

## WORLD BRIEFS

### BUMPER CROP OF HARVESTS MAKING ETHIOPIANS FORGET FAMINE

NAIROBI (IPS) — Ethiopians, for years victims of a devastating cycle of drought and famine, hope that starvation will now be a thing of the past. United Nations agencies have predicted a near record crop harvest for 1999, making it the seventh successive year of abundant food production. A joint World Food Program and Food and Agriculture Organization mission report made available to IPS projected that cereal and pulse yields would reach 11.69 million tons by mid-year. That figure is up nearly 36 percent from 1998's relatively poor harvest, but slightly less than the record 1996 crop that brought in more than 13 million tons of food and grains. "Ethiopia has made a turn-around from the life threatening famine of the 1980s. What we see is a new drive to achieve food security," said Judith Lewis, the local WFP representative. "The government policy has changed in terms of working with the population to solve their food problems, and the transport system is also much more sophisticated now," she said. More than one million people died of hunger in Ethiopia between 1984 and 1990, and more than eight million others suffered severe malnutrition.

### RWANDA'S 'POPULAR BANKS' HOLD NEW APPEAL FOR RESIDENTS

KIGALI (IPS) — After being nearly run into the ground by poor management, embezzlement and the country's civil war, Rwanda's rural-based "popular banks" are making a comeback. The banks are starting to regain popularity among rural Rwandans and non-governmental groups, reviving them from their state of decline. "For the popular banks to achieve a better performance, the people themselves must feel the need to get involved in their management, in setting up committees which would collaborate with the executive boards," said Jean Sayinzoga, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives. Sayinzoga, who is also chairman of the Popular Banks Executive Board, added that Rwandans need to be advised on how to acquire and manage loans for community-based projects. "Otherwise, the banks will not break with the tradition of providing loans to the rich residing in the city to the detriment of the rural areas where the money comes from," he said. Rwanda's popular banks, founded in 1975, were modeled after the Swiss cooperative banks and intended to assist people living in rural areas and small towns.

### MALAWI WATCHES DREAMS OF NATIONAL TV NETWORK FADE

BLANTYRE, Malawi (AIA/GIN) — Malawians' hopes of watching their own national television network have been dashed due to lack of finance to launch the station. The problem arises from the government's refusal to allow prospective joint venture partners to put up 80 percent of the money needed because it fears losing political control of the project. Television Malawi was initially set up as a joint venture between the Posts and Telecommunications Corporation and TV Malawi but the deal fell through. During the last sitting of Parliament, the information and broadcasting minister confirmed that due to a cash squeeze, the Posts and Telecommunications Corporation has not been able to buy transmitting and studio equipment. The project has generally been viewed as a luxury. Ninety percent of the country's nine million people live in rural areas and live below the poverty line. Electricity reaches only 20 percent of urban households and is virtually non-existent in rural areas.

### DOCTORS SUGGEST USING CHARMS TO COMBAT CRIME

LUSAKA, Zambia (AIA/GIN) — A prominent Zambian traditional doctor has advised the government that it should allow the use of charms to tackle crime in the country. At a regional conference on the impact of crime in southern African countries held in Lusaka recently, "Doctor" Vongo said the government should not fight crime alone but work with traditional doctors. He said most traditional doctors have strong charms capable of tracing thieves and finding stolen goods. "We are able to place small charms in strategic places like banks where frauds are the order of the day. It is very easy to arrest thieves that way." He said African governments should not take his suggestion as a joke, but return to their roots and accept it as something that can help alleviate the problem of crime.

## INTERNATIONAL

# U.S. eases economic pressure on Cuba

By Jim Lobe

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (IPS) —

Four days after Castro celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, the U.S. government announced that it will ease some of the restrictions it has placed on the island. But, it rejected bolder steps — including a comprehensive bipartisan review of Cuban policy — as urged by some influential Republicans.

Under the new measures, U.S. citizens will be able to send more money to Cuban families and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Washington will support more scientific, educational, religious and athletic exchanges. And the number of direct flights to the island for Cuban-Americans who wish to depart from cities other than Miami will be expanded. If Cuban Pres. Fidel Castro agrees, direct mail service between the two countries will also resume.

"Taken together," said Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, "[these measures] constitute a major advance in our effort to reach out to the Cuban people."

However, the Clinton administration has rejected growing calls from U.S. business and humanitarian communities to exempt food and medicine from the trade embargo against Cuba.

The White House also declined to sponsor a bipartisan commission to undertake the first comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward the island since the early 1960s.

"These steps are extremely timid," said Wayne Smith, an analyst at the Center for International Policy who served as the head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana in the early 1980s. "Anyone who was hoping that the administration would support a really serious review of the basic policy has got to be deeply disappointed."

There has been speculation centered around a primarily Republican initiative dating back to last October, when Sen. John Warner of Virginia asked Clinton to form a bipartisan commission to undertake a comprehensive review of Cuban policy, including Washington's 37-year-old trade embargo.

The initiative gained the explicit backing of senior

Republican foreign policy officials, led by former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Lawrence Eagleburger, and was endorsed by 24 senators, including 16 Republicans, as of mid-December 1998.

At the same time, senior administration officials hinted that they welcomed the initiative, prompting a major counter-campaign by staunch anti-Castro forces led by the Miami-based Cuban American National Foundation and its allies in Congress, particularly Sen. Robert Torricelli of New Jersey and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms.

These developments coincided with the preparation of a report on U.S.-Cuban relations. The report has been put together by a task force convened by the influential Council on Foreign Relations and chaired by Bernard Aronson and William Rogers, two former Republican assistant secretaries of state for Inter-American Affairs. Rogers had been one of the signers of

the Warner initiative back in October.

On Jan. 3, Aronson and Rogers summarized the major recommendations of the task force in an article published in *The New York Times*. While they did not address the question of convening a bipartisan commission, they put forward — in the name of the task force — a number of specific steps for the administration to take.

Among the more far-reaching, they called for lifting most restrictions on the sale of food and medicine to Cuba, permitting all U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba on regular commercial aircraft flights, and licensing U.S. companies under some circumstances to do business on the island.

The administration rejected these measures, choosing instead from a menu of lesser proposals detailed in the forthcoming report.

These included expanding social and cultural contacts through bilateral exchanges of academics, scientists and athletes, among others.

The most public of these would be a proposed trip to Cuba in March by the Baltimore Orioles, a major league baseball team, although it has yet to be agreed to by Havana.

The new measures also include allowing any U.S. resident — not only those with families in Cuba, as the current policy requires — to send up to \$1,200 a year to any Cuban family or NGO.

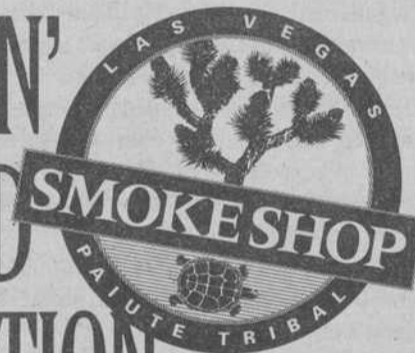
Cubans now receive about \$1 billion annually in remittances from the United States, and Smith told IPS he believed this new provision could increase the amount by another \$500 million a year.

The administration will also authorize the sale of food and agricultural technology to NGOs and "Cuba's emerging private sector, such as family restaurants and private farmers."

Finally, it will negotiate with Havana over resuming direct mail service between the two countries.

The administration also announced that it will strengthen its Radio and TV Marti broadcasting.

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