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Nicaragua: Cuban Ships Deliver Consumer Goods To Isolated Eastern Coast

by Deborah Tyroler

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Residents of the isolated coastal area of Puerto Cabezas are normally entitled to buy one pound of low-priced beans and a like amount of rice every 15 days. But in the second half of March, supplies ran low and residents were put on half rations. In the second week of April, the situation suddenly improved. Full rations were restored, and there were goods in the stores. The difference was that the Cuban freighter Cienfuegos, delayed by bad weather finally arrived, bringing with her 1,200 tons of supplies. Among the products aboard were rice, beans, powdered milk, boots, cooking oil and toothpaste. For the last year most of this area's needs have been met by shipments from Cuba. Food from Cuba is sold at controlled prices, under the direction of the Sandinista government. In northeastern Nicaragua 110,000 people are spread out over more than 20,000 square miles. There are few industries and only patches of agriculture. Before the Sandinista take-over in 1979, much of the supplies came from New Orleans and other Caribbean ports. But when foreign-owned lumber yards, mining companies and seafood packers were nationalized and foreigners moved away, the ships stopped coming, and shortages of food and other consumer items became the rule. About a year ago the first freighter from Cuba arrived. At least six vessels have arrived since then. The pier where Cuban ships unload their cargo is being rebuilt. There is a touch of irony in the new contacts between Puerto Cabezas and Cuba. In 1961, under Somoza, US-backed anti-Castro Cubans set off from Puerto Cabezas to launch the Bay of Pigs invasion. (Basic data from NEW YORK TIMES, 04/15/87)

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