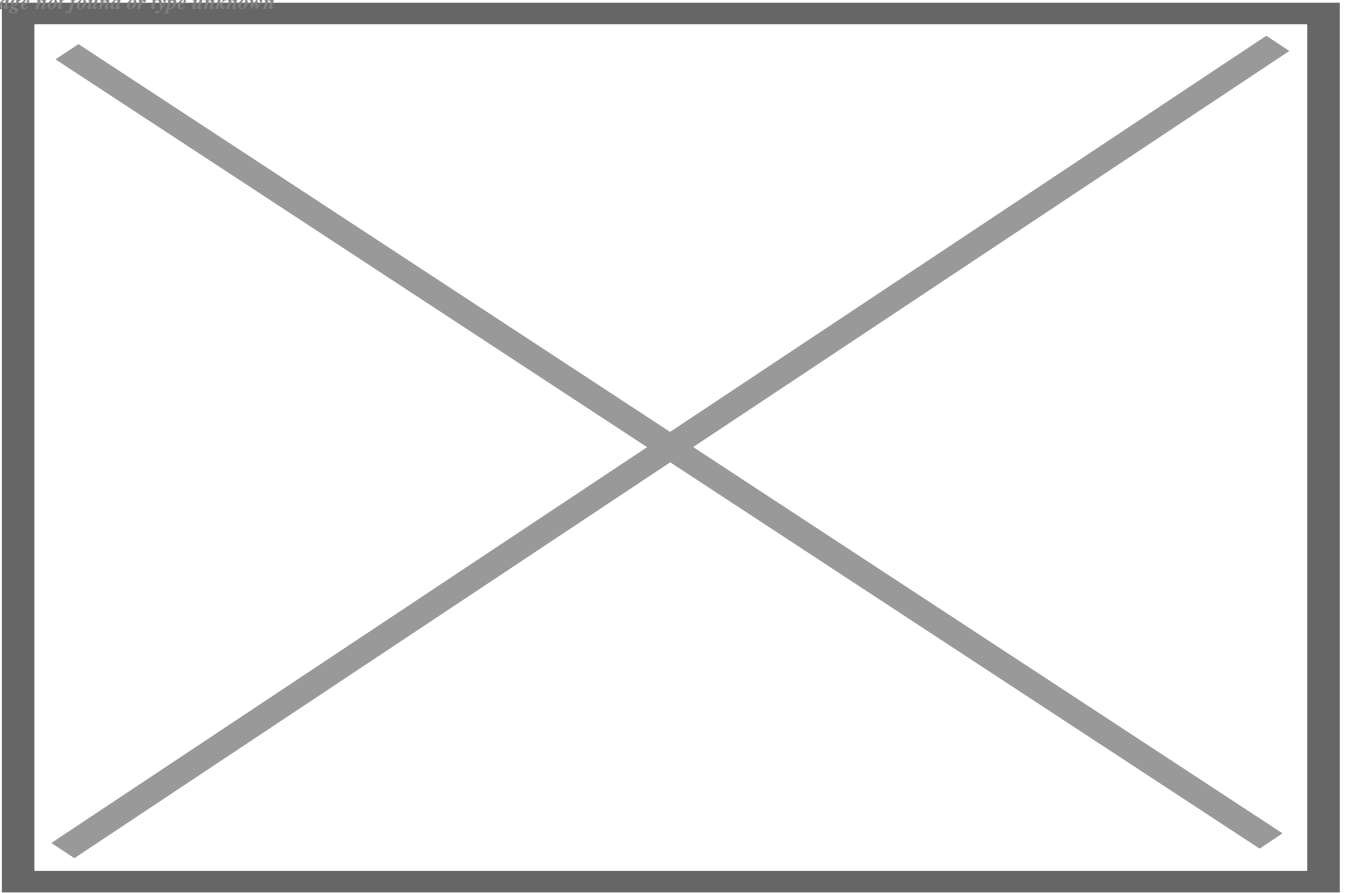


# *Always by the side of the people to find solutions to problems*

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Havana, April 1 (RHC) -- In the midst of the complex situation the country is going through and which demands extraordinary efforts in all senses, Political Bureau member and Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz insisted, while addressing the most recent meeting of the Council of Ministers, on the importance of "always being at the side of the people, especially in the search for solutions to mitigate or eliminate the problems that have been accumulating."

The Prime Minister spoke of explaining in a timely manner and always listening to the concerns and proposals of the population at the meeting, which was chaired by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party and President of the Republic, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez.

