

The Blue Moon

.....because your critic is your best friend

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Cuba

Special Edition



Journey Through Time:
P-15 Unraveling the Vibrant
Tapestry of Cuba
P-6 US Policy on Cuba

Mintur
MINISTERIO DE TURISMO, CUBA

GAVIOTA
GRUPO DE TURISMO
CUBA

MGM
MUTHU HOTELS

cubanacan
G R U P O

The Blue Moon

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BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES *Across the Globe*

Our magazine is much more than a mere magazine, as we act as a vital link to the global business community. Our expansive network of business associates, which includes JJ Enterprises, RIN, Indian and local Chambers of Commerce in Latin America, Africa, and Arab countries, as well as National and States Chambers of Commerce in India, enables us to provide unparalleled connections and opportunities with confidence.

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Animals die due to human lethargy

The carcass of the beautifully spotted leopard lay on the highway. No one had bothered to take care of it. Vehicles zoomed past the body on the National Highway 44 in the early hours of Wednesday until the local police were informed and the forest department came into action with their theories as to where the animal had come from. The carcass was taken for post-mortem by the forest department, who suggested that it was hit by a white-coloured car. That was it. No further investigation as to who the killer would have been. It seemed like murder in cold blood and the killer going off the hook.

The point of discussion was the origin of the leopard, whether it came from some forested area of Haryana or region in Aravallis (mountain range). Sariska (National Park in Rajasthan) is nearby and so are many populated areas which have a green belt all around. A human locality Sainik Farms had witnessed a leopard some time back, which was never traced. The poor animal must have lost its way and found its death on the highway. The report has been pushed into old files branding it as a story of man-animal conflict.

The killing of an animal should be considered as serious as killing a human; otherwise, animals like this poor leopard will soon become extinct in our country's so-called biodiversity parks. Leopards will have to be protected like tigers. Not long ago one of these spotted felines had wandered into a hostel for girls near Udaipur. It disappeared when a resident saw it coming out of a room.

In yet another case a leopard was seen loitering in the underground parking lot of a well fenced colony which even had cameras installed and 24 hour security. Someone in the colony had photographed the animal moving around in the parking lot. What more could be done by the security staff than to inform the local police who came hunting for the animal but could not trace it.

There have been reports of sightings in the rural

Mukhmelpur (North West Delhi, India) and Ibrahimpur areas, but nothing happened after that.

Experts are of the opinion that green corridors should be developed for the safe crossing of animals, who can get blinded by vehicle headlights and are unable to move to safety.

Amit Mittal

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Cover Story

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Journey Through Time
Unraveling the Vibrant Tapestry of Cuba
Jjuliaa Gangwani

Cuba, the Jewel of the Caribbean

Whilst exploring Cuba, we had the privilege of engaging in dialogue with H.E. Mr. Juan Carlos García Granda, Minister of Tourism for the Republic of Cuba. This interaction allowed us to gain valuable insights into the tourism industry of Cuba.

In a voice brimming with enthusiasm, the Minister of Tourism declared, “Cuba is now open and extending a warm welcome to Indian travelers! Whether you’re dreaming of a grand wedding, seeking the perfect haven for your honeymoon, or simply yearning to unwind and immerse yourself in our vibrant culture and breathtaking landscapes, Cuba is a treasure trove of experiences waiting to be discovered.”

As of January 23, 2023, it has become a prerequisite for visitors to Cuba to complete a digital customs declaration. This is part of a comprehensive digital form that also encompasses immigration and health information.

In a move that is likely to enhance the acceptance of USD in Cuba, Cuban financial and banking institutions have reinstated the acceptance of cash deposits of US dollars in bank accounts. This initiative effectively removes any remaining barriers for locals to utilize USD.

The Minister of Tourism in Cuba, Juan Carlos García, has expressed the country’s commitment to fostering responsible tourism. This commitment prioritizes the health and safety of all visitors and Cubans.

With regard to the Indian film industry, Cuba has had the honor of hosting a single major Bollywood movie to date. However, as a tourism expert, I perceive Cuba as a unique opportunity for filmmakers. The diverse array of hotels and activities available here can serve as excellent backdrops for films, thereby promoting both establishments and the vibrant culture of Cuba. The process of filming in Cuba does necessitate coordination with the Cultural Ministry,

which can occasionally present challenges. Nevertheless, we view this as an opportunity to exhibit the beauty of Cuba to the world.

Cuba is fortunate to have a highly educated population, with various schools including theater schools that produce talented individuals. Numerous music producers and filmmakers have leveraged this talent for their music videos and films, resulting in some exceptional work. Although their contributions may not always be visible in the credits, they play a pivotal role in the production process.

Our Ministry forms an integral part of a commission that serves as a bridge between the Culture Ministry and tour companies. This facilitates the process of filming or creating music videos by providing comprehensive information and assistance. We eagerly anticipate welcoming more filmmakers to our properties and ensuring that they have

a rewarding experience.

We are also examining the feasibility of long-haul flights to accommodate more Indian tourists. We recognize the need for volume and are committed to working towards this objective. Visitors to Cuba, irrespective of their origin, feel welcomed due to the tourist-friendly nature of our people. We are collaborating with the government to simplify the visa process and streamline it to make it easier for Indians to visit.

The Cuban government has a visionary plan to build its economic future on tourism, with the construction of over 100,000 new hotel rooms and 24 new golf courses by 2030.”



H.E. Mr. Juan Carlos García Granda
Minister of Tourism
the Republic of Cuba



US Policy on Cuba

The Other Collective Punishment Taking Place in the World

by Gregory Biniowsky

I am a Canadian lawyer and political analyst who has lived and worked in Cuba for over thirty-five years, which is the greater part of my life. I have worked as a professor at the University of Havana, as a consultant for the United Nations Office in Havana and the Canadian Embassy in Havana, and have represented large international law firms that have provided strategic advice for foreign investors interested in Cuba as an emerging market, helping them navigate between the Scylla of the US embargo and the Charybdis of the Cuban state bureaucracy.

However, more important than my intellectual and professional ties to Cuba, I have a deep love and connection with the Cuban people, of all political persuasions. Their present-day suffering and anguish have motivated me to write this opinion piece.

Cuba is presently in the throes of one of the worst crises it has ever faced. In 2014, Cuba was experiencing an incredible and uplifting period of hope initiated by the Obama Administration's policy of reproachment. The lifting of the US embargo and the ending of a 60-year siege of the island was clearly on the horizon. The Cuban government was progressively opening up its economy to Cuban entrepreneurs and foreign investors, seeking a pragmatic mixed economy within the context of "Cuba socialism". US companies were lining up at the door, expecting an imminent lifting of the embargo. And non-US companies were racing to establish a presence before the arrival of the US companies. Obama courageously opened the US embassy in Havana and then came to visit the island. In fact, an increasing number of Cubans living in Miami began returning to Cuba to establish businesses with family members on the island. There was colour and hope blossoming throughout the island. I was there, and shared the certainty that a great future for Cuba was on the horizon.

This all came crashing down in 2016 when Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. Although he was the only candidate during the

Republican primaries who said he would continue to negotiate it with Cuba, but simply do a 'better job' than Obama in cutting a deal with the island, when elected, he was quickly pressured by the Cuban exile lobby, led by Senator Marco Rubio, to reverse track. In an almost pathological way, Trump then began to systematically reverse every positive step that Obama had made.

It is key to consider three of the most important elements of the US embargo: collective punishment of the Cuban people, the extraterritorial imposition of US law, and the cynical manipulation of the powerful and emotive term 'terrorist'.

