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## **Cuba News Briefs: Beach Erosion, Nuclear Plant Safe, Exiles Arrested**

by LADB Staff

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### ***Beach erosion affects economically crucial tourist areas***

Many of Cuba's most famous and economically important beaches are being destroyed by a combination of natural processes, unwise coastal development, and deforestation. East of Havana at Varadero, the island's most popular tourist beach destination, beach recession is proceeding at a rate of 1.2 meters per year. Other beaches affected include El Megano, Santa Maria del Mar, Boca Ciega, Guanabo, and Veneciana all located around Havana.

According to a 1996 report by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), beach erosion is happening in several Caribbean countries. The report estimates that beach displacement is taking place in Cuba at an average rate of three meters per year as sand is eroded or removed for other uses, leaving bare beaches unacceptable for tourism.

While some of the erosion can be attributed to natural causes such as the effects of wind and wave action, Ernesto Trista of the Cuban Oceanographic Institute said bad policies accelerate these processes through the contamination of marine ecosystems and the subsequent slowing of sand production.

The government has recognized the dangers of beach erosion and is planning several countermeasures. Legislation is under consideration to prevent tree cutting along the coast and to force the removal of structures, such as seawalls, that cause erosion. However, coastal protection measures were started several years ago in Varadero but have made only limited progress. Most of the structures that should have been removed are still in place.

### ***Nuclear plant at Juragua deemed no threat by US team***

Cuban plans to complete the nuclear power plant in Juragua in Cienfuegos province have stirred fears in the US that an accident could send radioactive fallout over Florida and other southern states. US concerns were sharpened last year when Russia promised assistance and various countries showed interest in forming a consortium to complete the plant (see NotiSur, 09/17/92 and 10/26/95; NotiCen 05/01/97).

In June, State Department spokesperson Nicolas Burns said the US opposed completion of the plant. "We are concerned about the reliability of the plant and the environmental consequences," he said. Funds have already been approved for the Defense Department to set up an early-warning system in Florida to detect radiation. The environmental concerns about Juragua have been absorbed into the US's general anti-Castro policy and are being added to the US list of possible security threats posed by Cuba. In October, anti-Castro Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) organized a forum to discuss the plant as a possible threat to the US. Independent Cuban journalist Olanca

Nogueras told the forum that the partially completed plant was using defective and damaged parts and ignoring vital maintenance procedures.

Nogueras's view contrasts sharply with that of nuclear physicist Thomas Cochran of the Natural Resources Defense Council. During a visit to Cuba in November, Cochran said the plant would present no threat to the US even in the event of a nuclear accident, though he stressed that construction problems, deficiencies in the training of personnel, and other weak points would make the plant less safe than those in Europe and the US. Cochran was in Cuba as part of a defense-analysis team investigating charges raised in Congress that Cuba threatened US national security.

"A nuclear Chernobyl in Cuba does not exist despite claims of alarmists in the United States," said retired Rear Adm. Eugene Carroll, deputy director of the Center for Defense Information and a member of the team. However, the team's assessment was mostly based on current circumstances. For example, it noted that the plant was a long way from completion and that, even if foreign capital could be found to complete it, the job would take another four years.

Furthermore, "no source of funding at the billion-dollar level exists today or is foreseen in the future," said Carroll. The team also reported that the plant shows evidence of proper maintenance and storage of reactor and other critical parts. According to Cochran, should the plant become operational, Cuba would be more affected by an accident than the US. "An accident could have a devastating impact on Cuba's economy when other nations become unwilling to import contaminated products, such as sugar, from the country," he said.

### *Exiles investigated in plot to kill Fidel Castro*

On Oct. 27, the US Coast Guard found a boat in trouble off the coast of Puerto Rico. On examination, US Customs officials found two .50-caliber sniper rifles and 70 rounds of ammunition hidden on the boat. The four men aboard are all Cuban exiles living in south Florida. At a court appearance in San Juan, one of the four said the purpose of the trip was to assassinate Fidel Castro at the Ibero-American summit on the Venezuelan island of Margarita in early November. The four men were held in Puerto Rico on charges of conspiracy to commit murder and illegal possession of firearms. A judge subsequently dropped the conspiracy charge for lack of evidence.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) found that the boat had been docked at the home of Marco Antonio Saenz, a Miami business partner of Feliciano Foyo, treasurer of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF). Saenz told authorities that he let a friend, Jose Llama, a member of CANF's board of directors, tie the boat up on his property. The boat is registered to Nautical Sports, of which Llama is director, president, secretary, and treasurer. Llama is a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion. In 1996, he helped found the Hispano-Cuban Foundation in Spain, which functions as an overseas extension of CANF and has worked to influence Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar's government to press for a tough anti-Castro line in European Union affairs (see NotiSur, 01/10/97).

On Nov. 20, a federal grand jury in San Juan indicted the four suspects on the illegal arms charge and for making false statements to the Coast Guard. They were then released on bail. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 06/06/97; Notimex, 10/28/97; Itar-Tass, 11/02/97; Inter Press Service, 10/05/97,

11/10/97; Miami Herald, 10/31/97, 11/07/97, 11/21/97, 11/23/97; Reuter, 10/30/97, 11/01/97, 11/10/97,  
11/25/97; Associated Press, 11/01/97, 11/25/97; Washington Post, New York Times, 11/26/97)

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