As it has been in every moment of the Revolution, Marrero Cruz also emphasized the need to defend unity in all scenarios. A unity, he said, that necessarily has to be accompanied by demanding and ensuring that what is established is fulfilled, in which the main leaders of each place have a leading role, to whom "it corresponds to us, more than ever, to be the example.

"Today the fight is hard and to fight it we need to take a firm step, with our heads held high", he said, in order to be able to "advance in the solution of the problems, in improving the conditions of our population, but with the conviction that we are going to fight and we are going to win the fight".

The current context we are facing, he considered, "commits us more to advance in the implementation of the Government's projections, hence our insistence on the need to identify the distortions and negative trends that are currently manifesting themselves.

"If we do not start by identifying the things that are wrong with us, the things that are not working properly and seek solutions to them, we will stop, we will not move forward, and we will continue to do, as we have said, a little more of the same," he said.

We live in different times, he recalled, which demand more exigency and control, always defending planning. "The fact that resources are scarce, that we have so many problems does not mean that we do not have to plan and that we do not demand compliance with the plans".

Precisely, the first item of the wide and varied agenda of the meeting was dedicated to informing about the status of the implementation of the measures approved as part of the Government's projections to correct distortions and re-boost the economy during the year 2024.

Mildrey Granadillo de la Torre, First Deputy Minister of Economy and Planning, explained several of the actions that were carried out between February 28 and March 22, in order to comply with the schedule.

She reminded that, as from March 1st, the updated retail prices of fuels, both in cup and in foreign currency, came into effect and will be subject to revision every three months.

In addition, he commented that although the non state-owned companies that provide passenger and cargo transportation services acquire fuels for the exercise of these activities at the established wholesale prices, the expected impact on prices has not been achieved, as they have continued to increase.

Likewise, he referred that the Agreement that establishes the tariff for the population of electric energy for the residential sector was updated, which was increased, as of March, by 25% for consumers that exceed 500 kWh. This measure was conceived as a demand containment mechanism.

During this period, it was also approved the continuity, until June 30, of the extension of tariff exemptions for the importation of food, medicines, medical supplies and cleaning products by natural persons.

The First Deputy Minister of Economy and Planning valued that, in the period under analysis, attention has been focused on the projections that contribute to the macroeconomic stabilization, to the increase of foreign currency income, of the national production and to the development of the economic actors.

In this sense, the Prime Minister insisted on the need for all the organizations and local governments to clearly assume how each of the actions and projections that have been designed are implemented in their area, and to have a more active participation in this sense.

## ECONOMY AND BUDGET AT PENCIL POINT

The agenda of the day, as usual in these meetings, included the report on the behavior of the main economic indicators at the end of February.

According to the explanation of Joaquín Alonso Vázquez, Minister of Economy and Planning, this was a period marked, among other aspects, by a slight growth in the export of goods with respect to a similar period of the previous year, as well as non-compliances in the agricultural production plans.

Regarding tourism activity, he detailed that, although the plan was only 89 % fulfilled, which represents the arrival of 268,176 visitors, these figures are 11.9 % higher than those of February 2023, and 8.6 % more than in January of this year.

Regarding the sugar harvest in particular, he considered that it has turned out to be very complex, characterized by low industrial and sugarcane yields, which have been affected by fuel shortages and other organizational issues.

Even though in the last few days sugar production levels have been recovering, he said, what has been achieved puts a strain on the fulfillment of the plan and, with it, the distribution of sugar to the family basket.

In this regard, Julio García Pérez, president of Grupo Azucarero Azcuba, commented that, from the economic and financial point of view, several of the companies that are currently harvesting sugar have losses, which are associated both to inefficiencies and instability of the milling process.

Taking into account the accumulated backlog, he said, we have proposed the strategy of milling until time permits in certain areas where it is possible to do so, with the purpose of recovering the indicators of the Plan of the Economy related to sugar production.

The greatest impacts left by the results of the harvest to date, he said, are associated with the insurance of the standard family basket.

Speaking at this point of the meeting, the member of the Political Bureau and general secretary of the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba, Ulises Guilarte de Nacimiento, called attention to two issues of special interest to workers, and to which greater attention should be paid by the administrations.

The first one, he said, is associated with the "growth that has been taking place in several sectors of the economy in the non-payment of workers, which constitutes a dissatisfaction within the collectives".

He also referred to the more than 300 companies that have losses, which include a significant number of workers who are limited, as a result of the lack of efficiency in business management, to be able to receive the benefits that come with the application of the powers we have given to the socialist state enterprise and thus be able to improve the workers' income.

About those issues, the Prime Minister considered that both are, in the first place, the responsibility of the main bosses in each place. There is a system that establishes, he recalled, that "wherever there is a financial problem, it must be discussed, proposals must be made and solutions must be sought before the date on which it is due to pay salaries".