While the world is justly outraged by the collective punishment of the Palestinian people by Israel, there is another process of collective punishment taking place in the world, more subtle and less violent, but just as immoral: the economic punishment of the Cuban people by the United States. The US embargo on Cuba was strategically designed to impose such economic and social hardship on the Cuban people that they would become so desperate so as to rise up against their government. The use of wide-spread suffering as a political weapon on an innocent population is never morally justifiable, and should be seen as a stain on the moral reputation of US foreign policy. Every year the global community rejects the embargo in UN votes, but the US, usually only with Israel, and some micro-state island in the South Pacific votes against resounding world opinion. Within the US embargo law against Cuba, there has always been a dangerous clause, called Title III of the Helms-Burton Act, which essentially allows anyone to sue in a US court any foreign company 'benefiting' from property that was nationalised by the Cuban government back in the early 1960s. Setting aside the little-known fact that Cuba offered compensation for these nationalizations, such an imposition of US law on foreign companies for activities outside of the United States is a flagrant violation of international law. For this reason, ever since the Helms-Burton law was created in 1996,

every US president, both Democrat and Republican, repeatedly suspended the implementation of Title III, so as not to enrage US trading partners and provoke a reaction from the WTO.

This all changed under Trump. Again pressured by the Cuban exile community, Trump had the audacity to implement Title III in 2019. This led to a series of lawsuits in Florida courts targeting companies from around the world who dared invest in Cuba. As an international lawyer in Cuba, I have personal experience of how this extraterritorial application of US law successfully frightened away many foreign companies that were ready to invest in Cuba, with the promise of capital, technology and market access that the island desperately needs. However the threat of being sued in Miami was simply not a risk that most large multinational companies wanted to take, and they quickly cancelled their Cuban plans after the implementation of Title III.



The third element of the US embargo, possibly the most outrageous one, is the spurious categorization of Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. The concept of terrorism is laden with deep significance, given the thousands of victims of terrorism around the world. But the world community has recognized that today, if ever, Cuba has no connection whatsoever to terrorism anywhere in the world. To utilize such a claim against Cuba vulgarizes and hollows out the concept of terrorism, and is an insult to those countries and people around the world who suffer at the hands of real terrorist organizations or states. Moreover, this categorization is not simply a rhetorical insult to Cuba. It has enormous impacts on the Cuban economy. The terrorist categorization effectively kills major international bank financing and credit for the Cuban government and foreign investors, further suffocating the Cuban economy and, in-turn, suffocating the Cuban people. President Obama (2009-2017), with applause from around the world, removed Cuba from the terrorist list, ending a long-standing cynical and intellectually embarrassing policy. The result

was even more banks and companies lining up to explore and enter the Cuban market (notwithstanding the intrinsic difficulties of the Cuban market, which is the fault of the Cubans!). However, when Trump became president (2017-2021), he dutifully returned Cuba to the terrorist list, provoking an immediate freeze of the Cuban economic spring.

I have informally spoken to many US policymakers and diplomats, over beers in Washington or rum in Havana, and in private, the majority have confided that the US embargo does not represent or defend US interests, but is instead a product of the parochial political interests of the well organized and very wealthy Cuban-American lobby. Just as some argue that the Israeli lobby has taken hostage US policy in the Middle East, it is cogent to argue that US policy towards Cuba, and possibly towards Latin America, has been taken hostage by the Cuban exile lobby.

When Donald Trump was defeated by Joe Biden in the 2020 election, the world breathed a collective sigh of relief. In Cuba, people became optimistic once again.

The general hope and expectation was that Biden would at least reverse the Trump policies and return things to where Obama left them. But quickly, we found out that, when it came to doing the right thing for the Cuban people, and regaining some moral legitimacy for the United States, President Biden was too afraid of the political forces in South Florida.

Since being elected, President Biden has made some cautious steps towards returning to the Obama policy, but has left untouched the key elements of Title III extraterritoriality and the politicized, absurd use of the terrorist designation on Cuba. What makes Biden's maintenance of Trump policy on Cuba so outrageous and egregious is that Cuban society is presently on its knees, suffering the worst social and economic crisis since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Following the impact of the Trump election, Cuba received the second body blow in the form of the COVID pandemic. The island had to suspend tourism, one of its most

important hard currency sources, and at the same time devote enormous resources to protecting its population from the COVID virus (it is important to note that Cuba was the only small country in the world to develop its own efficacious COVID vaccine, an incredible achievement). The double impact of Trump and COVID has left the Cuban economy in tatters and Cuban society gasping for oxygen. This should be reason enough for the Biden Administration to put ethics above political expediency, and do what is necessary to mitigate the suffering of the Cuban people.

Of course, there is the argument that the Cuban government is authoritarian and violates the human rights of its people, and thus deserves the pressure placed upon it. But this is a specious claim made by the United States that a person with even a basic understanding of global politics can see through. Anyone can see that the United States engages with countries such as China, Vietnam and Saudi Arabia, which have political systems that are very different from what the US demands of Cuba. Moreover, maintaining a harsh embargo on Cuba simply promotes the fortress mentality within the Cuban government, strengthening hard-liners and weakening reformers. As one senior Cuban government official confided to me, “how can we explore political and economic experimentation and change in our country when all we can do right now is focus on keeping the economy afloat for the next month?”. And as a former Obama Administration official publicly commented, watching the Cuban people gasp for oxygen when, though modest policy change, oxygen could be given to them, is the “utmost act of cruelty”.

The focus on political expediency, combined with political pusillanimity, is the main reasons that US policy has not changed. However, I would argue that the international community has some of the blame, because of its relatively passive silence. Simply voting against the US embargo in the United Nations yearly condemnation of the embargo is not enough. The US policy on Cuba establishes dangerous precedents of extraterritorial application of domestic law and the misuse of the designation of terrorism, which if gone unchallenged, will harm global affairs and diplomacy related to other global issues. Thus, the international community needs to take a stronger stand, and do more to challenge US policy on Cuba. First and

foremost, as a gesture of humanity to the Cuban people, the global community needs to oppose US policy more vigorously on Cuba. But global community also must take a stand so as to defend key elements of global diplomacy and international law. The WTO needs to concretely and forcefully challenge, both politically and legally, the extraterritoriality of Helms Burton Title III. Following the example of Canada, countries (such as India) can implement specific antidote legislation which ensures that their domestic companies are not pressured by US parent companies to follow the US embargo outside of the US jurisdiction. The Global South needs to countervail the damage of US policy on Cuba by promoting greater focused economic engagement with Cuba. Of course, all countries of the Global South need economic engagement and support, but Cuba is the only small nation in the world that faces the full brunt of US suffocation, and thus has a special need to be supported.

Cuba is far from being a perfect country or a paragon of democracy. It has unfortunately been forced to create a defensive political system in response to sixty years of aggression from the most powerful country in the world. But Cuba has clearly shown its willingness to change and to engage with the United States to resolve political differences. It is time that courageous political leaders and policymakers, in the United States, extract their foreign policy from the swamp of parochial electoral calculations and political expediency. And while we wait for the United States to do the right thing, it is imperative for the Global South and the international community to make greater efforts to give oxygen to the Cuban people.





Unveiling the Vision of Gaviota

A Journey into the Heart of Cuba's Tourism Renaissance



During our visit to Cuba, we had the privilege of engaging with Mr. Carlos M. Latuff, the esteemed President of the Gaviota Group. Here are the key insights from our discussion:

The Gaviota Group, a leading hotel conglomerate in Cuba, is exploring a potential partnership with MGM, with plans to establish numerous Indian restaurants for our guests' convenience.

We have incorporated five companies, including hotels with bus services and a commercial company supplying all necessary provisions to our hotels.

A contract with Mr. Maran from MGM ensures the provision of all necessary supplies, including spices, through this commercial company. We anticipate welcoming a million Indian guests next year. In collaboration with MGM, we plan to open a Gaviota office in India to cater to our travel agency, making it easier for our Indian market.

Our alliance aims to make our Indian guests feel

included and loved, with opportunities to enjoy local dance, people, and cuisine. We are committed to providing a warm and kind welcome to all our guests, assuring them of an unforgettable experience.

We take pride in our beautiful beaches, lush vegetation, and welcoming people. Our initial steps include forming alliances with significant international hotel companies.

