

# Poor nation's aid-offer the rich 'can't refuse'

Aid is supposed to be something rich countries give to the poor. But Cuba, a developing country, is offering needy American students free places in a new medical school in Havana. Cuba is not just cocking a snook at Uncle Sam. By maintaining a successful health system, reports Tom Fawthrop of Gemini News Service from Havana, it is challenging global economic models.

**L**ATIN American countries that once feared Havana as the launching pad of revolution against the oligarchies of the region are now welcoming Cuban doctors and medical missions with open arms. And if a black congressman has his way, the United States may well join the ranks of these countries.

Honduras is the latest covert. This Central American country was until recently one of the few states left that had no diplomatic ties with Cuba. All that changed after the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and the humanitarian aid provided by 108 doctors from Cuba.

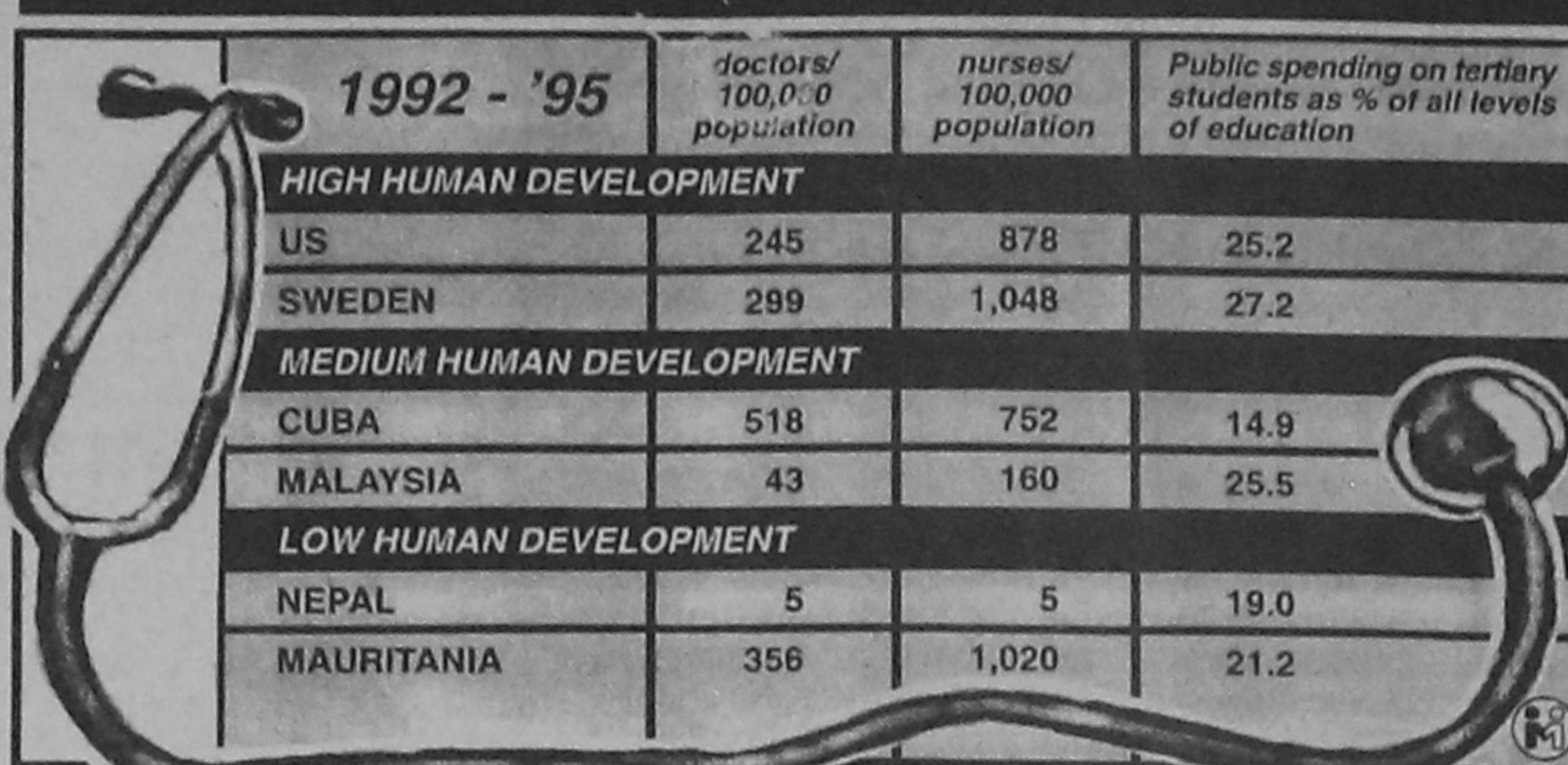
Now, a main street in the capital, Tegucigalpa, has been renamed 'Cuba Solidarity Street'. But emergency aid is not enough for Havana, which is critical of short-term aid from western countries without a longer-term concern for the prevailing malnutrition and lack of access to medical care in the developing world.