Regarding the behavior of the economy at the end of February, Marrero Cruz considered that, although "it is true that there have been many difficulties with fuels and the economic situation is complex, it is also true that there are things that are being left undone and could have been done in terms of economic and productive issues".

On the other hand, he considered it is also essential to achieve a greater demand and follow up of the actions that allow a greater foreign currency income to the country, which is vital to acquire food and fuels. "And this has a lot to do with the need to produce more", he reiterated.

With emphasis, he spoke of the essential review that must be made of the progress of the fulfillment of the plans. It is urgent, he said, to identify "the existing non-compliances, which are really due to external

impacts and which are due to things that have not been done".

He also referred to the problem of high prices, for whose containment the measures applied have proved to be insufficient, as well as the inspections carried out by the existing inspection bodies.

In this sense, he emphasized the priority that must be given to reorganize the inspection activity in all the territories and "unleash a raid against the high and speculative prices that the population demands so much, and consequently apply all the powers that are established by the governments to contain them".

Another of the points analyzed by the meeting was the report on the execution of the State Budget and the behavior of the fiscal deficit at the end of January 2024.

The Minister of Finance and Prices, Vladimir Regueiro Ale, explained that, at the end of the first month of the year, a fiscal deficit of 12,632 million pesos was recorded, lower than the planned amount of 5,281 million pesos, which is determined by a non-execution, fundamentally, of current expenditures and a slight over-fulfillment of revenues. However, several provinces have not been able to reduce the deficit to date.

On this subject, the Premier considered that it is extremely important to achieve, by the end of March, to have clearly defined, among other elements, the problems associated with the execution of the Budget, what actions we have taken to solve them and how we intend to modify the situation during the year.

He also insisted on the discipline that must be followed for the execution of the Budget, since there are still violations associated with the change of destination of the approved amounts, as well as distortions related to the contracting that is carried out.

Each chief, he said, has to "be clear about the responsibility he/she assumes when signing a contract, where the agreed prices are overstated and, therefore, the payments".

#### OTHER ISSUES ON THE AGENDA

From the Palace of the Revolution and connected via videoconference with the 15 provinces and the special municipality of Isla de la Juventud, the meeting evaluated other issues on the national agenda related to the economic and social sphere of the country.

One of them corresponded to the report on the results of the control system of overdue accounts receivable and payable, which was presented by the Minister of Finance and Prices, Vladimir Regueiro Ale.

In spite of what has been done, after six months of updating the system, he said, neither the expected transformation nor the expected effectiveness can be appreciated, and there is a lack of opportunity for analysis in search of solutions.

As a result, the overdue accounts receivable and payable have not been reduced, since the subjective and objective causes and conditions that determine non-payments have not been resolved, said Regueiro Ale.

According to his words, "there has been a lack of rigor in the analyses and administrative and disciplinary measures that contribute to the orderly collection and payment of receivables and payables".

Next, the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade and Investment, Oscar Pérez Oliva, presented the reports corresponding to the closing of 2023 on the economic effects caused to the country by irregularities in foreign trade operations, and the implementation of the Integral Strategy for exports of goods and services.

Both topics, it was agreed during the meeting, are of vital importance in the path to achieve greater foreign currency income for the country and, in general, to advance in the fulfillment of the Plan for the Economy.

Also, as part of the agenda, the status of compliance with the implementation of Law 145 on Territorial and Urban Planning was examined. This document, considered Raúl Acosta Gregorich, president of the National Institute of Planning and Urbanism, constitutes an important support for the updating of the plans of territorial and urban planning, as tools for the exercise of public administration.

Later, the Minister of Justice, Oscar Silvera Martínez, updated those present on the development and control of the process of registration of state-owned real estate in the Property Registry at the end of 2023, in which there were difficulties associated with the effectiveness and rigor in the work system of some entities.

Then, the Comptroller General of the Republic, Gladys Bejerano Portela, presented the main elements of the evaluation of compliance with the Policy of Improvement of the National Audit System, aimed at strengthening preventive work and contributing to the fight against indiscipline, illegalities and administrative corruption.

In this regard, the Prime Minister stressed the importance that, in the midst of the complex economic situation the country is going through, it is more necessary than ever to maintain "a sustained and effective control system".

Finally, the members of the Council of Ministers approved the sculptural intervention to be carried out in the José Martí Anti-Imperialist Tribune, an action that is the competence of this body, as it is a project of high patrimonial importance, under Decree Law 238 On the Development of Monumental and Environmental Sculpture, of 2015.

(Source: Granma)

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