We eagerly look forward to welcoming more visitors and providing them with a memorable experience.



Muthu Playa Varadero



Gran Muthu Almirante Beach Hotel, Holguin



Gran Muthu Rainbow Hotel, Cayo Guillermo

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES Across the Globe

Opportunities in Bolivia

The company that creates a transportation system (micro-mobility vehicles) based on solar energy and electric cars under an innovative model that allows operations to start in different cities of Latin America in a very scalable way and, with the use of technology, the sector achieves mass transport of citizens.

Excellent business projections for the next 36 months. The investment will be used for the infrastructure of the vehicle plant, The purchase of material stock necessary for mass production and Manufacture lithium batteries.



Opportunities in Chile



SALE OF PHOTOVOLTAIC ENERGY PROJECT IN CHILE

Sale of 100% of the company

100MW solar plant project located in the Atacama region, dedicated to supplying energy to the national electrical system. Consists of 170,000 solar panels. The plant has a lifespan of 35 years. Positive connection feasibility.

Opportunities in Mexico

FINANCING FOR INVESTMENT FUND IN MEXICO

First investment fund with a focus on avocado farmlands. (65% avocado gardens - 35% other crops).

Investment in small and medium-sized gardens which maximize financial returns along with a positive impact from an environmental and social perspective.



Continued on Pg 14

MGM Muthu Hotels: A Blend of Luxury, Comfort, and Cultural Immersion

The essence of Mr. Kevin Maran, Managing Director's youthful energy and his vision for taking MGM Muthu Hotels to new heights

Q. Can you provide an overview of MGM Muthu Hotels' worldwide presence?

K.M. - MGM Muthu Hotels operates 50+ hotels with 10000+ rooms across Portugal, Cuba, Kenya, Portugal, Spain, France, Scotland, England and India.

Q. What are the special offers currently available for booking stays at your hotels? Do you offer any special packages or discounts for Indian travellers?

K.M. - MGM Muthu Hotels believes in providing world class service at the most competitive prices to our guests. We are also coming up with innovative offers and packages for our guests and discerning travellers. Specific to Cuba, we have created unique 7 nights, 9 nights itineraries and more for the Indian travellers.

Q. Can you provide more information about the all-inclusive holidays offered at your hotels?

K.M. - Our hotels in Cuba offer all-inclusive holidays which include accommodation, meals, snacks,

beverages and select nautical experiences. This is a great way to have a fulfilling holiday with friends or with family. Gran Muthu Habana offers stays on bed and breakfast packages.

Q. What are the benefits of booking directly through your official website?

K.M. - We offer the best online rates on our brand website.

Q. Can you provide more details about the facilities available at your hotels (e.g., pools, spas, dining options)? What types of rooms and suites are available for booking?

K.M. - MGM Muthu Hotels in Cuba offer all facilities for a comfortable and enjoyable holiday. Which includes multiple dining options in each hotel with a variety of cuisines on offer and an elaborate spread of buffet for all meals. We offer outdoor swimming pools, children's pool, rooms with swim up semi private pools and much more. The hotels also have indoor bar, pool side bars and cigar rooms, recreation centres, gymnasium, spa and amphitheatres offering daily entertainment shows. More details about our offerings can be found on www.muthuhotelsmgm.com

Q. What unique experiences can guests expect when staying at your hotels?

K.M. - MGM Muthu Hotels in Cuba located in Cayo Guillermo, Cayo Coco, Santa Maria, Holguin and Varadero offer daily live entertainment shows which bring the evenings delightfully enjoyable for all age groups. Our Animation teams are looking for new and innovative ways to keep our guests engaged and entertained through out the day. There are also short excursions available on request to nearby tourist locations.



Q. Are Indian meals available at your hotels' restaurants?

K.M. - Our hotels have chef's from India offering all kind of Indian food on order. The company has originated from India and understands the importance of Indian cuisine being available for Indian guests not only from India but also from locations like Canada.

Q. Is there any assistance provided by the hotel for Indian travellers who may not be fluent in Spanish or English?

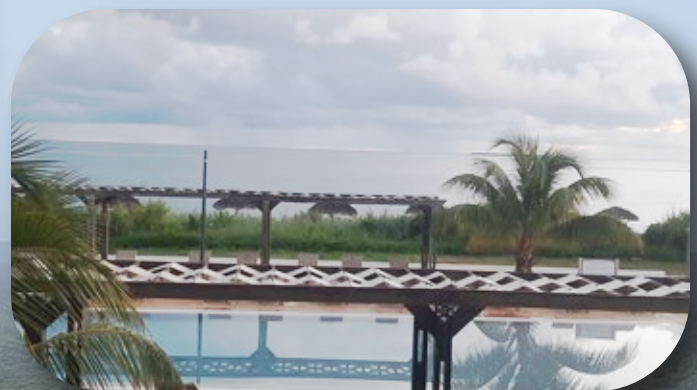
K.M. - All our staff members can communicate in English and are able to assist guests where required.

Q. Can you provide details about any cultural events or festivals celebrated at your hotels that might be of interest to Indian guests?

K.M. - As mentioned before there are daily live entertainment shows which also include themed nights like Bollywood night with Indian region music and dance.

Q. What are the future expansion plans for MGM Muthu Hotels? Are there any new locations being considered for future hotels?

K.M. - MGM Muthu Hotels is on set on a growth track and we would be adding more hotels Cuba as well have expansions plans across countries like Uganda, Tanzania and Portugal.





Embracing Global Connections

Expanding Horizons in Hospitality and Tourism

During our visit to Cuba, we had the privilege of engaging in a conversation with **Mr. Jorge Alberto Garcia Dominguez**, the esteemed **President of the Cubanacan Group**. Here are the key takeaways from our discussion

We warmly welcome you to our hotel, a part of our esteemed group established 36 years ago. With around 117 hotels across the country, we aim to provide more than just accommodation; we offer enriching tourism experiences. Our ventures include unique locations, community projects, and hotels showcasing Cuba's colonial architecture. We also have 17 joint ventures with foreign investments.

Our future plans include hotel renovations and developing new experiences for our guests. We appreciate the support of journalists, Bloggers, YouTubers and influencers who help broadcast our progress. We take pride in Cuba's uniqueness in tourism, marked by our highly educated populace. We assist in obtaining filming permissions and are open to drone filming within legal limits.

Our group, in collaboration with the Culture and Tourism Ministries, facilitates filming and music video creation.

We also offer a comprehensive healthcare service to enhance our guests' experience.

Recognizing the significant Indian diaspora in the US, Canada, Australia, and Europe, we aim to attract more visitors from these regions. We are aware of the potential increase in flights from India and the UK are working towards easing transit visa requirements. Plans to extend our services to Europe, the US, Canada, UK, New Zealand, and Australia are underway.

We eagerly anticipate welcoming more guests for a memorable experience.



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Opportunities in Peru

Continued from Pg 10

HOTEL FOR SALE IN IQUITOS

Sale of 100% of the assets

Midscale category hotel (90 rooms), located in front of the emblematic Plaza 28 de Julio, in route to the airport and the different jungle lodges.

It will be operated by an internationally renowned hotel chain.

The hotel is already built and in the finishing process (it is 6 to 8 months away from going on the market).

The closing of the project is pending, which consists of the following activities: complete with the facilities, acquire the equipment and finishes, as well as the implementation of the hotel.



SALE OF HYDROELECTRIC POWER PLANT IN AYACUCHO

Hydroelectric power plant with a capacity of 4.6MW.

