

Emerging community of bloggers in Cuba

Blogging has finally hit Cuba, despite the challenge of gaining access to the Internet and the limited number of home computers on the island, and the emergence of a Cuban community of bloggers may soon be more than just wishful thinking.

„I think blogging from Cuba is an important way of making our reality and opinions known and of communicating with the rest of the world“, Roger Trabas, a self-taught computer programmer and author of a site called „Kilómetro Cero“, told to IPS Agency.

"The biggest challenge is getting an Internet connection," admitted Trabas, who has to access the Internet from work and also deal with problems such as low speed.

Due to the nearly half-decade U.S. embargo, Cuba can only connect to the Internet via satellite, which limits bandwidth dramatically and makes data transfer more expensive. This could change with the laying of an underwater fibre optic cable from Venezuela, which is scheduled to be completed in 2010.

Only 5.2 percent of the respondents to the 2007 Survey on Access to Selected Information and Communication Services, conducted by the National Statistics Bureau, used a computer at home, while 88.8 percent used computers at their place of work or study.

Government policy has prioritized access to the new information and communication technologies in scientific and educational centers, cultural institutions and state bodies, over individual use.

"It's not easy, but it all depends on how determined you are," observed Trabas, who writes about a variety of subjects on his website, from computer programming to aspects of life in Cuba.

Nobody knows exactly how many blogs are produced in Cuba. The Bloggers Cuba directory lists a mere 14 personal web pages, while the site „Blogs sobre Cuba“, which includes blogs hosted from other countries, attests to some 650. For its part, the directory of the non-governmental Cuban Journalist Union indexes a total of 174 blogs.

In its State of the Blogosphere 2008 report, the blog search engine Technorati reveals that as of Sept. 20 there were 133 million blogs worldwide. Of that total, only 7.4 million had posted new information in the last four months, and approximately 1.5 million had updated their information during the week prior to the study's completion.

Sources: IPS, Miami Herald

Cuba bolsters food rations to counter shortages

Fruits and vegetables are getting hard to find across Cuba after hurricanes wiped out crops, but the government is tapping food reserves to bolster the monthly food ration that Cubans have received for decades.

According to the Reuters news agency, Cuba would step up imports when needed to make sure no one goes hungry, a situation that could arise by December when diplomats estimate Cuba's reserves will run out.

A survey of major cities and the hardest-hit provinces found that supplies of vegetables and fruits had dried up, even in the usually well-supplied black market. But starches and proteins could still be found with an effort.

"The problem is you have to be at the markets when something comes in, because supply is irregular," said Carlos Pena, a state worker in Holguin province.

Cubans say the monthly ration usually provides enough basic food to get through about two weeks, and then they have to supplement it with purchases.

Across much of the country the ration has been increased with additional rice, beans, sugar, cooking oil, a few cans of fish and meat, crackers and other basics, according to people interviewed.

In the few provinces where there was little storm damage, including Havana, rations have not been changed. However, some food that normally would have gone to the Cuban capital was being diverted to needy parts of the country.

In measures that some critics say have only worsened the storm-induced shortages, the Cuban government has slapped price controls on staples and limited how many pounds of rice, for example, an individual can purchase.

It also has cracked down on sales outside the state-controlled distribution system and pressured farmers to sell only to the state. Street vendors have disappeared across the country and what is available at private markets has dwindled.

Source: Reuters

Cuban dissidents call for independent small businesses

The Party of Democratic Solidarity (known as PSD) a moderate group within the Cuban opposition, revealed on October 2, 2008 a proposal for the "economic restructuring" of the island through the creation of small and medium independent businesses. Information was brought by EFE Agency.

The PSD, said that Cuba „demands an urgent economic restructuring“ and that the government's „persistence“ in following the current economic model confirms that „real socialism as an economic, political and social system has failed“.

The PSD plan conceives of „an initial process based on independent small and medium companies“, which could be private, cooperatives or mixed firms, as a way to revitalize the economy and create jobs.

The group said that the small and medium businesses „would help reduce the exodus of Cubans“ and would be a „factor to attract capital“.

In addition, the PSD called for strengthening „the right of Cubans who live abroad to invest in Cuba“.

The PSD rejected the government's initiative to hand over idle lands to peasants to work, considering it a „negative measure that will not resolve the food crisis in Cuba, which has already lasted 50 years“.

The group said that peasants, who are not the owners of the land they receive to work, will try to „get the maximum out of it“ and will thus degrade it. „The economic, political and social panorama is dismal and bleak as never before, above all after the passage of the hurricanes“, the PSD said.

Source: EFE