With such long-term goals in mind, Cuban President Fidel Castro last year offered Spanish-speaking countries of the region a brand new medical school in Havana. The setting up of the Latin American Medical School is part of Castro's long-cherished dream to showcase the island nation as a world medical power. It is the world's first special university campus totally dedicated to free medical scholarships for the developing world or poor students from wealthy countries.

Critics of Castro's socialist regime scoff at any such notion. The United States government and Cuban dissidents in the US claim that only foreign patients enjoy the full benefits of an economically-stressed health system, while ordinary citizens have to search on the black market for imported medicines.

Ignoring such criticism, the Cuban delegation at the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in September caused a stir by announcing that the doors of the Latin American Medical School would also be opened to poor students from the US -- a he says.

## The health of nations



country that has imposed crippling economic sanctions against Cuba.

As many as 250 places have been set aside for African Americans, and another 250 scholarships for members of other minorities, including Hispanics and indigenous Indians.

The school's recruitment philosophy requires that students from wealthy countries such as Brazil, Chile and the US should come from the poorest regions, where ordinary people have little or no access to affordable medical care -- especially regions with large ethnic minority populations.

This unprecedented offer from a poor country to provide free medical education to citizens from the world's richest nations is an embarrassing reminder to Washington that, for all its superpower wealth, 43 million US citizens still do not enjoy any health insurance, or have routine access to health-care.

Erwin Wanchafilo, a second year student in Havana from the Mapoche Indian people of Chile told Gemini News Service, 'Where I come from we have no doctors at all, only one paramedic. The health situation is very bad. In Chile the privatised medicine is dominant, so Cuba is my only chance to study medicine.'

In Chile you need a lot of money to study medicine, fellow-Chilean Leonardo Frotz added. The Cubans teach moral values for the medical profession that do not exist in my country. I want to go back to work for changes in our health system.'

Currently the school is hosting 3,329 students from 43 ethnic groups and 20 nations.

This means having to cope with students with often widely-differing academic standards. Cuban translator Olga Perez is worried that 'many students are coming from bad educational systems; some even have problems with spelling and sentence structure.'

'For the first six months we have to upgrade their all-round secondary education before they even begin their medical studies.'

However, Eloisa Le Riverend from Cuba's prestigious Finlay Institute, a medical research centre that discovered the Menigitis B vaccine, insists that medical standards cannot be compromised out of political solidarity.

'Unless they reach the same standard as Cuban medical doctors, we cannot pass them,' he says.

In the case of the US, black American Congressman Bennie Thompson from Mississippi, representing one of the poorest districts in the country, has eagerly embraced Castro's offer. Havana has further challenged Washington by offering to send a number of Cuban doctors to the state of Mississippi where doctors are in short supply.

While Cuba trumpets its claim that its comprehensive free health system is much fairer than the US system, Washington points to a number of Cuban doctors who have recently defected from humanitarian missions abroad -- two from Zimbabwe and a few from Zambia.

Mauricio disagrees: 'Solidarity does not mean much from a rich country -- real solidarity comes from sharing the little you have with those who have even less.'

Havana has even started to approach some western governments with a view to providing financial backing for future Cuban humanitarian missions.

Castro told the visiting US congressman that it would be hard for Washington to oppose the Cuban offer: 'It would be a trial for them. Morally, could they refuse?'

Even if the next US president permits Mississippi students to travel to Havana for medical training, health authorities in the US could thwart the Cuban aid access to health-care.

And while many Cubans lack consumer goods, Castro argues that the wealth of this Caribbean nation is represented by its 66,000 doctors, its outstanding primary health care system, and its scientific achievements in coming up with new advances in vaccines, neurology, biotechnology, and other fields.

Many critics complain that while the government finances such grandiose schemes and is currently fielding some 2,000 doctors in more than 50 countries around the globe, Cubans at home lack medicines, and their hospital services survive thanks only to donations from abroad.

The health budget for this year includes 17.5 million US dollars from European and Latin American non-governmental organisations, and is supported by substantial donations of medicine and aid from international solidarity groups.

Japanese readers snap up, daily, a staggering 72.2 million copies. Modern presses here print 121 'general interest' broadsheets or tabloids.

A new survey by the influential Nihon Shinbun Kyokai (Japanese Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association) reveals that 557 out of every thousand residents get a paper.

Most Japanese households subscribe to what is known here as 'sets': morning and evening editions of the same paper -- although there's been a slight decline of 'sets', subscribed to by offices and 'single-person households.'

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.

Indeed, it's an article of faith that an unfettered press is essential for democratic governance. Jefferson's classic option on choosing between newspapers and government is quoted, with relish, in Political Science 101

classes.

But there's more to that than shekels. Newspapers, after all, are not just another commodity.