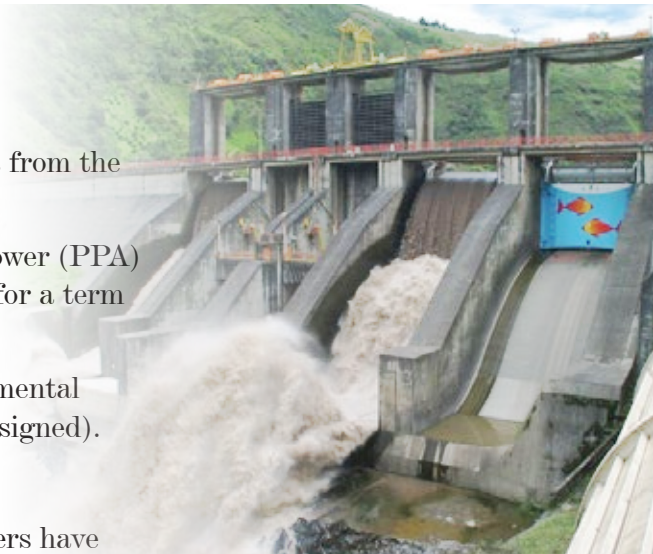
Interconnection point to the National Grid 250 meters from the powerhouse.

Commercial agreement for the sale of energy/future power (PPA) with the electricity distribution company of Ayacucho for a term of 7 years.

Generation concession signed and registered, Environmental Impact Study approved and Social License (easement signed).

Estimated work execution time is 400 days.

Currently, all electromechanical and civil works suppliers have been assigned.



SEARCH FOR FINANCING FOR HOTEL AND GASTRONOMIC PROJECTS

Group that operates in the gastronomic and hotel sector since 1993, with a nationally recognized brand, is in search of financing.

The use of the resources is for the conclusion of 7 investment projects that are underway. The average progress of the projects is between 40 to 60%.

Continued on Pg 27

Journey Through Time: Unraveling the Vibrant Tapestry of Cuba

by Jjuliaa Gangwani

In the grand tapestry of life, it is often said that what you seek is also seeking you. This profound truth became my lived experience as I found myself yearning for a respite from the post-pandemic world, aching for a change of scenery, and longing for a chance to recharge, connect with kindred spirits, and simply be.

One fateful evening, under the chandeliers of a high-end reception, destiny knocked on my door. The Ambassador of the Cuban embassy to India extended an invitation to be part of a familiarization trip. And thus, the first chapter of my Cuban journey was penned.

Cuba, a land where one can rejuvenate amidst the emerald hues of the Caribbean Sea, meander through colonial lanes, marvel at rainbow-colored buildings, ride in vintage cars, or simply don a hat, lather on some SPF lotion, grab a Cuban beer, and surrender to the rhythm of the waves at any MGM Muthu Hotels.

Whether you're at the cusp of a new beginning, seeking inspiration, planning a wedding or honeymoon, celebrating life, or identifying as LGBTQ, Cuba embraces you with open arms. Its people, warm and resilient, navigate life's challenges with grace, embody a no-complaints attitude, and radiate contentment. They strive for excellence, and even in the face of adversity, they refuse to succumb to despair.

MGM Muthu Hotels and Gaviota Tours from Cuba spearheaded a campaign to unveil Cuba's charm to Indian travelers, media, travel agents, and social influencers who were part of this enlightening journey.

From the moment we set foot at Havana Airport, we were enveloped in VIP treatment. The sight of the women workforce at Havana International Airport was a testament to their strength and resilience. Our

tour leader, Mr. Perez from MGM Muthu Hotel, was the epitome of cordiality and stayed with our group until the end. His knowledge was vast, and his English, learned from Cuba University, was impeccable.

At MGM Gran Muthu, Havana, which faces the Caribbean Sea, I was blessed with a room that offered



Sea view

a mesmerizing sea view. After a 33-hour journey and grappling with jet lag, I took a brief sojourn to the seashore, returned to the room for a nap. The comfort of the room lulled me into a deep sleep until 11 pm. By the time I woke up, dinner was over, and a few group members were gearing up to experience Havana City.

I chose to stay back and satiate my hunger. MGM Muthu and Gaviota Tours had thoughtfully organized a 24x7 food, drink, and coffee facility at their snack bars. I savored a bowl of soup and my favorite cappuccino (Cuba Coffee). After this, I planned for my next day, as it was an early check-out to embark on our Paradise trip, starting from Cayo Paredon, and stay at MGM Muthu Rainbow for the next three days.

En route to Cayo Perdon, we soaked in the charm of many small towns and their people. We savored the



typical Cuban Pina Colada and then witnessed what I had been eagerly waiting for - the heaven on earth where the Caribbean Sea was on one side and the Atlantic sea on the other. Our bus was passing from between, and in the middle of the road, there was a crown-like structure signifying that this island is the king of Cuba.

Ah, the journey to Cayo Paredon, a hidden gem nestled in the heart of Cuba, was indeed a sight to behold. As we traversed the road that leads to Paredon, we found ourselves in a unique spectacle where the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea flanked us on either side.

Imagine this: On one side, the Atlantic Ocean, vast and majestic, its waves crashing against the shore with a rhythm as old as time itself. On the other side,



Jardines del ray

the Caribbean Sea, tranquil and serene, its turquoise waters shimmering under the tropical sun.

The road, a slender ribbon of asphalt, stretched ahead, a silent guide leading us through this breathtaking landscape. As we traveled, the salty sea breeze filled the air, carrying with it the promise of adventure and the allure of the unknown.

This journey, where you're cradled between two seas, is a testament to the magic that is Cayo Paredon. It's a place where nature's grandeur is on full display, a reminder of the beauty that lies in our world's untouched corners

So, buckle up and enjoy the ride. Let the rhythm of the road and the melody of the seas be your soundtrack as you journey towards Cayo Paredon.

In the heart of Cuba lies Cayo Paredon, a city that whispers tales of adventure and serenity. The journey by road is a feast for the senses, but if time is of the essence, a flight will swiftly carry you to this paradise.

Our abode was the MGM Muthu Rainbow Hotel, a sanctuary that embraces all with open arms. The hotel's inclusivity, extending its warmth to the LGBTQ community, was a testament to its big heart. Our first night in Cayo Paredon was a celebration of unity and diversity. The air was alive with the rhythm of salsa music, the aroma of Cuban cuisine, and the laughter of our group from Portugal, Spain, the UK, and Canada. As a vegetarian, I found comfort in the familiar flavors of Indian food and the variety of Continental dishes.

The next morning, we set sail for Cayo Cruz. Armed with a hat, SPF lotion, and a swimsuit, we were ready to embrace the Caribbean Sea. Despite my fear of deep waters, I found myself drawn to the sea. With a life jacket and the support of my team members, I dipped my legs into the water. It was a liberating experience, akin to the River Ganga washing away all stress.



Back on shore, a beach party awaited us. Dance, food, snorkeling, beach time, drinks - the choice was ours. Even without alcohol, the water, my vegetarian food, music, dance, and snorkeling made me live the moment to the fullest. A sudden shower of rain was the cherry on top.

Upon returning to the hotel, we were greeted by another round of entertainment at the swimming pool. The hotel's entertainer, a dynamic lady with an infectious energy, had everyone engaged in the pool activities. However, feeling slightly feverish and eager to attend the Cuban Night at MGM Muthu Imperial Hotel, I chose to rest.

The Cuban Night was a cultural extravaganza, showcasing Cuban culture, drinks, food, people, and vintage cars. But amidst all this, I found myself yearning for the familiar beats of Bollywood music. To my delight, the next night was Bollywood Night.

The following day, I chose to rest and experience the hotel, especially to meet the dynamic pool entertainer, Ms. Yadar Ibelleo, Entertainment Manager, Muthu Rainbow Hotel. Her tireless energy and dedication were inspiring. I wished for such pool entertainment in India and hoped that she gets an opportunity to expand her horizons beyond Cuba.



Ms. Yadar Ibelleo
Entertainment Manager

This adventure, filled with unforgettable moments and experiences, was a testament to the magic of travel and the beauty of Cuba.

Gaviota Tours and MGM Muthu started Bollywood night with a fabulous performance, which made me a proud Indian. Our Indian culture is so diverse, but

still, we all live like a family. Later, yes, Bollywood numbers, it was non-stop fun. At one point, my fun came to a halt when I got the news that the host was holding a press conference for the media.

