of 0.6% between 1994 and 1999, dropping to 0.4% in the 2000-06 period. That's in contrast to the 1980s — the peak of industrial investment — when workers from other parts of Cuba streamed into Cienfuegos, pushing up population by 1.4% a year.

The provincial capital, also called Cienfuegos, ranks as Cuba’s 10th-largest city, with 140,734 people as of December 2006, or around 35% of the province’s inhabitants. Other towns in the province include Cumanayagua (24,400), Cruces (20,000), Aguada de Passajeros (16,000), Palmira (12,000), Lajas (11,000), Rodas (10,000), Abreus (5,000) and Yaguaramas (3,500).

Economy
The local economy is a combination of farming, manufacturing and port activities. The province’s development is closely tied to the bay and port that share its name.

Cienfuegos has 3,038 sq kms (1,173 sq miles) of agricultural land. Of these, sugar cane accounted for 127,000 hectares, or 30% of the total, prior to the 2002 downsizing of the industry. Now, just 74,000 hectares (24% of the total) is devoted to sugar.

Sugar production and shipping is the economic backbone of Cienfuegos, a condition that remains even after the downsizing, which left the province with seven active mills — compared to the 12 that existed in 2002, when Cienfuegos accounted for 6-7% of total Cuban sugar production.

Poor yields forced authorities to close the following mills: Martha Abreu (formerly San Francisco); Ramón Balboa (San Agustín); Primero de Mayo (Perseverancia); Espartaco (Hormiguero) and Pepito Tey (Soledad). All were built between 1839 and 1892; together, they produced 170,000 tons a year in the mid-1940s. Dismantling the mills left at least 12,000 people jobless.

By Cuban standards, the sugar mills of Cienfuegos are typically small, except for the Cinco de Septiembre mill — built in the 1980s — with an original grinding capacity of 7,400 tons a day, today reduced to 4,600 tons/day, or 25% of the province’s capacity.

At only 100,000 tons, this harvest’s expected output is a pit- tance compared to the 500,000-ton-a-year harvests produced in Cienfuegos before the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

At current market prices, the province’s 2006-07 harvest represents a value of only $24 million, compared to more than $300 million in the 1980s.

This is the 8th in a series of monthly articles on Cuba’s 14 provinces by cartographer Armando H. Portela, who has a Ph.D. in geography from the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Havana. Portela currently resides in Miami.
Pasture lands, mainly spontaneous and generally infested with thorny bushes and weeds, cover 105,000 hectares. At their peak, dairy farms along the Arimao River Valley near the town of Cumanayagua produced 40 million liters of fresh milk per year, thanks to a quality Holstein herd and mixed breeds, but this has decreased considerably in the last decade as result of the economic crisis.

Coffee covers around 5,300 hectares in the mountains. Although output is modest, Cienfuegos produces the high-priced Crystal Mountain brand, which is exported to Japan, Taiwan and Western Europe. Coffee yields are generally poor. Growers left the mountains — sometimes against their will in the 1960s, as the armed uprising against Castro’s government strengthened in the Escambray mountains — and the worker shortage here is now critical.

A plan to attract farmers back to the coffee zones in the mid-’90s succeeded in luring only 1,600 settlers in the last five years. Coffee growing is blamed for causing considerable damage to the environment, but the same lack of resources that dramatically cut output in the last decade has forced the government to restore some environmentally friendly — and cheaper — growing methods used over 50 years ago.

**INDUSTRY**

Major investments in the 1970s and ’80s turned Cienfuegos into one of Cuba’s leading industrial hubs, but the economic hardships at the end of the 1990s has paralyzed the province’s industrialization.

Even so, the industrial expansion has had severe environmental consequences. Uncontrolled industrial waste disposal, oil spills and untreated runoff from the sugar industry reportedly have ruined marine ecosystems in the bay (see CubaNews, September 2002, page 3).

The Juraguá nuclear power plant, easily the most notorious industrial investment in Cienfuegos, was begun in 1983, halted when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and officially abandoned in 2000 — even though its first reactor was 75% to 80% finished and just two years away from completion. The project roused deep safety concerns in the

United States from the very beginning, because the heart of the facility would have been a Soviet-built 440-megawatt reactor similar to the one responsible for the April 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl.

The Carlos Manuel de Céspedes thermal power plant began operations in 1978 with a capacity of 398 MW, equivalent to 12% of Cuba’s total generating capacity. It has two 34-year-old Czech-made units and two 24-year-old Japanese units. The government recently invested $37 million to refurbish the plant so that it can burn Cuban crude oil, which it says will save $50 million a year in imported fuel costs.

That power plant is linked to the backbone of Cuba’s national power transmission grid through a double-extension line of 220 and 110 kV running 60 km (37 miles) to Santa Clara, in the center of the island.