Under the starlit Cuban sky, the rhythm of Bollywood music echoed, marking the commencement of a memorable night. The presence of the President of Gaviota Group and the Chairman & MD of MGM Muthu Hotels added a touch of grandeur to the event. As the beats of **“EK THA TIGER”** filled the air, I found myself leading a dance, a tribute to the song filmed in Havana, Cuba. The leaders, unlike some back home, embraced the rhythm and joined the dance, their spirits undeterred.

The dawn brought with it a fork in our journey. While the group split, I stayed true to the original itinerary, ready for another day of Cuban adventure. The day promised a plethora of experiences - a tranquil day at the hotel, a visit to other MGM Hotels, or an adrenaline-filled day of skydiving, rafting, a soothing massage, and a beach party.

Choosing the path of thrill, I enrolled for skydiving. As I waited for my turn, I joined my newfound friends in a game of Dominoes, a popular Cuban pastime, and enjoyed rafting. Just as the beach party was about to commence, a call from the skydiving team sent a thrill down my spine. The helicopter had arrived. As I boarded the bus for skydiving, I found myself questioning the human quest for adventure. But as fate would have it, the skydiving was cancelled due to rain. With a heart full of mixed emotions, I opted for a massage. The soothing experience, enhanced by the view of the sea, was a balm to my adventurous spirit.

The grand finale of our journey was the closing of Destinos Gaviota 2023 at Hotel Vila Gale Cayo Paredon. The event was a celebration of Cuba's rich traditions, history, and art, attended by over a thousand participants from around the globe. The event also marked the official presentation of partner hotels MGM Muthu, Cubanacan, Cayo Paredón Grande, MGM Muthu Rainbow, Gran Muthu Almirante Beach hotel- Holguin, Santiago de Cuba, Varadero to Havana as new vacation spots in Cuba. As the curtains fell on this grand event, we were left with memories that would last a lifetime.

Camagüey & Holguín

As dawn painted the sky with hues of orange and pink, we bid adieu to the vibrant Carnival. Hearts brimming with joy, minds etched with memories, we embarked on a new journey from our hotel.

Our first stop was Camagüey, a city that proudly wears its rich history and colonial architecture. We strolled through the city, discovering the five main squares, each a testament to the city's past. Our journey led us to Parque Ignacio Agramonte, a historic walking area adorned with beautiful colonial buildings, and Martha Jiménez's Studio Workshop, a gallery showcasing the work of the renowned artist.

Post a delightful lunch, we set off for Holguín. The journey, a 204-kilometer tapestry of beautiful landscapes, was made all the more enjoyable by the camaraderie in our bus. As the sun began to set, we arrived in Holguín, the 'City of Parks', and checked

into the Gran Almirante Beach Hotel, where we were welcomed with the rhythm of traditional Cuban Salsa.

The next morning, after basking in the pristine beach and the luxurious property of the hotel Almirante, we set off for Santiago de Cuba. Our bus was filled with laughter and music as we played Bollywood Antakshri, a game that transcended language barriers.

Upon arriving in Santiago de Cuba, we were introduced to the Santa Ifigenia Cemetery, the final resting place of many notable Cubans, including Fidel Castro. Although time constraints limited our exploration, the sightseeing from the bus offered a deeper understanding of the city's history and its influential figures.

Our journey culminated as we arrived at the airport, ready to fly to our next destination, Varadero. And with that, we were ready for our next adventure.



Varadero

In the hushed serenity of dawn, we found ourselves at Hotel Los Cactus, Varadero, a tranquil oasis nestled amidst beautiful gardens, an idyllic backdrop for weddings and honeymoons. Varadero, the jewel of the Caribbean, welcomed us with its sun-kissed beaches and crystal-clear turquoise waters.

Our stay, though brief on paper, was filled with unforgettable moments. We surrendered to the allure of the beach, playing volleyball, basking in the sun, and savoring Cuban beer as the sunset painted the sky in hues of gold and crimson.



Our journey then led us to **Havana**, a city that greeted us with the echoes of its rich history. We explored the Havana Rum Factory, the Habanos factory, and strolled through the colonial lanes of **OLD HAVANA**. The craft bazaar was a treasure trove of souvenirs, a perfect place to bring a piece of Cuba back home.





In Havana, we discovered **BUENA VISTA CURRY CLUB**, a unique fusion of Indian and Cuban culture, serving authentic Indian food to the rhythm of salsa music. The ride in Havana's vintage cars was a journey back in time, culminating in a delightful meal at a local shack.



The grand finale was an unforgettable poolside party at Gran Muthu Havana, a perfect end to our Cuban adventure. The next day, we packed our bags, our hearts filled with memories of the past 15 days, ready to return home to India.

Looking back, I realized that my journey was not just about the places we visited, but also about the memories we made and the friendships we forged.

In travel, the journey is just as beautiful as the destination.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the host Ministry of Tourism, Gaviota Group and MGM Muthu Hotels for making this journey possible.





Cuba: Where History, Culture, and Natural Beauty Collide

by Mario Pérez

Cuba, situated in the Caribbean, is a highly sought-after destination for tourists. Its beautiful beaches, vibrant culture, and fascinating history attract visitors from all over the world. Havana, the capital of Cuba, is full of energy and liveliness. Its vivid colonial architecture, winding streets, and music at every corner make it an exceptional place to explore. Tourists can take leisurely walks along the boardwalk, explore the famous Old Havana neighborhood, and immerse themselves in the city's lively nightlife scene. Apart from Havana, Cuba has many other popular tourist destinations. Varadero is famous for its stunning white sand beaches and crystal-clear waters. Travelers can relax at all-inclusive resorts or engage in water sports while exploring coral reefs through scuba diving. Trinidad is another popular place in Cuba that stands out as a preserved colonial city designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its winding streets lined with colonial homes give off a serene atmosphere that transports visitors to another era. Additionally,

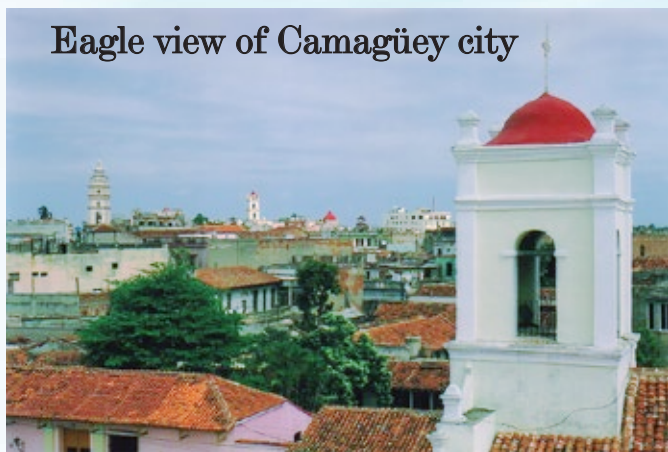
tourists can visit Valle de los Ingenios, known for its sugar cane plantations. Cuba also offers various cultural activities, including performances of traditional Cuban music in bars and salsa clubs, visits to museums such as the Museum of the Revolution, or participation in festivals and cultural events held throughout the year. Cuba has a rich and fascinating history, as well as vibrant and exciting tourism. The country was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492 during his first voyage to the New World. Over the following centuries, Cuba experienced Spanish colonization and became a major trading center for sugar and tobacco. However, it also witnessed the slavery and oppression of indigenous people.

In the 19th century, Cuba fought for its independence from Spain and finally achieved it in 1902. However, the country experienced several periods of political instability and dictatorships before the Cuban Revolution in 1959, which was led by Fidel Castro. The revolution brought significant changes to Cuban

Carnival of Santiago De Cuba



Eagle view of Camagüey city



society, including the nationalization of industry and the implementation of a socialist system. Today, tourism is one of the main drivers of the Cuban economy. With its rich culture, beautiful beaches and historic cities, Cuba has become a popular tourist destination.

Havana, the capital of Cuba, is a vibrant city full of charm. Its cobblestone streets, colorful colonial buildings and music on every corner make it a fascinating place to visit. Tourists can stroll along the Malecón, enjoy a mojito at the famous La Bodeguita del Medio bar, or visit the iconic National Capitol. Other notable tourist destinations in Cuba include Varadero, which is known for its miles of white sand beaches and crystal-clear waters, perfect for relaxing and enjoying the sun, and Trinidad, a colonial city declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its cobblestone streets and colorful houses offer a glimpse into Cuba's colonial past.

Tourism in Cuba also offers the opportunity to explore its beautiful nature. Viñales National Park is famous for its impressive mogotes, rock formations unique in the world. Visitors can go hiking, horseback riding, or simply enjoy the stunning views. In addition to its natural beauty and rich history, Cuba is also known for its music and dance. Cuban son and salsa are an integral part of Cuban culture, and tourists can enjoy live shows and learn to dance to these infectious rhythms.

In summary, Cuba is a country with a fascinating history and vibrant tourism. From its discovery by Columbus to the Cuban Revolution and beyond, Cuba's history has left a lasting mark on its culture

and society. At the same time, tourism in Cuba offers visitors a unique opportunity to enjoy beautiful beaches, rich culture and delicious food. Whether you are interested in discovering the rich history of Havana, relaxing on the beautiful beaches of Varadero or exploring the stunning nature of Viñales, Cuba has something for everyone.



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Unraveling the Legacy of Habanos A 25-Year Journey of Cuban Cigars in India

Let's Embark on a Fascinating Journey through the Rich History and Artistry of Cuban Cigars, Guided by the Expertise of Habanos' Vice President of Development
Mr. Jose Maria Lopez Inchaurre



The narrative of the Cuban cigar unfurls its first chapter in the year 1492. The momentous discovery of America by the Western world also marked their inaugural encounter with tobacco, a plant deeply embedded in the customs of the indigenous Cubanos. Historical documents of that era depict these natives engaging in a ceremonial practice of smoking tobacco, akin to our modern-day cigar.

The ceremony was a grand affair, where the priest, the custodian of the ritual, would roll the tobacco leaves and smoke them. Thus, the original

consumption of tobacco by the indigenous people was strikingly similar to smoking cigars.

As time progressed, the 17th and 18th centuries witnessed the burgeoning development of the tobacco industry, particularly in Spain and Cuba. The tobacco leaves from Cuba were exported and cultivated extensively, leading to the establishment of the world's first cigar factory in the 7th century in Spain, followed by another in Cadiz.

The wheels of time continued to turn, and the industrial landscape began to evolve in Havana, Cuba. This marked the genesis of the global recognition of Cuban cigars. The history of Cuba is intrinsically intertwined with tobacco, shaping not only its economy but also its societal norms.

The 19th century brought about significant changes in Cuba, particularly in the realm of labor rights. These reforms were largely influenced by the tobacco industry, which played an active role in union activities. This industry was instrumental in shaping the socio-economic evolution of Cuba during the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, the history of the Cuban cigar is not merely a tale of tobacco and smoke, but a testament to the transformative power of an industry on a nation's socio-economic fabric.



Jose Maria Lopez Inchaurre
Vice President of Development
Habanos s.a.

The genesis of the first factories in the 19th century was primarily driven by foreign investors. These investors were predominantly from families that had established trade relationships with the indigenous people of America, dealing in a variety of commodities. Recognizing the potential of the burgeoning tobacco industry,

these families began to channel their investments into cigar factories. This marked the inception of a new era in the history of the tobacco industry, setting the stage for the global recognition of the Cuban cigar.

The global market for cigars, particularly the Cuban cigar, has witnessed a remarkable transformation over the past two to three decades. The cigar industry has surged in popularity, riding on waves of growth that have swept across the globe. This growth was particularly noticeable in the 90s, a period that marked the beginning of the cigar's worldwide popularity.

Historically, Europe has always been the natural market for cigars. During the colonial era, the majority of cigars produced in Cuba found their way to European shores, with Spain and France emerging as the leading markets. However, the landscape began to shift in the 90s, with the American market experiencing a significant boom. This was followed by an explosion in the Middle East in the early 2000s, and more recently, an exponential growth in Asia over the last five to ten years.

Today, we find ourselves in a world where the demand for cigars is truly global. However, this surge in demand presents a unique challenge. The production of cigars is a meticulous process, involving strict quality standards from the selection of the tobacco leaf, through the fermentation and ageing process, which can take one to three years, to the final rolling of the cigar.



In response to this growing demand, efforts are being made to expand the cultivation of tobacco and recover historical lands. However, this is a time-consuming process, and currently, there is a significant gap between supply and demand. The real challenge lies not in merely increasing production to meet demand, but in doing so while maintaining the same high standards of quality that have come to define the cigar industry. This is the story of the cigar industry's journey, a tale of growth, quality, and the relentless pursuit of excellence.

Making of Cuban Cigars



Our entire process, from cultivation to export, is meticulously controlled and 100% based in Cuba, under the supervision of the Council of Origin. Quality assurance begins at the very start, when the seed is sown, and continues throughout the process with stringent standards akin to those in the wine industry.

We work closely with Tabacuba, a Cuban entity responsible for producing tobacco leaves and manufacturing cigars, to ensure the highest quality of our product, Habanos, which is a prominent name in Cuban cigars.

Quality checks are conducted at multiple stages, including after the cigars are rolled in factories. Prior to exporting Habanos, a final quality control check is performed, ensuring that only the finest products reach our customers worldwide. This rigorous process underscores our commitment to maintaining the esteemed reputation of Cuban cigars.

Tobacco production in Cuba is primarily managed by private growers who have contracts with the Cuban state. These growers cultivate and procure tobacco leaves under the supervision of Tabacuba, a state-owned company that provides all necessary resources for production. The entire farming process, from sowing to harvesting, takes approximately four months.

Post-harvest, the leaves are dried in curing houses managed by the tobacco growers. This drying process initiates chemical changes in the leaves, including the fixation of sugars and other components. This is the first stage of what we refer to as farming.

The leaves then undergo two rounds of natural fermentation, triggered by humidity, temperature, and microorganisms present in the leaves. This process alters the leaf's components, breaking down cellulose and producing other chemical components suitable for smoking.

The leaves are then packed for a third round of fermentation, or aging. The duration of this process, which can range from one to three years, allows the leaves to evolve and improve in quality.

Once the leaves have been fermented and aged, they are sent to manufacturing industries where cigars are hand-rolled and packed. A final quality control check is conducted before the cigars are exported worldwide.

From a Cuban perspective, every detail of this process is meticulously checked for quality. From sowing the

seed to drying the leaves, everything is done by hand, making each cigar a unique, handmade product. Despite the potential for human error, the quality of Habanos cigars remains consistently high.

The annual Havana festival celebrates the cigar-smoking community and showcases the tobacco production process. We also host the Habanos World Challenge, a year-round contest culminating at the festival, to test knowledge about cigars and promote Habanos culture.

Indian market

Our 25-year collaboration with Cingari has introduced Habanos cigars to the Indian market. With the initial phase of introduction complete, we're now focusing on expansion. This includes introducing new variants of our global brands and secondary brands like Pratham, a Cuban brand originally created for France.

Our expansion strategy aims to increase our market presence in both metropolitan and secondary cities. We're committed to enhancing understanding of cigar



smoking and targeting new consumers, emphasizing that smoking a cigar is a lifestyle choice.

Cigar accessibility in India has increased significantly due to the rise of duty-free markets and reduced taxes. Our masterclasses deepen participants' understanding of our diverse cigar culture, and our portfolio expansion provides more choices for consumers. As a result, India is beginning to understand the cigar culture.



Unveiling the Tale Untold

A Journey with the Visionary who Introduced Habanos to India 25 Years Ago.