The Karl Marx cement factory, opened in 1980, was recently renovated and expanded at a cost of $105 million. Now known as Cementos Cienfuegos SA, the plant is 50% owned by Cermev — a unit of Cuba’s Ministry of Basic Industry — and 50% by Las Pailas de Cemento SA, a Spanish company controlled by a private investment bank.

The plant now has two kilns producing 1.6 million metric tons a year, boosting Cuba’s total annual cement production to 2.5 million tons (see CubaNews, April 2004, page 6).

Another megaproject involves the Camilo Cienfuegos oil refinery, which has remained idle since its completion in 1991. It has a potential refining capacity of 60,000 barrels per day (3 million tons per year) — or over 30% of Cuba’s annual fuel consumption.

Last year, CubaNews reported that Venezuela’s state-owned PDVSA said it would invest $83 million to rehabilitate the Soviet-designed refinery in a joint venture known as PDV-Cupet SA, owned 51% by the Cuban government and 49% by Venezuela. The aim is to build a pipeline that will take as much as 120,000 barrels a day of products to a 600,000-bbl storage terminal on the island’s northwestern coast. The refinery is to open sometime in 2007, initially processing 65,000 b/d of crude (see CubaNews, June 2006, page 2).

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

Although all settlements and economic hubs are reachable through paved roads and railroads, Cienfuegos lies relatively far from Cuba’s primary land routes — the National Expressway, the old Central Highway and the Central Railroad — and is instead connected to all three by narrow roads.

A domestic airport located close to the capital city has limited, irregular links with the rest of the country, while the Port of Cienfuegos is the second-busiest in Cuba after Havana. Cienfuegos boasts the leading terminal for Cuban sugar, capable of handling over two million tons a year. At its heyday, the bulk sugar terminal handled 30% of all Cuba’s sugar exports. The port also exports citrus, cement and fuel.

In 2004, Cienfuegos attracted 163,295 tourists — roughly 8% of all visitors to Cuba — generating $23 million in revenues and $4.5 million in profits for the tourism industry.
If your organization is sponsoring an upcoming event, please let our readers know! Fax details to CubaNews at (301) 949-0065 or send e-mail to larry@cubanews.com.

Apr. 11: Panel on results of 2007 FIU/Cuba poll. Details: Hugh Gladwin, Director/Institute for Public Opinion Research, Florida International University, 3000 NE 151 Street, North Miami, FL 33181. Tel: (305) 919-5778. Fax: (305) 919-5242. E-mail: gladwin@fiu.edu.


Apr. 24: “New Perspectives from the Cuban-American Business Community” The Bildner Center, New York. Speakers: Carlos Saladrigas, co-chair of the Cuba Study Group, and Baruch College professor Ted Henken. One of a series of events focusing on the Cuban-American exile community. Details: The Bildner Center, City University of New York, 365 Fifth Ave., Room #9206, New York, NY 10017. Tel: (212) 817-2099. E-mail: bserrano@counciloftheamericas.org or ffernandez@as-cao.org. URL: www.as-cao.org.

Apr. 26: “Doing Business With Cuba,” InfoMart, Dallas. One-day workshop co-sponsored by Texas-Cuba Trade Alliance and International Trade Center/SBDC. Washington lawyer Bob Muse and Larry Luxner, publisher of CubaNews, to speak. Cost: $60. Details: Dr. Parr Rosson, Texas A&M University, 464a Blocker Bldg. 2124 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843. Tel: (979) 845-3070. Fax: (979) 847-9378. E-mail: prosson@tamu.edu. URL: www.tcta.us.

Apr. 27: “El Lector de Tabaqueria: Historia de Una Tradición Cubana” The Bildner Center, New York. Author Araceli Tinajero discusses her book about the traditional Cuban “lector” who reads newspapers, magazines and literature to cigar workers. Presentation is free and will be in Spanish. Details: The Bildner Center, City University of New York, 365 Fifth Ave., Rooms #9204/05, New York, NY 10017. Tel: (212) 817-2099. E-mail: bildner@gc.cuny.edu.

May 14-17: International workshop on the effects of iron on human health, Havana. Details: Centro Nacional de Bio-preparados (BIOCEN), Carretera de Beltran, Km 1.5, Bejucal, La Habana. Tel: +53 7 881-7024. Fax: +53 7 883-1144. E-mail: biocen@biocen.cu.

May 23-29: Or Hadash/Next Generation Jewish Humanitarian Mission to Cuba. Orlando’s young Jewish professionals organization lead mission to support Cuba’s tiny Jewish community. Details: Congregation Ohev Shalom, 5015 Goddard Avenue, Orlando, FL 32804. Tel: (407) 645-5933 x233. Fax: (407) 296-7101. E-mail: orhadash-orlando@jfgo.org.

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