Let's Explore his Remarkable Path Together

The introduction of cigars in India was a gradual process by CINGARI, sparked by a visit to Cuba 25 years ago. Despite challenges, **Mr. Chetan Seth, President of Cingari**, persisted in promoting cigars, driven by personal history and belief in the market's potential. Our efforts, including hosting parties and engaging influencers, led to increased awareness and acceptance of cigars.

We educate individuals about cigars through F&B classes and masterclasses, covering topics from cigar origins to tasting experiences. We also conduct tastings and pairing sessions, expanding beyond cognac to include wine and other beverages.

Our training program, developed by the trained trainers, offers three levels of certification to ensure product continuity and foster appreciation for cigars. We've established Habanos Lounges in hotels and aim to accredit more outlets, including luxury Paan shops, Our initiatives aim to educate, engage, and enhance the cigar experience for all.

We have identified three key areas of focus for our organization:

1. Regulatory Challenges: We acknowledge the

complexities involved in implementing tobacco regulations. It is not feasible to enforce these regulations without a comprehensive public smoking provision. The health implications of second-hand smoke are a significant concern, and we are committed to addressing this issue.

2. Club Experience: We aspire to create an exclusive club experience where members can enjoy liquor and cigars at their leisure. This concept is inspired by certain clubs in Paris, where members have access via a key, sign for what they consume, and enjoy a personalized experience. We aim to replicate this level of service, while also improving ventilation systems for a fresher environment, akin to clubs in New York.

3. Market Expansion: We recognize the potential for growth in the cigar market in India, particularly in light of the country's increasing wealth. Our strategy involves expanding into secondary cities and enhancing our presence in metropolitan areas. We are also considering the opening of more duty-free shops and exploring markets in popular tourist destinations like Goa.

We believe these strategies will enable us to provide a superior experience for our patrons and achieve our business objectives.



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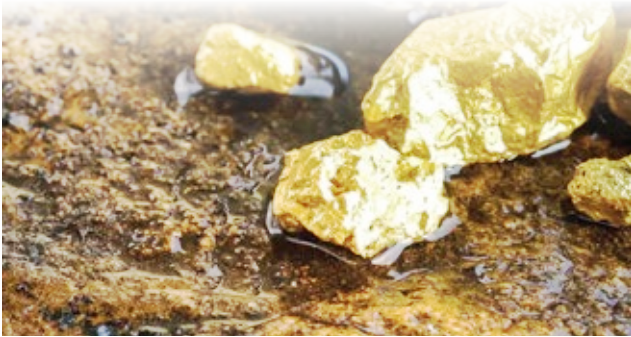
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Next Year will be the Year of Denmark in India

With several tedious efforts Editor Amit Mittal was able to snatch a short interview with the Ambassador of Denmark Mr. Freddy Svane, but it seemed to wriggle out of hand due to personnel engagement of the busy Ambassador. However, he did not let it slip away, he somehow managed a second appointment the same day. The Excellency obliged and spared some of his valuable time for a short interview. Overwhelmed at the magnanimity of the Ambassador, the Editor had few questions to ask which he has laid down for the readers below. And of course some snaps that could be shot hurriedly all for the readers :

Q. There seems to be a strong effort to increase Bilateral trade, however, it was USD 4.52 billion in 2022 (import to India USD 3.13 billion and export in service by India valued at USD 1.39 billion). What do the figures for 2023 show ? Increasing trend or a decline ?

They show an increasing trend of nearly 40 per cent as far as trade of goods is concerned. It is even higher in the services sector. In 2022 export to India was of the order of \$ 7 billion which also includes services. It is expected to be still higher in 2023. There has been significant increase of Danish investments in India.

Q. The major export items from India to Denmark are textiles, apparels and yarns related, vehicles and components, metal goods, iron and steel, leather and footwear, and travel goods.

India is also exporting pharmaceuticals to Denmark. Don't forget millets and rice from India.

Which rice is being sent to Denmark. The government has banned export of rice ?

Lot of basmati rice is going to Denmark. Maybe it is the lot before the ban was enforced.

Q. Major Danish exports to India are medicinal/pharmaceutical products, power generating machinery, industrial machinery, metal waste and ore, and organic chemicals.

As per Denmark Statistics figures, the value of total



direct investment inflows from Denmark to India during 2000-2021 was USD 1.81 billion. Figures for current FY please ?

The investments from Denmark to India are increasing. Figures from investment from India to Denmark have been \$2 billion and from Denmark to India \$3 to 4 billion.

Q. Around 200 Danish companies have invested in



India in sectors such as shipping, renewable energy, environment, agriculture, food processing and smart urban development. Major Danish companies present in India include AP Moller Maersk Group, Vestas, LM Wind Power, Grundfos, Danfoss, Carlsberg, FL Smidth, Novo Nordisk, Haldar Topsoe, Ramboll, etc. Is the number of Danish investors static ?

According to a recent survey conducted by DI (Danish Investments), a significant number of Danish companies are considering increasing their investments in India. The survey found that one-third of the Danish companies surveyed expressed their readiness to increase their investments in India.

What problems are Danish investors facing in India ? What is the total investment of these companies ?

There are tons of bureaucratic problems in India. The ease of doing business has had little effect. There are several non-tariff barriers. It is a time consuming process.

Q. As per the information available from Invest in Denmark, the total value of Indian investments in Denmark is about USD 560 million. Around 25 Indian companies are present in Denmark in various

sectors, including IT, renewable energy and engineering.

Indian companies present in Denmark also include Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, L&T Infotech, HCL, Infosys etc.

Q. To commemorate 75 years of India's Independence talks on India@75 by eminent persons, school outreach programme with interactive sessions, youth cricket workshop, rangoli, art and dance workshops; essay writing, painting and poster making were organised in Denmark, but found no mention of these in India. Why ?

Next year 2024 is the 75 th anniversary of diplomatic ties between India and Denmark. It will be marked on a grand scale. This will bring Danish culture closer to people of India.

I suggest exchange of such events between the two countries to increase people to people contact. Don't you hold such opinion ?

Q. Which is the most important MoU between the two countries ?

Water and Renewable Energy are important aspects. Next year 2024 you will see the year of Denmark in India. There will be a number of events conducted to raise awareness about Danish culture and people. You will see the beginning from next month with Air India making direct flights to Denmark three times a week. This will bring people to people ties closer.



Credentials

Cyprus



H.E. Mr Evagoras Vryonides
High Commissioner of the
Republic of Cyprus

Bulgaria



H.E. Mr Nikolay Hristov Yankov
Ambassador of the Republic of
Bulgaria

European Union



H.E. Mr Herve Delphin
Ambassador of the European
Union

Envoys from five nations presented their credentials to President Draupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on 23 October'23, marking a new chapter in the diplomatic relations between their respective nations and India

France



H.E. Mr Thierry Mathou
Ambassador of France

Moldova



H.E. Mrs Ana Taban
Ambassador of the Republic of
Moldova



PERU-INDIA FTA AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

by **Ambassador Jorge Castaneda**
Former Ambassador of Peru to India

The resumption of the negotiations of the free trade agreement between Peru and India next December 2023 and the entry into operation of the port of Chancay in November 2024 provides an opportunity for the agricultural sector to have greater relevance in the negotiation and subscription of said agreement. This is because, on the one hand, India, with more than 1.4 billion inhabitants, is the first economy in terms of population in the world, with a growing consumption capacity and demand for food products that requires it to have new international suppliers. On the other hand, Peru as a leading global exporter of a wide range of agricultural products that are in high demand internationally, and has the capacity to meet part of that demand.

There is a great opportunity for India to have a varied supply of quality agricultural products from Peru particularly because the agricultural products of both countries are in most cases different and counter-seasonal. Moreover, the economies of India and Peru are not competitive but complementary. For instance, the Indian food diet is primarily based on the consumption of spices, herbs and a variety of vegetables, grains and legumes and that its main agricultural products are: milk, legumes, rice, wheat, sorghum, corn, cotton, cane sugar, peanuts, farmed fish, sheep and goat meat, fruits, vegetables and tea; whereas the potential agricultural products for export from Peru to India are: vegetables, plants, roots and tubers; edible fruits and nuts, avocados, grapes, citrus fruits, melons and watermelons; coffee, tea, herbs and spices; cereals, milled products, malt, starch, wheat gluten; seeds and oilseed products, various seeds and fruits, industrial and medicinal plants, straw and fodder; gums, resins and other vegetable juices and extracts.

Being that the diagnosis of opportunities described above is favorable, why is it that agricultural trade

between India and Peru is not significant and is limited to a few products and for small amounts in value (See ANNEX 1). This responds to several concurrent factors that make it difficult to take advantage of the opportunities. These are tariff and non-tariff barriers, transit time, cost of maritime transportation and logistical costs.

TRADE BARRIERS

In India, agricultural activity is a protected sector through tariff and non-tariff barriers that aim to avoid foreign competition. Tariff rates for agricultural products with average rates that vary by country between 20% and 98%. This makes imports more expensive and therefore increases costs for consumers. In contrast, in Peru, the ad-Valorem tariff levels applied to agricultural products for 100 percent of the tariff universe are tariff rates of 0, 6 and 11 percent and the logistics costs.

NO DUTY BARRIERS

Non-tariff barriers are regulations used by governments to make it difficult or prevent the importation of certain goods without raising their tariffs. This can occur through a total import ban, the establishment of import quotas or through the adoption of very demanding quality controls or very strict packaging requirements.

TRANSIT TIME, MARITIME TRANSPORTATION AND LOGISTIC COSTS

Maritime transport plays a crucial role in the exports of fresh and perishable foods, being one of the most used means for shipping this type of merchandise. Ships and refrigerated containers are used for transportation in order to preserve the cold chain.

The maritime transit time between India and Peru is approximately 45-50 days, a fairly long period that is reflected in the costs of freight and insurance and in turn in the CIF value of trade flows.

The logistics cost is the sum of those hidden costs that are produced by the succession of activities such as the storage or transportation of a good from the producer to the final buyer. The logistics cost is related to the efficiency and effectiveness of the logistics process. The greater the efficiency and effectiveness, the lower the cost. The International Logistics Index 2023 places India in 38th place and Peru in 61st place.

PROPOSALS

In the agricultural sector, the resumption of the negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement between Peru and India provides an opportunity and a challenge for both countries to create the necessary conditions to deal with tariff and non-tariff measures, maritime transport time and logistics costs to boost bilateral trade because they are complementary sectors between them; and due to the growing demand of the Indian market for agricultural products which requires obtaining new sources of supply of quality products.

On Peru's side, the tariff issue does not constitute a barrier to entry for agricultural products from India, which is not the case for Peruvian products that face high tariffs for entry into India. This requires India to refocus its position on its tariff barriers for Peruvian products in the agricultural sector which should be compensated by Peru with benefits in another sectors of interest to India. The treatment of the issue of non-tariff restrictions should follow the same logic of mutual cooperation with the criterion that sensitive agricultural products are not an obstacle for commercial cooperation to impact other products with restricted access.

Regarding maritime transport time and logistics costs between Peru and India, it is important to stress that India will be able to benefit from the reduction of maritime transport time from 45-50 days to 25-30 days as well as of the logistics costs of its exports and imports not only in relation to Peru but also with

Colombia, Ecuador, Chile and Bolivia, through the entry into operation of the Port of Chancay, 82 km north of Lima. The Port of Chancay will be the first smart and digital port in the South American Pacific, with greater depth of The Pacific coast, with the capacity to receive ships of 18,000 to 24,000 fully loaded containers (TEU). The port will also create the development of a logistics, technological and industrial complex as well as the creation of an adjacent Special Economic Zone, that also provide India for new opportunities of investment in Peru.



This single action by the Peruvian Government makes Peru a strategic partner for India to take into account not only from the point of view of trade in agricultural products but also geopolitically in relation to have the opportunity to mitigate the Chinese presence in South America, taking a position in the Peruvian agricultural sector in which China hasn't entered yet.

What has been expressed makes it necessary for India and Peru to rethink the negotiation, in the agricultural sector, to address said issue and also include the issues of technical cooperation, technology transfer and investments in said sector.

COOPERATION AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

The development and modernization of Indian agriculture with the creation of centers for high-tech agricultural equipment, the provision of credit to farmers for the purchase of machinery and other incentives aimed at increasing agricultural production and productivity provides the opportunity through the negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement to develop cooperation and technology transfer between Peru and India



INVESTMENTS

India, like Peru, are countries with the greatest biodiversity in the world and have several types of land, suitable for growing a large number of crops. For this reason. Peru appears to India as an ideal country for agricultural investment for the production of vegetables, legumes and fruits that it does not produce. At the international level, Peru plays an important role, having positioned itself as one of the main agricultural countries in the world. This, thanks to the variety of climatic conditions added to good soil and water management, in addition to having balanced crop nutrition, among other factors.

Peru has irrigation projects that are awaiting execution and that will make available to investors in the agricultural sector, an area that is estimated at 400,000 hectares and the improvement of the land. The greatest expectations are in the Majes-Siguas II-Arequipa projects, which will involve an area of 38,500 new hectares, and the III stage of Chavimochic (Trujillo), which will involve 63,000 new hectares.

Finally, it should be highlighted that, with the port of Chancay Peru will make better use of the 21 Free Trade Agreements that it currently has signed with

the main economies of the world, all of which will generate the expansion and diversification of its exports, particularly agricultural and the increase of investments in the country.



CHAVIMOCHIC IRRIGATION PROJECT

ANNEX 1

PERU AGROEXPORTS TO INDIA	2021	2022
Total	3,295,610	4,942,318
Tara powder (caesalpineae spinosa)	699,266	960,412
Tara seed mucilage (caesalpineae spinosa)	199,578	923,877
brazil nuts without shell, fresh or dried	735,065	744,965
Red blueberries, billets and other fruits of the vaccinium genus, fresh	166,329	741,959
Others: other vegetable juices and extracts	361,488	689,500
Fresh grapes	289,244	276,362
Other gums, resins, gomoresins, and natural oleoresins	27,456	189,696
Other fruits and other fruits, uncooked or cooked in water or steam, with azuc.Oedul.Freeze	0	136,910
Other quinoa (chenopodium quinoa) except for sowing	29,505	79,740
Other cocoa beans, whole or broken, raw, except for sowing	2,017	55,619
Avocados, fresh or dried	470,929	33,953
Asparagus, fresh or refrigerated	9,704	33,848
Pisco	5,382	29,376
Harina de maca	13,693	22,560
Demas preparaciones para salsas, y demas salsas preparadas	0	12,616
Mangos y mangostanes, frescos o secos	0	6,270
Fats and oils, animals, and their fractions, partially or completely hydrogenated	0	2,731
Other plants, parts of plant, seeds and fruits of species used mainly in perfumery, medicine or for insecticidal, parasiticidal or similar uses except refrigerated, frozen	3,000	1,925
Cocoa powder without added sugar or other sweetener.	11,125	0
Other food preparations of semolina flour, starch, starch or mal extract	268	0
Other nuts, including mixtures prepared or otherwise preserved	0	0
Other food supplements	6,578	0
Flour, semola, and powder of the other products of the chapter. 8 exc. Bananas	906	0
Other castor seed, even broken, except for sowing	62,500	0
Tomato seeds (licopersicum spp.)	20,000	0
brazil nuts in shell, fresh or dried	18,417	0
Other fruits and other fruits, uncooked or cooked in water or steam, s/azuc.Oedul.Freeze	124,695	0
Uncrushed or powdered ginger	38,457	0

Preparation: ADEX DATA TRADE,
Source: Customs - Peru

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